# Towards improved use of monitoring data

## Lessons from Partos member organisations

PARTOS

The Spindle, May 2016

This publication was developed in the framework of the Partos learning platform. In 2016 the working groups of the learning platform transformed into labs as part of The Spindle, an initiative by Partos to connect innovators for development.



The Spindle

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# Background

In development coorperation monitoring has evolved as a practice that is predominantly geared towards fulfiling upward accountability to donors. Monitoring is associated with gathering data for filling reports that are rarely used as the basis for broader reflection or to inspire practitioners to develop new and creative solutions. For most organisations, the potential to use monitoring results for learning is therefore under-utilised. In order to better understand why this is the case a working group made up of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) managers and experts from Partos member organisations commissioned a study to identify factors that constrain the use of monitoring data by Dutch-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as their development partners around the world. The research also gathered a number of cases stories describing how various Partos members have tried to address one or more of these factors.

The Partos Working Group consisted of M&E managers and experts of NGOs that received a substantial part of their funds from the Dutch government in the framework of MFS II[1], a co-financing facility through which the government allocates subsidies to development organisations. Hence, MFS II has played a dominant role in shaping the current M&E practice of these organisations. The M&E experts felt that the data and findings generated through M&E were used predominanty for submitting reports to the donor. The potential of monitoring data for innovation and learning remained under-utilized. The aim of the working group was to find innovative solutions to address this problem.

This phenomenon is not unique for the Dutch MFSII programme. The bureaucratization of M&E is broadly recognized as a general problem throughout the international development community. In the Netherlands the need to address this problem has become even more urgent in view of the raised level of ambition of the new policy framework replacing MFS II that came to an end in December 2015. The new policy framework introduced by the Dutch government is centred around strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) in low and middle income countries to engage in lobbying and advocacy campaigns to influence policymaking towards sustainable and inclusive development. As such interventions are very context sensitive, it is essential that CSO coalitions develop the capacity to reflect, learn and adapt to the political and socio-economic environment in which they intend to induce change. An important component of such capacity is the adoption of more sophisticated M&E systems as part of the day-to-day practice of these organisations.

Since the late 1990s numerous studies have contributed to enhanced insights in the factors that influence the use of M&E. It is remarkable that most studies focus primarily or exclusively on the use of evaluation findings. Few studies address the use of monitoring data. A case in point is an annotated bibliography compiled by the Centre for Development Innovation (CDI) at Wageningen University for the 2014 conference[2] on 'Improving the Use of Monitoring and Evaluation Processes and Findings.' Out of 66 publications in the list, only four refer explicitly to monitoring and there is no study that focuses exclusively on monitoring.

According to the Working Group members the use of monitoring data is an underexplored field with arguably much better prospects for learning than evaluation. This is due to the relative long time interval between evaluations. Often there is only one summative evaluation towards the end of a project cycle. As a consequence, evaluations are less useful for continuous learning and adapting in a responsive way to sudden contextual changes. Therefore, the working group decided to focus its efforts on finding ways to improve the use of monitoring data.

Photo by: ICCO Cooperation

# Partos study on the utilisation of monitoring data

In order to find out more about the use of monitoring data and about the factors that influence use, the Working Group commissioned an email survey of 112 Partos member organisations. Each contact person in the mailing list was invited to send the survey to the head of the organisation, one M&E person and a maximum of three programme staff. The survey received 59 responses from individuals estimated to represent between 29 and 47 organisations.[3] The respondents were distributed as follows: nine organisation heads; 25 programme coordinators; and 25 staff members involved in M&E and/or knowledge management tasks. For at least 16 organisations the survey was considered as not being applicable for a variety of reasons.[4]

Three-quarters of respondents were based in organisations in the Netherlands that are only indirectly involved in implementation, either because they are grantmakers who primarily channel funds to their implementing partners on the ground (42%), or serve as the central office or headquarters for a network of field offices (32%). One-quarter of respondents said they represented organisations that are directly involved in implementation.

## Part 1 The actual use of monitoring data

The first part of the questionnaire concerned questions about the actual use of monitoring data.

### Key findings

As the Working Group members had expected, accountability to donors is considered by far the single most important purpose for the utilisation of monitoring results. Steering (taking decisions and making adjustments in programme implementation) was to a considerable degree also listed as a purpose for monitoring. On average, respondents perceived learning "occasionally" to "a considerable degree" a purpose for monitoring. It is important to note that most of the learning was perceived as being implicit, without leaving behind a paper trail of documented knowledge or lessons learned.

It is interesting to note that directors of organisations seem more optimistic than their colleagues about the potential to use monitoring data for other purposes, beyond accountability. In general, M&E staff were more critical than both directors and programme staff, particularly about the utilisation of monitoring for learning objectives.

## Part 2 The factors that influence use

In the second part of the questionnaire respondents were presented with a long list of possible factors that can influence the use of monitoring data beyond reporting and accountability. For these questions, a framework of factors originally developed by RAPID, ODI (Court et al., 2005)[5] and adapted by Sandison (2006), was used. The factors were formulated as positive statements about the organisation, such as "In your organisation the right type of data are being collected."

Respondents were asked to indicate whether each statement was applicable to their organisation and if it was considered an important factor in influencing the use of the data beyond reporting. Reponses were given using a four-point scale (Not/hardly, Somewhat, Quite a bit, Very much). Through focusing on those statements that were often not true for the organisation concerned but that nevertheless represented factors that were considered important for use, it was possible to identify factors that most organisations are struggling with in "getting it right."

Respondents were asked to respond to the questions from the perspective of the Dutch NGO and/or their implementing partners and field offices.

### Key findings

The respondents identified the following factors as being important for the use of monitoring data but problematic "to get it right" in their own organisations:

- Quality analysis - Making a good quality analysis on the basis of the data;
- Type of information – Collecting the right data;

- Ownership – Staff needs to consider monitoring as something that they do “for themselves” rather than to please someone else;
- Quality presentation – Data analyses are presented in ways that the issues at stake can be easly understood;
- Design for use - The design of the monitoring system is geared to the needs of users.

Among factors that were considered to be important for the use of monitoring data but that respondents believed partners and field offices were struggling with included:

- Monitoring expertise - The organisation has staff with specific monitoring expertise;
- Quality analysis - Making a good quality analysis on the basis of the data;
- Financial resources - Sufficient financial resources are made available for monitoring;
- Trust in flexibility - The organisation trusts that flexibility is allowed by (back) donors to adapt programmes;
- Quality presentation – Data analyses are presented in ways that the issues at stake can be easily understood;
- Ownership – Staff needs to consider monitoring as something that they do “for themselves” rather than to please someone else.

# Addressing the factors that influence the use of monitoring data

Once it had identified some of the factors that hinder organisations from making use of monitoring data, the Working Group commissioned a search for examples of good or promising practices among Partos members relating to some of these factors. This resulted in eight case stories that can be used as a source of inspiration for those who aim to improve the use of monitoring data within their own organisations or among their partners.

The next section provides a brief introduction to each of the case stories that concludes with a table containing an overview of the eight case stories and the factors addressed by each.

The rest of the report presents the eight case stories.

## Introduction to the case stories

### Sensemaking: An approach for analysing monitoring data (The Fair Green Global (FGG) Alliance)

The analysis of monitoring data is inadequate in many organisations. This negatively affects the use of data for learning, steering and reporting. This case describes how the Fair Green Global (FGG) Alliance has improved its data analysis through introducing annual sensemaking meetings.

### Creating trust through flexible programming (Cordaid)

In order to use monitoring data effectively, there is need to build trust among partners that donors are open to adapting interventions on the basis of such findings. This case shows how, through its Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction Programmes, Cordaid learned to become flexible by encouraging communities to design and adapt interventions based on their own analyses of monitoring information.

### Designing a monitoring system that meets the requirements for internal as well as for external use (GPPAC)

Many NGOs struggle with monitoring systems that are designed for external accountability but that are ill-equipped to meet the learning needs of users within the organisation. This case describes how, over the course of a decade, the monitoring system of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) evolved into a system that also meets the needs of internal users.

### Visualising monitoring data through data mapping (ICCO Cooperation)

While many NGOs acknowledge that monitoring data need to be accessible to the intended users, most NGOs find it difficult to present monitoring results in a user-friendly way. This case describes how ICCO has started to experiment with “Google Fusion Tables” and “CartoDB” tools to create maps and infographics, instead of only tables.

### Improving the relevance and ownership of monitoring data (Oxfam Novib)

Three factors that significantly influence the degree to which monitoring data is effectively used by NGOs and their partners are: 1) the type of monitoring information that is collected; 2) the degree of ownership of the monitoring process by programme staff and implementing partners, and; 3) trust among the parties involved that interventions will be adapted based on the monitoring findings. This case describes the main lessons that Oxfam Novib has learned relating to these three factors, in the context of its Peace and Prosperity Promotion Programme in South Sudan.

## Outcome Mapping (SNV Tanzania)

This case describes the experience of SNV Netherland Development Organisation in promoting the Outcome Mapping (OM) approach in Tanzania. SNV adopted the OM approach as a tool to improve the analytical quality of monitoring data, as well as the overall reporting and monitoring expertise of its local staff and development advisers.

## Ownership, financing and expertise in Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance)

Factors that often limit the use of monitoring data include, among others, lack of monitoring expertise, insufficient financial resources and limited sense of ownership of the data. Woord en Daad & Red een Kind (WDREK) reflect on their experiences in addressing these three constraints.

## Scorecards for data collection, analysis and presentation (Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance)

The quality of data analyses and the quality of the presentation of these analyses are two factors that influence the use of monitoring data. This case describes how Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance successfully introduced scorecards to improve data collection, analysis and presentation by their implementing partners.

