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MODULE 6. EVALUATE ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE COMPLEMENTARY FEEDING

A n overview of this module: This module guides you in managing an evaluation that demonstrates the progress made toward improving complementary feeding based on the strategies, activities, and MEL plan you developed.

Before you begin this module: Gather important activity reports (prioritization documents, formative research, the SBC strategy, monitoring data, activity work plans, theory of change, MEL plan, etc.) and team members who were involved in their development and use.

The output of this module: Evaluation report with recommendations specific to SBC approaches to improving complementary feeding

STEPS IN THIS MODULE:

6.1 Form the evaluation team.
6.2 Revisit the purpose of the evaluation.
6.3 Develop the evaluation protocol.
6.4 Support the evaluation process.
6.5 Develop and share recommendations.
BACKGROUND

Use the MEL plan that you developed in module 4 to carry out the evaluation as described in this module. The USAID Advancing Nutrition Measuring Social and Behavior Change in Nutrition Programs: A Guide for Evaluators (2022) has additional detail for carrying out evaluations. As an implementer, you may be working with an external evaluator who will actually conduct the evaluation. In that case, your role will be to manage and support external evaluators and use the recommendations from the evaluation. This module is written to provide guidance for those who are directly involved with the evaluation and those who have support roles.
6.1 FORM THE EVALUATION TEAM.

Often, evaluations are conducted by evaluators who are not members of the project team, which strengthens the credibility of the evaluation. It is important that the evaluation team offers skills that demonstrate their familiarity with the project’s goals, pathways, activities, outcomes, and evaluation methods. The evaluation team should have strong technical knowledge and skills around SBC and complementary feeding. They should also be familiar with the program context and have experience working on the type of evaluation as well as the evaluation methods that you are planning. The Defining Social and Behavior Change Competencies for Multi-Sectoral Nutrition list highlights knowledge and skills that are particularly useful for monitoring and evaluation.
6.2 REVISIT THE PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION.

Now that you have started implementing, revisit your evaluation design and questions to make sure they are still the right ones based on what you have learned. Program changes (such as staff or priority changes) may change your evaluation. Once you have adjusted or affirmed your evaluation design and questions, make sure the evaluation team understands them well. Discuss any questions to make sure everyone has a common understanding and has the same goals in mind when developing the evaluation protocol.
6.3 DEVELOP THE EVALUATION PROTOCOL.

The evaluation protocol will outline how the evaluators plan to carry out the evaluation and answer the key evaluation questions. Development of the protocol is an important time to ensure close collaboration between both evaluators and program staff. It offers a roadmap for the evaluation process, including but not limited to ethical considerations, logistics, analysis plan, and data management plan. While all of these components are critical, this section focuses on the elements that relate to nuances of complementary feeding and where unintentional bias (related to complementary feeding) may occur: sample/sampling strategy, data collection approaches, and timelines.

The evaluation protocol articulates which respondents, observations, and key documentation can help you answer the overarching evaluation questions. To inform development of the protocol, gather the project documents that offer a deeper understanding of the behaviors, associated activities, and their measurement. This can include prioritization documents, formative research, the SBC strategy, a PIP (if developed), monitoring data, activity work plans, theory of change, MEL plan, and so on.

Use those documents to reconfirm prioritized behaviors and associated factors and make sure that all evaluators have a clear understanding, as the priority behaviors should be the critical reference point for your evaluative work and should be included in the protocol. Once evaluators have a clear understanding of the behaviors, determine which activities were designed to promote the uptake of those behaviors. When reviewing each activity, consider asking the following questions to determine key elements of your evaluation protocol.

Figure 8. Simplified PIP

![Figure 8. Simplified PIP](image)

The answers to these questions should be a product of a joint discussion between evaluators and implementers. It is important that everyone involved have the same understanding of the complementary feeding work:

- What is the coverage of each activity?
- For those included in the coverage, what was their level of participation in the program’s activity?
- What factors did this activity address? Are those factors important for changing the priority behavior?
- To what extent did the activity’s coverage, participation/dose, and factors lead to a change in the behavior?

These questions will help you build the following elements of the evaluation protocol. Keep in mind exposure to activities is important for impact, but the combination of activities and participation or dose to support behavior change are highly context specific (Kim et al. 2020).
6.3.1 Determine the evaluation sample.

The sample for the evaluation will be guided by the type of evaluation that has been selected and the design of the evaluation questions. In module 4, we explored three possible evaluation questions. Let’s use the evaluation question “To what extent have the identified intermediate outcomes (the factors that influence each priority behavior) been achieved?” as an example to determine the sample. When determining where to find respondents and who those respondents are, consider the answers to your question above related to coverage, dose, and factors.

