

Language and the provision of health services in Kenya

The 1948 Declaration of Human Rights recognizes health as a fundamental human right. Long accepted as critical to a population's wellbeing, health ranks highly in many nations' development endeavours. This is not surprising considering the fact that health has a clear relationship with development. In fact, access to quality health care is an important indicator of the level of development of an economy. The implication of the above is that the provision of health services needs to be treated as a top priority for any progressive government. Since independence, Kenya identified health as a key development agenda, and has come up with numerous programmes aimed at developing its health care system over time, albeit with mixed results. Declaring health, a devolved function in the Kenya Constitution (2010) does not appear to have led to much improvement as was expected by many. Clearly, despite the stated realization and previous commitment to improved health care, the country's health sector is still bedeviled with numerous challenges. Indeed, to some Kenyans, access to health care services is a nightmare. Therefore, the inclusion of universal health care in the Government's Big Four Agenda, which is further proof that the country continues to recognize the significance of having a healthy population, has given citizens the audacity to hope for better times. Are there signs of the expected better times in health care so far? What are the factors that appear to have, and continue to impede the development of the sector to higher standards? What is the role of language in efforts at ensuring good provision of health services? Attempts to answer these and related questions form the focus of this paper. Interviews will be used to collect data from health facilities in Migori and Bungoma Counties.