Summary of discussion in the OMLC

Outcome harvesting for different kinds of outcomes?

June 2012

Highlights of discussion on the OM Community Map:

Reply 7:

Behavioural changes do not just 'lead to' outcomes - they are outcomes!

Terry Smutylo, Canada

Reply 17:

'Impact' and 'outcome' represent points on a same timeline.

Daniel Buckles, Canada

Reply 15:

They are limits to the influence of interventions due to many intervening factors.

Kornelia Rassmann, Germany

Question:

Could outcome harvesting also be applied to concrete outcomes which are not about changes in actors' behaviours?

Steve Powell, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Reply 18:

It is important to show causal linkages between interventions and behavioural changes.

Jacqulyn Joseph, Guyana

Reply 8:

Outcomes and impacts are results reached at different phases

Abdou Fall, Senegal

Reply 10:

The problem with 'impact' is that evaluating changes cannot be attributed to a single cause.

David Week, Australia

The full discussion can be found in the OMLC forum:
http://www.outcomemapping.ca/forum/viewtopic.php?t=1252

Original Email
Steve Powell, Bosnia and Herzegovina
26 June, 2012

Dear all,

A question on Outcome Harvesting- could outcome harvesting also be applied to concrete outcomes (such as, say, lives saved due to vaccinations) which are not necessarily or primarily about changes in actors' attitudes, behaviour etc (even though changes in attitudes, behaviour etc might be key steps to achieving them)?

Sure, both Outcome Harvesting [OH] and Outcome Mapping [OM] give various good reasons why they both put a focus on changes within key partners, but would they preclude extending that focus? On the face of it, Outcome Harvesting sounds like a very interesting way to collect evidence of all kinds of different changes.

Best Wishes
Steve Powell

Responses were received, with many thanks, from:

1. Kornelia Rassmann, Germany
2. Kevin Murray, United States
3. Edouard Guevart, The Democratic Republic of Congo
4. Abdou Fall, Senegal
5. Charles Dhewa, Zimbabwe
6. Terry Smutylo, Canada
7. David Week, Australia
8. Zephirin Selemani, The Democratic Republic of Congo
9. Jacques Somda, Burkina Faso
10. David Wilson Sanchez, Bolivia
11. Daniel Buckles, Canada
12. Jacqulyn Joseph, Guyana
13. Rick Davies, United Kingdom
14. Ronald Mackay, Argentina

Summary of Responses:

1. Kornelia Rassmann, using Steve's example of lives saved by vaccinations, argued that 'lives saved' would be the 'impact' rather than the 'outcome' according to OECD-DAC "Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management" (2002). For her, outcomes would be behavioural changes in ministerial staff or people becoming more aware of the benefits of vaccinations.

> **Definition of impact according to the OECD**
>
> "The positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended"

2. Kevin Murray, considered that the use of 'outcome' in OM is very useful but narrows the more usual definition, and can lead to confusion. The longer term results, as well as behavioural changes, can be incorporated into OM or OH exercises if people consider them important.

3. [Abdou Fall](#), added that outcomes and impacts are results reached at different phases. For him, cumulative/aggregated/sustained outcomes lead to impact (defined as large scale improvement in quality of life of people and environment). However, he identifies limitations when using OM in Natural Resources Management (NRM) contexts.

   He adds in another post that although OM focusses on behaviour change, it doesn't mean that this is the only kind of outcome we should be monitoring; it's just the only kind of outcome that OM can help with.

4. [Terry Smutylo](#), pointed out that OM does not underestimate the importance of measuring changes in human and ecological well-being. To the contrary, it adds human, social and organisational behaviours to such changes in order to fully understand the influence of interventions. He points out that changes in interrelationships do not just 'lead to' outcomes but they are outcomes themselves.

5. Kornelia also shared a document by Ricardo Wilson-Grau (2008) which provides a useful definition of the terms 'outcome', 'output' and 'impact'. The resource can be found here: http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=189.

Step #1 – OECD Definitions	Step #2 – Generic adaptations	Step #3- Customised to the organisation's needs, an example
A development result is the output, outcome or impact (either intended or unintended, positive or negative) of one or more activities intended to contribute to physical, financial, institutional, social, environmental, or other benefits to a society, community, or group of people.	I share with my principal these generic adaptations of the OECD definitions. I built them up over the past few years with the development and social change organisations with which I work.	My third step is to work with the organisation to arrive at a definition that is concrete and specific to her or his organisation.
Output: The products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention; may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.	**Output**: The immediate results of your organisation's activities – the processes, goods and services that it produces. For example: workshops, training manuals, research and assessment reports, guidelines and action plans, strategies, and technical assistance packages.	**Output:** The immediate result of a grantee's activities – the processes, goods and services that she produces through activities partially or totally funded by us.
Outcome: The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs. Outcomes are the observable behavioural, institutional and societal changes that take place over 3 to 10 years, usually as the result of coordinated short-term investments in individual and organizational capacity building for key development stakeholders (such as national governments, civil society, and the private sector).	**Outcome**: Observable positive or negative changes in the actions of social actors that have been influenced, directly or indirectly, partially or totally, intentionally or not, by your activities or your outputs that potentially contribute to the improvement in people's lives or of the environment envisioned in the mission of your organisation.	**Outcome**: Change in a policy or practice or both of development actors influenced by our grantee's' activities and outputs. Policy changes are modifications of formal or informal, written or unwritten political, cultural, social or religious norms that guide the actions of people, organisations and institutions in the sphere of the state, the market as well as in civil society. Changes in practice represent a modification of what is done in society-the laws or regulations must be applied or new socio-cultural norms practised.
Impact: Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.	**Impact:** Long-term, sustainable changes in the conditions of people and the state of the environment that structurally reduce poverty, improve human well-being and protect and conserve natural resources. Your organisation contributes partially and	**Impact:** The significant, structural, sustained and positive improvement in the lives of people suffering from poverty, injustice, insecurity and exclusion to which the policy and practice changes have contributed.

