

**PVO Survey on Reported Burdensome Information
Requirements
Placed on Title II PVOs in Four Countries**

**The Monitoring and Evaluation Sub-Working Group
Food Aid Consultative Group
April 2, 1999**

Table of Contents

SUMMARY	1
IMPLICATIONS	1
BACKGROUND	2
DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY	3
RESULTS	4
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	9
NAMES AND ORGANIZATIONS OF SUB-WORKING GROUP PARTICIPANTS	11
ANNEX: INTERVIEW GUIDE	A-1

SUMMARY

The M&E Sub-Working Group conducted an anonymous survey of 20 Cooperating Sponsors (CSs) Title II development activities in four countries (Mozambique, Ethiopia, Peru and Bolivia) from September to October 1998 to determine if there has been a proliferation in reporting requirements, a lack of clarity in identifying those requirements, and a lack of resources needed to meet those requirements. Responses were received for 12 (63%) of the CS activities from all four countries.

The results partly indicate for the four countries surveyed that:

- Integration between Mission Strategic Objectives (SOs) and CSs was common. However, problems were noted at the level of integrating CSs into Mission's strategic planning. Relationships were reported as informal and are sometimes at the lower IR level. CSs are not always invited to meetings, their advice is not taken into account, or it is considered irrelevant to the identification and pursuit of the Mission's objectives.
- Commonly agreed-upon indicators are collected whenever appropriate. Because different methodologies are used by different CSs to collect the data, however, any benefits from having commonly agreed-upon indicators may be reduced, and the capacity of USAID to aggregate these data for its own reporting needs is weakened.
- It does not appear that Missions are requesting CSs to collect information that is of no use to the CSs. Most CSs' strategic objectives are linked to the Mission's, and since there is agreement on indicators to be used, conflicts rarely emerge. Three CSs reported burdensome reporting, but this was not shared by other CSs working in the same country. Only one CS reported that additional financial resources were specifically provided by a Mission to the CS for the purpose of supporting an additional M&E burden, and the amounts involved were not reported.
- All four Missions have a resident USDH, who covers food aid programming and is assisted by FSNs. In the four countries selected, thus, the backstopping capacity needed to support the CSs in meeting their reporting requirements seems to be present.

IMPLICATIONS

- Better cooperation and interaction could be pursued more systematically at the strategic planning and implementation level between Missions and CSs. The planning process appears informal, as Missions do not always consult with CSs. Conversely, CSs perceive that Missions do not invite them to planning exercises, and they see this as the basis of problems in methodologies, data frequency collection, indicator selection, etc. Strategic

planning may be a better place to start to eliminate frictions over monitoring and evaluation in the field.

- The statement " . . . *a proliferation in reporting requirements, a lack of clarity in identifying those requirements, and a lack of resources needed to meet those requirements*" is not supported by the data collected for this study. Although a small percentage of the CSs sampled said they had to comply with unexpected demands from the Mission, when the situation existed in one country, it generally did not affect all CSs working with the Mission in that country. Given the small number of occurrences found, it is best to avoid complex policy measures, and deal with reporting problems on a case by case basis.
- In cases of a perceived burden on reporting, CSs should refer Mission officials to the joint BHR/PPC cable on Title II M&E reporting requirements (Cable number, State 044913, dated March 11, 1999) and present the situation to the appropriate Country Backstop Officer in the Office of Food for Peace in Washington, who will seek to resolve the issue in consultation with the respective parties.
- Preferably early and frequent consultation of CS and Mission on monitoring and evaluation subjects will take place, not only to minimize disruption to the implementation of programs, but to learn from the best M&E practices being developed by the partners. Missions, AID/W, and the CSs should interact regularly to ensure that guidelines are harmonized and that scarce technical resources are used to maximize the impact and documentation of impact of Title II resources.

BACKGROUND

On April 3, 1998, the Food Aid Consultative Group established the Monitoring and Evaluation Sub-Working Group in response to concerns expressed by some Cooperating Sponsors (CSs) that there is a proliferation in reporting requirements, a lack of clarity in identifying those requirements, and a lack of resources needed to meet those requirements for development Title II programming. The focus was on performance monitoring for Title II programming and excludes reporting for other purposes including host governments, other funding sources such as other donors, and other USAID-funded activities. To address the issue, a questionnaire was sent out to the 20 CSs working in four targeted countries as a first step in enabling the sub-working group to identify specific concerns. Ten of the eleven survey responses received are listed in Table 1 and are further analyzed below. Note that one response was for a CS that had not yet begun its activity and, as a result, its response was not included in the analysis. In addition, only one CS included detailed cost data addressing questions numbers 18-21. (See the Annex for the questionnaire.) The M&E working group would like to sincerely thank the Cooperating Sponsors, both at the headquarters and especially in the four countries, for the willingness to respond and their candor in their response.

DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY

The four countries (Mozambique, Ethiopia, Peru and Bolivia) were selected because they represent a broad cross-section of CSs, sectors, and Title II experience. Two of the countries have had CSs express concern over the extent of reporting. The size of the programs is considerable. There are 22 Title II development CSs operating in the four countries selected. These 22 CS activities are implemented by 13 different CS organizations, three of which are local NGOs. All programs covered in the four countries have begun since 1997, one as recently as 1998. The sectors covered by the programs are extensive and include agriculture, infrastructure, income generation, maternal and child health, nutrition, and natural resources.

It was decided to sample 20 of the 22 CSs dropping EOC and REST, two local NGOs in Ethiopia due to potential difficulty in communicating with them.

Of the remaining 20 CSs, one CS had only begun its activity in 1998 and has not been part of the reporting that has taken place over the past few years. Of the remaining 19 programs, 12 or 63% responses were sufficiently completed to be included in the analysis. It was notable that one CS did not respond despite its presence in three of the four countries. Another CS did not respond even though it had only one program. The non-respondents do not represent any obvious characteristics different from those who did respond. With all four countries represented, the M&E Sub-Working Group concluded that the 12 responses are representative of the situation.

All CSs were part of the development of the set of questions and administered the questions over the months of August and September 1998. Respondents were encouraged to be candid in their responses and results were tabulated without linkage to particular CSs.

Table 1: Response Rate

Country	CS	Response received?
Bolivia	FHI	Yes
	ADRA	No
Peru	TechnoServe	Yes
	CARE	Yes
	Prisma	Yes
	ADRA	No
	PCI	No
	Caritas	Yes
Mozambique	Africare	Yes
	WVRD	Yes
	CARE	Yes
	ADRA	No
	FHI	Partly
	SCF	No
Ethiopia	Africare	Yes
	CARE	Yes
	CRS	No
	FHI	Yes
	SCF	No
	WVRD	Yes

RESULTS

The results, as indicated in the previous section, were compiled from 12 responses. Questions 1 to 5 represent a general description of the programs and are not tabulated in this report. Responses to the rest of the survey are as follows:

Question No. 6: Who provides Mission backstopping for the Title II program?

There was some confusion over the question. It is known that in all cases, US Direct Hires supported by FSNs provide backstopping. In eight cases, CSs stated that Direct Hires assisted by FSNs are providing backstopping. Of the remaining CSs, one did not answer the question; two misunderstood the question; and, another said it does not know yet who will provide backstopping since it's program has not started. It is interesting to note that in one country, CSs responded to the question differently; one said a direct hire provides backstopping, a second one said FSNs did, and the third simply did not answer that question.

Question No. 7: Is the CS part of a SO team?

In eleven cases, CSs say they are part of the SO team or its equivalent, although three of these CSs report that contacts are not regular and became formal once a year when the Previously Approved Activities (PAAs) were prepared. In other cases, the CSs say they were not part of the Mission SO team but were part of the IR team. However, all but two of the latter report good contacts with the SO teams. There is, therefore, a level of contact that could be improved and the links between the CS activity and the mission's SO more clearly identified.

Question No. 8: Are the CSs operating in this country using commonly agreed-upon indicators?

All valid responses say they share indicators among themselves and with the Mission, at least when their objectives overlap. While they use the same indicators, however, they sometime use different methodologies to collect the data. This may make the data set incomparable. CSs pursuing objectives specific to their program do not use commonly agreed-upon indicators.

Question No. 9: Are the CS's activities integrated into the Mission's SOs, and if not, how are they reflected by the Mission in its regular reporting?

Responses indicate CSs' activities are integrated into the Mission's SOs. The meaning and extent of this integration may vary by SO team however. One CS, for instance, mentions that, while its nutrition activities overlapped with the Mission's SO, the CS's activities were not reported in the Mission's FY 1997 R2. A Mission's SO often only partly reflects the range of Title II activities. For example, Mozambique CSs were carrying out health, nutrition, agriculture, infrastructure and income generation activities and are reporting under the SO dealing with increased incomes.

Table 2: Responses to Questions 6 to 10 (Number of responses in parentheses.)

