USING AND DISSEMINATING M&E RESULTS

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

- ➤ Reviews reasons to use and disseminate M&E results
- ➤ Describes how to use M&E results to improve your program's interventions
- ➤ Offers tips on how to disseminate results to priority target audiences
- ➤ Presents different formats for dissemination of results

Why Use and Disseminate M&E Results?

There are several reasons to use and disseminate M&E results: to improve program interventions, to strengthen programs institutionally, to advocate for additional resources and "youth-friendly" policies and to contribute to the global understanding of what works. Each of these reasons is explained in detail below.

M&E results help improve your program interventions.
Using M&E results keeps you and your staff in a "learning mode" as you gain understanding about how and why your program is working. M&E results also help you make decisions about the best use of resources. For example, outcome and impact evaluations may provide further insight on certain risk and protective factors, thus shaping your future efforts. As staff use results to reflect on the program's implementation and make necessary improvements, they are more likely to feel supported by the M&E process.

M&E results strengthen your program institutionally.
M&E results can help stakeholders and the community understand what the program is doing, how well it is meeting its objectives and whether there are ways that progress can be improved. Sharing results can help ensure social, financial and political support and help your program establish or strengthen the network of individuals and organizations with similar goals of working with young people. By publicizing positive results, you give public recognition to stakeholders and volunteers who have worked to make the program a success, and you may attract new volunteers.

M&E results can be used to advocate for additional resources and "youth-friendly" policies.
Disseminating M&E results can raise awareness of your program among the general public and help build positive perceptions about young people and youth programs. M&E results often shape donors' decisions about resources in terms of what

and how many to allocate to youth programs. Results can also be used to lobby for policy or legislative changes that relate to youth by pointing out unmet needs or barriers to program success.

If you identify problems early in implementation, you can respond promptly by modifying your program strategy, reassigning staff or shifting financial resources to improve the chances of meeting your program goals and objectives.

M&E results contribute to the global understanding of "what works."
By sharing M&E results, you allow others to learn from your experience. The dissemination of M&E results—both those that show how your program is working and those that find that some strategies are not having the intended impact—contributes to our global understanding of what works and what doesn't work in improving young people's reproductive health. This advances the field by building a body of lessons learned and best practices that can strengthen ARH programs around the world.

Using M&E Results to Improve and Strengthen Your Program

M&E results should be disseminated and used on an ongoing basis, right from the beginning. Your quarterly monitoring and process evaluation reports can be summarized and presented to donors and other stakeholders. Outcome and impact evaluation results should also be used in a timely manner in order to ensure that they have a role in improving and strengthening your program.

M&E results should also lead to decisions about changes in program implementation.
Periodic staff meetings devoted to discussing M&E results can engage staff in collectively making program adjustments. If you identify problems early in implementation, you can respond promptly by modifying your program strategy, reassigning staff or shifting financial resources to improve the chances of meeting your program goals and objectives. If you used a participatory evaluation approach, you should ensure that participants are involved in reviewing results and determining how to use them.

Specifically, M&E results can be used to:

- ➤ highlight program strengths and accomplishments,
- ➤ improve program management and planning,
- ➤ identify weaknesses of program implementation,
- ➤ determine demand for service modification or expansion,
- ➤ assess quality of care,
- ➤ identify future research needs, and
- ➤ strengthen funding proposals.

M&E results can help you design new or follow-on activities.
Programs often begin on a small scale in order to test their feasibility. Evaluation results document the strengths, limitations, successes or failures of these initial efforts and allow program planners to make objective decisions about which elements of a program to continue, modify, expand or discontinue. Elements that are not very successful but show promise can be modified for improvement. Successful elements can be expanded by:

- increasing their scale or scope,
- changing the administrative structure or staff patterns,
- expanding the audience and/or targeting new audiences, or
- spinning off separate programs.

Disseminating M&E Results to Others

Disseminating M&E results to those outside your program is often complex because different audiences will have different information needs. You will have more success disseminating results if you involve major stakeholders, budget adequate resources and develop a dissemination plan before results are finalized.

