

# The Monitoring and Evaluation Phase

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The monitoring and evaluation of any project is critical. It helps us learn important lessons about the project. Tools developed for monitoring and evaluation need to be user friendly and manageable. For example, many teachers involved with COS complain that they do not have enough time for COS activities.

The M&E tools for the COS project can be adapted and modified to suit different situations. It may not be possible for future COS projects to use all COS M&E tools presented in this toolkit as they require substantive training, and may not be feasible in all situations. They were important for the pilot project so that it was possible to comprehensively evaluate the project. It was found that school-based records were often the easiest for COS groups to complete and the most accurate. The tools used in the pilot involved school convenors and neighbourhood agents completing personal records, the schools keeping a record of COS activity and fieldworkers reporting on consultation in the field.



**SCHOOL-BASED  
RECORDS WERE  
THE MOST RELIABLE  
RECORD OF COS  
ACTIVITY**

## Indicators

The following overall indicators were agreed for the COS Project:

- ◆ Numbers of Circles of Support groups in community
- ◆ Frequency of contact with adults and children
- ◆ Nature of support provided
- ◆ Numbers of members of Circles of Support groups
- ◆ Numbers of households actively supported
- ◆ Percent of supported OVC who are enrolled in school
- ◆ Percent of supported OVC who are attending school regularly.

These indicators were measured by the school convenors and neighbourhood agents themselves. School convenors kept 'diaries' of the activities of their COS groups, and copies of the relevant pages were periodically sent to HDA where the information was collated centrally. Additional information was collected through semi-structured group interviews with Circles of Support group members at each site. This was done towards the end of the pilot phase, and provided valuable insights into the successes and challenges faced by the groups, as well as their views on the sustainability of the model.

## M&E objectives for COS

The M&E objectives for the COS pilot project were:

- ♦ to identify the success factors or barriers to implementation
- ♦ to document the process of implementation
- ♦ to identify the effect of the project on the educational continuity of children, as far as possible
- ♦ to describe what would be needed for replication of the project.

## M&E tools

All of the information from the COS pilot projects has been gained from the M&E tools that were used during the pilot phase. The M&E tools were:

- ♦ COS diary
- ♦ Fieldworker development diary
- ♦ Snapshot weeks
- ♦ Quarterly reports
- ♦ The COS children's study.

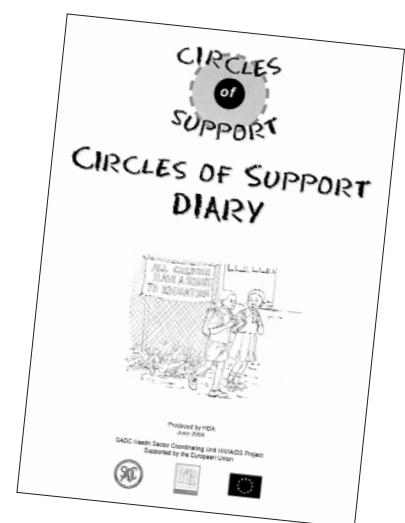
## COS diary

Each school convenor and neighbourhood agent was provided with a diary that included important information sheets. The information recorded was:

- ♦ names of all individuals or organisations that form part of the COS group
- ♦ details of households supported and visited
- ♦ lists of organisations that provide services that can be utilised, and details of this
- ♦ details of school-age children in each household, and their attendance records with follow-ups after a three and six month interval.

During the pilot duplicate copies of these forms were kept. This meant that the master copy was then kept by the individual school convenor or neighbourhood agents for their personal records. A copy of all the forms included in the diary is attached in the appendices. It was found that the diary was often completed inconsistently and was not a good record of COS activity across the sites, although some agents and convenors found keeping a personal record to be valuable.

It is recommended that all the forms found in this toolkit be modified for any new / future situation. Also follow up visits were not sufficiently recorded in the current forms.



## **Fieldworker development diary**

During the implementation of the project, fieldworkers at the pilot sites were required to keep a record of all interactions with neighbourhood agents, schools convenors, schools and other stakeholders from the pilot site. The purpose of this diary was to look at resources needed for future project replication elsewhere. Clear guidelines were provided to fieldworkers to complete the diary. The diary elicited information about the range of stakeholder meetings and the type of issues being raised. A copy of the diary is found in the appendices.

While the diary has been critical in providing useful information, some fieldworkers comment that the diary inadequately reflects the time spent maintaining communication between the various stakeholders.

