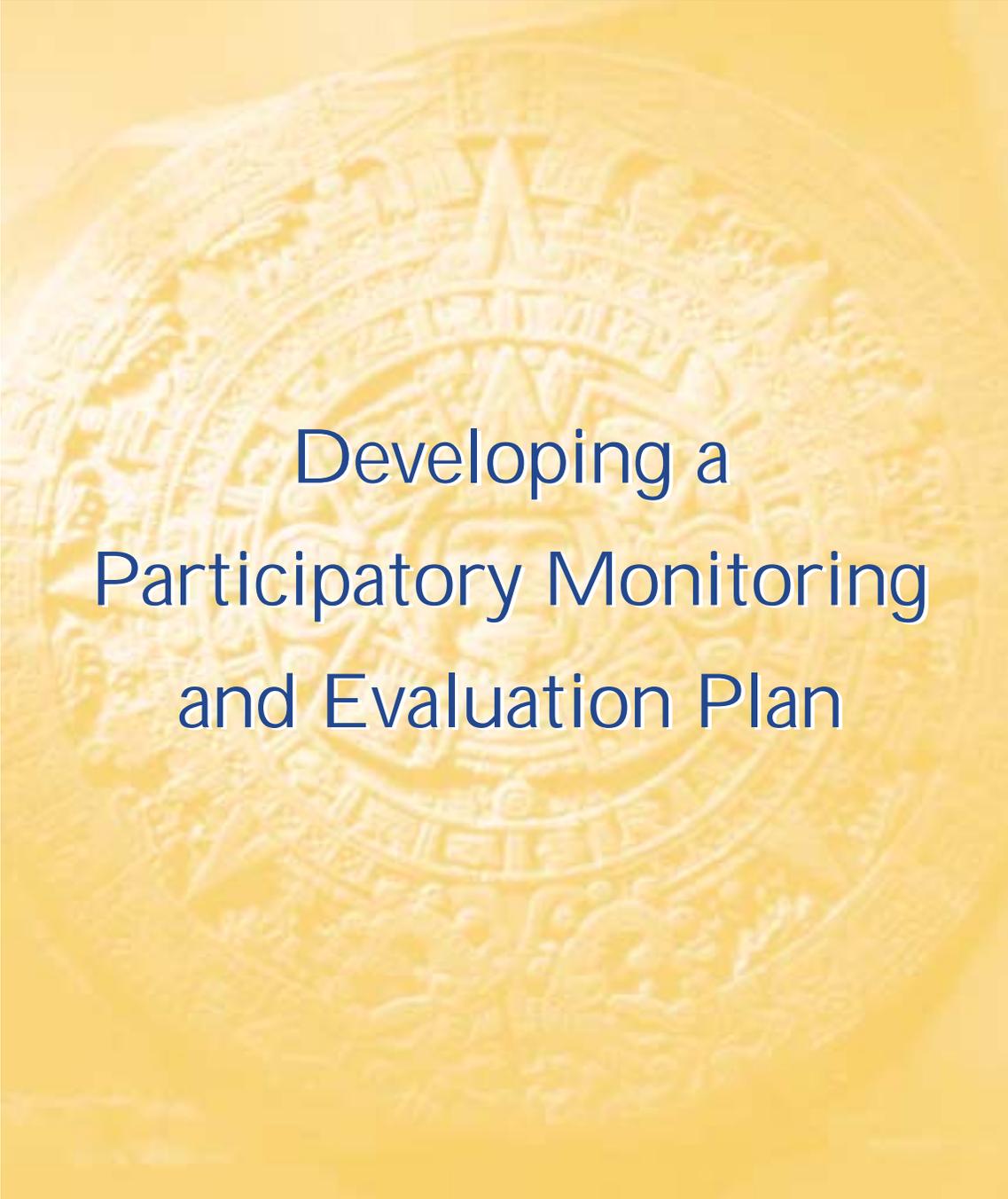


PROJECT
LESSONS
LEARNED
CASE • STUDY



Case Study of an NGO
Capacity Building Project in Mexico



Developing a
Participatory Monitoring
and Evaluation Plan

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1 | SUMMARY

This case study provides a record of how a group of leading Mexican nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) participated in the development of a project planning matrix designed to represent International HIV/AIDS Alliance (the Alliance) activities in Mexico and set indicators and collect data required to show project results. It is a detailed account of a project that reached 64 different groups in three priority states in its first year, strengthening HIV/AIDS information and other services through capacity building in strategic planning and external relations. It also describes how these groups orchestrated a three-dimensional public presentation of first-year achievements.

Not only did the NGOs successfully implement a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan that dovetailed with bilateral and multilateral agreements, they achieved astonishing project results—all objectively verifiable. The organizations also established a foundation for a more strategic, community-based response to the AIDS epidemic in Mexico.

The quantitative data for the first year speaks for itself. Out of 64 participating NGOs: 62 finished with written mission statements; 56 with written strategic plans; 46 with action plans designed to implement organizational strategies; 54 with identified external relations goals; 63 with priority partners identified; and 35 with an external relations action plan in writing. Fifty-six gave examples of how they had developed new or closer collaborative relations with other partners. On the basis of this data, baseline data, and additional project monitoring documents, the project demonstrated that it exceeded each of its three main project purpose indicators.

