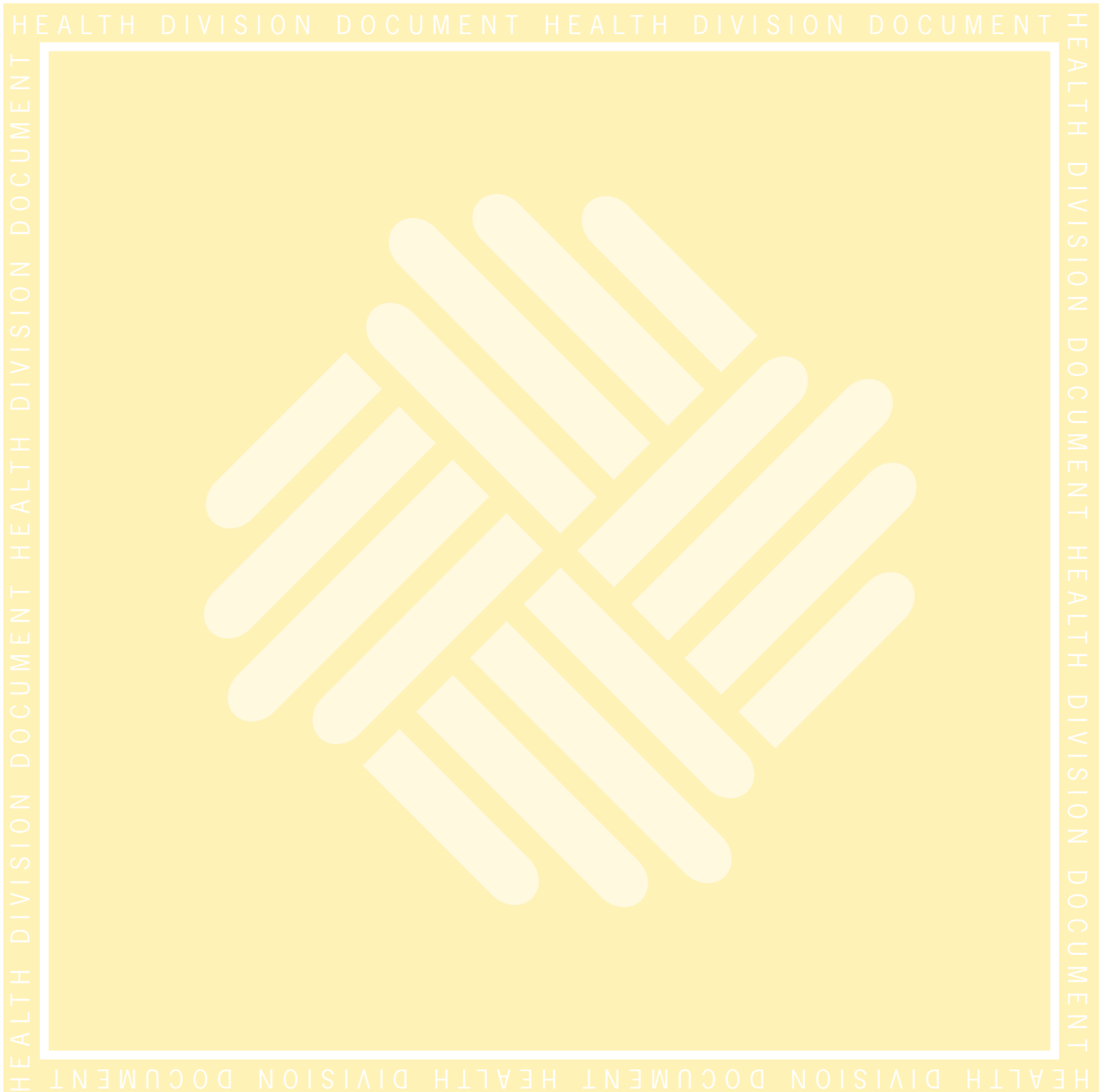


Health Division Document 2005:3 Issue Paper on NHA

Policies in the Kenyan Health care sector

– Why are they so difficult to implement?



