



Groups of women go from houses to houses in the remote villages to vaccinate the children.



Polio, world wide vaccination

As we all may know, *Polio* (*poliomyelitis*) is caused by a virus which invades the nervous system. It can cause irreversible paralysis in a matter of hours. Though Polio can strike at any age, it mainly affects children under five years old. Since the late 1960s, vaccination against polio has been compulsory in Belgium for all infants before they reach 18 months old. This is the only vaccination compulsory by law in Belgium.

The World Health Organization (WHO) decided in 1988 to eradicate polio globally by the year 2020. The organization joined hands with major public and private organizations to fight this disease worldwide. This global effort to eradicate polio is the largest ever internationally coordinated private public health effort in history. Underpinning the effort is more than 20 million volunteers worldwide, who have collectively immunized over 3 billion children over the last 20 years. The initiative's goal is to reach every last child with polio vaccine and ensure a polio-free world for future generations. This

drive has reduced polio by 99%. Currently, the wild polio virus, which attacks the nervous system leading to childhood paralytic disease, is confined to Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan.

When the *Global Polio Eradication Initiative* was formed, polio paralysed more than 350,000 people a year. More than 16 million people have been saved from paralysis because of vaccination efforts against polio.

Situation in India

India, a country of 1.2 billion people, was declared polio-free by the World Health Organization (WHO) in May 2014. It was considered a landmark in the global drive to eradicate

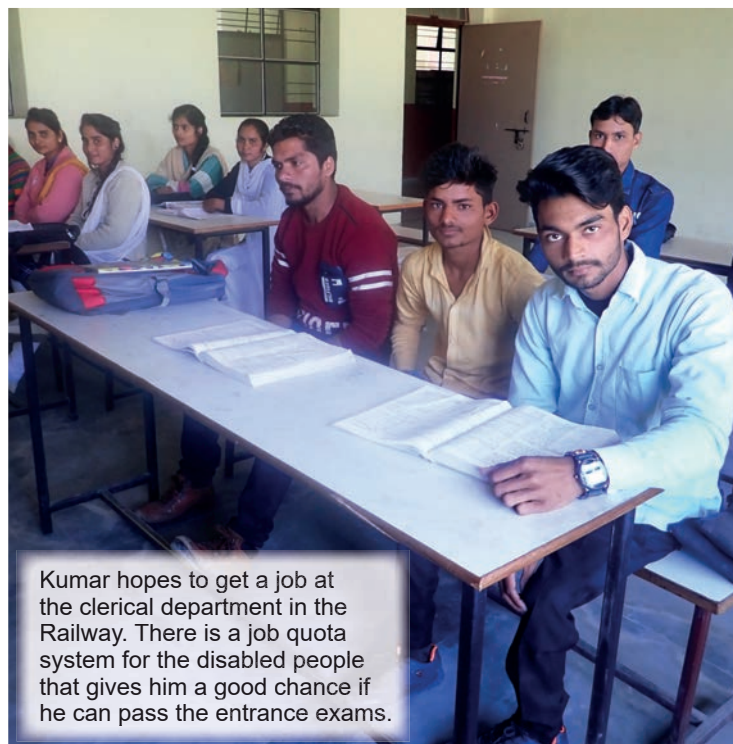


Vaccine products are kept in boxes with cold bricks.

polio. In the absence of wild polio transmission, it was expected that cases of paralysis would reduce to an acceptable rate of around two per 100,000, but this has not materialized. A surveillance system continues to annually investigate some 50,000 cases of *acute flaccid paralysis* (AFP) defined as a sudden onset of paralysis or weakness in any part of the body of a child under 15 years of age. The study found the paralysis rate to be as high as 30 per 100,000 in the state of *Uttar Pradesh*, where we are working.

Two types of polio vaccines exist : an inactivated poliovirus given by injection (IPV) and a weakened poliovirus given by mouth (OPV). The frequency of OPV (*oral polio vaccine*) administration was found to be directly or indirectly related to the incidence of non-polio acute flaccid paralysis. The WHO's *Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan 2013-2018* calls for a transition in vaccines requiring removal of all OPVs in the long-term to eliminate the rare risks of the vaccine-associated paralytic polio and vaccine-derived poliovirus.

Polio couldn't confine Kumar to his home, he did the schooling with the help of his family and passed class 12 exam last year. This year he joined the Computer diploma course in our Saint-Anthony's ITI.



Kumar hopes to get a job at the clerical department in the Railway. There is a job quota system for the disabled people that gives him a good chance if he can pass the entrance exams.

