ASSESSMENT

OF

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

IN

PROJECTS MANAGED BY THE

BUREAU FOR GLOBAL HEALTH

OFFICE OF POPULATION AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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ACRONYMS

CA	Cooperating agency
CDC/DRH	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Division of Reproductive Health
CI	Conservation International
CMS	Commercial Market Strategies project
CTO	Cognizant technical officer
CTR	Contraceptive Technology Research project
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
FDA	U.S. Food and Drug Administration
FHI	Family Health International
FP	Family planning
FY	Fiscal year
GH/OHA	Bureau for Global Health, Office of HIV/AIDS
GH/PRH	Bureau for Global Health, Office of Population and Reproductive Health
HCP	Health Communication Partnership
HIPNet	Health Information and Publications Network
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
IR	Intermediate Result
IRH	Institute for Reproductive Health
IUD	Intrauterine device
JSI	John Snow, Inc.
KIX	Knowledge and Improvement Management Exchange
LMIS	Logistics management information system
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
M&L	Management and Leadership Program
MIS	Management information system
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
PAC	Postabortion care
PASA	Participating agencies service agreement
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan
PRB	Population Reference Bureau
RH	Reproductive health
SDM	Standard Days Method
SO	Strategic Objective
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Each year, the Bureau for Global Health's Office of Population and Reproductive Health (GH/PRH) invests in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) through its cooperating agencies (CAs). M&E activities are conducted to collect and analyze data to improve program performance and effectiveness, assess progress toward programmatic impact, identify best practices for replication and expansion to the country level, and report to the Agency, Congress, and other stakeholders. This assessment was conducted to review the scope of M&E efforts and the use of data generated by M&E by CAs and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Implicit objectives of the assessment were to determine whether the indicators currently used by GH/PRH projects correspond with the Strategic Objective (SO) and Intermediate Results (IRs) under development, and to determine whether the M&E process can be streamlined.

Data collection relied on document review, indepth interviews, and two self-administered questionnaires. Fieldwork was carried out from July 19 to August 6, 2004. Two team members conducted indepth interviews with key project staff from eight projects, including M&E specialists and project directors. Telephone interviews were conducted with field-based evaluation officers. Nine other projects completed a self-assessment questionnaire. A second questionnaire was distributed to USAID cognizant technical officers (CTOs) and technical advisors.

FINDINGS

Monitoring is seen as routine tracking of activities to ensure that they are carried out as planned. Evaluation is seen as a more episodic assessment of the outcomes or impact of those activities. Many CAs see an overlap between monitoring and evaluation, especially when the objective is to obtain a complete understanding of project accomplishments and/or concerns. Questionnaire responses and interviews indicate that there is a need for standardized terminology and M&E concepts. Regardless of the precise meaning of monitoring and evaluation, most CAs and CTOs agree that

- Missions are more interested in monitoring and USAID/Washington is more interested in evaluation,
- there is much more monitoring occurring than evaluation,
- the imbalance is continuing to grow, and
- less monitoring and more evaluation is needed to determine outcomes or impact.

Whereas the work plan determines what will be monitored, the Strategic (or Results) Framework determines what will be evaluated. Monitoring occurs mostly at the field level, but CAs also monitor some global activities, such as the development and dissemination of tools, the development of partnerships, and collaboration with other

CAs to replicate best practices. Evaluations are usually carried out to determine whether key results have been achieved. Amounts of funding for M&E cannot be estimated. Although data are available from a few CAs, most either do not track expenditures for M&E at all or in the manner that USAID needs.

M&E plans or Performance Monitoring Plans (PMPs) are usually based on the CA's Results Framework, which defines the expected impacts, intermediate outcomes, and outputs of the projects. One problem that CAs have in developing these plans is writing them to fit project, USAID/Washington, and Mission objectives.

Staff reports, observations, special project data, routine service statistics, and review meetings are the most common monitoring methodologies. Most CAs use survey data in their evaluation strategies as well as key informants, indepth interviews, focus groups, and internal evaluation teams. Technical appropriateness and the need for the data were the most important factors influencing method choice; however, cost was also important. Research CAs, MEASURE Evaluation, and MEASURE DHS were the most used external experts cited in developing evaluation strategies and monitoring systems.

The primary audience for monitoring and evaluation results is the project staff and USAID, both at the global and Mission levels. CTOs and CAs agreed that a combination of written reports and face-to-face meetings was useful, as it allows quantitative data to be elaborated through interactive discussions. Evaluation results are generally more widely shared and disseminated than monitoring results, although the main dissemination methods are similar.

The main uses of monitoring data are summarized by one project, "Staff use reports for tracking progress, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and taking corrective measures where necessary." Other uses of monitoring reports include soliciting feedback from clients; determining whether activities are being completed on time and within budget; noting implementation successes for replication and possible expansion to the country level; determining whether strategies and services need adjustment; taking action to improve coverage, efficiency, and quality of interventions; and informing decisions during the next planning cycles. Evaluation reports are used to inform program strategy and activity design and to report data to GH/PRH and Missions. They are also used to identify and capitalize on program strengths, correct program weaknesses and set realistic goals, identify new areas of study, and provide guidance about best practices for replication and possible expansion. Respondents provided many examples of how activities and, in some cases, Results Frameworks or Strategic Objectives, had been altered as a result of M&E findings. Twelve projects provided examples of how monitoring or evaluation data helped them develop replication or expansion strategies.

