Profiles

A Process for Nutrition Policy Analysis and Advocacy

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What is *Profiles*?

Profiles is a process for nutrition policy analysis and advocacy:

- a process designed to demonstrate the contribution that improved nutrition can make to human and economic development in a given country;
- a process designed to translate technical nutrition data and analyses into terms and arguments that make sense to non-experts;
- a process designed to influence the way policymakers think about public health nutrition issues, and the priority they give to investing in nutrition programs;
- a process designed to estimate the costs, effectiveness, and benefits of nutrition programs. Cost:benefit and cost:effectiveness analyses are used to set priorities, assess the affordability of proposed interventions, compare alternative programs, and allocate resources effectively;
- a process that uses interactive computer-based models to project the consequences of poor nutrition on mortality, morbidity, health care costs, worker productivity, mental development, fertility, and other functional outcomes.

How can *Profiles* be used?

Profiles has been designed with three main goals in mind:

Nutrition Advocacy
Created to communicate with policymakers, ***Profiles*** offers a way to engage national leaders in policy dialogue about public health nutrition. ***Profiles*** is used to create a number of nutrition scenarios. The status quo scenario demonstrates the future nutritional status for a population and the costs to society and government if nothing is done to address the nutrition problems considered. A second scenario examines the impact of the proposed intervention (or interventions) policymakers are asked to support. The costs and benefits of improving nutritional status are calculated and graphically presented in a simple fashion, allowing policymakers to immediately see the outcomes of alternative program investments in terms that are relevant to them.

Program Planning
Although ***Profiles*** is primarily an advocacy tool, it can be used by nutrition and public health experts to facilitate the design of new programs. The framework provided by ***Profiles*** encourages program planners to examine potential payoffs of alternative program approaches. Its quantification of assumptions enables program planners to think about coverage, costs, and desired impact in a structured way. In addition, the process of collecting data required by ***Profiles*** and creating scenarios has proved valuable in generating and focusing dialogue about key program issues.

Training
As a working model, ***Profiles*** can be used in training situations. By learning to manipulate the models, and by becoming familiar with the supporting scientific literature, users gain an appreciation of the different functional consequences of malnutrition and the role of different interventions.

What does *Profiles* contain?

Profiles contains relationships that link nutritional problems to different functional consequences and possible interventions. The problems that ***Profiles*** is currently designed to analyze include:

- protein-energy malnutrition
- sub-optimal breastfeeding
- maternal malnutrition
- vitamin A deficiency
- iodine deficiency
- iron deficiency anemia

Profiles uses nutritional, demographic, economic, and other data together with relationships from the scientific literature to quantify the impact of these nutritional problems on human performance, health, fertility, and survival.

The model can be modified to include specific data for the particular country where it is used. The country-specific data are collected in-country as well as derived from targeted literature reviews and scans of databases. Data are then entered into the ***Profiles*** model for the country.

What is the process for customizing *Profiles* to a specific country setting?

The adaptation of ***Profiles*** to a specific country generally requires a two-week technical assistance visit to work with a local team to:

- review ***Profiles*** models and assumptions; collect and review country-specific data; agree on cost/coverage data about the possible intervention(s); and conduct simulation runs and sensitivity analysis;
- train the team in using ***Profiles*** spreadsheets;
- identify priority target policy audiences and define the focus of the nutrition policy reform;
- train the team in basic advocacy strategies;
- prepare a persuasive script that captures the strongest arguments of the ***Profiles*** analysis and addresses the concerns and requirements of each policy audience;
- develop a computer-based presentation that introduces key information, graphs, charts, and other visual materials that add appeal to the communication strategy;
- train the team in using computer-based communication tools;
- check the presentation for coherence and correspondence between the script, the model, and the reality;
- prepare handouts for the audience, including copies of the script, printouts of the screens, and a document detailing the scientific basis for the arguments presented.

Profiles in Africa

Ghana: Giving Priority to Nutrition in Child Survival Programs
An alliance between the USAID mission in Accra, the Nutrition Unit in the Ministry of Health, the Center for Social Policy Studies at the University of Ghana, and UNICEF was formed to conduct nutrition policy analysis and develop a policy communication strategy using ***Profiles***.

The purpose of this work was to increase awareness among country planners and decision makers from all sectors (health, agriculture, education, community development, and economic planning), key donors, public leaders, and the PVO community of the importance of nutrition as a development issue and to present feasible, cost-effective solutions to improve malnutrition trends.

