

Bangladesh Reality Check 2009

Policy Brief - Health

The purpose of Sida's five year Reality Check is to try to prompt further action within the ongoing sector reform programmes that can improve the quality of life of people living in poverty in Bangladesh. Taking the form of a 'listening study', it documents annually people's experiences and perceptions of changing health and education services, based on short intensive home stays with 27 households for four days and nights in nine locations.¹

Main Findings in Health

- People actively seek to optimise access to health services from the variety of formal and informal, governmental and non-governmental providers available – but with only very limited information.
- Quality and use of public health services continue to decline (in terms of staff, equipment and additional costs imposed by gatekeepers), with increasing use of private health providers such as diagnostic centres.
- Our informants prefer private diagnostic centres or private facilities to public providers, despite the higher prices that they may charge.
- People who feel failed by formal service providers tend to go to traditional providers (such as healers and homeopaths), where service is cheap but quality may be variable. Some formal providers unhelpfully undermine the reputation of useful informal providers such as traditional birth attendants.
- New, effective individual leadership is the main factor contributing to examples of positive change in public health facilities, where these have taken place.
- Most people still feel unable to make complaints about poor public services, and view most health professionals as remote and non-responsive.
- The Community Clinic system (recently revived by the new government) does not yet function well, and is mainly used by people only as an occasional collection point for free drugs.
- Increased cell-phone use can improve access to information and assist referrals, but new health helplines are perceived as too costly and remain underused.

Recommendations

- Regulation, quality control and productive partnering is needed of the range of public/private, formal/informal and governmental/non-governmental providers to better ensure people's right to health.
- Awareness raising activities need to be undertaken by government and civil society to empower service users to demand a better service culture.
- Key public health issues such as excessive salt intake, public spitting and first aid awareness should be addressed using simple messages.

¹ More detail can be found in the Reality Check Bangladesh 2009 full report at www.sida.se