

# A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR ACTOR FOCUSED PLANNING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

**Jan Van Ongevalle (HIVA), Huib Huyse (HIVA), Eugenia Boutylkova  
(Consultant), Anneke Maarse (Double Loop) & Cristien Temmink (Independent  
Consultant)**

PME PROCESS MUST BE TAILORMADE



COMMENTS ARE WELCOME [jan.vanongevalle@kuleuven.be](mailto:jan.vanongevalle@kuleuven.be); [huib.huyse@kuleuven.be](mailto:huib.huyse@kuleuven.be)

KU Leuven  
HIVA - RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR WORK AND SOCIETY  
Parkstraat 47 box 5300, 3000 LEUVEN, Belgium  
[hiva@kuleuven.be](mailto:hiva@kuleuven.be)  
[www.hiva.be](http://www.hiva.be)

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# 1 | Acknowledgements

This paper is a tribute to the many people of the various organisations and their partners who have taken part in this collaborative action research. They have given us a unique opportunity to join them on their journey of piloting various PME approaches to help them deal with complex processes of social change. They are the drivers of the action research as they systematically reflected on their practice. They are also the people who produced a rich narrative of their experiences in the form of a case report. This technical paper draws from these case reports and we can only hope that we do justice to the work done by the various cases. The organisations involved in the action research are Cordaid, Light for the World, ETC COMPAS, ICCO, MCNV, Oxfam Novib, STRO, Vredeseilanden, War Child Holland and Woord & Daad (W&D).

A special word of thanks also goes to the Dutch organisation 'PSO - Capacity Building in Developing Countries' who funded this research through its Thematic Learning Programme on PME of complex processes of Social Change.

## 2 | Introduction

During a collective action research that ran from 2010 till 2012, ten development organisations (nine Dutch and one Belgian), together with their Southern partners, explored if and how a variety of planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) approaches and methods helped them deal with processes of complex change. These included outcome mapping (OM), most significant change (MSC), client satisfaction instruments (CSI), SenseMaker and participatory M&E tools such as personal goal exercises. The added value of these approaches for dealing with complex change is documented in the action research report that states the following major conclusion:

*An actor-focused PME approach, if done well and followed through with the necessary leadership, can provide development organisations working towards complex change with the means not only to demonstrate this complex change (i.e. show their results) but also to learn how this change happened and how they contributed to it. This can help organisations to adjust their strategies according to lessons learned, making them more effective and adaptive.*

The action research report however provides only limited detail about the ‘technicalities’ of choosing, introducing, adapting and implementing the PME approaches that were explored in the action research. This working paper therefore complements the action research report by telling the more technical side of the different PME pilots. We hope that the practical experiences from the action research cases can help other organisations who are considering to use similar actor focused PME approaches within their programmes. Readers who want to delve deeper in specific cases can access the individual case reports through the following link: <http://hiva.kuleuven.be/nl/nieuws/actor-focused-planning-monitoring-and-evaluation-pme>.

This paper is structured as follows:

- *Chapter 2* gives an overview of the various actor focused PME approaches that were piloted in this action research. The chapter also explains what is understood by an actor focused PME approach;
- *Chapter 3* zooms in on the technicalities of implementing the actor focused PME approaches. We briefly explain each approach and outline the various PME needs that they were able to address within the action research cases. We also explore the main challenges related to each approach and how some of these were addressed;
- *Chapter 4* concludes the paper by highlighting how the four dimensions of any actor focused PME approach (i.e. head, spine, arms and legs) need to be considered in order to ensure their successful implementation. The chapter also suggests a framework for categorising the various actor focused PME approaches according to their focus on actors who are influenced directly or indirectly by a programme and according to the extent to which they come with an open or a predetermined analytic framework.

### 3 | Focusing PME on the programme actors

A common characteristic of the PME approaches reviewed in this paper is their focus on specific actors whom a programme is trying to influence directly or indirectly. Figure 3.1 illustrates how the different PME approaches, piloted in the action research, focused on programme actors who can be situated at various levels along the different spheres of influence of a programme.

**Figure 3.1** Visualisation of actor focus of the PME approaches piloted in the action research

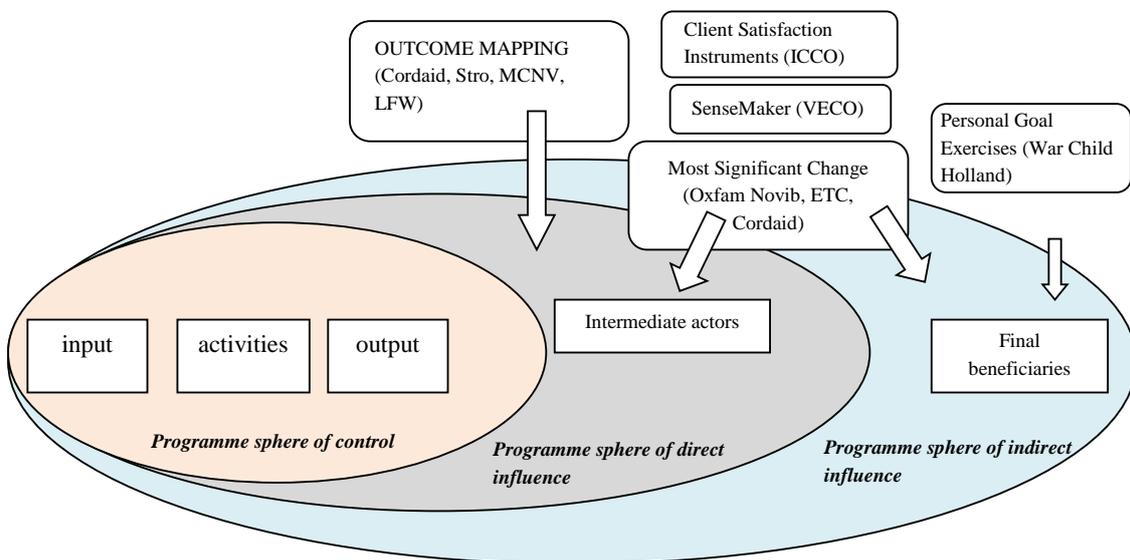


Table 3.1 summarises the specific actor focus of each PME approach in the different cases.

**Table 3.1 Outline of the actor focus of the PME approaches piloted in the action research**

PME approach/PME tool	Actor focus
OM (Light for the World, STRO, MCNV, Cordaid)	Initial planning and on-going monitoring is focused on changes in behaviour and relationships of intermediate local actors who are supported by the programme and whose actions are believed to contribute towards changes at the level of final beneficiaries.
MSC (Oxfam Novib, ETC Compass, Cordaid)	Representatives from target groups are asked about any significant changes that they experienced as a result of the programme. The type of target groups involved depends on the information needs. ( <i>e.g.</i> final beneficiaries and/or members from local partner organisations)
CSI (ICCO)	Clients ( <i>i.e.</i> recipients of services) are given an opportunity to provide direct feedback about their satisfaction with the services received. Clients can be the final programme beneficiaries ( <i>e.g.</i> hospital patients giving feedback through client satisfaction surveys) or could be the staff within a local partner organisation ( <i>e.g.</i> hospital staff giving feedback towards management through consumer panels). <i>Appendix 1 shows an extract from a client satisfaction instrument.</i>
Score Cards (W&D)	Score Cards are used to monitor outcomes related to quality of service delivery and participation. They are used in evaluation sessions with groups of education staff in the case of quality of education score cards or groups of parents and other community actors in the case of participation score cards.
SenseMaker (VECO)	Actors involved in a programme are given an opportunity to share their perception about topics or interests (mostly related to the objectives of the programme) through sharing a short story (micro-narrative) and self-signification of their stories according to the predetermined topics of interests. In the case of VECO, target groups are actors involved in value chains which include farmers, farmer organisations, companies, local NGOs, government, business development services and other supporting organisations.
Participatory M&E tools, <i>e.g.</i> personal goal exercises and workshop module evaluations (War Child Holland)	Through this tool, youth participating in War Child Holland's life skills workshops were directly involved in setting their own change objective and monitoring their progress in achieving this objective as well as in providing feedback on each module and the entire intervention. In addition, the personal goal setting was also used for setting professional/capacity building goals for implementers of the intervention (both partner and WCH staff).

We are aware that the term ‘actor focused’ may be contested. In the literature they are more commonly referred to as participatory PME approaches. We prefer to use ‘actor focused’ because it captures better their specific added value of zooming in on specific actors whom a programme is trying to influence directly or indirectly.

While these actors may participate in various degrees in the PME process, the actor focused PME approach directs attention of programme staff towards the changes in their target groups. We identified the main characteristics of an actor focused PME approach as follows:

1. a key characteristic of an actor focused PME approach is that it does not focus on the ‘hoped for changes in state’ (*e.g.* changes in income levels, agricultural production or health for example). Instead focus will be more on what people *do* (*e.g.* behaviour, practices, relationships) in order to contribute to the hoped for changes in state and/or people’s perceptions about the progress towards hoped for changes of state;
2. programme staff and the actors whom the programme is trying to influence directly or indirectly are actively involved in the collection and/or use of monitoring information.

