Two Things Are Not Always Better, but Two Things that Can Relate Are an Improvement

In Côte d'Ivoire, two databases exist for HIV-related programs. One of the programs benefits orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). The other program, DREAMS, ("Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe") is for adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) at risk for HIV. These two programs originated years apart, and their databases are separate. The problem now—as both programs are operating in proximity to each other across Côte d'Ivoire—is that their separate information platforms can't talk to each other.

This means that the programs cannot easily identify where they both may be helping the same beneficiary. Nor can they resolve duplicative services or identify gaps in services that one or the other of them might address. Moreover, neither can be certain that its data are accurate or complete—because records for the same person could exist in both data systems and no one would know.

That will change in 2019, because MEASURE Evaluation, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), will support developing a link between the OVC and DREAMS databases. When that is accomplished, managers of programs aimed at children, adolescents, and young adults can more easily see which people their interventions are reaching and discover who is getting help twice and who may be missing help altogether.

Many issues and problems arise when two programs may have overlapping services or beneficiaries and remain unaware of that fact. Among the issues, duplicated beneficiaries overestimate the population need for services and cloud the picture of who is getting what services. Duplicated types of services—such as support for schooling—or situations in which beneficiaries receive similar services from two programs waste scarce resources that could be used to help more people. Further, the fact that program data may not reflect who is getting what services is a data quality issue that confounds accurate understanding of service delivery and effectiveness.

Building a link

The first step—already taken—was that MEASURE Evaluation facilitated a workshop bringing together the managers and implementing partners for the National Program for the Care of Orphans and Vulnerable Children and for DREAMS to arrive at agreement that a link between their databases was a good idea.

All parties agreed to begin with a review of the separate data collection tools to see what common data elements existed and, if necessary, revise those tools so that a specific common data element could be collected—the beneficiary identification number being chosen as that element. This common data element would allow the two databases to be compared in an effort to pinpoint any anomalies or suspected duplications. The workshop served to revise indicators and data collection tools as a step toward establishing the technical specifications for creating a linking module between the OVC and DREAMS databases. This task is currently in the hands of a technology specialist who is developing the proposed link. MEASURE Evaluation will test the link and then will help OVC and DREAMS program managers use it to identify duplicated services.

The link also can support processes that will facilitate communication between the two programs for effective targeting of potential beneficiaries. In addition, this work will also help build the capacity of the National Program for the Care of Orphans and Vulnerable Children to manage both databases.

The expected result from the linkage between the two programs will be to improve the effectiveness of both, to improve data quality, and to make certain that partners who may work in the same location with the same target population can talk with each other and work together in the most effective way.