Kumar's fight against Polio

We come across people affected by polio in our project area. We tried to integrate a few students in *Saint-Anthony's Schools*, but it was difficult for them to cope with the schooling without full support from their families. *Kumar's* parents are a good example for this, they do whatever it takes to make *Kumar* have a good future ! He is 20 years old, he lives in a village 5 km from our *Saint-Anthony's School of Dugawar*. When he was 8 months old, he had fever and his father took him to a local hospital where he was given fever medicine. Next day, his mother noticed weakness in his legs. They took him to a hospital where he was admitted for a week. Since he didn't get better in the hospital, they treated him with traditional medicine for 6 months. All this while they were not aware that he had contracted polio. His father recalls that at that time there was no vaccination for polio in the village. At the age of 14 he underwent surgery which helps him to move around with the help of a stretcher. He cannot walk without the help of the stretchers.

This year Kumar joined the *Computer diploma course* in our *Saint-Anthony's ITI*. His older brother drops him to our school and gets him back every day !

His dream is to get a job in the clerical department in the Railway. He is preparing to appear for entrance exams while doing this



diploma. If he could pass this exam, he has better chance to get a job under the job quota for the disabled people.

We really hope that he will get his dream job even though there is a lot of competition in this field. Meanwhile, we have left our door open for him to join our office and work with us, at the completion of his diploma, so that he gets more practice and can be on his own.

Anthony's bread has been actively participating in the campaign for the polio eradication.

Poor healthcare

An estimated 2.4 million people died in India in 2016 due to conditions that could have been treated by healthcare, the highest number of « amenable deaths » among the countries studied. Of this, nearly 66% died of poor quality of the healthcare services received and the remaining, due to non-utilization of healthcare services.

The majority of the public healthcare system catering to the rural and remote areas relies on inexperienced and unmotivated interns who are mandated to spend time in public healthcare clinics as part of their curricular requirement. Qualified professionals are not willing to spend their time in these villages. Most of the villagers go to the local practitioners and a lot of superstition plays a big role as well.

We have lost few children from *Saint-Anthony's schools* during the past years.

Though we would like to get deeper to know what went wrong and where it went wrong, parents are least bothered to go back or know the reason. They attribute it to their destiny, God's Will. And in most of the cases, they cremate the body the same day.

« *My little brother wants ad-*



Ankur, a student of our school, died of rabies.



Health care sessions are organized by *Anthony's bread*.

mission in nursery mam », this is what Ankur told our head mistress on a Friday, while leaving the school. Who could ever imagine that this would be his last day in *Saint-Anthony's school* !

Ankur was a very good student, energetic and full of life. Back home from school on a Friday, he had stomach pain. His father brought him some medicine from a local hospital. Next morning, he refused to come to school. Around noon his grandmother noticed froth foaming in his mouth, and he was afraid of any drink given to him and, some abnormal symptoms. They rushed him to the city hospital, from where he was referred to another hospital and finally to *Delhi's* main hospital. The doctors in *Delhi* hospital gave him 12 hours time and proposed to take Ankur back home, so that he can be with his family for the last hours of his life. As the doctors told them, he passed away on Sunday morning at 10.00. His body was cremated the same day.

He was diagnosed with rabies, he was highly infected. The parents told us that he was bitten by a puppy 6 months ago, and was given the vaccination against rabies. Why the



We are promoting vaccination programs in the Saint-Anthony's Schools....

India, rabies is still not a notifiable disease. Indian children often play near stray dogs, which are many and roam freely, and are used to sharing their food with them, which results in frequent bites. In one study, most children attacked by dogs were unaware of having been bitten and their parents often ignored the attacks or simply treated the wounds

vaccination didn't work ? Initially the family was furious and questioning about the effect of the vaccination he had, but after a day, they pacified themselves, as all the villagers, and attributed it to God's will for them !

India reports about 18,000 to 20,000 cases of rabies a year, and it is about 36 % of the world's deaths from the disease. The real number could be even much higher because in

by applying indigenous products such as hot peppers or turmeric. Only a few parents sought medical advice, usually with delay.

Vaccination Program

Few months ago, a group of medical officers with volunteers came to *Saint-Anthony's School* around 9.00, ready to vaccinate the students against *measles* and *rubella*. We suspended the classes and immediately started the vaccination.

We asked the medical officer why he came without informing us. He responded that, when the schools are informed early, many of the parents don't send the children to school that day ! Many schools even refused to organise the vaccinations because of some rumors about the side effect of the vaccination.

When he saw the positive response from our school, he sent a message to his office to get more staff immediately so that they could cover the whole school in one day. The medical officer was surprised by the positive approach of *Saint-Anthony's School*. Our project area has advanced a lot due to our effort in this field. However, in the villages where there is no awareness yet, people are very skeptical about certain vaccinations.



A little stress before injection...