

Medicines... a critical building block of the health system

Using a systemic approach to medicines management, collaboration with other components of the health system has been promoted

Results

- Funds from community health fund (CHF) and other sources are used to procure complementary medicines
- Financial guidelines for management of funds and medicines are implemented
- A new software IMIS records community health fund enrolment and use of medicines
- Awareness on antibiotic use in the community is joined with health promotion campaigns
- Maintenance and repair of medical equipment supports diagnostics for informed pharmacotherapy
- Health Facility Governing Committees are trained on their role to monitor and manage health facilities



A consultation room at a health facility in Dodoma Region (K. Wiedenmayer)

Access to essential medicines is internationally recognized as part of the right to the highest attainable standard of health. But in Dodoma Region, essential medicines are often beyond the reach of most households.

To alleviate this situation, the Health Promotion and System Strengthening Project is working to improve medicine management. This means addressing the supply chain as well as the use of medicines. Lack of access to medicines is a problem, but access is of little advantage if the medicines are not used correctly.

Health system strengthening is not complete without strengthening the management and use of essential medicines. The quality of health services crucially depends on the availability and appropriate use of essential medicines and supplies. Only when all building blocks are strengthened and linked, can a health system provide quality health care services to the population.



WHO 2009: Systems thinking for health systems strengthening

A systemic approach to strengthening the supply chain

As one of the building blocks of the health system, medicines are crucial for the functioning of health care delivery. Availability of medicines supports and motivates health workers in their clinical work, and gives people confidence in the public health system. But most of all, it allows patients to be treated and to get better. Availability of medicines is often equated with good quality of care even though other factors are equally important, such as waiting time, empathy, compassion, adequate diagnostics and functional medical equipment, evidence-based therapeutics and affordability of care. In the larger spirit of universal health coverage in Tanzania, medicines availability at health facilities will encourage the population to enroll into the Community Health Fund leading to social health protection.

The supply chain in Tanzania and Dodoma Region is characterized by a multitude of actors and activities within a complex chain of interdependent events that are again linked with other building blocks of the health system. The pharmaceutical system encompasses a value chain from the Ministry of Finance - which provides funds for pharmaceutical procurement and distribution - down to the community who uses medicines. This system is prone to innumerable weaknesses, gaps and loopholes that eventually impact on the availability and use of medicines.

A situation analysis and health facility survey in 2011 revealed complex and systemic weaknesses of the whole supply chain at all levels including aspects of financing, human resources, health information, governance, supply and record keeping skills, bureaucratic procedures and service delivery, as well as issues with Medical Stores Department (MSD) leading to significant stock-outs of medicines at facility level.

Medicines availability at health facilities will encourage the population to enroll in the CHF



Patient waiting area at a dispensary in Dodoma Region (K. Wiedenmayer)

Collaboration and system thinking

The regional HPSS project can only influence certain aspects of this system to strengthen

medicine management and enable better availability of medicines. Through partnerships, we seek to build on the strengths that exist and to bolster weak areas through training programmes and coaching, new management and supply chain design concepts and awareness building. Challenges in the pharmaceutical sector are multifaceted, systemic and complex. Stepwise and bundled interventions to strengthen the supply of medicines should target gaps in the supply chain that are attainable and sustainable while often overlapping with other health system components, such as financing and governance.

This collaboration and thinking outside of the vertical approach to pharmaceutical management is promoted and pursued in dialogue and interventions. Critical is the involvement and empowerment of all concerned actors, notably the pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical staff handling medicines, but also actors at the interface between system components and between health system and community. After all, the ultimate recipient and beneficiary is the patient, all patients regardless of socioeconomic or health status. Teaming up with infrastructure and maintenance staff, district accountants and community leaders will enhance collaboration and strengthen the health system and service delivery.

Dodoma Health Project Tanzania - Background

Health Promotion and System Strengthening (HPSS) or Tuimarisha Afya Project is part of the development cooperation between Tanzania and Switzerland. The HPSS project was launched in 2011 and supports Dodoma Region in the areas of health insurance, community health promotion, pharmaceutical management and management of maintenance and repair services for a period of 10 years. The project is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH).

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