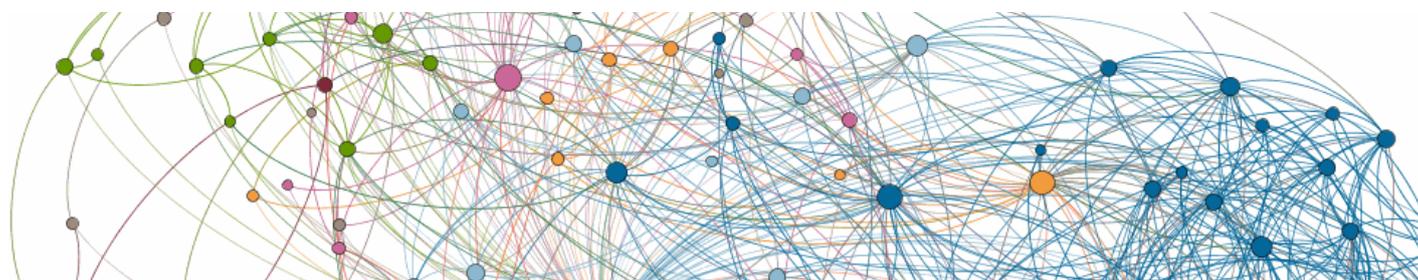


## Outcome mapping – a breadth of uses

By Harleen Thati and Rachel Keeler, based on work by the Accountability in Tanzania programme<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, development programmes have become increasingly complex, seeking to tackle ever more complicated problems and to achieve sustainable impact by changing the fundamental social, economic and political systems that entrench poverty. At the same time, donors are demanding clearer and stricter ways of quantifying their impact. Limitations of conventional results evaluation methodologies thus often create a tension between accountability and the flexibility to pursue innovative approaches to development.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, we explore the benefits of Outcome Mapping, an alternative planning and results evaluation system for complex development interventions. Key to the success of this system has been the ability to adapt it in creative ways to meet an individual programme's needs. This paper looks at three unique ways in which the Accountability in Tanzania (AcT) programme has adapted OM to help its grantees improve governance in Tanzania and to capture the true impact of their work.



### Outcome mapping

Outcome mapping (OM) was developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada in 2001 as an alternative – or in some cases a complement – to conventional methods of planning and evaluating complex, results-focused programmes and activities. One driver for an alternative system was the limitations of conventional evaluation systems such as the logical framework (log-frame), which tend to rely on easily quantifiable, linear frameworks that are necessarily simple and often unable to capture the

messy complexity of how development really happens.

One of the most important attributes of the OM method is its ability to track a breadth of activities – both planned and opportunistic, and capture a range of results – from the incremental to the transformative, across a variety of stakeholders. This is in contrast to more conventional systems of results measurement, where the focus is narrowed to a manageable task of measuring planned activities, and using pre-defined indicators to chart high-level results.

### How does it work?

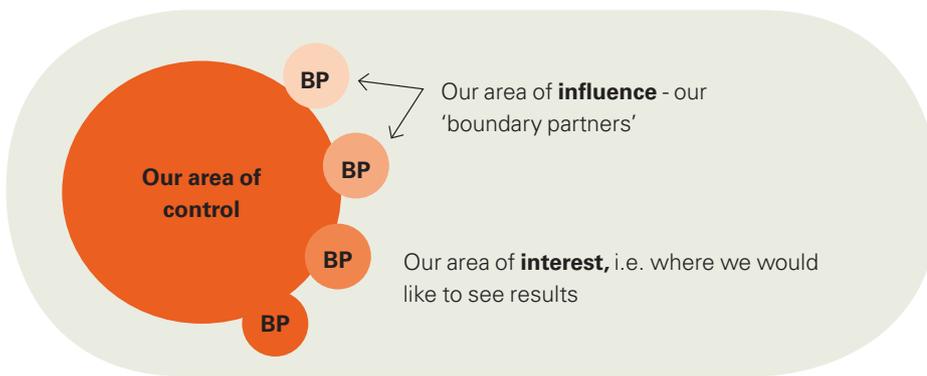
OM begins by identifying “boundary partners”: influential people, organizations, institutions or other entities with whom a programme will work to achieve its goals. These partners might be politicians, community leaders or the media. This process helps organizations plan better interventions because they must critically assess which people have the power to effect change, and what the best strategies are to work with them.

