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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Delivering rehabilitation and relief services in the conflict affected hard-to reach areas of Borno state

Saurabh RamBihariLal Shrivastava, Prateek Saurabh Shrivastava, Jegadeesh Ramasamy

Shri Sathya Sai Medical College & Research Institute, Department of Community Medicine, Kancheepuram

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Dear Editor,

The ongoing conflicts in the various parts of the world have compromised the quality of life of millions of people. Similar trends have been reported in the Borno state of Nigeria, where almost 7 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance [1]. At the same time, 2 out of 3 health facilities have been partially or completely non-functional due to which people are deprived of health care as well as welfare services [1]. Further, close to 1.5 million internally displaced people is taking shelter in the state, while more than 5 million have been forced to experience food insecurity in the last 3 months [1]. Also, a funding gap of more than 90% has been identified in the health sector when compared with their actual demands [1].

Moreover, an outbreak of cholera has been identified in a camp for internally displaced individuals close to state capital [2]. In addition, there is a definitive risk of a malaria outbreak and associated deaths in the region in the coming months [1]. Deficiencies have been identified even in the field of routine immunization, family welfare services, and other routine services [1,3]. Furthermore, to complicate the matter local residents have to even deal with the issues of accessibility, transport constraints, safety concerns, affordability, and shortage of health care personnel [1-3].

In order to deal with all these problems collectively, the World Health Organization (WHO) has come forward and is working in close collaboration with the health ministry [2]. The aim of this collaboration is to expand the reach of essential health care by augmenting the resilience of the health system, strengthening of surveillance activities, better collaboration between concerned stakeholders, presence of holistic plans to deal with outbreaks, and ensuring the regular assessment of the nutritional status of children, combined with appropriate management of existing complications [2,3].

***Coresponding Author:** Saurabh RamBihariLal Shrivastava, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College & Research Institute, Department of Community Medicine, Kancheepuram **E-mail:** laraibmaalik@gmail.com

In terms of interventions, the WHO is assisting in extending their support towards malaria control by supplying insecticide-treated bed nets & anti-malarial drugs, organization of immunization campaigns, the establishment of early warning and response system, and training of health personnel [1,2]. In addition, more than 50 mobile teams have been established in different parts of the state to deliver antenatal & postnatal care, child health care (viz. vitamin A supplementation, de-worming, assessment of nutritional status, administration of polio vaccine, etc.), and referral services in hard-to-reach areas [4]. The personnel in the mobile teams have been trained and they are playing an important part in saving the lives of thousands of people from preventable causes [4]. In-fact, since its establishment close to 0.4 million people have been benefitted, of which 75% have been children [4].

Moreover, steps have been taken to rehabilitate health care establishments with the help of different welfare organizations, and the decision to renovate is taken based on the criteria of accessibility, extent of damage, population density, staff availability, and financial support [1,2,4]. In addition, periodic meetings have been organized to ensure better coordination between involved sectors and streamlining of desired activities [2,4].

To conclude, the ongoing conflict in the Borno state is significantly disturbing the quality of life of millions of residents, and it is the need of the hour to expand the coverage of quality assured health care services by ensuring multi-sectoral approach.

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