Pakistan’s October Earthquake and Heartfile’s role – 08 Health Information System

The October 8, 2005 earthquake, which originated in the Himalayan mountains of Pakistan was the worst disaster in the history of the country; it left more than 70,000 dead, injured twice that number, left up to 1 million homeless and 1 million in immediate need of assistance. One of the major components of the immediate relief and rescue operations is the health sector related response. Setting up health services, catering to the injured and providing public health services in a milieu with increased risk is part of this approach.

The monitoring of health services and related parameters and disease surveillance during natural disasters is as difficult as it is important. The timely availability of authentic data on mortality, morbidity, and other measures is a necessary prerequisite for effective medium- to long-term planning, implementation, and evaluation of health-related interventions and assistance. In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake, therefore, the need for establishing, maintaining, and the expansion over time of a comprehensive, integrated, systematic, and sustainable health information system was recognized as a priority. This led to the conceptualization and the creation of the 08 Health Information system.

The 08 Health Information System has been designed to act as a decision support system, which involves the systematic collection, consolidation, and evaluation of morbidity, mortality and health services data and its interpretation and dissemination for appropriate public health actions. It is generally perceived that data collection and its application are two standalone processes and that the former must precede the latter. This is a misperception. The process of data
collection and action are not mutually exclusive. The idea is to tap data sources on an ongoing basis in order to provide the necessary evidence as to guide and modify actions. At inception it was envisaged that the O8 Health information system would assist in timely, appropriate, and need-based actions under the relief and rehabilitation initiatives of the Ministry of Health, the international donor partners and volunteers in the health sector.

The O8 health Information System involved the creation of a health information database which has specially been tailored to accommodate the information needs in the health sector, post-earthquake. The system gathers data from point of care (remote and tertiary) into a central database in order to assist short-, medium- and long-term policy and planning within the health sector. This information system builds on and keeps account of all the information that the Ministry of Health, WHO and the Pakistan Army receive from their field and other operations and additionally includes information from the public and private sectors. It captures data relating to all the health interventions both in the earthquake affected areas as well as in the health care facilities of the non-affected areas serving the earthquake victims. In addition, it also captures mortality and key morbidity trends. Its deliverables include daily summaries and analytical report/s.

The system has been designed and conceptualized by Heartfile and Pakistan’s Health Policy Forum in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, WHO and UNICEF and is currently been maintained at Heartfile. The data sources for this information system are based on Ministry of Health and WHO sources, with which it actively links. Heartfile manages and maintains the system and generates reports on a daily basis, which are then communicated to the Ministry of Health in order to assist them in strategic planning and decision making. Reports are also shared with international agencies and can be accessed online through the Heartfile website. It is perceived that this has
enabled the streamlining, management and communication of health-related information pertaining to the earthquake disaster of October 8, 2005.

Since its operationalization on October 17, 2005 the O8 Health Information System has been generated daily reports from this system and issued to the partners; these reports include a quantitative overview of health services and morbidity by location.

The most recent report is posted here in pdf format:

One-month Post O8 Health Assessment

Daily Status Reports:

- November 29, 2005
- November 21, 2005
- November 16, 2005
- November 2, 2005
- October 21, 2005
- October 20, 2005
- October 19, 2005