Progress towards goals is then tracked in terms of observed changes in behaviour amongst these boundary

*This is one of a series of short pieces from KPMG IDAS Advisors designed to show forward thinking based on our extensive experience. It covers general development topics, as well as specific issues facing fragile states, private sector development, governance, assessment and organisational development, renewable energy and climate change. The series is edited by Julio Garrido-Mirapeix, Head, and Abijah Kanene, Manager for Market Intelligence Learning and Knowledge, IDAS Africa. This paper was written by Harleen Thati, Senior Adviser, and Rachel Keeler, Impact and Innovation Manager at KPMG IDAS.*

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a summarized adaptation of two papers written by Kate Dyer, Programme Director of the Accountability in Tanzania (AcT) programme. They are: *Making ‘Evidence’ the Plural of ‘Anecdote’* (OM ideas No. 6, November 2012), and *Evidence for Partnership: Adapting Outcome Mapping into Measuring and Managing a Grant-Making Partnership* (forthcoming). Kate also generously supported the authors with her time and feedback in the production of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> See: Taylor, B., 2013, *Evidence-Based Policy and Systemic Change: Conflicting Trends?* Springfield Working Paper Series (1), The Springfield Centre, Durham.



**Figure 1: Boundary Partners**

Boundary partners are referred to as such because they operate on the boundary of a programme's sphere of control, connecting the programme to its sphere of interest. This connection represents the programme's sphere of influence – and it is only through these partners that it is able to achieve its mandate.

partners. Practitioners are asked to record small changes that they observe every day in 'outcome journals', which enables them to capture a range of evidence from the seemingly small to the transformative. This also allows practitioners the freedom to capture whatever information best illustrates the change – as opposed to collecting information against specific pre-defined indicators, as is done with a log-frame.

This way, the OM approach supports the concept that there is no single way to achieve a goal, yet it captures many of the important steps taken on the route to reaching it – making it easier for practitioners to reflect on which implementation strategies are working best, and why. This analysis informs the strong learning element of OM, which encourages programmes to reformulate their strategies as they go along, based on lessons that emerge from reflecting on the evidence collated from their journals. The lack of prescription means that practitioners are less likely to favour certain activities simply because they align best with reporting indicators.

Outcome mapping has spread quickly through the development community and is now implemented by hundreds of programmes around the world. Its popularity points to the great demand for more innovative approaches to results planning and evaluation in today's environment. Creativity and

adaptability are critical to the success of these approaches – and what is exciting about OM is the many ways in which practitioners have been adapting it to meet the specific needs of their programmes.

#### **Adapting OM: The Accountability in Tanzania (AcT) Programme**

Funded by the UK's Department for International Development, and managed by KPMG, the £31 million Accountability in Tanzania (AcT) programme<sup>3</sup> provides one useful example of how OM methodologies can be applied creatively to facilitate flexible, impact-driven development programming. AcT provides flexible grant funding to 26 civil society organization (CSOs) working to improve accountability of government in Tanzania. The programme has been recognized for its pioneering application of outcome mapping to support and critically evaluate its grantees.<sup>4</sup>

One of AcT's primary strengths has been its approach to partnership – the cornerstone of OM – whereby it provides grants to promising CSOs to support their strategic planning, rather than to support a specific project. AcT seeks to support and challenge its partners to think through the results they want to achieve, the strategies they will use to achieve those results, and the capacities they need as an organisation to implement those

**In order to facilitate its innovative approach to grant-making, AcT has adapted outcome mapping to meet its needs in a variety of ways. This paper explores three of those adaptations:**

1. Firstly, AcT developed new results measurement indicators that allowed it to merge its CSO-level OM data with the programme's overall logframe in order to demonstrate, from top to bottom, how change actually happens.<sup>5</sup>
2. Secondly, AcT developed a database through which to manage its OM results. Database analysis has allowed AcT to develop a clearer view of the results pathways for the programme, report results easily to DFID, and develop much more precise progress markers to facilitate further learning.
3. And lastly, OM has provided an effective basis for structuring and monitoring AcT's partnerships with CSOs – in order to gauge the extent to which AcT support is helping to achieve a strengthened civil society in Tanzania.

strategies, based on their experience and knowledge. This flexible funding style is quite different from many grant programmes, in that it moves beyond the traditional focus on inputs and outputs or ring-fenced projects that are relatively easy to quantify and report on, but which don't necessarily contribute to change being sustained beyond the life of project inputs.

In order to facilitate its innovative approach to grant-making, AcT has adapted outcome mapping to meet its needs in a variety of ways. This paper explores three of those adaptations.