## **Snapshot weeks**

The monitoring and evaluation exercise included two snapshot weeks. These weeks were chosen to represent COS activity midway and towards the close of the implementation period. The first snapshot week involved collecting complete forms from the COS diaries and feedback interviews with agents and convenors. This was a structured interview and feedback was collected from school convenors and neighbourhood agents about their experience of training, the use of the COS tools and their experience of implementing COS activity on the ground. The information collected from the first snapshot week was used to prepare four case studies of COS schools. The case studies are found in the appendices and also incorporated data collected during the capacity audit conducted in the inception phase. The second snapshot week was a school-based record of activity. The data from this snapshot week has been included in the implementation section on what was learnt at the pilot sites. The form used at schools is included in the appendices.

### **NOTE:**

**In the Appendices are:**

- ♦ **Copies of all forms used in the COS diary**
- ♦ **A copy of the fieldworker development diary**
- ♦ **The school based record used in the second snapshot week**
- ♦ **Case studies of four COS schools**

## Quarterly reports

The main purpose of the quarterly reports was to record the progress of the overall COS project. Nine quarterly reports were submitted by the managing or implementation agents in each country during the implementation period. Early quarterly reports submitted at the early stage of implementation gauged the following information:

- ♦ the national and regional consultation process
- ♦ the selection of pilot sites
- ♦ the stage of development of the project in relation to the implementation model
- ♦ the initial meetings at the pilot site
- ♦ overview of progress for the period under review.

Copies of the minutes of meetings and any additional reports e.g. those submitted to the MoE, had to be attached. The subsequent quarterly reports focus on:

- ♦ ground work to build sustainability
- ♦ details of training programmes
- ♦ tracking school convenors and neighbourhood agents that had left the project and their reasons
- ♦ feedback on whether the monitoring and evaluation tools were working
- ♦ challenges facing the project.

## The COS children's study

A study was conducted using interactive focus groups with two groups of children in each country. The children were aged from 6-12 years and 13-18 years old. The purpose of the study was to:

- ♦ to assist the project to tailor its response to children
- ♦ to provide an opportunity to track the lives of vulnerable children
- ♦ to elicit feedback from vulnerable children about the support they have received
- ♦ to understand reasons why vulnerable children may not receive support from the project
- ♦ to establish whether it has made a difference to the lives of children that have been reached
- ♦ to draw out lessons for replication.

A tool for the interactive focus groups was developed and is included in the research report that is available on the HDA website at <http://www.hda.co.za>

# Some important lessons and reflections about COS

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It is difficult to prepare final conclusions for a project that is dynamic and that in every school takes on a slightly different feel and look depending on the people driving the initiative and their environment. However, there are some lessons or conclusions that stand out in the minds of people who have worked on the pilot project. These concern the following areas:

1. Small interventions can make a meaningful impact on children's lives
2. The communication between schools and communities can be built by a simple intervention like COS
3. The development of gender-sensitive programming for vulnerable children is essential
4. COS training changed the way in which neighbourhood agents and school convenors dealt with children
5. Psycho-social interventions that emphasise talking and listening to children are critical if we want to build resilience in children
6. COS has modeled two interesting approaches to stigma
7. Monitoring records are best kept by schools supported by qualitative evaluation of COS activity.

## Small things can make a big difference

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A critical element of COS success depends on communities and schools believing that even the smallest things can make a big difference in the lives of vulnerable children. Feedback from children and from neighbourhood agents and school convenors repeatedly showed that small actions such as talking and listening to a child, walking with a child to school for five minutes or small donations collected in schools and then distributed to children in need did provide enough support to keep children in school. A strength of the COS model is that distributing material resources has not dominated the intervention on the ground therefore encouraging very local level solutions to be found.

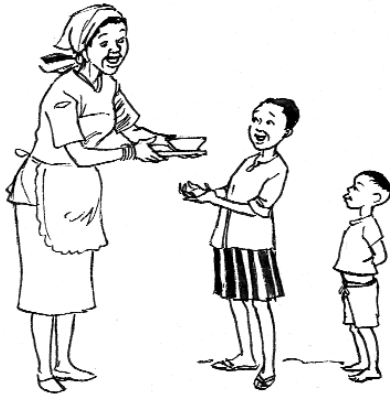
## COS helps to create social cohesion between schools and communities

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Many schools participating in the COS pilot had weak links into the community that were largely centred on a few parent-teacher meetings in a year. The COS project established dynamic links into local communities that encouraged regular communication between schools and communities. Some teachers found the household visits enlightening, giving them new insights into the backgrounds of their students. All COS schools reported having established links with local organisations and government departments able to offer support.

