



THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS IN THE TANZANIAN HEALTH SECTOR

Experiences from Health Service Users in Selected Health Facilities

'Why should I bother myself to put my complaint into the suggestion box while I know the facility in charge has been fishing our papers from the box by using a glued stick?' – respondent commented!



Background

In this policy brief, complaint is broadly - an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service provided by the Government in the public health facilities and therefore the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of complaint mechanism refers to ways through which citizens communicate their complaints and how complaints are being addressed to improve the services. Sikika conducted research at facility level in Temeke, Ilala, Kinondoni, Kibaha Rural, Mpwapwa and Kondo Districts and found out that complaint mechanisms are not effective, thus affecting the quality of services provided by the government.

Methodology

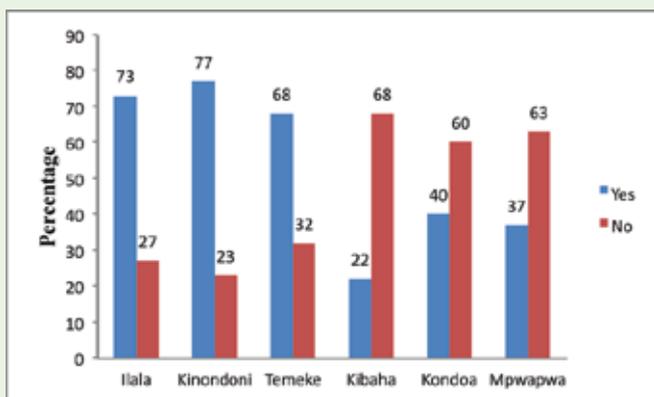
Sikika conducted a survey in six districts namely- Kinondoni, Ilala, Temeke, Kibaha-Rural, Kondo Districts and Mpwapwa to explore the existence and functioning of complaint mechanisms at health facility level. A total of 390 health service users were randomly selected in the stated districts. The interviews were conducted at health facilities' premises after the respondents had completed all the treatment procedures while the consent of the respondent was considered prior to the beginning of each interview. A questionnaire with both open and close-ended questions guided the interview process.

Major Findings

Availability of Complaint Mechanisms at facility level

To assess the availability of complaint mechanisms at facility level, health service users were asked whether there is any kind of complaint mechanisms in their respective health facilities. Findings show that complaint mechanisms exist more in urban facilities as compared to rural facilities. From **Figure 1** below, Kinondoni is the most leading district (77%) followed by Ilala (73%) and Temeke (68%). Kondoaa (40%), Mpwapwa (37%) and lastly Kibaha (22%).

Figure No. 1: Availability of complaint mechanisms in the surveyed health facilities



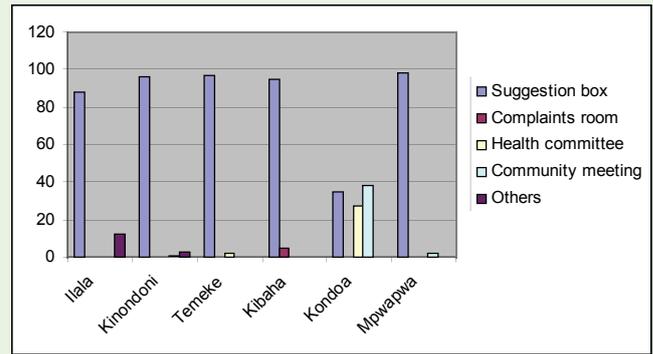
Source: Sikika, 2011.

Types of complaint mechanisms existing at health facilities level

Research findings show that suggestion box ¹ is the most (more than 80%) applied complaint mechanism in the surveyed districts. Other methods are community meetings, complaints rooms, health facility committees and phone numbers of District Medical Officers (DMOs) and Local Government officials as seen in **figure 2** below

¹ Suggestion box is a device for obtaining additional comments, questions and requests. In its most basic and traditional form, it is a receptacle, with an opening, not unlike an offering box or voting box. http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/suggestion_box retrieved on 17th November 2011

Figure No.2 Types of complaint mechanisms existing at health facilities level



Source Sikika, 2011.

