

RECOMMENDATIONS from the INFO Evaluation

A. GENERAL

1. The landscape for information and dissemination has changed dramatically over the last decade through gains in technology, particularly the Internet and the increased number of sources of high-quality FP/RH information. USAID/PRH thus has two options for the focus of a follow-on project: produce a technical publication that responds mainly to the policy, research, and other knowledge needs of USAID/PRH, or create field-oriented products based on user needs and demands. The team felt that it was not possible for one project to do both well. The clearly expressed need in the evaluation findings is for field-oriented products.

2. USAID should review the assumptions and activities being implemented currently through INFO. Some of INFO's best-known and most expensive products like *Population Reports* and *Family Planning: a Global Handbook for Providers* need to be analyzed in terms of responsiveness to user needs and where these fit in with other sources of technical information that target audiences use. Many INFO products are not used widely, but it is not clear whether this is due to promotional and distribution weaknesses or a more fundamental misreading of audience needs. Products, regardless of how well-designed they are believed to be, should not drive the new activity, as they now do with INFO. USAID must identify the target beneficiaries, determine their needs, and design a program to meet them.

3. USAID/PRH's historical technical leadership role should continue in any new activity. None of the recommendations or activities proposed would sacrifice this. There is a role for state-of-the-art technical resources, but USAID should consider (a) whether there is a need for a worldwide "one-size-fits-all" field dissemination strategy, which many other donors have abandoned, and (b) whether *Population Reports*, which no longer has the weight or use that it did in the past, should be reconfigured. All of the evaluation evidence points to a new direction and a new focus for any follow-on project.

4. With the amount of FP/RH information already available outside INFO, a future publishing model should deploy the skills and talents of writers as data miners to review information and data, extract what is relevant for their target audiences, and repackage it so it is useful for those audiences.

5. USAID/PRH should focus future information production and dissemination efforts on digital publishing and web-based services. While there may be a continuing need for print materials for some areas and populations, the need for these is declining even among audiences with limited connectivity. USAID's role in providing quality technical information need not be diminished by this change in emphasis. It may in fact be enhanced.

6. A new project should have a specific strategy for regionalization and localization. Increasingly, the use of materials is governed by how well they apply to specific diverse populations; the demand for linguistically and culturally appropriate materials is not well met. Combined with new web applications that allow a choice of materials used, the interest in regional and national adaptations would rise, and there would be more Mission interest in the products and services offered.

7. USAID/PRH needs to decide where Missions fit into their information strategy and seek ways to improve how a follow-on project would work with them. If field participation is desirable, it should seriously canvass missions about how information efforts (not necessarily structured like the INFO project) might respond to their needs. Missions have been excluded from the INFO/PIP model for many years. It will take time to build project elements that respond to their information needs.

8. USAID/PRH needs to consider the implications of using INFO's technology capacity in other areas without regard to FP/RH content or relevance. KM management for the Bureau for Global Health is an example. There are technical and content costs to this type of entrepreneurship that have not yet been fully calculated and could divert the project away from its basic mission.

9. In a follow-on activity, USAID/PRH should look at nontraditional ways of disseminating information. These might include working with the popular press as a resource for health information (e.g., becoming a resource or “gatekeeper” for popular culture), or search engine optimization to make sure that project-generated information appears at the top of searches.

B. PROGRAM EVOLUTION

1. Strategies and products should be shaped so that USAID missions perceive that project activities will help them achieve their own program objectives as well as PRH's. The follow-on project should have clear added value for the field, and the value of the current project's IR1¹ activities should be reviewed with them. Inputs from implementing partners might also be a source of information.

2. USAID should consider the business community's approach to large and expensive activities by doing market research to determine the audience, niche, use, and resources necessary for a follow-on activity. This might also look at potential cost savings and cost recovery for some activities.

3. USAID/PRH might consider the approach used by *International Family Planning Perspectives* to support capacity-building and foster technical exchange between developing country researchers.

C. PROJECT CONTEXT AND RELATIONSHIPS

USAID Missions

As recommended above, USAID Missions must be specifically included in deliberations about design of a new program:

- Survey USAID mission staff about their actual FP/RH information needs and how the follow-on project can be responsive. This should include soliciting input on dissemination of INFO print products.
- Develop a strategy for regularly updating mailing lists and investigate alternative mechanisms for distribution in-country.
- Work with in-country partners to tailor INFO technical information for local use.

Cooperating Agency and Field Implementing Partners

1. The follow-on project needs to be positioned within the landscape of the FP/RH information available. A new design should expand collaborative activities and could usefully be positioned as a support, not a competitor, to other projects. Evidence from the evaluation suggests that this will require a change in perspective and approaches to colleagues by the implementer of the new award.