	indirectly to these enduring results in society or the environment.	

Source: Wilson-Grau (2008)

6. David Week, responded to Kevin Murray's comment on the use of 'outcome' and 'impact'. The problem with 'impact' is that evaluating changes cannot be attributed to a single cause, but a series of complex processes with many intervening factors. He also thinks that not only behaviour changes counts as outcomes. However, outcomes, rather than impact, truly recognise the dimension of change of a project – acknowledging its severe and finite limits.

7. Zephirin Selemani, argued that 'impact' and 'outcomes'; are not interchangeable and should be used appropriately to avoid confusion.

8. Jacques Somda, agreed with Terry that OM approach helps to understand and account for the influence of interventions (human and ecological) by including behaviours. He also linked back to the OM Manual: Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs. He cited Michael Quinn Patton's foreword to illustrate that if impact is the ultimate goal, some changes along the way may be dismissed by traditional planning and M&E tools – attentiveness along the journey is essential. Again, he agreed that outcomes are as important as impacts but they do no designate the same thing.

> "Outcome Mapping provides not only a guide to essential evaluation map-making, but also a guide to learning and increased effectiveness, and affirmation that being attentive along the journey is as important as, critical to, arriving at a destination"
>
> Michael Quinn Patton (2001), p.IX

9. Steve also raised the issue of the importance of OM as an approach that refocus development planning and management onto neglected areas. However, he argued that the key idea behind Outcome Harvesting is trawling systematically what partners perceive as significant changes (which could very well include outcomes other than behaviour change) and have them verified. Given this, he clarifies his question: **does OH *have* to follow OM's definition of outcome, when this could mean discounting or ignoring some of the outcomes that have been identified?**

10. David shed light on OM's emphasis on "constructing a satisfying account of what happened and what came out of what happened" over a "pseudo-scientific measure of "outcomes" and "impacts"".

   He offered a model often used in management psychology to illustrate how 'outcome' and 'impact' are fussily defined. The model divides things into three concentric spheres or circles which are further explained in the textbox. He warned, though, that these definitions too are not distinct and highly contestable.

> • **Sphere of control:** what you can control. In OM, this is what occurs inside the project, because you can control spending, employees, subcontractors, etc.
>
> • **Sphere of influence:** these are matters you can influence, but can't control. In OM, your boundary partners sit in this domain. The sphere of control is a subset of the sphere of influence.
>
> • **Sphere of concern**: these are all the matters that you care about, but can't influence directly or control.
>
> In a project, you might have as your **sphere of concern**: "economic advancement of poor women"; your **sphere of influence** includes all your boundary partners; your **sphere of control** is what you pay for directly.

He also identified a problem with the evaluation industry. It responds to bureaucratic clients' needs: they want a product that is justified, measurable and free from human judgement or interpretation; a positivist perspective that doesn't correspond to human systems.

11. Kornelia pointed out that OM focuses on results that may have led to possible effects such as lives saved, and the contribution made by particular projects or interventions. She shared an excerpt from a forthcoming publication co-authored with Richard Smith, John Mauremootoo and Ricardo Wilson-Grau. The authors say that there are limits to the influence of interventions can expect to have on behavioural changes because there are multiple factors and agents involved. OM looks for contribution in terms of behavioural changes outcomes. OM does not control whether an outcome occurs or whether impact is realised.

> "(...) networks face considerable uncertainty when establishing a common vision and mission for those with diverse institutional mandates and when trying to understand the limits to a network's sphere of influence or measuring its contribution to results. OM specifically acknowledges these challenges and makes a number of relevant key assumptions about development and humanitarian interventions (Earl et al. 2001; Ambrose et al. 2012). For example, while recognising that impact is the ultimate goal towards which a development intervention works, OM focuses on the outcomes eventually leading to development impact – rather than on the impact itself – because the complexity and long-term nature of the development process often makes it extremely difficult to link impacts to a specific intervention. Further, OM assumes that sustainable ecosystems and human wellbeing depend on human behaviour and hence defines outcomes as behavioural changes. However, it recognises that there are limits to the influence that any intervention can expect to have on behavioural change outcomes. There may be multiple actors and factors essential to achieving sustainable change and therefore, instead of focusing on cause and effect attribution".
>
> Rassmann et al. (forthcoming)

12. David Wilson Sanchez, drew upon the vaccination example provided by Steve. He suggests that the development of the vaccination, making it available, and subsequently applying it are all outputs. The outcome is people choosing to take advantage of the opportunity and becoming vaccinated. To illustrate this point, he cited an example in Bolivia of a government programme to make flu vaccines widely available: the outcome would be that two million people decided to get vaccinated, and the contribution to change is that the Bolivian government has embarked on an intensive campaign to make the vaccine widely available for the whole population (ten million).

