4. What should be monitored and evaluated?

So far, we have looked at what we mean by monitoring and evaluation. Before we start to look into how to do monitoring and evaluation (who should be involved? and doing what?), we need to consider what should be monitored and evaluated. What is the information that we should collect? With regard to evaluation, what are the "things" in the situation of your target group that will tell you that you have had the effect you wanted to have? In other words, what are your "indicators" going to be?

Monitoring

Key ideas

∴ You will need to monitor implementation from three points of view:
the use of your resources and the target and the quality of your activities.

∴ It is easier to monitor if you have a clear plan of activities to start with.

∴ Monitoring the quality of activities is sometimes not straightforward, but collecting feedback from the participants and staff is a good starting point.

In general you will need to monitor implementation from three points of view:

- Use of resources.

- Target of the activities.

- Quality of the activities.

With regard to the first two, you will find that it is easier to keep track of what your project is doing if you have a clear plan to start with. The plan should indicate which activities will be implemented and should include for each activity information about when it will be implemented, for how long, with what resources (human, financial and technical) and reaching how many people. It will then be easy for you to determine how to collect the following information during implementation:

- When was the activity implemented? For how long?
  Was there a significant deviation from your plan? If so, why?

- How much money and how many people did you use for this activity?
  Was there a significant deviation from your plan? If so, why?

- How many people did you reach through this activity?
  What was their age and gender?
  Was there a significant deviation from your plan?
  Did you fail to reach somebody you wanted to reach?
  Did anyone drop out? If so, why?

Monitoring the quality of activities is a bit more difficult (see two examples from the Philippines below). In the first example, Kahayag decided to use attendance as an indication of quality. However, another group, the Foundation for Adolescent Development, thought that participants might not like the activity and still attend. It is always very important to obtain feedback from the target group about the activity they participated in. No activity is going to be successful if the target group does not enjoy it or find it useful.

Attendance as an indication of quality

For us, the relatively consistent attendance of participants in an activity shows the level of interest of target beneficiaries, while good reactions and comments from the community and participants may mean that the activities implemented were accepted and agreeable. Children are the most honest and most transparent and do not fake their likes and wants. They will not go back to an activity if they experienced something bad and if they like it they will be most willing to participate again.

Kahayag, the Philippines

Usefulness of feedback

From time to time, the facilitator of substance abuse sessions conducted a one-on-one interview among the young participants. This usually happened after the session, when participants were having their snack. Based on the interviews, they really appreciated the use of the video in teaching about or discussing substance abuse. The showing of the video encouraged participants to share their thoughts and opinions on substance abuse. We collected feedback among them to know if the methodology used in conducting the sessions was effective among youth participants. It was good, because through their feedback we are now confident in continuing to use videos as a method of teaching.

Foundation for Adolescent Development, the Philippines

In this case, the Foundation for Adolescent Development in the Philippines chose a rather informal method of collecting information. Nevertheless, as we pointed out at the beginning, such subjective feedback, however useful, may not be enough and, especially in activities designed to provide information or skills to be used at a later stage, a more objective measure of how information or skills have been taken on board at the end of the activity would be very helpful. In fact, the Foundation for Adolescent Development itself decided to go a bit further, as can be seen below.

Usefulness of pre- and post-testing

The Foundation for Adolescent Development also developed a self-administered test for the youth and parent participants in substance abuse prevention and education. Youth and parents who attended the sessions completed the pre- and post-tests. These tests became more useful for us in terms of identifying the insights and learning gained by the participants. The results also told us what aspects needed improvement in conducting the session in the future.

Foundation for Adolescent Development, the Philippines

Finally, it is also very important to obtain feedback from the staff working on an activity on how they feel the activity went. A critical look at your activities, coupled with some specific information about who did and did not participate and why, and some feedback from those who did participate, can go a long way in telling you how well the project is progressing.

Evaluating whether you have achieved your goal of preventing substance abuse

Key ideas

- Most projects are too small (in terms of duration/intensity/coverage/number of risk and protective factors addressed) to be able to make a measurable difference in terms of substance abuse behaviour.

- Substance abuse behaviour does not change in the short term.

- Evaluating a project in terms of substance abuse behaviour to show significant results that can be attributed to the action of the project requires external expertise and is not cheap.

- Therefore, it is a choice recommended only to comprehensive programmes that have been working with good coverage and intensity for a substantial period of time.

