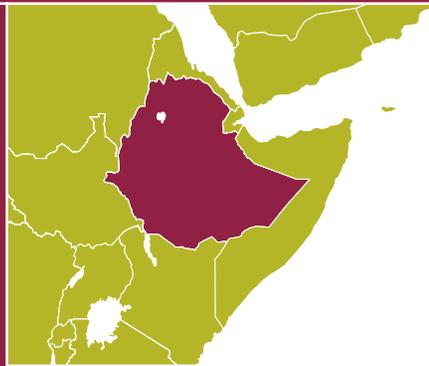


policy

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TRAINING AND PILOT MENTORSHIP PROGRAM ON FAMILY PLANNING MODELS



*Participant Perspectives
and Lessons Learned*

This publication was prepared by Serawit Lisanework, Yadira Almodovar-Diaz, and Lelise Dembi of the Health Policy Project.

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Training and Pilot Mentorship Program on Family Planning Models

Participant Perspectives and Lessons Learned

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INTRODUCTION

The USAID-funded Health Policy Project (HPP) in Ethiopia builds the capacity of leaders to increase demand for and use of evidence for family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) services in support of the strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluation of programs, nationally and in selected regions. The project also focuses on strengthening health structures to further harmonize and align the efforts of public, private, and donor-funded FP/RH-related programs. In addition, all of HPP's capacity-building activities address gender as a cross-cutting issue.

Generating data and information to determine the impacts of FP/RH-related activities on health indicators and trends is an essential component of achieving program objectives and goals. To strengthen the capacity of national planning bodies, professional associations, training institutions, and research partners in this area, HPP collaborated with the Ethiopian Public Health Association (EPHA) to provide trainings and technical updates on key FP/RH models, including the GAP (Gather, Analyze, and Plan) Tool and a selection from the Spectrum System of Policy Models.

In 2012, HPP and EPHA began a series of training-of-trainers sessions, basic trainings, and technical updates on the selected models. To date, 52 policymakers, experts, and academics have been trained, including individuals from various government institutions at the federal level and in the Amhara Region (e.g., the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development; the Amhara Regional Health Bureau; the Amhara Bureau of Finance and Economic Development; the Amhara Bureau of Women's, Children, and Youth Affairs; and several academic institutions, including Addis Ababa University, Gondar University, Bahir Dar University, and Debre Markos University).

Until recently, there had been limited practical application of the models and use of the results for planning and advocacy purposes. Thus, to ensure that participants would apply the skills learned, HPP and EPHA designed and implemented a pilot mentorship program that paired selected trainees and master trainers as mentees and mentors, respectively. An orientation session was held in May 2014 to familiarize the participants with the concept and define and agree on the roles of "mentees" and "mentors."

The mentorship program aimed to support the selected trainees in (1) applying the Spectrum models and GAP Tool and (2) producing policy briefs, fact sheets, and/or other materials to inform planning, implementation, and evidence-based decision making by policymakers and other key stakeholders. In total, 11 mentees and 7 mentors participated in the two-month program and produced nine evidence-based policy briefs.

To document the lessons learned and obtain participant feedback on the training and mentorship program, an assessment, including in-depth interviews, was conducted.

Objectives of the Assessment

The assessment aimed to

- Garner mentors' and mentees' perceptions about the importance of the training in building their capacity to use the GAP Tool and selected Spectrum models
- Gauge mentors' and mentees' perceptions about the mentorship program
- Identify lessons learned and recommendations for scaling up the mentorship program

METHODOLOGY

Participant Selection and Orientation

A total of 11 mentees and 7 mentors participated in the pilot phase of a mentorship program. The mentors were recruited from those who received the training-of-trainers course and possessed proven experience with facilitating Spectrum training and applying the models. The mentees were selected from those who attended a four-day Spectrum technical update training in early 2014. Willingness to participate in the pilot mentorship program was used as a major criterion to enroll mentors and mentees. The selected mentors and mentees attended a one-day orientation in May 2014 to discuss the overall objectives and activities of the pilot program, their respective roles and responsibilities, and the support that EPHA/HPP would provide. The mentor-mentee matching process was also completed, followed by an initial one-on-one meeting for the mentees to draft their action plan describing the activities and products they would work on with their mentors. Tools and tips for arranging effective mentoring meetings and developing and submitting monthly process reports to EPHA/HPP were also provided. The mentees' action plans and mentorship were implemented between May and July 2014.

