

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF DECENTRALISATION ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES IN AFRICA (RHD)

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Background

The provision of appropriate reproductive health care remains one of the main challenges in developing countries. The development of reproductive health services is continually confronted by challenges in a changing environment, an important element of which is decentralisation which is being undertaken by most governments in Africa. The general objective of the RHD was to make health sector decentralisation more effective in the development of appropriate reproductive health services. The general research question was: How does decentralisation affect reproductive health services? The overall research project compared different forms of decentralisation in two Anglophone (South Africa and Uganda) and two francophone (Burkina Faso and Mali) countries to assess the impact of decentralisation on, and importance for, the development of reproductive health services.

Methods

The South African research was undertaken between 2003 and 2006 and comprised in-depth qualitative interviews with all three spheres of government - National, Provincial and Local. Three health districts in North West Province were selected as case districts - Klerksdorp in the Southern Region, Mafikeng in the Central region and Ganyesa in the Bophirima Region. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed.

Results

Decentralisation is complex and it is not possible to separate the impact of this process from other parallel policy changes, such as development of reproductive health policies and their implementation. The context in which this is being introduced impacts on the ability of the local level to respond to the demands of a decentralised system. This in turn impacts on the implementation of reproductive health policies and outcomes. The findings illustrate the complexity of evolving systems for health services. Insight is gained into factors requiring consideration before and during implementation if there is to be a positive outcome from policy changes.

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