2. Better use of project information, especially online resources, should be a priority. A design team needs to consider how, for instance, project resources should be allocated to library functions. These are expensive, and others also seem to be meeting these needs. Costs of activities like these that are valued need to be examined in terms of the market they serve.

3. A new design should focus on who is using project information and how. Ensure that the recipient of the new award undertakes research to better understand how to improve use by partners in-country.

¹ IR1: Improved family planning and reproductive health information available

International Donors and NGOs

USAID should review the strategy for creating and disseminating state-of-the-art technical publications for the field. Although the models used by other donors may not be appropriate considering the special political environment in which USAID works, some aspects of them may be. The availability of technical materials through multiple sources other than the donor agency suggests that the more comprehensive USAID approaches may not be necessary. Regional or national approaches would be more cost-effective than the current strategy of individual worldwide technical publications for multiple audiences.

D. STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK

The evaluation team recommends that future USAID/PRH information and dissemination activities be based on user needs and demand from the field. This should be the primary consideration when designing all project components.

E. PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

The Publishing Model

1. INFO's proposal to make a fundamental change in the purpose and scope of its principal publications should be considered. Producing an edition of *Population Reports* once a year with regular updates of relevant materials would significantly reduce labor and other costs. Ancillary materials could be more responsive to local and regional audiences, a commonly cited need throughout the evaluation.
2. INFO's workflows and the way they are managed need a fundamental change. Its operational efficiency depends on this, whether it continues producing the same print products or different types of products.
3. USAID should use a business model and balanced scorecard approach to decide what to produce and whether products of the follow-on project should be centrally produced and distributed. Audience demand is one element, but the business model should also be applied to the strategy for development, production, timing, and cost of publications. A clear distinction should be drawn between the needs of peer-reviewed academic publications and technical update materials for programs in developing countries.
4. Any follow-on project should clearly define its mission in light of:

The changed publishing and information landscape, with

- accelerating convergence of traditional print-on-paper and electronic/digital products; ever greater demand for accessibility to information through the Internet
- more technology available
- different expectations of what information can be used for
- a move away from centrally sourced information to a user-centered approach, where users define what they want to know and how they will find this out
- increased opportunities for online collaboration

The need to adopt a new business model that

- takes account of the changed publishing and information landscape, user needs, and the impact of technology, and moves away from the current issue-based model to a continuous online publication model
- enables the organization to clarify its vision and strategy and translate these into action
- introduces metrics along the lines of the balanced scorecard for managing and measuring the organization's performance across a number of perspectives, such as

- learning and growth
- business processes
- customers
- finances

The Technology Model

1. INFO should make its technology strategy more explicit, especially how technology investments support the overall program strategy. A technology strategy would orient an assessment of whether or not potential investments support the mission and would help develop a longer-term vision for technology.
2. Technology should be used to increase opportunities for localization and local adaptation of content. Allowing users to create a “My Pop Reports” or other type of similar publication would be exciting. By extending the taxonomy and the concept-matching approach that INFO is currently exploring and adding new drag-and-drop types of AJAX interfaces, a new project will be able to offer content packaging services to field-based users in a sustainable way.
3. A follow-on design should explore containing costs (PDF links) while increasing usability (HTML) by inserting a technological solution into the production workflow to increase ease of adaptation for multiple media, i.e., store the content in a database system that then has two different outputs, HTML and PDF, with the layout determined by the medium.
4. USAID might consider completely out-sourcing technology. This will likely result in more flexibility and a better product at potentially significant cost savings.
5. A follow-on design should consolidate all databases and resources into one server environment that may be more cost-effective and have lower maintenance costs. Further cost assessment would be needed, but it is likely that remote server administration through a server farm could be cost-effective and very efficient.
6. USAID should consider restricting the collection, maintenance, and continuous updating of health and HIV/AIDS materials for use by FP/RH users in a follow-on activity. It is not realistic to assume that Internet users in other areas of health and HIV/AIDS will use a USAID/PRH project website as a regular source. There are already multiple quality sources such as UNAIDS, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, or the Communication Initiative (funded by USAID and other donors).

The Library Model²

1. Mechanisms should be reviewed to streamline the current management of POPLINE and other databases. This will be helpful in future design efforts and also reduce costs. Despite the value of the library services, they are expensive. Ways to make them more cost-effective should be investigated.
2. USAID should explore strategies to increase access to and use of web-based library services by populations that are currently underserved. These are some of INFO’s most popular and well liked features. The popularity of these sites in the U.S., Mexico, and Uruguay (approximately 60% of users) and the relatively lower numbers for Asia and Africa suggest that expanding regional and national access there should be a priority for any strategy using electronic media.

² The core elements of the term "Library" are: (1) the information shared has been vetted by subject-matter experts; (2) the information has been classified, indexed and with abstracts to improve searching; and (3) information is sent to people for free or people are allowed to read it without payment.

