The patients at the Bonderi health center have been grumbling for weeks about the poor service provided to them. The health staff have not been able to fill the majority of prescriptions because of medication stockouts at the health center. The village leaders who live a few hours’ walk from the health center have even complained about the large number of measles, neonatal tetanus, and whooping cough cases in the past year and the deadly bouts of malaria afflicting the children. No one from the health center has even visited their area for several months, and no committee meeting has been held since the health center opened.

Because there has been no committee meeting, the chairman has neglected to make any plans for spending the funds earned at the center. No income was recorded, and there has been no audit of expenditure. Consequently, the health center can no longer
provide the most basic services or even pay the salaries of its workers. The health workers did encourage the committee to comply with the management recommendations made by the district health management team during its supervisory visits. However, when nothing happened, they finally threatened to resign if the situation did not improve.

Ibrahim, the nurse, informed the committee chairman about the complaints they were receiving from the community. When Ibrahim consulted the register, he was unable to find any cases of measles, whooping cough, neonatal tetanus, or malaria reported in any village. The reason for this is that people from the villages located some distance from the health center had stopped going to the center due to the inadequate patient care and shortages of medication. Eventually, the chairman began to grasp the consequences of his poor management on the health of the community. Ibrahim and the committee chairman therefore visited these villages and confirmed the situation. Outstanding illnesses were treated, and Ibrahim and the committee chairman agreed to monitor the activities of the health center more closely and address management problems.

### Elements of Health Center Management

- Management committee meets regularly
- Problems are solved in consultation with the health staff and the community
- Action plans are made with goals, timetables, and assigned responsibilities
- Basic information on the functioning of the health center is reviewed regularly by the health committee
Reflection

This story shows that community support for managing the health services is critical to success. The health committees and the health center staff should work as a team to ensure that the health services run smoothly and that community needs are being met. As seen in Bonderi, community members complain as soon as the quality of care at the health center declines. Lack of attention to management and financing of services can often result in this type of poor performance at the health center and an increase in the occurrence of basic diseases. There are many reasons why the health committees do not function as they should:

♦ Sometimes the committee members are too busy to meet;
♦ The committee’s responsibilities may not be clear;
♦ Some committee members may live far from the health center;
♦ Committee members may not have the skills to fulfill their management responsibilities; and
♦ The health workers and the committee members may not communicate regularly.

To reduce these constraints, health workers must work closely with the health committee and the community and try to improve service quality and encourage regular involvement of the health committee in the management of the health center.

Consider these questions:
♦ How does this story relate to your work at your health facility?
♦ Does the health committee for your area meet regularly?
♦ Does the health committee help manage the funds raised at your facility?
♦ Does the health committee consult with the community about their needs in relation to the health center?
♦ If the health committee is not actively involved in the work of the health center, do you know why?
♦ What can you do to encourage the health committee to contribute to the management of the health services?

To answer these questions, begin by looking at the data you collect at your health center and from the health management committee. Then follow the five steps of self-evaluation.
Self-Evaluation

Step 1: Choose and Define an Appropriate Indicator

From facility and health management committee data you can calculate indicators of the strengths and weaknesses of community involvement in health center management. There are two basic indicators that health workers can use to conduct self-evaluation of community involvement in health center management (see box). To begin, the health worker should select only one indicator and analyze it. Here we suggest starting with the first indicator in the box—percentage of meetings held by the management committee—which is an important indicator for assessing the effectiveness of community involvement in health center management.

Define the Indicator for Percentage of Meetings Held by the Management Committee

Key Indicators for Community Involvement in Health Center Management

- Percentage of meetings held by the management committee
- Number of new activities undertaken by the health center staff with funds managed by the management committee

REMEMBER! The numerator and the denominator can cover any period of time (quarter, year, etc.). However, the time period related to the numerator and the denominator in a single indicator must always be the same.
This indicator only measures the amount of effort made to hold meetings. It does not indicate attendance by committee mem-
ners, the relevance of decisions made, the decision-making
process used, and to what extent recommendations were imple-
mented. Yet the committee meeting is an important factor in the
successful management of health centers. Committee meetings
offer opportunities to share information about community
management and community health as well as chances to make
decisions, formulate recommendations, and assess decisions and
recommendations.

STEP 2: Analyze the Data (Calculate—Interpret—Present)

Calculate the Indicator

The Numerator

The numerator is calculated with information found in the
records kept on the management committee.

Example: The management committee met once last quarter.

