

Women-led solutions for a polio-free Pakistan

The Listening Project

POLIO GLOBAL ERADICATION INITIATIVE

Overview

In 2022, the Pakistan Polio Programme launched **The Listening Project**, an effort to systematically listen to perspectives from Pakistan's female frontline health workers and design solutions for a polio-free world together.

Pakistan is one of the last two countries where wild poliovirus remains endemic, along with neighboring Afghanistan. To interrupt the transmission of wild polio, the group is focusing efforts on reaching all eligible children through repeated high quality vaccination campaigns.

Frontline health workers are the program's most valuable asset in this effort, and over 60% in Pakistan are women. In certain communities, women can enter homes where men cannot, helping ensure access and building trust with families. Until now, there had been no systematic way to hear from female frontline workers rapidly and at scale, or to implement solutions to polio eradication barriers based on their experiences.

To fill this gap, **The Listening Project has given women in some of the highest risk areas of Pakistan a platform to be heard, address challenges, and drive women-led solutions for a polio-free world—and beyond.**

Over 60% of frontline health workers in Pakistan are women.

In Brief

The Listening Project aims to:

- Systematically listen to female frontline workers to understand their perspectives on the challenges facing polio eradication
- Co-design solutions with female frontline workers to improve their experiences and overcome obstacles to deliver a polio-free Pakistan
- Identify pathways to supporting female frontline workers in their transition to post-polio careers



August 2022



Ongoing



2024 and onwards



Phase I: Listening

In August 2022, The Listening Project set out to systematically collect data from health workers at scale. The initiative carried out randomized **phone surveys to more than 2,600 frontline workers from 25 districts** at the highest risk of polio outbreaks across the country. Through these surveys, the program began to identify some of the most prevalent challenges facing frontline workers and their work to reach children with polio vaccines.

With this information, the program then designed and conducted **14 workshops** to hear directly from female frontline workers about their experiences and solutions to overcoming the most pressing barriers. **For the first time, these health workers had their own stage, while more program leadership's sole job was to listen.**

In all, frontline workers provided more than 300 unique solutions to overcome key polio eradication barriers, but the workshops went beyond the polio program. In addition, women shared their hopes for careers post-eradication, from supporting other health programs in their communities to poultry farming to running online businesses.

Phase II: Rolling Out Solutions

Next, National and Provincial Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs) reviewed and prioritized the highest impact solutions to overcoming remaining barriers. These proposals ranged from **higher pay for health workers to improved pre-campaign training to special considerations for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.**

Many solutions are already being put into action, such as the development of new and tailored trainings for all frontline workers on key topics raised by refusal families, anti-harassment policy to better safeguard and support frontline worker teams, increased remuneration for all frontline workers to acknowledge their incredible efforts for the polio programme, and official ID cards for all frontline workers to improve their credibility in communities.

Phase III: Preparing for the Future

Over the next few years, the final phase of the initiative aims to ensure the hundreds of thousands of female frontline health workers in Pakistan have the tools and support to continue into other livelihoods once polio has been stopped for good. To best support this transition, the program began piloting **"upskilling" workshops** in fall 2023, focusing on soft skills such as digital and financial literacy as well as a range of business skills. With support from expert external partners across the country, the polio programme aims to roll out upskilling sessions, trainings and other support programs designed to meet the needs of participants over the coming years.

2,600
frontline workers
surveyed

14
in-person systematic
listening and
training workshops

300+
solutions to polio
eradication barriers
identified



My self-confidence has grown from participating in this initiative, because it is so meaningful that the Polio Programme has taken the time to listen to our experiences and ideas, and that some of the solutions we proposed are being adopted to improve campaigns as well as our work experience.



- A female frontline polio worker

Learn more:

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[Co-designing solutions – and futures – at the Pakistan Polio Programme](#)

Pakistan NEOC 🔍 ⋮

[Perspectives from workshop participants](#)

Project Syndicate 🔍 ⋮

[Women health workers hold the key to ending polio](#)