An essential part of the project's achievements was the development of an M&E process that defined expected results in a strategic and measurable framework. For the NGOs involved, the M&E process itself became a capacity building experience, with groups subsequently demonstrating increased ability and desire to use M&E

matrices in their wider institutional plans. In their own words:

“Our best lesson learned was becoming aware that, ‘yes, we can’ and ‘yes, we did,’ and now we can just keep going.”

The project is now in its third year. Overall support for the project, including contributions from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and financial and technical support of the Alliance, have increased from US\$169,805 in 1998, to \$249,316 in 2000. All M&E costs were covered under these commitments. By 2003 the project aims to reach NGOs in the eight priority states identified within the National AIDS Program's five-year plan (1998-2003).

The following case study describes in detail how this 12-month NGO capacity building project, became a five-year program.



2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The project was initially envisaged as a 12-month endeavor. Funds from USAID/Mexico, along with the Alliance's own resources, were allocated to support activities within the framework of the following USAID/Mexico result:

Increased capacity of non-governmental organizations to deliver HIV/AIDS/sexually transmitted infection (STI) information and services and increased participation of civil society in the policy and planning process.

This result supports the Mexican National AIDS Program's (CONASIDA) five-year plan (1998-2003). The Alliance-led project aimed to support USAID's Result with its own, more specific, purpose: to focus on building the capacity of NGOs and voluntary groups involved in HIV/AIDS work. Specifically, the project aimed to improve NGO strategic planning and foster more effective, collaborative relations to expand the impact and sustainability of NGO work.

Thus, the Alliance's final project purpose read:

By June 2003, improved external relations and strategic alliances among leading AIDS NGOs, persons living with HIV/AIDS groups, civil society activists, and other institutions, in a total of eight priority states [as selected under the USAID/Mexico national five-year plan].

Since funds were committed for only 12 months, results needed to be measurable and visible in the short term to help guarantee longer term funding

and technical support. At the same time, results needed to provide data that would show longer term impact in terms of "increased capacity to deliver information and services" among the Mexican groups reached, and/or "increased participation of civil society" in the national response to HIV/AIDS.

Another immediate challenge was how to translate what amounted to a "log frame" result and project purpose into reality in a way that guaranteed full involvement and ownership of host-country implementers.



3 BACKGROUND

When the project was conceived, Mexico's HIV/AIDS epidemic was the third largest in the Western Hemisphere, after the United States and Brazil. Around 200 NGOs and community-based groups were implementing HIV/AIDS prevention and care activities, and hundreds more were involved in broader aspects of sexual and reproductive health. Most of Mexico's AIDS-related initiatives represented a creative and spontaneous response to an epidemic that had not yet been fully recognized. Mexico's population of men who have sex with men and their immediate families, including wives and girlfriends, had borne the brunt of the epidemic. However, external funding to support prevention work among this population was scarce; only a handful of groups were regular recipients of international attention and/or grants. This environment created significant competition among groups struggling for survival.

In addition, most Mexican organizations working on HIV/AIDS/STIs fell into one of two main categories:

1. Established community development organizations, usually with a focus on rural and/or women's reproductive health and rights; and
2. Recently formed AIDS-specific groups responding to the needs of those directly affected by the epidemic (at the time, mostly men who have sex with men and their close relations).

The latter category also included some notable exceptions: longer established homosexual rights organizations, some formed as far back as the early 1970s. [Colectivo Sol, the group chosen by the Alliance as its host country linking organization, was the oldest running homosexual rights

organization, and had more than a decade of experience working in HIV/AIDS.]

At the start of the project, each category of NGO represented somewhat different experience and expertise, but very little communication or strategic cooperation had ever been achieved between the two. In fact, during much of the 1980s and 1990s, conflict between the traditionally "feminist" organizations in the first category, and some of the male-oriented homosexual rights groups in the second, was open and frequent.

Through its capacity building focus, the Alliance project aimed to help professionalize and expand recognition of the work carried out by so many highly motivated voluntary groups and NGOs, while promoting cross-fertilization of skills, experience, and perspectives between these two categories of civil society actors.



4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 RATIONALE: CAPACITY BUILDING FOCUS

The project's focus on strategic planning and external relations training was based on the Alliance's international experience and a working hypothesis: improved strategic and collaborative relations among leading HIV/AIDS NGOs can increase their capacity to deliver services. Building strategic alliances allows individual efforts to become "more than the sum of their parts" by creating opportunities to increase the sum total of the range and scope of services made available.

The Alliance approach to external relations training does not simply involve promoting networking or information exchange. The training process is designed to ensure a deeper change in the perceptions and external communication patterns of NGO workers to actively expand and sustain the impact of their work. The underlying signifi-

cance of the methodology used is that it enables participants to develop for themselves a deeper understanding of their current working context and to re-think, as necessary, how they should focus energies and resources in their external relations strategies, including with whom they should collaborate, and why.

The process was designed to stimulate a collaborative approach among NGOs, which moved groups from their current external relations planning process (usually based on reactive planning and historical allegiances) to more proactive planning and a new understanding of potential partnerships:

End Point: external relations based on proactive planning, collaboration based on shared goals, conflict resolution and improved communications.

