

What it takes to get it right: A qualitative study exploring optimal handover of health programmes in Tonkolili District, Sierra Leone

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Introduction:

Well-planned handovers are growing more important as MSF engages in contexts for extended periods of time, often in collaboration with Ministries of Health (MoH). Since 2015 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has been supporting the MoH in Tonkolili district, Sierra Leone focusing on maternal and child health. To prepare for a handover, a qualitative study exploring elements of a successful handover was undertaken in 2019.

Method:

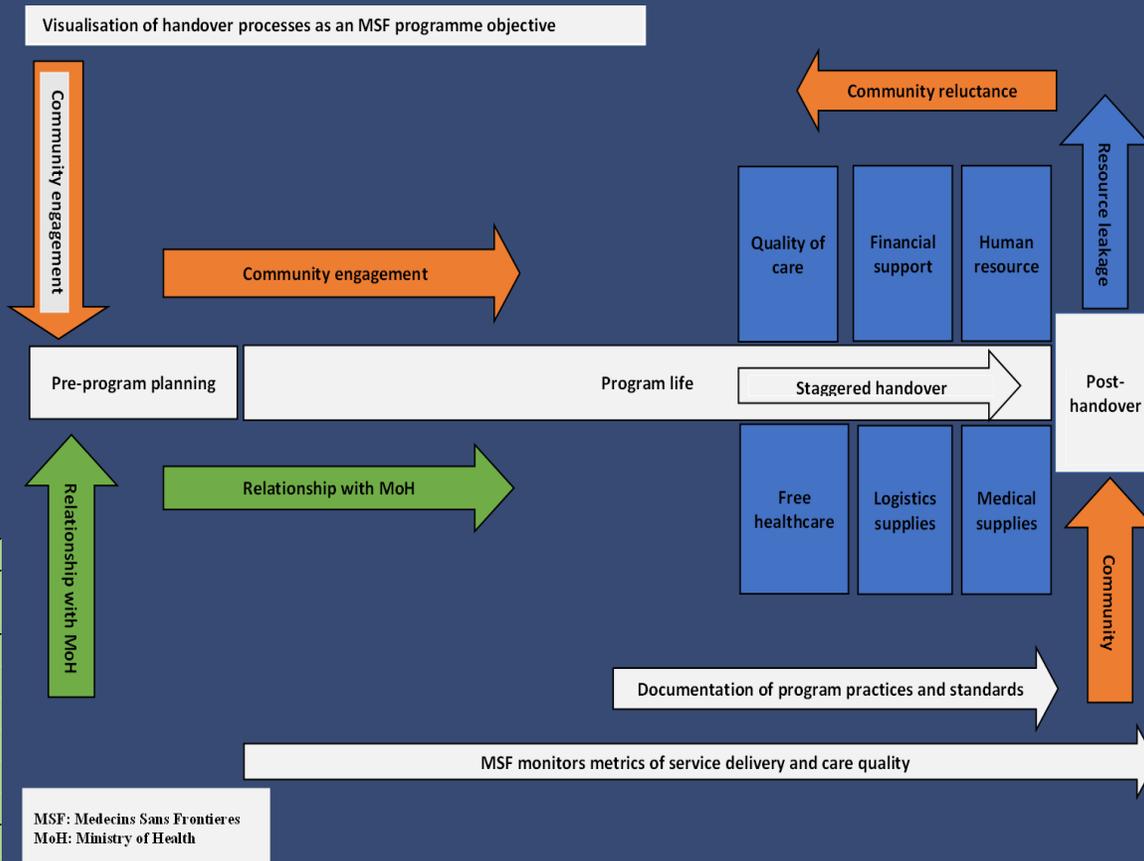
- Qualitative study design with an exploratory approach.
- Using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Study participants	Type of					Total		
	Mile 91	Magburaka	Freetown	Amsterdam	Interview	Male	Female	participants
MoH Policy Makers			8		IDI	7	1	8
Community leaders	6	6			IDI	11	1	12
Community members	2	2			FGD	24	24	48
MoH staff	4	6			IDI	4	6	10
MSF staff		1	2	2	IDI	4	1	5

IDI: In-Depth Interviews, FGD: Focus Group Discussion, MoH: Ministry of Health, MSF: Medecins Sans Frontieres
FGD: 12 participants per group

Main findings

- A handover of programmes is a continuous longer-term process to be considered at project design and inception of project activities.
- A handover process requires clear communication and relationship building.
- Important to have efficient resources and management capacity for a proper handover.



Discussions:

The study revealed that a handover can be successful when considered as a process that starts from the inception phase of the programme and continues until after MSF had exited.

- Communication and collaboration with key stakeholders linked with proper analysis.
- Quality and sustainability of services post-handover are linked with availability of resources (finance, human and material).
- Handover as an objective as opposed to having a handover strategy.

Conclusions:

Value for having guidelines for programme handover including the following topics:

- Making handover an objective.
- Staged communication.
- Work with a handover committee,
- Performing 'gap analysis'.
- Systematic use of handover chronogram.
- Staged handover.
- Post-handover assessment.

Using these principles, a handover plan could be adapted to a particular context, ensuring a successful transition.

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