

# **Learning to adapt & adapting to learn**

## **Using elements of outcome mapping in the 'Resilient Adolescents in the Syria Crisis' programme**

**Syria Adolescents Programme**

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## Word of thanks

As authors, we would like to thank everyone who participated during the numerous planning, monitoring and evaluation activities of the SAP programme. Without their input and critical reflections this paper could not have been realised.



**Abstract**

This learning paper highlights how elements of outcome mapping were used by Save the Children Sweden in a project (2018-2020) that supports adolescents, affected by the Syria crisis, to become more resilient. The paper first outlines how the spheres of influence framework has been applied to develop an actor focused theory of change. It then describes how progress markers, as an alternative to SMART indicators, were formulated to monitor the programme’s results. The paper also outlines how long lists of progress markers were categorised in a more realistic and practical results framework. The paper then continues to elaborate how outcome journals, qualitative data analysis techniques and regular review meetings and reflection workshops were utilised for data collection, for collective learning among programme stakeholders and for informing planning and programme adjustment. Various practical guidelines and tips on how to implement elements of outcome mapping are provided. The final part of the paper explores to what extent outcome mapping was able to foster several key enablers of adaptive programme management and highlights some of the challenges that programme stakeholders faced. Practical recommendations towards the use of outcome mapping in future programmes are also proposed.

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## Introduction

This learning paper describes how elements of outcome mapping were used by Save the Children Sweden to strengthen adaptive programming in a project (2018-2020) that supports adolescents, living in a post conflict context, to become more resilient.

Drawing from the practical experiences of the Resilient Adolescents in the Syria Crisis' programme (SAP), a 3-year regional project implemented by Save the Children Lebanon and Syria, the paper provides practical guidance, tools and tips that can inform other programmes who may want to use elements of outcome mapping or who are on the look-out for planning, monitoring and evaluation approaches that can enhance adaptive programming.

The paper is structured as follows. After a short outline of the outcome mapping methodology, the paper first outlines how the spheres of influence framework can be used to develop an actor focused theory of change. It also describes how progress markers offer a practical alternative to SMART indicators for monitoring change in behaviour of a programme's target groups (both in the sphere of influence and interest). The paper also highlights how long lists of progress markers can be categorised in a more realistic and practical results framework. The paper then elaborates how the use of outcome journals, qualitative data analysis techniques and regular review meetings and reflection workshops provide a conducive basis for data collection, for collective learning and for informing planning and programme adjustment. The final part of the paper explores to what extent outcome mapping was able to foster various key enablers of adaptive programme management in the SAP programme and highlights some of the challenges that programme stakeholders faced. Some practical recommendations towards the use of outcome mapping in future programmes are also provided.

This paper builds upon a case study of the same project that was published in the SAGE Handbook of Participatory Research and Enquiry and which describes how outcome mapping facilitated the participation of programme stakeholders in planning, monitoring and evaluation of the SAP programme (Van Ongevalle et al. 2021-Forthcoming).

## Outcome Mapping in a nutshell

Outcome mapping<sup>1</sup> is a method specifically designed for planning, monitoring and evaluating projects that aim to achieve complex social change (Earl & al. 2001, Earl & Carden, 2002). The focus of Outcome mapping is on behavioural changes of individuals, groups and organisations. The methodology assumes that social change, essentially involves what people or organisations do and the way they interact with others and their environment. Therefore, Outcome Mapping focuses primarily on mapping and monitoring changes in the behaviour, relationships and actions of those people, groups or organisations that a project is trying to support or influence, either directly or indirectly. Outcome Mapping assumes that the sustainable and long-term impact on a particular target group is the result of the interaction of various actors and factors. The method therefore maps out changes (outcomes) in people and organisations that fall within the sphere of influence of a project. On the basis of this, it is then possible not only to learn about the contribution of the project or of other actors or factors, but also to check whether the changes observed are in line with the ultimate aim or vision of the project.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information and case examples of outcome mapping visit the outcome mapping learning community at: [www.outcomemapping.ca](http://www.outcomemapping.ca)

## Rationale for using outcome mapping

Save the Children implemented the Swedish Government funded Syria Adolescent Programme (SAP) (2018-2020) in response to the humanitarian crisis due to war in Syria. SAP was financed through Swedish development assistance in support of adolescents and their care givers in the Middle East Region, namely in Lebanon and Syria. Save the children decided to use outcome mapping as a method for planning, monitoring and evaluation for the following three main reasons:

- 1) *To promote results that can be sustained after the project:* By using outcome mapping, the SAP programme intended to design its intervention in such a way that programme activities would not only focus on direct service delivery to the adolescents and caregivers but also influence and support local actors so they can continue to provide such services after the end of the programme.
- 2) *To promote participation of local actors:* Active involvement of local stakeholders in programme design, monitoring and evaluation is an important principle within outcome mapping. Such participatory approach is also institutionalized by Save the Children as good practice within its programmes intending to improve outcomes for adolescents.
- 3) *To promote adaptive programming:* The particular focus of outcome mapping on iterative learning and programming cycles (allowing programmes to learn and to apply the learning during implementation) was seen as an important principle that could foster adaptive programming. Hence, it was decided to use outcome mapping as an integrated planning, monitoring and evaluation approach that was considered flexible, solution-oriented and allowing for regular programme review and adaptation in a participatory manner.

## Using outcome mapping to design the SAP programme in an actor focused way

This section outlines how elements of outcome mapping were used to design the SAP programme in an actor focused way with active participation from both Save the Children field staff and implementing partners. In the SAP programme, the implementing partners are local NGOs and community based organisations who already play an important role in working with other community actors in order to support adolescents and care givers in the intervention areas (see box 1).

### **Box 1: Putting local actors more strongly in the steering seat of the programme.**

The active participation of the implementing partners was a direct result from the use of outcome mapping and represented a major shift in Save the Children's programme design practice. As a result, instead of working directly with adolescents and the care givers, Save the Children supports its implementing partners who in turn work with the adolescents and care givers and other actors in the local community. The specific focus on intermediate local actors instead of the final beneficiaries is an important feature of the outcome mapping method. This does not mean that outcome mapping is not interested in the change at the level of the final beneficiaries or their active participation in the programme. Their participation in monitoring and evaluation is actually promoted through the actions by the intermediate actors (boundary partners) who are supported by Save the Children.

## Step 1: understanding the context

A good knowledge and understanding of the local context are important prerequisites for any outcome mapping process. Hence, a first step involved consultations with adolescents, caregivers and community stakeholders, such as representatives from local organizations. The main objective of the consultations was to identify adolescents' aspirations and priorities, their assets and key barriers, as well as the solutions that they perceive for overcoming their challenges and fulfilling their aspirations. Additionally, the consultations aimed to identify the attitudes and perceptions of caregivers and community stakeholders towards adolescents and the situations they face. These consultations helped to develop a more in-depth understanding of the local context and its key actors. Such understanding, while always incomplete and partial, is an important prerequisite before kick-starting an outcome mapping process.

## Step 2: Using the spheres of influence framework.

During a second step in the design phase of the SAP programme, staff from Save the Children together with its implementing partners clarified the programme's theory of change in an actor focused way. This was done during the first half of a three day programme design workshop, by means of outcome mapping's sphere of influence framework (see fig. 1) and drawing upon the findings from step 1 (stakeholder consultations) that were discussed at the start of the design workshop.

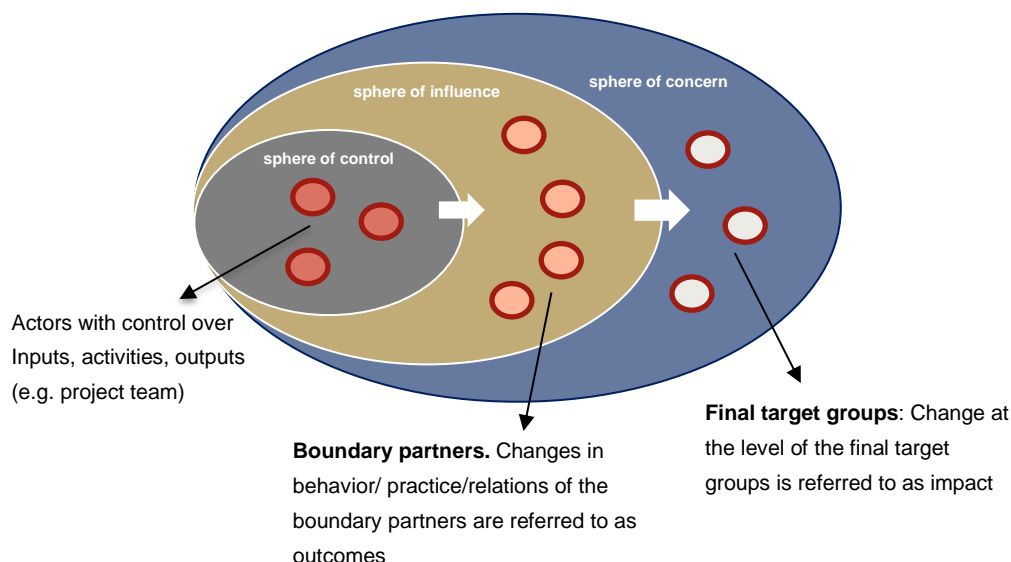


Fig. 1. Spheres of influence framework (based on [www.outcomemapping.ca](http://www.outcomemapping.ca))

