Learning, Evaluating, and Adapting Social and Behavior Change Programming in Zambia

Breakthrough RESEARCH is designing three complementary studies in Zambia, Nigeria, and Democratic Republic of Congo to evaluate the impact of integrated social and behavior change (SBC) programs. Integrated SBC programming addresses behaviors and outcomes across multiple health topics such as family planning, sexual and reproductive health, and HIV, or across multiple development sectors. In Zambia, the research team will evaluate approaches to integrated SBC currently being piloted by its sister project, Breakthrough ACTION. Breakthrough RESEARCH will use realist evaluation to help SBC implementers design, evaluate, and adapt their programs based on evidence.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS ACTIVITY?

Many SBC interventions are designed to influence the enabling environment for health, including the gender norms and attitudes that inhibit people from adopting health-seeking behaviors such as use of modern contraception, HIV testing, and antenatal care. With a focus on the intended program outcomes by health area, a realist evaluation asks: What works? For whom? In what contexts? The evaluation and program team work together to conceptualize and map the pathways through which behavior change is expected to occur. The evaluation process involves a cyclical process of participatory learning and adaptive decision-making, with program and evaluation teams meeting in the design phase and periodically thereafter to review, discuss, and apply existing evidence, data, and program results.

In Zambia, Breakthrough ACTION will encourage young people to adopt and maintain healthy behaviors such as preventing unwanted pregnancies through family planning use; using condoms, particularly for high-risk sexual activity; and getting tested for HIV—among other positive health behaviors. To achieve these results, the project will focus on reducing barriers to behavior change—e.g., by addressing social and gender norms, improving interactions between health providers and clients, and strengthening the linkages between health facilities and communities. Breakthrough ACTION will integrate SBC communication in branded media campaigns, community engagement activities, and when supporting positive parenting within families, among other activities. Breakthrough RESEARCH has aligned its evaluation activities to support Breakthrough ACTION and build the capacity of its local service delivery or NGO partners, while also assessing the impact of their integrated programming.

HOW WILL THIS ACTIVITY BE IMPLEMENTED?

To assist Breakthrough ACTION and its program partners, this activity will work with implementing partners to create detailed theories of change that articulate how activities are expected to improve health outcomes, and where and how social changes are needed to facilitate impact across multiple health outcomes. The Breakthrough RESEARCH team will:

ACTIVITY SNAPSHOT

Evaluate integrated SBC programs and adapt them based on evidence.

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ANTICIPATED TIMELINE
2018 – 2019

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION
Zambia
Lay the foundation for realist evaluation. The research team will articulate a program theory and change pathways (causal linkages) that lead to expected health outcomes and identify the gaps in knowledge about these pathways that need be filled with existing or new data. A design workshop with local project staff will explore these issues and assess how the theory of change might be evaluated.

Fill evidence gaps with existing data and evidence. The research team will analyze project and health services data, collect relevant literature, and design small-scale data collection and assessments to gather evidence related to the program’s theory of change. The team will also meet periodically with implementing partners to assess program impact, identify evidence gaps, and assess how the program may adapt to achieve greater impact.

Work with local research counterparts. The research team will work with research counterparts to answer programming questions such as the following:

- How can a project using bundled SBC components (e.g., addressing multiple health topics like family planning and HIV) be implemented more effectively and adaptively as it goes to scale? How effectively does the program address social norms regarding adolescent sexuality and decision-making dynamics within families?
- How do social and gender norms held by community members create barriers and/or offer opportunities to encourage people to adopt healthy behaviors? How can these barriers be effectively addressed, particularly when programs are targeted toward populations such as adolescents? How do social norms influence multiple health outcomes for adolescents?
- How does the program’s stage (e.g., pilot stage or more mature) influence the process of integration? How does the context (e.g., urban or rural) affect how the norms are approached programmatically and how effective change may be?

The teams might also propose additional studies and analyses to build the evidence base to pressure test an intervention’s mechanisms of change. This approach allows program planners to adapt and scale up interventions based on the latest evidence.

Distill lessons learned. Breakthrough RESEARCH will review the theory of change and evaluation results in workshops with project staff and a wider group of stakeholders. It will also disseminate lessons learned about using the realist evaluation results for assessing a program’s theory of change, evaluating impact, and guiding a program for successful scale-up and sustainability.

HOW WILL THE OUTCOMES HELP IMPROVE SBC PROGRAMS?

The realist evaluation will give program managers in Zambia an early understanding of the change mechanisms, mediating factors (facilitators and barriers), and effectiveness of their program in enabling adolescents to adopt healthy behaviors. This process of discovery will provide crucial information to allow managers to adjust their programs more effectively and efficiently as the programs go to scale.

**ANTICIPATED PRODUCTS**

- A set of project change theories and maps that articulate the pathways through which social and behavioral changes are expected to occur
- Synthesis of evidence on SBC interventions and outcomes directly related to program implementation
- Workshop reports documenting the realist evaluation process and its application to integrated SBC in the Zambian context