

The Manager

CASE SCENARIOS FOR TRAINING AND GROUP DISCUSSION

Hondurala District Prepares for a Local Rapid Assessment

“In one month the Regional Director is expecting us to know why our district has a measles outbreak and give him a plan of action,” said Dr. Juan Carlos Lopez, District Health Officer, Ministry of Health (MOH), to the health personnel he had assembled at his office. “First we must determine how to get the information we need. What is it that we need to know?”

“We need to determine the cause of the outbreak. But first, we need to confirm that these cases really were measles,” said Dra. Ludmila Ortega, Deputy Health Officer. “Then we should check the immunization records of these cases to learn whether they were immunized, and whether the immunization was done at the appropriate age.”

“If children over nine months of age are not being immunized, then we need to know why they aren’t,” said Dr. Oscar Sanchez, District Immunization Officer, “Do their mothers lack access to services, or do they not know what to do to immunize their children?”

“What if we find that children who have been immunized at the right age are still getting measles?” asked Nurse Manuela Orosco. “Maybe the problem is vaccine failure.”

“Let’s consider what actions we could take if our research identifies either a large non-immune population or vaccine failure as possible causes for this outbreak,” said Dr. Lopez.

“If it is a problem of access, then maybe the mobile unit could increase the number of community visits it makes,” suggested Dra. Ortega.

“If the problem is lack of knowledge on the part of mothers,” said Nurse Orosco, “maybe we could work with local communities to start a program of community follow-up with mothers.”

“If the problem is vaccine failure,” said Dr. Sanchez, “I think we would have to do another assessment to determine whether there might be a break in the cold chain.”

“Good,” said Dr. Lopez. “Those are just the kinds of recommendations we could include in our action plan for the Regional Director, depending on what we find.”

“But what research method will be quick enough to allow us to meet our information needs in only a few weeks and give us data we can depend on?” asked Dra. Ortega. “We have to be careful about the cost. We won’t be receiving any extra money for this effort, right?”

“Right,” said Dr. Lopez. “However, last year I attended a conference on research techniques where managers from several countries gave presentations on using Local Rapid Assessments to gather accurate data quickly and inexpensively. Some of these LRAs used facility assessments, while others used focus group discussions, exit interviews, household interviews, or record reviews. Many used a combination of methods.”

Case Scenario: Hondurala District Prepares for an LRA

“Household interviews with families who have a child who has reportedly had measles will help us to confirm the diagnosis and check immunization status,” said Dra. Ortega. “We could include some questions that would determine if the problem is lack of access to services or lack of knowledge about immunization.”

“Can we do this kind of assessment by ourselves, without outside help?” asked Dr. Sanchez.

“Well, the problem is limited to our district,” said Dr. Lopez. “If we use the Local Rapid Assessment approach, limit the number of interview questions, and interview a small but representative sample of mothers, then we can get the information we need and stay within our budget and our deadline.”

“Okay,” said Dr. Sanchez. “I’m convinced, but what is involved?”

“First we have to write down our assessment needs and develop a problem statement. Then we develop the household interview, define the sample, and develop a schedule,” said Dr. Lopez.

“In order to have enough time to prepare a report and an action plan, we should allow only eight or ten days for gathering data,” said Dra. Ortega.

“Wait a minute! This is all going a little fast for me,” said Dr. Sanchez. “What about tabulating the data? That can take a long time, just by itself.”

“In conducting a Local Rapid Assessment, we can tabulate nearly all the data right in the field using manual tabulation sheets that we design,” said Dr. Lopez. “We’ll verify the data at the tabulation stage. Once we return to the office, we will only need to consolidate the data on the tabulation sheets into percentages on a single summary sheet. We should have the results a couple of days after we’ve finished collecting the data.”

“Once we have written our problem statement and determined what information we need, let’s divide ourselves into two groups,” said Dra. Ortega. “One group can develop the LRA questionnaire and data analysis forms. The other can identify the sample of households and prepare a schedule.”

“Good idea,” said Dr. Lopez. “Let’s get started. We have no time to lose.”

Case Discussion Questions: Hondurala District Prepares for an LRA

1. Why is this district thinking of doing a Local Rapid Assessment? What is the problem they have identified and what are some possible causes?
2. What should their assessment objectives be? What research method could meet those objectives?
3. What steps should they take in developing and carrying out their chosen LRA method?

Case Analysis: Hondurala District Prepares for an LRA

1. Why is this district thinking of doing a Local Rapid Assessment? What is the problem they have identified and what are some possible causes?

The district's main reason for doing a Local Rapid Assessment is to find out why there is a measles outbreak. Some of the reasons why a Local Rapid Assessment is appropriate include:

- **They don't have much time.** The Regional Director wants some answers and an action plan in one month.
- **Their budget is limited.** They need to use a research approach that will not require new funding. They need to do the research with their existing staff instead of hiring outsiders to do it for them.
- **The problem they must investigate is localized.** The measles outbreak is limited to their district. A district-level effort is appropriate.

The problem they have identified is:

“There was a measles outbreak affecting only Hondurala District. It may have been caused by the presence of a large non-immune population or by vaccine failure.”

Possible cause: a large non-immune population. This population could include children under nine months (because they are too young to be immunized) and children older than nine months who are eligible for vaccination but who have not been vaccinated.

Possible cause: vaccine failure. Research can point to vaccine failure as the cause if there are children older than nine months of age who have been vaccinated against measles and still contracted the disease.

2. What should their assessment objectives be? What research method could meet those objectives?

For the possible causes identified, their assessment objectives should be as follows.

Possible cause: large nonimmune population. If there is a large non-immune population, it can be divided into two groups: non-preventable and preventable. The non-preventable group is made up of children under nine months, because they are too young to be immunized against measles, or children who did not receive the vaccine because of medical contraindications. The preventable group is all children older than nine months who have not been immunized against measles. The LRA team's assessment objectives will be to determine what proportion of cases were not vaccinated due to lack of access to services and what proportion of cases were not vaccinated due to lack of knowledge on the part of mothers.

Case Analysis: Hondurala District Prepares for an LRA

Possible cause: vaccine failure. The LRA team's assessment objective will be to determine what proportion of cases were vaccinated on time but still presented with measles. If the proportion of these cases is high, then the team will conduct a follow-on LRA to evaluate the cold chain.

Research method. The LRA method they could use in carrying out a Local Rapid Assessment is household interviews with mothers of infected children to:

- confirm the measles diagnosis (using standard case definition);
- check immunization cards to see whether each child was immunized and if so, whether the child was immunized at the appropriate age (at or older than 9 months);
- determine why the mother did not have her child immunized if the immunization was not done.

3. What steps should they take in developing and carrying out their chosen LRA method?

In developing and carrying out household interviews, they need to:

- form an LRA team;
- develop information objectives for the assessment;
- design the assessment, including developing a questionnaire and data analysis forms, and defining a sample;
- organize transportation and data collection;
- carry out the assessment;
- tabulate, summarize, analyze, and interpret the data;
- develop an action plan to prevent future measles outbreaks.