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A CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATIVE OVERVIEWS OF FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

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FOR EVALUATIVE OVERVIEWS OF
FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

by

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INTRODUCTION

It is our view that program evaluation should be objective, systematic, comprehensive and useful.

It should be objective in the selection of the evaluation topics through data collection, analysis and interpretation. That is, evaluation is most productive when it employs sound research methodology.

It should be systematic in approach, based on a logical framework or model. Ideally, evaluation studies should be linked in a general plan that allows the investigator to study systematically the critical aspects of the program.

Evaluation should be comprehensive. It should include studies of all significant program activities and problem areas. It should avoid redundant study of the same limited subjects while neglecting other important topics.

Finally, evaluation should be useful. There should be a link between evaluation and planning. Evaluation should provide information that can be used in decision-making about the future course of the program.

It is our impression that many program evaluations do not satisfy these criteria. Family planning program evaluation is often limited to clinic service statistics and KAP (Knowledge-Attitude-Practice) sample surveys. Although these may be important, they are not necessarily the only studies that should be undertaken. Why is so much attention given to studying new acceptors rather than active clients? Why is so little attention paid to costs, to the way people are processed through clinics, to contraceptive distribution systems, to training programs, to the effects of very expensive mass communications programs? These and many other basic program aspects are often overlooked. The result can be unbalanced, arbitrary, even useless evaluation.

It is important to be able to identify significant problem areas so that they can be evaluated and improved. Unfortunately, there are a large number of factors that affect program services and it is seldom easy to identify them without conducting a careful analysis or exploratory study. The purpose of this Manual is to present a guide and a checklist of questions that can be used to carry out such exploratory

studies. This information can then be used to select evaluation topics and to design an objective, systematic, comprehensive and useful evaluation plan.*

Instead of beginning with an elaborate service statistics system or KAP field survey, we recommend beginning with an overview of the entire program and its major activities. The purpose of the overview is multiple: 1) to familiarize the evaluator with the program; 2) to discover significant problem areas; 3) to formulate evaluation and research problems; 4) to establish priorities for future evaluation; 5) to provide the basis for a comprehensive evaluation plan; and 6) to explore the feasibility of specific evaluations. The overview is, in effect, an exploratory or formulative study of the family planning program. It is the first step in the development of an evaluation system.

The product of the overview is a description of the most significant parts of the program and those aspects that most need to be monitored and evaluated.

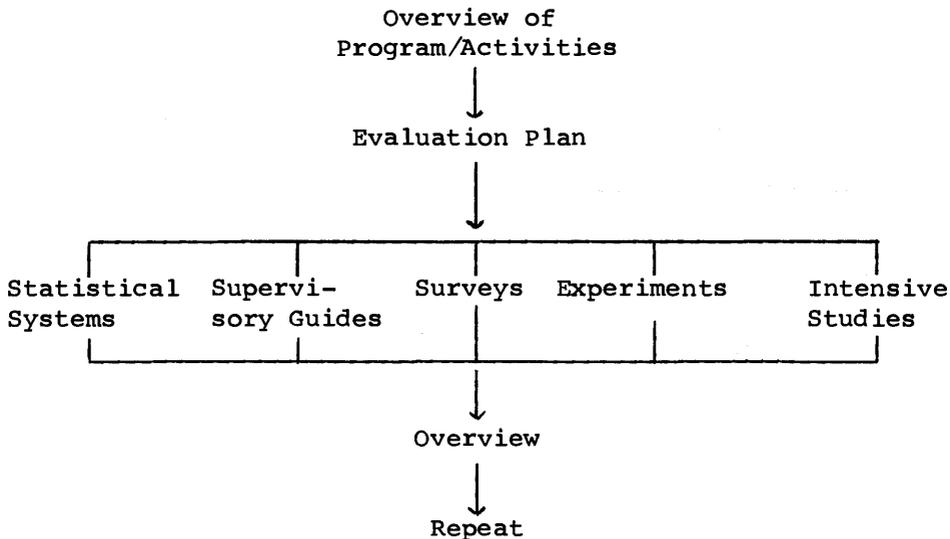
The second step is the preparation of a general evaluation plan. Although the plan may take a variety of forms, a simple format is to organize the plan in terms of types of evaluative studies: statistical reporting systems, supervisory guidelines, surveys, experiments, and intensive studies.

The third step is to design and carry out the recommended evaluations. Since programs are dynamic and evaluation needs will change over time, this entire process should be repeated periodically. This process is illustrated in Figure 1.

