

Health System Strengthening

An Experience from the Field
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Strengthening?

- Health systems cannot be strengthened by governments, experts, money, infra structure alone
- By now it is known that active participation of people at the local level is the key in holding duty bearers accountable
- Weak health systems violate basic human rights

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Right?

- ☞ The Preamble of WHO's Constitution unequivocally states that the enjoyment of the HIGHEST ATTAINABLE STANDARD OF HEALTH is one of the fundamental rights of every human being
- ☞ 60 years of WHO have brought not much change

People's Action

- ☞ Health systems need to be reorganised to give social action and empowerment greater pre-eminence
- ☞ Conversely, social action and empowerment will push for the reorganisation of health systems

Empowerment

- Empowerment is not just about knowledge; it is about the recognition and the building of abilities to change power relations in society. Outside agencies cannot and do not empower anybody; they may facilitate, but ultimately it is the people who wrest power and thus need to empower themselves.

Just World?

- Even in a remote village or a slum, the struggles for development, for health and for social justice, are inseparable from the global struggle for a more just world economic and social order (ASG)

The Problem

- Shrinking budgets (malignant neglect by governing classes)
- Poverty begets poor health systems (also, it creates brain drain and destroys health systems)
- Pay for services and privatisation deny access to the poor

The Problem

- The vertical approaches of many PPPs of WHO weaken health systems
- Private health insurance and privatisation of health care deny access to the poor, weaken health systems
- Therefore the need of people to establish their right to health

At community level –A Six Way Process

1. **Community Organisation**
2. **Information gathering**
3. **Information Provision**
4. **Training**
5. **Participation in Local Governance**
6. **Holding Duty bearers accountable**

Community Organisation

- Using principles of community organisation, participation, social capital building – usually socially excluded groups
- Formation of special interest groups – women, youth etc.,
- Geographically, demographically significant scale

Information Gathering

- At the Community Level, by people themselves – eg. how well is the health system working
- The act of information gathering is in itself a liberating process
- Participatory process strengthens communities and authenticates results

Information Provision

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- Information arranged by the community to identify problem areas as well as their strengths and weaknesses
- Prioritisation matching their resources
- Use of Right to Information Act

Training

- ✓ Appropriate contents, appropriate methods
- ✓ At various levels
- ✓ Campaigning, advocacy etc., plus skills in local interventions such as timings, allocations, roles and responsibilities of health personnel, health decision makers

Also

- ✓ Knowledge of a rights-based approach
- ✓ Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- ✓ WHO
- ✓ Health as human right
- ✓ Existing laws that can be used to hold duty bearers accountable using the system itself, eg. Judiciary

Local Governance

- Intervention into Primary Health Centres, sub-centres, duty and timings of health personnel
- Local and sub-district health budgets and other allocations such as drugs
- Use of forceful non-violent confrontational methods

Health as a Right?

- Health Systems cannot work in the absence of, for eg.
 - Effective Public Food Distribution System - food security
 - Functioning police and impartial judiciary
 - Reasonable infrastructure including transport
 - Universal education
 - A population that is aware and willing to stand up and be counted

Pressure tactics?

- TRIPs

- GATS etc.,

 - Reduce access of the poor to health

 - Increase costs

 - Reduce number of personnel available to public health systems

PHM

- Small experiments however successful don't mean much

- Need to be done on a large enough scale – geographically and demographically to make an impact

- This is what PHM is trying to do – build up critical masses across the globe that would demand Health for All NOW