We all work on substance abuse prevention. At least one of the aims of any given project, therefore, is to prevent substance abuse by young people. Evaluation needs to show that we have been able to do that. The problem is that this is really not easy.

Some projects are simply too small to make a difference in terms of substance abuse behaviour. They might have funding to tackle only one of the risk and protective factors that put communities and individuals at risk for substance abuse. Moreover, changes in the way people start and continue to abuse substances do not take place in the short term. Suppose you do some substance abuse prevention work with 10-year-olds. How would you know if it had been effective? You would need to look a long way into the future to see, for example, if fewer of the children, when they grew up, had substance abuse problems later on. The effect would be very hard to measure because of all the other things that might have happened to them in the meantime (as mentioned, researchers call these "intervening variables").

Measuring change in behaviour is difficult

A year or two for a project like this is not enough to fully realize the goals. Although there were encouraging signs, we realized that trust-building alone, that is, between us and the youth, us and the adults/parents, us and the community as a whole, required the largest amount of time. It is also too short a time to determine the impact of the project, in particular on an issue as important as substance and drug abuse.

Foundation for Drug Information Campaign, the Philippines

Even if you could show that your group of 10-year-olds had turned out to be less likely to have substance abuse problems, these findings would come too late to help you in demonstrating that your substance abuse prevention work had been effective. Ten or so years later, the substance abuse problems might be very different; 10-year-old children would be different—and you would probably have moved to another job. A more measurable objective would have been better. Finally, many projects, for funding or other reasons, last for one, maybe two years. In either case, it would not be realistic to expect such projects to make a difference in terms of substance abuse behaviour, and it would be unfair to assess them by this factor alone.

Substance abuse behaviour is not something that people report on freely. There could be problems with the accuracy of people's reports concerning their own substance abuse and some methods are better than others at assessing substance abuse behaviour accurately. To be sure you are collecting information with a methodology that is appropriate, it would be worth seeking some help from people with **specific** training in this area. However, this would make for a more expensive type of evaluation.

We do not mean to say that it is impossible to measure the effect of your project in terms of substance abuse behaviour. However, for this kind of evaluation to be useful, certain conditions must be met. A project should have been or be comprehensive enough (addressing a range of relevant risk and protective factors), intensive enough, covering enough of a target group and running for long enough. Adequate funding for the evaluation should also be available in order to hire an experienced evaluator and to allow for an experimental or quasi-experimental design (what is the point of showing that your project has resulted in a change in substance abuse behaviour if the change cannot be attributed with certainty to the project?). In other words, it should be a very conscious choice, a sort of investment. However, we would not recommend this choice to many of our partners, who are probably able to work on one, maybe two risk factors, with not very high coverage or intensity, for a couple of years. A lot of evaluation effort would result in rather disappointing results.

The goal of preventing substance abuse and the indicators

If you decide that your project addresses enough risk and protective factors with enough intensity and covers enough people to show effects in terms of substance abuse behaviour, your next step is to decide what your indicators will be. Usually, for this kind of evaluation, you will have hired an outside expert and this is definitely something he or she should be helping you with. There are many different kinds of substance abuse behaviour and so there are many different things that you could measure. In part, what you measure will be determined by the substance abuse problem that you set out to tackle in the first place. Essentially, you will be looking at two main possibilities.

Age of the young people when they start using substances

The younger a person is when he or she starts to use substances, the greater the chance that he or she will develop problematic substance abuse later in life. An increase in the age at which young people start using substances is already a very good prevention result.

Number of young people who have ever used substances, and used substances in the last 30 days, and the rate of change

These are the two most widely used indicators of substance abuse. In some countries where binge drinking (drinking a large amount of alcohol on one occasion) is a problem, you might want to examine the lifetime and monthly occurrence of this particular kind of alcohol abuse.

Evaluating whether you have achieved your objectives of addressing risk and protective factors

Key ideas

- Your prevention activities will normally address a range of risk and protective factors. Changing the situation of your target group or community in terms of relevant risk and protective factors would therefore be the objective of your activities or project.

- Even if it is too difficult to demonstrate that your activities have changed substance abuse behaviour (your goal), you might be able to demonstrate that your activities have changed the situation in terms of risk and protective factors (your objective(s)).

- Beside recognizing important achievements, you could reasonably state that your activities have been able to contribute to the promotion of healthy lifestyles and substance abuse prevention.

Another way of approaching the evaluation of prevention is to "break prevention apart" and to consider the evaluation of the components of prevention rather than prevention as a whole.