Starting Point: external relations, reactive to immediate needs, based on current perspectives, allegiances and conflicts.

The training, as adapted for Mexico, was designed as an experiential workshop (learning through exploring real experience and practice), based on the Alliance's fully participatory approach. The training lasted about five days, with each group sending at least three senior participants. This was to ensure that an organizational change process could be implemented beyond the workshop context. By the end of the training and follow-up, participating organizations aimed to have:

- Clarified their mission statements;
- Clarified their goals, strategic plans, and activities;
- Prioritized their external relations goals;

- Identified their priority partners in relation to these goals; and
- Developed a plan to work with these partners.

The project's first year involved a total of 64 Mexican groups, either already involved in HIV/AIDS work or interested in starting. The first workshop was piloted with seven leading AIDS NGOs, who were then trained to provide technical support to the remaining groups, during a series of five additional workshops held in three priority states: Mexico City and surrounding areas, and the rural, southern states of Oaxaca and Yucatan.

OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING PROCESS

Each NGO to receive training began by analyzing the identity it had created for itself, as individuals and as an organization. NGO staff analyzed their mission, goals, and objectives, and action plans. They then looked at this strategic plan in the context of their current external relations, by graphically mapping out their position within their working universe—a universe that invariably included many other actors, stakeholders, and beneficiaries. During a graphic imaging process, each NGO group was encouraged to analyze:

- With whom it collaborates and why;
- The overall nature of current external relations;
- Key conflicts or allegiances;
- The influence of other stakeholders or actors; and
- How staff feel about their position in the “working universe.”

The imaging process used in this analysis was an original and creative adaptation of the Venn diagram. Each participating group mapped out their

current situation by pasting up their own “solar system” on large flip-chart paper, which represented their working universe. They identified the nature of their current working relations, through the relative positions, size, and color of planets, asteroids, and comets, which each represented various actors.

Once this situation had been fully explored and mapped, each NGO/voluntary group was encouraged to undertake a strategic planning exercise using another visual imaging technique, this time involving a framework of concentric circles, known as the contextual map. Each circle was used to illustrate one of the following:

- The beneficiaries of each NGO/group;
- What the group needs, and with whom the group should collaborate, to serve these beneficiaries;
- How the nature of the work is changing and any effect on services provided;
- Potential alliances to maximize the effectiveness and sustainability of the group’s HIV/AIDS information and services; and
- Who the priority partners are within these alliances.

As participants looked back at their current working universe (Venn diagram solar systems), and compared it with their more strategic contextual map, some inherent contradictions became apparent. For instance, one group realized that, in addition to having activities that were unrelated to their overall mission, their contextual map also made it obvious that their current focus on working exclusively with women was not strategic, at that point in time.

For most groups, this was where the process of organizational change really began, motivated in addition by the visual presentations and new ways

of thinking displayed by other participating groups.

The remainder of the training process covered the practical steps involved in planning for change, through the step-by-step development of improved strategic and external relations plans, while also encouraging a change in the general perceptions of each group. For example, many participants entered the workshops understandably seeking greater exposure for their own work, including access to funds or other support. An inherent weakness in this perspective is that it discourages collaboration, with groups viewing one another as potential rivals.

Through active listening and structured communication brought about by the workshops, many participating groups began to realize they would be better off working collaboratively, and even included joint funding proposals in their revised strategic plans. This led to a shift in focus from isolated struggle to collective efforts, with more constructive exploration of conflict. Developing organizational self-esteem was crucial to this process, hence the focus on participatory exercises, which encouraged sharing within, and among, groups on the emotional, as well as intellectual, levels.

4.2 RATIONALE: PROGRAM DESIGN, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As mentioned above, funds for this project were initially guaranteed for only one year. Effective documentation of achievements during the first phase was essential to ensure high visibility of the short-term results, while at the same time laying the groundwork for documentation of the pro-

gram's longer term impact, at USAID's Result (or Intermediate Result) level. The M&E process would also provide the information essential for effective program management, as well as valuable documentation of a new and innovative country initiative for the Alliance.

In addition, the M&E design was planned to help encourage complementarity among initiatives managed by other leading stakeholders. The USAID HIV/AIDS strategy, developed in close consultation with the National AIDS Program (CONASIDA), clearly reflected national concerns and priorities for strengthening Mexico's response to HIV/AIDS. The Alliance program sought to dovetail its M&E plan into this national strategy. This level of collaboration aimed to facilitate closer cooperation between the NGOs and the government's own national and state-level operations. The program also aimed to complement the The Futures Group International initiative, which stimulated the establishment of state-level multisectoral fora. The Alliance process and results design (discussed during its earliest stages with The Futures Group International) aimed to build the capacity of NGOs/voluntary groups to better articulate their concerns, improve their service delivery, and take an active role in the fora coordinated by The Futures Group International.

DEVELOPING AN IMPACT INDICATOR

Drawing up a common sense impact indicator at the Results level turned out to be relatively straightforward. The indicator had to logically link the project purpose (i.e. the Alliance's strategic planning external relations training) to the USAID Results: "Increased capacity of NGOs to deliver HIV/AIDS information and services" and "Increased civil participation". In theory, the indicator also had to set the same timeframe as the USAID-supported national five-year strategic

plan, as well as stating some concrete measure of effectiveness. Thus the following Result-level indicator was developed:

At least 50 percent of NGOs/groups who have received external relations training, can provide by June 2003 at least three specific reasons why they believe their improved external relations work has increased their capacity to deliver HIV/AIDS information and services; and/or can show their external relations activities have resulted in widening the impact of their work through the additional involvement of others.

