

QUALITATIVE PARTNER BASELINE: REFLECTIONS ON PROVISION OF OUTCOME MAPPING SUPPORT TO ACT PARTNERS, 2010.

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This short document provides a baseline of the state of development of AcT Partners when they first started receiving systematic support from the AcT Planning Mentor. It provides reflections on what outcome mapping (OM) has to offer the organisations, the challenges for them in taking it on, and in time, the opportunity to look back and observe any progress made. In what follows, reference to particular organisations has been deliberately avoided; however, the lessons recorded here derive from work with TNRF, TFCG, Women's Dignity, Restless Development, Oxfam, Sikika, REPOA and Hakielimu.

BASELINE AND STARTING POINT

OM is new to Tanzania. With the exception of MDF, whose engagement is with training organisations to use OM, there don't appear to be other organisations or programmes using it here. It seems many partners were receptive to the idea of receiving support in OM from AcT, as they perceived it to be a means of strengthening their M&E. Most were working with a results based management systems, based broadly on a log-frame or an adaptation of it, and many had received feedback from donors that they needed to be better about results reporting and documentation. Most had very little idea what working with OM would entail, and many at the start of the process tended to think that their challenges with M&E would be addressed by the employment of an M&E officer, whose role would mainly be to keep track of progress against the indicators identified in their organisational log-frame.

Some weaknesses were noted in the strategic planning model used by a few of the partners. Whilst most organisations did do some form of description of the policy context, there was very little analysis of what actually makes change happen - or the broader political economy. One partner shared a draft of their strategic plan with the 'situational analysis' to be drafted at a later date - and the content of the plan indeed demonstrated very little engagement with the actual context of the sector and its dynamics; rather the focus was on the outputs that the organisation felt it would contribute to the overall mix.

The strategic planning approach adopted by at least two partners seemed to actively avoid consideration of the effectiveness of or usefulness of the work carried out. This was justified in terms of 'only putting into the plan what the organisation could be held accountable for', but goes alongside a 'managing by inputs' approach to development, with little consideration given higher level results or impact. Some workshop participants were very assertive that this wasn't their responsibility - a kind of thinking that makes it hard to promote realistic reflection on strategy. For example, whether there is any evidence that policy briefs are effective in influencing policy makers, and if so, which ones, under which circumstances.

All organisations have at least some staff well versed in the use of the log-frame, and hence in 'aid administration' approaches. They are used to setting targets in a way which might be appropriate for service-delivery activities (eg awareness raising meetings in X number of villages by given date), with the



numbers chosen at worst arbitrarily, or in response to donor pressure ('donors want to see us having more coverage') and at best with a sharp eye for what is feasible with the time and resources available. Some staff strongest in this way of working, found the opportunity to dream ('what would you really love to see in the behaviour and attitude of so and so..?') quite hard to conceptualise. The idea of identifying 'love to see' progress markers in the full knowledge that they might not be achieved, but might be used as a stimulus to reflection on whether and how the programme might be adjusted during implementation to achieve the best possible outcomes, was quite uncomfortable for them.

There was also a sense that the results achieved by an organisation were almost stand alone, and independent of an organisation's internal state of development. To the extent that internal organisational development was considered, it was documented terms of 'need to recruit and retain qualified staff', without saying qualified to do what. This tends to promote a fairly static view of an organisation – one set up to deliver certain outputs, and which sees its needs as being continuing to deliver the same outputs. One of the revelations for them of OM, has been the explicit link between identification of desired results in terms of attitude and behaviour change of partners, thinking about what strategies are required to bring about those changes, and then what is required within the organisation to be able to carry out those strategies efficiently, effectively and to maintain a position 'ahead of the game'.

NATURE OF SUPPORT PROVIDED:

This has largely been in the form of start up meetings with key staff to explain OM and discuss organisational requirements and constraints, followed by a one or more workshop-style sessions, followed by feedback and finalisation of the progress markers which was done either electronically or through face to face meetings with key staff.

There have been a variety of formats for the workshop-style meetings: 2 two-day workshops with a week in between, or an organisation to do 'homework'; 3 half day workshops either morning only or afternoon only, with the other half day for homework; where staff numbers involved have been only 2-3 people, the format has been more in the style of informal meetings than a workshop. Only one workshop has been held with a partner's partners – that for Oxfam in Shinyanga, about which there is a separate file note.