3. Concept-mapping might be a strategy to explore in a future information project, but it is expensive. The evaluation team thought that despite INFO's proposal this should not be acted on in the current project but might be considered as an innovative approach in a new design.

Collaboration

1. The Implementing Best Practices (IBP) activity is a good investment for USAID. It has high visibility, fosters collaboration, and helps USAID participants stay current on global health matters. Even though it is largely a health activity, USAID might consider it a good investment of INFO funds and LOE. However, it might be better to house the activity in another office of USAID and contribute PRH resources to it for PRH-related activities.

2. Increasing non-English discussions on the site should increase involvement by adding populations that most need peer-to-peer-based collaboration and support. Either explicit internationalization or general outreach and support for non-English discussion should be discussed with the WHO IBP Secretariat.

3. If USAID/PRH continues funding a project's participation in the IBP/WHO forum, it should ensure that its new project uses this resource more intensively in its own formal content creation. INFO staff gave isolated examples of using the IBP for feedback on outlines and topics; these efforts should be institutionalized in a new project to make sure content is directly responsive to user needs.

4. USAID/PRH should continue support for HIPNET³ and remain active and visible there, because their involvement was cited as one reason for its success.

5. HIPNET has enjoyed the support of its member organizations because of INFO leadership. Nevertheless, INFO and HIPNET are not the same, although they are often seen as synonymous. The collaboration necessary for an effective HIPNET could be improved if there was more effort to delineate HIPNET goals and activities separately from those of its management.

6. The innovative activities in INFO's recent work, particularly collaborative work with other donors and the field, are an important area for growth in the current project as well as in any follow-on activity. USAID/PRH should give the project latitude and flexibility for such collaborative and field-responsive activities because they often are responses to emerging needs. However, the team feels that USAID should consider restricting these activities to areas germane to FP/RH.

F. MAIN ACTIVITIES

Population Reports

If USAID/PRH continues to produce this publication, it should consider INFO's proposal to produce a single issue annually, with supplemental materials made regularly available throughout the year. General Recommendations 2 and 8, above, are also relevant in considering how a follow-on design should consider the revised scope and purpose of *Population Reports*.

Web-Based Services: The FP/RH Landscape

1. In a new activity USAID should concentrate on gaps in current RH information and knowledge. One element of this recommendation is to explicitly avoid repackaging what others are using under an INFO or follow-on project logo. A new activity should focus on adding value to current information by translations or

³ The Health Information and Publications Network (HIPNET) is a mission-driven partnership that addresses a key public health need for access to technical health information and innovative information technologies that strengthen the performance and sustainability of health care programs, organizations, and services around the world. The mandate of HIPNET is for all health and information products, but members are predominantly from PRH initiatives. HIPNET has over 500 members, mostly USAID staff, implementing partners, and NGOs that currently receive funding from USAID/PRH.

adaptations, creating supportive tools and materials, and other ways to take collaborating partner contributions further.

2. USAID should therefore try to restrict the role of content creation in a new project to areas where there are information gaps. The new project should be an information broker, validating information and facilitating local partners and subject matter experts as they create and edit content. This role can foster local capacity building in content development, help with local adaptation, and act as quality control to insure that local content meets good scientific standards.

Knowledge Management

The team does not recommend that INFO or a follow-on be proposed as the mechanism to meet GH KM needs. While INFO's current KM efforts seem to serve the specific requirements of PRH well, there may be better mechanisms to do this at the bureau level. Efforts to fund KM activities that are being covered elsewhere may also meet with resistance from other offices.

Monitoring and Evaluation

If USAID is serious about M&E in a follow-on project, it *must* provide more robust funding and insure that this line item can be used for no other project purpose. Many of the issues identified in this evaluation might have been addressed earlier if USAID had indicated its commitment to M&E through a protected budget and careful monitoring. Good M&E is expensive but worthwhile if it produces high-value information that results in products that are used and have an impact on health behavior. Regular content analyses and readership studies should be part of the M&E strategy.

G. AUDIENCES AND USERS

1. Basic decisions about clients, audiences, end users, and beneficiaries should be made before USAID/PRH goes forward with a new design.
2. USAID/PRH needs to decide if the new activity is for the benefit of the office's mandates for global technical excellence as defined by USAID/PRH technical offices or for the benefit of FP users and the providers that serve them.
3. USAID/PRH should consider funding a target beneficiary assessment *now* to identify goals and key audiences. The evaluation team recommends strongly that this not be done by squeezing resources out of the current INFO budget, if possible, since that project's staff already perceives its budget situation as dire. Access to information and barriers that work against it should be included in the assessment.
4. To have utility for the field, a new project *must* consider users and their needs as the drivers of activities, not the other way around. Audiences must be the starting point of planning, not a passive category on the way to outcomes.