The spheres of influence tool consists of three concentric spheres (sphere of control, sphere of influence and sphere of concern) that are used to map the programme's actors according to how they influence each other as they contribute towards the overall vision of the programme. It provides a practical framework that helps programmes to clarify which actors a programme can influence or support directly or indirectly in order to contribute towards durable positive change in the life of the final target groups. It does recognise that a development programme cannot control change and that its influence is limited. It also recognises that development problems such as poverty, discrimination, exclusion, conflict are complex and influenced by many different actors beyond the control of any development programme (see box 2). Hence the framework

does not assume a linear and predictable link between specific outputs (e.g. lifeskills training) and resulting outcomes (change in behaviour of adolescents). Instead it recognizes that certain activities may at best contribute to multiple outcomes in different actors, while realizing that any outcome will also be influenced by many other factors and actors beyond the control or even knowledge of the programme.

**Box 2: Dealing with complex change through the spheres of influence framework.**

The spheres of influence framework departs from two important insights related to programmes that seek to tackle complex development problems such as poverty, exclusion, discrimination, conflict, ....

- 1) **Actors make change happen.** Development problems faced by actors in the sphere of concern are structural in nature and the structures, systems and institutions that sustain these problems will usually not change by themselves. It takes actors to engage with these structures, systems and institutions in order to change them. In essence thus, developmental change is about changing individual and collective behaviour.
- 2) **Development problems are complex.** They are also referred to as 'wicked' problems. This means that they have multiple links with various dimensions (e.g. socio-economic, political, environmental, ...). They involve multiple actors from all spheres of life (state, market, civil society, community, religious groups, ...). Programmes will need to be built around a multiplicity of actors, and these actors may hold different understandings of the programme's objectives (e.g. what is a solution to some may be seen as a problem to others), how to achieve these, and what the roles and responsibilities are of each of these actors. Different power relations will also be at play between the different actors.

Hence, a theory of change approach will only be relevant to the extent that it helps a programme to deal with this complexity and to analyse and provide information about the 'messy' day-to-day social interactions between different programme stakeholders and to facilitate and support these interactions (Bossyns et al., 2016). The spheres of influence framework does this by recognising that a programme's sphere of control is limited. Rather than assuming that the world out there can be 'engineered' (as assumed when using a logical framework), the spheres of influence model heralds the idea that actually, a lot 'out there' is not under the control of your organisation or intervention (Alonso et al. 2021).

Figure 2 below illustrates the actor focussed theory of change of the SAP programme that emerged from the programme design workshop.

- **The sphere of control** contains the programme actors who have considerable control over the programme's inputs, activities and outputs. For the SAP programme, these are the different Save the Children offices. Save the Children's implementing partners are partly positioned in the sphere of control as they also have an important say in the type of activities that are implemented.
- **The sphere of influence** contains the boundary partners of the SAP programme. These are the actors who can play a key role in contributing towards a sustained positive change for the final target groups in the sphere of concern. The boundary partners are supported or influenced directly by the actors in the sphere of control. The implementing partners are partly positioned in the sphere of influence because they are also considered to be boundary partners of Save the Children.
- **The sphere of concern** comprises the final target groups of the SAP programme. These are the adolescents and their care givers. Usually, actors from the sphere of control only have an indirect influence on the final target groups. However, during the design of SAP it was considered likely that Save the Children and the implementing partners would

also implement activities directly targeting the final target groups. It was agreed that such activities should involve as much as possible the boundary partners so they would not be bypassed but instead would develop their own capacity as they engage in the process.

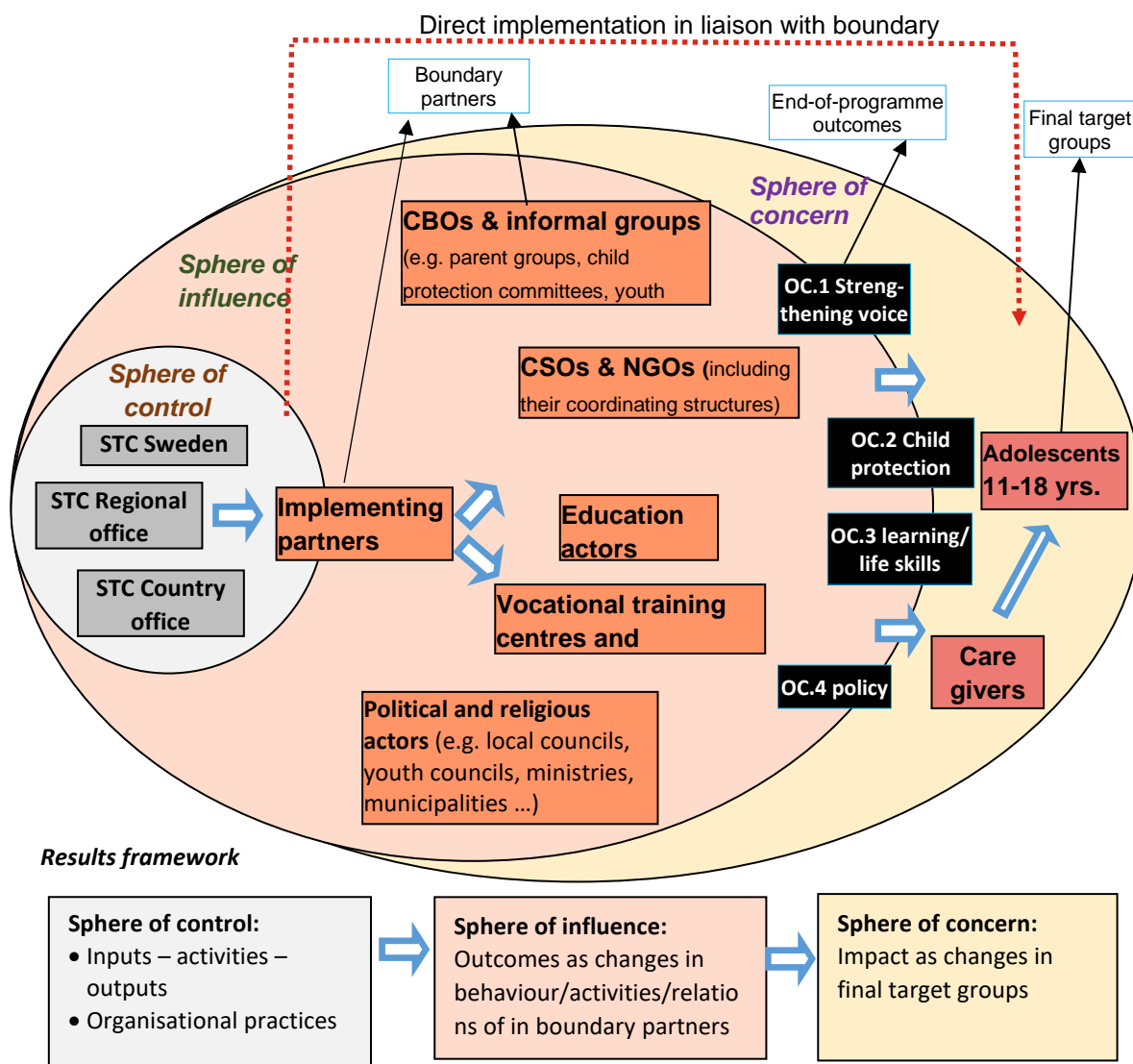


Fig. 2. Simplified version of the SAP program's actor focussed theory of change





### Box 3: Toolkit<sup>2</sup> – spheres of influence

An actor mapping according to the spheres of influence can be useful at any stage in the project cycle e.g. at the planning stage to inform project design, or during project implementation when you want to learn about the project’s effects.



Make a list of the people or organisations that you consider to be stakeholders within your project. By “stakeholders” is understood those individuals, groups, organisations or institutions, that you consider having a vested interest in the project.

Place the final beneficiaries (final or indirect target groups) of the project in the sphere of concern.

Place the actors whom the project will support or influence directly and who play a key role in contributing towards positive change for the final beneficiaries within the sphere of influence. These actors are the project’s boundary partners

Place the actors who have control over the project activities within the sphere of control.

The stakeholders who do not fit in any sphere are possibly strategic stakeholders. These are actors who have an interest in the project, but the project is not seeking to influence them nor to monitor them. You can place the strategic stakeholders outside the spheres.

#### Tips!

Some actors can appear in different spheres at the same time.

This mapping is to be done in a participatory way. Where possible you can involve project stakeholders in the exercise.