Question	Bolivia (1)	Peru (4)	Mozambique (3)	Ethiopia (4)
6. Who provides Mission backstopping for the Title II program?	USDH&FSNs (1)	USDH&FSNs (1) USDH&FSN (3)	USDH&FSNs (3) USDH (1)	USDH (2) AID/W & REDSO (1)
7. Is the CS part of a SO team?	No but invited to meetings (1)	Part of IR not the SO (4)	Yes (3) Yes but contacts rare (1)	Yes (2) No but good contacts (1)
8. Are the CSs operating in this country using commonly agreed-upon indicators?	Partly but not the methods (1)	Yes (3) Yes from 1999 on (1)	Yes where possible (4)	Yes (3)
9. Are the CSs activities integrated into the Mission's SOs?	Yes (1)	Yes (4)	Yes (4) but not reflecting CS activities	Yes (3)
10. Is the CS currently collecting and reporting information that is not, or will not be used by the CS directly for their program results management?	No (1) but data collection is too frequent	No (4)	No (3) Yes (1)	No (2) Yes (1)

Question No.10: Is the CS currently collecting and reporting information that is not, or will not be used by the CS directly for their program results management?

Of the 12 valid responses, three CSs mention they were required to collect information they do not need for themselves (see further observation in next section for those cases). One CS saw the whole process of reporting as something that they must do in order to comply with USAID regulations. The CS also felt that reporting raised important internal CS problems in “...*that our implementation of the system and results reporting itself are topics that are new for our staff. Because we have only been going for one year – the 1996 baseline and 1997 results report have come too early for any of us to feel they are fulfilling any useful role.*” Nutrition or anthropometric impact indicators for Washington were identified as unnecessary by another CS. Yet another CS was concerned over the frequency of data collection, not the indicators per se. Although not required to collect information on unnecessary indicators, one CS mentioned that the frequency of data collection as requested by USAID is higher than justified by the needs of its program.

Questions Nos. 11-21: (See Annex for questions).

The responses to these questions were varied as indicated in the following paragraphs.

Three CSs said they are required to collect information they do not need for themselves. In these cases, CSs comply because they feel the Mission may take drastic action against them if they do not comply.

One CS says it was requested by the Mission to collect data on household income that it would not collect otherwise since it is not implementing any activity aimed at increasing income. One component of its program, agricultural productivity improvement, may affect household income but assumptions about crop prices have to be made in order to translate productivity increases into income figures and another CS stated that equally valid information could be obtained from other sources, e.g. Grain Market Research, the FAO or other research institutions. The CS estimates the cost of this additional data collection to be around \$2400/year, or 20% of its overall M&E cost.

Another CS argued that the additional requirement for a nutrition impact indicator was placed by USAID/Washington, and the CS estimated that the cost would be approximately \$18,000 over the life of the activity.

One CS stated that it was collecting information that it would not collect were it not required by the donor, although it acknowledges receiving financial support from the Mission to do the collection. The CS felt that it was being criticized in the past for not reporting enough on programmatic impact, so it revised its logical framework to incorporate indicators matching those of USAID. The CS developed an extensive M&E system far exceeding the requirements worked out with USAID. The CS reported that some of the indicators are challenging to collect, particularly those on household income. A few suggestions are made to use proxies instead of monetary figures, as they do in other countries. For this CS, the cost of the additional information

collection was heavy: \$460,500 per year, which is more than 50% of total M&E budget (using the figures provided by the CS). It should be noted that these costs were start up costs for a large Title II and Development Assistance (DA) funded program (approximately \$60 million over 5 years) in a country with little background information and technical expertise.

One CS mentioned that, although the efforts to standardize indicators and approaches between CSs and Missions have merit, they also have drawbacks. Standardization may hurt if it imposes lower quality, does not recognize field differences, or contradicts the philosophy of a particular program.

One CS expressed some concern about the information required and the way that it is being compiled by the local USAID Mission. In this country there are seven CSs working in the country from the arid region to the pastoralist region. They felt that it was inappropriate to be aggregating information from all seven regions. An example is cereal production. Cereal production and cereal yields are vary considerably in the different parts of the country in which the cooperating sponsors are working. CS "A" may raise cereal yields by 5 %, CS "B" may raise cereal yields by 20% and CS "C" may raise cereal yields by 2%. To state then that USAID/CS interventions increased cereal production by an average of 9% throughout the areas in which the CSs are working gives a distorted view of the interventions unless there is a very detailed explanation which usually is not read. The average figure then becomes 9% and anything less than this is seen as a failure where in fact the small percentage increase may be locally more significant and may have greater impact than a yield increase of 20%.

