Background
Guatemala faces a high burden of preventable illness, chronic childhood malnutrition in particular, but lacks adequate resources to address these challenges through its Ministry of Health. Low-income, rural, and indigenous Mayan populations are disproportionately impacted. Primeros Pasos is a primary care clinic serving indigenous communities in the Palajunoj Valley of Guatemala and provides medical and dental services, as well as nutrition-focused community outreach programs.

There are two primary outreach programs:
1. School outreach: key health concepts, including nutrition, hand hygiene, and dental hygiene, are taught to primary school students.
2. Maternal outreach: key health concepts are taught to pregnant women and mothers with young children.

Due to frequent changes in the outreach program, the current monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for the outreach program is not optimized to obtain actionable results.

Improving the M&E process will ensure that high quality data is available for program improvement and grant applications, and it will reduce unnecessary burden on staff and volunteers.

Aims
Goal: To update and streamline the M&E process for Primeros Pasos’ outreach program in relationship to their 3-year strategic plan.

Specific aims:
1. Simplify data collection and entry processes for the outreach program.
2. Maximize the utility and accountability of M&E metrics.
3. Develop basic tools that improve data analysis capabilities.

Structure
The two main project phases were data collection and development of project tools.

Data was collected on the current M&E system through:
1. Staff surveys
2. Staff interviews
3. Field observations

Multiple project tools were developed based on these data, including:
1. SWOT analysis of the current M&E system
2. Proposed annual timeline for monitoring and evaluation
   a. Revised evaluations including:
      i. Knowledge-based assessment for mothers
      ii. Skills-based assessment for young children (3-6)
5. Logic frame for the proposed M&E program, including necessary inputs, outputs, and measured outcomes
6. Volunteer guide covering best practices for data collection and entry
7. General recommendations on aligning curriculum with evaluations

Strengths
- History of data collection in schools and communities
- Frequent contact with schools (2x/month)
- Use of output (# of sessions, attendance, etc.) and outcome (height, weight, health knowledge) metrics

Weaknesses
- Evaluations open answer and a challenging format to grade
- Evaluations: challenging with low literacy children and mothers
- Data input and analysis on a class-wide rather than individual level

Opportunities
- Incorporation of volunteers for data collection and entry
- Longer term linkage of anthropometric and health knowledge data
- Incorporation of grant-specific metrics into M&E plan

Threats
- High attrition rates in outreach programs (~50%)
- Frequent changes in organization volunteers and staff
- Limits imposed on outreach program by schools, including class time limits

Figure 1. SWOT analysis of Primeros Pasos’ current M&E system.

Figure 2. Proposed annual timeline of M&E for the outreach program.

Lessons Learned
- M&E should be limited to key metrics, focusing on the main health challenges identified by staff (nutrition and hygiene)
- Turnover (staff, volunteers) and short-term volunteer projects can lead to a piecemeal M&E approach, reducing efficiency and efficacy of data collection, entry, and analysis
- Evaluation tools must be flexible given varied literacy levels, but standardized to ensure consistent and efficient grading
- In organizations with minimal staff, simplifying processes to allow for outside assistance (volunteers, etc.) may make programs more sustainable over time
- Data entry on a more flexible timeline may provide necessary information without burdening clinic staff
- Overall flexibility of M&E programs may make them less vulnerable to outside threats, particularly changes in school/community schedules, fluctuations in the number of volunteers, and technology challenges including internet and electricity outages

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