For example, critical factors may be the taste of small fish and lack of skills to prepare small fish that children enjoy. Select a mixed group of caregivers who were a part of the cooking demonstrations. If there is information on participation, include caregivers with high participation, and as a comparison, also select women in the coverage zone who had little participation. Those with less participation may provide insight into barriers preventing them from participating. Consider adding the community health worker to the sample, as they will be able to contextualize the findings.
6.3.2 Determine the evaluation data collection methods.

When possible, use mixed methods to answer your key evaluation questions and to triangulate (i.e., use different data sources) your findings. To answer the evaluation question “To what extent have the identified intermediate outcomes (the factors that influence each priority behavior) been achieved?” consider using monitoring data, a population-based survey, key informant interviews, and observations to answer the question, as illustrated below.
6.3.3 Establish the evaluation timeline.

Determining the timeline for the evaluation is important for complementary feeding programs. As complementary feeding behaviors for young children vary depending on their age and throughout the life of the program, it is always important to reconfirm which households are eligible to answer the evaluation questions or to consider the wording of the survey questions (for example, depending on the respondent). In addition, it is important to consider the seasonal availability of the food that is being promoted by the program. If observing the preparation of fish, for example, consider whether the evaluation is being planned during a time when fish is available to the respondent.
6.4 SUPPORT THE EVALUATION PROCESS.

As the implementer, you may be supporting the work of the evaluator rather than directly involved in conducting the evaluation. Consider the following points as you engage the evaluation team and plan for their visit:

- Ensure that the evaluator selects (and the program provides access to) representative samples of respondents. For example, if the complementary feeding activity seeks to encourage women to feed children 6–23 months a diverse diet daily, including animal-source foods such as eggs, market vendors may be identified as supporting actors who can supply small fish and eggs in child-friendly ways. In this case, both caregivers and market vendors may be appropriate respondents, not one or the other.

- Beware of unintentionally biasing the results by engaging respondents who will positively or negatively skew the results of the evaluation. For example, if the complementary feeding activity works with fathers so that they can bring home meat when they go to the butcher shop or trading center, offer the evaluators additional respondents or ways to observe if you think fathers might unintentionally bias the results.

- Encourage engagement with respondents who may not be conveniently located. Samples should include respondents from different villages, respondents with children in different age groups, and so on. The unique voices of these different groups will be important for seeing the full evaluation picture.
6.5 DEVELOP AND SHARE RECOMMENDATIONS.

Findings can be used to improve the organization's and stakeholder's approach to continuing to improve complementary feeding as well as future programs. In the final evaluation report, indicate where changes and actions are recommended as a result of the findings, including where to improve monitoring and evaluation. Recommendations must be supported by evidence while keeping stakeholder values in mind. Make recommendations for future programs based on what worked well, what did not work well, and what is still unknown. Share evaluation findings with communities and partners. Dissemination events enable partners and stakeholders to reflect on the findings and prioritize future directions or adjustments.

ILLUSTRATIVE STORY: MARYAM AND BRIAN DESIGN A COMPLEMENTARY FEEDING PROGRAM

Excited for Evaluation

When they are ready to prepare for evaluation, Maryam and Brian make sure the evaluation team is familiar with the study, has technical knowledge around diverse diets for young children and SBC skills, and has experience with the evaluation study methods proposed. Together, with the evaluation team, they revisit the evaluation design and affirm it captures what stakeholders are interested in finding out.

Next, they work with the evaluation team to outline their evaluation protocol and decide on respondents, methods, and timeline. Brian is particularly interested to see how caregivers are feeding their child fish, so they make sure to include observations at home visits in the evaluation protocol. They time these observations for the lean season when fish is available. To support the evaluation team, Maryam and Brian help to select a representative sample of respondents, by selecting those whose characteristics accurately reflect those of the target population. Based on monitoring data they know that one community is seeing more success than others, but they include respondents from both to make sure they are getting a full picture of what happens and to make sure the program reaches the more distant communities.

Upon review of the evaluation data, they find the program does contribute to increasing minimum dietary diversity in children 6-23 months and specific to children 6-12 months. Based on their strong formative research, the factors that they chose to focus on - access, norms, and skills - contribute to this change. They are excited to find this association using the indicators that they had carefully identified and the baseline data they had established. They also find that the level of participation in the program activities does lead to improvements in minimum dietary diversity. Where participation is lower, the program sees less uptake of the behavior. They are eager to share these findings with other programmers to help them plan for participant retention in future efforts.

Sharing the Story

Maryam and Brian notice one interesting finding that community dialogues really help to shift established norms and this became most evident in the endline data. They are excited to apply these findings to their program and share the findings with local communities. They hold a dissemination event with partners and stakeholders including those they had talked to at the Ministry of Agriculture to reflect on the findings and prioritize future directions.
CHECKLIST

Did you:

☐ Form the evaluation team?
☐ Revisit the purpose of the evaluation?
☐ Develop the evaluation protocol?
☐ Support the evaluation process?
☐ Develop and share recommendations?
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