

# Control and Accountability Tools - Spot Checks

“Spot Check” or Sample-Based Site  
Monitoring: Application in Colombia  
*Familias en Accion*

By Maria Claudia Vasquez (18 pages)

# Definition of Spot Check

- Mechanism of supervision in the field of application of operational procedures for Program implementation.
- Objective is to review operations of Program in different localities.
- Operations includes procedures, manuals, organizational responsibilities, documentation, etc.

# Why Spot Checks?

- Complements externally contracted financial and other audits
- Promotes attention to building capacity to investigate and correct problems
- ***Internal*** process evaluation, feedback loops and correction mechanisms critical

# Value of Spot Checks

- Practical way of finding out how Program operates on the ground and whether as intended
- Are Program materials being used well? Are they effective/efficient?
- Are there unexpected developments affecting the Program and its objectives (always)?
- What are the local and personal decisions, misunderstandings, interpretations?
- Done in “real-time”
- Generates input to make improvements

# Familias en Accion CCT Colombia

**Objective of Program** is to increase investment in human capital of poor children:

- Reduce school absences and drop-outs in primary and secondary education
- Complement family income in order to raise food expenditures
- Improve health care for children below 7
- Improve child care practices

- Provides monetary transfer to mothers bimonthly conditioned on school attendance and health controls of children
- Started in December 2000
- Currently covers 590,000 families
- In 680 rural municipalities throughout the country

# Organizational Structure

- Program under Presidential Executive Agency – Social Action.
- National Coordinating Unit (UCN)
- Regional Coordinating Units (UCR)
- Implemented at Municipal level  
Municipalities sign agreement with UCN
- Municipal contact (Enlace municipal)
- Schools, health clinics, mothers, banks