Determine the audience for M&E results and why you want to share them.
Many different audiences will be interested in evaluation results. Locally, there may be interest among community organizations, school administrators, parent groups, youth, religious organizations, health providers, the media, government officials and social service agencies. At the regional or national level, professional colleagues, reproductive health or adolescent advocacy groups, policymakers and funding agencies may need to learn of your results. nternationally, other program staff, youth advocates, reproductive health specialists, program planners and funding agencies will benefit from the additional knowledge gained about ARH activities.

Stakeholders include program staff, youth, teachers, parents, school and government officials, community leaders, service providers, and donors.

Think about your reasons for sharing results. Do you want to:

- increase public awareness about young people's reproductive health status and needs,
- encourage communities to support youth,
- improve coordination among agencies working with youth,
- advocate for policy change,
- encourage that increased resources be allocated to youth programs, or
- provide lessons learned for both in-country and international programs?

Share both positive and negative findings.
While every program wants to highlight positive findings, sharing results about what didn't work is also important. Stakeholders also need to understand what is and isn't working, to guide their support toward the most effective youth strategies. Further, most donors appreciate a program's willingness to critically review its work; admitting what hasn't worked well will

Sample Report Outline	
Executive summary	Concisely states the most important and useful findings of the report
Introduction	States the scope of the evaluation (its purpose, audience and key questions)
Background	Explains the setting, target population and basis of the program
Methodology	Describes how the evaluation was carried out
Findings or results	Presents findings about program performance, outcomes and impact
Conclusions	States the evaluator's interpretation of findings
Recommendations	Proposes action, based on conclusions
Lessons learned	Describes implications for similar programs in different settings or for your own program's future activities
Unresolved issues	States what remains to be done or examined and poses unanswered questions
Annexes	Offers additional material that explains evaluation methods, data collection instruments, schedules, persons interviewed, documents reviewed, statistical tables and list of acronyms

Adapted from USAID CDIE, 1997.

improve your credibility and help you solicit funds for changes in program strategy.

Tailoring Dissemination of Results to Different Audiences

Many possible channels exist for presenting evaluation results. For some audiences, one approach may be sufficient (e.g., an all-day retreat with program staff). In other cases, you may want to disseminate results via numerous channels to ensure that the message you are trying to communicate reaches your targeted audience. For example, to reach community members, you might prepare a newspaper story and hold an evening meeting.

In order to plan your dissemination, you must also assess:

- what budget is available,
- the cost of preparing and producing dissemination activities, and
- who is capable of carrying out the activities.

Some activities, such as community-level meetings, are relatively inexpensive. Others, such as publications with broad distribution or national-level seminars, can be quite costly.

Dissemination may be carried out by staff members or may be done in collaboration with outside experts. For example, you may have someone on staff who is able to organize a workshop or conference and someone who is able to prepare a report or publication. If you do not have the capacity to prepare a press release or develop a computerized slide presentation, you may require external assistance.

Common Dissemination Formats

The most commonly used formats are written reports, oral presentations, press releases, fact sheets and slide or computer presentations. While these formats differ in length, detail and the amount of technical information, some common elements are:

- logical organization,
- direct and concise language, and
- use of appropriate illustrations and examples.

A written report combined with visual aids is an effective means of disseminating M&E results.
Written reports can be used to provide an update on the program's progress; document evaluation procedures, findings and recommendations; maintain an internal record of evaluation findings for program staff; and publicize important program information and experiences. To write informative reports that people are likely to read, you should:

- ➤ use clear, simple language in the active voice,
- ➤ be brief and to the point,
- ➤ use attractive layouts, including headings, sub-headings and white space,
- ➤ use boxes, bullets, italics and bold fonts to emphasize important points, and
- ➤ use quotes, anecdotes and case studies to put a human face on the statistics you present.