The CS went on to stress that in addition to the above issue of aggregating data, USAID must be sure that all seven CSs are collecting it in the same way. The period between the last results survey and the one that is now due for FY '98 should have been the time to make the refinements, but the opportunity has largely been lost and all CSs are going to be scrambling again to submit our results reports.

Another CS provided an example of additional information required that aided the CS in designing a more effective program. The Mission requested more information on the degree to which participants who have graduated from the program re-enter the program at a later date. The CS wanted to use the data available from its health posts to estimate the number and percentage of ex-participants who re-enter the program. However, the Mission wants the CS to interview a sample of old beneficiaries to develop this estimate rather than to rely on program data and/or the knowledge of the health workers. The CS has agreed to do this analysis and estimates that it will cost \$25-30,000. The CS raised this as an example of where the Mission was asking for information that the CS would not have collected on its own. However, the Mission indicated that the CS would use this information to improve the management of its programs. The CS acknowledged that it could easily undertake such a survey and that such data -- on the number of people re-entering the program -- could be very useful to the Mission in assessing the impact of Title II MCH programs more broadly.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A good level of integration between SOs and CSs was reported at the level of activities, but not on strategic planning with the Mission.. There is a good coordination between CSs and Mission SO teams, but it seems rather informal and is sometimes at the lower IR level. This situation was of concern to CSs: they are not always invited to meetings, their advice may not taken into account, or it may be considered irrelevant to the identification and pursuit of the Mission's objectives. From this experience, the CSs feel that interactions could be pursued more systematically at the strategic planning level.

There is a general agreement among the CSs and the SO teams as to the choice of indicators CSs report on. Commonly agreed-upon indicators are collected whenever appropriate. Because different methodologies are used by different CSs to collect the data, however, any benefits from having commonly agreed-upon indicators may be reduced, and the capacity of USAID to aggregate these data for its own reporting needs is weakened. A higher degree of interaction at the strategic planning level (see paragraph above) could avoid that.

Except in three special cases, it does not appear that Missions are requesting CSs to collect information that is of no use to them. Since most CSs strategic objectives are linked to the Mission's, and since there is agreement on indicators to be used, as is generally the case, then conflicts rarely emerge. Problematic situations only arise when the CS does not have the same SOs as the Mission or that Washington imposed the collection of a particular indicator to measure impact of the CSs program when the CS felt that this was not the best indicator. This was reported only twice in the whole sample. In a third case, a greater frequency of data collection was required by the Mission. The Mission and the CS should not have highly different needs in terms of the frequency of their data collection efforts and a process of negotiation can resolve this issue but may require Washington input. This is an issue to be discussed at the strategic planning level.

The financial resources specifically provided by the Missions to CSs for the purpose of supporting the additional M&E burden were mentioned only by one CS and amounts involved are not known. It is thus not possible to make conclusions on this aspect.

In conclusion, and responding to the earlier concerns of *“a proliferation in reporting requirements, a lack of clarity in identifying those requirements, and a lack of resources needed to meet those requirements”* the data received so far implies the situation is not common. Three of the twelve CSs sampled said they had to comply with unexpected demands from the Mission. Also of interest is the fact that, when the situation exists in one country, it does not necessarily affect all CSs. On that basis, and given the rarity of the occurrences, it would seem the recommendation is to avoid overly complex measures, and deal with the problematic cases one by one, under the general assumption that USAID cannot impose indicators and methods upon CSs that have no objective interest in doing them.

The few problems reported in the responses to this questionnaire point to issues in strategic planning. The whole planning process seems informal, as USAID does not consult with CSs.

Conversely, CSs perceive that USAID is not always keen to invite them to planning exercises, and they see this as the basis for problems in methodologies, data frequency collection, indicator selection, etc. Strategic planning may be a better place to start to eliminate frictions in the field.