## Gender sensitive programming for vulnerable children is essential



Like many other development initiatives that encourage care and support in the community, in general COS groups were supported and run by women. The involvement of men was largely only found in high schools where more teachers can be expected to be men. The experience of the COS project suggests that development initiatives to support vulnerable children through schools will therefore largely rely on the input of women unless more active roles are developed for men in the programme. Positive role models of men's involvement need to be promoted in communities. Many women involved in the COS project spoke of the strain of meeting the COS goals. Household visits clashed with expectations at home to prepare food and look after children. A key task facing long term sustainability of the COS project will be to find mechanisms to time limit involvement of volunteers or to ensure a sustainable workload over time.

The research conducted with children supported through the COS project suggests that girl children may face less opportunity to cope with the difficult situations they face. Boys were more likely to report finding piece work, temporary shelter or support from an adult such as at the local police station or community centre. The findings suggest that girls have less opportunity to "make a plan" and therefore may have less opportunity to develop resilience. The reasons for this were not explored but it should be expected that socialisation, role expectations and greater home responsibilities such as care for sick parents and younger siblings may make "having a plan" almost impossible.

## COS training changed school convenors and neighbourhood agents

*"There is general consensus among the school convenors and village agents that the training on OVC and project implementation substantially increased their awareness of HIV/AIDS and the needs of OVC. All participants speak of the impact the increased knowledge of these issues made on their professional lives as well as their roles as spouses and parents."*

- Report of the independent best practices study  
November 2005, commissioned by SADC.

Across the board school convenors have been able to report a change in their role as teachers. Prior to the training school convenors reported that they were not sensitised to the issues facing vulnerable children and would reprimand children for falling asleep in class or missing school. Since the training they are able to immediately identify the symptoms and take early action.

*"The training and the project has made us more sensitive to children. Our attitude to children has changed. Instead of beating a child for being late, we ask "why are you late?" We dig to find the real problem." - Circles of Support school convenor*



Neighbourhood agents testify to the immense benefits of the COS training and now feel able to assist neighbours in need.

“The project has strengthened the village leaderships and churches and has made community more sensitive and aware of children, e.g. If a child is withdrawn and dropping grades, immediately now teachers and community begin to wonder if the children are destitute or being abused.”

- Chairperson of local COS group, Botswana

“Training was helpful... It was an eye opener. Now if there is a funeral, I talk to the child as well...”

- Neighbourhood agent, Swaziland

The extent to which COS trainees had been able to internalise this change in attitudes is best reflected in comments around their own parenting style. One neighbourhood agent best summarised this as “more talking and less beating”.

## Talking and listening to children

An independent write-up of the Swaziland COS project prepared by Rose Smart for the MTT Stage 11 report concluded that one of the successes of the COS project is that “*children are talked to in ways they hadn’t before*”. This type of change is very difficult to quantify and capture but has been a consistent observation about the COS project in all three countries.

Many times COS volunteers have been unable to secure material support but have observed that finding the time to talk through a child’s situation has provided enough support to stabilise his or her attendance at school. This type of lay psycho-social support is critical and should not be marginalised by a tendency to over focus on material support. Children themselves report how often they are seeking advice to manage their situation better. This type of simple psycho-social intervention builds resilience in children. Both this type of intervention and the shift in volunteer attitudes are very difficult to quantify in projects.



## Stigma

Stigma is experienced both at home and at school by vulnerable children. It is critical that interventions such as COS develop approaches to challenge stigma. Although the COS project has not had a programme of activities to directly address stigma faced by vulnerable children, there is evidence in the COS children’s research that vulnerable children experience stigma at school and at home.

The COS guidelines for child participation state that children are stigmatised in the following ways, through:

- ♦ avoidance by others
- ♦ rejection by others
- ♦ moral judgement passed by others
- ♦ discrimination
- ♦ abuse by others.

Stigmatised children often self exclude themselves, hold a negative perception of themselves, withdraw from social situations, sometimes over compensate by being too friendly and fear to disclose information.

The pilot intervention suggests that COS has been successful at identifying vulnerable children and not just orphans for support. Although in areas such as Namibia where there has been a programme of orphan registration, then a higher percentage of orphans are registered for support by the COS project. Stigma in the COS project is being tackled differently within schools. An evaluation visit to a pilot school in Botswana in November 2005 found that the COS project had been fully integrated into the ethos and systems of the school so that both teachers and students were fully aware of the programme and openly offered support to children in need. In fact so much so that in one school in Botswana a 'Miss OVC' talent contest was hosted profiling vulnerable children.

The child participation study conducted in a school in Swaziland found that children were getting support through the school secretary without being labeled or identified as "COS children". Both approaches would appear to have value.