As we will see in this paper this provides opportunities for dialogue and relation building and learning.

## 4 | Overview of PME approaches used in the action research

### 4.1 Outcome mapping

#### 4.1.1 What is outcome mapping?

**Outcome mapping (OM)** is a methodology for planning, monitoring and evaluating development programmes that are oriented towards social change. OM provides a set of tools and guidelines to gather information on the changes in behaviour, actions and relationships of those individuals, groups or organisations with whom the programme is working directly and seeking to influence. OM puts people and learning at the centre of development and accepts unanticipated changes as potential for innovation. For more information visit [www.outcomemapping.ca](http://www.outcomemapping.ca) or download the OM manual.

#### 4.1.2 Which PME needs can OM address?

##### 4.1.2.1 Using OM to develop an actor centred theory of change

OM can be helpful to develop a theory of change in which the relationships, roles and responsibilities of programme actors are clarified. This is particularly helpful for programmes that follow a multi stakeholder approach, supporting local actors who play a role in addressing a specific development issue. OM's concept of 'spheres of influence' provides a practical tool to develop such an actor centred theory of change. This concept basically consists of three concentric circles that can be used to map the programme actors according to how they influence each other.

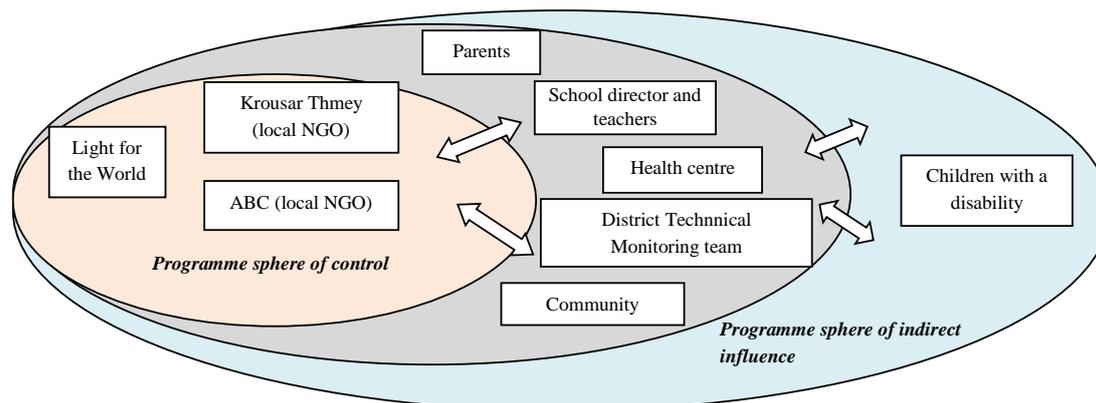
The first circle represents the sphere of control and contains those programme actors that have control over a programme's activities (*i.e.* inputs, activities and outputs). The circle of direct influence contains the actors whom a programme is trying to influence directly. These actors are also called the programme's boundary partners. A programme has no control over the actors within the sphere of direct influence but it has direct contact with them and therefore can try to influence them directly. The sphere of indirect influence contains those actors whom the programme is only able to influence indirectly because the programme has no direct contact with these actors.

An example of an actor centred theory of change according to the circles of influence is illustrated by the Light for the World Case in Textbox 4.1. The advantages of developing such actor centred theory of change are also highlighted.

#### **Textbox 4.1: Using OM to develop an actor focused theory of change**

Light for the World used OM to develop an operational plan for its intervention in Cambodia on inclusive education to promote access for children with a disability in the mainstream schooling system. The planning process evolved over a period of one year. It consisted of two planning workshops with local stakeholders and one study visit of Cambodian NGOs and ministry officials to Vietnam. One programme officer of Light for the World and a local consultant in Cambodia facilitated the planning process. A simplified version of the actor map according to the spheres of influence that emerged during the OM planning process is shown in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1 Actor map according to spheres of influence in the Light for the World case**



Mapping the programme actors according to the spheres of influence has been useful for the LFTW programme for the following reasons:

1. it allowed the programme to identify those local programme stakeholders that were seen as key for the achievement of sustainable results in the field of inclusive education. These key actors, also called the boundary partners, are situated in the sphere of direct influence (*i.e.* the parents, the school directors and teachers, the health centres, the district technical monitoring teams and the communities);
2. it also became clear that Light for the World could not directly work with the boundary partners but had to work closely with two local NGOs. It was clarified that the local NGOs and LFTW were situated in the sphere of control because they formed the programme implementing team as they had control over the programme activities;
3. the fact that there was no direct contact between programme team and final beneficiaries (*i.e.* the children with a disability) was also clarified. This helped the programme to remain realistic about the fact that for change to occur in the final beneficiaries, there would be need for change to occur in the actors located in the sphere of direct influence.

#### **4.1.2.2 Using OM to monitor changes in behaviour and relationships**

Mapping the various actors involved in a programme according to the spheres of influence is a useful step in developing a framework for monitoring changes in the behaviour of the actors a programme is seeking to influence (*i.e.* the programme's boundary partners). Once you know the actors in the sphere of direct influence, a programme can use the outcome challenge and progress marker tools that come with the OM methodology to specify the changes in behaviour or practices that a programme hopes to contribute to within these actors (*i.e.* the boundary partners):

- the outcome challenge describes the ideal changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities, and/or actions of a boundary partner. It is the programme's challenge to help bring about these changes;
- progress markers help programmes to monitor the progress of the boundary partners in achieving their outcome challenge. The specific features of the progress markers are described in Text-box 4.2.

**Textbox 4.2: What are progress markers?**

1. Progress markers are clustered in three categories: 'expect to see', 'like to see' and 'love to see':
  - 'expect to see' progress markers describe changes that are somehow expected to happen and are often achievable in the short term. They can be fundamental though to allow more profound changes to happen at a later stage;
  - 'like to see' progress markers represent some deeper changes that are already more difficult to achieve;
  - finally, the 'love to see' progress markers represent the more fundamental and often longer term changes that the partner organisations aspire.
2. Progress markers differ from traditional SMART indicators in the sense that they are not timed nor necessarily specified with pre-set targets in advance.
3. Taken as a set, progress markers, provide a map of the possible complex change process that a boundary partner wants to engage in. This map is not the real territory. Complex change is often unpredictable, and the expected change as set out by the progress markers can turn out differently in reality. Therefore, progress markers may be adjusted during the monitoring cycles or new progress markers may emerge.
4. Progress markers do not constitute a check list and don't have to be seen as 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.

Together with the outcome challenge, the progress markers provide the boundary partners and the programme who supports them with a flexible framework to monitor progress related to their change process. The use of OM to plan and monitor changes in behaviour of the boundary partners is given by the MCNV case in Textbox 4.3.

**Textbox 4.3: Using outcome challenges and progress markers to monitor changes in behaviour (the case of MCNV)**

In the community development programme of MCNV, progress markers were used by community based organisations and local NGOs to map their own capacity development process. The outcome challenge was formulated as pointers towards specific capabilities of the five capability framework<sup>1</sup> that had emerged as areas that needed strengthening during a preceding organisational assessment exercise. Figure 4.2 illustrates the customised outcome challenge and associated progress markers for one 'old people's organisation' in Vietnam who was a boundary partner in MCNV's community development programme.

<sup>1</sup> Baser H. & Morgan P. (2008), 'Capacity, change and performance, study report, discussion paper no. 59B', Maastricht, The Netherlands: European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), available at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCDRC/Resources/CapacityChangePerformanceReport.pdf>.

