Strengthening Capacity for Measurement, Learning and Evaluation among Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation implementation projects

LONDON SCHOOL of HYGIENE &TROPICAL MEDICINE

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IDEAS
Evidence to improve
maternal & newborn health

Background

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funds projects in countries with a high burden of maternal and neonatal deaths. The projects implement innovative approaches to enhancing survival of mothers and newborns, largely through community-based innovations. To complement this investment, the foundation funds IDEAS at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine; a six-year measurement, learning and evaluation grant which assesses its maternal and neonatal health strategy in Ethiopia, North-East Nigeria and Uttar Pradesh in India.

The implementation projects are tasked to produce evidence of the effectiveness of their innovations. To support them, IDEAS runs a Technical Resource Centre (TRC) to collaborate with grantees and enhance their capacity for measurement, learning and evaluation .

IDEAS Technical Resource Centre organisation

The IDEAS TRC, coordinated in London, depends heavily on IDEAS Country Coordinators based in Nigeria, Ethiopia and India, who have regular contact with implementation projects and are well-placed to identify areas of research-related work which may benefit from input from the IDEAS TRC.

Technical assistance and capacity strengthening is given by the IDEAS team and other School staff.

What the Technical Resource Centre does

Our main focus is on strengthening the organisational and individual capacity of staff who work on implementation projects so they undertake their own measurement, learning and evaluation activities effectively: how best to assess project progress and outcomes; to interpret data; to disseminate findings. Some capacity-strengthening activities focus on the skills of individuals, e.g. participation in training courses, or sharing London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine Distance Learning materials.

Capacity strengthening examples

Nigeria: We established a collaboration with the **Society for Family Health** comprising:

- Mapping project activities against a theory of change, identifying critical measurement points and milestones for scale up

- Introducing a *Continuous Survey* approach to monitoring progress, and using data for project management

- Undertaking a process evaluation of the use of *Continuous Survey* data for project management and decision-making

Uttar Pradesh: We responded to a request from the **Sure Start** project to review and advise on the project evaluation plan and to review drafts of an academic paper reporting project results.

Ethiopia: We responded to a request from **Saving Newborn Lives COMBINE**, to collaborate on an *End of Study Qualitative Review* which documents lessons from project implementation to inform recommendations to the Government of Ethiopia on scale up and integration of community-based antenatal and newborn care into the Health Extension Program nationally. The study is being submitted for peer review and publication.

Lessons learnt from running a Technical Resource Centre

Lesson: A measurement, learning and evaluation collaboration should be established at the project design phase, with input on the evaluation plan.

Background: IDEAS sought to establish collaborations with projects already in their implementation period and with measurement, learning and evaluation procedures approved by funders.

Lesson: Projects must identify their own measurement, learning and evaluation needs, the TRC can guide them in this process.

Comment: Effective collaborations have been initiated by projects which recognise the potential of capacity strengthening through working with IDEAS. Not all projects have the same capacity to recognise this potential and need for guidance.

Lesson: Practical training should be developed with a specific measurement, learning and evaluation objective in mind, using project data. The capacity of the project to fulfil this objective should be strengthened, not the capacity of individuals.

Background: In response to a request, the TRC offered a one-week Geographic Information Systems (GIS) training course, structured around the project's own data, to enable them to undertake spatial analysis. In another case, GIS training was not effective because there was no defined objective and project data were not available to use. The skills individuals acquired were quickly forgotten.

Lesson: To establish a collaboration during the lifetime of an under-performing project, there should be active and explicit support from the funders.

Background: Projects may need technical assistance because they are under-performing in their measurement, learning and evaluation , but may be reluctant to acknowledge this. IDEAS' relationship with Society for Family Health in Nigeria is particularly effective because the foundation Project Officer was engaged in establishing and maintaining the collaboration.

Images: Working with an implementation project colleague in Ethiopia © IDEAS 2011

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