A set of technical arguments and a policy communication strategy were developed to advocate for nutrition policy reform. The strength of the technical arguments presented using ***Profiles*** helped energize the nutrition community in Ghana and mobilize efforts that led to the selection of nutrition as the priority field for intervention within the new MOH Child Survival Strategy.

Mali: From Nutrition Data to Policy Reform
Responding to the deterioration in nutritional status nationwide revealed by the 1996 Demographic and Health Survey, the President of Mali called for the development of a new nutrition strategy under the leadership of the Ministry of Health.

In 1997, a French translation of the ***Profiles*** software was introduced in partnership with the Ministry of Health to analyze current nutrition policies, project the contribution that improved nutrition could make to the human and economic development of the country, and help define nutrition policy priorities and recommendations for the new nutrition strategy.

This initiative led to the creation of a core group of nutrition advocates that included representatives from the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Education, and the PVO community. This core group played an instrumental role in the development of the new nutrition strategy to be integrated into Mali's Ten-Year Plan for the Development of the Economic and Social Sector.

Profiles in Asia

Bangladesh: A Partnership for Nutrition Policy Communication
This first country application in 1993 demonstrated the effectiveness of ***Profiles*** as an influential policy communication process for nutrition. UNICEF, the World Bank, and the Ministry of Health worked together to call attention to the tremendous nutrition problems faced by the country and the social and economic benefits that would result from reducing these problems.

Profiles was used to analyze intervention alternatives and demonstrate the cost:effectiveness of particular nutrition programs. Nutrition interventions such as salt-iodization, an integrated community-level young child nutrition program, and iron fortification and supplementation were presented as child survival strategies that would affect social and economic development.

Profiles helped build consensus among decision makers in Bangladesh to bring nutrition to the forefront of national development policy, and played an important role in securing the final approval of a World Bank loan for a large nutrition project in Bangladesh.

Philippines: Estimating the Costs and Benefits of Micronutrient Interventions

In 1994, the Asian Development Bank and the Philippines Department of Health requested a ***Profiles*** cost:benefit analysis to promote a comprehensive program that included providing iron tablets to pregnant and lactating women and iodized oil capsules to women of reproductive age. The six-year program was expected to result in a 20% decline in maternal anemia rates and the virtual elimination of iodine deficiency in women.

Profiles consequence models related demographic and epidemiological data (prevalence of nutritional deficiencies) to functional consequences (mortality, morbidity, intellectual development, and economic productivity). ***Profiles*** models calculated the cost of the promoted interventions and their effects on the nutritional deficiencies at the population level.

Using a common methodology and conservative assumptions, ***Profiles*** showed that the productivity benefits resulting from each intervention compared favorably with the program costs, yielding a benefit:cost ratio of 1.8 to 1 and 7.8 to 1 for the iron and the iodine supplementation interventions, respectively.

Profiles in Latin America

Bolivia: Policy Communication at the Regional and District Levels

The application of ***Profiles*** in Bolivia, the first in a Spanish-speaking country, aimed to meet the new policy communication needs created by the decentralization process. ***Profiles*** was used in Bolivia to help the Nutrition Unit in the Ministry of Health and the major nutrition-oriented PVOs conduct policy analysis and develop a communication strategy to advocate for a bold new investment in nutrition at the regional and municipal levels.

The application of ***Profiles*** was instrumental in presenting nutritional data and cost-effective program recommendations in terms that were relevant to decision makers in the three regions of the country—*Altiplano, Valles,* and *Llanos*—engaging them in policy dialogue about public health nutrition issues and helping them recognize nutrition issues as development issues.

At the request of UNICEF, the advocacy intervention developed using ***Profiles*** was used to garner high-level national support for a National Nutrition Policy and to set goals for the year 2002.

El Salvador: Preparing for the First National Conference on Nutrition

The application of ***Profiles*** in El Salvador brought together government and community decision makers from various sectors such as health, agriculture, education, community development, and economic planning, and provided a consensus-building opportunity to define and articulate national nutrition issues in preparation for the first National Conference on Nutrition.

A core group of thirty professionals participated in a two-week workshop to estimate the consequences of malnutrition for the human and economic development of the country, analyze current nutrition policies, and outline effective strategies for combating malnutrition over the next five years.

The most recent available data were used for this exercise, including the recent Demographic and Health Survey conducted in El Salvador by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (1998 National Family Health Survey).

Profiles computer-based models were used to analyze the costs and benefits of different interventions, compare alternative scenarios, and develop a policy communication strategy to engage national leaders and international donors in policy dialogue about public health nutrition.

...because facts don't always speak for themselves.

More information about ***Profiles*** can be obtained by contacting:

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