Visual aids such as maps, tables and charts, graphs, and photographs can be used effectively to summarize information and add "life" to a written report:

- ➤ *Maps* can illustrate areas with high rates of adolescent births, low birth-weight babies, many school dropouts or high youth unemployment. They can also be used to show the program location and the projected impact of activities on the target population.
- ➤ *Tables and charts* are often used to show comparisons—e.g., local statistics in relation to state and national figures—or other information, such as a breakdown of teenage births according to the age of the mother.
- ➤ *Line graphs* can be used to illustrate change over a number of years, such as the number of adolescent births over the past 10 years in a community.
- ➤ *Bar graphs* can also illustrate change over time or changes among sub-groups of the target population.
- ➤ *Photographs* can show your program in action, putting a face on the numbers you are presenting and making readers feel more connected to your project. They can also be used to document community participation in program activities.

Tips for Making an Effective Oral Presentation

Spend time preparing:
- Your presentation should be 20–30 minutes maximum, and cover the main points that your audience needs to know
- Practice your presentation aloud

Anticipate the unexpected:
- Anticipate questions and plan answers
- Plan what you will do if you run out of time or if you finish early

Pay attention to detail and avoid easy mistakes:
- Arrive early and be prepared
- Ensure that audiovisual equipment is available and in good working order
- Avoid last-minute rehearsing or organizing of notes

Give more to the audience than it expects:
- Use visual aids, such as slides or graphics
- Provide appropriate handouts
- Allow time for questions
- Use question-and-answer time to fill in details (if the audience asks)

Based in part on Hanson, Hanson, and Stoddard, 1995.

An *evaluation report* should emphasize only the most important and useful findings, highlighting information that you think will shape the decisions made by staff, donors, policymakers, communities and youth. Keep descriptive information, such as the background of the program, to a minimum, as many readers will be familiar with the program. Include an *executive summary*—i.e., an overview of your main findings. This summary should be written so that it can be distributed independently, for example, to policymakers who may be less likely to read a full report.

Oral presentations are another means of disseminating program results. Oral presentations provide a direct, concise overview of your findings and allow for discussion. You or your staff can give presentations at national meetings, in one-on-one meetings with your board of directors or donors or to community forums. Successful presentations are direct and concise and feature visual aids such as

Preparing Slides and Overheads
The text on slides and overheads should: • use no more than two different fonts, • use a font size that is large enough to be seen when projected (at least 24 point), • separate groupings of ideas with white space, • have seven words or fewer per line, • use phrases instead of complete sentences, and • include no more than six or seven lines per slide. The graphics on slides and overheads should: • use bullets effectively; • use art and graphics that face “no” toward the slide content, not “out” toward the slide edge; • assure there is enough white space around graphics; • use charts or graphs to enhance data interpretation; and • use legends, labels and reference points to enhance charts and graphs.

slides or transparencies. Call attention to the most important points and fill in the details when your audience has a chance to ask questions.

Visual aids help maintain the audience’s attention during presentations. Slides, overheads and posters—whether computer-generated or hand-drawn—emphasize important points by presenting information in an abbreviated form. Offer an appealing mix of text (words) and graphics (images).

Press releases can generate media coverage of your findings.
As more people gain access to newspapers, radio, television and the Internet, media coverage of your findings is gaining in importance. Many programs find that the most effective way to reach policymakers is to encourage media coverage of their evaluation results.

A *press release* is a concise statement that presents an overview of your evaluation findings, which you give to the media. The media will usually use the release to develop a story, and it may prompt them to seek additional information about your program’s activities.

Fact sheets convey findings in a short, concise format.
Fact sheets are especially effective for advocacy, conveying information to policymakers and others who do not have the time to read longer reports. A fact sheet can also be used as a presentation handout or mailed to program stakeholders. Supply bulleted lists of major findings, keeping the list to under two pages in length.

Tips for Writing a Press Release
• Keep the information simple and clear. • State the most important information in the first lines. • Present at most three key findings. • Limit the release to two double-spaced pages. • Avoid technical or statistical terms. • Include the date and information about whom to contact for more information. • Send to multiple newspapers or radio stations at the same time. • Send to producers and editors, as well as their staff reporters.