RESULT-LEVEL INDICATOR

This indicator in part reflected a result of the planned capacity building that the Alliance, from international experience, could largely predict. An important part of the Alliance's external relations training is to help groups learn how to encourage additional involvement of others in HIV/AIDS information and services. After consultation with project participants during the project's pilot training, this impact indicator remained (and remains to date) largely unchanged. It has, however, been complemented by a new indicator, in order to assess the results of more recent program areas focusing on increasing evidence-based planning among civil society actors.

DEVELOPING INDICATORS FOR THE PROJECT PURPOSE

Developing the project purpose indicators, however, was more complex. These indicators would need to show more immediate and specific gains to the external relations training carried out during the 12-month period, while ultimately contributing towards the impact indicator and avoiding overly complex data collection in the longer term.

Early liaison with the project's local implementers was essential to develop project purpose indicators that would work for all concerned. It was only after the initial pilot training workshop in external relations carried out by Alliance consultants for participants from a total of seven leading AIDS NGOs in August/September 1998, that appropriate indicators for the project purpose could be developed, with the knowledge that these would be relevant to NGO participants.

At the same time, the local USAID Mission was working to ensure that its own evaluation consultants for USAID/Mexico's Strategic Objective #4 (from the MEASURE project) could meet with the Alliance consultant developing this project's M&E framework. This ensured that the same indicators dovetailed with USAID's log frame and M&E plan. Meetings between The Futures Group International and the Alliance consultant were also arranged initially through the Mission.

4.3 METHODS/ACTIVITIES INVOLVED IN THE M&E PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The 1998 pilot workshop in strategic planning/external relations, which provided the basis for realistic indicators, was carried out with the intent that the core group of leading NGOs would undergo training, adapting contents and approach to the Mexican reality while increasing their own capacities. They would then receive further training as trainers, to enable them to provide technical assistance to additional groups. The core group of NGOs would subsequently provide training to an additional 60 or more groups in three out of eight priority states, within the first year.

The pilot training curriculum was an adapted version of the Alliance's *Pathways to Partnerships* external relations training toolkit, and incorporated original methodologies developed on-site, such as the visual working universes as Venn diagrams.

One key observation made during the pilot training was that participating groups needed to be clear about their overall mission and project strategies (including their goals, objectives, and activities) before being able to develop an effective external relations plan.

This finding was reflected in the adapted curriculum, as well as in the first of three project purpose indicators developed during the pilot training. The second and third indicators developed reflected other key objectives of the training, namely: developing new collaborative relations with partners not previously worked with (non-traditional partners), and encouraging additional involvement of other actors previously not working in HIV/AIDS information and services. This data (i.e. evidence of additional involvement of others) would also contribute toward the impact indicator described above.

The three main project purpose indicators developed were:

1. By June 2003, at least 75 percent of all leading AIDS NGOs/PLWHA groups and civil society activists receiving training and technical assistance from the project will have demonstrably improved strategic plans, which include external relations and alliance-building strategies.
2. By June 2003, at least 50 percent of the above will have initiated new collaborations, as outlined in their external relations plans, with non-traditional partners in order to strengthen existing prevention/care activities.

3. By June 2003, at least three additional non-traditional actors will have started, or significantly increased their involvement in, HIV/AIDS prevention/care in at least seven out of eight priority states.

PROJECT PURPOSE INDICATORS

The Alliance also worked with the seven host country NGOs to select three main output areas for the first year, which were included in the project planning matrix along with their own process indicators. The first output area reflected the project's overall purpose, with three indicators mirroring those above, but with a first-year timeline by June 1999, and a specified total number of groups to be reached (60-70) in three out of the eight priority states (i.e. Mexico central, Oaxaca and Yucatan). The other two output areas related to project process and sustainability. Thus the three output areas for the first year read as follows:

Output Area One:

In each of three priority states, capacity developed for leading NGOs/PLWHA groups/civil society activists in external relations and alliance building.

Output Area Two:

Nationally, capacity developed for seven leading AIDS NGOs/PLWHA networks to provide technical support in planning and implementing external relations and alliance building to peer organizations in three project states.

Output Area Three:

Sustainability of program ensured for replication throughout a total of eight priority states (named in national strategic plan 1999-2003).

PROJECT FIRST YEAR, 1998-1999

As previously mentioned, output area one represented the first stage of attaining the overall project purpose. Output area two ensured in-country sustainability for external relations technical support, by reflecting the plan to train a core group of seven NGOs to provide the technical support in strategic planning and external relations to other groups. Output area three was included in the project planning and M&E framework to help ensure that further financial and technical support could be found for expansion to a total of eight priority states over a five-year period, as well as consolidation of the project's first year achievements. This was to be done precisely by having an M&E plan, and ensuring its implementation.

IMPLEMENTING THE M&E PLAN

The project now had a stated purpose, along with three specific purpose-level indicators, which were logically linked to USAID's result, as well as output areas identified for the first year, and corresponding process indicators (not detailed here). The stage was set to reach additional 60 or more groups, with clarity about what kind of data should be collected by the implementers, and why.

