

Playboxes: Improving health facility waiting areas in Mozambique through play



Background

When seeking essential health services, two major barriers identified by caregivers in Mozambique are lengthy wait times of three hours or more and health facility (HF) waiting areas that are not child-friendly. The Ministry of Health (MOH) seeks to improve national HIV pediatric treatment adherence through introduction of play areas in clinic waiting areas and to increase maternal and child health service utilization more broadly.

In collaboration with the MOH and community-based organizations (CBOs), PATH has been supporting playbox sessions in waiting rooms of all ten HFs in Boane District since November 2014 in an effort to improve the waiting experience for children and their caregivers. During the sessions, community health activists counsel caregivers on age-appropriate play and communication and guide caregivers and children to select handmade toys from a playbox as they await consultations.



Playbox with handmade and recycled toys. Photo: PATH.

Methods

PATH conducted 21 semi-structured key informant interviews with caregivers, CBO activists, and clinicians in Boane, Mozambique, in November 2015 to understand each group's experience with the playbox sessions and identify best practices. Data was analyzed for themes following iterative, open-coding of the transcripts using ATLAS.ti (v7).

Findings

Playbox sessions were positively received by caregivers and clinicians. Both groups emphasized the positive change in children and caregivers' waiting experience, resulting in the increased motivation of caregivers to return to the HF.

"The playboxes affected the consultations a lot. Now we laugh, we learn love; we adults learn while we are here. Even the child, when she hears, 'Let's go for weighing,' she starts running because she wishes to find that which is waiting for her at the health center. And on the days that the playboxes do not come out, the children ask for it."

—Caregiver of seven children and six grandchildren

Additionally, caregivers and clinicians reported increased knowledge of developmental milestones and integrating play into daily life. Clinicians and activists also noticed a positive change in the interaction between caregivers and children in the waiting areas.

“It is good because it teaches me how to play with the children... so that the child can develop quickly.”

–Caregiver of three children

“[Development] is a part of child health that was forgotten. Before the playboxes, the mothers would just put their children on their backs. Now mothers play with their children. They play and take every opportunity to do so.”

–Boane health facility clinician



Caregiver and child playing with playbox toy. Photo: PATH.

The increased knowledge of developmental milestones empowered caregivers to be more engaged during HF consultations to discuss developmental concerns, resulting in an increased detection of developmental problems.

“From the moment you explain to a mother about her child's development, she begins to say that my son has this or that problem, and this helps the health center itself.”

–Boane health facility clinician

“The playboxes affect my work because it helps us identify children with delayed development and [discover] the type of difficulty the child has, through the use of toys and parents' involvement.”

–Boane health facility clinician

The evaluation identified the importance of strong clinician support in regular implementation of playbox sessions and reinforcement of key messages. A best practice identified through the evaluation was to also have a playbox in the consultation room for use during consultations. The benefits of this practice are multifold: the toys keep the child happier during the exam, which gives the clinicians and caregivers an uninterrupted opportunity to speak calmly, and it also allows the clinician to better assess the child's development. Thus, clinicians should receive some orientation and training on the playbox intervention prior to implementation.

Another best practice identified was the involvement of caregivers in contributing items to the playbox and to act as peer educators, coaching other caregivers on development and integrated play.

Next steps

Many of the best practices and recommendations identified through the evaluation have been incorporated to improve implementation of the playbox sessions in Boane and to guide scale-up of this intervention in the remaining districts of Maputo Province (Matutuine, Namaacha, Marracuene, Magude, Moamba, and Manhiça), as well as in western Kenya where the program has recently been introduced. Additional feasibility and impact evaluations will be conducted to offer the MOH the evidence and know-how needed for scale-up beyond Maputo Province.