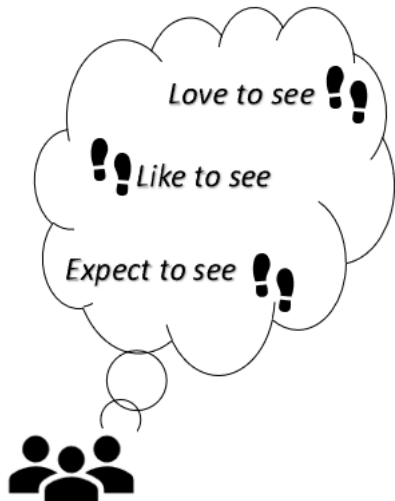
When identifying the intermediate actors in the sphere of influence, select the actors that are most strategic for the project, i.e. actors that can take on a significant multiplier or leverage role and whom the project team can support or influence directly.

The spheres of influence map is not static. It should be reviewed and adapted during the project because of changes in the context, changes in the situation of certain actors or because of new insights gained during the project.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Civil Society in Development (CISU) (2020) <https://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/global-citizenship-education-how-to-measure-and-improve-the-impact>



### Step 3: Formulating progress markers



The third step involved the development of progress markers for each boundary partner in the programme’s sphere of influence. Progress markers describe the (observable) changes in practice or behavior that the project hopes to influence within its boundary partners. Progress markers describe the envisaged change process of the boundary partners moving from initial more easy to achieve changes (expect to see progress markers) to deeper changes that may take more time to materialize (like to see progress markers) as well as the ideal behavior that would demonstrate that the boundary partners is well on its way to contribute optimally to the project’s vision (love to see progress markers). Box 4 illustrates a set of progress markers that was developed during the programme design workshop for local NGOs/CSOs.

The project cannot control the achievement of the progress markers. It can only try its best

to support or influence the boundary partners to achieve them. At the same time the progress markers represent outcomes that contribute directly to the achievement of the impact goal (change at the level of the final target groups). Hence, they constitute important development results that need to be monitored in order to learn about the project’s progress and its contribution towards sustained positive change.

Progress markers are Measurable, Attainable and Realistic but they differ from SMART indicators by the fact that they are not necessarily timed, nor do they require pre-specified targets. Knowing that the actual change is beyond the control of the programme and often unpredictable, the expected change as set out by the progress markers can turn out differently in reality. Therefore, the specific change will only become clear after it has happened. Hence progress markers may also be adjusted during the monitoring cycles or new progress markers may emerge.

#### Box 4: Progress markers for local NGOs/CSOs

##### **Expect to see**

- Participate in capacity strengthening and awareness raising activities organised by the project regarding adolescent engagement approaches.
- Engage with and listen to the views of adolescent girls and boys from different parts of the community (e.g. come up with new approaches to effectively reach youth)

##### **Like to see**

- Prioritise programmes for/with adolescents
- Coordinate with other actors

##### **Love to see**

- Act Implement activities to influence policy and decision making within local governance structures



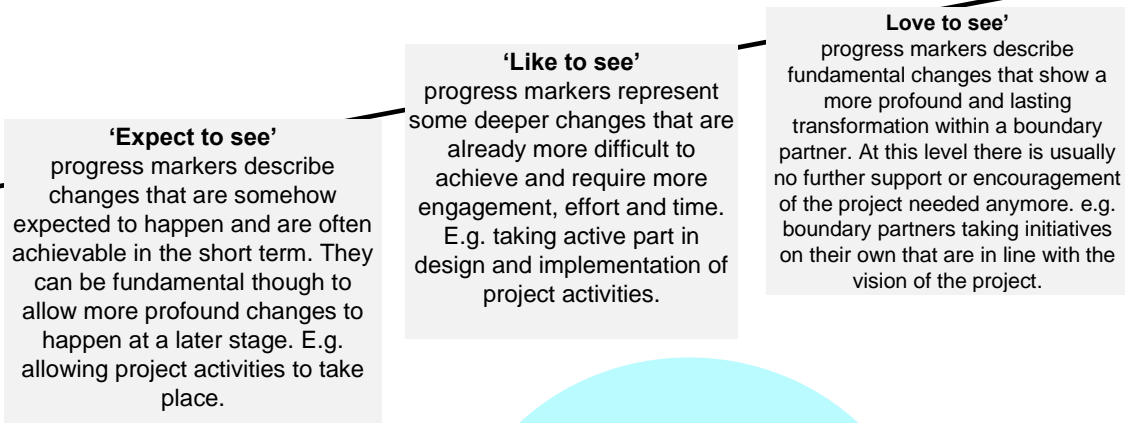
Participants at the programme design workshop also chose to develop progress markers for the care givers and the adolescents in the programme’s sphere of concern. This is not standard practice in outcome mapping where the desired change at the level of the final target groups is commonly described in the programme’s vision statement. However, it was judged that formulating progress markers for the final beneficiaries would help the programme to track change at impact level. At the same time, in line with the principle of working towards sustainable results, it was emphasised during the workshop that monitoring at the level of the final target groups should not take priority over monitoring change at the level of the boundary partners. This was considered important to avoid a situation where programme teams would revert to direct service delivery instead of strengthening local actors to deliver those services. This turned out to be a point of attention throughout the SAP project.



### Box 5: Toolkit<sup>3</sup> – progress markers



Progress markers describe the (observable) changes in behavior, practice or relationships of a programme’s boundary partners. They are clustered in three categories: ‘expect to see’, ‘like to see’ and ‘love to see’ progress markers.



#### Tips

Progress markers do not constitute a fixed check list and should not be rigid targets against which progress is measured. Instead they provide a framework for dialogue or reflection concerning any observed changes at the level of the boundary partners in the project’s sphere of influence.

Taken as a set, progress markers, provide a map of the possible complex change process that an actor could be engaging in. Due to complex change being unpredictable, progress markers may be adjusted, or new progress markers may emerge along the way.

Progress markers differ from traditional indicators in the sense that they are not time bound nor necessarily specified with pre-set targets or numbers in advance.

## Step 4: Categorising progress markers

From the donor side, there were no specific expectations regarding the use of any particular planning, monitoring and evaluation method. Hence the donor did not object towards a programme design based on outcome mapping and the use of progress markers to build the programme results framework. The only requirement was that the results framework was aligned towards the four end of programme outcomes that were outlined in the grant agreement. For this reason, the progress markers were categorised into emerging categories of change that the programme hoped to see occurring in different boundary partners in order to contribute to specific end of programme outcomes.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Civil Society in Development (CISU) (2020) <https://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/global-citizenship-education-how-to-measure-and-improve-the-impact>



For example, progress markers related to ‘acting as influencers in the community’ appeared as a common denominator for a type of change in behaviour that the programme hoped to see within the different boundary partners. This then led to the following broader progress marker that applied to the different boundary partners: *“Boundary partners act as influencers in the community through building trustful relations with adolescents and different community actors”*. This broader progress marker was subsequently linked to the relevant end of programme outcome, namely, end of programme outcome 1: *“Adolescent girls and boys are valued and influence decision making at household, community, structural level”*.

The same was done for the progress markers of the final target groups. Figure 3 shows an extract from the programme’s overall results framework for one of the end of programme outcomes. The changes at the level of the local boundary partners and the final target groups listed in figure 3 provide sets of generic progress markers that are used to track and record observed outcomes in the outcome journals during subsequent monitoring cycles. (see appendix 1 for the full list of categorised progress markers).



End-of-programme outcomes	Change at level of the final target groups (adolescents & caregivers) to which the programme hopes to contribute through its work with the local boundary actors	Change at the level of the local boundary partners who play a key role in making a positive difference for the final target groups	Risks Assumptions
<p><b>Outcome 3:</b> Adolescent girls and boys have improved well-being and equitable access to learning opportunities in a protective environment.</p>	<p><b>Adolescent girls and boys</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have increased and equitable educational and employment opportunities</li> <li>• Can use the skills they have obtained (through the project)</li> <li>• Gain access to employment market after 18 years old</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boundary actors provide vocational skills, life skills and business development skills to adolescents.</li> <li>• Boundary actors take concrete steps to create and promote ‘decent work’ (safe work place, decent wage, ....) and gender equality for adolescents seeking work</li> <li>• Boundary actors participate actively in design and implementation of employability promoting activities in the project</li> </ul>	<p>Actors wish/or can be convinced to see the empowerment of adolescents as positive and not a threat to existing power structures.</p> <p>Inter-generational conflict between adolescents and caregivers can be influenced to bring positive change</p>

Fig. 3: extract from SAP’s results framework



The categorisation of the progress markers resulted in a considerable reduction of the number of progress markers that needed to be monitored. This turned out to be a key factor that helped to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation framework did not become too heavy.