Assessment Instruments

To assess the results of the training and pilot mentorship program, HPP conducted individual interviews with mentors and mentees using a semi-structured questionnaire designed for this purpose (see Annexes 1 and 2). Each participant read and signed a consent form describing the purpose of the interview and the process for safeguarding confidentiality. The interviews were conducted in August and September 2014.

MENTEE PERCEPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Spectrum and GAP Tool Training

Mentees described the Spectrum model training as very useful for understanding and applying the various tools. Some participants advanced their prior knowledge and skills using the tools, while others had an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the tools for the first time. In addition, all participants improved their data manipulation knowledge and skills. The training was also very useful to help mentees understand the importance of having evidence-based information for effective planning, monitoring and evaluation of development programs. One mentee stated

Though I had pre-existing rudimentary knowledge about the tools, the training enhanced my data manipulation skills, including data interpolation, data inputs, and interpretation of results. The training also helped me understand the importance of evidence in program planning.

The mentees also reported that the training was crucial in motivating them to apply the tools in their work:

I think most of the tools in the Spectrum suite are applied for national level planning. I am highly motivated to apply the tools when I get the chance to work in FP interventions at the national level; the training motivated me to read further on the tools.

The training motivated me to apply the tools in collaboration with colleagues. I have a plan to apply the tools and write articles for a regular newsletter in my institution.

Almost all mentees described the exercises and practice sessions as very important in increasing their knowledge of and skills in the tools. Mentees reported that they fully understood the FamPlan, DemProj, and RAPID tools after the training, but that the GAP Tool remained difficult to understand and apply.

I rate the training in the specific tools as excellent for DemProj and FamPlan, very good for RAPID, and good/fair for FP GAP. The FP GAP session has limitations both in the training and refresher courses, the theoretical and practice sessions for FP GAP weren't clear, presentations weren't clear.

Mentees made the following recommendations for future training:

- More support from EPHA/HPP on getting available data for use with both the Spectrum models and GAP Tool
- Engage more experienced GAP Tool facilitators
- Include additional staff from the Federal Ministry of Health in Spectrum training, as they have the opportunity to apply these tools for planning purposes
- Include experts from the Ministry of Education in Spectrum training, particularly on RAPID, as this tool can be used to plan activities for education programs
- Allocate more time for exercises and practice sessions to reinforce participants' skills rather than just focus on the theoretical aspects of the tools

- Provide immediate follow-up after the trainings to expand the application of these tools among individuals trained
- Reduce the number of participants in a single training session, so that each trainee has sufficient time to practice entering data inputs and generating and interpreting results and data outputs

Mentorship Support

All mentees described the mentorship program as very useful, given that it motivated them to apply the tools and improved their communication skills and ability to identify and use data from different sources. As a result of the mentorship, 9 of the 11 mentees were able to produce policy briefs using the Spectrum models.

It is due to the mentorship that I was able to produce a brief using RAPID.

The orientation for the mentorship program was also crucial for the mentees to learn about their roles and responsibilities, get to know their mentors and their roles and responsibilities, and develop their draft action plans. All mentees agreed that the orientation was effective and achieved its intended objectives.

The mentorship orientation was very helpful. It was participatory and the materials and facilitation techniques used were clear. They helped me get introduced to my mentor and learn what was expected from me. My mentor taught me how to communicate [more effectively].

Mentees made the following recommendations for future mentoring programs:

- In the orientation session, allocate more time to discuss how mentees and mentors can work together effectively
- Since the mentees are employees of various institutions and may already be overstretched with their regular duties, allocate sufficient time to apply the tools and produce the policy briefs

Mentee-Mentor Relationships

Most mentees described having very good working relationships with their mentors. The mentees valued the technical support they received from their mentors, particularly for scenario development, data input, results interpretation, national and regional data searches, and write-ups of the briefs.

The mentees and mentors had frequent meetings and exchanged ideas and information via phone and emails throughout the mentorship process.

Although most mentees were able to follow their action plan's timeline, some lacked the time to deliver the products as initially planned.

