

Child Health Counseling Cards, Dominican Republic

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health (SESPAS), CRS, World Vision, and USAID, the CHANGE Project is establishing a community-based child health program in 43 communities in the Dominican Republic. The program philosophy, structure and materials are adapted from the successful AIN model developed in Central America.

The program focuses on preventing inadequate growth (a proxy for malnutrition and infections) among all children under 2 in participating communities. The adequate growth of these children is assessed monthly by a group of trained community volunteers. Based on the weighing results and the responses to a few questions, the volunteers then give appropriate counseling to each mother or other caregiver. The mother and volunteer negotiate one or two small changes in practices that should enhance the child's growth and health. The set of counseling cards is an aid in the counseling and negotiation process.

The Dominican cards were designed on the basis of in-depth qualitative research that included behavioral trials, so that the program could fair quite confident that suggestions to the mothers were feasible. The cards were carefully pretested and revised in the summer of 2003.

The set comprises 20 cards organized as follows. There are two "diagnostic" cards and "negotiation" cards for each of four age groups of children. These cover issues appropriate to the age group. In addition, there are four special cards that are used as needed. These cover simple healthy recipes based on common foods, feeding a young child who is sick or lacks appetite, nutrition of the breastfeeding mother, and other practices directly related to child nutritional status (hygiene behaviors, being up-to-date with vaccines and micronutrient supplements). There are "references" to these special cards on the other cards.

The cards contain few if any words, so their use depends principally on an understanding of their organization and the drawings. The volunteer begins counseling by noting how much weight the child has (or has not) gained in the past month, then uses the cards for the appropriate age group. If the child gained adequate weight, the volunteer uses only the first of the two diagnosis cards to understand current practices and the first of the negotiation cards to probe possible improvements in practices. If the child has not gained adequate weight, the volunteer uses both diagnostic and counseling cards for the age group. In either case the volunteer uses the appropriate special cards.

Volunteers in the Dominican Republic will be trained and begin using the cards in October 2003.