## **Monitoring records are best kept at schools**

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The implementation of the monitoring tools in Circles of Support demonstrated that the most reliable records were collected through interviews with school COS groups. The completion of the diaries held by individual school convenors and neighbourhood agents were often incomplete although records of household visits were found to have some value and were a paper record of work completed by the COS group. In future it may be possible for an overall record of COS activity to be collected through site visits to participating schools by school inspectors, regional or other co-ordinators. There is however some work to be done collating information once records are completed. In order for Circles of Support to report its impact on school performance and attendance by vulnerable children, each school needs to be encouraged to keep a record of all children supported by COS recording their attendance, grades and other observations during the school year.

All the tools developed as stand alone tools to be completed by COS volunteers inevitably did not fully capture the changes in attitudes and approaches to working with children reported on in this toolkit. Visits to COS schools by project management, implementing partners and independent researchers provided valuable information about the project. Also the qualitative children's study helped provide a more balanced picture of the project's impact. The role of qualitative approaches in monitoring and evaluating an intervention like COS is critical.

# What happens next?

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## Sustainability and roll out

The Ministry of Education in each of the pilot countries has made a substantial commitment to roll out the Circles of Support Project. This includes rolling out the project to new schools and into new regions. Proposals for roll out have been prepared in Namibia and Swaziland as part of pilot site sustainability planning. Meetings have also been held with schools to discuss what happens after the pilot site. A proposal for bridging funding to cover the period between the pilot and long term implementation is also being prepared.

For long term sustainability there are a number of important issues that need to be thought through. These are:

- ♦ How will the COS project ensure that volunteers working in the COS project are able to sustain their work over time? Either through time limited participation, training of new volunteers or sustainable workloads?
- ♦ Who will provide fieldwork support and co-ordination of participating schools in a scaled up initiative? Staff from the Regional Education Ministries will not be able to conduct site visits to large numbers of schools on a regular basis unless they are specifically appointed to do this.
- ♦ How will monitoring data be collected and where will monitoring data for the COS project be collated? Is there capacity in the Ministry of Education? Or will external support be necessary for this?
- ♦ How can training be delivered to large numbers of schools? This includes both start-up training for schools, training for new volunteers joining a COS group after it has been established and continuing education for participating COS volunteers.
- ♦ What model of psycho-social support will be offered to COS volunteers for the future? All programmes using volunteers need to ensure that volunteers are supported in their work.
- ♦ How will child participation be introduced into the COS project?

In Namibia and Botswana, the Regional Office of the Ministry of Education is the driver for roll out into new schools. The existing pilot regions are developing their own plans to take forward training and monitoring of COS activity. It is expected that existing in-country trainers will lead training. Health and Development Africa will be asked to train additional trainers. In Namibia and Swaziland, roll out is planned to extend to new Regions. This is facilitated through national offices of the Ministry of Education in each country. Roll out into new regions will require that new regional co-ordinators are identified for the project in the respective regional offices.

In Namibia and Swaziland, it is felt that the COS Project will need external funding and proposals have been submitted to local and international donors for support. In Namibia, the Circles of Support Project will combine with an IBIS funded programme that encourages the development of support to vulnerable children through the training of school boards. In the Namibian proposal, it is planned that a fieldworker will be selected from a cluster of schools to monitor COS activity. In Swaziland, a COS fieldworker will work from an office associated with the Guidance Department of the National Ministry of Education. From there he will monitor and grow school activity.

The Botswana Project has worked closely with the District Multi-sectoral AIDS Committees (DMSAC) in the Southern Education Region. The DMSAC is able to access funding from government once a project is integrated into its annual plan of action. For the future, the COS project will be adopted and funding will be accessed through the DMSAC.

In all the pilot site countries, the Ministry of Education is encouraging greater reporting of COS activity whether at the regional or national level through linking the project to specific performance areas of key officials or ensuring that a regular report about COS is received at Ministry committee meetings.

Health and Development Africa continues to grow its commitment and interest in Circles of Support and will seek funding for a pilot initiative in South Africa.



# **Appendices**

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**Appendix 1. Capacity audit tool for use in schools**

**Appendix 2: Train the trainer curriculum**

**Appendix 3: COS diary**

**Appendix 4: Fieldworker development diary**

**Appendix 5: School monitoring form to record COS activity**

**Appendix 6: Guidelines for building child participation in COS**

**Appendix 7: Case studies of COS schools**

## **COS documents on the HDA website**

1. COS facilitator's guide
2. COS children's research study - 'Children's Voices'
3. Policy review for COS pilot schools
4. Capacity audit report for COS pilot schools
5. COS posters and pamphlet including translated versions