

Media Update

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UNDP

PRESS RELEASE

PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS PROGRAMME (PrEP) LAUNCHED BY THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT OF PUNJAB IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

Lahore 15 OCTOBER 2022—The Health Department of Government of Punjab, in partnership with the United Nations in Pakistan, launched the Pre-exposure Prophylaxis Programme (PrEP) in Lahore yesterday.

PrEP is considered a ‘game changer’ in the prevention of HIV. Even though it has been more than 10 years since the first evidence of the efficacy of daily oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) was published, much of the PrEP scale-up is still highly concentrated in a small number of countries. Health Department, Government of Punjab in partnership with the United Nations in Pakistan, set a precedent in the country by launching community-based- PrEP for key populations and sero-discordant couples. PrEP does not replace condoms but offers an additional HIV prevention choice. Community-based PrEP dispensation is critical because CBOs working in Punjab have outreach programs and can play a pivotal role in creating awareness and ensuring stigma-free access to PrEP programmes.

With support from UNAIDS along with WHO and UNDP, the Government of Pakistan developed guidelines and standard operating procedures for community and health facility-based dispensation of PrEP. The launch event was organized under the leadership of the Director General Health Services of

the Health Department Punjab in partnership with UNAIDS, UNDP and WHO. Before the launch event, a training was held with ART Centre staff from around the Punjab province on ensuring effective and evidence-based PrEP services.

Dr. Awias Gohar, Project Director PACP shared that between 2010 and 2020, Pakistan has seen an increase of 84% in new HIV infections and unless we take bold steps today, we will not be able to halt further new infections and PrEP is a step in the right direction. Addressing the participants, he further emphasized that *“PrEP offers a significant strategic opportunity to precision target prevention programmes for key populations. For the administering of PrEP to sero-discordant couples and key populations, formal linkages have been established between ART Centres and the outreach component of the current programme. This approach utilizes outreach workers at the frontline to engage individuals who are at risk for HIV. Their main task is to connect members from the community to public health services, so that they can be reached by HIV prevention programs that will now include PrEP. Outreach workers disseminate HIV prevention packages, provide safe sex education materials and support for behaviour changes, and most importantly, refer the community for HIV testing and counselling and created linkages with ART treatment centres.”*

Asim Raza, Additional Secretary Coordination and vertical programs, primary and secondary Health Department of Punjab shared that *“The Punjab AIDS Control Program is providing free of cost counselling, testing and treatment services for more than two decades to people living with HIV. Given the recent expansion, the program now has its network of centers expanded to all of the 36 districts of Punjab. The program has forty-five centers that are located in teaching and DHQ hospitals. The program has its own advanced diagnostic bio-safety level 3 laboratory. It is stated with great pride that due to this laboratory the program provides free PCR and CD4 tests for HIV patients that are very expensive if done from any private lab. The dedication of the program and its staff is commendable. The provision of free of cost services such as testing and medication and the program’s robust lost to follow up mechanism is truly remarkable. Since July 2016 the program has screened 2,041,998 persons for HIV. The program since its inception has registered 35,976 HIV positive persons and currently 17,154 positive persons are on*

regular treatment. It is very proudly stated that the program has been successful in ensuring 204 HIV negative births from HIV positive mothers. In Punjab the leading cause of HIV transmission is from quackery. The re-usage of medical instruments by quack doctors and dentists cause HIV transmission and once a person becomes a carrier he is surely to transmit it to their spouse. This is why we believe that PrEP is ground breaking as it will curtail the transmission of HIV between spouses. Used along with other preventive measures the results will be not short of remarkable. I would like to commend the community based organizations present here for their services and support. They play key role in linking community members to treatment centers and keep strong in face of every stigma and discrimination. We as a nation also must work on changing our behavior towards the stigma and discrimination that is present when it comes to HIV/AIDS. Many HIV patients never opt for testing and treatment due to the fear of this disease. It is our responsibility to create environments that are warm and welcoming so every HIV patient can get treatment without fear, stigma and discrimination.

In the end he thanked the UN global partners, the UNDP, UNAIDS, UNICEF and WHO for their extensive support in healthcare services in Punjab especially for HIV/AIDS and, thanked all for supporting this launch of PrEP that will definitely change things for the better

Dr Rajwal Khan, Strategic Information Adviser, UNAIDS Country Office, Pakistan and Afghanistan congratulated the Health Department Government of Punjab for formally launching the PrEP programme and said, “We are impressed by the political commitment and concrete actions by the government to address the needs of communities. Ensuring a supportive, enabling environment free from stigma and discrimination will help achieve the targets of the Punjab AIDS Strategy 2021-2025 and contribute effectively towards ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. Community outreach workers and counselors have the advantage of being able to reach people who are at risk. The integration of community-led HIV prevention programs and the meaningful participation of communities are critical to ensure that policies and services are responsive to community needs.”

Heather Doyle, Programme Manager for the HIV Global Fund grant at UNDP, participated in the launch on behalf of UNDP and added that “UNDP has been honored to work closely with Punjab AIDS Control Program (PACP), UNAIDS and the community partners to push this initiative forward. We look forward to continuing this partnership so that everyone who needs PrEP has access.”

Several members from the community-based organizations and representatives from key populations participated in the launch and expressed hope that chances of new HIV infections will get reduced through PrEP uptake. According to research, when taken daily as directed, PrEP can reduce the risk of HIV infections by more than 90 percent.