* Two manuals in this series deal with the selection of evaluation topics and the design of evaluation studies: Jack Reynolds, "A Framework for the Selection of Family Planning Program Evaluation Topics", Manual No. 1, and "A Framework for the design of Family Planning Program Evaluation Systems", Manual No. 2, Division of Social and Administrative Sciences, International Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction, Columbia University, revised January 1973.

FIGURE 1

AN EVALUATION STRATEGY



The present Manual presents several suggestions for conducting the overview and a checklist of items that should be investigated. The checklist is a series of questions that relate to program planning, operation and evaluation. The principal subtopics of inquiry are: the need for the program, program objectives, policies and strategies, planning, resources, activities, evaluation, and constraints.

Overviews can be made of the entire program or of specific activities. We will use the program as our example in the text.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING AN OVERVIEW

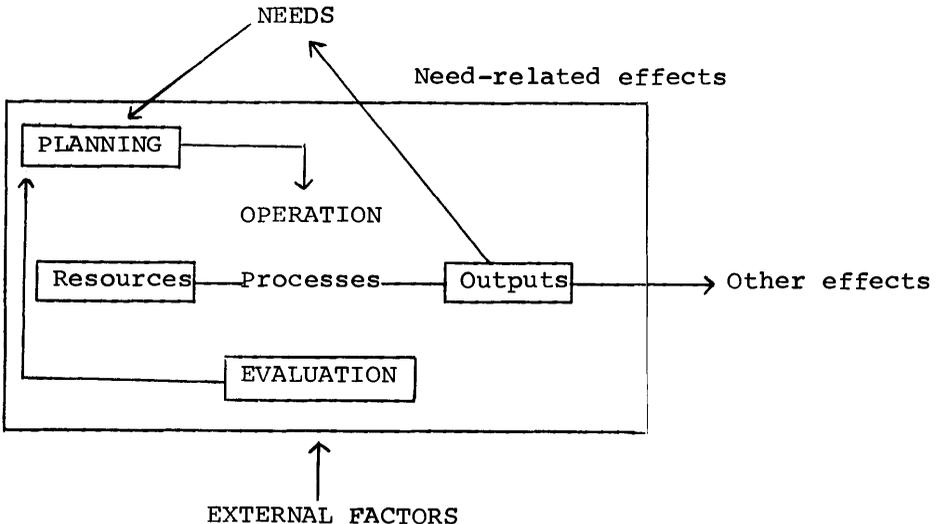
An overview is an exploratory study. We have already outlined the purpose of such studies. Before presenting the specific checklist, it may be useful to outline a procedure for conducting the study.

The overview should be conducted in a short period of time by one or two members of the evaluation unit or team working as closely as possible with the program directors. If the overview is to be of a specific activity rather than the entire program, the evaluator should try to list the major program activities and then select, with the program directors, the high priority topics.

It is helpful to have a conceptual model to guide the research. The model that we are employing is that of a system (see Figure 2). This model assumes that certain family planning needs are present in the community. A program is planned to meet those needs. Program resources are combined in specified processes to produce products and services (outputs). Hopefully these outputs will have the desired effect of meeting the community's needs. They may have other effects as well.

FIGURE 2

SUMMARY MODEL FOR AN OVERVIEW OF FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMS



To make sure that the program plans are being carried out and that they are effective, the program should be evaluated and the results fed back to the program planners. There are also external factors outside the control of the program that need to be identified so that they can be dealt with or the program modified.

The checklist is based on this model and the questions try to cover each of the major components.

The data collection instruments can take a variety of forms. The checklist can be used as an instrument in itself, but it is more appropriate to use it as a guide. Specific observation guides or questionnaires should be constructed to fit local conditions. Not all of the checklist questions may be relevant, and different questions may be more appropriate in individual cases.

It is helpful to begin with a review of the literature. Both direct and indirect literature can be useful (program proposals, budgets, annual reports, memoranda, studies or reports of other family planning programs). Interviews with a few key informants who have had relevant experience in the subject area can be very helpful. The investigator should try to get diverse points of view by interviewing critics, newcomers, ex-directors as well as present directors, coordinators, advisors and program users.

Once these preliminary soundings have been made the investigator will be in a better position to revise the checklist and develop his data collection instruments.

It is also important to observe the major activities as much as possible in order to understand how various factors interact and how program resources are processed to produce goods and services.