When we started implementation, it was difficult to go in line with the action plan. We were busy and overwhelmed with the routine office duties, and there was a delay in the completion of the brief.

One mentee had difficulty working with the mentor due to disagreements on the process and the data sources to use in developing the policy brief. The EPHA had to intervene, and an internal agreement between the mentor and mentee was reached to end their mentorship relationship. Thus, EPHA staff provided direct support to the mentee to complete the brief.

Some of the major challenges faced by the mentees during the mentorship process included the geographic distance between some mentees and mentors, and delayed responses from mentors to emails sent by the mentees.

Mentees made the following recommendations to improve the mentee-mentor relationship:

- Ensure a suitable pairing between mentees and mentors, accounting for location of residence
- Ensure that the mentors have adequate time for and commitment to the mentorship, so that mentees receive the necessary support and timely responses to their questions
- Allocate the appropriate number of mentees to a mentor, in line with the mentor's available time, commitment, and place of residence (some mentors had two mentees and could not support both sufficiently due to time shortage and physical distances)

Regarding the mentors' skills in using the Spectrum models, most mentees acknowledged that the mentors had sufficient knowledge and skills to coach them. Some mentees found their mentors' skills limited with the particular tool they wanted to use for their analysis. Hence, they recommended carefully assigning mentors based on their skills and experiences with specific tools and models. These mentees commented that a mentor with strong skills in RAPID cannot provide effective support to a mentee who is producing a paper using DemProj.

Brief Dissemination

Nine of the 11 mentees developed a policy brief using the Spectrum models and are currently disseminating these products. For instance, one mentee recently submitted her policy brief to her employer's library, and the technical resource is now available to all employees. Another mentee is planning to publish his brief in a local journal, while the remaining mentees are sharing their products with colleagues and/or looking for opportunities to present their work at conferences. Five policy briefs were accepted for presentation at the annual EPHA conference in February 2015.

Tool Competency and Additional Support

Although mentees feel they are now competent in applying the models, they desire follow-up support from EPHA and HPP as the mentorship pilot phase has ended. Some want support on tools such as the GAP Tool, which they have not applied in the past, while others want further support in writing policy briefs and other communication products. Three mentees desire support from their institutions so that they can regularly apply the tools and share their knowledge and skills with their colleagues. One university lecturer wants support from his university to incorporate the tools in the pre-service education of health science and demography studies.

MENTOR PERCEPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Spectrum and GAP Tool Training

The majority of the interviewed mentors (three) are Spectrum trainers and trained their mentees in at least one workshop. They believe that the Spectrum and GAP Tool trainings were vital for their mentees and created opportunities for mentees to learn about the different models or reinforce their existing knowledge and skills. Moreover, the trainings enabled mentees to understand how data are accessed, used through the application of the tools, and interpreted for the production of policy briefs.

Mentors made the following recommendations for future training:

- Identify trainees with no previous experience with the models and devote more time for them during the trainings
- Allocate additional time for practical sessions and exercises

Mentorship Orientation

The mentors found the orientation useful, since it helped clarify the roles and responsibilities of mentors and mentees and initiate collaboration. The instructional design and materials used were also clear and easy to understand.

Mentors made the following recommendation for future orientations:

- Expand the mentorship program to others who didn't get the chance during the pilot phase, and encourage mentors and mentees to continue working together once the program ends

Mentor-Mentee Relationships

The mentors described having very good relationships with their respective mentees. They met at least three times, and some mentors and mentees met more frequently (once a week given the geographical proximity). In addition, mentors had numerous email and phone communications with their mentees and felt that they provided valuable technical support in scenario development, data analysis and interpretation, and writing policy briefs.

The mentors mentioned the following major challenges of the pilot mentorship program:

- Shortage of time to complete the policy briefs
- Lack of regional and/or national data for some indicators

Mentor Experience

The program helped the mentors share experiences with their mentees. The mentors found their mentees committed, responsive, and very interested in the program. Almost all the mentors described their personal and working relationship with their mentees as very good. They communicated clearly with their mentees and were able to help them produce policy briefs, which were the expected final outcomes of the mentorship program. The mentors found the mentorship program important as it helped mentees to recognize the real challenges of finding data and better understand the current situation of family planning in Ethiopia, including policy implications. Consequently, the mentors are happy to continue serving in the future and believe they have very good knowledge and skills in applying Spectrum models.

