

Driving social impact with common global indicators for healthy lifestyle programs: Lessons learned

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Abstract

Background: Partnerships between corporate entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in delivering community focused health and well-being programs are becoming increasingly valuable especially in the context of promoting healthy lifestyles around the globe. The Mondelēz International Foundation (MIF) has funded healthy lifestyles community based programs targeting children and youth through partnership with seven global NGOs. To assess collective impact of these programs, it is crucial to identify best practices and common impact indicators that can be measured across programs. MIF therefore organized the Healthy Lifestyles Evaluation Workshop to explore these pertinent questions.

Objective: Share best practices and identify common impact indicators to measure the success of current and future MIF funded healthy lifestyles programs.

Methods: Analysis of the Program Impact Pathways (PIPs) and measured output of each of the seven programs.

Results: Individual and combined analysis of PIPs of the seven NGO programs led to identification of three critical impact indicators: nutrition knowledge, physical activity, and healthier eating, and also enabled NGOs to identify pathways to improve program delivery among the target population.

Conclusions: This workshop enabled MIF and partner NGOs to come together to align on metrics and future engagement approaches for promoting and evaluating community based healthy lifestyles programs.

Key words: Program Impact Pathways, healthy lifestyles, nutrition knowledge, physical activity, healthier eating

Introduction

The Mondelēz International Foundation is funded by Mondelēz International, one of the world's largest snack food companies. The foundation's strategic focus is to promote active and healthy lifestyles through a three-pronged approach: nutrition education, active play, and access to fresh foods. To achieve this objective, the foundation has partnered with seven nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) based in Brazil, China, Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain, and the United Kingdom, providing grants to each NGO to run large-scale healthy lifestyles programs in their local communities targeting children and youth.

An element of the Mondelēz International Foundation strategic approach is to create intensive, 3- to 5-year partnerships with a select group of NGOs. Although this approach has borne fruit since 2007, the foundation had never convened a cross-border group of NGO partners, either virtually or in person, to share and discuss best practices. That changed in 2013, when the foundation—through an internal

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partnership with the Mondelēz International Global Nutrition Group and external partnerships with the Nevin Scrimshaw International Nutrition Foundation,



PICTURE 1. Workshop participants and Professor Rafael Pérez-Escamilla of Yale University



PICTURE 2. Workshop participants and Michael Alberg-Seberich of Active Philanthropy



PICTURE 3. Workshop facilitators, participants, and sponsors

Dr. Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at the Yale School of Public Health, and Michael Alberg-Seberich, Managing Director of Active Philanthropy—held a Healthy Lifestyles Program Evaluation Workshop in Granada, Spain, on 13–14 September 2013, with its seven NGO partners.

The main aims of this workshop were to share best practices used by each NGO to generate positive, measurable, and successful outcomes for healthy lifestyles-promoting community intervention projects funded by the Mondelēz International Foundation. The objective was to collectively identify a suite of common indicators of the impact of the programs on healthy lifestyles that could be applied to monitor and evaluate the success of each NGO program.

Through the workshop's structured exploration of the program evaluation, each NGO discovered how accurately its program delivered its desired outcomes. Alongside these NGO partners, program organizers asked themselves a few key questions: Did the participants increase their knowledge of nutrition education? Are the target audiences, primarily the participating children, more physically active? And equally important, how do we communicate the impact of these programs in ways that are universally acceptable across all of the NGO partners?

Preworkshop preparation: Setting the stage for common indicators

To kick off the initiative, the Mondelēz International Foundation team set up a planning call to convene appropriate field program leaders and measurement and evaluation leaders from each NGO. Here, we introduced the opportunity to join the foundation in identifying a set of common indicators.

To establish a baseline understanding of each healthy lifestyles program, principal facilitator Professor Pérez-Escamilla met with each NGO leader to learn the fundamentals of each program and issued a follow-up questionnaire after each meeting. The questionnaire sought to further explore how each NGO delivered the healthy lifestyle elements that are a priority for the foundation: nutrition education, physical activity, and access to fresh foods. Additionally, Professor Pérez-Escamilla investigated how the NGO partners managed

their evaluation process and identified the measurable outcomes tracked within their programs.