Most projects responded that they were doing the correct amount of monitoring, but several made the point that while the level of effort required to monitor is appropriate, the level of effort needed to report results is too great. It was also mentioned that the reporting requirements for the Office of HIV/AIDS (GH/OHA) are excessive given that systems are constantly changing, requiring time and resources to retrain staff. Several individuals also mentioned the burden of responding to many ad hoc requests for information, particularly if they require nonstandard queries of the database.

Of the projects reporting that they conducted too little evaluation, comments mainly focused on their lack of funds. Three noted the relatively adverse positions of USAID Missions toward evaluation, particularly when it is perceived to reduce the project activity budget. Several projects mentioned that their CTO did not support evaluation efforts and their contention that research should be conducted only by research projects. This implies a lack of understanding of the distinction between and the complementarities of research and evaluation on the part of USAID staff.

Several projects mentioned the value of preparing semiannual reports as well as the importance of good databases in the monitoring process. Others valued the PMP and M&E plans as a means of orienting all staff and counterparts to the expectations for each project, and of reaching consensus on project activities and outcomes. The most useful evaluation activities are those that enable accurate and informative results reporting over time as well as comparison of achievements with objectives.

Projects were equally divided in reporting that M&E had both saved money and improved performance, or improved performance alone. Most projects indicated that they could not quantify the amount of savings; perceptions were based on the discontinuation or reorientation of activities that were found to be not performing to expected standards.

LESSONS LEARNED

Monitoring Is Essential But Need Not Be Excessive

CAs, CTOs, Missions, and GH/PRH all agree that monitoring is essential, but they also believe that there is too much monitoring. Or, there is too much reporting required. For some projects, the level of effort that is now put into preparing monitoring reports is excessive and takes away from time that could be better spent on program implementation and evaluation. The development of every M&E plan or PMP should include a very critical review of data needs and an accurate assessment of how data will be used in order to collect the least number of indicators. Unless checked, monitoring will squeeze out resources needed to determine if the activities being monitored make any difference, leaving questions concerning outcomes and impact unanswered.

Evaluation Is Needed But Does Not Have To Be Extensive or Expensive

Many CAs and CTOs want to see increased emphasis on outcome and impact evaluations. They want to know whether the interventions that they implement have any effect on the use of FP/RH services, contraceptives, and eventually, fertility and health. There seems to be some resistance to this from some Missions and CTOs, while other CAs and CTOs believe that additional evaluation needs to be conducted if USAID is going to maintain its leadership niche in the delivery of effective FP/RH services. Additional effort needs to be made to inform them about simple, small-scale evaluation strategies that can be used in the field.

Linking Project and CA Strategic and Results Frameworks

There is a need to show how all USAID projects contribute to improved services and health. That means that a link has to be shown between each CA project and the overall outcome and impact objectives of the Agency. Currently, the projects have a linear structure in their strategic and results frameworks, each being independent of the other. No links are shown between the CAs' SO and IRs, GH/PRH's SO and IRs, and the Agency's overall goal. Most if not all CAs know that their work is not isolated but part of a larger system that links their subsystem to others. They understand their interdependency, but conceptually, they are seen as completely independent of one another, each one affecting an outcome of use of services and an impact on health. There is a need to view what CAs do as interrelated activities or subsystems, all of which are directed toward the achievement of a common goal.

Adopting a Management Information Cycle

All but a few CAs view M&E as the essence of their management information systems, and few regard M&E as part of a larger management information system (MIS) that also includes needs assessments and design/planning. These four information stages are related to one another in a continuous cycle of management information. This continuous cycle of information generation and use is the foundation of good management and can be readily adapted by CAs. By following this management information cycle, programmers know how to reach their objective.

Measuring Qualitative Results

Many of the current qualitative indicators (e.g., for leadership, advocacy, policy environment) used by CAs, Missions, and GH/PRH are weak. Indicators drive performance, and faulty indicators can actually be dysfunctional by directing effort away from the intended objective and focusing it on easy-to-measure but meaningless activities. There is a need to develop alternative methods for assessing the performance of qualitative results. Options include the elimination of weak indicators and substitution of evidence-based narratives that demonstrate how and how much progress has been made in achieving qualitative objectives. Scales, indexes, and careful case studies are other examples of alternative approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A core recommendation is to form a CA working group on evaluation that can address some of the following:

- standardize M&E concepts and terminology;
- develop qualitative indicators for GH/PRH SOs and IRs;
- facilitate exchange of evaluation models and results among CAs;
- support training to CAs in M&E, especially in quicker and less expensive evaluation methodologies; and
- develop criteria for what to evaluate.

Some recommendations will require action by GH/PRH and/or Missions:

- apply a systems approach to Strategic and Results Frameworks;
- build evaluation, especially of outcomes, into all projects;
- reduce monitoring reporting burden;
- request that CAs report adoption or application of research results;
- test validity and utility of M&E tools developed by CAs; and
- allocate additional funds for evaluation.

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