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1. Introduction

Since the time of independence, in 1963, the performance of the Kenyan economy has been mixed. During the 1960s the country performed well, but since then there has been a steadily decline in the economy. Average growth level during the past decade has been around 2 percent. The poor economic performance has led to an overall deterioration in the overall welfare among the Kenyan citizens (KDHS, 2003). Some 56 percent of the population live in poverty and there has been nearly no improvement at all in the health status among the population during the past decades (PHRplus, 2005).

Policies in the Kenyan health care sector are clearly aimed at improving the health for the entire population. In a previous report it was found that policy documents are well supported by data about e.g. expenditures on health and burden of disease. National Health Accounts (NHA), Public Expenditure Reviews (PER) and Kenyan Demographic and Health Surveys (KDHS) are examples of reports used for policy purposes in the health sector. However, it was noted in the report that even though health expenditure and other data are used for policy purposes in the Kenyan health sector, the policies are not followed. The reasons for policies not being implemented were not further explored in the report (Glenngård and Hjalte, 2004).

In the National Health Sector Strategic Plan (NHSSP) 1999–2004 it is clearly articulated that health services shall be concentrated to meet areas such as reproductive health, integrated childhood illnesses, increased immunisation, environmental health, HIV/AIDS and malaria. Yet, the KDHS, 2003, reveal that there has been a decline in both medical antenatal coverage and in child immunisation rate between 1998 and 2003. Regarding malaria, no more than 22 percent of the households had a mosquito net in year 2003, to be compared to the target of 60 percent in year 2006. Furthermore, the latest NHA and PER show that the development of expenditures and allocation to different levels of health care services in part goes against the policy goals stipulated in the NHSSP. The current proportion of expenditure on health as a share of total government spending, 8 percent, is well below the goal of 15 percent adopted by African leaders in the Abuja Declaration of 2001 (Kenya NHA 2001/2002).

The provision of health and medical care services in Kenya is dependent on donors. More than 16 percent of total expenditures on health originated from donors in year 2002 (Kenya NHA 2001/2002). During

2005, decisions about the future donor support to the Kenyan health sector are to be made. A new NHSSP, covering the years 2005–2010, was supposed to guide the donors in their future support to the health sector. However, this plan has been delayed and as a consequence some donors have chosen to extend their current support one more year and work out a new plan for support, which is to commence in year 2006. Overall, there seems to be a fatigue among the donors regarding the poor performance and failure to meet set policy objectives within the health sector (Kenya Consultative Group, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to explain some of the divergence between policy objectives and implementation of policies in the Kenyan health care sector. Next, this report gives some background information about health and social indicators in Kenya. Then, a brief description of policies and objectives in the health sector and evidence on the rate of implementation of these policies is presented. The presentation is primarily based on reports by the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Kenya and its collaborating partners. Possible explanations to the difficulties of implementing policies in the Kenyan health sector are outlined in the next section, based on interviews with representatives from the MoH in Kenya, donor organisations and organisations providing technical support to the MoH and on available policy documents. The interviews were conducted in Nairobi in March 2005. Finally, conclusions are drawn and possible future scenarios are presented.

2. Background

The Kenyan population has increased from 25.3 million to 32.3 million over the past 20 years, and the population density increased from 37 to 49 people per square kilometre between 1989 and 1999. About 80 percent of the population live in rural areas. The country is characterised by a young population. About half of the Kenyan population is below 15 years of age and no more than 3 percent is over 65. Despite policies targeted at improving health and reducing inequalities in health, there have been no major improvements in this area over the past 10 years (Table 1). Infant and child mortality is high; about one in every nine children dies before their fifth birthday (KDHS, 2003). Although 56 percent of the population live in poverty, the households contribution to total expenditures on health in 2002 were 51 percent (Kenya NHA 2001/2002).

