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**The right of a child**

In family and society, children need to be protected to survive, grow, learn and develop to their full potential. They have the right to have proper care and to grow up in a protective setting. Unfortunately, millions of children in Pakistan are deprived of this right. As a result, a large number of children undergo violence, abuse, negligence and exploitation.

The right of a child to birth registration is a fundamental human right. Birth registration is a legal evidence of a child’s existence and identification. Naturally, all under-five children in Pakistan should be provided this right. However, because of the lack of awareness about the necessity and benefits of registration, the disadvantaged and underprivileged segments of society have deprived their children of this right. In Pakistan, the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) is authorized to register births of children. According to Unicef, the births of only 42 percent of the country’s children are registered with the authority.

The fact is that accurate birth registration of all Pakistan’s children can help prepare an exact data of children which would be helpful to immunize and vaccinate all children, and to compile an accurate information about child labour, child marriages, child sexual abuse and out of school children.

The Pakistan Demographic Health Survey 2017-18 (PDHS) reveals that routine immunization coverage in the country stood at a gloomy 66 percent. For this reason, the World Health Organization has positioned Pakistan among the 10 countries that account for nearly two-thirds of the world’s unimmunized children. The Covid-19 outbreak has further badly affected the situation. Immunization and vaccination activities remained suspended for five months from March to July, 2020. The delivery of life-saving routine immunization, which protects children from the most threatening diseases, was disrupted. In Pakistan, around 7.8 million children are born every year and the number of unimmunized children has augmented enormously, leading to widening immunity gaps.

Countries around the world have completely gotten rid of the poliovirus but Pakistan and Afghanistan are still reporting the deadly virus. In 2020, Pakistan reported 84 wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) cases. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the country’s polio vaccination drive remained suspended for five months, which exacerbated the issue further.

Pakistan could not curb polio outbreaks effectively and the virus spread. As a result, Last year, at least 128 cases of vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (VDP) were reported, while the overall reported VDP2 cases in 2019 was only 22. This shows the worsening situation for children under five in the country. The International Health Regulations (IHR) has categorized Pakistan as a state infected with WPV1 and DPV2 with potential threat of global spread.

Pakistan stands at number three among 10 Asian countries, where two-thirds of the world’s neonatal deaths take place every year. The WHO reports that Pakistan, with an estimated 2,98,000 annual neonatal deaths and neonatal mortality rate at 42 per 1000 live births, accounts for seven percent of the world’s neonatal deaths. Many newborns are deprived of access to even basic healthcare. Only 38 percent of children are completely breastfed for the first six months after birth.

Covid-19 worsened the situation further as human and financial resources were side-tracked from essential maternal and newborn health to effectively respond to the pandemic. While Covid-19 was badly affecting the health systems of almost all countries, mothers here continued to give birth. Newborns need indispensable medicines and vaccines for their safety and health. As routine immunization campaigns amid the coronavirus pandemic were paused, these mothers and their newborns suffered a lot as well.

Data estimated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) discloses that Pakistan has 8.5 million child workers. The gloomy economic situation of today has compelled many families to push their children into the labour market. If Pakistan now conducts a Child Labour Survey, the data assembled will shockingly show a two-fold increase in the number of children trapped in modern-day slavery.

For children’s right to protection to be protected, the federal and provincial governments must take concrete and productive initiatives. There is a need to create awareness among people about the importance of immunization and vaccinations.

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