<sup>3</sup> AcT is a £31 million governance programme funded mainly by DFID and managed by KPMG International Development Advisory Services, Africa. The programme is to run in Tanzania from 2009 to 2015, and includes ring-fenced finance (partly provided by DANIDA) for governance and accountability issues linked to environment and climate change.

<sup>4</sup> MacDonald, Neil and Vogel, Isabel. *Accountability in Tanzania – Mid-Term Review*, December 2012

<sup>5</sup> Dyer, Kate. *Making 'Evidence' the Plural of 'Anecdote'*, Kate Dyer. *OM ideas* No. 6, November 2012 (p. 2)

## 1. Merging OM and Logframes

When the AcT programme first took up outcome mapping, it encouraged its partners to use OM as a strategic planning and monitoring tool in the field, while AcT continued to report on its programme-wide results to DFID through a conventional log-frame. OM was seen solely as a tool that AcT partner organizations could use to understand changes in the attitude and behavior of governance stakeholders, as well as to strengthen their own strategic thinking, monitoring and learning systems.

The AcT team recognized that the changes in stakeholder behaviour observed by its CSO partners actually underpinned the achievement of all of the programme's desired results – from basic outputs to purpose and goal – and were demonstrating how change happens. However, as the team began to systematically receive outcome journals from its partners, it realised that the log-frame indicators it was originally working with to measure the programme's overall progress were unable to capture the depth and breadth of results – many of them unanticipated – that were reported in the journals. The log-frame was useful for reporting clear, major steps – such as legislation being passed – however was not nuanced enough to capture smaller steps – such as meaningful engagement between government officials and civil society – which formed the daily stepping stones toward achievement of the higher level results.

The response to this was to re-work AcT's theory of change along with its progress indicators, so that the most worthwhile developments and behavior change anecdotes – i.e. steps on the path to increased government accountability – could be captured. Through this process, the AcT team began to better understand how OM could be used in conjunction with a log-frame to capture the benefits of both approaches: clarity and discipline imposed by the log-frame, and

flexibility and strategic learning through outcome mapping. AcT now uses a set of programme-level log-frame indicators derived from its partners' OM results, based on behavior changes amongst their common boundary partners.

By merging OM and conventional indicators in the AcT programme's revised log-frame, the programme management team is in a strong position 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."<sup>6</sup> The next challenge was to find a way to systematically record information and anecdotes against these new, more appropriate indicators in a way that allowed them to be seen as part of a broader picture.

## 2. Recording results to analyse the big picture

One challenge noted by many users of OM is that the system produces an enormous amount of anecdotal information that can be difficult to manage. One major innovation of the AcT programme's use of OM has been its ability to systematically track and analyse behavior changes from across all of its CSO partners. This has produced rigorous qualitative evidence that can be quantified, reported to donors, and compared across projects.

AcT has done this by developing a database that allows the team to organize diverse results from its various partners. When AcT receives reports from its CSO partners, it codes the various examples of progress in the report according to a relevant AcT programme-level indicator and puts this into the database. Each example is also coded according to the CSO from which it came and a sector, such as health, environment or education. When it comes time to report to DFID, this database can easily produce a list of relevant examples from CSOs that apply to each AcT programme indicator. So, for each indicator, DFID receives a number (how many

instances of progress have been achieved for that particular indicator) and a comprehensive list of short qualitative stories explaining the nature of each progress point. For example, a report to DFID might state that three instances of progress have happened under Outcome 1 – 'Elected national representatives taking action at national level' – that can all be tracked back to action taken by partner CSOs, with relevant qualitative explanations, e.g.:

- A shadow budget produced by the opposition party has pressured the government to adopt better measures to address the problem of students who join secondary schools without reading and writing skills.
- The Labour Minister told a parliamentary session that work on a new pension policy was underway, with benefits expected the next year;
- Government was rehabilitating roads in villages where citizens had questioned officials about the disappearance of cotton proceeds from their district.

AcT is also able to further disaggregate these higher-level outcomes according to three steps: immediate outcome (such as a commitment in a speech), intermediate outcome (such as legislation that has reached the drafting process), and final outcome (such as legislation being passed). By the time a result reaches a "final outcome" it is possible to demonstrate a complex results chain, tracked through AcT's Programme Log-frame indicators, but using evidence from outcome mapping.