What is prevention about? For us, it is about strengthening protective factors and weakening risk factors. You can read more about this in our handbook and training materials on planning.* For the moment, let's agree that in order to prevent substance abuse among young people in a community, you will normally undertake a needs assessment, which will identify the factors that put young people at risk of abusing substances and those which protect young people from this. On this basis, you will plan for a range of activities that address the relevant risk and protective factors. There are many activities that you could implement, addressing many risk and protective factors. However, you could broadly group your activities into nine categories according to which factor they address. You could have activities that:

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*See United Nations, Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, *A Participatory Handbook for Youth Drug Abuse Prevention Programmes: a Guide for Development and Improvement* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.XI.10) (http://www.unodc.org/youthnet/pdf/ handbook.pdf); World Health Organization, *Primary Prevention of Substance Abuse: a Workbook for Project Operators* (http://www.unodc.org/youthnet/global_initiative/pdf/initiative_activities_workbook.pdf); and World Health Organization, *Primary Prevention of Substance Abuse: a Facilitator Guide* (http://www.unodc.org/ youthnet/global_initiative/pdf/iniative_activities_facilitator_guide.pdf).

- Provide information about the health and social effects of substances (this could be done through teachers, peers, parents, youth workers, etc.).

- Strengthen personal and social skills (this could be done through teachers, peers, parents, youth workers, etc.).

- Strengthen positive personal attachments to parents, guardians and/or other adults.

- Provide shelter, education, vocational skills and job opportunities.

- Provide opportunities to spend free time in a way that is fun, constructive and challenging.

- Limit the availability of substances.

- Raise awareness of the problem of substance abuse in the community.

- Provide youth-friendly health and social services.

- Shape a community culture and youth subculture that encourage healthy lifestyles and discourage substance abuse.

As an example, imagine that you had identified one of the risk factors in your community was that, after school, students had too much unsupervised time, without much to do. Please note that in real life you would have identified more than one risk or protective factor. However, to keep the example simple, let's stick to this one. You had decided, therefore, that to prevent substance abuse you would plan activities, so that young people in your community would spend their free time in a way that was fun, challenging and constructive. You could say that to have young people in the community spend their free time in a way that was fun, challenging and constructive was the objective of your project.

As in all good projects, you plan the evaluation before starting implementation of your activities. You could try to assess whether young people in your community are no longer starting to use substances. As we have seen in the previous section, this is not easy for a number of reasons. What you could do instead is to assess how many young people spend their free time regularly and frequently in healthy activities. If you have achieved a significant increase, you could say that you are contributing to the promotion of healthy lifestyles and therefore to substance abuse prevention. You worked on the assumption that young people were starting and continuing to use substances because they had too much free time. Even if you cannot assess whether the substance abuse behaviour has changed, you can at least reasonably state that you have contributed to preventing substance abuse by changing the situation. It is not perfect, but it is an achievement and should be recognized.

Objectives and indicators

Once you have decided that you will assess whether your activities have achieved their objective(s) to change the situation in terms of risk or protective factor(s)—rather than their goal of preventing substance abuse—you will need to choose indicators for each of the objectives. That is, you will need to decide what information you will collect to show that the situation changed in the way you intended.

Sometimes people talk about "proxy indicators". A proxy indicator "stands in for" the indicator that one really wants to examine but which is too difficult to measure. For example, say that it is too difficult to get information about the quantity of alcohol that young people drink each week, but that you know how much they spend on alcohol. You could use expenditure as a proxy indicator of their alcohol consumption. If the amount of money spent on alcohol increased (and the price remained the same), you could conclude that the level of alcohol consumption had also increased.

In the context of evaluation, because it is too difficult to estimate how many people are using substances, evaluators often measure how many people have a positive or negative attitude towards substance abuse. In other words, the number of people with a positive attitude towards using substances is often used as a proxy indicator for the number of people using substances. In that case, however, we would need to be very sure that there is a strong link between the two. We would need to be sure that people with a negative attitude towards substances either do not start, or stop, using substances. The most common proxy indicators are knowledge, beliefs and attitudes about substance abuse. The problem with using these as proxy indicators is that the link to substance abuse is not very strong. The link with knowledge is especially weak. The link to attitudes towards personal use is stronger, but it is not easy to measure.