The table on the next page provides an overview of the factors that are addressed in the various case stories.

| Underlying factors in the use of monitoring data | Cases stories of good or promising practices that address these factors |
|---|---|
| Quality analysis: Informed 'reading' of the data to draw useful conclusions and guide further action. | • Sensemaking, an approach for analysing monitoring data (The Fair Green and Global Alliance)<br>• Outcome Mapping (SNV Tanzania)<br>• Scorecards for data collection, analysis and presentation (Woord and Daad & Red een Kind Alliance) |
| Type of information: Collecting the right data | • Improving the relevance and ownership of monitoring data (Oxfam Novib) |
| Ownership: Ensuring that programme staff and partners adopt monitoring processes as something that they do "for themselves" rather than to please someone else. | • Improving the relevance and ownership of monitoring data (Oxfam Novib)<br>• PMEL ownership, financing and expertise (Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance) |
| Quality presentation: Data analyses are presented in ways that the issues at stake can be easily understood. | • Visualisation of monitoring data trough data mapping (ICCO Cooperation)<br>• Scorecards for data collection, analysis and presentation (Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance) |
| Design for use: The design of the monitoring system are geared to the needs of users. | • Designing a monitoring system that meets the requirements for internal as well as for external use (GPPAC) |
| Monitoring expertise: The organisation has staff with specific monitoring expertise | • Outcome Mapping (SNV Tanzania)<br>• PMEL ownership, financing and expertise (Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance) |
| Financial resources: Sufficient financial resources are made available for monitoring | • PMEL ownership, financing and expertise (Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance) |
| Trust in flexibility: The organization trusts that flexibility to adapt programmes is allowed by (back-) donors | • Creating trust through flexible programming (Cordaid)<br>• Improving the relevance and ownership of monitoring data (Oxfam Novib)<br>• Outcome Mapping (SNV Tanzania) |

Photo by: Oxfam Novib

# The case stories

Photo by: Oxfam Novib

# Sensemaking, an approach for analysing monitoring data[6] The Fair, Green and Global (FGG) Alliance

In many organisations the analysis of monitoring data is inadequate. This negatively affects the use of data for learning, steering and reporting. This case describes how the Fair, Green and Global (FGG) Alliance has improved data analysis by introducing annual sensemaking meetings.

The Fair, Green and Global (FGG) alliance is an alliance of six civil society organisations: ActionAid, Both ENDS, Clean Clothes Campaign, Milieudefensie (Friends of the Earth Netherlands), SOMO and Transnational Institute. The FGG Alliance started its collaboration as well as its sensemaking during MFS-II. In the meanwhile, it has entered a new stage of collaboration under the Strategic Partnerships with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This case shows how the FGG Alliance has used sensemaking in its first five-year programme.

Throughout MFS-II, the FGG Alliance focused on four strategic areas:

1. The development, promotion and scaling up of inspiring examples of sustainable development in developing countries.
2. Promoting corporate accountability, particularly at Dutch companies that operate in developing countries.
3. Revising European trade- and investment policies, so that future investments will benefit the local communities and their environment in developing countries.
4. Changing the financing policies of major banks and political institutions like the World Bank in order to finance (infrastructure) projects that benefit indigenous people and their habitat in developing countries.

In 2012, representatives of the six members of the FGG Alliance reflected on the performance of the Alliance during the first full cycle of planning and reporting. Data on 71 output and outcome indicators had been collected for the reports. These had been complemented with narratives on key results achieved with regard to each strategic objective. However, what the Alliance lacked was an overall summary of progress made across the different strategic objectives. In order to address this issue, an annual sensemaking meeting was introduced in 2013.

## Sensemaking: how it can work

Every year around mid-March, the FGG Alliance organizes a half-day sensemaking meeting. The key inputs for this meeting are monitoring data about progress made in the last year. Each of the member organisations collects data on the relevant output and outcome indicators and develops several narrative texts to explain the key results achieved with regard to each of the four strategic objectives it is working on. In addition, members report on major deviations from the annual plan. In separate narratives they report on results achieved with regard to the learning agenda, gender, and capacity development topics. The indicator data is compiled and stored in a large excel file. The narratives are combined in a report that contains approximately 65 stories (with a total length of around 50 pages).

Usually around 8-10 people participate in the meeting. These include the main contact persons responsible for monitoring and evaluation and the coordinators of the strategic objective teams.[7]

The meeting consists of two parts. In the first part, which takes approximately 1.5 hours, participants focus on identifying "the highlights" of the report, which include the main results achieved. They also reflect on the relevance of these results. Based on the narrative reports the participants are asked to select, from the table of contents, the three most interesting results. The participants are guided by the following two questions:

1. "*Which three results are according to you the most relevant, important or significant and why?*"
2. "*What do these results tell us about achieving our goals?*"

The facilitator scores the number of times individual results' sections have been selected by the participants and the participants discuss the relevance of the selected sections.

During the second part of the meeting (which takes approximately one hour) participants review the compiled monitoring data for the 71 progress indicators contained in the excel file. This part of the meeting focuses on checking the reliability of the data and on reflecting on

the progress achieved as indicated by the data. Questions that guide the discussions during this part are:

1. "Which goals do we seem to be achieving? Does this reflect reality? Are we satisfied with the results or is there room for improvement, and how?
2. Where do you see that we are lagging? Does this reflect reality? Is it a problem, are we really missing something? If so, what can be done about it?"

In addition to generating these outputs, the meeting is sometimes also used to discuss other topics such as major lessons learned, or "brilliant failures."[8]

Throughout the discussions, the facilitator notes down the main outputs on a flipchart (see below).

## Sensemaking: key conditions

Based on the Alliance's experience some key conditions can be identified that need to be fulfilled for the meetings to be effective. These are:

- All key persons need to be present, prepared and committed to ensure meaningful and inclusive discussions. In the case of the Alliance these include the coordinators of the Strategic Objective Team and the M&E coordinators of member organisations. Therefore, the meeting needs to be planned well in advance.
- The number of participants should not be too large – 8-10 persons has been found to be the ideal group size – to keep the discussion focused and effective.
- Different facilitation techniques should be applied to keep the energy flowing and maintain people's attention.

## The benefits of sensemaking

The findings from the sensemaking meeting are used for different purposes.

First, the main achievements and trends of the previous year are identified through counting the number of times results have been selected by individual participants. The Alliance uses this as input for the general sections of the Annual Report. Furthermore, the narratives with the highest scores are included as examples in the Annual Report.

Second, from the discussions about the relevance the participants learn why certain results are considered important. The discussions contribute to an improved and joint understanding of change processes and the extent to which these are adequately captured by the Alliance's Theory of Change. An improved understanding of the context helps participants to appreciate what has been achieved, for example unexpected achievements that have come about despite extreme counter pressure, or because of unforeseen opportunities. Such results can therefore point to successful cooperation with partners around the world, or of a new strategy that is starting to bear fruits. By identifying such trends, Alliance members can enhance the effectiveness of their interventions and become better informed about the best course of action to take in the future. For example, a positive shift in the public opinion concerning the obligations of multinationals that can be used. Participants also learn about the areas in which the Alliance's progress is lagging behind its targets and the causes of these shortfalls.[9]

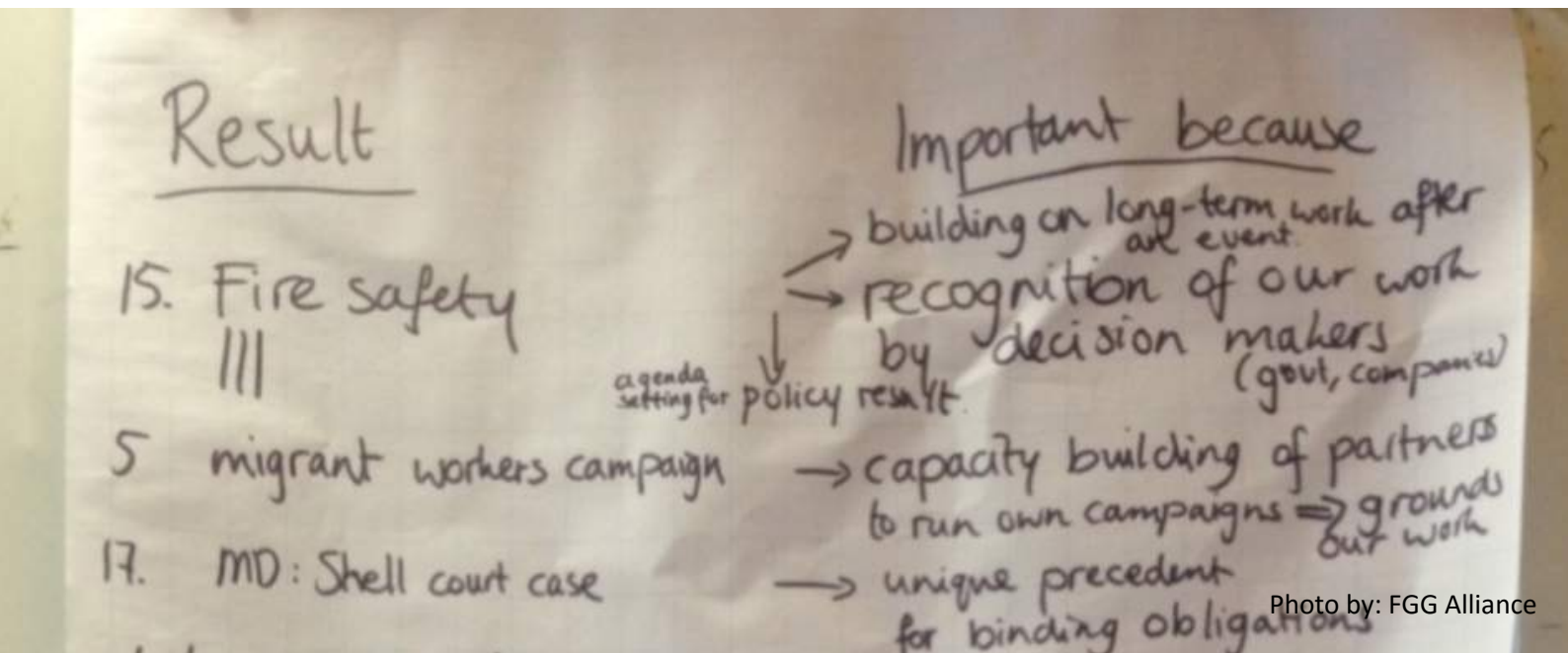


Photo by: FGG Alliance

Third, sensemaking meetings help the Alliance to improve its monitoring system. During the second part of the meeting the collected data is checked for outliers by comparing them with the results obtained in previous years, as well as with the targets. In this way potential errors can be identified − for example if an indicator was wrongly interpreted by a member organisation or if there was a problem with the collection or reporting of data − which may lead to adjustments in the programme. During this part of the meeting participants also reflect on the general monitoring framework including whether the definitions are adequate or what data should be collected, etc. This contributes to a shared sense of ownership of the system and its improvement. On several occasions the Alliance has used the insights gained from this approach to redefine various indicators, as well as to design a new programme and M&E plan.