Table 1. Selected demographic and health indicators for Kenya, 1993, 1998 and 2003

	1993	1998	2003
Population, total (million)	25,3	28,7	32,2
Life expectancy at birth, total (years)	57 (-92)	50 (97)	46 (-02)
Households contribution to total expenditures on health	53 (-94)	n/a	51 (-02)
Fertility rate (total births per woman)	5.4	4.7	4.8
Birhts attended by health staff (% of total)	45	44	41
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	67	73	77
Child immunization against DPT (% of children under 12 months)	89	79	74
Under 5 mortality rate	93	110	115
Child malnutrition (% of children under 5)	23	22	19

Sources: World Development Indicators Database, World Bank, 2005; KDHS, 2003, Kenya NHA 1994 and 2001/02.

The country is divided into 8 provinces and 72 districts. Access to health and medical care is unequally distributed across the country, as is the fertility rate and the level of education (Table 2). Generally, the Central province and Nairobi account for the best values whereas the Northeastern province accounts for the worst (with the exception of HIV/AIDS prevalence).

Table 2. Selected demographic and health indicators for Kenya, by province 2003

	Nairobi	Central	Coast	Eastern	Nyanza	Rift Valley	Western	North Eastern
Fertility rate (total births per woman)	2.7	3.4	4.9	4.8	5.6	5.8	5.8	7.0
Population with no education (%)	10.0	12.0	37.8	21.2	18.3	28.6	18.2	86.8
Use of modern contraceptives (%)	44	58	19	38	21	25	27	0
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	67	44	78	56	133	61	80	91
Under five mortality	95	54	116	84	206	77	144	163
Women who received no antenatal care (%)	3.8	6.3	11.3	7.4	9.1	9.6	6.1	68.3
Births attended by health staff* (%)	79	67.9	33.8	38.6	38.6	37.3	29.4	8.5
Full child vaccination coverage (%)	63.1	78.5	65.8	65	37.6	55.5	50	8.8
Children with symptoms of ARI and/or fever (%)	54.9	68.5	56.6	40.9	68.3	52.3	86.9	33.1
Children with symptoms of ARI and/or fever taken to HCP (%)	56.3	45.9	58.3	53.3	40.5	47.1	34.2	26.7
Children with diarrhoea taken to HCP (%)	35	26.5	42.8	49.2	22.5	26.3	21.4	10.2
Households with at least one mosquito net (%)	37	16.2	34.2	16.8	32.1	11	19.8	37
Child malnutrition (% of children under 5)	6.3	14.6	25.4	21.2	15.6	22.8	19	n/a
Women underweight (BMI<18.5, %)	4.5	7.1	13.3	13	10.6	18.6	11.9	27.5

Source: KDHS, 2003. *Doctor and/or nurse/midwife

The health system is organised in a pyramidal structure and diagnosis and treatment is more advanced the higher up in the pyramid they are found. Basic primary care is to be provided at primary health care centres and dispensaries. District, sub-district and provincial hospitals are to provide secondary care, i.e. integrated curative and rehabilitative care. Third level care is provided at the general hospitals Moi and Kenyatta, located in Nairobi. Poor people in rural areas who are ill and choose to seek care, usually only have the option of treatment at primary care facilities. These facilities are often under-staffed, under-equipped and have limited access to medicines.

The Household Health Expenditure and Utilisation Report, 2003, reveals that among those Kenyans who are ill and do not choose to seek care, 44 percent were hindered by cost. Another 18 percent were hindered by the long distance to the nearest health facility. The major reasons for not seeking care at the nearest health facility were inability to pay for services and that medicine were believed not to be available.

3. Effects of earlier policies in the health care sector

The Government of Kenya has addressed the issue of inequalities and poor performance in a number of policy documents. Kenya has also committed itself to achieving the Millennium Development Goals for health, i.e. to reduce the under five mortality by two thirds, reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters, and to halt and reverse the incidence of HIV/AIDS and malaria (United Nations webpage, 2005-04-29).