However, because the mentors and mentees were employees of different institutions, they had limited time to fully engage in the mentorship program and some were obliged to postpone meetings, which resulted in delays in completing their policy briefs. They also expressed their desire to have sufficient reference materials for Spectrum models and training in other FP/RH models. One mentor requested additional financial and logistics support to effectively engage in future mentorship programs, while the remaining mentors recommended scaling up training and mentorship support to strengthen institutional knowledge and use of evidence for planning and decision making.

One trained person per organization is not enough. We need to have a larger pool of trained persons to better use the information generated using Spectrum models.

The mentors found the mentorship program useful to strengthen mentees' knowledge and skills. They believe that the mentees gained significant knowledge and skills in applying the models through the mentorship program and that the mentees were able to produce high-quality policy briefs using the Spectrum models and GAP Tool.

As far as EPHA's support is concerned, almost all the mentors were happy with its support during the mentorship program. This support included (but was not limited to) arranging for a car to collect data from relevant institutions such as the Ministry of Health, providing data for modeling purposes, and providing stipends to cover travel costs related to in-person meetings.

EPHA collected monthly reports from mentors to monitor progress. The mentors found the reporting template useful and easy to use but too general. Further, some mentors stated that the template has several irrelevant questions and that they did not receive feedback on some monthly and final reports, as well as the policy briefs produced by their mentees. However, the majority of mentors described receiving productive supervision from EPHA, which was essential in the timely completion of the policy briefs.

Stipends

Mentors were asked to rate the importance of the stipend they received on a scale of 1–10 (1 being not important at all and 10 being extremely important). Overall, the mentors described the stipend important to motivate them and cover accommodation and other expenses when they traveled to meet with their mentees. Two mentors rated the stipend a 9, one rated it an 8, and one stated that the opportunity to exchange knowledge and skills during the mentorship program was much more important than the stipend he received.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Training is necessary but not sufficient to promote the use of Spectrum models. Post-training coaching and mentorship are necessary to ensure their application.
- The application of Spectrum models can be expanded across relevant sectors with effective training, follow-up, and mentorship support.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The use of Spectrum models can be scaled up in public institutions in Ethiopia if professionals are well-trained and mentored.

Mentors and mentees made the following overall recommendations for scaling up the mentorship program:

- Carefully select the participants for Spectrum trainings and mentorship programs
- Involve people from the Ministry of Health in the mentorship program
- Encourage mentees to select their own topics to apply the models and produce policy briefs
- Support mentees and mentors to disseminate their work through publications and presentations
- Extend the mentorship period; two months may not be sufficient to effectively mentor the mentees and complete the final products
- Provide additional support from EPHA/HPP to gather and avail some of the data required for the policy briefs
- Maintain or increase incentives for mentors
- Facilitate (EPHA/HPP) a mentor-mentee group meeting, where mentees can present the results of their work and receive feedback

ANNEX 1. MENTEE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Name of mentee: _____

Date of interview: _____

Interviewer: _____

Introduction: “My name is _____. We are conducting individual interviews with all the mentors and mentees that participated in the EPHA/HPP pilot mentorship program. The purpose of this assessment is to identify the usefulness of the program, as well as participants’ perceptions about its quality and the outcomes of the work done. We also want to hear your recommendations for how to improve the program in the future. We will summarize the results in a report that will not include identifiable information to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Please feel free to share any insights and feedback you may have. Before we start, do you have any questions for me?”

I. Spectrum training and mentorship orientation

1. How useful was the Spectrum Technical Update training for you?
Probe for the top 2–3 areas that mentees found most useful, and why. Ask about the instructional design, exercises completed, and materials used.
2. If we were to conduct another technical update training, what would you recommend improving or changing?
3. How useful was the Mentorship Orientation?
Probe for the top 2–3 areas that mentees found most useful and why. Ask about the instructional design, exercises completed, and materials used.
4. If we were to conduct another mentorship orientation, what would you recommend improving or changing?

II. Perceptions on the mentor-mentee relationship

5. How frequently did you meet with your mentor? Who initiated the contact? How was the quality of the meetings?
Probe for length of meetings, type of encounter (Skype conversation, face-to-face), use or lack of a written agenda, and location and level of formality/informality of meetings. Probe for any challenges.

