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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Who is involved?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration of Families</td>
<td>UCN, UCR, Municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Payment</td>
<td>UCN, UCR, Muni, Banks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions Verification</td>
<td>Munis, Schools, Clinics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Payment</td>
<td>UCN, UCR, Muni, Banks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers’ Assembly</td>
<td>UCN, UCR, Muni, MLs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers’ Meetings</td>
<td>UCN, UCR, Muni, MLs, otros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints and Questions</td>
<td>UCR, UCN, Municipality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Municipal Counsel of Social Policies
Municipal Committee for Certification

Municipal Liaison

Social Accountability Committee
Education and Health Personnel
Head of Mother’s Group
Leader Mothers
Payment “Banks”
Aspects Included in Spot Checks

• Inscription of Eligible Families
• Verification of Fulfillment of Conditionalities
• 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>Number interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Mother Participant</td>
<td>1,602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Mother Leaders</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of School</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Clinic</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Municipal Enlace</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Reg. Coordinator</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints and Problems</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey to Banks</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Documents</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 enlaces who have lists of schools, clinics, and completed stickers
Selected Results

- Municipal Representatives do not completely understand Program and not dedicating enough time (3rd round – improvement, 4th 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 (3rd 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)