Last, but not least, through sensemaking meetings members develop an appreciation and better understanding of each other's work. As L. Ruijmschoot, PME officer of the FGG Alliance phrased it:

> *It is always wonderful to hear colleagues explain what they think is impressive about other peoples' achievements and it creates a sense of mutual pride. (…) The level of understanding achieved by discussing achievements and how these were won in a live conversation goes beyond what could ever be reached just by reading each other's stories. This is a major benefit to further cooperation.*

# Creating trust through flexible programming Cordaids' Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction Programmes[10]

Partners are more inclined to use monitoring data if there is trust between them and donors that findings from monitoring can be used to adapt interventions.[10] This case shows how Cordaid has learned to become flexible in terms of allowing communities to design and adapt interventions based on their own analyses of monitoring information.

Cordaid is the Dutch Catholic Organization for Relief and Development Aid that aims at a just and sustainable world for everybody. Cordaid works with over 600 partners in 41 countries and has programmes in the areas of healthcare, humanitarian aid, economic opportunities, education, security & justice, resilience and investments. As one of the largest NGOs in the Netherlands, Cordaid raises and receives funds from both governmental and other institutional donors, companies and private and family contributors to finance its international development and cooperation activities.

## A new approach, a different mind-set

Cordaid has implemented Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR) programmes in 12 countries since 2007. The aim of CMDRR programmes is to build resilient communities that are able to survive and bounce back from disasters such as floods, drought or cyclones. Communities are the primary actors in the CMDRR approach, with Cordaid's implementing partner organisations acting as facilitators. Communities conduct their own disaster risk assessments and analyses, and develop action plans that include measures to reduce disaster risks and to be prepared for disasters. They also establish disaster risk reduction (DRR) committees to manage and monitor the implementation of the plans.

As part of its CMDRR programme in India, Cordaid works with 10 partner organisations in various disaster-prone states. As the CMDRR approach was new for Cordaid, its partners and communities, the focus during the first three years of implementation was on capacity building and learning. The partners of Cordaid, who were previously involved in direct implementation of projects, had to learn to become facilitators of community-driven processes. Similarly, communities had to learn to take responsibility for the design, implementation and monitoring of DRR plans, instead of being passive aid recipients. This change in mind-set was achieved through providing training that explained the CMDRR concept to partners as well as the communities. In addition, on-the-job support was provided by the Indian organisation Association for Stimulating Knowhow (ASK).

In the beginning, partner organisations were still heavily involved in the design and monitoring of the DRR plans. Gradually communities started to take the lead in the planning, implementation and monitoring. Communities also engaged in mobilizing support from third parties such as for example local governments. Such support included financing and other types of support to implement their plans.

## Providing the scope to adapt programming

Cordaid had to adopt a very flexible approach. As communities' sense of ownership increased, Cordaid needed to adapt its programming based on communities' own analysis of monitoring information. Cordaid had to find a balance between ensuring the quality and proper implementation of the overall programme and at the same time allowing communities to make their own decisions in the implementation of their plans. Cordaid was confronted with questions on where to set the boundaries in its support to community-managed projects: for example, should it provide support to mitigate the risks of very different disasters than it had initially envisaged, such as crops destroyed by elephants rather than floods?
Through adopting a flexible approach and respecting and responding to local needs as articulated by the community DRR committees Cordaid enhanced its responsiveness and learning capacity. For example, Cordaid learned that vulnerability is linked to the caste system, with the lowest castes often living in the most vulnerable areas and with very limited capacity to cope with disasters. As a result, the programme shifted its focus to Dalit and tribal groups who are systematically excluded and discriminated within their communities.

The ability to adapt programmes and to truly be responsive to communities' needs, based on insights gained from monitoring processes, has fostered the overall ownership and quality of Cordaid's CMDRR programmes and increased the sustainability of the results achieved.

Photos by: Cordaid

# Designing a monitoring system that meets the requirements for internal as well as external use GPPAC

Many NGOs struggle with monitoring systems that are designed for external accountability but are ill-equipped to meet the learning needs of users within the organisation.[12] This case describes how, over the course of a decade, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) restructured its monitoring system to meet the needs of its internal users.

GPPAC is a member-led, worldwide network of civil society organisations (CSOs) that work on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It was founded in 2003 and consists of a Global Secretariat, based in The Hague, and 15 regional networks of local CSOs supported by Regional Secretariats. In its initial phase, GPPAC built its monitoring system around the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), which was followed by an adapted version of the Outcome Mapping (OM) and Outcome Harvesting (OH) approaches in 2006 and 2009 respectively.

## The Logical Framework Approach

The LFA is one of the most commonly used approaches in planning, monitoring and evaluating NGO projects and programmes. Soon after its introduction, however, GPPAC became dissatisfied with this approach because LFA methodology did not provide a good fit with the nature of the network, its activities and its information needs. GPPAC attributed this to three main problems with the LFA approach:

1. The LFA is based on linear thinking, which made it difficult to capture the complex processes involved in conflict prevention in simple linear cause-and-effect result chains. In addition, GPPAC is itself a fluid and dynamic network that is constantly changing and adapting to its environment.
2. The LFA approach was not conducive to the participation of network members in the development of the logframe or in learning processes.
3. It proved to be extremely difficult for GPPAC to use the LFA effectively to demonstrate its achievements and the added value of the network itself.

Given these limitations, GPPAC decided to use the LFA only for proposal writing and reporting. Data collected through the monitoring system was mainly used for reporting to GPPAC's donors and not for internal learning or programming purposes.

## Outcome Mapping

In 2005, GPPAC began to search for alternative PME approaches. After having explored the key needs of the network members, GPPAC adopted a customized version of OM methodology in 2006.[13] Among the reasons for choosing OM was its non-linear approach which recognises that change can be a complex, continuous and cumulative process in which an actor can be both a change agent as well as subject to change. The OM approach was also seen as being more useful for monitoring the progress achieved towards GPPAC's conflict prevention goals, due to its focus on identifying behavioural changes among "boundary partners." Boundary partners are the key individuals, groups, and organisations with whom GPPAC directly interacts to effect change. Through tracking changes in their behaviour, GPPAC can show that it has made progress towards achieving its objectives of facilitating social change. Such progress can include actions by key boundary partners that were influenced by GPPAC, but also actions that GPPAC helped prevent from happening (such as conflicts). A third advantage of OM is that it focuses on "contribution instead of attribution." This is important because it is often impossible to fully attribute observed changes to GPPAC's interventions due to the complex environment in conflict settings, which consists of a multitude of actors and intervening factors. Finally, the approach supports learning within the network, which was one of the main reasons why GPPAC opted for OM.

As a first step to implement OM, GPPAC's members engaged in formulating "intentional designs" for each of GPPAC's five global programmes[14] (up to three per programme). These designs consisted of outcome challenges that describe the envisaged behavioural change of GPPAC's key boundary partners. The intentional designs also consisted of progress markers. These are the indicators used for monitoring the changes in behaviour. OM monitoring journals were developed for collecting data on the progress markers. Furthermore, monitoring guidelines were developed. Network members were

expected to report annually on the agreed outputs and outcomes. Progress was reflected on during annual monitoring meetings, which in turn informed strategic decision making and programming.

In practice, GPPAC experienced major challenges in implementing the OM approach, which necessitated further adaptation of the tool. Some of the lessons learned in implementing the OM approach are:

- Keep the planning phase light by mainly focusing on developing common outcome challenges and strategies: GPPAC's planning process is highly participatory with many consultations taking place at regional and national level. Developing a full-fledged intentional design for each programme is therefore expensive and time consuming. GPPAC also operates in a rapidly changing context that limits the value of detailed planning efforts.
- Don't artificially compartmentalise the programmes in different intentional designs as the programmes together contribute to the envisaged outcomes.
- Simplify data collection and analysis by only monitoring key behavioural changes of the boundary partners rather than attempting to collect data on all progress markers. In reality, progress markers were hardly used in monitoring due to the large number of data that it generated for the entire network.
- Simplify the monitoring system to make the best use of available resources (time, money) and keep the jargon simple. The initial monitoring system developed was found to be too complex and resource-intensive.

As GPPAC members participate in the network on a voluntary basis they tend to allocate limited resources for their participation in the GPPAC monitoring system as they have their own organisational priorities and M&E systems. Furthermore, various members had difficulties in understanding the OM jargon, which led to a focus on "form" rather than the content of monitoring. Language barriers also hampered the collection of useful outcome data. All this affected the quality of monitoring information.

## Outcome Harvesting

From 2009 onwards, GPPAC further adapted its monitoring approach to address some of the practical challenges encountered in applying the OM approach. This primarily entailed weaving in elements of Outcome Harvesting (OH) methodologies into the PME system, complemented with elements of the LFA in developing GPPAC's 2011-2015 strategic plan.