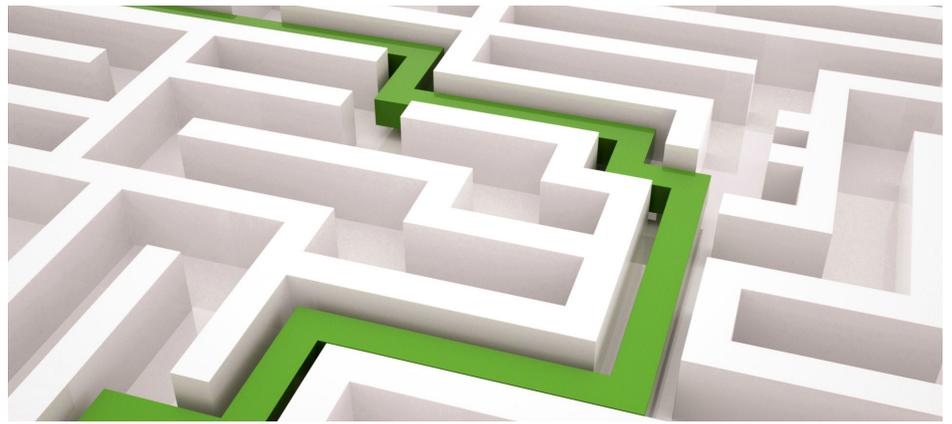
As evidence builds up from various partners alongside various indicators, it moves beyond one-off qualitative anecdotes and begins to act as more rigorous quantitative evidence that reveals the scope and scale of what AcT partners are collectively achieving. In-depth analysis of database reports has revealed some interesting insights and questions:

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed explanation of how AcT arrived at its new set of indicators and revised theory of change, see: Dyer, Kate. *Making 'Evidence' the Plural of Anecdote*, Kate Dyer. OM ideas No. 6, November 2012

- There is far more work going on at the local than national level, belying the stereotype that governance and accountability work in Tanzania is Dar-es-Salaam focused. While this is common knowledge now, the AcT programme was one of the first to document the shift away from a national focus<sup>7</sup>
- Advocacy organizations spend more of their time and resources raising awareness, capacity building and conducting research in the field, as opposed to trying to directly influence national level policy – contrary to the assumptions of some donors
- The numbers reached through information dissemination are remarkably high – raising the question of whether reinforcement of messages is effective or a saturation point has been reached. Using outcome journals more rigorously may even allow the programme to back-track to understand the types of information dissemination that stimulate action, and therefore the types of funding and strategies that can be most effective.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. What is the role and value of the AcT programme in making change happen?

As the AcT management team engaged further with outcome mapping, they realized that OM could also serve as a sound basis for a tool through which AcT could plan for, monitor and improve its partnership with CSOs. In AcT's case, each of its CSO grantees could be seen as a boundary partner – just like the partners the CSOs work with in the field. And just as CSOs measure behavior changes amongst their boundary partners with OM, so AcT could use OM to measure changes in the 'behavior', or rather the effectiveness, of its grantees. Measuring this progress would also allow AcT to show how the programme is strengthening civil society in Tanzania – one of the programme's desired outcomes.



The process of developing this tool – which AcT calls 'Progress Markers for Partners' (PMP) – was organic and iterative. Drawing on their grant management and civil society strengthening experience, the AcT management team identified a series of characteristics that they believed would define an organization that was effective in working in the complex world of citizen, civil society and government relations. PMPs cover various areas such as 'learning' (whether organizations took a positive approach to learning and used it to improve their own programming), 'political economy' (whether organizations could effectively respond to shifting political influences), and 'financial management' (whether organizations effectively manage robust internal financial systems).

Within each characteristic, the team assigned descriptions for three classic OM progress marker categories: 'expect to see', 'like to see' and 'love to see'. These descriptions were put into a spreadsheet for each AcT partner. Whenever one of the management team interacted with that partner in a way that demonstrated one of these kinds of behavior, it was recorded in the relevant square of the spreadsheet with a date. These interactions could be anything from formal discussion meetings to observations made at public meetings to posts on online discussion forums.

#### **As the evidence built up, it demonstrated the following particularly valuable notes:**

- The PMP provides more detailed and comprehensive insight into a partner's performance than through formal, periodic meetings and reports
- It enables oversight of the strengths and weaknesses of partners collectively across the portfolio
- It helps to maintain institutional memory, such that if a staff member had to take over a relationship with a certain grantee mid-way through the grant, it provided instant and detailed insight into how that partner had performed over time.
- And finally, a systematic use of PMPs allows the AcT management team to assess and report on the progress of its partners as a group to DFID.