13. Daniel Buckles, argued that flexibility in the use of terms is more important than uniformity. For him, 'impact' and 'outcome' represent points on a timeline. They both explore causal relationships (complex or linear). OM uses the time factor to reduce scope for uncertainty about these relationships. OM (like Impact Evaluation) is still trying to explain how and why change happens (by showing plausible causal linkages between interventions and behaviour change). For him, what matters is that evaluators situate the terms they use in the context of their studies and in relation to the field in general.

14. Jacqulyn Joseph, agreed with these points saying that most of the community members are interested not only on what has changed but in looking how and why changes happen. Thus, it is important to show casual linkages between interventions and behaviour changes, and the use of time factor to reduce scope for uncertainty in these linkages.

15. Steve also agreed that both OM (and by extension, OH) and other forms of impact evaluation are involved in making causal links.

> "In the literature, this is called an INUS cause: and Insufficient but Necessary part of a Condition that is itself Unnecessary but Sufficient for the occurrence of the effect. These ideas were developed by the philosopher JL Mackie (1974)"
>
> Stern et al. (2012), p.41.

OM is however more realistic on what kind of causal claims can be made. He recommended a recent DfID working paper on contributory and INUS causes. The document can be found here: Broadening the range of designs and methods for impact evaluations (Stern et al. 2012)

16. Rick Davies, shared a post on necessary and sufficient causes following Steve's references to Stern et al. (2012). He presented a graphic on possible combinations of causal conditions which can be found here: http://www.mandenews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/representing-different-combinations-of.html. He also provided an example of the factors facilitating and hindering women's access to political office by Mona Lee Krook (2010) using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). The article by Krook can be found here: http://www.politicalstudies.org/pdf/krook.pdf.

> "Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) (...) seeks to bridge quantitative and qualitative methods by developing a set of techniques for studying medium-*n* populations, which involve formalising comparisons as means to incorporate information from a larger sample while retaining the integrity of individual cases. Analytically, this approach relies on two core ideas: (1) causal combination, in the sense that the effects of individual conditions may depend on the presence or absence of other conditions; and (2) equifinality, or the notion that there may be multiple causal paths to the same outcome (Ragin, 1987; 2000)".
>
> Krook (2010), p. 887.

17. Ronald Mackay, recommended a document by John Maine (2008) on how to determine cause and effect in evaluation work: Contribution analysis: An approach to exploring cause and effect. ILAC Brief No. 16. Rome, Italy: Institutional Learning and Change.

18. Steve also shared a post to show an easy way for evaluators to do classification trees using the statistic software R. He used the example data set used by Krook (2010) on women's access to political office. He identified problems explaining final resulting models and whether there were spurious results.

> **Spurious relations**
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> A spurious relation is a situation in which measures of two or more variables are statistically related but are not in fact causally linked – usually because the statistical relation is caused by either coincidence or the presence of a third variable (confounding or lurking variable). Since correlation can arise from the presence of a lurking variable rather than direct causation, it is usually said that 'correlation does not imply causation' (Vogt 2005)

19. Rick used decision trees to illustrate results of QCA used by Krook (2010). He agreed with Steve that there are two problems related to spurious results using decisions trees. The first one is 'over fitted' trees. This aspect relates to the number of final branches or cases used by the model. The best use to avoid this problem is reducing the number of cases. The second problem identified by him is that even decision trees that have proven to be good predicting what will be found still present spurious findings. Sometimes predictive knowledge does not have to be causative knowledge. For instance, a national immunisation campaign – this is, a predictive knowledge about people's behaviour - may be useful to reach most people in need. And Rick indicates, more realistic in the short-term rather that aims to change their behaviour – where some causative knowledge would more relevant.

The use of decision trees and other means helps testing theory and data mining determining what kind of attributes have causative roles. He shares Barbara Befani's review of the DfID working paper 'Models of Causality and Causal Inference' previously cited to illustrate this point.

Concluding remarks and actions to take forward:

- Causal relationship between interventions and behavioural changes is a key issue for many community members. This is not only a problem associated to Outcome Mapping but other approaches as well.

- 'Outcome' and 'impact' both explore causal complex or linear relationships. For some members, they represent different points on the same timeline. However, OM is suggested to be more realistic on what kind of causal claims can be made.

- The definition of OM terminology is still blurry for some community members. For instance, outcomes are often associated exclusively to human behaviour (e.g. difficulty applying into Natural Resources Management, as mentioned in the discussion) or to short-term changes (in contrast to impact which would involve long-term changes).

- Some interesting points have been made drawn from statistical analysis. For example, the use of Qualitative Comparative Analysis to determine causality between variables and the problem of spurious relations to exclude lurking variables.