While it is rooted in OM thinking, outcome harvesting is less focused on charting the progress achieved with regard to predetermined outcomes. Instead it involves collecting evidence of what has been achieved and then retrospectively determining whether and how the intervention contributed to this change. Instead of reporting on progress markers, network members are asked to "harvest outcomes," which are linked to specific global and regional goals that have been defined in a participatory manner. The monitoring system also includes SMART indicators that are used by the Global Secretariat

Photo by: GPPAC

to report to donors.

Members now report on the behavioural changes of boundary partners, the significance of these changes for conflict prevention, and on how GPPAC contributed to these changes. This approach has shifted the focus from detailed planning efforts to the monitoring of actual results. In addition, it captures both expected and unexpected achievements more comprehensively.

To further improve the quality and user-friendliness of the monitoring system, GPPAC has developed an online platform where members can easily upload and access their annual plans, reports and other monitoring data. Members can now also upload and access output and outcome information on a continuous basis. In addition, the Global Secretariat provides simplified monitoring guidelines, with training and coaching support to members on how to harvest and report on outcomes. The new monitoring guidelines include only the most relevant terminology on OM and OH.

GPPAC has made significant progress in the past decade with designing an appropriate monitoring system. Nevertheless, it still faces important (structural) challenges:

- Network members have limited resources available to harvest and report outcomes and to engage in joint learning processes.
- Network members have difficulties with identifying and formulating outcomes. Members tend to focus on the most important and recent outcomes, at the expense of less visible, or earlier changes. Some of the members also struggle with documenting the outcomes in writing especially when this needs to be done in English.
- Network members are hesitant to link behavioural changes among boundary partners to their own interventions.
- Regular monitoring and learning meetings should take place to discuss outcomes, identify and reflect on patterns of outcomes, and formulate suggestions to inform strategic and programmatic decision making processes. In a global network this is difficult to organise.

GPPAC, therefore, continues to work on improving its monitoring system to maximise the value for its users.


Photo by: GPPAC

# Visualising monitoring data through data mapping ICCO Cooperation

While most NGOs acknowledge that monitoring results should be accessible for the intended users,[15] many organisations find it difficult to present their monitoring data in a user-friendly way.[16] This case describes how ICCO has started to experiment with "Google Fusion Tables"[17] and "CartoDB"[18] tools to present data in maps instead of only in tables.

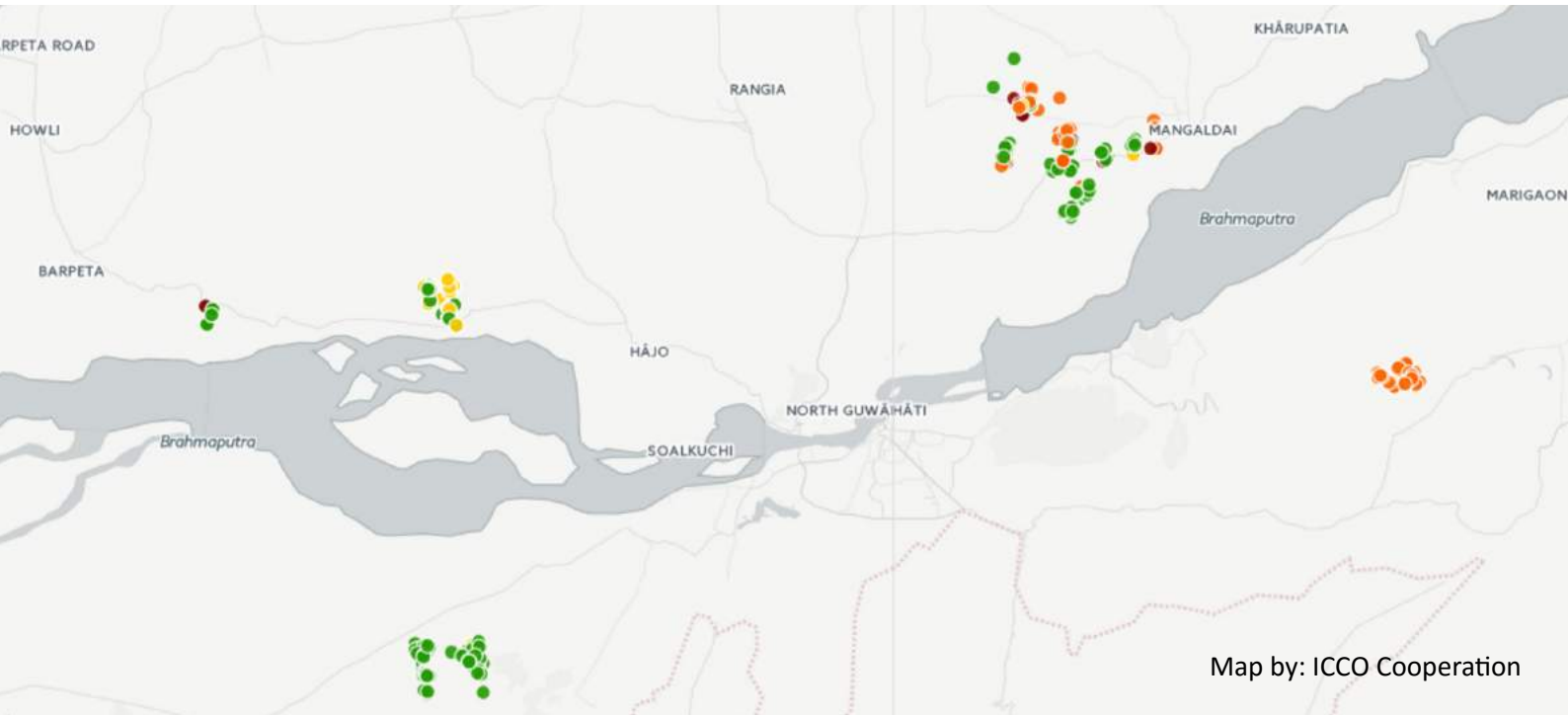
ICCO Cooperation is the interchurch organization for development cooperation that works towards a world in which people can live in dignity and well-being, a world without poverty and injustice. ICCO works in 44 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. ICCO's operational work is done in seven Regional Offices covering eight regions worldwide. ICCO connects enterprising people in the Netherlands and in developing countries to each other and works closely with local civil society organizations, including development organizations, educational institutions and businesses.

ICCO Cooperation has explored various data visualisation methods to improve the presentation of its monitoring data and analyses. One example is ICCO's approach to demonstrating the outcomes of its Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) interventions. ICCO collects relevant data at the household level by conducting Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) surveys using the AKVO FLOW tool. This is a smartphone/tablet application for field data collection that is supported by an online service for designing and distributing surveys, and assembling and managing the resulting datasets. After piloting the FLOW tool in Indonesia in 2012, ICCO has implemented the tool in 15 countries.

The information collected through HFIAS surveys can be used to assess the prevalence of household food insecurity and to detect changes in the household food insecurity situation over time. After summarising the survey data, households are ranked according to a 27-point HFIAS score, based on the degree of food insecurity over the past four weeks (30 days). Through measuring HFIAS scores over a period of time changes in household food security can be made visible.

Instead of presenting the collected data in tables, ICCO has started to experiment with Google Fusion Tables[17] and CartoDB[18] tools to present the data in maps. This makes it possible to detect interesting patterns, which are easily overlooked when reading data through regular tables. Through such data maps, ICCO staff and partners can undertake deeper analysis and critical reflections on the relevance and effectiveness of ICCO's interventions, for example through comparing performance across districts.

The image below presents a data map for districts in India where ICCO Cooperation is active. The coloured dots represent different food security scores, whereby green= food secure, yellow=mildly food insecure, orange= moderately food insecure, and red=severely food insecure.




Map by: ICCO Cooperation

It becomes immediately clear that certain districts score significantly better than others. More than tables, a map triggers the M&E officer and programme staff to address questions such as:

- Was the baseline situation for different households and/or different regions the same?
- Why is our intervention working in one region and not working in another?
- Have there been external factors that influenced these results?
- Have we selected the right target groups?
- Was our sample correct?
- What follow up measures are we going to take? Should we intensify our interventions in the districts that seem to perform relatively poorly?

One of the potential pitfalls of visualising data is, however, that users may jump to the wrong conclusions due to a lack of analytical capacity to interpret the data. ICCO Cooperation has experienced that in some cases partners tend to collect a lot of data through surveys without knowing how these data will contribute to programme improvements. Tools like Google Fusion Tables and CartoDB can stimulate use of data for reflection and learning, but adequate capacity to analyse and research monitoring data remains essential.

# Improving the relevance and ownership of monitoring data Oxfam Novib

Three factors that significantly influence the degree to which monitoring data is effectively used by NGOs and their partners are: 1) the type of monitoring information that is collected; 2) the degree of ownership of the monitoring process by programme staff and implementing partners, and; 3) the existence of trust among the parties involved that interventions will be adapted in response to the findings.[19] This case describes the main lessons that Oxfam Novib has learned in relation to these three factors, in the context of its Peace and Prosperity Promotion Programme in South Sudan.

Oxfam is a world-wide development organisation that mobilises the power of people against poverty. Around the globe, Oxfam works to find practical, innovative ways for people to lift themselves out of poverty and thrive. Oxfam Novib is one of 17 affiliates of the Oxfam confederation, who together work with local partners in 94 countries.

Oxfam Novib implemented the South Sudan Peace and Prosperity Promotion Programme (SSPPP) between 1 October 2012 and 31 December 2015 with funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The aim of the programme was to contribute to establishing public safety and security in five counties in South Sudan. This was to be achieved by: addressing the main drivers of local conflicts; strengthening key actors' conflict transformation capacities; improving food security and income (creating a peace dividend); and strengthening the capacities of local governments and CSOs. Oxfam Novib implemented the programme together with two partner organisations, Oxfam Great Britain, and Oxfam Intermón.

The operational context in South Sudan was very challenging and unpredictable. The needs of the target groups changed frequently. To ensure the programme remained relevant, it was imperative to monitor results effectively and to adjust the programme when necessary.

