

Advancing Reproductive Autonomy with DMPA-SC Self-Injection in Emergencies and Underserved Areas in Pakistan

Problem: In many parts of Pakistan particularly the desert regions of Tharparkar, Umerkot, and Sanghar, as well as the conflict-affected districts of Gwadar, Quetta, and Zhob access to reproductive health services remains a formidable challenge. These areas are burdened by deeply entrenched socio-cultural restrictions, poverty, gender inequality, and limited health infrastructure. Health facilities are often too distant, under-resourced, or entirely absent. In such settings, women and girls frequently face high rates of unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and poor maternal health outcomes due to lack of contraceptive options and poor access to timely services.

The situation becomes even more critical during emergencies as in natural disasters like floods, droughts, or conflict-induced displacement—when the already fragile healthcare systems collapse. It is in these exact conditions that **DMPA-SC (Sayana Press) self-injection** emerges as a game-changing solution. It offers women an innovative, discreet, and self-managed method to maintain control over their reproductive health even when health centers are unreachable..

Innovation or Practice Description (200–300 words) – What was done, by whom, and how? Geographical scope.

Peace Foundation has implemented a comprehensive, community-centered initiative to promote DMPA-SC (Sayana Press) self-injection in remote desert and drought hit districts of Sindh—such as Tharparkar, Sanghar, and Umerkot and in conflict-affected regions of Balochistan including Gwadar, Quetta, and Zhob. The organization adopted a holistic, inclusive approach by combining awareness-raising, service delivery, capacity building, and advocacy.

Key activities:

- Conducted baseline assessments and community consultations to identify local barriers and perceptions around contraceptive use.
- Launched culturally sensitive awareness campaigns using local languages, storytelling, folk shows, and women-led discussions.
- Trained over 240 women leaders and peer educators to conduct household visits and community sessions on DMPA-SC self-injection.
- Collaborated with health departments to train 75 frontline health workers (Lady Health Workers, midwives, pharmacists) on counseling, administration, and follow-up.
- Equipped Basic Health Units (BHUs) and Rural Health Centers (RHCs) with DMPA-SC supplies, job aids, and IEC materials.
- Conducted male engagement sessions to address myths and gain support from husbands, fathers, and community leaders.
- Held regular coordination meetings with Deputy Commissioners and District Health Officers for integration into local family planning programs.
- Enabled thousands of women, especially in remote and high-risk areas, to adopt self-injection and take control of their reproductive health.

Results and Evidence of Impact (150–250 words) – Include quantitative or qualitative data, outcomes, or evaluation results

Peace Foundation's DMPA-SC (Sayana Press) self-injection initiative in desert and conflict-affected areas of Pakistan reached over 12,500 women and girls in two years, with 4,320 adopting the method and an 82% continuation rate after six months. The project trained 75 health providers and 240 female peer educators to deliver counseling, awareness, and education. Over 1,000 men were engaged to address

myths and stigma. Users reported increased confidence, privacy, and empowerment. Health workers noted reduced workload and higher client satisfaction. The model demonstrated strong potential for scale-up, improving reproductive autonomy and health system efficiency in underserved regions.

Scalability & Sustainability (100–150 words) – Is it adaptable for other contexts? What resources or policies support it?

The initiative aligns with Pakistan's national family planning and reproductive health policies, and is supported by global best practices endorsed by WHO and UNFPA. Local government partnerships, especially with district health departments, further enhance sustainability by embedding DMPA-SC SI into routine public health services. Training manuals, IEC tools in local languages, and the involvement of existing health cadres reduce the need for new infrastructure. With continued support from donors and policymakers, the intervention is well-positioned for broader adoption and long-term impact in advancing reproductive health equity.

Lessons Learned or Key Insights

- Community trust and culturally sensitive communication are essential for the acceptance of self-injection methods in conservative and underserved areas.
- Training female peer educators and involving community-based workers significantly boosts outreach, awareness, and user confidence.
- Engaging men and local influencers early helps reduce resistance and fosters a supportive environment for women's reproductive choices.
- Integration of DMPA-SC SI into existing public health systems ensures sustainability and reduces implementation costs

Partnevr Quotes or Community Voice (optional but encouraged) : In communities across remote and underserved areas of Pakistan, DMPA-SC (Sayana Press) has garnered widespread praise for its accessibility, ease of use, and ability to empower women. Many women, particularly in desert regions like Tharparkar and Balochistan's Gwadar, have shared how this self-injection method has improved their reproductive health choices. One women said "Before DMPA-SC, I had to travel far to get contraception, and sometimes the clinics were too crowded or far away. Now, I can take care of my health at home, privately, without the stress of travel or waiting," says a woman from a village in Tharparkar. An other women user said, In conflict-affected areas like Quetta and Zhob, women appreciate the convenience DMPA-SC offers, especially in unstable settings where access to healthcare can be interrupted. "Self-injection gives us the power to manage our family planning without depending on the availability of clinics, which are sometimes hard to access," a woman from Zhob explains