**Figure 4.2 Extract of progress markers and outcome challenge from MCNV case**

<p><b>Partner organisation: Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) of Vinh Thach</b></p> <p>Customised outcome challenge: The organisation improves its organisational capacity that will be shown in the following three pointers of the three prioritised capacities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- capability to relate: building good reputation of the DPO;</li><li>- capability to adapt and self-renew: leadership is open to change;</li><li>- capability to coherence: learning the process of change and development from other organisations and then apply.</li></ul> <p>Expect to see progress markers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. organising meetings and music shows on the occasion of important events of the organisation;</li><li>2. capturing and filing photos of the organisation's activities as a tool for reputation building;</li><li>3. revising the organisation's regulation in an appropriate manner;</li><li>4. attracting attention and receiving support from the local authority towards the implementation plan.</li></ol> <p>Like to see progress markers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>5. all members unanimously abide by the new regulation;</li><li>6. at least 3 athletes participate and win prizes in sports competitions for people with disability at provincial and national level;</li><li>7. participating in forums and workshops whose topics are familiar to the organisation and people with disability.</li></ol> <p>Love to see progress markers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>8. photos and information of organisation's activities are broadcast by the mass media (at least 1-2 times a year);</li><li>9. more organisations, agencies inside and outside province are more aware of and cooperate with the organisation;</li><li>10. there is a stable financial means for maintaining and organising activities of the organisation.</li></ol>
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#### **4.1.2.3 Using OM to learn about a programme's results during regular monitoring cycles**

Learning takes a central focus in OM. This means that merely collecting monitoring information around outcome challenges or progress markers is not enough. Collective 'sense making' or learning about the monitoring information during regular monitoring cycles and using these lessons to inform future planning is an essential part of an OM based PME approach. Among the cases that used OM in the action research, the following characteristics of successful learning processes emerged:

1. collective reflection about the monitoring information through meetings or workshops that involve programme staff and/or boundary partners. Participation of boundary partners in reflection on the monitoring information will be less likely when there is an advocacy or lobby relation between the boundary partner and the programme team;
2. skilful facilitation of collective reflection moments to support deeper learning;
3. using the progress markers and outcome challenges as a basis for dialogue and conversations instead of checklists that need to be assessed;
4. using the progress markers and outcome challenges in a flexible way, allowing them to change along the way based on the lessons learned;
5. combine reflection on changes in the boundary partners with reflection on the effectiveness of the support provided by the programme team.

#### **4.1.3 Challenges faced with OM implementation**

The challenges related to OM implementation listed here are not meant to be exhaustive. They are limited to the main challenges faced by the cases who implemented OM in the action research:

1. in two action research cases OM didn't progress beyond a first training workshop because of low organisational resonance with gathering qualitative M&E information or lack of time and financial resources to provide coaching after the initial training;
2. organising collective reflection moments to draw lessons from the monitoring information costs time and money. Being too ambitious with the number of monitoring cycles or monitoring meetings might not always be a good idea. In one case, the initial plan to have three monitoring cycles with two day reflection meetings had to be revised downwards to two cycles with half day reflection meetings;

3. within the various cases that used OM, learning about the monitoring information was mainly taking place at field levels in interaction with the programme actors. Aggregating the monitoring information and learning at higher levels (*e.g.* at head office level) was a challenge as it resulted in more monitoring meetings and less contextualised monitoring information. While there are no standard solutions, two cases took steps to address this challenge by developing their own web based information systems to make the monitoring information more accessible across geographical boundaries;
4. skilful facilitation may be needed to support more critical reflection during collective monitoring meetings. Such facilitation capacity is not always readily available.

#### 4.1.4 Summary of OM's strengths and challenges as experienced in the cases

Strengths	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Helps to develop an actor focused theory of change through its spheres of influence tool</li> <li>2. Specific focus on clarifying relationships between programme actors through the concept of spheres of influence</li> <li>3. Allows monitoring of changes in behaviour and relationships through easy to use tools such as outcome challenges, progress markers, outcome journals and strategy journals</li> <li>4. Progress markers provide flexible monitoring framework that can provide a basis for dialogue</li> <li>5. Stimulates collective 'sense making' about the monitoring information and using this lessons to inform future planning</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Risk of getting stuck in the planning and taking too much time to start the monitoring process</li> <li>2. OM requires a learning culture in an organisation where time and resources can be made available to support collective learning moments</li> <li>3. Aggregating OM based monitoring information from field level to higher levels</li> <li>4. Availability of skilful facilitation capacity to support critical reflection during collective monitoring meetings</li> </ol>

## 4.2 Most significant change

### 4.2.1 What is most significant change?

The most significant change (MSC) technique is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation. It is participatory because many project stakeholders are involved both in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded and in analysing the data. Essentially, the process involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories emanating from the field level, and the systematic selection of the most significant of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. The designated staff and stakeholders are initially involved by 'searching' for project impact. Once changes have been captured, various people sit down together, read the stories aloud and have regular and often in-depth discussions about the value of these reported changes. When the technique is implemented successfully, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on programme impact (Davies & Dart, 2005 p. 8). For more information visit: [www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf](http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf).

### 4.2.2 Which M&E needs can MSC address?

During the action research, Oxfam Novib, through its Measuring Milestones Initiative, explored how the MSC methodology could help partner organisations and their supporting consultants to demonstrate any changes related to gender justice in the ideological, informal layers of their organisation and the way these changes had happened. The COMPAS (Comparing and Supporting Endogenous Development) international network on the other hand introduced MSC to learn

about change processes taking place in the communities and the importance of worldviews and spiritual wellbeing in these changes.

#### **4.2.2.1 Collecting significant change stories**

##### **a) Story collection: a light or heavy process?**

The effort needed to collect significant change stories depends on the depth and detail of the stories that you need based on your own information needs:

1. in one action research case in Sri Lanka, story collectors would visit the story tellers more than once allowing them to probe for deeper meaning such as changes related to the respondents world view. Story collectors would also try to collect stories from three generations in one household, (*i.e.* grand parent, parent and child) in order to gain insight in different points of view. As a result, story collection was a rather intensive process (ETC Compass Sri Lanka);
2. in another case in Ghana, story collection was less intensive with story collectors collecting the stories in one round but with the resulting stories also containing less information about changes related to world view or spirituality as compared to the Sri Lanka case. This was compensated however by hiring a professional cameraman who put on video any evidence of change based on his own observation and information from the community (ETC compass Ghana).

##### **b) Developing trust between the story teller and collector**

Trust between story teller and story collector is essential and needs nurturing. This trust is important to ensure people's interest and engagement when collecting stories and their willingness to share sensitive stories. At the same time it helps to ensure that people feel empowered through the MSC process. The following lessons learned during the action research can be helpful in this context:

1. ask the story teller for consent to use the story in order to avoid violate trust;
2. be careful in how you use stories in public reports or publications;
3. consider the power issue as illustrated by the following example: 'in one malaria prevention programme, stories were internally collected from the female field staff. These stories proved to be very useful as a tool of appraisal for the predominantly male management. It was not clear however in how far the MSC exercise contributed to improved relations between field staff and management or if it was mainly a process to extract personal change stories from the female staff to be judged by the management';
4. the methodology demands story collectors to respect the voice of the story teller. They need to allow the story tellers to include their personal feelings and reflections about changes in their stories and to allow them to use their own words to describe these changes. This way, the voices that are captured in the stories can be convincing and can help to identify intangible changes and perspectives that are rarely heard;
5. it can therefore be necessary that the story collector first works on the relationship with the story teller, before starting to ask questions about change. This could imply several visits to the same story teller.

##### **c) Developing skills in collecting stories by doing**

Collecting MSC stories proved to be more difficult than expected. Some of the challenges included active listening while writing, probing and making the distinction between case studies and MSC stories. For example, with one of the partner organisations of Oxfam Novib, a first MSC cycle resulted in MSC stories where the voice of the story teller was difficult to find. Instead, the stories contained descriptions of a changed situation framed by a staff member of the organisation. At the same time, the quality of the MSC stories was shown to improve in subsequent MSC cycles with

story collectors confirming that that they had become better at understanding what is meant by 'change' and had gained skills to ask probing questions during their interviews.

#### d) Working with domains of change

Domains of change are broad and often fuzzy categories of possible MSC stories. They are different from SMART indicators in that they allow people to have different interpretations of what constitutes a change in that area. The utility of determining domains of change is two-fold. It can help organisations to group a large number of MSC stories into more manageable categories which can each be analysed in turn. In addition, domains can be determined to help organisations track whether they are making progress towards their stated objectives.<sup>2</sup>

From the action research it emerged that specifying domains of change can have advantages and disadvantages. Oxfam Novib initially used a very open domain defined as 'changes related to the GMLT trajectory'. This resulted in many stories which could not be related to the GMLT programme since many story collectors had a different understanding of the GMLT trajectory. The open domain also didn't help to specify the data sources or the actors that needed to be interviewed resulting in many stories from different categories of actors making subsequent analysis of the programme's theory of change difficult. An advantage however was the emergence of unexpected change stories which could have been missed if more specific domains of change would have been used.

### 4.2.2.2 Learning from MSC stories

#### a) Learning during story collection

Collecting stories proved to be a learning experience both for the one collecting the stories as well as the story teller. on the level of individual capacity building.

#### b) Learning during story selection

Learning from the MSC stories is an important principle that underpins the MSC approach. The selection of one MSC story out of the various stories that have been collected during a monitoring cycle is an important step within the MSC process that can stimulate learning from the stories. This is supposed to be done collectively involving programme staff or other stakeholders who draw insights from the discussions that emerge as they select the story that they perceive as showing the MSC (see Textbox 4.4).