# Operational Structure

## **Procedure**

## **Who is involved?**

Registration of Families

UCN, UCR, Municipality

First Payment

UCN, UCR, Muni, Banks

Conditions Verification

Munis, Schools, Clinics

Second Payment

UCN, UCR, Muni, Banks

Mothers' Assembly

UCN, UCR, Muni, MLs

Mothers' Meetings

UCN, UCR, Muni, MLs,  
otros

Complaints and Questions

UCR, UCN, Municipality

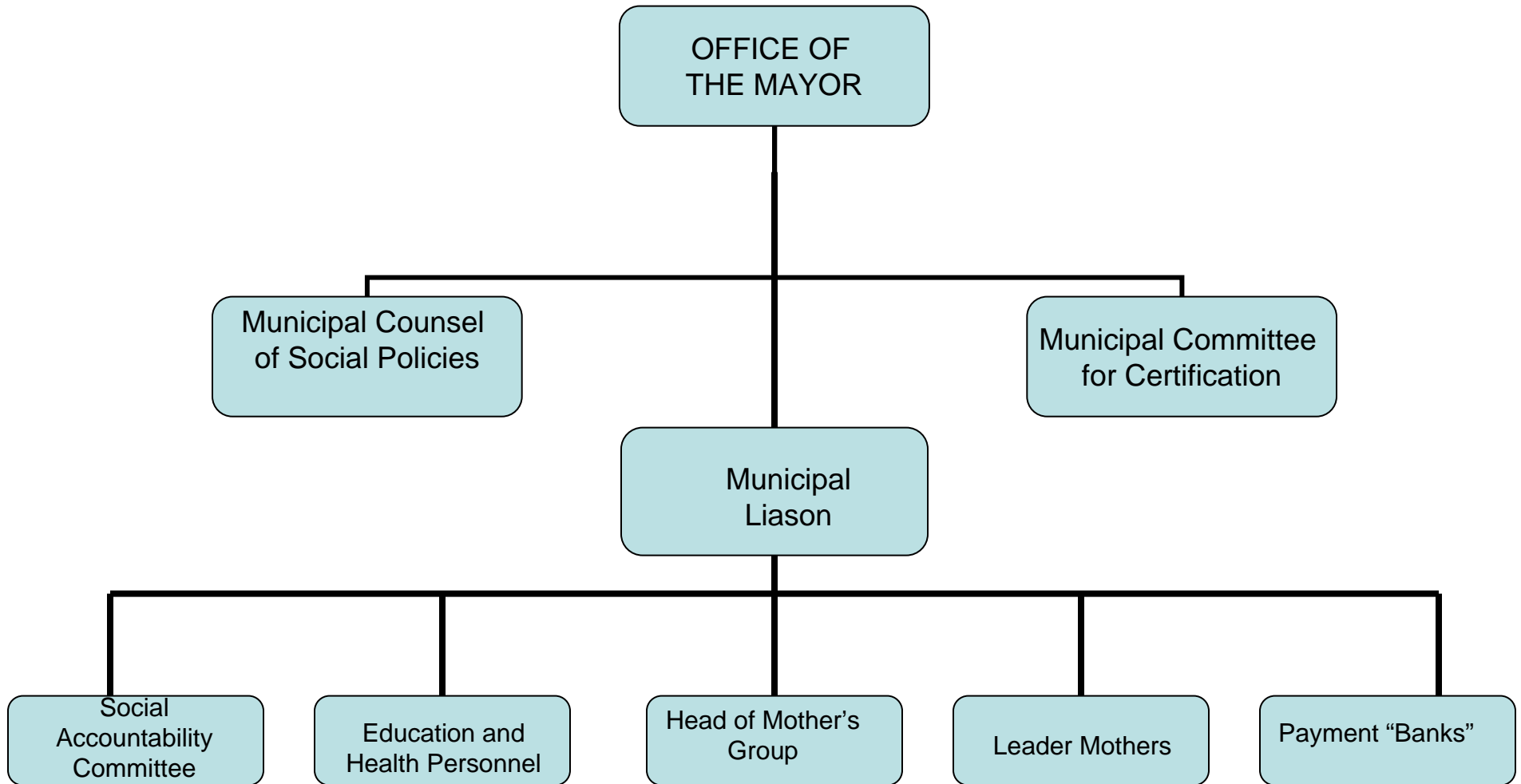
# Colombia - *Familias en Accion*

## Use of Spot Checks

- Monitors application of the procedures of the Program in different localities
- Implications of local adaptation of Program rules - this can work well or not so well
- Check if operations and procedures of Program met objectives in practice
- Identify strengths and weaknesses and required modifications
- Verify how procedures were being interpreted
- Identify “externalities”

# FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURE AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

## Families in Action Program



# Aspects Included in Spot Checks

- Inscription of Eligible Families
- Verification of Fulfillment of Conditionalties
- Payments
- Handling of changes in beneficiary data and complaints
- Participation in Educational/Promotional Activities (information on health, education, etc. for mothers)

# Methodological Decisions

- No of localities (statistically representative or not?)
- Define variables, topics of interest
- Instruments to collect information
- Identify agents to be interviewed
- Qualitative and quantitative analysis
- Role of follow-ups (were changes made, problems corrected, impact of remedial measures)

# Method used in Colombia

- Contracted by National Coordination Unit
- Supervised by Planning and Supervision Department
- Carried out every 6 months
- Initially same topics covered in each round. More recently the Program narrowed focus, choosing particular themes (Adequacy of allocation of administrative resources)
- 20 municipalities in 4 regions, chosen randomly, as were others to be interviewed
- 4 rounds of spot checks contracted externally with firm: team of 47 (13 central level, 4 regional coordinators, 8 supervisors, 8 assistants, 14 interviewers)
- Total Cost of US\$460,000
- Structured Interviews with key actors using survey (ranging from 30–132 questions each) – Program administrators, local governments, participants

# Example of First Round

<b>Source of Information</b>	<b>Number interviewed</b>
Survey of Mother Participant	1,602
Survey of Mother Leaders	50
Survey of School	119
Survey of Clinic	16
Survey of Municipal Enlace	30
Survey of Reg. Coordinator	30
Complaints and Problems	134
Survey to Banks	20
Review of Documents	91

# Examples of Indicators (400)

## **Knowledge**

- Mother's knowledge of specific themes
- Familiarity of clinic and schools staff of their Program guide

## **Utilization of materials**

- Do mother leaders use materials?
- Do school and clinic staff consult guides?

## **Compliance with operational procedures**

- Do mother leaders report on complaints?
- How many days do the Banks allow for payments, what is the waiting time?

## **Infrastructure**

- Do regional offices have necessary equipment?
- Do mothers stand in line at the bank inside or outside?

## **Organization**

- % of schools that require written excuse for absence

## **Procedures**

- % of complaints resolved at the Regional Coordination Unit
- % of municipal enclaves who have lists of schools, clinics, and completed stickers

# Selected Results

- Municipal Representatives do not completely understand Program and not dedicating enough time (3<sup>rd</sup> round – improvement, 4<sup>th</sup> round more updated documentation)
- Low Commitment of schools and health centers causes problems with verification of conditions, time of mothers
- Minor amount of \$ not claimed by mothers, UCN errors
- Payment processes often modified, for the better
- Verbal complaints
- Low Participation of Mothers in Education Sessions
- Expansion in role of Mother Leader – Program asset (3<sup>rd</sup> round – helped in verification of conditions)
- Insufficient budget for Regional Coordination Units to fulfill role – procedures falling into disuse

# Reaction of Program

- Conclusions and recommendations considered pertinent – payments process and verification of conditionalities
- Program made changes based on the results of the spot checks
- Information provided not only that there was a weakness, but its cause (could get behind the numbers)