
Recommendations: Creating a New Social Behavior Change Program

The following recommendations are adapted from a lessons learned report that was prepared by the first program manager of International Medical Corps' "Bienvenue aux Changements dans la Communauté" program in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Recommendations for future programming are divided into four categories: 1. Assessment, 2. Program Design, 3. Program Implementation, and 4. Monitoring & Evaluation.

1. Assessment

Carry out a contextual analysis.

An assessment of the realities on the ground concerning the topic in question and the practical and logistical challenges of program implementation is necessary for the development of a well-targeted and realistic intervention.

Gain knowledge of local organizations and civil society working in the area of interest and how the system is structured.

Having an awareness of how civil society and local organizations working in the area of interest are structured in country can help with program development and implementation. It can help to understand how the new project's activities can contribute to existing systems, identify gaps, propose activities based on need and select potential partners.

Explore different ways of working with potential partners.

View local organizations and partnerships as a means of extending the reach of a program even when providing grants cannot be part of a program. Assessing the potential of local partnerships and exploring ways of working with them to increase the geographical reach of the program and harmonize and reinforce messages across the board.

2. Program Design

Involve specialist at the program development phase.

Specialists in the topic of interest, in behavior change approaches and in monitoring and evaluation should all be involved from the initial phases of program design through to implementation. This will allow for the proposal and subsequent intervention to be viable and technically sound.

Ensure clear program objectives are defined at the developmental stage.

Every project should have specific program objectives that contribute to an overall result. Focused activities can then be planned to achieve the desired change.

Embed BCC interventions in a theoretical framework.

Theories can be longwinded and confusing; however, they provide essential guidance to program development. At the developmental stages, it is very helpful to assess the situation and identify the most suitable theoretical frameworks to achieve the desired outcomes. Theories need to be selected according to the nature of the problem and the contextual realities. Basing an intervention on theoretical groundings can help identify which elements to focus on and guide program activities.

Less is more.

In social behavior change interventions, focus is very important, and this requires sacrificing some activities to improve the impact of the essential ones. A good way of identifying a single focus for all activities is to do a root-cause analysis. The root cause then informs all aspects of programming.

Ensure that the roles and objectives of partners well defined from the start.

Each member of a consortium should have clear roles and a scope of work with clear objectives for program implementation. Constant, open communication throughout program implementation is important to ensure that all consortium partners are aware of their function and how their input contributes to the realization of an overall shared goal.

3. Program Implementation

Have well-defined job descriptions and invest time in staff recruitment and continuous formal and on-the-job training.

Project staff have an important role in ensuring that activities are implemented correctly and will have the desired effect. Spending time of understanding exactly the qualities and competencies required to carry out the job is very helpful in selecting the most appropriate candidates. An awareness of what qualities are necessary for the job is also helpful in identifying training needs. Investing time in building staff capacity through training as well as on-the-job coaching will contribute to sustainability and the realization of a technically sound intervention.

When different programs co-exist in one site, set up regular meetings and open communication lines to harmonize planning and program implementation.

Regular meetings between the different programs operating in the same site are essential to ensure smooth and coordinated implementation of activities. At the field level meetings may be organized on a weekly basis. Organizations with management offices outside the community should also meet, less frequently, at relevant levels. Sharing information can help guide efficient programming and increase a sense of unity within communities.

When conducting large-scale activities, make sure you have key messages prepared that will be disseminated in a predetermined way during the event.

Large-scale, edutainment events are effective ways of attracting crowds and raising awareness. To make the most of such occasions, it is important to know in advance the key messages that needs to be passed onto the community through the event. The event will then need to be planned in ways that allows the sharing of that key message, it can be through the distribution of eye-catching, easy to read leaflets, through the introduction of a quiz competition during the breaks, through information stands, or simply by portraying the key message through the event, be it a sketch, a dance, or a song.

Train the GBV SBC Mobilizers in basic GBV response and referrals

SBC Mobilizers work to sensitize communities. It is important that they have knowledge of basic elements of GBV response so that they are able to provide basic support and referrals to survivors they might encounter through their work. They can also convey information on basic response to their network of facilitators.

Have an adapted and tested curriculum for training.