The first thing to be finalized was a pre-post intervention questionnaire, piloted by the Alliance consultant working on the M&E plan, Hilary Hughes, during the 1998 pilot strategic planning/external relations training workshop. This questionnaire was to provide the baseline data, used to show achievements for each group in seven specific areas covered by the training.

The questionnaire aimed to elicit information that would specify what was meant in the purpose-level indicator by "demonstrably improved

strategic plans, which include external relations and alliance building strategies.” The questionnaire asked about which strategic plans NGOs already adopted, and how such plans were developed and/or improved. It was deliberately short and simple, since it was to be administered on the job by the seven leading NGOs who were to facilitate the roll-out trainings and provide follow-up technical assistance to other beneficiary groups. The pre-post questionnaires were identical, apart from the last question, which sought data on collaborative relations developed as a result of the training/technical support process.

Questions included:

- Does your organization have a written document explaining your mission?
- Does your organization have a written document explaining your institutional strategic plan (aims and objectives, and main activities)?
- Does your organization have an action plan, specifying staff/volunteers responsible for tasks, and by when?
- Does your organization have specific external relations goals?
- Do you have priority partners?
- Do you have a specific external relations work-plan?
- Have you established new or closer collaborative relations with other groups, since your involvement in the project? If yes, with whom, doing what? If no, why is this?

The baseline questionnaires were administered on the opening evening of each training workshop, with NGO facilitators interviewing each of the NGO/voluntary groups participating in the training. Post-intervention questionnaires were completed, again through interview sessions with participating groups, during the last of three technical support follow-up visits scheduled for each

beneficiary group. These support visits were carried out by one of the NGOs. Any remaining post-intervention questionnaires were completed during interviews with groups attending the lessons learned mini-evaluation workshops, which were held in each state, toward the end of the project’s first year. These lessons learned workshops gathered additional qualitative data, which fed into the national-level evaluation and re-planning workshop, held in August 1999.

EVALUATION AND RE-PLANNING WORKSHOP

The August 1999 evaluation and re-planning workshop was a fully participatory process, held at a rural retreat in the mountains of Real del Mont, in the state of Hidalgo. Participants included NGO technical support providers and additional representatives from selected beneficiary groups in each state. Following the internal review and re-planning process, the workshop’s final day was devoted to presenting results and future plans to a wider audience of stakeholders.

The presentation day resulted in a spectacularly creative exhibition, providing guests with a three-dimensional appreciation of the project’s history, its qualitative and quantitative results, and its strategic vision for the future. Guests included representatives from the National AIDS Program, as well as other major stakeholders, including the local USAID Mission and multilateral donors active in Mexico.

During the Real del Monte workshop, the project’s main implementers (and some additional beneficiaries) worked together in a way that dissolved individual NGO boundaries. In the words of the host country Project Coordinator, Rafael Manrique of Colectivo Sol, a series of evaluation exhibits were uncovered, “like an archeological

dig” revealing, piece by piece, a unique environment in which the groups had lived and worked together, as well as a virtual environment, in which they envisioned continuing their work.

Perhaps the most extraordinary indicator of partner participation in the evaluation process was demonstrated by the project implementers and beneficiaries, who co-opted the data collection and results documentation process, to the point that their chosen presentation tools reflected methodologies learned in the strategic planning and external relations trainings.

Presentations unfolded, one by one, in a three-dimensional walk-around display, bringing to life the prosaic log frame on which the project was based. As professionals belonging to UNASSE (a women’s rights group in Yucatan) pointed out some two years after the event:

The way in which we participated at that first evaluation workshop in Real del Monte was a new experience for us, using new approaches—an experience which left us with a great feeling. Without the need for complicated analysis, we used new matrices that stimulated our creativity, while giving us an interest in every step, with attention to detail that involved every workshop participant. Finally, we realized we were operating as one team. This was the real success of the process: We lived the evaluation experience ... using our own creative dynamics and presentation models.

– Consuelo Ramirez, Psychologist, and
Amelia Ojeda Sosa, Lawyer, UNASSE

The final workshop exhibits were presented in a three-dimensional tour around the workshop venue, which included:

- An entrance display, consisting of a photo history, or *Historiografía Gráfica*, of the entire project, documenting key activities during the previous year, including shots from each of the various training workshops (six in all), and selected shots from follow-up field visits. The photographic expertise of the Project Coordinator, Rafael Manrique of Colectivo Sol, made this photographic record possible.
- Presentation of an adapted version of the contextual map used in the external relations trainings. This time, the concentric circles and symbolic graphics reflected the overall strengths and weaknesses of the project itself, along with a full analysis of relations with current and potential beneficiaries, implementers and stakeholders.
- Presentation of a project universe map in three stages: one representing how the organizations interacted prior to the project, one representing where they had arrived in terms of collaborative relations, and another presenting a vision for the future, including goals for subsequent years.
- A state-by-state mini-tour, with separate presentation zones or *salas*, each exhibiting the work and results in one of three states: Oaxaca, Yucatan and Mexico central. Workshop guests were able to meet the state-level focal point NGOs responsible for technical support and follow-up, and some of the training participants and facilitators discussed outcomes and future plans from a local perspective.
- Presentations of the main quantitative and qualitative results recorded during the M&E process, using large, multicolored graphics.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Quantitative results measured the number of NGOs who made gains in seven specific areas for each of six training workshops (and follow-up). The results represented an astonishing illustration of the host country project commitment. Out of a total of 64 participating NGOs:

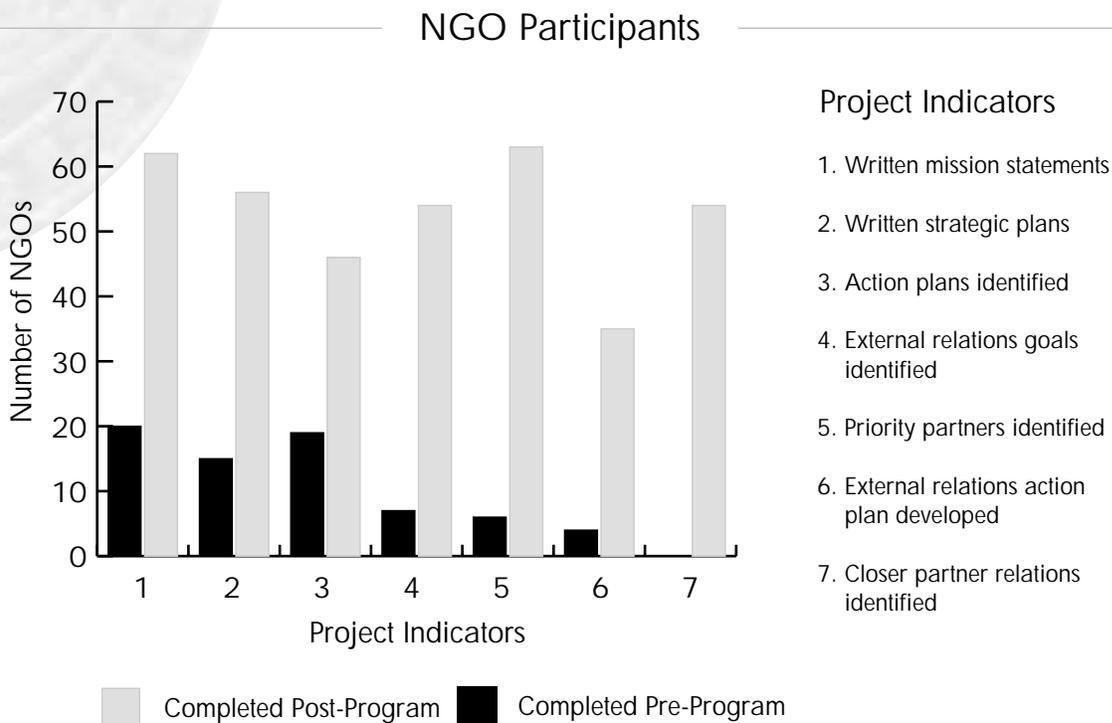
- 62 finished the project’s first year with written mission statements;
- 56 with written strategic plans;
- 46 with identified action plans;
- 54 with identified external relations goals;
- 63 with priority partners identified;
- 35 with an external relations action plan; and
- 56 gave examples of how they had developed new or closer collaborative relations with other partners.

The graph below illustrates the overall quantitative results for the 64 participating groups. Bars 1-7 correspond to the seven areas outlined above,

and indicate NGO response to the questionnaire, pre- and post-intervention.

In relation to the project purpose indicators, it was clear from the first year’s results that, of the groups reached so far, more than 80 percent (exceeding the target of 75 percent) had demonstrably improved their strategic plans, which included external relations and alliance-building strategies. More than 80 percent (exceeding the target of 50 percent) had initiated new or closer collaborations to strengthen their existing HIV/AIDS information and services.

With reference to the third project purpose indicator, which set the target of three new actors in each state mobilized to work in support of HIV/AIDS information and services, each of the three initial states reached reported between two and five additional actors now working in HIV/AIDS. Qualitative information was provided for each of these new actors, including details



about their particular links with NGOs participating in the Alliance project. For example, in Yucatan, a youth network had been started, with key representatives receiving training in external relations and organizational development mentoring from the women's reproductive rights group, UNASSE. In Oaxaca, the Ecology Forum decided to include HIV/AIDS issues in its regular program agenda, establishing closer links with with Gunaxhii Guendanabannii, another of the Alliance project NGOs.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS PRESENTED

Qualitative data was collected during the state-level lessons learned workshops, and during the overall project evaluation workshop in Real del Monte. Many quotations were captured to illustrate a number of result levels. For the purposes of this case study, which focuses on the M&E process itself, only a brief summary of qualitative findings is provided here.

The most important tangible gain for NGOs receiving project training and technical support was achieving greater clarity in their organizational direction and strategy:

We were able to ground our high-flying objectives by putting them down on paper. This helped us in two ways: for ourselves, by gaining internal clarity while, in the eyes of others, we developed a real presence.

– Teatro y SIDA, Oaxaca

A range of qualitative findings relating to intended and unintended outcomes were categorized according to levels of impact. A selection of these categories follows:

- Personal level. As one volunteer from the National Network of PLHA said: “I feel more

committed to the work now that our direction is clearer. I can take decisions and I know who I should be linking up with—for myself and for the network.”