No clear pattern has emerged as to what works best. What is important is organisational willingness to commit to the process – with some of the weaker partners it has appeared that the commitment is only there for the actual period of the workshop, with significantly less generated out of work carried out back at the office. On the other hand, where there has been organisational commitment, the second workshop has been very fruitful, as staff have had the opportunity to digest some of the material before pushing on to further stages of the OM process.

In all cases, the partner organisation has been asked to take responsibility for recording of the workshop deliberations, in the effort to promote their ownership of the work, rather than it appearing to be an AcT workshop which AcT will facilitate and bring back to them the documented findings and discussions. Some organisations have produced excellent and informative reports, whereas for others it has been much more

of a record of ‘work in progress’ enabling subsequent support to be very closely tailored to what emerges as being areas of understanding that need to be strengthened.

WHAT OM HAS ACHIEVED:

For organisations that have been prepared to run with the idea of OM, the benefits have been clear – and are reflected in getting away from linear results-based ways of thinking, into a more critical and informed way of thinking about change, including the broader political economy and culture. Accepting that change isn’t linear was a revelation to those with a professional background in ‘aid administration’. Some individuals commented that progress markers enabled a more realistic approach to monitoring change than conventional indicators –and hence what kinds of change what ‘counts’ as a result.

The flexibility to think through afresh what brings about change was valuable in some cases in shifting the balance between local and expatriate staff – with local knowledge of culture, language and political economy being clearly more useful in terms of identifying progress markers than some kinds of ‘international’ expertise. This was particularly successful where the Tanzanians had a real personal commitment to bringing about change, as opposed to an approach which was more limited to ensuring accountability for the use of donor funds (important as that is) and hence only interested in results to output level only.

The way OM makes an explicit connection between results in the external environment, strategies carried out and internal organisation development, promoted clear and specific thinking about organisational development priorities. Rather than a general sense that ‘we need a communications officer’, for example, organisations started to reflect more critically on the capacities they had which were enabling effective implementation of strategies, and conversely in which areas they were weak *in a way which was holding back effective implementation of particular strategies, and hence achievement of results.*

There is great interest (too early yet to see how it will play out in practice) in the use of the different journals. Officers at all levels of partner organisations can see their value in simplifying reporting processes (avoiding the need for long narrative/descriptive reports) and standardising across officers working in different places at different times. Quite what the administrative demand is in terms of pulling together the findings from the different journals for use at quarterly and annual meetings it remains to be seen.

ON-GOING CHALLENGES FOR OM:

The initial challenge of OM is to get organisations past the implicit sense of they have to take on OM as a condition for accessing AcT funding. Some such organisations expressed some resistance to the new terminologies involved, seeing them only as the latest donor fashion, rather than something that has intrinsic merit. Even for those who do take on board the concepts, the language of expect to, like to see, love to see is very confusing in Kiswahili. A note on language and translation is being prepared – as the issue was raised in an acute form in a workshop in Shinyanga. It is possible that signs or symbols to complement words may help – especially to convey the idea of ‘expect to see’, ‘like to see’ and ‘love to see’.

For all partners, as for AcT itself, it is not possible yet to use OM as a stand alone monitoring tool. Enabling organisations to make the connection between OM and log-frame approaches has been done through the

intermediary step of creating logic-models. This appears to be quite successful, not least as it forces organisations to think beyond the level of output to the kinds of changes that are ultimately being sought.

There is also great potential to use OM to help strengthen the link between narrative and financial reporting, especially at the level of reflecting on and reporting on strategies – what is working well, and why, and linking this to cost and cost effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

AcT has only systematically been applying OM to supporting strategic planning work with partners since May 2010, but already significant progress has been made – giving confidence that the work is at the forefront of development thinking – through the application of OM to governance work, and in our initiatives to combine OM with more conventional log-frame approaches. Critical challenges during 2011 will be to continue to support organisations to use the journals they have designed for their intrinsic value to the organisations concerned, and not simply as a reporting mechanism to AcT. We need to develop more experience in working with organisations to identify progress markers with their own boundary partners – including ordinary citizens, village committees, local government officials and so on. We need to ensure that the tools which work well for partner organisations themselves (as already trialled and represented in the AcT OM Manual), are adapted and made equally relevant to those with different levels of exposure to aid programming, and different concepts of governance and accountability.

The Accountability in Tanzania Programme (AcT) is an initiative funded by UKaid from the Department of International Development. AcT seeks to work with civil society to strengthen their capacity to demand the delivery of quality services and efficient and accountable management of public resources.

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