After gathering the baseline data, Professor Pérez-Escamilla advised and coached the participating NGOs in how to document the impact of their programs. He introduced the NGOs to the Program Impact Pathways (PIP) process. PIP is a tool that is gaining traction in healthcare evaluations to document the impact of an intervention. NGO partners were collectively introduced to the basics of the PIP process and were provided with a guide designed by Professor Pérez-Escamilla. This guide, “Applying the Program Impact Pathways (PIP) evaluation framework to school-based healthy lifestyles programs” helped each organization design its own PIP [1]. In preparation for the workshop, each NGO designed an overview presentation that highlighted the programs funded by the Mondelēz International Foundation and a PIP chart describing the inputs, outputs, and Critical Control Points (CCPs). This process enabled each NGO to gain a deeper understanding of the data it collects, as well as the evaluation results and impact indicators it uses.

During the workshop: The nexus of sharing insights and learning

The Healthy Lifestyles Program Evaluation Workshop, organized by the Mondelēz International Foundation in partnership with the Mondelēz International Global Nutrition Group and the Nevin Scrimshaw International Nutrition Foundation, was held in Granada, Spain, on 13–14 September 2013. The workshop facilitators were Dr. Rafael Pérez-Escamilla and Michael Alberg-Seberich (pictures 1–3).

In the first session, each NGO shared its PIP analysis with its colleagues from around the world. Professor Pérez-Escamilla then presented a landscape analysis of global trends in the measurement of the impact of community-based programs. He also shared his analysis of the ability of each NGO partner to deliver the

healthy lifestyle impact elements most important to the foundation—namely, nutrition education, active play, and access to fresh foods. Based on the results of this analysis, and drawing from the experience of working on public health-focused community intervention programs, Professor Pérez-Escamilla then suggested a suite of common indicators for discussion by the foundation and the NGO partners.

Table 1 lists the impact indicators measured connected to healthy lifestyle knowledge, body mass index (BMI), healthy lifestyle attitudes, and healthy lifestyle behaviors. Knowledge demonstrates a participant’s understanding of healthy lifestyles, while attitudes reflect how participants feel about living a healthier lifestyle. BMI is a common measure used by the World Health Organization (WHO) to track obesity rates. Behavior measured the actions participants take to become active, consume more produce, and practice good dietary habits, such as water consumption. It was surprising that even though all programs relied heavily on education in healthy lifestyles, only three of the seven partners tracked participants’ improved knowledge, while four partners tracked improved attitudes toward living a healthy lifestyle. With regard to BMI, only two partners monitored this metric; however, the workshop dialogue revealed that many countries have legal obstacles with respect to obtaining parental consent when collecting BMI data or directly obtaining feedback from child participants.

The workshop helped us understand that collection of data for the NGOs was further complicated by cultural, legal, and governmental challenges to gathering information from parents, children, and school administrators in different countries. In Russia, program partners were challenged to increase access to fresh foods in a market with limited options to diversify diets. In China, program partners had historically battled malnutrition through hunger relief programs and had limited experience in offering active play and nutrition education to rural schoolchildren. We were encouraged by the volume of data collected, but the data types and

TABLE 1. Indicators tracked by the Mondelēz International Foundation Program partners

Type of indicator	Brazil	China	Germany	Italy	Spain	Russia	UK
Knowledge							
Nutrition education	X		X				X
Physical activity	X		X				X
Body mass index	X		X				
Attitudes							
Nutrition choices			X		X		
Physical activity			X	X	X		X
Behaviors							
Physical activity			X	X	X	X	X
Produce consumption	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dietary habits			X		X		

the collection frequency varied between NGOs, making it difficult to compare the impact of different programs. Additionally, for many of the NGOs data collection was cost prohibitive, making it difficult to track the most impactful metrics.