NAMES AND ORGANIZATIONS OF SUB-WORKING GROUP PARTICIPANTS

<u>MEMBER</u>	<u>OFFICE</u>
Ann Swindal	LINKAGES
Bruce Cogill	LINKAGES
Carol Horst	WVI
Dan Blumhagen	PPC/CDIE
David Evans	FHI
David Nelson	BHR/FFP
Dilbert McCluskey	ANE/OAR
Eunyong Chung	G/PHN/HN
Harold Tarver	AFRICARE
Ina Schonberg	ME&A
Jeanne Downen	CARE
Tim Anderson	AFR/DP
Jinda Cekan	CRS
Kate Robins	WVI
Michael Korin (Chairman)	BHR/PPE
Randy Purviance	ADRA
Roberta Van Haefen	LAC/RSD
Samuel Tadesse	CHEECHI
Terrance J. Ryan	FAM
Tim Frankenberger	CARE
Tom Marchione	BHR/PPE

Annex

Interview guide

FINAL VERSION

July 31, 1998

Guide Purpose: A working group set up by the Food Aid Consultative Group is responding to the concern expressed by some Cooperating Sponsors (CS) of a proliferation in reporting requirements, a lack of clarity in identifying those requirements, and a lack of resources needed to meet those requirements for development Title II programming only. The focus is on performance monitoring for Title II programming and excludes reporting for other purposes including host governments, other funding sources such as other donors, and other USAID-funded activities.

The following questions are part of the first step in enabling the CS to identify specific concerns in a limited set of sample countries.

The questions are meant to guide the interview. The interviewer and respondent need to be familiar with the technical aspects of the CS programs as well as the specific Mission’s Strategic Objectives. For selected questions, the respondent should provide their opinion on the degree of accuracy of the information provided.

Following the compilation of the responses, the FACG working group will request those selected Missions to respond with their perceptions of the reporting requirements and the process used to obtain information not only from CS but also for the USAID R4 process.

All information collected will be confidential and only summaries of the responses will be discussed between USAID and the CS. The responses will be held by the CS. Participants are encouraged to be candid. Questions 1 through 5 should be completed by the CS and are general data on the programs. The remaining questions should be sought through electronic mail and telephone conversations with qualified respondents.

Please send responses by AUGUST 31, 1998 to Food Aid Management: TJ Ryan (202) 544 6972 (email: tryan@foodaid.org).

Country: BOLIVIA PERU MOZAMBIQUE ETHIOPIA

CS: Date:

Respondent Name and Position:

Interviewer Name :

General Information: (Q. 1-5 to be completed by the CS headquarter)

1. What are the annual and LOA budgets, commodity levels, and 202(e) levels for the PVO Title II program?
 2. What are the annual and LOA levels of dollar support provided by the Mission to the Title II activity?
 3. What are the numbers of direct and indirect beneficiaries of the Title II program?
 4. Describe the sectors of the program.
 5. How many years has the PVO been operating Title II programs in this country?
- [FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO BE COMPLETED BY FIELD]
6. Who provides Mission backstopping for the Title II program (e.g. FSN, BS-15, PSC)?
 7. Is the CS part of the Strategic Objective team and if so, describe the participation.
 8. Are the CSs operating in this country using commonly agreed-upon indicators?
 9. Are the CSs' activities integrated into the Mission's Strategic Objectives and if not, how are they reflected by the Mission in its regular reporting?
 10. Is the CS currently collecting and reporting information that is not, or will not be used by the CS directly for their own program results management?

YES NO

[go to Q.11] [Stop here]

Specific Information:

11. What and how is the information collected? [describe each indicator's name, definition, and periodicity of data collection]
12. Who is requiring the information and why? [circle or underline response]
USAID MISSION BHR/FFP CS HQ OTHER (*specify*)
13. Describe how the requirements for additional information were arrived at, such as participation in strategic objective teams, consultation, instructions, etc.
14. List any benefits the CS perceives for providing this information and any repercussions for not collecting the information.
15. Does the CS have any suggestions on modifying or changing these additional information

requirements?

16. Is there another source for this information (other than the CS providing it)?
17. Are there other data available that would serve the same purpose but that are less burdensome to collect?
18. If possible, place a dollar value on the cost of the overall monitoring and evaluation program.

ANNUAL COST:

LOA COST:

Degree of accuracy of this information [circle or underline response]

Not very accurate Somewhat accurate Very accurate

19. Roughly what is the aggregate cost for collecting the additional information identified Question 11? (in US\$)

ANNUAL COST:

LOA COST:

Degree of accuracy of this information [circle or underline response]

Not very accurate Somewhat accurate Very accurate

20. What percentage of time do field personnel spend collecting and reporting this additional information identified in Question 11?

Degree of accuracy of this information [circle or underline response]

Not very accurate Somewhat accurate Very accurate

21. What other costs and resources are specifically required to support the data collection and reporting of the additional information identified in Question 11?

File: m&efacv4.wp5