# Monitoring progress markers to learn about the project's outcomes

## Using an outcome journal to monitor progress markers

To monitor the categorized progress markers, an outcome journal was developed and made available both in English and Arabic. This journal provided a tool for recording observed changes (outcomes) in the behaviour, actions or relations of the boundary partners, adolescents and care givers. Those changes were recorded against relevant progress markers. Unexpected change can also be documented in the journal. In addition, the journal includes some learning questions. These questions helped the programme staff and partners to reflect on the importance of the observed outcomes as well as the programme's contribution. Figure 4 below shows an extract of one completed outcome journal.

N \_\_\_\_\_ SAP Programme

**Progress Journal Form**

*As a participant of SAP project, you are asked to fill in this progress journal on monthly basis in order to better understand the needs of the communities and developments on the ground, with the objective to improve our SAP programme. The journal is also filled in by every participants of SAP project, and the results will be grouped and analyzed in consolidated manner. Every quarter, you will receive the consolidated results. You do not have to indicate your name or position if you prefer to submit the form anonymously. There are instructions provided under each question for how to fill it in.*

**1. Filled by (indicate your position):**

**2. Organization (circle the one that applies, in case you do not work in Save the Children, indicate the name of your organization):**

1 Save the Children

2 Other Organization (Indicate name) \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Date of filling in the progress journal:**

Day	Month	Year
28	February	2019

**4. Actor (circle those included):**

① Adolescents

2 Care givers

③ Boundary actors (please specify which boundary actor):

4 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Outcome area (based on the Codes on Page 3, indicate which Outcome Area does the progress Journal belong to.)**

1 Outcome 1: Strengthening Voice

2 Outcome 2: Child Protection

3 Outcome 3: Learning / life skills

4 Outcome 4: Policy

**6. Progress Marker (based on the Codes on Page 3, List the Code of progress marker(s). You can indicate up to n progress markers):**

Code	Description
331	Boundary actors provide vocational skills, life skills and business development skills to adolescents.

**7. Noticeable facts / changes in actor (thinking about the Actor(s) you chose, as well as the Progress Markers indicated in question 6, please give short description of actions, behaviours, or even speech of the Actor(s) that has happened over the last 1 week and which shows progress towards the project outcome.**

- Outreached 64 youth
- 2 groups formed 48 attended
- 39 youth outreached in UNRWA school divided into 2 groups
- one of the youth participants escaped from his work to attend the session, he shows interest in participating more, the facilitators later on visited the employer and negotiate with him to allow the child and 3 more children working with him to attend
- Some marginalized girls (out of school, not participating in any kind of community activities) reached out and started to participate in our program after negotiating with their parent
- during the initial session the youths felt uncomfortable, while through time they start socializing and establishing bonds which create a convenient atmosphere for them as observed by the facilitators
- The inclusion of people with special need, one of the girl showed enthusiasm by participating actively in the sessions with positive feedbacks from her
- Challenge in outreaching working children, Hard to convince the employer unless he will cut from their salary

**8. What do you think was a main helping factor(s) for these changes that you described in question 8? (You can give details on different aspects that helped to reach the progress described by you, the helping factors could be activities, their timing, approaches, etc.)**

- The trust already established between the community members and partners
- communication with employers through workplace visits (convincing him by explaining their impact of this program on youths, it will enhance their work quality and make it more safe and efficient)
- Parent outreached started to encourage their children to participate
- Attended youths started to influence their peers to engage
- Najib Partner is planning to prepare a session outdoor or out of the camps for youths, they consider this activity as essential step to keep the participants motivated and enjoying the program

Fig.4: Extract of completed outcome journal

### How were the outcome journals completed?

- In general, outcome journals were completed on a monthly basis, individually or in small teams, by project staff from the partner organisations. This was often done together with staff from Save the Children. Throughout the project, Save the Children MEAL staff provided guidance and capacity building support towards the field staff in order to improve the quality of the journals.



**i** *“More frequent journaling and reflection helps to digest and analyse information in a faster manner, ultimately contributing to adaptive programming cycles in a more meaningful way. It also facilitates adaptive practice in the field and avoids progress journals merely turning into end-of-month reports” (SC MEAL officer).*

#### **What was the added value of the outcome journals?**

- The outcome journals helped field staff to track and capture more systematically the effects of their activities on the programme’s target groups.
- Also, the qualitative nature of the journals, allowing field staff to describe the observed changes in words and to provide illustrative examples was considered an important added value.

#### **What challenges did field staff face when using the outcome journals?**

- Tracking and describing change in a qualitative way was not common practice and was initially quite challenging for the field staff. Also, the practice of journaling whereby staff record details and reflections about any observed changes or effects was rather new. However, with continuous support from Save the Children MEAL and operational staff, the quality of the monitoring information recorded in the outcome journals improved significantly through successive monitoring cycles.

**i** Focusing on smaller scale changes, and providing examples makes it easier for the team to identify changes in the field. Often, we think of ‘change’ as a long-term impact of the programme, demystifying this through practical examples relevant to the context of communities makes the process easier. Ultimately, the more participatory and well-organized the process of setting Progress Marker would be, the easier it will be to identify the changes in the field.

*“In terms of the quality of the journals, the most useful exercise was the practical exercises to fill the journals with the field staff rather than the theoretical sessions. This was clearly reflected in the continuous improvement in the journals’ quality. At the end, we have a reliable means of verification to capture the changes that reflected the impact of the program on the spheres of influence and concern.” (SC MEAL officer)*

#### **What was done to support the completion of the outcome journals?**

- The following support was provided by Save the Children in order to improve the quality of the monitoring information in the journals:
  - Induction training on how to fill the journals,
  - Staff from partner organisations filling the journals jointly with Save the Children staff who would help to elaborate the information that is entered in the journals.
  - Completing the journals during a meeting whereby Save the Children staff entered the oral information brought in by the field staff about observed outcomes into the journal.
  - Translation of the outcome journals from Arabic to English
  - Piloting the use of an online system to insert monitoring data in the journals.



**Box 6: Toolkit – outcome journals** (adapted from *Civil Society in Development (CISU)* (2020))

An outcome journal can be useful for project staff or other stakeholders to systematically document and analyse interesting changes they observe in relation to specific progress markers. Fig. 5 shows a generic format of an outcome journal. Of course, every project will have to customize the format of the outcome journal according to its specific information needs. A separate journal needs to be developed for each boundary partner or actor the project wants to monitor through a set of progress markers. An outcome journal lists the progress markers for a specific target group (in the first column). For each progress marker there is the possibility to provide information about observed changes (positive or negative). The journal can also be used to capture additional information such as unexpected changes (i.e., changes that were not foreseen through the progress) or factors that hinder or promote change.

**Tip !**

Data about the progress markers can be collected in different ways:

**1**

Observations during activities or interactions with boundary partners or target groups. These observations can be registered in the outcome journal in a continuous way. Members of a project team can keep their own outcome journals. It is also possible to keep one centralized outcome journal for each actor through an online document, where all team members can enter their observations. The outcome journal can also be completed at a fixed time (collectively during a reflection meeting or individually).

**2**

**Interviews or focus groups:**

The outcome journal can also provide guidance for interviews or focus groups with the boundary partners or with other actors who may have useful information about the progress markers. Triangulating information obtained from different sources will support and strengthen analysis.

**3**

**Self-assessment:**

The outcome journal can also provide a useful self-assessment tool for boundary partners or target groups. This way, they can make their own assessment of their progress in relation to the progress markers.

Make an outcome journal for each of the actors the project wants to monitor.



Discuss in your project team, how you will use the journal. For example, how, by whom and how often data will be collected.

<b>Name of the key actor to be monitored:</b>			
<b>Date of the monitoring period:</b>			
<b>Name of persons who completed the journal:</b>			
	<b>Description of the observed change</b>	<b>Significance of this change</b>	<b>Contribution of the project</b>
<b>Expect to see</b>			
Progress marker 1			
Progress marker 2			
<b>Like to see</b>			
Progress marker 3			
Progress marker 4			
<b>Love to see</b>			
Progress marker 5			
Progress marker 6			
<b>Learning questions</b>			
Unexpected changes			
Factors that hinder or promote change			
Suggested adaptations to planned activities or TOC			

Fig. 5: Generic example of an outcome journal

## Analysis of the monitoring information

As explained in the previous section, some analysis of the observed outcomes already happens during the completion of the various components of the outcome journal. This analysis is key to learn on a more continuous basis about progress at field level in particular locations where the outcomes are observed. These insights can inform ad hoc adjustment of project activities (also referred to as single loop learning).

From a strategic and adaptive programming point of view it is of course important to widen this analysis and to consider outcomes collected at different locations and across different monitoring cycles. Such broader analysis can provide useful insights about the programme's theory of change, its underlying causal assumptions and the influence of contextual factors which may in turn inform adjustments at a more strategic level (also referred to as double loop learning). The next sections explore some of the approaches and tools that were used by the SAP programme to facilitate this wider analysis of the monitoring information.