Data collection should be comprehensive but not detailed. Where data are unavailable, inadequate, or inappropriate, this should be reported. One of the purposes of the overview is to uncover such information gaps.

The analysis may require a good deal of imagination and insight if the investigator intends to go beyond basic description of what he observes. In some cases it may be possible to generalize about certain observations and to relate

them to hypotheses and theory. The evaluator should be careful about drawing conclusions, however. Exploratory studies are usually ex post facto and can rarely demonstrate cause-effect relationships. But enough information may emerge to allow the evaluator to formulate an hypothesis about a cause-effect relationship which can be tested in a later study.

The report should be brief and to the point. It should contain both an objective summary and the investigator's recommendations for needed research and evaluation. Obvious program strengths and weaknesses -- certain to be uncovered -- should be presented.

The report should be prepared for internal discussion with the program directors, who should be given no cause to see the overview as threatening. The major objective is program improvement, not exposé.

The report may follow a variety of formats, but the following is suggested:

1. Description of the need for family planning services; description of program policies, strategies, objectives.
2. Description of program activities: services provided, resources used, activities undertaken;
3. Description of aids and barriers to program utilization: geographic and physical location; economic, organizational regulations;
4. Description of quantity and quality of services: magnitude, duration, timeliness, program goals, community needs;
5. Identification of factors that facilitate or impede acceptance of services: physiological, psychological, social, cultural, political;
6. Analysis of data gaps: listing of checklist areas where information is unavailable or inadequate;
7. Listing and bibliography of research and evaluation studies underway or reported;
8. Summary of apparent strengths and weakness of program

activities; availability; accessibility; adequacy
and acceptability of services;

9. Recommendations for research and evaluation.

THE CHECKLIST SUMMARIZED

The checklist can be divided into three parts: planning, operations and evaluation. Figure 3 gives a summary of the topics of inquiry. As an aid in formulating specific questions we have added lists of descriptive criteria and evaluative criteria. Appropriate criteria can be selected and matched with each topic to develop questions. For example: What is the need for family planning services? Who identified the need? When was it identified? How great is the need? In applying the evaluative criteria to the program plan: Is the plan logical, consistent, clear, precise, relevant, realistic, adequate? These criteria are not expected to apply in every case, nor are they offered as the only or best criteria in a given situation. They should be used as a guide that may lead the investigator to formulate useful questions.

1. Planning

The evaluator's first task is to determine whether there is a need or demand for the program. The investigator should determine how the need for the program was determined, based on what criteria, when, by whom, and whether the need has changed over time.

He should then identify the program objectives, policies and strategies. He should try to determine how they were set, by whom, how realistic they are, whether they can be justified, and what effect they may have on program services. He should make a special effort to relate all of these to program needs. In many programs there are no clear objectives, policies or strategies, and the need has been assumed but never determined. It is important to point out such deficiencies.

Finally, the investigator takes a critical look at program plans and the planning process. These should also be reviewed in relation to program needs and objectives.

2. Operation

In this section the investigator should examine the organization of the program, its structural features, relationships between departments and agencies, coordination, conflict, stress and tension.

He should then investigate the major activities of the

program in terms of processes, direction, supervision.

Finally he should make a critical inventory of program resources and note how they are employed.

3. Evaluation

In this section the investigator is concerned with what types of evaluation have and have not been done, and how such studies relate to the assessment of program activities and the measurement of program outputs, effects, effectiveness and efficiency.

With all of this information the investigator should have a panoramic view of the program and should be able to identify the internal constraints and those aspects of the program that need to be monitored and evaluated.

He should also try to identify the factors outside the control of the program (external constraints) that may limit program effectiveness.

All of this information can now be brought together to formulate recommendations for evaluation priorities.

FIGURE 3

SUMMARY OF THE CHECKLIST FOR OVERVIEWS OF FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMS

PROGRAM PLANNING

NEED FOR THE PROGRAM

By clientele
By geographic area
By population characteristics
By quantity
By type of service
Over time

PROGRAM POLICIES

Formal/Informal
By type
Laws
Rules/Regulations
Guidelines
By subject
Planning Policies
Organizational Policies
Personnel Policies
Direction Policies
Supervision/Control Policies
Research/Evaluation Policies
Product & Service Policies

PROGRAM PLANNING (Continued)PROGRAM POLICIES (Continued)

