

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT FOR EFFECTIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE

Recommendations to Improve Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) have undertaken various research surveys to assess the impact of COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan. Simultaneously CPDI held consultative sessions with different segments of the society and deduced some key recommendations for the improvement of the government's responses towards COVID-19 pandemic. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic will be more effective if these recommendations are adopted by the relevant departments. It is worth mentioning that epidemiologists have been constantly expressing the concerns that we may face such pandemics in future as well. Now it is important to learn from past experiences and need to improve our policies for the betterment of the government response. These recommendations are enlisted below:

1. Capacity building of institutions to vigil the spread of epidemic diseases and issue alerts accordingly.
2. Improve the research capacity on epidemics in the country and take necessary steps for local production of vaccines.
3. The NCOC has played a significant role in enhancing mutual consultation and cooperation between the various federal agencies and the federal and provincial governments, but there is a need to make this procedure more effective and frequent with legal basis.
4. Establish a vigorous Local Government structure and train their staff for playing an effective role in public awareness and adoption of preventive measures at the local level.
5. The process of dealing with epidemics should be transparent enough with access of relevant information to all.
6. Health and education facilities should be improved, standardized and accessible in order to better prevent the spread of epidemic diseases or to deal efficiently with the problems caused by them.
7. Improve the primary healthcare system on priority basis as it can greatly help in the prevention and control of epidemics at the local level.
8. There should be separate wards for infectious diseases' patients in hospitals and other health centers.
9. Appropriate policies and procedures should be devised for streamlining joint ventures of public and private sectors' health facilities for coping with the pandemic situations like the one already faced.
10. Government should take effective measures to ensure timely, easy and low cost availability of essential medicines for all.

11. The heroic deeds of the health staff during the pandemic must be recognized through rewards and enhanced remunerations.
12. During the pandemic government must ensure provision of health facilities and vaccines to poor and deprived segments of the society to remove their grievances.
13. For mass awareness campaign, CSOs, religious scholars and other social activists should be engaged to nullify the superstitious & suspicions related to the COVID-19 and its precautionary measures.
14. The federal and provincial governments should take action against those who spread misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine and inform the public against the misleading information with accurate ones.
15. The government must ensure equal access to vaccines during pandemic crisis for all without any discrimination.
16. Policies should be formulated for immediate recruitment of paid volunteers to avoid staff shortage during the pandemic crisis.
17. Government must take steps for storing sufficient quantity of essential items related to epidemic diseases in order to avoid shortage in emergency situations.
18. Government should focus on programs related to volunteering organizations, Girl guides and Scouts so that they can support government efforts in dealing with the pandemic situation.
19. Guidelines, rules and SOPs related to the pandemic should be reviewed and improved and relevant officials should be trained from time to time to implement them and avoid any ambiguity with regard to the roles and responsibilities of the concerned officials or institutions.
20. Taking into account the problems and needs of the neglected segments of the society, steps should be taken to ensure timely provision of assistance to them during pandemic. Special attention should be paid to the elderly, the disabled, transgender and women.