## Customising a data base to centralise and analyse outcomes

The information from the monthly outcome journals was entered in an Excel database (see figure 6) by the Save the Children MEAL staff. This database was particularly useful to centralise the monitoring information from the various outcome journals filled by different teams in different locations. It also provided an accessible tool for bringing together the monitoring information from subsequent monitoring cycles which facilitated analysis of progress over time.

N	1. Position	Team	2. Organization	2.2. Name of Other Organization	3. Date	4. Actor	4.3. Name of boundary actor	4.4. Other Actor	5. Outcome Area	6.1. Progress Marker Code 1	6.2. Progress Marker Code 2	6.3. Progress Marker Code 3	7. Noticable Facts / changes	8. Significance	8.1 Description of significance	9. Main helping factor
1	Instructor of Small Projects vocational	ED	SCI		27/7/2020	adolescents			Outcome 3: Learning / life skills	312	313		312- After the Corona crisis and our return to the centers, the students were very happy and excited to return to their professions and work more. I noticed very positive changes and behavior.	Medium	After the crisis, we have reviews of them and we have seen notable progress on all sides	312-3122- The transition, of course, is the way we deal, the end of the ban period, and the students returning to work permanently. This leads to more benefit for them. Finding difficulty for the
2	Decoration (pre-fabrication) coach -Tal Kocher	ED	SCI		26/7/2020	adolescents			Outcome 3: Learning / life skills	311	312		312- I noticed after our return and the return of the students, many of them 311-crisis as a result of the fear of the spreading coronavirus, which is prevalent in neighboring countries and regions of Syria. This led to a narrowing of the local market and lack of demand for professions and goods, which requires continuous training and getting used to the atmosphere (and the relation between and stud	low	311- Corona pandemic, high foreign exchange rate, economic blockade of Syria 312- The students forgot most of the	312-3122- The transition, of course, is the way we deal, the end of the ban period, and the students returning to work permanently. This leads to more benefit for them. Finding difficulty for the

Fig. 6: extract from the Excel outcomes database

In preparation of quarterly review meetings and 6 monthly reflection workshops (see below), the MEAL staff with support from an M&E consultant carried out a first level analysis of the monitoring information in the Excel database. The aim of this analysis was to provide both a narrative as well as visual overview of the programme's progress in relation to the progress markers of the boundary partners and the final target groups (adolescents and care givers). This analysis was then used as a basis for discussions during the review meetings and reflection workshops.

The next paragraphs outline some of the tools that were used during the first level analysis of the monitoring information in the journals. These include narrative analysis and tools to visualise qualitative data including colour coding and tabulating outcomes as well as the importance/contribution matrix.

## Narrative analysis

During a first step, all recorded outcomes over a particular monitoring period are extracted from the database and categorized as per end of programme outcome, per actor and per progress marker. These outcomes are then read in order to identify important changes at the level of the adolescents, caregivers and boundary partners. Where possible,





observations about specific changes are triangulated by cross checking if different staff from the partners or Save the Children recorded similar observations. The significance and potential contribution of the programme as well as any information regarding challenges and follow up are also considered for each end of programme outcome. Box 7 shows an extract from such narrative analysis of the changes observed within the boundary partners in Lebanon. The extract concerns observed changes linked to the progress markers that relate to Child Protection (= end of programme outcome 2 within SAP).

**Box 7: Narrative analysis of observed outcomes (Source - Lebanon progress report Jan-April 2021)**

Changes observed at the level of the boundary partners during this monitoring period are mainly related to the increased capacity of Save the Children’s partner organisations to adapt to the Covid19 situation and to conduct remote case management (CM) interventions and awareness sessions with adolescents and care givers. Various observations in the performance journals provide examples of this increased capacity as well as reflections about the capacity development support activities by Save the Children and other organisations (e.g. IRC) that were able to contribute to this increased capacity. Case workers from the three partners for example reported that they were able to benefit from various trainings delivered remotely by different agencies (incl. IMC, SCI, IRC,) about how to implement Case Management during Covid19. *“An important change was the fact that we were able to set up an alternative way to continue our intervention with the same quality as before. To be able to share our training needs and our challenges with the SCI team as well as the development of a new database and an action plan to follow up with cases, facilitated our work.” (case worker).*

**i** Investing in capacity for qualitative data analysis and reporting can be useful to support narrative analysis. At the same time, it is equally important to make this process participatory and linked to the field – meaning that any type of analysis should be triangulated with other data, as well as validated, fed from and analyzed together with the field teams.

**Visualisation of qualitative data**

Where possible, findings from the qualitative analysis were visualized so that they could be presented and discussed more easily during the collective review meetings or reflection workshops.

**Color coding:** One way of doing this was by using quantifiable assessment criteria for the level of achievement of the progress markers. The different assessment criteria were linked to a particular colour as shown in figure 7 below.

White	No change
Red	Negative change
Yellow	Positive change (project dependent – needs follow up)
Green	Positive change (not project dependent – no support needed)

Fig. 7: Color codes for levels of achievement of progress markers

This made it possible to quickly visualize the degree of achievement of each progress marker. This is illustrated by figure 8 showing a PowerPoint slide that was used to present progress within the progress markers related to end of programme outcome 3 (lifskills and education) during the monitoring period Jan-June 2019.



End of programme outcome 3: lifeskills and education (observed changes Jan. – Sept. 2019)					
	<table border="1"> <tr><td>no change</td></tr> <tr><td>negative change</td></tr> <tr><td>+ change (project dependent – needs follow up)</td></tr> <tr><td>+ change (not project dependent)</td></tr> </table>	no change	negative change	+ change (project dependent – needs follow up)	+ change (not project dependent)
no change					
negative change					
+ change (project dependent – needs follow up)					
+ change (not project dependent)					
Progress markers	Observed changes				
331: Boundary partners provide vocational skills, life skills and business development skills to adolescents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19 adolescents in VOCTEC sessions of MS</li> <li>'Aamel VOC TEC center providing vocational training for 8 participants (Najdeh). Al Najdeh follows up.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* From the 43 surveyed VocTec centers some (how many?) are prepared to provide free VOCTEC training (AN)</li> <li>* Service office director in Saida actively supported outreach by inviting groups of students to get information about project and urging them to enroll in life skills training.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Other organisations paying attendance fee leading to drop outs from SAP project</li> </ul>				
332: Boundary partners take concrete steps to create and promote 'decent work'	No Change				
Capacity development implementing partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perception among MS staff that SC training on life skills and the participatory development of the life skills training curriculum contributed to improving their facilitation skills to make adolescents feel safe.</li> </ul>				

Fig. 8: Using color codes to visualize level of progress of progress markers

**Tabulating outcomes:** Another potential approach to visualize aspects of the monitoring information involves the tabulation of the number of changes observed according to the progress markers for a particular end of programme outcome and categorized according to low, medium and high significance. Such tabulation is illustrated in figure 9 below. The figure shows the number of changes observed for the progress markers under outcome one (Voice) for the adolescents between February till August 2019. (see table xxx below for the definition of low, medium and high criteria).

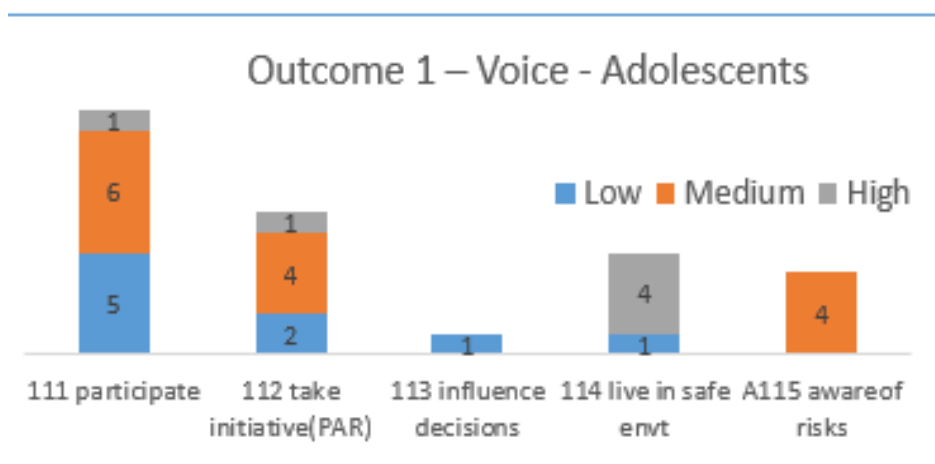


Fig. 9: number of changes observed in the adolescent progress markers under outcome 1.

Of course, the numbers in these graphs are rather meaningless by themselves. The added value of such graphs lies in the fact that they can facilitate collective reflection on progress as they quickly show where progress is achieved and where change is still limited. This information can then inform further discussions about the reasons why change is still limited in certain areas and about the need to adjust strategies or plans. During the analysis, specific outcomes can also be filtered out to illustrate progress for a particular progress markers. Such outcomes can then be used as examples of significant change. Key outcomes can then be analysed according to their significance and the extent to which the project was able to contribute towards this change. The significance/contribution matrix illustrated in the next paragraph can provide a potential tool to facilitate such analysis.