## Limited relevance and ownership of the original monitoring framework

After the first two years of implementation, Oxfam Novib realized that the programme was not well monitored. The monitoring framework, which was developed during the formulation phase, was hardly used in practice and had not been reviewed for its suitability during the first two years of implementation. The partners did not have a sense of ownership with regard to the monitoring framework. The indicators were not well-understood. Intended and unintended higher-level results were not effectively tracked. Furthermore, partners did not understand the interconnectedness of the various outcomes. This was a serious weakness as the programme was based on an integrated approach towards conflict risk management and livelihoods. For example, while the intention had been to strengthen food security and income in order to create a peace dividend and reduce the risk of conflicts, partners had focused on the individual outcomes instead. They failed to see how these outcomes were interlinked and how they were supposed to contribute to the programme's overall objective.

## An inclusive approach for revising the monitoring framework

Oxfam Novib therefore decided to revise the SSPPP monitoring framework and organised a training workshop for key programme staff of all partners in May 2014. The workshop focused on the programme's Theory of Change, the key monitoring questions, the indicators, and the data collection methods. The Theory of Change was jointly analysed and participants were asked to draw connecting lines between the different outcomes of the programme. This exercise strengthened partners' understanding of the interconnectedness of the programme's outcomes and their relationship with the programme's overall objective. Subsequently, partners were stimulated to reflect on what they needed to know in order to be able to monitor the effects of the programme. They were asked to formulate relevant monitoring questions "in normal language" to help with the monitoring of outcomes. Participants indicated that this exercise helped them tremendously in understanding what they needed to measure. This approach was preferred to working with indicators, which many partners considered to be too abstract and difficult to understand.

> *One of the questions formulated by participants was: 'Is there a reduction in water related conflicts?' This question was related to the outcome 'Natural resource related conflict reduced through increased*

*access to water and improved water management.' In order to answer this question, participants came to the conclusion that one should look for a decrease in the number of water-related conflicts in the payams (an administrative division) where the boreholes are constructed. It was concluded that this information could be obtained through asking the members of peace and water management committees about their views and experiences. By focusing first on formulating a relevant monitoring question rather than an indicator, partners were able to quickly determine which data needed to be collected and which was the most appropriate method for data collection. They were not confused anymore by difficult M&E terminology.*

The Oxfam Novib monitoring framework was revised based on the outputs of the workshop. The partners involved have welcomed the new framework as being more relevant to their monitoring needs, easier to understand and "owned" by all implementing partners.

In order to encourage partners to move from a focus on outputs towards longer term outcomes, Oxfam Novib increased the frequency of monitoring visits to partners. During these visits partners were encouraged to reflect on achieved outcomes based on the revised monitoring framework. As a result, partners started to track both long and short-term changes.

## A mid-term reflection exercise undertaken by partners themselves

In February 2015, the programme partners undertook a mid-term reflection exercise with the aim of monitoring the progress achieved and analysing whether additional changes were needed to improve the effectiveness of the programme. Instead of hiring a consultant it was decided that the partners would implement this exercise themselves. The partners collected relevant monitoring data through focus group discussions and key informant interviews. This approach further strengthened their ownership of the monitoring process and stimulated them to engage in the collection and analysis of monitoring information. The results of the mid-term review were discussed during a reflection workshop in March 2015, with the lessons learned providing an entry point for adjusting the programme and formulating recommendations.

*For example, based on the data analysis it became clear that, as was expected, cattle raiding was a significant source of conflict, and that the programme had managed to resolve disputes between cattle and farm owners successfully by stimulating youth to join fishing groups, instead of remaining in cattle camps. During the reflection exercise a constructive dialogue took place based on this analysis, with participants pointing out that promoting fishing alone is not a sustainable solution because fish stocks in the river Nile are declining. The discussions led to the realisation that to find sustainable solutions there is need to pay more attention to providing farming opportunities for the youth.*

## Key lessons learned

Some key lessons that can be drawn from Oxfam Novib's experience include:

- Review the monitoring framework, together with the implementing partners, during the start-up phase of a project/programme. This ensures that the framework is focused on collecting the right type of information and is well-understood and owned by all partners.
- Focus on concepts that are easily understandable when discussing with partners which information needs to be collected. A case in point is to substitute complicated concepts like indicators with "monitoring questions." By jointly formulating monitoring questions all stakeholders gain an improved understanding of the indicators that follow from these questions.
- Do not underestimate the internal capacity that is available to collect and analyse monitoring information. While Oxfam Novib often hires external consultants to carry out mid-term reviews, the experience with the mid-term reflection exercise has shown that such internal monitoring exercises can be useful for collecting the necessary monitoring information, engaging in joint learning, and fostering the ownership of monitoring processes. It does, however, require that an experienced monitoring officer or expert is involved to provide support to the individual partners and to maintain oversight of the process. In addition, sufficient financial resources need to be made available to implement the exercise. Oxfam Novib ensured the latter through the inclusion of a specific budget line for M&E in partners' programme budget.

- “Dare to ask” for donors’ consent with regard to programme adjustments. In Oxfam Novib’s experience, donors can be more flexible and willing to accept programme changes than partners often think, provided that the proposed adjustments are based on sound arguments. For NGOs implementing programmes and projects in volatile contexts, it is advisable to propose a flexible approach right from the start. This could entail agreeing to focus on higher level results in programme and project proposals, rather than a detailed log-frame. This helps to prevent frequent and time consuming requests to change planned activities and outputs during implementation of the programme.


Photo by: Oxfam Novib

# Outcome Mapping SNV Tanzania[20]

Important factors that influence the use of monitoring data by implementing partners and field offices are the quality of the analysis of monitoring data, monitoring expertise, and the existence of trust between donors and implementing partners that interventions can be adapted based on the insights gained.[21] This case focuses on SNV Tanzania's experience with Outcome Mapping (OM), the role played by KPMG, fund manager of the Accountability in Tanzania Programme (AcT), in promoting the approach, and on the relationship between AcT's experience with OM and the above-mentioned factors that influence the use of monitoring.

Tanzania is one of the 38 countries in which SNV is active in Agriculture, Energy and Water, Sanitation & Hygiene. Founded in the Netherlands in 1965, SNV has built a long-term, local presence in many of the poorest countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. SNV's global team of local and international advisors work with local partners to equip communities, businesses and organisations with the tools, knowledge and connections they need to increase their incomes and gain access to basic services – empowering them to break the cycle of poverty and guide their own development.

## Why SNV Tanzania adopted Outcome Mapping

The adoption of Outcome Mapping (OM) was promoted by one of SNV's donors in Tanzania, through the Accountability in Tanzania Programme (AcT). AcT is a DFID-funded programme which aims to increase the responsiveness and accountability of the government of Tanzania to its citizens, through a strengthened civil society. SNV is one of 29 AcT-supported CSOs supported in Tanzania. AcT allocates funding to promising CSOs with whom they engage in partnerships. The funding can be used in a flexible manner, for strategic planning and programming. AcT adopted OM to monitor the effectiveness of its programme and for reporting to DFID. Although AcT itself was expected to report to DFID based on a conventional log-frame, OM was used to collect the monitoring information to demonstrate how change actually happened and how AcT's inputs had contributed to results. Furthermore, AcT promoted OM amongst the partner CSOs to strengthen their strategy development, planning, monitoring, learning, evaluation, and reporting processes. The ultimate aim was to strengthen the effectiveness of CSOs' interventions and of the AcT programme as a whole.

AcT considered OM[22] to be an appropriate monitoring tool because it is based on the understanding that development processes are complex and non-linear, and that impact is achieved through behavioural changes among stakeholders. These stakeholders are not within the span of control of the CSOs but their behaviour can be influenced. With OM it is possible to analyse how changes in behaviour and relationships of stakeholders come about. The findings can be used to improve the effectiveness of development interventions. OM was part and parcel of the strategic design of the AcT programme, alongside the logframe. The crucial difference between the early programme and the programme after the 2012 was that there was a disconnect between the early logframe and OM. In 2012 the logframe, ToC and OM reporting were revised and aligned to make the logframe report following OM results rather than national statistics. That is when the real benefit of OM revealed itself