The Denominator

The denominator is calculated using information from the
health center planning document.

Example: The management committee planned to meet once
per month, or three times, last quarter.

Percentage of Meetings Held

Using examples from above, divide the numerator by the
denominator and multiply by 100: \( \frac{1}{3} \times 100 = 33\% \).

Interpret the Indicator: What Does this Indicator Tell You?

You can use this indicator to:

♦ Describe the problem: Is it big or small?
  — The committee met only one-third the number of times it
    planned to meet;
  — The committee is expected to meet one time each month
    (it missed two-thirds of its meetings for this quarter).
Compare the indicator with the target. Did you reach the target? Is community involvement in health center management adequate? Is it improving or becoming worse? There are normally standards set for the number of meetings a management committee should hold per year. In this case, the target is 12, or 3 per quarter. Is your indicator for the last quarter higher or lower than the target? What does that tell you about your management committee and its role with respect to the health center? If the annual target was set at 100% for this year, what can you do to ensure that the frequency of meetings improves? Should you reconsider the target? Perhaps it was too high?

Does this problem occur more often at certain times of the year?
You may want to look back at the number of meetings held by the management committee over the past year. Perhaps there were fewer meetings during a particular time of the year due to harvests or rains? Perhaps it is unrealistic to expect the management committee to take a whole day to meet every month when it is time for the crops to be harvested? You may want to hold shorter meetings at a busy time of the year or meet with committee members individually.

Presenting the Data

It is sometimes helpful to make a picture with the data (a graph or table) to illustrate changes in meeting rates over time or to discover when meeting rates are highest or lowest. These pictures can be used to explain the data to others, such as members of the management committee, other community leaders, and your supervisors.

Making a Graph or Table

You can make a graph that shows the number of times the management committee meets over the year. For each quarter, you first make a bar that indicates how many meetings took place and then make a similar bar for the target, or number of meetings planned. From this graph, you can then tell whether the committee met as many times as expected. In addition, you can also determine if there are certain times of the year when holding a meeting appears to be more difficult.
TABLE 1: Percentage of Management Committee Meetings Held Versus Target

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health center:</th>
<th>Bonderi</th>
<th>Indicator: Management committee meetings</th>
<th>Year: 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>Planned</td>
<td>Held</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STEP 3: Assess the Situation

Now use the indicator, the graph, and the table to assess the situation.

The indicator tells you the overall size of the problem at a specific time. The percentage of management meetings held last quarter was 33%, and the target was 100%.

The graph tells you whether there is any seasonal pattern to the frequency of meetings.

Table 1 tells you the overall annual meeting rate compared to the target.

WHAT IF...

✓ If the overall percentage of management meetings is acceptable (getting closer, equal to, or exceeding the target), then you may decide that you do not need to make any additional effort to improve community involvement in health center management. Give this information to the community and tell them that things are going well.

✓ If the indicator is too low or not showing much improvement, you may want to consider possible causes and solutions.

The cause of low frequency of management meetings may be found in the management committee, in the health team, or in both.

In the health committee, you might consider:
✓ The distance members live from the health center and the time it takes to hold a meeting;
✓ The lack of information or understanding about the importance of the role of the management committee; and
✓ The lack of skills to perform the role of the management committee.

Among the health team, you might consider:
✓ Whether relations with the committee members are open and supportive;
✓ Whether the health team is keeping the committee well informed about the work of the health center by sharing reports and data with them;
✓ Whether the health staff actively participate in the management committee meetings;
✓ Whether the health staff show their appreciation for the work of the management committee; and
✓ If there are certain committee members who do not feel confident contributing to the meetings, such as women or the youth representatives.
There may be many other reasons that the management committee is not meeting regularly. These are only examples. To explore the possible causes and solutions, you should discuss the problem with other health staff, the management committee for the health center, your supervisor, district managers, and especially the management committee and the community. Key sources of information in the community are village leaders, village health workers, and teachers. During the meeting, use both the data that you have analyzed and the tables and graphs that you have made to explain and illustrate the problem. Then hold a discussion about possible solutions.

Depending on the cause, these are steps you could take to improve the frequency of management committee meetings:

- Ensure that all members of the management committee understand their roles and the importance of their contribution to the management of the health center.

- Ensure that committee members have the information they need to make decisions about the health center.

- Arrange for assistance if members of the committee are not comfortable working in accounting or reading reports.

- Suggest that the committee add additional members with specific skills as needed.

- Show your appreciation of the work of the committee by telling others in the community about the importance of their role.