Where training occurs, a contextually adapted and tested curriculum ought to be in place. In cases where the training can be delivered by different programs, roles and topics which need to be covered by each program must be defined.

Develop a single name, logo, and jingle for the project.

When several partners are in one consortium, there is always the risk that each tries to promote its own organization. To avoid this, and to limit confusion on the part of the community, it helps to create a single name for the project, accompanied by a logo and a jingle if possible. This allows for communities to quickly identify the program and associate it with key messages while also ensuring unity between the different consortium partners.

Develop a message compendium to be shared with volunteer facilitators, peer educators and other partners.

Developing key messages for social behavior change can help focus interventions and communications. Gathering these messages into a compendium and sharing it with partners both internally and externally, can be an effective way of harmonizing messages and ensuring that all players speak with one voice.

When entering a new community, use existing groups and associations as a platform for sensitization sessions.

In every community there generally are groups that meet on a regular basis, including religious groups, groups of young people, or groups that are held together by a common profession. These groups constitute a ready-made platform for message delivery and sensitization sessions. Working with existing groups will not only prove less labor intensive and more cost efficient; it will also increase acceptance of the project as it is seen as working with the community rather than changing established structures.

Ensure that men-led activities do not exclude women.

In recent years there has been a call to involve men more actively in the fight against violence against women. Working only with men, however, perpetuates the status quo of norms around male superiority and risks disempowering women. When supporting men in GBV prevention, it is important that women are actively involved and leading interventions.

Ensure that community performances portray positive, aspirational behaviors.

Evidence suggests that promotion of desired behaviors is more effective than the promotion of negative practices. All elements of the intervention should therefore focus on promoting positive behaviors. This is particularly important in activities which have a visual element, such as theater, films or puppetry. As people attending these types of activities will see and witness the behavior portrayed, there is a greater risk that the event could have an undesired effect of perpetuating the negative behaviors.

When working with communities, emphasize the value on non-monetary incentives.

The benefits of becoming involved in a SBC program can be numerous, ranging from greater recognition in the community to improved skills that can be transferred to other areas. Commitment from community members is essential for the success of a program, and there is a risk that monetary remuneration may attract people who are not sufficiently committed. Programs should carefully consider appropriate remuneration for different levels of program participation and be sure to apply a compensation scheme consistently, where staff receive fair wages, and volunteers don't bear costs of participation, but money is also not an incentive for participation in trainings and other community activities.

4. Monitoring & Evaluation

Review available, analyzed service data to inform programming.

Staff leading SBC interventions within a broader GBV program should not have access to sensitive data related to individuals receiving GBV response services. Where possible, though, staff involved with GBV response can share anonymized analyses of service data with SBC staff, such as GBVIMS reports, to inform programming, including tailored activities related to trends of violence. Tracking analyzed service data over time can also provide an indication of SBC program progress.

Ensure regular, open, and effective communication between M&E and programs.

From program design and through implementation, M&E and programs need to communicate openly and regularly to ensure that means of monitoring activities are effective, to track indicators, and to inform adaptations in programming.

Develop ways of assessing whether messages are heard during large-scale events.

The first step towards behavior change is awareness. It is important for an SBC intervention to assess whether key messages are heard. Program and M&E staff should work together to find ways of determining if and which messages are heard, particularly in large scale events or radio programming where little or no interaction occurs with the audience.

Make sure there is a monitoring system in place when working with a network of community facilitators /peer educators.

Community facilitators and peer educators are helpful in extending the reach of SBC activities. Quality control of what they are doing and saying however is important, as is the provision of ongoing technical support to strengthen skills. Program staff can work with M&E to devise a quality control system to be managed through self-reporting by volunteers, regular meetings, or monitored sessions.

Pre and post tests for trainings ought to require yes/no answers or multiple choice.

Pre and post tests used with open questions present challenges for objective marking and comparison of results. When trainings are delivered at a large scale, and M&E staff will lead the measurement of results, it is preferable to include easily quantifiable response options.

Devise ways of assessing outcome.

A plan for assessing outcomes should be designed at the start of a program and can rely on a range of creative strategies, including the use of qualitative information gathered through focus group discussions or in-depth interviews, the development of proxy indicators, or the identification of comparison communities. Assessing the effects of an SBC intervention is important for both process and outcome evaluations.