Case Study: St²eep Zimbabwe

Enabling an actor-focussed approach

Key features

- OM in this case was particularly effective at bringing partners into the monitoring and evaluation process shifting the ownership of the programme to the local actors.

- An innovative framework was developed that integrates two perspectives at once, allowing both the programme team and the support team to make sense and use of the OM framework.

Background

The Secondary Teacher Training Environmental Education Programme (St²eep) in Zimbabwe began in January 2003 in partnership with the Ministry of Higher Education, the Flemish Office for Development, Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB) and three Secondary Teacher Training Colleges, in Harare, Mutare and Bulawayo. The aim of the project is to integrate environmental education (EE) into the curriculum of secondary teacher training and to support EE initiatives in the colleges and pilot schools in order to enhance the sustainable utilisation of natural resources, and promote life skills. EE is done through the integration of in-service training of lecturers, facilitation of the syllabi review process, developing EE learning resources and supporting college-based EE initiatives. St²eep is supported by VVOB, which provides financial support as well as three expatriate programme facilitators, each based in one of the colleges. VVOB, founded in 1982, works to provide technical assistance in projects and programmes to be implemented in developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America in joint management with and funded by the federal and Flemish governments.

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For its first two years, St²eep was run according to a log frame. However, despite success in achieving set outputs and objectives the team wanted to understand what was going on 'underneath the surface' of their log frame reports, and some informal self-assessment was carried out. A consensus emerged that the structure of the log frame meant that VVOB was too involved in the operational running of the programme, with M&E reports written largely for the donors and quite divorced from actual project planning, with little space for learning. The team perceived some big problems with the programme going forward, as it seemed to operate bypassing local structures and institutions, and hence was not sustainable. OM was taken on to systematise these discussions, to help them find a way of thinking about sustainability as a group, looking at the roles and responsibilities of St²eep

in relation to their local partners, and to translate this into a new concept for the role of the St^{2}eep programme.

Introducing and applying Outcome Mapping

Discussions about St^{2}eep's sustainability and its PM&E system began in August 2004 and an in-depth self-assessment workshop was held in December that year. The planning for St^{2}eep phase 2 began in January 2005, the decision to use OM came in March 2005 and the first OM workshop took place in June 2005.

The gap between the decision and the workshop allowed time for the reflecting on the methodology. There was a period of 2-3 months in which VVOB staff explored, read and discussed the potential of Outcome Mapping. They then held three large workshops: one to develop a framework for St^{2}eep, one to determine the role of VVOB, and one to design the M&E framework. Progress monitoring reports were compiled by St^{2}eep and VVOB; progress monitoring meetings and team learning activities were held every four months. Lessons learned from the monitoring process fed into the management cycle during operational and national management team meetings that were organised after each monitoring cycle.

A number of important lessons about introducing and applying outcome mapping emerged during this process:
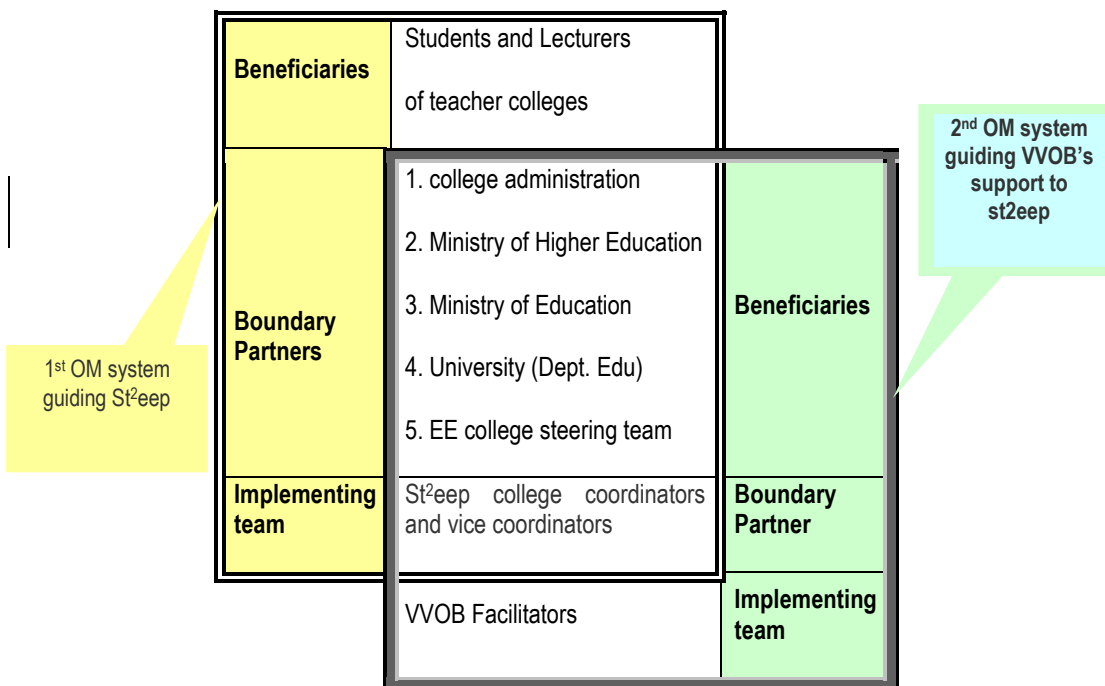
- The team felt that introducing OM was helped by the strength of the concepts and principles behind it, and the accessible manual. These concepts were more easily understood by immediately applying them to their own situation, and taking care not to use too many technical terms (especially with local partners).

