

Title

Can the marginalized get heard on the post-2015 development goals for health? Findings from consultations with socially excluded populations in Bangladesh

Abstract

As the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals approaches, global discourse around a post-2015 development agenda, intended toward holistic development for all people, recognizes remarkable progress worldwide. Bangladesh in particular has been lauded as an exceptional performer in the health sector with substantial advances in maternal and child health, however progress has been inequitable.

This study examines communities in Bangladesh who were left behind and whether their voice can be heard in a global discourse where it is translated into a policy agenda that is responsive to their needs. Selected marginalized communities in Bangladesh were consulted - to gain an understanding of their perceived health needs and their agency in being heard such that these needs are addressed. This qualitative cross-sectional study forms a larger multi-partnership project, which conducted research across the global South.

Marginalized communities have a holistic understanding of health much broader than just health: lived experiences in their social, environmental and political context bring to the fore issues around livelihoods, land tenure and rights, access to basic services, and quality of care. Communities have the same problems accessing an exclusionary state-led health system and turn to a highly pluralistic and unregulated informal health sector for basic health care. There was little confidence in local institutions meant to serve community interest and it was found that communities had no voice in decision-making bodies, which were dismissed as politicized.

Communities have reasonable demands for improving their health consistent with their human rights but lack confidence in existing infrastructures that systematically exclude them. The post-2015 development discourse must provide agency and remove the obstacles to harnessing the voices of the marginalized in order that their needs are not subsumed in a broader economic and political agenda.