Postworkshop: Lessons learned

The participants agreed that the workshop was thought-provoking, as well as emotionally and intellectually invigorating. They came from disparate communities and found the connections in their work to be professionally rewarding and productive. Although there are differences in how programs are executed, the goalposts for achieving healthy lifestyles for children are the same, and the building blocks for success are more similar than one might expect. Globally, the lessons coalesced around four key thoughts:

The PIP process not only helped us identify common outcomes, but helped each NGO to identify ways to improve program delivery, which ultimately leads to better outcomes. For example, of the various CCPs, nearly all NGO participants identified three as essential to ensure effective program delivery:

- » *Strong training and development programs for program facilitators, whether they be teachers, community health promoters, or NGO staff.* For example, Klasse2000 (Germany) considers the teaching skills of the health promoters the central program element [2], and the Alicia Foundation (Spain) generates teacher interest by offering unique off-site training opportunities [3].
- » *Commitment from local government, school administrators, and community-based organizations.* Nearly every program was most successful when local public health and educators had strong interest in the program, and most struggled with implementation when support was weak. According to INMED (Brazil): “Local partnerships ensure that government and community leaders are invested in the program and will take ownership” [4].
- » *Engagement of parents to reinforce program messages at home.* Klasse2000 (Germany) asks parents how they reinforce healthy lifestyle messages in the home and offers tools to improve reinforcement [2]. In Brazil, parents participate in gardening and basic nutrition workshops [4].

NGO partners entered the workshop process with varying levels of knowledge of evaluation, a variety of methods for collecting process and outcome measures, and a wide range of internal or external organizational infrastructures to measure indicators of success. For example, two of the seven NGO partners (Brazil and Italy) are members of multinational organizations. These partners have dedicated measurement and evaluation teams and provide some guidance on best

practices for internal tracking of common indicators across different countries. Both offered a pre-post evaluation model with baseline data collected before program implementation and at the end of the program as follow-up. In Spain, the Alicia Foundation is committed to measurement and encourages students to document food consumption in journals that can later be analyzed for evidence of improvement [3]. Yet, for some NGO partners, even though measurement and evaluation were considered important, fewer resources were being dedicated to the task. It is worth noting, however, that although partners invested in measurement at varying levels, no correlation was found between the level of investment and the metrics indicating real behavior change. During the workshop, with the assistance of Professor Pérez-Escamilla, each NGO partner gained a better understanding of which of the metrics it monitored were reflective of measurable process indicators (number of participants, amount of produce grown) and which were most closely tied to indicators of impact on health (dietary behaviors, time spent being physically active). For example, although the Health for Life in Primary Schools Programme (UK) has fairly rigorous data collection methods, the team identified opportunities to improve, stating that “a thorough understanding of the program impact (as shown in the PIP model) helped ensure that the most useful information was collected” [5]. Highlighting the conceptual differences between program process and impact indicators set the stage for community partners to consider how they redeploy limited resources to track the mix of indicators that best articulates the relevance of their healthy lifestyles programs. Not surprisingly, none of the organizations recommended discontinuing the tracking of any metrics. Admittedly, two days was a short time, and with more time the workshop could have explored this further, including the organizational barriers NGOs face to adopting new measurement and evaluation practices.

This two-day workshop was the first time the Mondelēz International Foundation convened its global NGO partners. Historically, programs operated independently, but the vision of identifying common global indicators demanded a unique approach that would break down silos between partners in the spirit of building teams and ultimately consensus. Certainly, each partner came to the table as a leader in the nutrition education field as well with specialized knowledge and cultural understanding of dietary behaviors in its community—but this workshop stretched our collective imagination about what could be accomplished on a global scale. As reflected in the articles in this Supplement describing individual programs [2–8], each partner faced unique local challenges, but we were reminded through the process that our collective challenge in advancing healthy lifestyle education was quite similar.