#### **Textbox 4.4: learning through selection of significant change stories (Oxfam Novib)**

During a story selection process in the context of an Oxfam Novib supported gender mainstreaming programme, programme staff of one local NGO agreed that the story shown below gave an example of intangible change at individual level. However the discussions also triggered the decision that the organisation needed to pay specific attention to the negative attitude of male staff towards the capabilities of their female colleagues to ensure a more 'gender friendly' organisations: *'That time one woman colleague worked with me in an equivalent position. At first I thought, how a woman could work in a messenger position. I had negative attitudes. Even then, I helped her. I used to accompany her when she distributed letters to the other offices. I felt uncomfortable to go with her. Sometimes I undermined myself to think 'how can a woman be working in the same position as me? (...) In the beginning of 2010 a GMLT workshop was held at my organisation. That workshop was exceptional for me. I learned about gender equality and it increased my knowledge and changed my perception, my outlook. It gave me clarity regarding roles and responsibilities of human beings. I understand my wrong interpretation ...'* (Bangladesh, 2012).

#### c) Learning during secondary analysis of the stories

'Secondary analysis of significant change stories provides an additional level of analysis that can complement the participatory selection of stories discussed above. It involves the examination, clas-

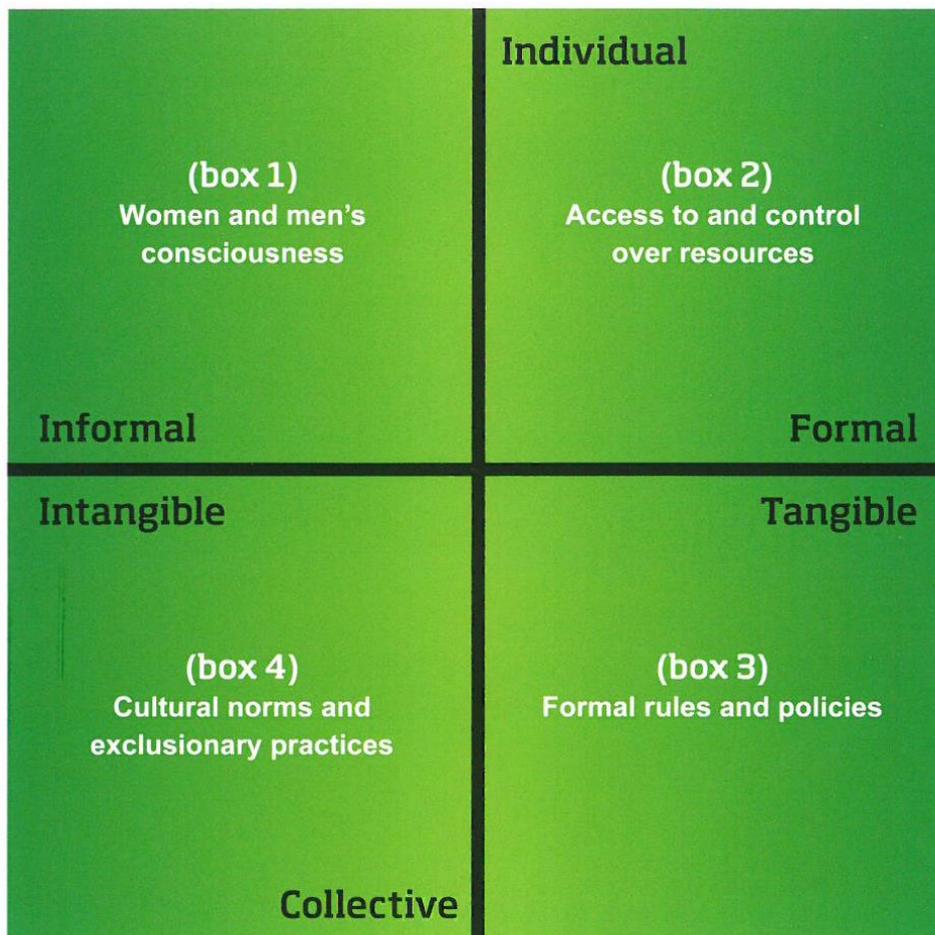
<sup>2</sup> Davies R. & Dart J. (2005), The MSC (MSC) technique; a guide to its use, see: [www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf](http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf).

sification and analysis of the content (or themes) across a set of significant change stories. The technique involves analysing a complete set of significant change stories including those that were not selected at higher levels. Unlike the selection process in MSC, secondary analysis is generally done in a less participatory way, often by the person in charge of monitoring and evaluation, or a specialist. While it is not a critical step in MSC, it can add further legitimacy and rigour to the process' (MSC guide, Davies & Dart, 2005, p. 39).

During the action research, secondary analysis of significant change stories was carried out in the Oxfam Novib case, where two head Office staff with the help of an external consultant carried out a secondary analysis on all the stories collected during a first MSC monitoring cycle in a gender mainstreaming programme. From a total of 20 partner organisations 119 change stories were collected and had been sent to Oxfam Novib. The secondary analysis explored to what extent the stories could be attributed to the gender mainstreaming learning trajectory (GMLT) and if they illustrated instances of gender related cultural change. From the 119 stories 44 stories were shown to correspond to these two criteria and were further analysed on the basis of the 'Gender at Work' framework (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3 Gender at work framework**

**Diagram 1: Gender at Work Framework**



The importance of the results from the secondary analysis for Oxfam Novib in terms of learning and upward accountability is demonstrated by the following insights from the action research:

1. it allowed Oxfam Novib staff to identify compelling examples of intangible change as a result of the GMLT and analyse how GMLT contributed to these changes;
2. results of the secondary analysis were used to complement the findings of an external review of the gender mainstreaming programme which had mostly focused on the achievement of the logframe indicators such as the number of partner organisations that carried out a gender analysis or the increase in the number of female staff in management positions in the partner organisations;
3. analysis based on the Gender at Work framework allowed Oxfam Novib to identify different pathways through which change was described in the stories which in turn provided helpful information about the theory of change of the Gender Mainstreaming Programme;
4. Oxfam Novib also learned about unintended outcomes such as changes in economic empowerment and gender based violence which were not key objectives of the gender mainstreaming learning trajectory. These insights led to reconsidering ideas about the way gender mainstreaming programmes and stand-alone women issues such as gender based violence are interconnected.

#### 4.2.3 Challenges faced with the implementation of MSC

1. Harvesting MSC stories doesn't automatically result in learning among programme stakeholders. The following factors were shown to pose challenges for learning to occur:
  - learning from the discussion during the selection of stories doesn't happen automatically. Proper facilitation may be needed for making sure that learning takes place;
  - people involved in the selection process can get stuck in discussions about the technical qualities of the stories (*e.g.* are they well written? Do they provide enough information? ...) instead of the meaning that people draw from the stories. This is especially the case when people lack understanding of the content and context of the MSC stories, making it harder to facilitate a meaningful debate during the story selection process;
  - people may feel hesitant to share their meaning and interpretation of stories in the presence of people with a higher status in the organisation. Some people might also feel that they lack the skills to interpret the stories or communicate their insights and therefore keep silent;
  - documentation of the discussions and the major lessons learned is an extra task that may not happen automatically. Someone may need to be assigned with the specific task to document discussions during the story selection process;
  - information in the stories may be too shallow or may be difficult to relate to the programme.
2. Using MSC stories to satisfy upward accountability requirements can be a challenge because of the sometimes large amount of narrative information that doesn't always suit easy quantification and visualisation in reports. The trend of getting mostly positive change stories and the varying quality of the stories can be another challenge. In addition someone far away from the field level may not have the necessary contextual knowledge to fully understand the stories. It needs to be mentioned that the issue of 'cherry picking' the positive stories becomes less of an issue when the stories are firstly used for critical reflection about the programme and when different stakeholders with different perspectives can give input in this reflection.
3. An MSC champion within the organisation who can spearhead introduction and implementation of the MSC approach is essential.
4. Human and financial resources can be potential limiting factors for the successful implementation of MSC. Story collection, selection of stories and feedback to the story collectors can take time and resources as illustrated by one partner organisation of Oxfam Novib who chose to follow a heavy story collection process:

*I asked questions and listened to the story teller. Then I went back to the office to type the story on the computer. Then I returned to the story tellers to read the story out loud to her. Again I took the information back to my office. In total I visited one story teller about 3 or 4 times to finalise the story.’ (Story collector district level, Bangladesh, 2012)*

5. Need for a change of mindset (need for unlearning established practice) whereby M&E personnel gets more of a coordinating function instead of a solely implementation function in terms of M&E. Hence, project/programme staff is required to spend more time than they were used to in the collection and analysis of data. If this M&E work by staff is felt to be an add-on to the normal workload then it may be difficult to sustain the MSC process over time.