- The participants in the workshop were also very important. As well as having a very experienced facilitator, they were very fortunate to have all boundary partner groups represented in each workshop. This enabled effective learning, and it allowed them to achieve a realistic balance of expectations.

- The introduction of OM was greatly helped by the small, enthusiastic team tasked with championing the framework. They acted as an "engine" for the implementation of OM, and the small size of this 'nucleus' made it easier to get things started, working hard to ensure that materials would make sense to other staff. They also helped to maintain momentum behind OM, providing follow-up and assistance with implementation.

- Also important was the attitudes of the wider team: implementing OM relied on the strong and widespread conviction that there was a problem with the way the programme operated and the role of their normal M&E activities, combined with a willingness and knowledge to address such challenges head-on. It emphasises the importance of having people *convinced by* OM to be able to implement it properly.

- These factors were reinforced by external support: the VVOB country representative for Zimbabwe was supportive of St^{2}eep using OM, and saw it as a chance to pilot the

approach. St^{2}eep was also connected with a programme in Ecuador which was applying OM at the same time, and an external consultant provided much support.

Developing the framework

Two interlinked frameworks were created to guide the St^{2}eep programme. Because St^{2}eep is a cooperation programme rather than an organisation, it was difficult to define exactly who was the implementing team, and who were the boundary partners. The programme structure was therefore redesigned around two interconnected OM systems: the 1st OM system, guiding St^{2}eep, defines the St^{2}eep college coordinators and vice coordinators as the implementing team, influencing the college EE steering team, college administration, government ministries and the University of Zimbabwe, with the students and lecturers as the beneficiaries. The 2nd OM system, guiding VVOB's support to St^{2}eep, defines the VVOB facilitators as the implementing team, influencing the St^{2}eep college coordinators and vice coordinators as their boundary partners, and the college administration, government ministries, university and EE college steering team as beneficiaries (see diagram below).

Beneficiaries	Students and Lecturers of teacher colleges		
Boundary Partners	1. college administration 2. Ministry of Higher Education 3. Ministry of Education 4. University (Dept. Edu) 5. EE college steering team	**Beneficiaries**	
Implementing team	St^{2}eep college coordinators and vice coordinators	**Boundary Partner**	
	VVOB Facilitators	**Implementing team**	

1st OM system guiding St^{2}eep

2nd OM system guiding VVOB's support to st2eep

A number of lessons emerged about fitting an OM framework to your context:

- The successful implementation of outcome mapping was in part down to building on what was already there. St^{2}eep already had strong participatory structures in place, and good relationships with local institutions and groups. There was also a feeling in the team that the principles behind OM were aligned with the emerging consensus on the future direction of the St^{2}eep programme, around supporting local actors and processes, and focusing on learning. However, OM did help the team be more systematic and strategic about applying these principles, pushing them towards looking at their

responsibilities and making hard choices on how to support their boundary partners rather than 'shortcutting' them.

- OM also gave the St[2]eep team the tools and the space to embed organisational learning. This was greatly enhanced by having assessments of the project by boundary partners, thanks to the trust and space for learning that was already there. It allowed them to ask the important 'why' questions in monitoring and evaluation, and look less at "what was or wasn't done?" and more at "what does this *mean*?".

- The shift towards deeper reflection and self-evaluation was not easy, however. Especially in some contexts, not everyone is used to asking themselves what their own strengths and weaknesses are, and what they should do differently. The Action Learning Sets (informal meetings held to allow space for open reflection) helped with this, giving the coordinators time to examine their own traits, and reflect on their own way of doing things. This not only helped with their organisational learning, it also meant that they had a united front when talking about OM to others.

Concluding remarks

Outcome Mapping has helped to make St2eep´s monitoring and evaluation process more actor-focused in its approach, enhancing motivation for learning. Ownership of St2eep's monitoring and evaluation system, and of its programming, has become more endogenous, as St2eep coordinators in each of the colleges became increasingly the leaders of St2eep. Outcome Mapping has also been able to draw the boundary partners into the monitoring and evaluation processes which has resulted in a deeper understanding of their expectations and responsibilities, has strengthened their partnership with the project team and has enhanced their commitment towards the project. This has successfully contributed to strengthened capacity of the boundary partners and to the sustainability of the project. Since this case study was carried out, VVOB funding for St2eep has come to an end in December 2008. Even after the funding had ended, St2eep continued to operate as a strong local project that is able to organise environmental education activities in the colleges and schools. St2eep´s current involvement in a national livelihoods training programme for primary schools (July 2009) and in introducing environmental education in primary teacher training colleges provides evidence for this.

Further information

'Learning the way forward: Adapting St2eep's planning, monitoring and evaluation process through Outcome Mapping' Kaia Ambrose
http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=160

'Is there life after the logframe? An account of an Outcome Mapping experience in education?' Huib Huyse and Steff Deprez

Acknowledgements