6. How would you describe the skills your mentor had in the use of the Spectrum model or GAP Tool before the mentoring program, compared to the end of it? How was his/her ability to listen? Clarity of his/her communication and usefulness of their feedback?
7. How was your experience as a mentee?
Probe about personal communication style versus mentor's, time availability, management of competing demands, and responsiveness from both parties.

III. Perceptions about skills development, quality, and use of product

8. How would you describe your skills on the use of the Spectrum model or GAP Tool before and after the mentorship program? Please briefly describe your experience.
Probe for changes in the level of confidence in the use of the tool and specific support the mentor provided.
9. How comfortable do you feel about interpreting and using the information generated through the Spectrum model or GAP Tool? Please share an example.
10. Did you learn anything *new* about the tool or the interpretation of the results from your collaboration with your mentor? Please describe.
11. Are there any areas where you would be interested in receiving additional information or support to be more comfortable using this model or tool?
Probe for support with writing, presentation, and analytical skills.
12. How do you plan to use the findings to inform policy and/or planning?

Recommendations

13. Based on your experience, would you recommend the mentorship program to your peers and colleagues? Why?
14. Would you recommend scaling up this program? Why?
Probe for specific activities, tools, and support that should be added or changed.
15. Any final comments:

ANNEX 2. MENTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

Name of mentor: _____

Date of interview: _____

Interviewer: _____

Introduction: “My name is _____. We are conducting individual interviews with all the mentors and mentees that participated in the EPHA/HPP pilot mentorship program. The purpose of this assessment is to identify the usefulness of the program, as well as participants’ perceptions about its quality and the outcomes of the work done. We also want to hear your recommendations for how to improve the program in the future. We will summarize the results in a report that will not include identifiable information to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Please feel free to share any insights and feedback you may have. Before we start, do you have any questions for me?”

I. Spectrum training and mentorship orientation

1. How useful was the Spectrum Technical Update training for your mentee? What about for you?
Probe for the instructional design, exercises done, and materials used.
2. If we were to conduct another technical update training, what would you recommend improving or changing?
3. How useful was the Mentorship Orientation?
Probe for materials, exercises done, instructional design, etc.
4. If we were to conduct another mentorship orientation, what would you recommend improving or changing?

II. Perceptions on the mentor-mentee relationship

5. How frequent did you meet with your mentee? Who initiated the contact? How was the quality of the meetings?
Probe for length of meetings, type of encounter (Skype conversation, face-to-face), use or lack of a written agenda, and location and level of formality/informality of meetings. Probe for any challenges.
6. How was your experience serving as a mentor?
Probe about personal communication style vs mentee’s, time/availability, management of competing demands, and responsiveness from both parties.
7. If we continue this program, would you serve as a mentor again? Why?
Probe for any additional training, coaching, support, and/or tools they may need.

III. Perceptions about skills development and quality of product

8. Based on your experience, how was the quality and timeliness of the work produced by the mentee?
Probe for what the mentee did well, the challenges they had, their level of confidence using the tool, their feedback provided, and their reactions to the feedback.
9. How would you describe the skills your mentee had in the use of the Spectrum model or GAP Tool before the mentoring program, compared to the end of it?
Probe for technical skills using the tool (data entry, verification), analysis, and interpretation.
10. Did you learn anything new from your collaboration with your mentee? Please describe.
11. Are there any areas you would recommend your mentee to continue working on? Have you shared this feedback with him/her? If yes, what was their reaction? If not, why?

IV. Support and supervision from EPHA/HPP

12. Did you request any support from EPHA as part of the mentorship program? If yes, what did you ask for and how timely and thorough was the response? How satisfied were you with the response?
13. What is your perception about the monthly reports requested by EPHA?
Probe for usefulness, adequacy of the questions, depth of analysis, frequency, and received feedback from EPHA.
14. On a scale from 1–10 (1 being not important at all and 10 being extremely important), how would you rate the importance of the stipend you received? What do you think about this type of incentive?
Probe for the idea of not using incentives.

V. Recommendations

15. If we wanted to scale up the program, what do you recommend us keeping? What should be changed or added?
16. Any final comments:

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