#### 4.2.4 Summary of strengths and challenges of MSC as experienced in the cases

Strengths	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can stimulate active participation of programme staff in monitoring activities by involving them in story collection or/and story selection</li> <li>2. Telling stories and listening to them is often experienced as ‘an inspiring exercise that brings people closer’ and that empowers people</li> <li>3. Allows to surface a programme’s intangible effects (<i>e.g.</i> gender related cultural change in the Oxfam Novib case and changes in spiritual, leadership, women empowerment and health in the ETC Compas case)</li> <li>4. Can help to demonstrate unintended effects that can be related to particular interventions</li> <li>5. Comes with concrete steps for analysing stories, <i>i.e.</i> story selection process and secondary analysis</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If staff sees MSC as not part of their normal work, it is hard to keep them motivated for a regular MSC process</li> <li>2. The process of collecting stories in such a way that it has an empowering effect for the story tellers is not considered easy by the story collectors and needs adequate skills</li> <li>3. Learning during story selection needs proper facilitation.</li> <li>4. Risk of stories that are shallow or difficult to relate to the programme</li> <li>5. Analysis of large amounts of narrative information</li> <li>6. Can be resource and time intensive</li> </ol>

### 4.3 Using OM in combination with MSC

#### 4.3.1 Which M&E needs can MSC address?

One action research case involving informal networks that worked towards the prevention of violence against women in Colombia, combined MSC and OM in their M&E system. It was decided to combine both methods to address the following two M&E needs of the programme: (1) to assess the changes in behaviour of key actors that the women networks were seeking to influence in their lobby and advocacy activities and (2) to assess the functioning of the networks.

Figure 4.4 shows an extract from the monitoring tool that was developed to track the behaviour change of key actors and which uses two elements of the OM approach, namely ‘outcome challenge’ and ‘outcome journal’. The monitoring tool is also inspired by the MSC approach as it contains a set of questions that help the women groups to build stories of change for each key actor and to draw lessons that are used to inform planning of future activities.

**Figure 4.4 Key actors monitoring tool used by communities of change in Cordaid's violence against women programme in Colombia**

Key actors we tried to influence during this period	What behavioural changes we were expecting to influence or support in these actors? (ideal behaviour)	Which was the behaviour of these actors, at the moment we began to influence or support them? (initial behaviour)	Have we observe changes? (mark with an 'X' one of the following options)			
			No change	Negative change	Some positive change	Significant positive change
Actor 1 ...	Outcome challenges copied from the annual plan, or emergent outcomes	Base line behaviour copied from the annual plan, or retrospectively defined for emergent outcomes			X	
Actor 2 ...						X
...				X		

Identifying the key aspects of the story of change (done for three actors that are given the highest priority):  
 Guiding questions: Who changed? Where? What kind of change? How these changes contribute to the National Advocacy Plan themes and purposes? What has been done to contribute to the described changes? Where? With whom? What other actors and factors contributed to the described change? How? The answers to these questions are later used as elements to build a story of change in a creative way and a title is assigned to each story.  
 Deepening the reflection and the learning from the story of change:  
 Guiding questions: Why this change is important for us and for our realities/contexts? What changes, if any, we still want to pursue in this actor? What actions we should implement to keep influencing or supporting this actor? What have we learned from this experience, that may be useful for the policy influence work for us and for others?

The following main advantages emerged from combining OM and MSC:

1. the OM and MSC based PME system was shown to help the programme to improve its advocacy strategies by making the theory of change more actor focused and the monitoring more focused on the effects within the actors whom the women networks are trying to influence;
2. reflection on the internal functioning of the communities of change, contributed to changing relations within those networks. This was facilitated by the fact that the monitoring system included an analysis on the current situation of the network and the ideal situation they wanted to achieve. The networks then monitored the progress towards this ideal and this contributed to a dialogue among network members about the network's structure, their general functioning, the roles of the network members and the process of decision making within the network.

#### 4.3.2 Challenges faced with combining OM and MSC

Combining MSC and OM by itself doesn't necessarily address the practical M&E challenge related the sometimes complex set-up of geographically dispersed programmes.

In the case of the 'violence against women' programme with geographically dispersed regional networks which themselves consist of various local networks and organisations, the M&E system based on OM and MSC ran the risk of becoming too heavy. Especially the large number of monitoring meetings at local, regional and national levels as well as the large amounts of qualitative monitoring information contributed to this challenge. While a web based M&E database had been developed, the problem of aggregation and feedback between various monitoring levels and the systematic documentation of the change process over time had not been fully resolved.

The 'violence against women' case illustrates that careful customisation and adaptation of any PME approach will be essential to ensure that it resonates with the specific needs, capacities and values of the programme that needs to implement it.

## 4.4 Client satisfaction instruments (CSI)

### 4.4.1 What are client satisfaction instruments?

'CSI are basically downward accountability tools that enable someone to monitor the satisfaction level of the users of a particular service. This service might be a public one (a government hospital, primary school), but also a semi-public or private one (a producer organisation, cooperative, NGO). But ... CSI is more! It is also a Philosophy: it gives voice to those who are usually not heard. It strengthens individuals and communities to become discussant in design, implementation and monitoring of services. It will beneficiaries turn into right holders. So, it is much more than just a technical tool.' For more information, see ICCO CSI website: [www.clientsatisfactioninstruments.org/](http://www.clientsatisfactioninstruments.org/)). Also, Appendix 1 shows an extract of a client satisfaction tool used in the ICCO case.

### 4.4.2 Which M&E needs can client satisfaction tools address?

The short feedback cycles that come with applying CSI has shown to help service delivery organisations to address the following M&E needs:

- helps service providers to pay more attention to the rights and expectations of their 'clients';
- empowers beneficiaries or clients who are not always used to criticise services that are provided for free;
- stimulates learning about expected and unexpected (see Textbox 4.5);
- helps to strengthen downward accountability when the results from the CSI are used to respond to the feedback from the clients and to review service delivery. In that respect, the narrative information about how specific issues that were brought forward by clients were addressed by the service provider were found to be more useful than the numeric satisfaction scores by the higher management within the local organisations that were implementing the client satisfaction tools.

#### **Textbox 4.5: Enhancing downward accountability through the use of CSI – (the case of ICCO)**

ICCO introduced CSI as part of ICCO's PME capacity-building support to partner organisations. The direct feedback from the final beneficiaries, obtained through CSI, allowed the local partners of ICCO to learn much faster about the expected and unexpected effects of their community development programmes and about the real needs of their target groups. These insights had practical implications for the programme strategy as illustrated by the following example:

*'At Nkhoma Mission Hospital ... health clients complained about the high price of the services. This - as mentioned elsewhere - also surprised the deputy director of the hospital, since for most services the patients were covered through the National Service Agreement. However, the patients that had to pay, were the ones of the neighbouring district for which their 'own' hospital was much further away than the Nkhoma Mission Hospital.'* This insight opened up internal discussions about the need for the programme to start up lobby and advocacy activities towards the government.

### 4.4.3 Challenges with CSI and how to address them

1. Using CSI may lead to clients making demands that are not realistic in terms of the capacity and mandate of the NGO that is supporting them. Such situations run the risk of creating a negative atmosphere with frustrated clients who are disappointed with the NGO who cannot live up to all their expectations. This is compounded in case interviewers make unrealistic promises to interviewees for the sake of buying people's participation. Dialogue between the supporting NGO and their clients can help to clarify and adjust unrealistic expectations.
2. Beneficiaries find it difficult to express their dissatisfaction with services that are delivered for free. In the case of free services, people would find it culturally very difficult to express their dis-

satisfaction out- rightly but would rather do it in a softer way in terms of suggestions. The following strategies were shown to help to address this challenge:

- take time to explain the purpose of the feedback and communicate about how the feedback has been used to inform practice;
  - using questions that can trigger more critical feedback, *e.g.* ‘If you were to pay for this service, would you still be equally satisfied or would you want something done differently?’.
3. There is a risk that organisations using client satisfaction tools invest a lot of effort in the collection of the data but neglect the analysis of the data and the documentation and feedback of the results of the analysis.
  4. Strategies to use the results of the CSI to lobby for reform is often not taken into account in the planning stage.

#### 4.4.4 Summary of CSI’s strengths and challenges as experienced in the cases

Strengths	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Draws attention of service providers to the rights and expectations of their clients</li> <li>2. Empowers clients/beneficiaries to give critical feedback</li> <li>3. Stimulates downward accountability</li> <li>4. Helps to learn faster about expected and unexpected results</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clients making unrealistic demands through the CSIs</li> <li>2. Beneficiaries finding it difficult to express dissatisfaction with free services</li> <li>3. Risk of getting stuck in assessing performance of service providers and not using this information for setting up reform measures to improve service delivery</li> </ol>

### 4.5 Personal goal exercises and workshop module evaluations

#### 4.5.1 What is a personal goal exercise and participatory workshop module evaluations?

The personal goal exercise is a participatory M&E tool that was used by War Child Holland to monitor changes in psycho-social wellbeing of children and young people affected by armed conflict who participated in its psychosocial support intervention ‘I DEAL’. To formulate a personal goal, facilitators first conduct a session with groups of youth to identify their strengths and difficulties regarding specific life skills, *e.g.* social relationships with peers and adults or managing emotions. Each participant then chooses one specific strength or challenge he/she wants to improve during the sessions. At the end of the intervention (*i.e.*, weekly sessions over 4 to 6 months) they assess to what extent they have achieved their personal goal. See also Appendix 2 for an outline of the guiding questions used during the personal goal exercise and workshop module evaluation from the War Child I Deal M&E toolkit.