Promotion/Advertising Policies
 Distribution Policies
 Financial Policies

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

By target group
 By target date
 By magnitude
 By duration of effect
 By type output
 Goods
 Services
 By type effect
 Changes in Awareness
 Changes in Knowledge
 Changes in Motivation
 Changes in Attitudes
 Changes in Behavior
 Changes in Status

PROGRAM PLAN/STRATEGY

Assumptions/Premises
 General Environment
 Market and Factor Market
 Demand and Need
 Investment
 Availability of Resources
 Scope of Plan
 Duration of Plan
 Type of Plan
 Content of Plan

PROGRAM OPERATIONPROGRAM ORGANIZATION

Structure
 Authority/Responsibility
 Direction/Leadership
 Coordination/Communication
 Supervision/Control

PROGRAM RESOURCES

Human Resources
 Money
 Materials
 Methods/Techniques

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Education/Information
 Product Distribution
 Medical Examination/Treatment
 Training
 Research/Evaluation
 Management/Administration

PROGRAM EVALUATIONPROGRAM EVALUATION

Of inputs
 Of processes
 Of outputs
 Of effects
 Of effectiveness
 Of efficiency
 Of constraints

CONSTRAINTS

Internal
 Policies
 Objectives
 Resources
 Activities
 Organization
 Information
 External
 Geographic
 Economic
 Psychological
 Physiological
 Social
 Cultural
 Political
 Legal
 Administrative

DESCRIPTIVE CRITERIA

Who
 What
 When
 Where
 Why
 How
 How much

EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

Availability
 Accessibility
 Adequacy
 Acceptability
 Logic
 Consistency
 Compatibility
 Clarity
 Precision
 Relevance
 Utility
 Reliability
 Validity
 Objectivity
 Realism
 Feasibility
 Timeliness
 Necessity
 Sufficiency
 Productivity
 Effectiveness
 Efficiency
 Comprehensiveness
 Systematic

THE CHECKLIST

PROGRAM PLANNING

Need/Demand for the Family Planning Program

Has a need for family planning services been identified? When was the need identified? Has it been revised or updated? How was need determined: by careful study, estimates, expert opinion, guesswork? Where is the need greatest: among certain types of people, for specific services, in certain geographic areas? Who identified the need: program personnel, objective researchers, foreign advisors? How much of the need is unmet by other services? How serious or critical is the unmet need? What consequences are expected if the need continues to be unmet? What are the projections for future need: will it increase, decrease, remain steady? How valid and reliable are the data on need? Are need data comprehensive? Does the unmet need refer to unavailable services, inaccessible services, inadequate services, unacceptable services? Is there a significant difference between need and demand for services?

Program Policies

Are there any government policies regarding family planning or population? What types of policies are there: laws, regulations, rules, agreements, statements; formal - informal; written - unwritten; manifest - latent; open - hidden? Are the policies adhered to or ignored? When were the policies put into effect, with what results? Who formulates the policies? Are the policies consistent: within the government, between agencies, between different levels of the program, in different regions of the country? Are the policies clear and specific or vague and general? Are they comprehensive or are there significant gaps? Are the policies acceptable or is there opposition? What is the basis of the opposition, among what groups? Have the policies had any impact: where, how much? Are the policies relevant and realistic in terms of needs for family planning, are they adequate? Do some policies need to be modified or updated? Are there adequate policies for planning, organization, personnel, direction of the program, supervision, research, services, promotion, distribution, communication?

Program Objectives

Does the program have objectives, goals, purposes, aims? What are the bases for the objectives: fertility control, health, service? Have specific target groups been identified? Have target dates been set? How much change is hoped for? When is it to come about? How long is the change supposed to last? How were the objectives set, when, by whom? Have they been revised or modified? Why? Are the objectives consistent with the needs for services? Are they realistic and feasible objectives? Are there priorities among the objectives? Have objectives been set for each major program activity? Are there any hidden objectives? Are the objectives measurable?

What types and quantities of services and products are sought? When are they supposed to be achieved, for what target groups? (Program Outputs)

What changes are sought in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, motivation, behavior, status (fertility, health, standard of living)? When are the changes expected to occur, among what target groups? How much change is expected and how long should it persist? Will this change be adequate in terms of the needs? (Program Effects)

Program Plan/Strategy

Is there a general strategy for implementing the program? Is there a specific plan? What elements does the plan include? What does it leave out? Who developed the plan, when, on the basis of what criteria? Is the plan adequate, logical, relevant, realistic? Is it a single purpose plan or a standing plan? Does it cover all sectors or only family planning in the government? Is it a national plan, regional or are there plans at the local level? Are there multiple plans? Why? Are they compatible and consistent? Has the plan been modified or revised: when, by whom, why? Do the plans reflect the needs? Do they reflect policies and objectives? What assumptions does the plan make about the general state of the environment, about market conditions, about demand and need for services, about future investment in family planning and the availability of resources?