- Attend all the committee meetings and make a good contribution to the discussion.

- Ensure that all members have a chance to contribute.
**STEP 4: Finding a Solution**

**Hold a Meeting**

To begin to address the problem, you may want to hold a meeting with other health workers or community members. These meetings should follow the steps indicated below.

**Set Priorities**

First, decide what is the most important and easiest step to take. Start with something that relates to your direct responsibilities in the health facility. Then move on to the community. For example:

1. **If you have not been keeping the management committee well informed about health center operations or problems:**
   - **Prepare** information for the committee members;
   - **Inform** them verbally about the health center; and
   - **Give** them monthly targets and reports of service performance.

2. **If you have learned from your discussions in the community or in the health center that management committee members are more likely to attend meetings if they are held in the evening or on weekends:**
   - **Change** the day or time of the meetings and let people know about it!

3. **If management committee members do not accept the importance of their role in health center management:**
   - **Find out why and learn** more about their views of their role; and
   - **Encourage** them to attend and explain what they can do to improve the health services and the health of people in the area.

4. **If members of the management committee do not have the skills or the knowledge to do their jobs:**
   - **Conduct** a short training on the importance of primary health care, management and accounting procedures, and community involvement.

5. **If women or young people feel uncomfortable speaking during the meeting:**
   - **Suggest** forming a sub-committee, which would give them specific tasks, or responsibilities; and
   - **Encourage** the chairperson to promote participation among all members.

Only you and the community together can decide the best steps to take to address the problem in your community.
**Develop an Action Plan**

Work with other health staff or committee members to make a plan. A plan is an agreed set of activities that will be conducted to address a problem or achieve a result. This plan might include improving the format of meetings, setting a more reasonable target for the frequency of committee meetings, or planning a training to orient the management committee members to their role in supporting the health center. The plan should list all the activities that will be done, when they should be completed, and who is responsible for completing them.

**Work with the Community**

Next, continue to work with the committee to implement the plan. While both the health workers and the committee can take responsibility for implementing the action plan, the committee may need your help to do their part.

**Seek Support**

If you need help, you could request support from the district health management team, a local NGO, local government, or other community groups. Teachers can help encourage the management committee to take their role seriously. A local NGO might explain to the committee their experience with community involvement in health center management. Solving management problems in the health center is everyone’s responsibility.
### Action Plan for Improving Community Involvement in Health Center Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities to improve the frequency of management committee meetings</th>
<th>Date to be completed?</th>
<th>Who is responsible?</th>
<th>Results achieved or not? Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conduct orientation of management committee</td>
<td>3/3/02</td>
<td>Ibrahim Health center staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reschedule meetings to the evening during harvest time</td>
<td>Starting at the beginning of the harvest</td>
<td>Committee chairman Ibrahim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide monthly reports to the management committee</td>
<td>21/3/02</td>
<td>Ibrahim Health center staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Blank tables are located in Annex 2 at the end of the document.

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**STEP 5: Monitoring the Results of the Action Plan**

It is important to monitor what happens as a result of your action plan. Did your activities lead to an improvement in the frequency of management committee meetings?

**Fill in the Action Plan and Note the Results that Were Achieved**

- ✔️ Assess the same indicator after a period of time to see if there has been any change.

Be sure to share that information with all those involved in identifying and addressing the problem.

If you reach the target or make any improvement:

- ✔️ Inform the management committee and the community of this success, congratulate them, and thank them; and
- ✔️ Ask them to make an effort to maintain or even improve on this good result.
If necessary, **work** with the committee and the community to reach a higher target for the next period and define activities that will help you reach it.

If you do not reach the target or your indicator remains low:

- **Identify** the reasons why this might have happened; and
- **Hold** an emergency meeting with the committee and the community to help identify the causes and find solutions.

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**The Results of Self-Evaluation**

Ibrahim made a table to show the management committee that they had only met 66% percent of the time proposed for meetings last year. He noted that meetings were apparently not held during harvest time and the period following the harvest, when people were involved in local holidays. Ibrahim suggested to the committee that they reduce the expected target for annual meetings to ten and hold only one long meeting just before the harvest begins to address any problems. At that time, the committee can make plans for the next few months, when most people are too busy to commit time to managing the health center. The committee members agreed to this plan. However, they also suggested that Ibrahim conduct an orientation for new members of the committee so they could understand their roles better. Ibrahim agreed to do this and thanked the committee for their interest in improving the support they provide to the health center.