#### 4.5.2 Which M&E needs can personal goal exercises and participatory workshop module evaluations address?

##### Textbox 4.6

‘A boy who was mainly bullying others learned how to better express himself during the I DEAL sessions. He became less shy and gained social skills, which eventually resulted in him becoming a youth leader! Currently, he helps to mobilize children for the programme.’ (*Facilitator South Sudan*)

1. The personal goal exercise helped to clarify the expectations of the workshop participants and assisted the workshop facilitators to support the participants in reaching their expectations.

This in turn contributed towards increased ownership of the programme objectives by the facilitators.

2. The personal goal exercise and workshop module evaluations helped to obtain qualitative narratives about change (as reported by the workshop facilitators) in psychosocial wellbeing at a personal level and interpersonal level (an example of such change is illustrated in Textbox 4.6). Before introducing the personal goal exercise, War Child was facing challenges to monitor these intangible changes in psychosocial wellbeing.
3. The information about changes in psychosocial wellbeing within individual workshop participants proved to be especially useful for the facilitators and for the workshop participants themselves. For the workshop facilitators it was motivational to learn about how their work could contribute to positive change. This information also helped the facilitators to adjust the sessions and to improve their facilitation skills in order to support the participants to achieve their personal goals.
4. In subsequent revision rounds, the content of the sessions (as well as the M&E tools) were revised based on the participatory module evaluations, as well as on feedback of facilitators and field staff. (*i.e.* exercises that were too complicated to facilitate well were shortened and simplified, and games that were felt to be not culturally sensitive were replaced by other games. Measuring the personal goals was made easier by changing the line into stairs numbered 1-10, on which the participants can indicate their progress, instead using a sad and a smiling face to indicate the negative (0) and positive (10) end of a line. Content-wise, exercises that were mentioned as not being culturally appropriate were omitted or adapted.

#### **4.5.3 Challenges faced with the implementation of the participatory M&E tools**

1. War Child's assumption that simply training the workshop facilitators in using the new participatory M&E tools such as the personal goal exercise would automatically ensure good implementation of the M&E tools turned out differently. Intensive coaching of workshop facilitators and follow up proved to be necessary.
2. Despite the improved ability of facilitators to capture changes at the level of the workshop participants, the analysis of this qualitative information is challenged due to limited documentation of the monitoring outcomes.
3. The difficulty of aggregating the qualitative information as well as the possible tendency towards 'cherry picking' the positive changes help to explain this challenge.
4. Due to the subjective nature of the personal goal exercise, the data should be combined with additional (external) research data on outcomes, to satisfy upward accountability needs. However, the monitoring information is used to illustrate the scores of War Child's global indicators<sup>3</sup> which are obtained by completing Indicator Progress Cards with quantitative information collected from a sample of groups that are supported by the life skills programme.

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<sup>3</sup> DEAL interventions are contributing to two global outcome indicators: (1) children and young people have positive social skills (= the ability to engage in positive relationships with caregivers, key adults and peers); (2) children and young people feel confident and have a sense of self-esteem.

#### 4.5.4 Summary of strengths and challenges of participatory M&E tools as experienced in the cases

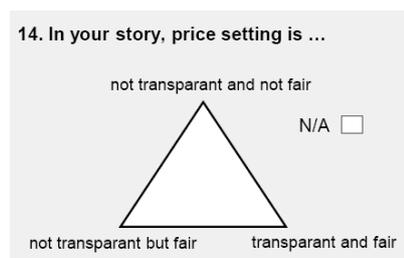
Strengths	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Help to clarify expectations of beneficiaries</li> <li>2. Help programme staff to gain insights in the objectives of the programme and to adjust practice based on monitoring information</li> <li>3. Help to monitor difficult to measure changes in psychosocial wellbeing</li> <li>4. Stimulate field level learning about unexpected and intangible results</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Setting aside the necessary time</li> <li>2. Availability of facilitation capacity</li> <li>3. Need for adaptation to local contexts</li> <li>4. Analysis of the qualitative monitoring information</li> <li>5. Documentation of the monitoring information</li> <li>6. Cherry picking of the positive stories for reporting</li> <li>7. Aggregating monitoring information from field level to higher levels</li> </ol>

## 4.6 SenseMaker

### 4.6.1 What is SenseMaker?

SenseMaker is in essence a pattern-seeking software that comes with a methodological approach. It is based on the collection and analysis of large amounts of fragmented materials such as spoken or written micro-narratives to make sense of complex realities. The approach is built on the idea that people use fragmented micro-narratives to make sense of the world around them. Through a probing question, respondents share a specific moment or experience. Typical prompting questions are formulated as: *'what specific moment or event made you feel discouraged or hopeful about ...?'* or *'imagine that you would meet a colleague, what would you tell to motivate or discourage her to ...?'* The story tellers then 'signify' or 'code' their own story against a set of questions which is referred to as the *signification framework*. For example, one of the topics of interest in the VECO case, focusing on inclusiveness of small-holders in modern markets, was price setting. Respondents were asked to put a mark in a triangle or 'triad' (see Figure 4.5) in order to show how they felt their story related to the three aspects of price setting as represented by each corner of the triangle. In addition to the triads, a typical signification framework also makes use of dyads (see Figure 4.6), *i.e.* a sliding scale between two extreme aspects of a topic of interest, and multi-choice questions that probe for demographic information about the story tellers, the feelings they associate with their story or the thematic content of the story. Using a large amount of 'signified' micro-narratives allows a programme to identify patterns around the topics of interest. Besides revealing patterns, users have direct access to the original material, *i.e.* micro-narratives stories to add extra layers of meaning to the patterns. SenseMaker is not freely available as it involves the use of a software package which needs to be leased from Cognitive Edge<sup>4</sup> the company who designed this method and who supports its implementation.

Figure 4.5 Example of triad signifier (VECO)



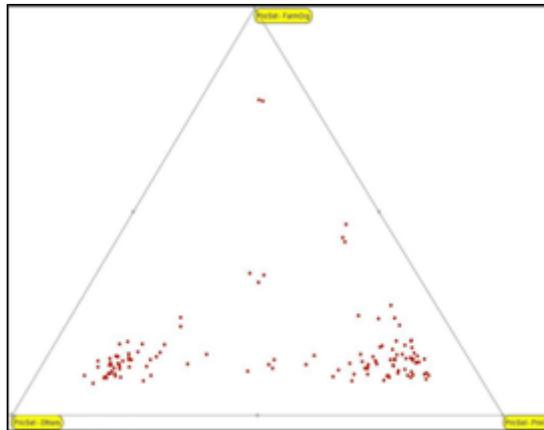
4 <http://cognitive-edge.com/>.



2. In this case, SenseMaker didn't provide direct answers to evaluative questions about the effects of a programme. Instead it helped to gain insights in the state of affairs concerning the inclusiveness of smallholders in modern markets. These insights can then be used to learn about the implications for the programme and to inform future programme interventions, enforcing or to dampening the patterns that may have been observed (see Textbox 4.8).

**Textbox 4.8: adjusting programme strategy based on insights from story patterns (VECO case)**  
 In one of the value chains supported by VECO, it became clear from the story distribution shown in the triad in Figure 4.8 below that *farmers are the least powerful party in price setting. Private companies dominate together with other parties (middle men)*. Following a reflection with chain actors on these patterns the following recommendations were made which were then followed up by the VECO programme: the need for trade contracts between the farmers cooperative and the company, further training (by the company) on tea picking techniques and a commitment from the company to display the prices at the collection points. VECO is also considering to use SenseMaker in subsequent monitoring cycles in order to learn about shifting patterns over time by analysing the stories that relate to such patterns.

**Figure 4.8** Emerging patterns of stories



3. In the VECO case, SenseMaker was considered useful for strengthening upward accountability for the following reasons:
  1. stories are signified by the people who wrote the stories and therefore there is less bias from external interpreters/researchers;
  2. the visual representation that is generated by the SenseMaker software is easy to understand, attracts attention and shows clear patterns. If it comes with a good set of stories, it combines quantitative data with qualitative data;
  3. results from the SenseMaker process can be integrated in the baseline/impact assessment reports and in the annual reports to the main donors;
  4. in addition, SenseMaker was felt to have the potential to strengthen downward accountability if it's used as a continuous system of story collection and feedback. During the feedback moments, programme actors or beneficiaries get an opportunity to reflect on the insights that emerge from the sense maker process and this can result in a deeper understanding of the programme and recommendations for programme adjustments.