With partners, the PMPs are shared early on in the relationship and form a good introduction to the dimensions of partnership with the AcT programme. AcT has also found it helpful to share PMP observations with partners to open a discussion on their progress and potential for improvement – something that AcT partners seem very willing to do. Partners' feedback on the tool has been overwhelmingly positive: one international NGO wanted to borrow and adapt the tool for its own partners, while smaller start-up NGOs have reported that the wording for the PMP categories helped them see what they could develop into as an organization in the future.

<sup>7</sup> *Accountability in Tanzania – Annual Review, December 2012.*

<sup>8</sup> *Dyer, Kate. Making 'Evidence' the Plural of 'Anecdote', Kate Dyer. OM ideas No. 6, November 2012*

PMPs have worked very well for AcT, but the approach has not been smooth sailing – a challenge has been maintaining the objectivity of AcT management team observations, because AcT team members work so closely with their grantee partners. However, this is mitigated by making observations over time, a rigorous process of internal moderating, and external reviews.

Reviews of the AcT programme by ODI have found that AcT's partnership approach and use of Outcome Mapping

is helping its CSO grantees to become more strategic and effective in their work:

“In the two CSOs who have been using OM for the longest there is clear evidence that information from monitoring is leading to a greater understanding of change processes and feeding back into planning (or re-planning) through learning spaces. For example, through the outcome journals, [one CSO] noticed that the media is having a much stronger effect than other strategies on influencing

the Forest and Beekeeping Division to respond to illegal activities – so much so that government officials have told them that they feel under pressure. This has led them to adapt their strategies to work more with media. Likewise, [another CSO] found through the journals that they weren't seeing community leaders responding to increasing demands from citizens as they expected. They decided to alter their strategy and introduce a new pilot activity to support community leaders directly.”<sup>9</sup>

## Lessons from the use of OM on the AcT programme

### 1. In order to demonstrate a programme's worth, you need the right indicators: flexibility is key

Getting the right indicators in place requires clarity in planning, and inevitably an iterative learning process to see what works. There must also be a balance between rigorous reporting accountability and the flexibility to capitalize on or mitigate unintended outcomes. In this way, meanders become opportunities rather than losses. Finding the right indicators also requires mutual understanding and open discussion amongst donors, implementers and external reviewers.

It also helps if indicators and results are comparable across a variety of organizations. This last part can be difficult because every programme is unique – on AcT, for example, various CSOs working in governance are making progress towards the same goal on very different paths. But AcT has found that it can cluster the steps by which change happens, as change in the governance environment often happens through meaningful engagement with common boundary partners. AcT's indicators are therefore both flexible and generalised enough to capture and compare those results.

### 2. It takes significant time and energy to get the full value out of OM; adaptation is key

OM was initially thought of as something that could be outsourced from the AcT programme – with partner organizations attending a single training programme on it in the early days of their partnership and using the tool thereafter. However with time and sufficient engagement, it has emerged that OM is a tool that is best developed and adapted in a variety of different ways. This is clear in the ways it has been used by the AcT programme – by merging OM and conventional indicators in the AcT programme's revised log-frame, the programme management team is in a strong position 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.” It has enabled the development of a tool that effectively guides and measures the usefulness of the AcT's engagement with its partner organizations, and has demonstrated the value of an organic, iterative approach to programme design and management. In the words of AcT Programme Manager, Kate Dyer, “Outcome mapping is not for the faint hearted. It takes a lot of investment of time and energy to get the full value out of it.”

## Conclusion

This paper is a brief overview of a set of issues that the AcT programme and its partners are reflecting on on an ongoing basis. Its fundamental lesson is that a balance between rigour and flexibility in outcome measurement and reporting is crucial to understanding whether an initiative is working or not. It demonstrates this through the example of the AcT programme, which shows that OM is a tool that can be used in a variety of adaptations to allow quantitative measurement of results, without losing the flexibility of the underlying partnership approach that is so fundamental to achievement of results.

Through the AcT example, this paper also demonstrates that donors have a key part to play in encouraging and allowing flexibility in programming – for example allowing programmes to go through the requisite trial and error to test a theory of change, and promoting systematic learning among recipients of donor funding to allow them to find the model that best works for them, and therefore by extension furthers the goals of the programme.

<sup>9</sup> Hearn, Simon. “Strengthening civil society in Tanzania: Is Outcome Mapping helping the AcT programme and its partners influence change?” ODI, June 2012.

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