**Importance – contribution matrix:** The importance and contribution matrix helped to visualise a qualitative assessment of the importance of the observed change (positive or negative) with regards to the end of programme outcome and the project's contribution to achieving this change. This is illustrated in figure 10 for changes observed at the level of different boundary partners in Lebanon during one of the monitoring cycles (i.e. Jan – Sept 2019). The figure also shows some of the mitigation or follow up measures that were suggested in response to the observed changes. Visuals like this were used a basis for deeper reflection with various stakeholders during the review meetings or reflection workshops.

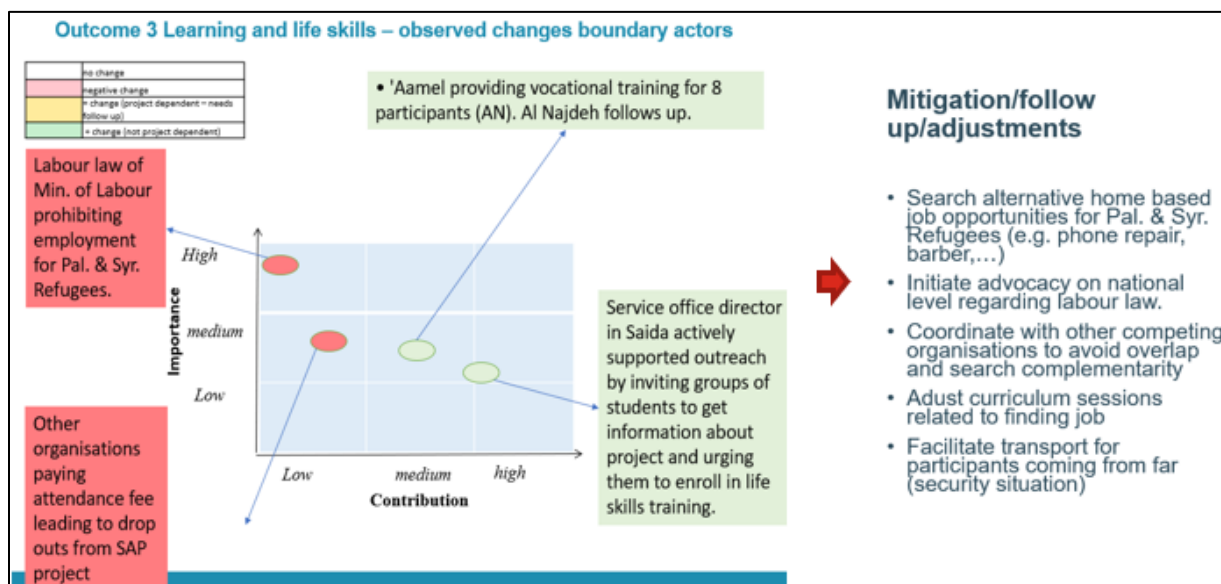


Fig. 10: Visualising change according to importance/contribution matrix (From progress report Jan – Sept 2019)

The definition of the assessment criteria Low, Medium and High for both the importance of the change and the project's contribution are outline in figure 11 below.

Contribution	
Low	SAP partners were one of a number of actors' that contributed but this change may have happened regardless.
Medium	There is reason to believe that SAP contributed substantially but along with other organizations, individuals, or processes.
High	There is reason (evidence) to believe that the change would clearly not have happened without the effort of the partners through SAP programme, who reported this change.



Importance scale	
Low	The change observed will not be manifested on the sphere of concern (adolescents and caregivers).
Medium	There is a reason to believe that this change will have some level of impact on adolescents and caregivers.
High	There is a reason (evidence) to believe that this change would impact adolescents and caregivers.

Fig. 11: Definitions of the assessment criteria low, medium and high

### Collective sensemaking during review meetings and reflection workshops

Insights from the first level analysis of the outcome journals, together with information from the partner’s regular activity reports, were used to inform 4-monthly review meetings and 6-monthly reflection workshops. These meetings and workshops provided important spaces for Save the Children and partners to collectively review progress and to draw lessons that could inform adjustments of programme plans and strategies if considered necessary.

While both meetings had a similar purpose and approach, the review meetings were less elaborate (usually half a day) allowing field staff to review progress and adjust planned activities more quickly. The 6-monthly reflection workshops were more comprehensive in nature both in terms of duration (usually 2 days) as well as the number of participants, which included Save the Children project staff and technical advisors, representatives from the partners as well as external consultants.

In general, the following elements were addressed to some extent during both meetings:

- Presentation of main activities and key outputs (e.g. number of target groups reached, what worked well and what didn’t,...)
- Reflection on the main outcomes of the project (incl. information from outcome journals, pre- and post-tests of training activities,...), their significance and the extent to which the project was able to contribute to them.
- Reflection on key challenges or risks observed by field teams and how to address them.
- Reflection on the implications for planned activities or overall programme strategies and potential adjustments that may be required.
- Reflection on organisational practices (e.g. partnerships, monitoring and evaluation activities, ...).

### Added value of the reflection meetings and reflection workshops

Feedback from programme staff both from Save the Children and partners learned that the review meetings and reflection workshops provided important spaces for deeper analysis of the available monitoring information as obtained by the outcome journals and the activity reports. The quotes below illustrate some of the general sentiments about the added value of the reflection workshops:

*“The reflection workshop provided a moment for the project staff (SC and partners) to pause and reflect on the activities carried out so far, the effects of those activities (outcomes), successes and challenges, adjustments to be made in the planned activities or strategies and the way forward for the next monitoring cycle”. (Respondent M&E feedback survey)*

*“The reflection workshop provided an opportunity to bring together information from different monitoring tools such as partners and Save the Children activity reports, outcome journals from the different project intervention areas, contextual knowledge from the workshop participants, .... It also provide an opportunity to learn from each other’s experiences and working contexts.” (Respondent M&E feedback survey)*



As reported during the midterm external evaluation, the reflection workshops also allowed to collectively assess and validate or question the information from the journals which was to some extent considered subjective. In addition, they were felt to facilitate decision making around actions to mitigate risks or to address challenges and to make programme adjustments where necessary. Table 1 illustrates different mitigation actions suggested during one of the reflection workshops (July 2019) to address contextual challenges observed in Lebanon.

Contextual challenges	Potential mitigation actions
Security risks limiting mobility and increasing the possibility of arrest when working without necessary permits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor that participants have proper legal papers and renew them on regular basis</li> <li>• Support participants who are not allowed to work (e.g. Syrian refugees) to set up home based employment projects (e.g. mobile phone repair, barber shop)</li> <li>• Partners to relate stronger with boundary partners in the area like municipalities and security forces</li> <li>• Forming youth committees and care giver committees and train them on conflict sensitivity</li> </ul>
Deteriorating economic and social situation contributing to drug abuse, less job opportunities,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use participatory action research (PAR) to support projects of training participants</li> <li>• Explain benefits of training but don't promise big things such as a job.</li> <li>• Integrate Life skills with Vocational training sessions</li> <li>• Monitor progress and highlight this to trainees in order to motivate them to participate.</li> <li>• Stress that the skills they are learning may not be useful now, but can be useful when they return to their country</li> <li>• Find spaces where they can hang out in a safe environment and where they have access to supportive adults?)</li> </ul>

Table 1: Results from reflections on contextual challenges during reflection workshop of 11 July 2019

Furthermore, besides providing a space for learning about the programme's progress, the reflection workshops were also considered helpful to promote dialogue and relationship building between Save the Children and its partner organisations. This is illustrated by the following reflections by some of the participants at the July 2019 reflection workshop:

- *It was beneficial regarding the personal relations between the Lebanon team, the regional SC team and the partners. It also allowed to share experiences and to get to know each other better.*
- *"Partners got to know each other better and the workshop helped to establish good communication."*
- *"Many stakeholders were at the reflection meeting: SC staff, SC regional office staff, all the partners. They all have the same understanding now of the programme. This was good to do just before starting up the implementation of activities."*

**Key challenges regarding the review meetings and reflection workshops**

While there was general consensus among programme stakeholders that the reflection workshops and review meetings constituted conducive spaces for deeper collective learning, there were also some important challenges that emerged. Some of them were not fully resolved and turned out to be a considerable limiting factor for operationalizing the principle of adaptive programming.

- The 6-monthly learning cycles turned out to be too long from an adaptive programming perspective where shorter learning cycles may be needed to allow for more regular reflections on progress and programme adjustments. It was assumed that the four monthly review meetings would allow for shorter learning cycles closer to the field. However, these review meetings eventually didn't materialize very often as they did not become fully institutionalized and also didn't receive the same technical M&E support as was the case with the reflection workshops. During final reflections towards the end of the programme, some MEAL staff indicated that shorter learning cycles, through monthly reflection meetings at field level, could have filled this learning gap.



