

THE CITIZEN

WOMAN

Maternal clinic in Pwanimchangani, Zanzibar island



Mothers and their children await medication at the maternal clinic. PHOTO | Sigrid ESPANA

IN SUMMARY

- Tanzania has for time immemorial lingered amid unreliable health services so derelict that patient survival is blurred by uncertainty

I once experienced a frightening situation while visiting a remote village in Zanzibar. I fell critically ill, my state of health needed imperative medical attention; unfortunately there was none promptly available. They rushed me to the closest medical centre which was an hour's drive away. I survived, but there are hundreds of people who have met fatality as a result of lack of access to immediate medical attention. Unfortunately, expectant mothers suffer quite severely from this lack, making child birth an unnecessarily dangerous procedure for both mother and child.

I recently set out on a journey to North East Zanzibar, to a place called Pwanimchangani. This is a remote area on the island surrounded by world-class hotels. Pwanimchangani is a small village which for years lacked proper medical services condemning the local residents to a life of dismal hope for survival if attacked by an ailment.

In 2004, a resort was opened in Panimchangani, the owners, having visited a village numerous times during the construction of the resort, were interested in giving back to the community, especially the women. This marked a change in the lives of many, the local residents would directly benefit from a project that would improve their lives.

However, a health centre was not the first project to be initiated in Pwanimchangani. The first project to be initiated was a mosque. This was followed by a dispensary. Pwanimchangani is a village inhabited by predominantly Muslim residents, so the first project to be initiated was a mosque.

Prior to the realisation of a modern health centre, women living in Pwanimchangani would give birth in the confines of their own homes; this is because there was no close health facility.

Working closely with the 'Sheha' (The Village Elder) to try and improve the lives of the local Zanzibaris in the village, possible ways were identified which could raise money for further community projects that would benefit the local community.

The Pwanimchangani Dispensary is the only health clinic available to accommodate just under 6,000 residents from the villages of Pwanimchangani and Khandvi. Although there are basic facilities and support for pregnant women available at the dispensary, many women are forced to travel long distances to hospitals that specialise in maternal care to deliver their babies. Added to the distance they travel whilst they are in labour, the cost incurred by them for transport to these hospitals is relatively expensive. Many women still deliver their babies at home without any medical support.

Maternity clinic

Taking this into consideration, Ocean Paradise Community Project, in conjunction with the village of Pwanimchangani built a maternal clinic that was opened on 23rd December 2013 by the ministry of Health, Ocean Paradise Resort Board of Directors and the Sheha. The official opening was followed by traditional festivities which highlighted the joy of the local community. The hospital will provide free health services to pregnant women from villages of Pwanimchangani and Khandvi.

I visited the maternal clinic to see how services were being provided to the local residents. On arriving at the clinic vicinity, I was met by a queue of women waiting

Recommend

Recommendations



Home
97 people recommend this.

to access medical services, the sound of mothers chattering, and babies crying overwhelmed the small corridor leading to the room where a lady acting as an orderly was administering medicine to the waiting patients.

Speaking to one of the clinic orderlies who introduced himself as Kheri Ali Kheri, he told me that since the maternal clinic is a newly established centre, they receive around 40-50 patients a day. The clinic, clearly understaffed, was looking to enhance its workforce by employing qualified doctors. For now, there are about four clinic orderlies who perform most of the duties with direct supervision of a licensed practitioner. I got a chance to talk to the most active orderly at the clinic, a woman named Silidi Hamadi, entering her office; she was immersed in clinical duties attending to a mother and a child. After she was done, she proceeded to explain that her duties at the clinic are broad-based, she is fully utilised in various clinical duties. I sensed that she is being over utilised, this is detrimental to patients. Hamadi does duties ranging from administering medicine, to cleaning the clinic. "I wish that other women would also volunteer and help out on small clinic chores," she states. More help is clearly needed at the small clinic which helps hundreds of local residents. "It gets tough having to learn many intricate clinical duties, I'm usually exhausted at the end of the day but the work I do is very crucial to the survival of many mothers and their children," Hamadi further explains. Extreme cases are referred to the municipal hospital in Kivungi where services are also provided at no cost.

Transport huddle

Among the many patients waiting outside the orderly's office was a woman named Ms Juma Jacob. she was there with her baby waiting for her turn to access medication. Jacob lives in a nearby village but has to walk for an hour and half so as to get to the clinic. Walking is the only means of transport she has at her disposal, she states that she is among the few lucky women who live "close" to the clinic. Other women have to walk for three hours to get to the clinic. On a lucky day, patients get car lifts to the clinic from merciful commuters. This situation leaves a considerable number of women to decide to give birth at home lest they risk complications en route to the clinic. "I'm glad that a clinic has been built in our village. My baby now is assured of getting good medication," Jacob says.

Poor transport service is another lingering problem. Efforts have been advanced to try and minimise the inadequacy of health services, however, with poor transport system to help patients get to the health centres, the efforts only help those living in close proximity to the health centres. Patients have aired their grievances toward this and wish that the government would help find a feasible solution.

Among other requests by the clinic orderlies is the need to have more medical supplies provided to the clinic. This is justified by the fact that the newly built maternal clinic is the only option available to most women living in Pwanimchangani, meaning that an overwhelming number of patients all depends on the same available medicine.

Further development

Adjacent to the clinic is another health centre in its final setup phase. The clinic will also serve as a maternal health centre. Unlike the one already in operation, the soon-to-be opened clinic is well equipped with modern hospital machinery. This means that the clinic in Pwanimchangani will be able to handle even the extreme of cases thereby doing away with having to refer cases to the municipal hospital.

These community projects bring a glimmer of hope to the lives of many. The penurious, needing all the assistance attainable get to benefit and live lives with minimal worries about the future and the state of their survival.

mthomson@tz.nationmedia.com