No pain, no gain

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Maria, a chubby and carefree two-year-old, was eagerly awaiting her turn for her patak, her two drops of oral polio vaccine. She could still remember how peculiar the taste was. This is going to be her fourth patak. Her Aunt Loleng was affected by this disease and she goes around with a heavy limp. The thought of last month’s scene when some children cried after getting their measles injections made Maria somewhat apprehensive. She could remember her mother’s encouragement: “Come on, children. It’s all right. It’s just like an ant’s bite. It’s nothing really. Remember, no pain, no gain.”

But today her mother assured her and her seven-year-old sister Clara that there would be no pain. Only the women would be given anti-tetanus injections to protect their future newborn babies against neonatal tetanus. Clara was enjoying the fiesta-like atmosphere in the vaccination centre. She explained. “Today is National Immunization Day, like earlier this year and twice last year. It’s an event for bringing children to the health centres for vaccinations so they don’t get sick. It’s our government’s effort to rid the country of this disease which causes the limp and other disabilities.”

Now Maria eagerly opened her mouth to get her OPV and Vitamin A drops. She heard the midwife tell her mother to bring her back next year on 15 February and 15 March for her next doses. That will be easy to remember because 15 February is her birthday. Then it was her mother’s turn to get her anti-tetanus injections. She was actually afraid of injections but today she was trying to be an example. “Come on, mother. Remember, it’s just like an ant’s bite. Remember, no pain, no gain,” Maria and Clara both said with a laugh.

Everyone was involved

It was 16 March 1994, and all over the Philippines in more than 60,000 vaccination centres there were similar lines and activities such as these in the Lanuza Health Centre. Everyone was involved – not only the local health workers and local volunteers, but students, boy scouts and girl scouts, civic organizations like the Rotary and Lions, professional and medical societies, the business sector, nongovernmental organizations, the drug companies, and even movie stars, singers and sports stars, and politicians – from governors to mayors and village councillors.

The message was carried by television and radio stations, in newspapers and magazines, and even in advertisements for foodstuffs and soaps. The major streets and highways all carried streamers announcing the National Immunization Day. Support from international and local agencies came in various forms – manpower and information dissemi-