PROGRAM OPERATIONSProgram Organization

How is the program structured and organized: by geographic area, type of service, agency, function, clientele, process? Who developed the organizational plan, when? Has it been revised? Why? Is the organization logical, useful, realistic, effective, efficient? How do the different parts relate to one another? What are the authority relationships? Are lines of authority and responsibility clear and logical? Who is in charge of the program and the various activities? Is direction adequate? Is leadership adequate and acceptable? How are the different activities coordinated? What are the lines of formal and informal communication? Are they adequate and efficient? Are program staff informed? Is communication two-way or does it flow from the top down? What supervisory functions are there? What control mechanisms are used? How much supervision and control is there? Is it adequate, acceptable, useful, systematic? Are job definitions clear? Is there overlap or duplication of functions or activities?

Program Resources

What resources are required by the plan and which are available? Are the resources adequate in all categories? What criteria are used in selecting resources? Who set the criteria and who controls the selection? Are some resources redundant, underutilized, overutilized, scarce?

Is manpower available in sufficient quantity and in all required job categories for all positions throughout the program and the country? Are personnel adequately trained? Are they sufficiently skilled, knowledgeable, competent, motivated? Are staff compatible? Do they work together? Are staff satisfied with the personnel policies and opportunities? Are the rewards for working in family planning attractive? How are personnel recruited, selected, oriented, supervised, disciplined, fired?
(Human Resources)

Is money available for the program, for each activity, for each region of the country? What are the sources of funds: grants, fees, contributions, contracts, donations,

government budgets? What restrictions are placed on the program by the funding sources? What are the prospects for money in the future? How is the budget prepared, by whom, how often? Who revises and approves it? Does the budget reflect the program plan? Is it adequate? How much does the program cost? What are the least and most expensive items? Do costs vary according to region, service, agency? How efficient is the program? (Money)

Are facilities, equipment and supplies available for the program, each major activity, each region, each agency? Are these materials adequate? Do they arrive on time? Is inventory control sufficient? Is maintenance adequate? Who is in charge of purchasing, distribution? (Materials)

What significant techniques are used in the program: medical, educational, distribution, communication, teaching, laboratory, administrative? Are modern techniques employed? Could they be employed? Is there resistance to certain techniques on the part of program staff, clients, community leaders? Are present techniques effective and efficient? (Methods and Techniques)

What are the major activities of the program: education, training, information, communication; medical examination, counseling, treatment; research and evaluation; program planning, management, administration? Which of these function well and which have difficulties? What are the general steps in each process? Are the processes standardized? Are they consistently and competently carried out? Which processes appear to be most effective and efficient? Why? Are the different processes integrated or divided? (Program Activities)

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Research and Evaluation

What types of relevant research and evaluation has been conducted? By whom, when, of what, where, how? What were the results? Were they used for program planning or modification? What significant changes were made as a result? How valid and reliable were the data collected? How objective were the studies? What types of data are presently being collected, for what purpose, by whom, how often? How relevant are these data? How are the

data processed, analyzed and interpreted? What is known about program inputs, processes, outputs, effects, effectiveness, efficiency? What is not known? What needs to be known? Why?

Internal and External Constraints

What is known about internal constraints and their effects on program operations: policies, program objectives, resources, activities, organization, information? What needs to be known, for what purpose?

What is known about factors outside of the control of the program? Have any studies been done or do any need to be done about the impact of external constraints on the program: geographic factors, economic, psychological, physiological, social, cultural, political, legal, administrative factors? What significant effects would these have on the availability, accessibility, adequacy and acceptability of services?

SUMMARY

In this paper we have outlined a strategy for conducting an overview of a family planning program and presented a checklist of items that should be included. We have stressed the importance of taking a critical look at many factors in program planning, operations, and evaluation, as well as external factors that affect the program.

Data provided by the overview can be used as a basis for the selection of evaluation topics, priorities and the design of evaluation systems.

Although the checklist has dealt with an entire family planning program, it can easily be modified to treat separate activities such as clinic services, training and mass communications.