The role of the Nevin Scrimshaw International

Nutrition Foundation was pivotal to facilitating the workshop as an organizing partner and linking it to the 20th International Congress of Nutrition held in Granada on 15–20 September 2013. The grant to cover the costs of convening the NGO partners was less than 1% of the collective funds the Mondelez International Foundation invests in all programs combined. This relatively small investment in convening partners not only benefited the Mondelez International Foundation by establishing a common set of global indicators, but also built the capacity of NGOs to monitor programs and launched a cohort of program partners that are committed to work together to improve health outcomes. In the post-workshop survey, 100% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop was valuable and that the goals had been achieved.

Finally, all program participants—facilitators, sponsors, and NGO representatives—were reinvigorated by the diversity of effective program tactics that are being leveraged to encourage children and families to adopt healthy lifestyles. The following are some examples:

- » The Alicia Foundation (Spain) uniquely empowers preteens as role models to help younger kids become active and improve nutrition behaviors through cooking workshops [3].
- » Klasse2000 (Germany) has excelled at applying a holistic approach to wellness by including nutrition education at the center of overall well-being. This includes understanding the connection between body functions, self-esteem, and relaxation techniques, as well as how to reject peer pressure to smoke, a unique challenge in German markets. Also distinctive of the German partnership is that schools fund-raise 200 euros to cover the costs of implementing the program, which ensures long-term sustainability and affords the opportunity for schools to operate with minimal support from Klasse2000 [2].
- » Save The Children (Italy) encourages families to get active together by creating neighborhood sports centers offering activities from rollerblading to soccer to basketball [6].
- » INMED (Brazil) instructs teachers, students, and parents in how to construct and maintain vegetable garden plots at each of the participating schools, where they cultivate produce used in school lunches [4].
- » Health Education Service (UK) teaches children basic cooking skills with the intention of developing a positive attitude to healthy food choices, an ability to recognize a variety of produce, and a willingness to try nutritious foods [5].
- » China Youth Development Foundation (China) has expanded the program by partnering with Mondelez International suppliers, and to date, more than 50 suppliers have made cash grants and in-kind product donations [7].
- » Charities Aid Foundation (Russia) invites schools

to compete for grants to fund the purchase of sports and cooking equipment. Winning schools are celebrated for their health and wellness leadership [8].

Common global indicators

Through this consensus-building process, three metrics emerged as critical indicators of success for the Mondelez International Foundation and its NGO partners:

- » *Nutrition knowledge*: the percentage of program participants who improve their nutrition knowledge;
- » *Physical activity*: the percentage of participants who increase their daily amount of physical activity or play (with a target of 30 minutes or more per day);
- » *Healthier eating*: the percentage of participants who report increased consumption of vegetables, fruit, and other fresh foods.

Efforts are currently under way to refine the common global indicators, including the frequency and tracking process as well as any incremental support needed. Additionally, each NGO will continue to implement process and impact evaluations appropriate to the unique program interventions.

Implications for the future

Convening all the NGO partners accomplished more than aligning them around a common set of metrics. It informed the Mondelez International Foundation's future strategic engagement approach with current and future healthy lifestyle NGO partners. The workshop has set the stage for additional cross-border collaboration and opportunities to share best practices. In fact, the foundation is committed to future virtual and in-person workshops to offer a learning laboratory for partners and, more importantly, to provide a platform for strengthening the delivery and evaluation capacity of each organization in the three key areas of nutrition education, physical activity, and access to fresh foods.

In 2014, the Mondelez International Foundation will be forming alliances with an additional six NGO partners to deliver new healthy lifestyles programs in Australia, India, and the United States. To implement the foundation's three-pronged approach, two partners will operate programs in each country. Each of these new partners is expected to report on the common indicators identified from the Granada workshop and contribute to the new learning laboratories centered on the foundation's three-pronged approach.

Collectively, we learned that transparent and collaborative approaches are of high value both for NGO leaders and for funding partners wishing to better understand the programs that they support and their impact. It further demonstrated that working together

can help advance how we define and measure common indicators across borders. Overall, the learning was exponential, and sharing the lessons learned is a pivotal dimension of advancing the field of community-based healthy lifestyle intervention programs, as well as improving their impact on public health.

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