### 4.6.3 Challenges faced with the implementation of SenseMaker

The following main challenges emerged from the SenseMaker case during the action research:

1. even if the topics that you may want to investigate through SenseMaker are clear (*e.g.* the issue of inclusiveness in the VECO case described above), it is not so straight forward to translate them into signifiers (triads and dyads). This is because the kind of questioning is quite different from conventional survey questions;
2. dyads and triads are useful to construct patterns in relation to certain values, qualities, issues, but less to have answers to specific questions;
3. developing a signification framework takes time. It is a rather long and iterative/cyclical process of trying out combinations triads, dyads and Multiple Choice Questions based on the topics of interest, discovering new interesting combinations, using and modifying triads & dyads that are commonly used in other frameworks and constantly cross-checking whether the questions are reflecting the essential topics of interests. It is recommended to carry out pre-tests with a limited group of respondents;
4. story-writing and self-signification can be challenging if you work with people from rural areas and/or people that are illiterate. Adequate preparation, facilitation and support is required.

### 4.6.4 Some practical tips

- Time from initial idea to finalised signification framework in the VECO case took seven months: July 2011 to February 2012.
- Story collection proved most efficient - with a small group of enumerators - through a facilitated story collection in group since individual interviews are time consuming if you have to collect large amounts of stories.
- Avoid that people have the feeling they are in an exam or test. People need to understand the purpose of the exercise and why it is important for the programme.
- The less triads and dyads, the easier and more focused the analysis part will become. It is important to be very focused and come up with triads and dyads that reflect the essentials of what you want to investigate.
- Multi-choice questions are crucial to make comparisons with results from the dyads and triads. So, during the design of the dyads and triads it is important to cross-check how they could be combined with relevant multiple choice questions.
- It is important before finalising the signification framework that the users are clear on the over-all questions they would like to see answered through SenseMaker. This helps to cross-check the relevance of signifiers and modifiers, but also assists data analysis later on.

#### 4.6.5 Summary of strengths and challenges of SenseMaker as experienced in the cases

Strengths	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Helps to gain insight about intangible results</li> <li>2. Story tellers evaluate their own stories so less external bias</li> <li>3. Allows quantitative analysis of large amounts of qualitative data</li> <li>4. Allows visual representation of large amounts of stories</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of signification framework (diads, triads, MCQs)</li> <li>2. Logistics for story collection since large amounts of micro narratives need to be collected</li> <li>3. Working with triads proved to be challenging for farmers in the VECO case</li> </ol>

#### 4.7 Using a common results framework and integrated planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL) system

##### 4.7.1 What is an integrated PMEL system (the case of W&D)?

W&D together with its partner organisations developed an integrated PMEL system for its programme across various regional alliances in different parts of the world. Each alliance contains up to nine partners and each partner uses the same results framework (see Appendix 2) for the respective programme areas of education, vocational training, basic needs, agribusiness, enterprise development, and strengthening partner networks.

The implementation and customisation of the PMEL approach consisted of the following elements: joint design of a shared vision on development (theory of change - as a guide for further programme development); a joint development of result frameworks per programme; the joint development of tools for monitoring; the appointment of designated PMEL staff, impact studies and the so-called PMEL strengthening visits, at which the individual organisations' PMEL systems are systematically assessed. This implementation was accompanied by various learning activities to enable reflection, including questionnaires to map the overall appreciation of PMEL, group discussions on the outcomes, three rounds of reflection sessions during regional alliance meetings and guided interviews.

##### 4.7.2 What M&E needs can a common results framework and an integrated PMEL system address?

W&D identified the following strengths related to its PMEL system based on a common results framework:

1. appointing specific PMEL coordinators raised the profile of PMEL within several partner organisations. Having a person responsible for coordination meant that more information was shared among staff members at different levels of the organisations involved, enabling a fervent discussion of the role and responsibilities of and expectations for PMEL;
2. joint development of the monitoring part of the PMEL system proved useful in learning about programme effects;
3. horizontal accountability was incorporated by organising PMEL-strengthening visits by peers (of both WD and other partner organisations in the regional alliances) and by bringing together PMEL coordinators for collective reflection sessions;
4. scoring themselves on various areas of accountability sparked interesting discussions among PMEL coordinators on the meaning of accountability; by explaining their scoring rationales to one another, PMEL coordinators could learn from each other;

5. first experiences in benchmarking, by presenting the results of the baseline studies, have been positive. The same kind of experience is expected when benchmarking will be done by making use of the ARR (Annual Results Reports);
6. a strong point of the common RFW and PMEL systems at alliance level is that it allows for comparison of data between partners on alliance level and all over the world;
7. partners are increasingly experiencing a 'PMEL culture' or 'culture of learning' at the level of their organisations, this contributes positively to the experienced level of accountability;
8. the appointment of PMEL coordinators contributed to a clear role division between programme and PMEL staff regarding PMEL matters. Formalising this role division, as some organisations are doing, is something that can be encouraged;
9. the scorecards have been appreciated very positively as they led to concrete actions plans and changes in the projects.

#### 4.7.3 Challenges with the implementing a common results framework

The following challenges were identified by the W&D case:

1. after a first monitoring cycle, it emerged that partner organisations predominantly looked at the monitoring process as a way to satisfy W&D accountability requirements and less as an internal learning opportunity about the programme;
2. in addition, external consultants are hired to collect outcome-monitoring data through outcome studies around most of the outcome indicators. This contributed to less interaction between programme staff and target groups in the monitoring activities, which could also be seen as a limiting factor to learning. The results of the outcome studies were felt by the partners to be interesting but not very practical. Exceptions were the results of the scorecards used to monitor the quality of service delivery, which the partner organisations considered very useful;
3. making data analysis a common responsibility at alliance level and circulating this information on all levels of the organisations;
4. reflections among W&D and its partners on the PMEL approach with regards to assisting the programme in dealing with relationships, it was felt that it had mainly helped in clarifying the role of the PMEL officers and their relation with their colleagues. Its potential for clarifying roles and expectations among various programme actors beyond W&D and its partner organisations was less pronounced. W&D is now investing in more systematic regional reflection meetings to support partner organisations to learn from the monitoring information;
5. considerable support is needed from W&D towards the implementation of the PMEL system.

#### 4.7.4 Summary of strengths and challenges of using a common results framework as experienced in the W&D case

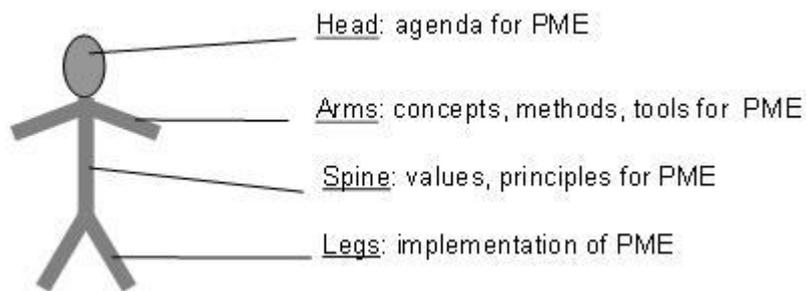
Strengths	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Allows benchmarking and comparison of data between partners located in different geographic regions</li> <li>2. Allows for aggregation of monitoring data</li> <li>3. Stronger focus on results</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seen by partner organisations as a reporting framework towards W&amp;D</li> <li>2. Compatibility with specific contexts</li> <li>3. Monitoring done by external evaluators or researchers not felt useful by partner organisations</li> <li>4. Considerable support needed from W&amp;D towards partner organisations becoming actively involved in data analysis and circulation of monitoring information</li> </ol>

## 5 | Conclusion

### 5.1 Considering the four dimensions of a PME approach

The success and usefulness of the actor focused PME approaches discussed in this paper were not solely dependent on their ‘correct’ implementation in a ‘technical sense’. In fact, the appropriate tools, concepts and methods associated with any of these approaches only constitute one of four dimensions that underpin them (see Figure 5.1). We identified these four dimensions based on the action research findings and drawing from INTRAC’s metaphor of the human body for capacity development (Lipson & Hunt, 2009) which we adapted to the context of PME.

**Figure 5.1** Four dimensions of a PME approach



Below we outline some important characteristics of each of the four dimensions that were shown to contribute to the success of the various actor focused PME approaches piloted during the action research. We also highlight some challenges that were observed in relation to the four dimensions.

#### *The head*

The head refers to the agenda for PME and gives the answer to the question: ‘PME for what?’. An agenda for actor focused PME that is carried by management and programme staff is essential to ensure the necessary mandate and support for PME within a programme or organisation. The following two aspects of the PME agenda proved to play an important role for mobilising this support:

- a strong commitment to learn from expected and unexpected programme effects and to use lessons learned to adjust programme activities;
- an explicit commitment to satisfying upward and downward accountability needs.