In the NHSSP 1999–2004, it is clearly articulated that health care services should be targeted at reducing differences in health status by providing good quality health care services that is accessible and affordable to the entire population. Yet, according to the KDHS, 2003, 25 percent of the sick Kenyans do not seek care due to different barriers and services are far from equitable distributed. The level of child immunisation was 57 percent in the country in 2003. While 79 percent of the children had full immunization coverage in the Central province the corresponding figure in the Northeastern province was only 9 percent. The average fertility rate is 4.9 children (2000–2003) per woman; 3.4 in the central province and as high as 7 in the Northeastern province. In addition, people in the Northeastern province are least educated; 93 percent of the women and 71 percent of the men have no education at all compared to 13 and 6 percent, respectively, for the country as a whole. Regarding antenatal care, about 90 percent of all Kenyan women received some services, either from a nurse, midwife or doctor but large differences across the country can be noted. More than 96 percent of the women living in Nairobi received antenatal services compared to 32 percent of the women living in the Northeastern province (see Table 2).

Health services shall be targeted at reproductive health, integrated childhood illnesses, increased immunisation, environmental health, HIV/AIDS and malaria, according to the NHSSP 1999–2004. However, there has been a rise in infant and under-five mortality between the years 1998 and 2003 and a continuous decrease in child immunisation levels over the past 10 years. Also the target of reducing child malnutrition by 30 percent over the period 1999–2004 is far from achieved. Regarding the target of improving environmental health, the access to clean water and sanitation remains a severe problem. Less than half of the population have access to such amenities. About 24 percent of the Kenyan households draw its drinking water from either rivers or streams and a majority of the households, 53 percent, are within 15 minutes of

their water source. Malaria morbidity and mortality ought to be reduced by 30 percent according to the plan and by 2006; 60 percent of the population ought to have at least one mosquito net. Still, in 2003, malaria was the most important diagnose in both outpatient and inpatient care, 43 and 41 percent of all patients, respectively. Overall, 22 percent of the households had a mosquito net in 2003. On the positive side, the fertility rate remains at a low level compared to other countries in the region. Similarly, the HIV/AIDS prevalence is also comparatively low (KDHS, 2003).

Kenya signed the Abuja Declaration in 2001 and thereby committed to allocate 15 percent of total government spending on health. According to the NHA 2001/2002 the proportion was no more than 8 percent in 2002. Thus, this objective has not been accomplished.

According to the NHSSP 1999–2004 overall resources should be re-allocated from curative care at hospitals to primary and preventive care. By treating patients at the right level, capacity would be set free at the hospitals. However, data in the PER 2003 and the PER 2004 indicates that this has not happened. The PER 2003 shows that financial allocations to the two biggest hospitals in Kenya, Moi and Kenyatta located in Nairobi, increased from less than 14 percent in 2000/01 to almost 20 percent of the MoH recurrent expenditures in 2002/03.

The Kenyan 1994 NHA report revealed that households accounted for more than 53 percent of health care expenditure whereas the government financed less than 20 percent (Kenya NHA 1994). These findings were alarming, especially since more than half of the Kenyan population lived below poverty line. Still, in 2002 the Kenyan households contributed with some 51 percent of total expenditures on health although 56 percent of the population live in poverty (Kenya NHA 2001/2002). Some 44 percent of sick Kenyans who does not seek care are hindered by cost, according to the Household Health Expenditure and Utilisation Report, 2003. This does not correspond to the objective of providing good quality health care services that is accessible and affordable to the entire population.

4. Obstacles for implementation of policies

4.1. Findings from the evaluation of the NHSSP 1999–2004

In an evaluation of the NHSSP 1999–2004, by the Health & Economics Development Consortium (Hedc) it was found that there was a general weakness in all aspects of health policy support systems, which affected the overall implementation of policies (Hedc, 2004). The implementation of the plan has therefore been slow. More specifically, the following aspects were found to constitute problems for a successful implementation of the NHSSP:

- The preparation and dissemination of the plan was weak, which resulted in a lack of ownership and coordination. The plan did not reflect shared views and priorities by all concerned parties and therefore lacked the necessary commitment among key stakeholders to implement the plan effectively. Furthermore the plan was too general and lacked clarity in focus and benchmarks for monitoring evaluation.
- The plan did not include strategies of governance such as human resource rationalisation, financial management reform and legal and policy framework to support implementation of the plan.
- The plan lacked an implementation framework such as annual work plans, standard guidelines, institutional linkages and specific benchmarks for monitoring evaluation. This led to open-ended implementation where health service units had to develop their own plans of action with weak linkages to the NHSSP.
- The plan lacked clarity in the sense of who had the mandate to oversee implementation achievements, coordination, supervision, and monitoring of services.
- The plan lacked a national monitoring framework, which resulted in weak monitoring of performance in the programmes and health sub-sectors, such as human resource management, financial management, drugs and medical systems and resource accountability.

4.2. Findings from the interviews

The results from the interviews with representatives from the Ministry of Health, donor agencies and organisations providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Health support the findings by Hedc (2004). Generally, two major obstacles for implementing policies in the Kenyan health sector were discussed during the interviews.

The first major obstacle concerns operational management of policies. All respondents believed that the NHSSP 1999–2004 was too broad, which made operational management very difficult. The plan was based on academic discussions and constructed by consultants. The consultants did not consider practical operational management and did not succeed in bringing key decision maker on board. This led to a lack of consensus among policy makers and among those who were to implement the plan, respectively. Linked to this, conflicting policies have been formulated, e.g. to cut back on recurrent costs at the MoH, implying a reduction the number of civil servants, while at the same time improve the quality of services and the follow-up and monitoring of policies.

The second obstacle concerns decision makers confidence in the information that policies are based upon. The general opinion prior to the first round of NHA was that the government was the major contributor to health care financing in Kenya. However, the 1994 NHA revealed that households accounted for more than 53 percent of health care expenditure whereas the government financed less than 20 percent. Due to the rather unpleasant findings the policymakers did not officially approve the report and it was not completed and officially disseminated until year 2000. If the policy makers and those who are to implement policies do not believe that they have access to accurate data, two sets of problems appears. The first is that policies formulated may not be realistic. For example, the Abuja Declaration state that the budget for the health care sector should correspond to 15 percent of the governments total expenditures. The respondents expressed a believe that this declaration should not have been signed if policy makers have had access to data about the current situation at the time, i.e. that approximately 6 percent of the governments total expenditures was allocated to the health sector. The second problem has to do with political commitment. If policy makers do not believe that strategies are supported by ‘hard proof’ about the impact the existing allocation of resources have on the access and quality, it is hard to commit to changes in the allocation of resources. Note that other stakeholders, e.g. donors, had confidence also in the first round of NHA. It was primarily among government official that the data was regarded as not credible. This can, in part, be explained by the fact that the first NHA report revealed that households, not the government, were the main contributors to total health care expenditures.

The issue of re-allocation of resources from hospitals to primary and preventive care is of particular interest. Downsizing the budget of general hospitals require a strong and transparent leadership. Prior to the dissemination of the Household Expenditure and Utilisation Survey report decision makers were not convinced that such a re-allocation was a pro-poor strategy. It was argued that the hospitals were already underfunded. However, well-functioning preventive and primary care services would reduce the need for curative care, implying that improvement of such services would make resources available at the hospitals. Nevertheless, hospital care is presently regarded as very important among decision makers since patients turn to the hospitals when they do not receive proper primary care. Thus, this is a ‘catch 22’-scenario. On the one hand, re-allocating funds from hospitals to primary and preventive care services would decrease the need for curative services at hospitals. On the other hand, such a re-allocation would lead to an inability to treat patients, who presently are in need of curative care services at the hospitals. Connected to this problem is the fact that any worsening of the situation at the general hospitals is much more visible to the public than

any improvement of the primary care services in the rural areas. Hence, strong political commitment is believed to be of major importance if to succeed with re-allocating resources from hospitals to primary and preventive services.