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About UNDP

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About UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

UN Pakistan

PRESS RELEASE

Trade and Industry should prioritize sustainable development framework including climate action – The UN and FPCCI

The United Nations and Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) organized 'UN and Private Sector Consultation: Exploring Potential for Sustained Collaboration' at a local hotel in Karachi on Wednesday last week. The Head of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO), Shah Nasir Khan, the Senior Vice President FPCCI, Muhammad Suleman Chawla, VP Engineer, M.A. Jabbar, Dr. Jawaid Qureshi, and Dr. Farhan Ahmed, the Convener and Deputy Convener of the UN Committee of FPCCI participated in it. The UN officials from UNRCO, UNIDO (UN Industrial Development Organization), UNDP (UN Development Program), UNICEF (UN Children's Fund), UN Women, FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization), WFP (World Food Programme), and UN Global Compact Network from Pakistan, and Bangladesh orientated the participants on the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for Pakistan for 2023-2027, importance of engagement with the private sector, financing for sustaining development and business and human rights. Officials from public and private sector, academia, NGOs and civil society, women, representatives of youth, and the Turkish Consul General, Cemal Sangu participated in the event.

Keeping in view the sustainable development goals (SDGs), the UN in Pakistan has set five priorities (outcomes) for Pakistan for the next 5 years that include basic social services (health, nutrition, WASH, education, social protection), gender and women empowerment, climate change and environment, sustainable inclusive economic growth and decent work, and governance (rule of law, ethics, transparency, and accountability for the public and private sectors). The participants of the event provided their valuable input to the UN for consideration of their framework. The draft framework now is being reviewed by the government of Pakistan before its final approval.

Mr. Barkaat Ali (Development Coordination Officer-UNRCO) while highlighting the seriousness of engagement with the private sector shared that globally US\$ 5-7 trillion were required per year to achieve SDGs and the annual gap was US\$ 2.5 trillion. Similarly, Pakistan, according to one estimate, required US\$ 31 billion per annum between 2019 and 2030 to achieve its targets. The collaboration between the Government, the private sector and the UN was thus critical. Mr. Shah Nasir Khan informed that UNSDCF would require US\$ 4.7 billion for its implementation out of which US\$ 1.16 billion (24%) were available. These funds are deployed for development of various sectors under different programs and initiatives including trade, industry, entrepreneurial development, gender equality, women empowerment, youth development, etc. The audience were briefed on various projects of the UN in Pakistan. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres recently visited Pakistan and sought help from the international community for Pakistan to respond to the unprecedented floods which have cost an estimated loss of US\$ 30 billion to the country.

The SVP FPCCI, Muhammad Suleman Chawla, highly appreciated the efforts of the UN agencies and their financial and technical assistance in various sectors. He lauded the efforts of the Central Standing Committee of UN Affairs of FPCCI and its Convener, Dr. Jawaid Qureshi, for holding such productive events. He informed that FPCCI has various standing committees like health, education, environment, women entrepreneurship and women empowerment, etc., which contribute to social and economic development, including the SDGs.

In the panel discussion, the VP Engineer, M.A. Jabbar, stated that the governance system in Pakistan is very weak. There is a lack of transparency, accountability, participation of all the stakeholders, collaboration, and cooperation. There is a trust deficit between the public and private sectors. However, there is a serious need to overcome these gaps. He cited various examples of hazardous effects of industrial waste, pollution, noise pollution, and ignorance by most of the industrialists and private sector. However, there are companies that have high concerns and measures to protect the natural environment. He advised that the Government of Sindh and the Federal Government should reconsider their agreement on setting up a railway

infrastructure to dispatch coal of Thar to the industrial zones of Punjab, etc. for energy production. Rather, they should establish a coal-fired plant in Thar and put the energy into the national grid.

The UN representatives also highlighted various serious issues concerning climate change, global warming, and challenges to the biodiversity and ecosystem caused by environmental degradation and its cost to the society and economy. The developed countries caused the highest degradation to the environment, but now they are considering impactful measures for carbon neutral or net zero effect. The Indus Basin system of rivers is creating livelihood for millions of people in Pakistan and neighbouring countries. Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali, President SZABIST University, ex-Minister of State for Education and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Sector emphasized on the governance mechanism to bring systematic reforms. She stated that to combat the environmental challenges, there is a serious need that universities should introduce new courses and specialized degree programs on water management, gender studies, violence and justice, etc.

Dr. Jawaid Qureshi added that the environmental changes cause lack of rains and droughts as well as heavy rains and floods, deforestation, sea erosion, etc. The coastal belt of Thatta and Badin has been eroded by the sea, which has engulfed 30 million acres of land, and there is a dire need of planting mangroves there, and reforestation. Many countries have 25% or more of their land covered with forests, while we have only 2% forest cover. One recent example is the loss by the floods 2022. Generally, there is little awareness and model examples in Pakistan on issues like corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, environmental, social, and governance (ESG) concerns by investors and shareholders, responsible consumption and production (CSP), public-private partnership (PPP) for provision of public services, etc.

Finally, FPCCI team represented by the SVP, Muhammad Suleman Chawla, and the UN team represented by Shah Nasir Khan agreed to continue such interactions between the two organizations for attaining the outcomes of the sustainable development cooperation framework (SDCF) for Pakistan for 2023-2027, keeping a high priority on climate action.