- Institutional level. Another volunteer, working for Ave de Mexico, a sexuality education organization said: “We discovered that systematizing and professionalizing our plans meant using tools that proved very useful in our everyday tasks, as well as for overall organizational planning. This is the basis of ensuring sustainability.” Another group from Oaxaca described this process as building “institutional self esteem”.
- HIV/AIDS NGO environment. It became clear to many groups that work in HIV/AIDS had a broader context, relating to human rights in general, and that collectively they needed global strategies to respond to the impact of global trends, including a better understanding of the political processes involved.
- Programmatic level. Comments consistently revealed that the seven leading resource organizations, as well as some other beneficiary groups, now felt as if they were one entity, with a common goal, working together in the project like a new umbrella NGO. “As far as many people are concerned [i.e. those working in HIV/AIDS in Mexico], this project has itself become a new actor, a new NGO, a new Alliance,” the participant said.

The following statements, made by Psychologist Consuelo Ramirez and Doctor Sandra Peniche of UNASSE, Yucatan, capture the uniqueness of the project's first year:

This was the first time in the history of the fight against HIV/AIDS in Mexico that the most important NGOs took collective and

strategic action ... and it is the first time that the strategic focus was internal capacity building of the groups concerned.

The transparency of the process, and the sensitivity of Colectivo Sol [host-country coordinating NGO for the project] in driving this process, was, from our point of view, the key factor behind overcoming resistance to collaboration, smoothing over past conflicts, and finally bringing together key leaders in this field.

– UNASSE, Yucatan

The following comment, also from UNASSE, relates as much to the collective monitoring and evaluation process used to document results, as to the project results themselves:

Our best lesson learned was becoming aware that 'yes, we can' and 'yes, we did,' and now we can just keep going.

4.4 COSTS

Costs for the M&E plan and its implementation, including data collection, were covered under the overall budget for project activities. Total funding for the first year, including USAID funds and Alliance financial and technical contributions, amounted to US\$169,805. Following the first-year evaluation, additional resources were committed totalling \$277,907 in 1999, and \$249,316 in 2000.



5 RESULTS OF THE M & E PROCESS

This section deals with the outcome of the M&E process, rather than the project results per se. Most observations relate to those directly involved in the M&E implementation, namely the leading NGOs which were responsible for setting realistic indicators, gathering and analyzing the data, and presenting data to stakeholders. For these NGOs, participating actively in an overall M&E framework resulted in the following gains:

- Increased capacity to use monitoring and evaluation matrices and other tools;
- Wider institutional application of M&E, beyond the project;
- Increased capacity to demonstrate results, internally and externally;
- Increased capacity for evidence-based project planning; and
- Increased attractiveness to donors.

One group, Ave de Mexico, which had existed for many years prior to the project's inception, grew from a staff of two in 1998 to a paid team of 10

during the project's three years. NGOs and groups receiving training and technical support are beginning to show similar gains, themselves becoming more aware of the importance of M&E, and expressing a greater desire for further capacity building in M&E.

For the Alliance, such active host-country participation in the M&E process ensured the project's

activities and achievements were extremely well documented in the field, thereby providing a comprehensive basis for program management.

Overall, the framework allowed for demonstrable results linked directly to the project purpose, and provided transparency to project stakeholders at all levels.



6 CONCLUSIONS/ LESSONS LEARNED

A participatory M&E plan can only be as authentically participatory as the program on which it is based. To a large degree, the success of this M&E approach owed much to the commitment of the NGO resource organizations involved, and to their improved organizational self esteem gained through a successful, and collaborative, capacity development initiative. The methodologies employed were based on an Alliance approach to organizational development training, which encourages active listening and structured communication within and between groups. As a result of this process, many participating groups began to undertake collaborative efforts, with more constructive exploration of conflict. This in turn nurtured ownership over the program results and their documentation.

From the perspective of the Alliance consultant responsible for the project M&E during the first year, Hilary Hughes, the evaluation workshop in Real del Monte was “a dream come true—a project planning matrix and log frame that not only made sense to the donors, but proved it

could be a living experience, of real importance, for the host country implementers concerned.”

In addition, the efforts of Nancy Alvey, of USAID/Mexico, came to fruition. A strong liaison between CONASIDA, The Futures Group International and the Alliance had facilitated a sharing of expertise between program actors at all levels and was ensuring ongoing programmatic complementarity. The Alliance’s resource organizations were also beginning to receive national recognition for their role in strengthening the response to HIV/AIDS.

Developing an M&E approach that doubles as a motivational force in program success, as happened in this case, depends largely upon frequent and broader liaison at all levels during log frame development; ensuring an ultimate best fit between the donors’ expectations, and the vision and expertise of the implementers and beneficiaries involved. Just as the improvement and expansion of NGO work in HIV/AIDS depends on the involvement of others, so does successful M&E.

M&E success also depends on encouraging ownership of results among the host country implementers—results they can be proud of and use to their own advantage to garner broader support for future work. The quality and quantity of data gathered and documented during the project’s first year helped substantially to secure financial and technical backing for the project’s next steps.