- Particularly in relation to the boundary partners, some of the follow-up points kept on being repeated during subsequent reflection workshops. Also, when specific strategies were suggested on how to address specific challenges, these strategies were not always implemented or followed through by the next reflection workshop. And this was particularly the case when it involved action points related to the boundary partners. This challenge can be partly explained by the fact that the adaptive programming approach introduced in SAP was a significant departure from Save the Children's common humanitarian practice. To be made accountable for learning about change at the level of the boundary partners in order to work indirectly towards more sustainable change at the level of the final target groups, remained a rather difficult concept for most programme staff and partners throughout the project.
- The qualitative analysis of the outcome journals in preparation of the reflection workshops turned out to be a substantial challenge for the MEAL staff, who were more comfortable with quantitative analysis of monitoring information reported against SMART indicators of a logical framework. It took considerable time for the project MEAL staff to get more familiar with such kind of analysis. This also explains why the 4-monthly review meetings, which did not get similar support from the M&E consultant, but which also require some input from the outcome journals, turned out to be quite challenging to organize.

## Using outcome mapping to strengthen adaptive programming - The final balance sheet

Any organisation or programme that is supporting complex processes of social change, will also change (Earl et al., 2001). This is in line with insights of complexity science which suggest that programmes “are involved within a mutually adaptive relationship with their environment “(Mara, 2011, p.327). Being able to change and adapt to the changing context is crucial for organisations or programmes to remain effective and relevant. Adaptive capacity therefore goes beyond the capacity of effectively implementing a programme or achieving results (tactical adaptation), but refers to the capacity of an organisation or programme to adapt even beyond a particular programme and within an often fast changing context (strategic adaptation) (O'Donnell, 2016). The importance of adaptive capacity for programmes working towards complex change is strongly recognised in a growing body of literature related to working and thinking politically and adaptive programming. At the same time, while many development organisations are increasingly recognising the importance of thinking politically and being adaptive, many still face considerable challenges to translate this thinking into practice (Teskey & Tyrrel, 2017). Planning, monitoring and evaluation approaches are not always helping in this regard, especially when they are based on a too linear and 'locked-in' input-output-outcomes-impact programme design (Teskey & Tyrrel, 2017; Booth et al. 2018). However, in the literature on adaptive management or adaptive programming, outcome mapping is often mentioned as an example of a complexity-oriented methodology that is particularly suited for promoting adaptive management (Passanen & Barnett 2019; USAID 2015).

Table 2 below analyses to what extent elements of outcome mapping helped SAP to realise some of the key enablers of adaptive programme management as described by O'Donnell (2016). This is done by contrasting what the literature says about the potential of outcome mapping to operationalise these enablers, with some practical experiences during SAP.



Key enablers for adaptive management	Key principles and concepts of outcome mapping
<p>1. Curiosity and appetite for risk taking among team members</p>	<p><b>What the literature says:</b> Outcome Mapping focuses its monitoring and evaluation on changes in behaviour of the actors in a programme's direct sphere of influence. This helps a programme team to learn more quickly about incremental changes it may contribute to in these actors. This can stimulate a programme team to take risks and try out new or innovative approaches or activities because they can detect what works or not more quickly, hence adjust before problems become too widely apparent or costly. (Earl et al. 2001).</p> <p><b>Experience in SAP:</b> It required a considerable mind shift among programme staff to feel comfortable with the fact that one is not accountable for the actual change to happen (given that change cannot be controlled) but for learning how best one can contribute to this change and adjust its activities or strategies when the change does not occur as was initially hoped. This remained a vague concept for staff who are used to carry out humanitarian projects involving direct service delivery to the final beneficiaries. This mind shift towards a more 'developmental' approach was not fully realised. However, there are indications that the SAP programme managed to plant a seed within Save the Children country offices and the partner organisations involved in SAP. This was evidenced by the fact that some elements of outcome mapping are now being implemented in other similar programmes, as was reported in SAP's final evaluation report.</p>
<p>2. Open communication within a programme team for shared understanding, building trust and buy-in for the need to change</p>	<p><b>What the literature says:</b> Outcome Mapping cannot be done by M&amp;E staff alone. People who are implementing the programme need to actively participate in subsequent planning, monitoring and evaluation cycles. Such active participation can stimulate dialogue and open communication among a programme team. This is particularly important to develop trust and to encourage ownership and use of monitoring and evaluation findings and to develop buy-in among all relevant staff for changes that need to be made (management, field staff, M&amp;E staff, finance....) (Earl et al. 2001, Patton 2010).</p> <p><b>Experience in SAP:</b> The use of outcome mapping did result in a stronger involvement of programme staff in the monitoring activities either through the completion of the monthly outcome journals or through participation at the review meetings or reflection workshops. MEAL staff played a supportive role towards data collection and analysis. Furthermore, through its actor focus and emphasis on collaborative learning (e.g. through the various reflection workshops) outcome mapping did provide a conducive framework for open communication and dialogue among different programme staff both from Save the Children and implementing partners. Nevertheless, it took considerable time to develop a common understanding about SAP's new M&amp;E approach. Also, ownership seemed to develop faster at field level as compared to some higher levels of management.</p>
<p>3. Open communication with programme participants (target groups and programme stakeholders)</p>	<p><b>What the literature says:</b> Outcome mapping provides an actor focused planning, monitoring and evaluation framework that can help a programme team to build trustful relationships with its boundary partners based on a shared understanding of roles and expectations, ongoing dialogue, and mutual accountability. This requires active participation of boundary partners during subsequent planning, monitoring and evaluation cycles so that boundary partners and programme team can learn together about progress and necessary programme adjustments (Earl et al., 2001; Jones and Hearn, 2009; Van Ongevalle &amp; Peels, 2014).</p> <p><b>Experience in SAP:</b> There are indications that outcome mapping did contribute to more open communication and more trustful relationships between Save the Children and its implementing partners. This was evidenced by their active participation in programme design and the subsequent monitoring and evaluation cycles. This was less evident in relation to the boundary partners in the various intervention areas. In line with its more traditional/humanitarian approach, the programme activities were predominantly focusing on direct service delivery towards the final target groups. Hence, engagement with boundary partners became a means to implement the designed activities, not an objective to be achieved. Interestingly, this discrepancy with the principles of outcome mapping and the explicit objective within SAP's theory of change to engage</p>



	more strategically with local boundary partners was flagged and repeated at each collective reflection moment and during external evaluations (mid-term and end-term). The final evaluation pointed to the following factors that contributed to this situation: a very significant departure from usual practice and terminology, complex communication lines between various levels of Save the Children, limited buy-in at some management levels.
4. Investment in feedback, monitoring and reflection	<p><b>What the literature says:</b> Outcome mapping requires a programme to organise adequate learning spaces where programme stakeholders (e.g. programme team, boundary partners,...) can meet during subsequent monitoring cycles to provide feedback, learn jointly about the programme's progress and inform necessary adjustments for the next cycle. Such meetings require the necessary resources and management support. (Earl et al., 2001; Van Ongevalle &amp; Peels, 2014).</p> <p><b>Experience in SAP:</b> Outcome mapping did promote the provision of learning spaces where Save the Children staff and implementing partners as well as technical advisors could reflect on progress and needed adjustments to planned activities or strategies. The reflection workshops, review meetings and meetings to complete the journals provide examples of this. These meetings were also planned at the design stage which helped to allocate the necessary resources to organize such meetings and to facilitate active participation by the participants, e.g. translation services, meeting rooms, transport, online facilitation, etc. At the same time outcome mapping does not guarantee that lessons learned will be used to inform programming. It remained a challenge throughout the programme to ensure that mitigation strategies for challenges discussed during one reflection workshop were followed up by the next workshop. Hence the sometimes repetitive character of some of the reflection workshops.</p>
5. Delegated decision-making and confidence to make decisions.	<p><b>What the literature says:</b> The close relationship that usually exists between a programme team and its boundary partners encourages decentralised decision-making as programme field staff is able to act upon the real time feedback they receive, making them also more confident to make adjustments to programme activities that are responsive to the needs of the boundary partners or the specific context. Furthermore, outcome mapping also focuses the monitoring process on the internal organisational practices of a programme. Delegation of decision-making processes and associated budget flexibility can be included as one of the organisational practices to be monitored. (Earl et al., 2001; Van Ongevalle &amp; Peels, 2014).</p> <p><b>Experience in SAP:</b> To a considerable extent outcome mapping did promote decentralised decision making by the implementing partners. The fact that the implementing partners who are also Save the Children's boundary partners, are more strongly positioned in the driving seat of the programme, is a contributing factor. Adaptive programming in relation to strategies towards the local boundary partners in the intervention areas has been less evident. However, the SAP programme can be seen as a significant step in the direction of an actor focused and developmental approach directed towards locally owned solutions for developmental problems.</p>

Table 2: Potential of outcome mapping to operationalise adaptive programming – literature vs experience in SAP



## Final reflections and recommendations

This final section summarises some key lessons learned from piloting elements of outcome mapping within SAP and offers some practical recommendations.