You should be aware that what we are proposing cannot really be called "proxy indicators", because we cannot say that any one of the risk or protective factors causes or prevents substance abuse on its own. However, as we mentioned before, achieving objectives in terms of weakening risk factors (or strengthening protective factors) is a step in the right direction, should be recognized, and can be said to contribute to the goal of preventing substance abuse.

The choice of which indicator to use will be determined, at least in part, by the amount of human, financial and technical resources that you have at your disposal to evaluate your project. For some indicators, it is easy to collect relevant information. For others, it is not. The table opposite lists some possibilities for each of the objectives mentioned above.

Monitoring and evaluating unintended effects

Key ideas

- You need to be open to information that points to results (both positive and negative) that the project did not intend to achieve.

- It is particularly important to follow up with people who have dropped out of your activities or whom you have not been able to reach. This could be key to understanding how to improve your activities.

Of course, a project may have effects that you had not expected or intended. Evaluators need to be open to the possibility that the work will result in positive or negative changes that might not have been part of the original objectives. This is also one of the reasons why it is

OBJECTIVE	POSSIBLE INDICATOR	POSSIBLE INDICATOR	POSSIBLE INDICATOR
To provide information about the health and social effects of substances	Number of youth who have accurate facts about substances, their short- or long-term effects and how much they are used	Number of youth who have negative attitudes towards substance abuse (but not substance abusers)	
To strengthen personal and social skills	Number of youth who are more able to solve problems constructively and cope with their emotions and stress	Number of youth who have more faith in their strengths and talents and use them constructively	Number of youth who feel they are making new friends
To strengthen positive personal attachments to parents, guardians and/or other adults	Fewer tensions and/or more dialogue in the families of the community	Less substance abuse in the families of the community	Number of youth who have positive attachment to adults who do not abuse substances (a teacher, a coach, etc.)
To provide shelter/education/ vocational skills/job opportunities	Number of youth whose basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) are met	Number of youth in school/vocational training/work	Number of youth who report good academic levels and positive attachment to the school environment
To provide opportunities to spend free time in a way that is fun, constructive and challenging	Number of youth who frequently and regularly spend their free time in fun, constructive and challenging activities	Number of youth who actively participate in organizing fun, constructive and challenging activities for other youth	
To limit the availability of substances	Number of youth who feel that they can get substances easily	Number of substance-free venues where young people can and do meet	
To raise awareness on the problem of substance abuse in the community	Number of people who have accurate information about substances and their effects	Number of people who remember the logos and messages of the awareness-raising activities	Number of people who request information about substances or assistance with a substance abuse problem
To provide youth-friendly health and social services	Number of youth who use health and social services	Number of youth who are satisfied with the health and social services	Quality of health and social services provided
To shape a community/youth culture that encourages healthy lifestyles and discourages substance abuse	Number of youth who identify themselves with role models promoting healthy lifestyles	Number of youth in the community who choose substance-free recreational activities and venues	Advertisement of legal substances is limited or banned

useful to mix quantitative and qualitative methodologies in the collection of information for evaluation purposes. Quantitative methodologies give you the percentages, the real numbers. However, it is in the free-flowing discussion of a well-conducted focus group or in a semi-structured interview that unexpected issues can arise. For example, a youth club might get a very positive response from local adults, who notice an improvement in the behaviour of the young people attending it in terms of criminal or semi-criminal behaviour. Obviously, since you had not intended the programme to achieve this, and you probably did not do a baseline assessment, it will be difficult to assess whether there has actually been a change. However, the available indicators may prove useful for future phases of the project or for advocacy.

Some outcomes may be less welcome. An evaluation may reveal that levels of substance abuse have dropped as a result of a prevention programme in the school. At the same time, it may also reveal that more students have been expelled from the school for reasons related to substance abuse after the prevention programme was instituted. While this is not a positive outcome, the fact that it was noted would offer an opportunity to review the programme to see that students are, as far as possible, being assisted in dealing with their substance abuse problems and not made to leave school, which is in itself a risk factor.

Finally, it is particularly important to try to find out about the people that you have not been able to reach. Suppose you had a prevention programme that started with 20 people, but at the end there were only 10 people left and they were all positive about the programme. Suppose you were able to interview the 10 who had left and found out that all 10 had suffered bad experiences with the programme. It would become more difficult to say whether the programme had been a failure (because it didn't work for 10 people) or a success (because it worked for another 10). However, it would be very interesting to know the characteristics of the 10 people who had had bad experiences and ask them what had happened. This information would help you understand why the project had not worked for half of your target group and maybe give you some ideas on how to improve it.