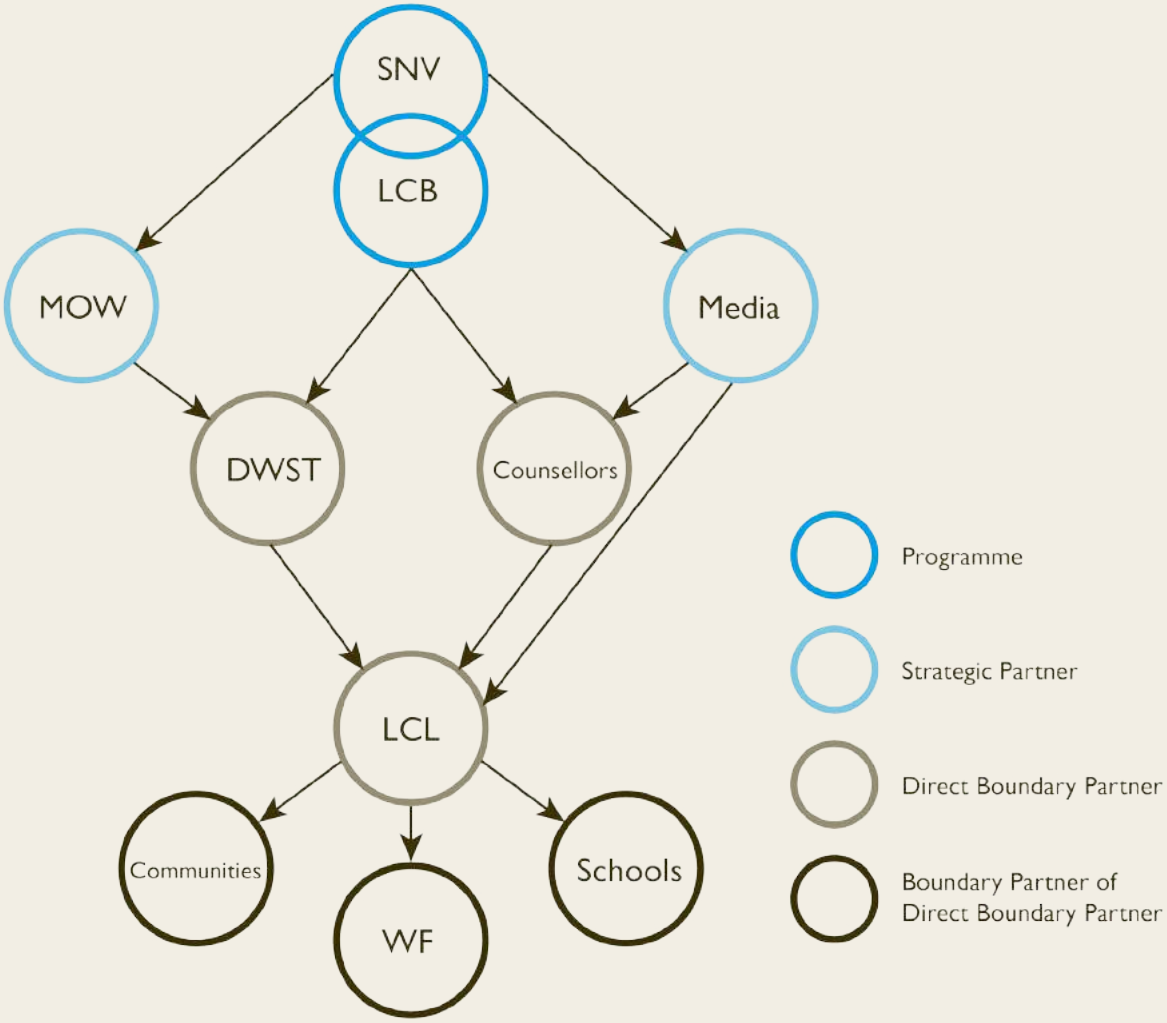
SNV Tanzania considered the OM approach to fit in well within its programme as its overall goal is to contribute to systemic change that leads to inclusive development. For SNV it is important to monitor how its interventions influence the behaviour of key stakeholders, and how these behavioural changes in turn contribute to development outcomes and impact. The insights gained from monitoring are used to inform its strategy and programme management.

## How SNV Tanzania implemented outcome mapping

AcT trained SNV programme staff in the OM methodology and facilitated the exchange of experiences in using the monitoring approach with other AcT partners. Consultants were contracted to develop the approach and to support SNV in operationalizing OM in its sector programmes and projects. One of the first steps undertaken was the development of a vision and a Theory of Change. These provided the overall strategic framework that specified what impact and outcomes SNV Tanzania aimed to achieve and how.

The next step was to identify the "boundary partners." These were the actors through which SNV sought to influence change. Boundary partners included actors whose behaviour was to be directly influenced by SNV's interventions. Other actors, who were considered catalysts of change, but whose behaviour could not necessarily be changed, were identified as strategic partners e.g. the media. For some programmes, boundary partner maps were made providing insight into actors' influence on each other and on the change process.

Boundary map of SNV's WASH programme




This map shows that for SNV's WASH programme four types of stakeholders exist, including: implementing agencies (SNV and its local implementing partners); strategic partners (Ministry of Water and Media); direct boundary partners (district water sanitation teams and councellors); and boundary partners of the programme's direct boundary partners (local community leadership, communities, schools etc). Next, it clarifies that local community leadership, district water sanitation teams and counsellors are the key boundary partners. The achievement of SNV's outcomes and impact is dependent on their changed behaviour and perceptions, and monitoring for behavioural change would, therefore, need to primarily focus on these boundary partners. Finally, it shows that the impact of the programme can be measured through changed behaviour at the level of the indirect boundary partners, such as schools and communities.

Through mapping the boundary and strategic partners, it was possible to identify key stakeholders with the power to bring about change. Subsequently, outcome challenges and progress markers were formulated. The outcome challenges specify the future desired behaviour of the boundary partners. The progress markers are indicators to measure changes in the behaviour of the boundary partners.

Outcome journals were used to monitor progress on the identified progress markers. SNV's implementing partners – known as Local Capacity Builders (LCBs) – recorded, on a regular basis[23], the changes that they observed in the behaviours of the boundary partners, both small as well as the more transformative changes. Outcome journals were filled every 6 months. For each boundary partner, the LCBs entered the following information in the outcome journal:

- the outcome challenge;
- progress achieved per progress marker (defined as a score indicating low, medium, or high development);
- the factors and actors that have contributed to the identified (positive/negative) change;
- lessons learned; and
- the required changes/reactions to improve the effectiveness of SNV's interventions.

In addition, the LCBs provided narrative descriptions of the observed changes and sources of evidence. The information collected through the outcome journals was subsequently used by the LCBs and the SNV programme advisors to jointly analyse key changes in the behaviour of boundary partners and discuss the implications for strategic and operational changes in the programme/project.

## Main benefits of Outcome Mapping

Both AcT and SNV Tanzania have benefitted in various ways from the adoption of OM. For SNV Tanzania, OM has improved the internal data collection process, specifically for qualitative data. Before the introduction of OM, observations about behavioural changes were discussed "in the car, under the tree or in the office" but these observations were not systematically documented. Through the introduction of systematic data collection processes with specific progress markers, SNV is better able to capture behavioural changes and trends among key stakeholders which may indicate emerging systemic change.

Secondly, OM has strengthened SNV's data analysis and reporting. In joint sessions SNV's advisors and LCBs engage in studying the outcome journals. They analyse change processes at the level of individual boundary partners and detect trends at the level of boundary partner groups or sector programmes. OM makes it possible to identify behavioural changes and trends that would have remained unnoticed if a less structured approach to data collection and analysis had been used. The use of OM has, furthermore, improved the quality of reporting. The presented findings result from a more robust process of data collection and analysis and less on – as was previously the case – anecdotal evidence. Every six months, SNV Tanzania prepares an aggregated outcome journal report based on several LCBs' outcome journals and the joint data analysis sessions. This report presents the general trends, aggregated scores and main findings per progress marker. Since the results of earlier aggregation reports are also presented, the reader can obtain a quick overview of the progress achieved over time.

Thirdly, OM has strengthened the monitoring and learning capacity of LCBs. The adoption of OM requires new skills and a change in the mind-set of the LCB. While many LCBs are small local NGOs who are inclined to focus on project outputs, OM has stimulated these organisations to observe and reflect on change processes. The OM training, the use of outcome journals and the on-the-job mentoring by SNV staff, have increased the capacity of LCBs to observe behavioural change and to reflect on and learn about the effectiveness of their interventions.

Other AcT partners who adopted the OM approach experienced similar benefits. Moreover, AcT's own analysis and reporting to DFID has improved as it is able to rigorously collect, analyse and report on concrete results and change processes, based on the evidence extracted from CSOs' Outcome Journals.

*We are increasingly confident that, through the way we are merging OM and conventional indicators in our revised log-frame, we are in a stronger position than before to provide a detailed and systematic body of qualitative and quantitative evidence that takes us beyond anecdotes, and towards a nuanced understanding of what makes change happen.*[24] Kate Dyer, Programme, Director AcT Programme

SNV Tanzania has learned that the introduction of

outcome mapping is best done in small incremental steps. Management, programming and M&E staff need to be given time to change their mind-set towards regular documentation of behavioural change, rather than the usual half yearly and annual mainly qualitative data collection, and become fully committed to it. Key actors, like the LCBs in the SNV case, need to be trained. In particular, building the skill to observe and document behavioural change is a challenge. Furthermore, it is important to develop a system to organise and analyse the data. In this case AcT developed a tailored database. Last but not least, OM requires flexibility by both implementing organisations and donors. Implementing organisations need to be able to adapt strategies and programming based on the findings of monitoring processes. AcT was able to implement and promote OM because DFID was supportive of the approach and was flexible when this was needed.

# PMEL ownership, financing and expertise Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance[25]

Factors that often limit the use of monitoring data include a lack of monitoring expertise, insufficient financial resources for monitoring and lack of ownership of the data. This case describes the experience of Woord en Daad & Red een Kind and their partners in addressing these three constraints, within the framework of the MFS II programme.

Woord en Daad and Red een Kind are both faith based NGOs. Woord and Daad connects people around the world in their fight against poverty from a Biblical perspective. WD works with partner organisations in Africa, Asia and Central and South America, it's supporter base in the Netherlands, social institutions, governments, enterprises and other sectors. Together with them, Woord en Daad strives to contribute to sustainable change in the Netherlands and worldwide. Red een Kind (Help a Child) connects children in Asia and Africa who live in poverty with people in the Netherlands. Red een Kind supports the communities and families of these children. In the framework of MFSII Woord and Daad and Red een Kind worked together in an alliance on four programmes: Education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training - Job and Business Services, Agricultural Development, Strengthening Partner Network.

## Ownership

Woord en Daad (WD) and Red een Kind (REK) introduced a comprehensive planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL) system as part of the WD-REK Alliance 2011-2015 programme.[26] The system included a Theory of Change (ToC), a Strategic Multi Annual Plan, Indicator Reference Sheets, Result Frameworks, Annual Indicator Reports, and Scorecards. Although these different components were developed using a participatory approach, many partners felt that the system was primarily focused on the information needs of the Alliance, which in turn were strongly influenced by the reporting obligations towards the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Many partners were of the opinion that the PMEL system was not really geared to their own information needs.[27]

Based on this experience both Woord en Daad and Red een Kind are now developing approaches that aim to strengthen the sense of ownership of partners with regard to their M&E systems and data.