- 1) **Management buy-in:** In a paper for the 20<sup>th</sup> birthday of the outcome mapping learning community, it was emphasised that “OM is more than a toolkit or methodology, it is an approach to thinking about change that embeds a particular philosophy, one that recognises complexity, builds on systems thinking and puts people at the centre” (OMLC, 2021). Hence outcome mapping, as was the case with SAP, can represent a considerable shift away from the more traditional linear logframe based approaches. The SAP case learns that there is need for adequate buy in and support from management at different management levels (field office, country office, regional office,...) with an explicit expectation from management that this new approach is taken up and followed through across subsequent PMEL cycles. Such buy in would help to avoid a situation that lessons learned about change (or lack of change) at the level of the boundary partners and suggested action points from one monitoring cycle, are not followed up in the next cycle. Without such specific expectation from management, there is a risk that programme staff and partners hold on or revert back towards focusing on providing direct services to final target groups, bypassing local actors who can play a key role in ensuring that these services can continue after the project. Of course, the SAP programme also learns that there is need to provide management with monitoring information that is already analysed and presented in an accessible way.
- 2) **Theory of change as a process:** From an outcome mapping perspective, an actor focused theory of change, is not static. It should be continuously used to critically assess the various assumptions that were made at the design stage and to adjust based on lessons learned during programme implementation. That means that aspects of the theory of change such as the boundary partners, progress markers and programme strategies and activities may change along the way. For the purpose of facilitating such adaptive programming, progress markers do not work as targets to measure success or failure. Instead they provide pointers that can help a project to learn how it is progressing and to change course if necessary. In outcome mapping, performance will therefore rather be measured by the extent to which the programme is learning to be most effective in contributing to impact through the changes it can promote within the boundary partners and the extent to which it uses this learning to adapt and improve along the way. Hence, from an outcome mapping perspective, the significance of a positive change at the level of the final target groups (i.e. adolescents and caregivers in SAP) will be largely determined by the extent to which this change can be sustained by the local actors or boundary partners even after the project has ended.
- 3) **Learning spaces and learning cycles:** The monthly monitoring meetings at field level as well as the 4-monthly review meetings and 6-monthly reflection workshops emerged as conducive spaces for learning about progress and for critical reflection about planned activities and strategies and the programme’s theory of change (double loop learning). However, follow up on action points that emerge from such learning spaces are a crucial precondition to avoid a situation where they become repetitive without informing concrete adjustments of the programme’s strategies or theory of change. To that effect, it’s important that the action points that emerge from the review and reflection meetings are deliberately used to guide the more regular field level monitoring meetings. Indeed, these meetings provide a good space for monitoring to what extent the action points and adaptations to the original planning or theory of change are being implemented in the field. Within SAP, management and MEAL staff played an important role in helping to ensure this link between the different learning spaces.
- 4) **Active participation:** Active participation of local stakeholders in programme design, implementation and monitoring proved to be particularly helpful for promoting the adjustments of programme activities and strategies in function of the specific needs and context of the actors supported or influenced by the programme. In SAP, this was particularly the case at the level of the local implementing partners (who are boundary partner of Save the Children) who took active



part in the various phases of the programme cycle. Also, at the level of the final beneficiaries (adolescents and care givers) whose feedback was actively collected and taken in consideration during subsequent planning cycles the programme was adjusted quite considerably in line with changing contexts and needs (e.g. the establishment of online support programmes during the Covid-19 pandemic). Participation of the key actors in the local community (i.e. boundary partners of the implementing partners of Save the Children) however remained rather limited to seeking their approval for carrying out the project activities. Yet, from an outcome mapping perspective, the active participation of these actors is all the more important. The experience from SAP learns that active participation of the boundary partners will not be guaranteed through the use of outcome mapping. Outcome mapping can provide a guiding framework for active participation, but ultimately it will need a genuine commitment towards such participation at the level of the programme staff at various management and operational levels.

- 5) **Invest in qualitative data analysis and research skills:** Analysis of the monitoring information captured in the outcome journals in preparation for the review and reflection meetings, turned out to be a considerable challenge within SAP. Progress markers as compared to SMART indicators do not comprise of specific definitions on how to measure them. Instead they provide a rather open monitoring framework that can guide collective sensemaking. The following approaches and methods proved particularly useful to support qualitative data analysis within SAP: 1) one common format of the outcome journals that could be used both in digital as well as paper form; 2) an accessible Excel database to centralise and store all recorded outcomes; 3) the use of various methods (e.g. color coding, tabulation of outcomes, positioning of outcomes according to significance/contribution matrix) to visualize the results of a first level analysis of the qualitative data, 4) triangulation of specific conclusions by comparing similar findings from different data sources (e.g. different respondents). To get MEAL staff as well as programme staff to become more familiar with these methods takes time and support, especially if an organisation is not familiar with such approaches (as was the case with SAP).
- 6) **Avoiding unfamiliar jargon:** During the final evaluation of SAP it was observed that some of the outcome mapping terminology such as boundary partners, spheres of influence and control, changes in behaviour, ... contributed to programme teams and various levels of management finding it difficult to situate this approach within their existing knowledge and practice regarding their engagement with local stakeholders. This was seen as having a disempowering effect on Save the Children country office staff and partner organisations contributing to limited ownership from the beginning. There is need to translate the outcome mapping concepts as much as possible in terms that are familiar and recognizable both for management and field staff. It can also help to explore how certain outcome mapping concepts relate to current practice that staff already knows, e.g. the way Save the Children's approach towards advocacy and capacity development relates to what is referred to in outcome mapping as 'supporting and influencing the boundary partners'.



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## Appendix 1: Progress markers code book

Actor	Code	Progress Marker
<b>Outcome 1. Strengthening Voice</b>		
1. Adolescents	111	Actively and equitably participate in design and implementation of project activities
	112	Lead community initiatives (e.g. lead PAR)
	113	Influence decisions that affect them (in family, school & community)
	114	Live in safe environment where they can achieve aspirations
	115	Aware of the risks they face and able to mitigate, including differentiated risks for boys and girls.
2. Care givers	121	Including fathers as equitable care-givers.
	122	Value adolescent girls and boys (e.g. more supportive of adolescent aspirations and choices)
	123	Act as agents of change (e.g. advocate with peers) around issues related to adolescents
	124	Share care work between mothers and fathers in a more equitable way.
3. Boundary actors	131	Boundary actors stop fearing adolescents and begin to understand and respect adolescent agency, aspirations and choices
	132	Boundary actors put in place mechanisms allowing and supporting adolescents to be heard and to influence decision making (e.g. representation)
	133	Boundary actors act as an influencer in the community through building trustful relations with adolescents and different community actors.
	134	Boundary actors engage in awareness raising activities on adolescent issues for caregivers, policy makers, community and adolescents.
<b>Outcome 2. Child Protection</b>		
1. Adolescents	211	Identify and access protection pathways
	212	Are aware of their rights
	213	Feel valued and protected
	214	Access safe and quality services and entertainment
	215	Are aware of the risks they face and able to mitigate them
2. Care givers	221	Use positive parenting techniques
	222	Access spaces (in their community) where they can find well-being and where they can interact with other care givers
	223	Understand that adolescent needs and aspirations may not align with their own (caregiver) needs and aspirations for their adolescents
	224	Communicate better with adolescents
	225	Experience increased levels of wellbeing
3. Boundary actors	231	Boundary actors provide spaces (in their community) where care givers can find well-being and where they can interact with other care givers (also providing opportunities for the boundary actors to interact with them and listen and respond to their needs)
	232	Initiate own initiatives to support adolescents (incl. most marginalized) in their community (both on prevention and response, e.g. referral mechanisms, services and mechanisms for adolescents to report incidents or seek support and care).
<b>Outcome 3. Learning / life skills</b>		
1. Adolescents	311	Have increased and equitable educational and employment opportunities
	312	Can use the skills they have obtained (through the project)
	313	Gain access to employment market after 18 years old
3. Boundary actors	331	Boundary actors provide vocational skills, life skills and business development skills to adolescents.
	332	Boundary actors take concrete steps to create and promote 'decent work' (safe work place, decent wage, ...) and gender equality for adolescents seeking work
	333	Boundary actors participate actively in design and implementation of employability promoting activities in the project
<b>Outcome 4: Policy</b>		
1. Adolescents	411	Lead advocacy on the local level
	412	Influence decision making at the local level
	413	Are capable of identifying rights violations relevant for both girls/young women and boys/young men.
3. Boundary actors	431	boundary actors implement activities to influence policy and decision making within local governance structure
	432	boundary actors implement activities that facilitate adolescents' access to policy makers
	433	Political boundary actors establish and implement adolescent friendly policies and services.