

HHFA data interpretation perspectives: comprehensive and specific

The need for both comprehensive and in-depth approaches to the interpretation of HHFA data

The users of HHFA data represent a heterogeneous group of professionals, with diverse responsibilities and interests. Programme managers will focus mainly on their area of responsibility, whereas provincial and district general managers, as well as managers of ‘*cross-cutting*’ departments (such as primary health care, hospital services, finance, or monitoring and evaluation) need to have a comprehensive overview of service provision. The HHFA analysis team therefore needs to keep in mind the diverse needs and interests of the various users when they interpret and present the findings, without overlooking the links between the different service areas.

In the initial phase of HHFA data review and description, the scope of the analysis and interpretation should be comprehensive, encompassing all the critical areas covered in the survey, to avoid that important findings are overlooked. Use of a “wide lens” approach at the beginning enables analysts to gain an overall picture. It can also provide clues as to where to “zoom in” with a “tele lens”, looking for details in critical areas that require in-depth analysis.

In many countries, “vertical” programmes (e.g. HIV or TB) often have their own management systems and resources. It is important for the experts in these areas to conduct an in-depth review of the HHFA data specifically related to their areas. However, focusing only on specific indicators and programmes, in isolation from the other components of health services, can result in important patterns in the data being missed, and relationships between indicators of different service areas being overlooked. Furthermore, common problems that require a unified strategy may be missed and the resulting picture may end up being narrow or even distorted.

For example, experts who focus only on malaria will not understand the issues that malaria services may have in common with other service areas (e.g. a weak supply system, lack of training, insufficient supervision, poor IPC measures, etc.). Therefore, even for the programme experts, an integrated approach to analysis and interpretation, that provides a broad overview of health facility services, can be beneficial for understanding key systemic issues that may affect their programmes.

Health services are the result of dynamic interactions among interconnected elements: the various programmes and services, as well as the workforce, infrastructure, equipment, medicines, financial resources, regulations, guidelines and procedures, management systems, etc.

Therefore, for example, management and finance indicators may provide insights into performance in the service readiness dimensions. Service readiness performance may help to explain results within the quality of care dimension. There may be significant differences in performance among different programmes, or problems common to multiple programmes. Maintaining an overview of all the programmes and dimensions of health services, in addition to in-depth programme specific reviews, is therefore crucial to achieving a solid understanding of what the data can reveal, and can help to highlight and prioritize issues for the attention of managers and policy-makers.