REK has opted for an approach in which each partner will develop their own ToC. By building the PMEL system around outcome indicators contained in these individual theories of change, REK anticipates that the system will be responsive to the needs of partners.

While WD will also support partners in developing PMEL systems that are primarily based on their own information needs, these systems are also expected to fulfil the main information needs of other stakeholders including donors. The key elements of this new approach are:

- Partners develop a ToC as the basis of their Strategic Program Plans for 2016-2020;
- After WD and the partner have both accepted the ToC and the strategic framework for cooperation, partners develop a PMEL plan based on a format provided by WD.

Currently PMEL plans are not systematically documented which makes the PMEL system vulnerable especially when PMEL staff leaves the organisation. Therefore, WD and REK support their partners with developing their own ToCs in a three-day ToC workshop, and, subsequently, the PMEL plans in a 4-day workshop. The PMEL plans include output and outcome indicators that will be used to track progress and to validate the ToC. The plans also include an overview of PMEL-related tasks and an assessment of capacities that need to be strengthened.

## Financing PMEL

In order to ensure adequate financial resources for PMEL, a separate budget line was included in the annual budgets of the partners. Part of this budget was used to recruit a PMEL officer and support PMEL activities. The budget also contained a provision for evaluations and outcome studies. The outcome studies (conducted in 2011, 2013 and 2015) focused on collecting data on the outcome indicators that the Alliance had agreed with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The budget for these outcome studies was jointly managed by WD and REK, which was conducive for coordinated and effective implementation. The drawback of this approach was that it exacerbated the problem of lack of ownership among partners of the two organisations.[28]

Based on these experiences, REK has decided to introduce some changes with regard to the management of financial resources for PMEL. While it will continue to manage the budgets for the current programme period (2016-2020), REK's partners will be given greater control over the design and management of outcome studies. The partners will also be responsible for drafting the Terms of Reference of the studies. Only some minimal requirements need to be adhered to: the studies need to be linked to partners' own ToC and they must address several pre-defined outcome indicators that REK needs to monitor.

## Monitoring expertise

The WD-REK Alliance successfully supported partners with the development of PMEL capacity, especially in terms of in-house expertise which was often very limited at the start of the programme. The support consisted of a training program, combined with PMEL strengthening visits and on-the-job coaching.

The partner training programme consisted of a general introduction to PMEL and a number of specialised modules covering topics such as How to formulate a ToC and How to effectively engage in planning. The trainings were complemented with on-the-job support by PMEL staff of the two organisations.

During the PMEL strengthening visits, the strengths and weaknesses of partners' PMEL systems were analysed. This was done in a participatory manner, by using a specially designed PMEL strengthening tool. The tool contained a series of questions on the different aspects of a PMEL system, for example: Are lessons learned from evaluations generally used to adapt existing and design new programs and projects? For each question, partners had to choose among four response options: completely, mostly, partly or not at all satisfied. These questions were discussed in groups representing a broad cross section of staff from the partner organisations. Based on this joint assessment, the group developed an action plan to improve the partner's PMEL system. Discussions based around the PMEL tool have proved to be a valuable approach to strengthening partners' understanding of the relevance and features of a PMEL system. The action plans have, furthermore, effectively informed the WD-REK Alliance's PMEL capacity building support.

Photo by: Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance

# Scorecards for data collection, analysis and presentation[29] Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance

The quality of data analysis and their presentation are two factors that influence the use of monitoring data. This case describes how Woord en Daad (WD) and Red een Kind successfully introduced scorecards to improve data collection, analysis and presentation by its implementing partners.

In 2011 WD and REK introduced a revised Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (PMEL) system. The previous monitoring system was considered to be too "output oriented" and focused on external accountability towards donors. In order to develop a more outcome-oriented PMEL system that served purposes of accountability, programme management and learning in a more balanced way, WD and REK introduced outcome studies. Every two years (2011, 2013 and 2015) data was collected on specific outcome indicators to gain more insights on how WD and REK programmes contribute to socio-economic development in the target areas.

One of the tools that WD and REK introduced for undertaking the outcome studies was a system of scorecards. Scorecards are used to assess the quality of an education institute or an education service provider on a number of topics. Topics may include the qualifications of the teachers, or the availability and quality of learning materials. These topics are categorized in key sections. For example, the key section "physical environment" includes topics such as classrooms and furniture.

Each assessment is conducted by a group made up of relevant staff from each educational institute, for example the director or head master, a teacher, and other operational staff. Other participants might include representatives of the partner organisation, the government, similar institutes, the Parent-Teacher Association and students. For each topic the group discusses the quality of the institute in the present situation, with the final score being awarded on the basis of consensus. The scoring process is guided by pre-defined statements, with participants being asked to select the statement which describes the present situation best. Each statement also represents a score ranging from 1 (weak), to 4 (strong). The process is guided by an experienced facilitator either a WD or REK member of staff or a consultant.[30]

The assigned scores are then entered in an excel file which also includes the results of previous assessments. The averages of the scores are automatically computed in an analysis sheet. The sheet makes it possible to compare the current and past scores. The results are presented on a dashboard which provides a quick overview of the topics and key sections in which progress has been achieved and topics that require more work.

The tables and graph on the next page illustrate how the information is presented. The example of this school shows that major improvements have been realised in the area of school policies, while school governance has deteriorated. The table shows that within the key section 'Content' three different topics were given very low scores, which indicates that with regard to these topics there is room for improvement.

The dashboard can also be used for analysing differences between and within sections, as well as quality changes over a period of time.

The scorecard also contains a standardised format for an action plan that can be used to translate the findings from the assessment into actions.

The scorecard approach was well received by WD and REK partner organisations. Some even adopted the tool to assess activities that are not part of the WD and REK programmes. WD and REK have used the scorecards to inform programme management,[31] their capacity building support strategy and for external reporting purposes. The advantages of the scorecards are that:

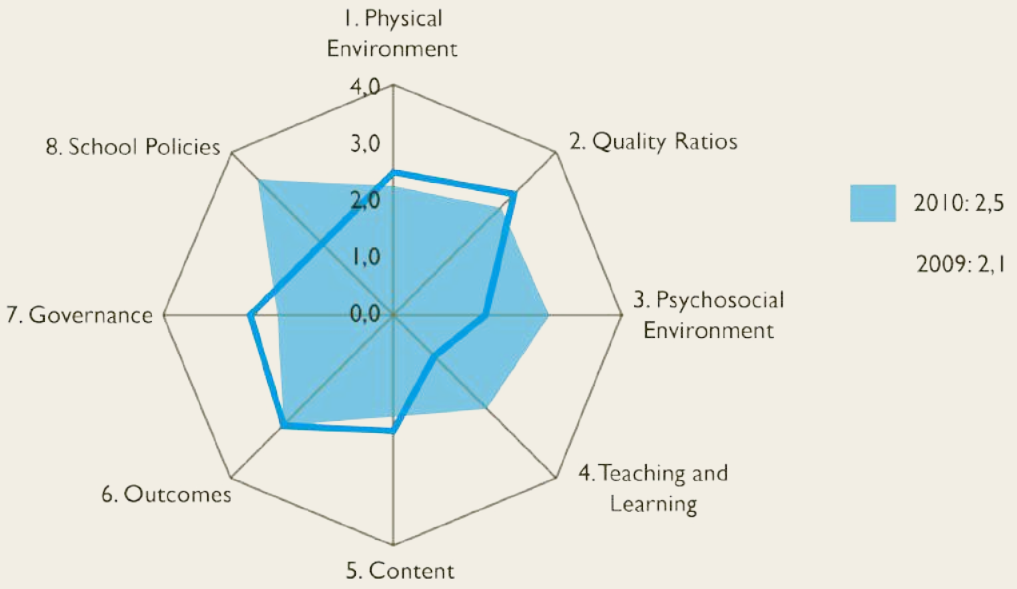
- the right type of monitoring data are collected (partners indicated that the scorecards focus on the type of information that they consider to be relevant);
- they simplify the process of data analysis and the production of concrete action plans;
- participants are encouraged to engage in critical reflection and joint learning on an equal basis;
- beneficiaries can participate (downward accountability);
- participants develop a sense of ownership because assessment and the joint development of the action

## Score card for data collection

| | 2010 | 2009 |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Physical Environment | 2,3 | 2,5 |
| 2. Quality Ratios | 2,7 | 3,0 |
| 3. Psychosocial Environment | 2,8 | 1,6 |
| 4. Teaching and Learning | 2,3 | 1,0 |
| 5. Content | 1,8 | 2,0 |
| 6. Outcomes | 2,8 | 2,7 |
| 7. Governance | 2,0 | 2,5 |
| 8. School Policies | 3,3 | 1,7 |
| **average:** | **2,5** | **2,1** |
| | use for indicator | |

| | weak | basic | moderate | strong |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Physical Environment | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| 2. Quality Ratios | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| 3. Psychosocial Environment | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. Teaching and Learning | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 5. Content | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| 6. Outcomes | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| 7. Governance | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 8. School Policies | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| **total** | **7** | **8** | **10** | **5** |
| **%** | **23,3%** | **26,7%** | **33,3%** | **16,7%** |

### Quality scores for school x (location y, partner z, country p)




| | |
|---|---|
| **Name school** | school x |
| **Location school** | location y |
| **Partner organisation** | partner z |
| **Country** | country p |
| **Date** | date |

| Issue | Category/Section | Proposed action | By whom | When |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| etc. | | | | |

plan are conducted in a participatory way;
- scores of individual institutes can be aggregated at the regional level which makes it possible to assess an entire WD programme; and
- they can be used for reporting and external accountability.