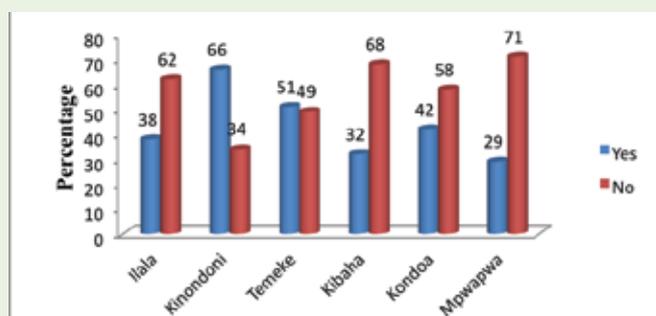
However, regardless the fact that the suggestion box is the most common way of submitting citizens' complaints, many respondents do not prefer using it for the following reasons:

- **Absence of confidentiality** - the suggestion boxes have been positioned in open areas and thus citizens hesitate to use the suggestion boxes since it is easy for them to be observed by health workers. This fear is more experienced in rural areas as compared to urban areas. "Afadhali huko mjini mna hospitali nyingi, hapa kwetu hospitali ni moja, naogopa kutumbukiza maoni yangu, nisije nikakosa huduma", a respondent in Kondoaa noted' literally meaning that in urban areas there are options on where one can access health services and thus, easy to cast a complaint in a suggestion box even in cases where anonymity is a problem
- **Illiteracy** - the majority of the citizens in rural areas do not know how to read and write therefore it becomes difficult for them to participate effectively in raising their complaints through the most commonly used mechanism – the suggestion boxes
- **Time consuming** - citizens are not comfortable with the use of suggestion boxes as it takes a long time from the date when they have submitted their complaints to the time when it reaches members of health facility committees. In addition, citizens do not see the value of using their time for this matter as they have never seen changes in service delivery despite the suggestions / complaints they made before.

Effectiveness of the Existing Complaint Mechanisms

When asked on the responsiveness of the above-mentioned complaint mechanisms, most of the respondents indicated dissatisfactions with the way their complaints are being managed. Since they do not see changes on the way services are provided, most of them feel the system is not effective. Based on the above type of mechanisms existing in each district, respondents were asked whether the existing complaint mechanisms are effective or not. Findings from this study show that Mpwapwa district has most ineffective complaint mechanisms (71%) followed by Kibaha (68) and Ilala (62%). From the same findings, Kinondoni district was noted to have the most effective complaint mechanisms (see figure 3 below)

Figure No. 3 Are the Existing Complaint Mechanisms Effective



Source: Sikika, 2011

Relationship Between Complaints Mechanisms and Provision of Quality Health Services

Sikika is of the view that effective complaint mechanism is the best measure for health service users' satisfaction. Having an effective complaints mechanisms guarantees feedback on health service providers' performance while delivering services to citizens. Again, the complaint mechanisms are the most useful source of information on both successful areas and the ones, which need to be improved in the course of delivering health services.

Recommendations

- Members of Health Facility Committees, in charges of health facilities, Local Government leaders and other responsible organs at health facility level should be accountable to citizens by exercising their responsibilities through responding to citizens' complaints on time and in effective manner.
- The Local Government officials, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) and the (President's Office – Public Sector Management (PO-PSM) should make initiatives to ensure increased citizen's awareness on their rights to raise complaints whenever they are dissatisfied with health services delivered to them. This can be done through educating the citizens on the importance of communicating their complaints whenever they are not satisfied with services rendered to them.
- Put in place the policy on complaint mechanism with a legal framework that will work to regulate the issues on complaint mechanism especially in health facilities. The government has to learn from experiences of other countries on what have they done with regard to putting in place the effective complaint mechanisms. In Trinidad and Tobago for example; the government through the Ministry of Health Services has enacted a specific law that gives the citizens the right to complain regarding their dissatisfaction to health care services at health facilities through the Patients Charter of Rights and Obligations that clearly tell that citizens have a right to file a complaint when they consider their rights infringed².

2 Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago: Ministry of Health. www.health.go.tt



P.O. Box 12183, Dar Es Salaam
Tel +255 22 2666355/7 | Fax +255 22 2668015
Email: info@sikika.or.tz | Website: www.sikika.or.tz