By February 2001, the project had really become a program, with geographical expansion to the states of Puebla and Guerrero, while continuing to consolidate work carried out in Mexico City/State, Oaxaca and Yucatan. The program is currently seeking to expand further (as of March 2001), to include two remaining priority states, Jalisco and Veracruz, to meet the overall project objective of eight states prioritized under the National AIDS Program.

Finally, no M&E plan should be written in stone. Matrices are a reflection of a planning process, but only at a given point in time. A successful M&E plan depends wholeheartedly on regular contact with the field, in order to continue to reflect field reality and re-planning priorities. As such, additional technical support objectives have been integrated into the Alliance/Mexico planning matrix in recent years, to reflect the need for NGO capacity building in evidence-based HIV/AIDS programming, including participatory community assessment, project design and M&E. The program log frame, while remaining essentially similar to that developed initially, now includes new indicators to reflect emerging program needs.

To sum up, the Alliance/Mexico project is now in year three of a five-year plan, and is well on the way to showing ultimate success; that is, providing evidence that at least half the groups reached are widening the impact of their work, through capacity building and/or “the additional involvement of others.”



APPENDICES

A. SUGGESTED READING

Handbook of Indicators for HIV/AIDS/STI Programs, USAID. Copies available from The Synergy Project at www.synergyaids.com.

National AIDS Programmes: A Guide to Monitoring and Evaluation, UNAIDS, June 2000. See www.unaids.org.

Objectives Oriented Project Planning – A planning guide for new and ongoing projects and programmes. 1997, GTZ. 32pp.

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International HIV/AIDS Alliance:

Dr Arletty Pinel, Coordinator for Latin America, 1996-1999

Kate Gibson, Senior Programme Officer: Latin America, 1999-2001, currently Senior Programme Officer: Partnerships

Hilary Hughes, Lead Consultant to the Mexico project, 1998-February 2000, responsible for the M&E design and its implementation, and author of this case study.

Colectivo Sol AC:

Juan Jacobo Hernandez, National Coordinator

Rafael Manrique, Project Coordinator, Proyecto Alianza, responsible for overseeing project implementation among the leading NGOs and Resource Organizations, and for coordinating the data collection for the M&E plan.

Resource organizations and state-level focal points:

Staff and volunteers of:

- Ave de Mexico
- FRENPAVIH
- Frente Comun
- Fundación Mexicana para la Lucha Contra el VIH/SIDA
- Gunaxhii Guendan Abanni
- La Red Mexicana de Personas Viviendo con VIH/SIDA
- UNASSE/GIRE
- Vivir con Dignidad

E. PROJECT PLANNING MATRIX (PPM)

STRATEGY	INDICATORS	ASSUMPTIONS
<p>Strategic Objective (1998 USAID/Mexico Strategic plan 1999-2003)</p> <p>Enhanced Access, Quality and Sustainability of HIV/AIDS/STI Services and Information for Vulnerable Populations in Targeted Areas.</p>		
<p>Result Area (USAID/Mexico)</p> <p>Increased capacity of non-governmental organizations to deliver HIV/AIDS/STI information and services and increased participation of civil society in the policy and planning process.</p>	<p>At least 50% of leading AIDS NGOs/PWA groups, who have received external relations (ER) training and are monitoring their ER goals and work plans, can provide by June 2003, at least three specific reasons why they believe training and work in ER has increased their capacity to deliver HIV/AIDS information and services; and/or can show their ER activities have resulted in widening the impact of their work, through the additional involvement of others.</p>	
<p>Alliance/Mexico Programme</p> <p>Ultimate Purpose</p> <p>By June 2003, improved external relations and strategic alliances among leading AIDS NGOs, PWA groups and civil society activists and other institutions in a total of eight priority states¹.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By June 2003, at least 75% of all leading AIDS NGOs/PWA groups and civil society activists receiving training/TA in the programme will have improved strategic plans, which include ER and alliance building strategies. 2. By June 2003, at least 50% of above will have initiated new collaborations, as outlined in their ER strategic plans, with non-traditional partners² in order to widen the impact of existing prevention/care activities. 3. By June 2003, at least three additional non-traditional actors will have started, or significantly increased, their involvement in HIV/AIDS prevention/care in each of at least seven out of eight priority states. 	<p>Funding secured for expansion of programme into additional five states.</p>
<p>Immediate Purpose</p> <p>By June 1999, improved external relations and strategic alliance building among leading AIDS NGOs, PWA groups and civil society activists and other institutions, in three out of eight priority states.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 At least 75% of 60-70 leading AIDS NGOs/PWA groups and civil society activists receiving training/TA in the project will have demonstrably improved strategic plans by June 1999, which include ER and alliance building strategies. 1.2 At least 50% of above will have initiated new collaborations, as outlined in their ER strategic plans, with non-traditional partners² in order to strengthen existing prevention/care activities, by June 1999. 1.3 At least three additional non-traditional actors will have started, or significantly increased, their involvement in HIV/AIDS prevention/care by June 1999, in each of the three project states. 	

1 As selected by USAID/CONASIDA Strategic Plan 1999-2003

2 Any partner not previously worked with, as well as partners from new sectors not previously worked with (e.g. health or development NGOs, women's groups, businesses, church, media, state government, "rival" AIDS NGOs).



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