From its experience with using the scorecards, WD and REK have learned that two issues need to be taken into account with this approach. First, although the scorecard is a self-assessment tool, it is advisable to have an external facilitator who probes participants to back up their statements with evidence and who ensures an open discussion focused on reflection and learning. Second, an appropriate balance needs to be found between the accountability and learning purposes of the tool. A strong focus on accountability may require more intensive and strict external facilitation to ensure the quality of the process. This however, could be at the expense of the learning purpose which requires that partners own the process and trust that the scorecard is not used to "judge" their performance but to learn. As Wim Blok -Manager for Results based management and Learning, Stichting Woord en Daad- has summarised it:

*The best way to show accountability is to demonstrate a learning attitude.*


Photo by: Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance

# End notes

## Introduction

1 MFS II was the 2011-2015 grant framework for Co-Financing Agencies (CFAs), which was directed at achieving a sustainable reduction in poverty and is the successor to MFS I, which covered 2007-2010. A total of 20 consortia of Dutch CFAs were awarded €1.9 billion in MFS II grants by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFa). The overall aim of MFS II was to help strengthen civil society in the South as a building block for structural poverty reduction. CFAs receiving MFS II funding worked through strategic partnerships with Southern partner organizations. MFS II-funded organizations supported a wide range of development activities of a large number of Southern partner organizations in over 70 countries.

2 http://www.wageningenur.nl/nl/show/CDISeminar_ME_2014.htm

3 The exact number is not known because the survey responses were anonymous.

4 For example networks of consultants or NGOs, fundraising platforms, research networks. Several of these responded that the survey was not applicable to their situation.

5 Court, J., I. Hovland and J. Young (eds) (2005) Bridging Research and Policy in Development: Evidence and the Change Process. London, UK: ITDG Publishing.

## Sensemaking, an approach for analysing monitoring data

6 This case is based on the written and oral inputs provided by L. Ruijmschoot, PME advisor Fair, Green and Global Alliance, at Both ENDS.

7 The Strategic Objective teams (four in total) are composed of programme staff that represent each of the member organisations that work on the respective Strategic Objective.

8 The concept brilliant failures is based on the idea that we can learn more from failures than from successes. For more information check out the website of the Institute of Brillant Failures

9 Sharing knowledge about the areas where the Alliance makes less progress and its underlying causes is, however, not a key focus of the sensemaking meeting. This type of more in-depth learning often is done by the staff that execute the programmes.

## Creating trust through flexible programming

10 This case is based on various documents and oral inputs provided by Marlou Geurts, DRR programme Manager South Asia, Cordaid.

11 Respondents to the Partos Survey “Use of Monitoring” (Rijneveld 2015) rate the importance of the factor “trust in flexibility” as 2.84 (on a four-point scale: Not/hardly, Somewhat, Quite a bit, Very much), while the score for the extent to which this factor was considered to be true is on average 2.08.

## Designing a monitoring system that meets the requirements for internal as well as external use

12 Respondents to the Partos Survey “Use of Monitoring” (Rijneveld 2015) rate the importance of this factor for the use of monitoring as 3.07 (on a four-point scale: Not/hardly, Somewhat, Quite a bit, Very much), while the score for the extent to which this factor was true for their organisation was on average 2.56.

13 This methodology was developed by the Canadian International Development Research Center. See for more information: IDRC (2001), Outcome Mapping - Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs (http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Resources/Publications/Pages/IDRCBookDetails.aspx?PublicationID=121)

14 These programmes are: Awareness Raising, Interaction and Advocacy, Network and Capacity Building, Knowledge Generation and Sharing, and Early Warning and Early response (EWER).

## Visualising monitoring data through data mapping

15 See for a similar statement concerning evaluations: Patton (2008), "Utilization-Focused Evaluation".

16 Respondents to the Partos Survey "Use of Monitoring" (Rijneveld 2015) rate the importance of this factor for the use of monitoring as 2.87 (on a four-point scale: Not/hardly, Somewhat, Quite a bit, Very much), while the score for the extent to which this factor was true for their organisation was on average 2.35. This implies that while NGOs regard the factor as important, in practice clear presentations of monitoring data and analyses are often lacking.

17 Google fusion tables is an experimental data visualization web application to gather, visualize, and share data tables, see for more information: support.google.com/fusiontables

18 CartoDB is a geospatial database that allows for the storage and visualization of data on the web and the creation of maps, see for more information: cartodb.com

## Improving the relevance and ownership of monitoring data

19 Respondents to the Partos Survey "Use of Monitoring" (Rijneveld 2015) rate the importance of the factor "type of information" for the use of monitoring data by the NGOs as 3.11 (on a four-point scale: Not/hardly, Somewhat, Quite a bit, Very much), while the score for the extent to which this factor was considered to be true is on average 2.51; the importance of the factor "monitoring ownership" at the level of field offices and implementing partners is rated as 2.68, while the score for the extent to which this factor was considered to be true is on average 1.96; the importance of the factor "trust in flexibility" is rated as 2.84, while the score for the extent to which this factor was considered to be true is on average 2.08.

## Outcome Mapping

20 This case is based on various documents and oral inputs provided by J. Adkins, Governance Adviser , SNV Tanzania, and on the documents: KPMG (2013), Outcome mapping – a breadth of uses, International Development Advisory Services (IDAS) Impact Paper 13: November 2013; Dyer, K. (2012), Making 'Evidence' the Plural of 'Anecdote', OM ideas No. 6; AcT (2011), Think Piece: Working With Log-Frames And Outcome Mapping In The Context Of The Accountability Tanzania Programme (Act).

21 Respondents to the Partos Survey "Use of Monitoring" (Rijneveld 2015) rate the importance of the factor "quality of analysis" for the use of monitoring data by implementing partners and field offices as 2.88 (on a four-point scale: Not/hardly, Somewhat, Quite a bit, Very much), while the score for the extent to which this factor was considered to be true is on average 2.04; the importance of the factor "monitoring expertise" is rated as 3.00, while the score for the extent to which this factor was considered to be true is on average 2.08; the importance of the factor "trust in flexibility" is rated as 2.84, while the score for the extent to which this factor was considered to be true is on average 2.08.

22 The OM methodology was developed by the Canadian International Development Research Center. See for more information: IDRC (2001), Outcome Mapping - Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs (http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Resources/Publications/Pages/IDRCBookDetails.aspx?PublicationID=121)

23 The regularity of recording varied between partners, who were encouraged to keep a diary to record observed behavior changes each time they met with the BP. Other partners kept 'back to office reports' in which these observations were included.

24 Dyer, K. (2012), Making 'Evidence' the Plural of 'Anecdote', OM ideas No. 6

## PMEL ownership, financing and expertise

25 This case is based on various documents and oral inputs provided by Geert de Jonge, Coordinator Planning, Monitoring, Evaluations and Learning, Red een Kind, and Wim Blok, Manager Result management and Learning, Stichting Woord en Daad.

26 The alliance programme consists out of four programmes: Education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training - Job and Business Services, Agricultural Development, Strengthening Partner Network.

27 The PMEL system introduced as part of grant framework MFSII in 2011 was considered and improvement compared to previous rant framework MFSI. Under MFSI NGOs were expected to report on far too many indicators. This caused monitoring fatigue among all partners. Under MFSII the PMEL system could focus on a limited number of well-defined indicators which contributed to improved collection and use.

28 Important exceptions were the scorecard outcome studies, which were widely owned by partners and facilitated the joint collection and analysis of relevant outcome data. See for more information the case-study on WD's Scorecards.

## Scorecards for data collection, analysis and presentation

29 This case is based on documentation and oral inputs provided by W. Blok, Manager Resultaatmanagement en Leren, Stichting Woord en Daad.

30 In the cases where partner organisations have sufficient in-house capacity (e.g. a strong PMEL officer) to facilitate the scorecard process effectively and enough distance to the service provider (e.g. the service provider is owned by another community-based organisation) no external facilitator is used.

31 For example, based on the analysis of the results of the scorecards in 2011, WD programme officers working on TVET paid specific attention in their interaction with partners organisations to those areas were the average scores were relatively low, like governance management. This entailed that partners' action plans were jointly discussed and used to steer for improvements in the identified areas. A key aspect of the interactions with partners was always that the scorecard was first and foremost used to foster learning and improve programme implementation, and not to "judge" partners' performance. This approach contributed to an improved performance (as measured in the 2013 scorecard round) in those areas that had received strengthened attention.

# Colophon

## The Partos working group on the use of monitoring data

Working group participants and contributors of case stories:

- Both Ends: Lieke Ruijmschoot, Mette Pfeiffer, Karine Godthelp
- Cordaid: Rens Rutten and Marlou Geurts
- Freepressunlimited: Victor van Oeijen
- HIVOS: Karel Chambille and Wenny Ho
- ICCO-Cooperation: Dieneke de Groot and Martijn Marijnis
- MamaCash: Corine Otte
- Lilianefonds: Anneke Hofs
- NedWorc: Verona Groveman
- Oxfam Novib: Anne Oudes, Annemieke Burmeister and Nele Blommenstein
- Red een Kind: Geert de Jonge
- Rutgers wpf: Ruth van Zorge,
- Save the Children: Esther ten Hoorn
- SNV: Margriet Poel and Julie Adkins
- Warchild: Arjen Mulder

Wouter Rijneveld (Resultante) conducted the survey and wrote the report, 'Use of Monitoring Report of a survey among Dutch development organisations about the use of monitoring data beyond reporting.'
Lydeke Schakel (Deveworks) gathered and wrote the case stories
Heinz Greijn (Partos) facilitated the working group and wrote the main text
Wangu Mwangi edited this final publication

Design: Stefanie Gielen

# Towards improved use of monitoring data

In development coorperation monitoring is associated with gathering data for filling reports that are rarely used as the basis for broader reflection or to inspire practitioners to develop new and creative solutions. For most organisations, the potential to use monitoring results for learning is therefore under-utilised. In order to better understand why this is the case a working group made up of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) managers and experts from Partos member organisations commissioned a study to identify factors that constrain the use of monitoring data by Dutch-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as their development partners around the world. The group also gathered a number of case stories describing how various Partos members have tried to address one or more of these factors.

Photo: Wouter Rijneveld having a conversation during an evaluation

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