A further point raised during the interviews was the weak linkage between the Ministry of Health and the districts. A general problem when implementing policies is that the priorities at the central and at the district levels are not harmonised. This might lead to a scenario where the government will allocate block grants according to its objectives but districts will use the funds according to priorities of their own. If the residents in the community favour education over health care, money will be concentrated to education regardless of the national policies. The objectives set at the national level should be linked to the priorities at the local level. There is a need to find a technical solution, which ensures that decisions at the district level correspond with overall policies and goals.

5. The way forward

Based on the interviews in this study and the evaluation of the NHSSP, a successful implementation of the next NHSSP (2006–2010) requires the following pre-conditions:

- Ensure that the plan is built on consensus among key policy makers.
- Develop annual work plans, guidelines and action plans to enable practical operational management of the plan.
- Develop clear benchmarks and timeframes of achievement for evaluation and clearly delegate a mandate to perform evaluations of implementation.
- Develop means to ensure that the priorities at the local level correspond to the objectives articulated in national policies, i.e. the NHSSP.

According to the interviews, some of the above suggestions are covered in the up-coming NHSSP 2005–2010. The respondents believed that the work on the NHSSP 2005–2010 is built on consensus among key policy makers to a higher degree than the former plan. Furthermore, the new NHSSP is to involve operational one-year interim plans. By the end of each fiscal year the operational plan for the up-coming year is to be laid down. Thus, the new plan is dealing with at least two important issues that were missing in the former, i.e. the lack of consensus concerning directions and strategies and the lack of specific targets, which makes the plan operational.

Regarding the lack of confidence in available data, policy makers view the second round of NHA as more accurate than the first round. Furthermore, the results of the Household Expenditure and Utilisation Survey are supported by a majority of policy makers. The objectives of the NHSSP 2005–2010 are more likely to be achieved due to primarily two things which were both lacking in the NHSSP 1999–2004: People are committed since they believe that the plan is built on accurate data and the plan is operational since it will be implemented in one-year phases.

In order for a national monitoring framework to be effective and to enable evaluation against specific targets, data from the health system as well as identification of specific benchmarks is required. The fact that policy makers now have a higher degree of confidence in the available data may have implications for the future demand for accurate data;

policy makers are more likely to demand data that they actually have confidence in. This development could improve data collection further and reinforce the success of the evaluation process of achievements in the health care sector.

Based on the interviews it seems difficult to re-allocate funds from hospital curative services to primary and preventive services. However, policy makers have committed themselves not to increase the budget for Kenyatta Hospital during 2006–2007. The primary care facilities in Nairobi are to receive more funding and equipment, e.g. ambulances so pregnant women can be referred to hospitals if necessary. The purpose is to channel patients to lower levels of care and thereby set free capacity at Kenyatta Hospital. Any extra funds allocated to the health care sector are to be used for primary and preventive services, e.g. funding of antiretroviral treatment of HIV and thereby set free hospital capacity by decreasing the burden of people with AIDS. Pre-payment schemes are to be implemented for hospitals to assure funding in a longer perspective.

6. Conclusions

The results from both the evaluation of the NHSSP 1999–2004 by Hedc and the interviews in this study suggest that a number of factors have hindered policy implementation in the Kenyan health care sector over the past 5 years:

- Lack of consensus and therefore commitment among policy makers.
- Lack of practical operational management of the NHSSP.
- Lack of means to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the NHSSP.
- Lack of confidence in available data among government officials.
- Catch 22 scenario regarding the re-allocation of resources from general hospitals to primary and preventive services.

According to the interviews some of these aspects were considered when preparing the NHSSP 2005–2010:

- A higher degree of consensus among key policy makers.
- Operational management is considered in the plan.
- Available data is viewed as more credible now compared to in the past.

Although implementation of the objective to shift resources from hospital care towards primary and preventive services seem to be very difficult the conditions for success in the area of implementing policies in the Kenyan health care sector appears to have improved. Whether the stated objectives of reducing inequalities in health status and provision of good quality health care services to the entire Kenyan population will be achieved remains to be seen.

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