

Philippines Utilization

OR Summary 31

Mobilize Policy Champion Teams to Foster Utilization of Management Tools

An approach involving teams of mobilized “policy champions” proved effective at influencing program managers to use a research-tested information system for identifying clients with unmet need for family planning. This approach was adopted by regional and national organizations, which plan to expand use of the management tool.

Background

In September 2000, the Population Council launched a nine-month project to test the effectiveness of teams of “policy champions” to increase the utilization of operations research (OR) findings in reproductive health policy and programs in the Philippines. The strategy was built upon evidence that local decision-makers in decentralized health systems often have little knowledge of reproductive health, and rarely use research findings in their decision-making.

The effort focused on using a research-tested community-based monitoring and information system (CBMIS) to help providers identify and respond to unmet need for family planning. The CBMIS uses a set of steps to identify clients’ unmet needs and facilitate their access to the necessary health services. The study showed that midwives, community health workers, and their supervisors found this client-based information useful in designing their work plans and directing their service efforts. The CBMIS also enhanced communication between providers and their clients. As a result, the provincial health officer of Davao del Norte used existing funds to expand the project throughout the province, increasing coverage from 130,000 people to over 700,000.

To increase the scale of utilization beyond the province, policy-makers assembled teams, each

composed of five or six locally committed and respected individuals, in four regions on the island of Mindanao. The team members, chosen from government, non-government, academic, and media institutions, received three days of orientation to become policy champions. Orientation focused on the issue of unmet need, using the CBMIS tool, presenting information effectively, focusing attention on the issue by tailoring messages to specific audiences (program managers), and advocating for local policy change.

Findings

◆ The policy champion approach was effective in convincing managers to use the CBMIS to improve family planning. In two of the four project locations, project managers adopted and pilot-tested the CBMIS. In two cities where the CBMIS is already installed, project activities resulted in a pledge to sustain the tool’s use. In one region, program managers organized city policy champion teams to continue the efforts



initiated by the regional team. One of the mayors in the same region created a task force on gender, health, and family planning that will serve as the CBMIS secretariat.

“I felt I am important in achieving the goals of reproductive health in the country. I realized how great my responsibility is as a policy advocate.” —A policy champion.

◆ The availability of a critical mass of locally relevant research findings contributed to the project’s success. For example, OR had shown that the CBMIS was (1) effective in identifying unmet need; (2) more effective than other available data-gathering systems; and (3) compatible with local information-gathering requirements. The strength and quantity of favorable evidence seems to have facilitated the tool’s adoption in areas where it had not yet been installed.

◆ The evidenced-based advocacy efforts used a variety of approaches, beginning with a clear, simple presentation of the issue that targets key stakeholders and decision makers. The four teams of policy champions used at least three primary strategies to facilitate utilization: coordination among key stakeholders; an orientation on the importance of addressing unmet need and using CBMIS; and involvement of stakeholders in plans for utilization.

Utilization

◆ The policy champion model was adopted for continuation by the Commission on Population, the country’s chief coordinating, monitoring, and

policy-making body for the national population program. The new effort expands its focus to the institutionalization of CBMIS and the integration of family planning with other health services, including maternal and child health care and screening for cervical cancer using Pap smears.

Key lessons learned:

- Program managers are open to new approaches to improve services
- There is no single approach to effective policy change, but efforts should begin with a clear presentation of the issue to key stakeholders and decision makers
- Provide evidence that the results are reliable to gain confidence
- Institutional support is critical to the assimilation of results and further utilization
- Involve key stakeholders from the outset to ensure later participation
- Creativity and collaboration are the key to ensuring resources for scaling up

◆ Other USAID projects in the Philippines – particularly one sponsored by Management Sciences for Health – are also using the lessons learned from the CBMIS experience to improve the client orientation of family planning services.

◆ Programs seeking to increase the utilization of evidence for policy and programmatic changes should consider the policy champion model. Champions must receive orientation on using, interpreting, and effectively communicating data to ensure clear presentation of the issue, relevant results and their implications for policy.

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