### *The spine*

The spine relates to the values or principles for PME. ‘Values are ideas and qualities that are informed by, and in turn inform, beliefs, principles and aspirations that are important to the actors involved in PME activities’ (Hunt & Lipson, 2009, p. 39). The spine determines how the PME agenda will be put in to practice. Across the action research cases we observed two important values for actor focused PME practice that helps programmes to deal with complex change:

- a commitment towards *active participation* of multiple programme stakeholders during the design and implementation of the PME system. This value manifested itself across the action research cases by an explicit attempt to involve programme stakeholders to reflect on their own change process and roles or expectations within a programme;
- a commitment towards *collaborative learning* among various programme stakeholders during PME activities. Across the cases we saw that such collaborative learning was stimulated through dialogue between different stakeholders.

These values have practical implications. It takes will, time, resources and skills to bring programme stakeholders together and to allow and facilitate such active participation and collaborative learning processes. A strong PME agenda is needed that can ensure the necessary support and mandate for translating these values into practice.

### *The arms*

The arms refer to the concepts, methods and tools associated with a PME approach. The availability of the capacity to customise and implement the tools, methods and concepts associated with a particular actor focused PME approach emerged as an important contributing factor for the successful implementation of the various approaches in the action research. A common challenge in that respect however was the often limited availability of facilitation capacity to promote critical reflection and stimulate collaborative learning processes among programme stakeholders. In addition, most of the piloted actor focused PME approaches, with the exception of SenseMaker, were found to provide limited tools and methods for analysing large quantities of qualitative information and aggregating this information at higher levels in the programme.

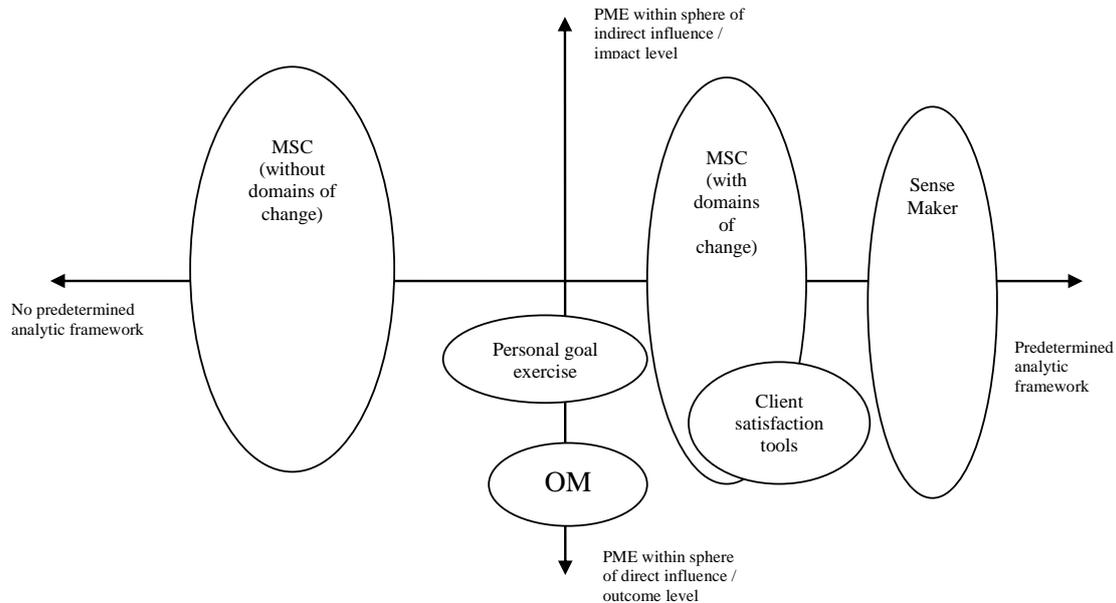
### *The legs*

The legs refer to the actual implementation of the PME approach. Their strength and the direction in which they are moving is strongly determined by the other dimensions of a PME approach but also by contextual factors. While a strong PME agenda might help to secure the resources and time for people to meet and reflect regularly this support was shown to come under pressure in the face of budgetary cuts by the main subsidy provider during the course of the action research. Also, organisations getting stuck in planning and taking a long time to move into regular monitoring cycles was shown to put strain on the motivation of programme stakeholders to remain actively involved in PME activities. Furthermore, an actor focused PME approach can remain an interesting experiment and not become part of day to day results based management if it is mainly carried by a limited number of interested individuals and not part and parcel of overall PME policy. These contextual factors need to be considered together with the other PME dimensions in order to ensure sustained implementation of an actor focused PME approach.

## 5.2 Choosing the actor focused PME approach that suits your PME needs

Choosing the right PME approach that suits your specific needs and context can be a challenging endeavour. To help organisations in making this choice, we positioned the actor focused PME approaches that were piloted in the action research according to the two dimensions shown in Figure 5.2.

**Figure 5.2 A framework for categorising actor focused PME approaches**



The first dimension represented by the vertical axis distinguishes PME approaches according to the extent they are used to focus on actors that are directly or indirectly influenced by a programme. According to this dimension, OM is positioned towards the bottom because of its specific focus on actors within a programme’s sphere of direct influence (*i.e.* the programme’s boundary partners). To a certain extent this is also the case for the personal goal exercise and the participatory workshop module evaluations as well as the client satisfaction tools where programme staff have direct contact with the programme beneficiaries. MSC and SenseMaker on the other hand can be used to monitor change at the level of the direct and indirect target groups of a programme.

The second dimension represented by the horizontal axis makes a distinction between actor focused PME approaches that come with a rather open analytic framework and those that come with a more elaborate framework for analysing the monitoring information.

We positioned MSC to the left of the diagram in case it is used without domains of change. When domains of change are used, then MSC shifts to the right side of the horizontal axis. OM, with its sets of progress markers for the boundary partners is situated in the middle of this second dimension because they constitute a rather flexible analytic framework that can be easily changed and adapted during the course of the programme. SenseMaker, with its well worked out signification system and to a certain extent also client satisfaction tools with their survey type questions were positioned towards the right side of the framework. This is because both methods require a more in-depth understanding to the issue(s) that will be studied during the monitoring process (*e.g.* inclusiveness in the VECO case and client’s satisfaction with particular services in the ICCO case). It is important to realise that being situated towards the right side of the framework does not mean that those PME approaches come with a predetermined programme interventional logic as is the case

with the logical framework that comes with SMART indicators. Both SenseMaker and client satisfaction tools have clearly brought up unexpected insights. Instead, their position towards the right illustrates that they require some more technical expertise in their development and customisation for a specific programme context.

We are fully aware that the framework suggested above is still work in progress and needs to be developed and fieldtested further. This should therefore be regarded as a work in progress appropriate to the character of this paper. It is hoped that the tool may initiate discussion and critique that may help to further develop the framework into a tool that may help organisations to choose a suitable PME approach that responds to their specific needs and context.

## appendix 1 Extract from Client Satisfaction Instrument to assess the service of Farmers Marketing Organisations (FMOs) (ICCO case)

We would like to ask you to fill in your satisfaction of the total service provided by [fill in name NGO]. Please rate each service from one (totally not satisfied) to five (completely satisfied).

	Service	1 (totally not satisfied)	2	3	4	5 (completely satisfied)
25.	Training for capacity building					
26.	Support by field workers and other NGO staffs					
27.	Facilitation of experience sharing					
28.	Results of the project					
29.	Overall satisfaction with the service provided by [fill in name NGO]					

30. Are there any major problems you have experienced regarding our services which make you dissatisfied with our [fill in name of NGO] services? Name up to three in order of their importance to you.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

31. What suggestions do you have that would help us provide better services to the farmers who use our FMO services? (Give up to three suggestions in order of importance to you).

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## appendix 2 Guiding questions of the personal goal exercise and workshop module evaluation from the Warchild Ideal M&E toolkit

### a2.1 Personal goal exercise

#### My personal goal drawing and line

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please draw your personal goal on the other side of this paper before marking the line below.**

1. At the start of the programme, I am this far in achieving my personal goal:  
(Mark where you feel you stand now, anywhere on this line)

I-----I

2. At the end of the programme, I am now this far in achieving my personal goal:  
(Mark where you feel you stand now, anywhere on this line)

I-----I

### a2.2 Module evaluation guiding questions

Module evaluation questions for reflection with the group:

1. What in this module did you like?
2. What didn't you like so much? Why?
3. What is the most important thing that you have learnt in this module?
4. What else would you have liked to learn about this theme?

Module evaluation questions for individual reflection by the facilitator:

1. What in this module did you as a facilitator especially like and why?
2. What did you not like so much and why? Do you have any suggestion to improve on this aspect?
3. Was there anything in this module not well explained? (think of unclear instructions, complicated exercises, *etc.*). Do you have any suggestion to improve on this aspect?
4. Is there anything you had to adapt/do differently in this module? If yes, what and can you explain why?
5. What would you do different next time?

## appendix 3 Results framework for W&D vocational training and job and businesses programme

Type of result	Objective	Indicator
<b>Impact</b>	Improved skills training and (self)employment opportunities, leading to more sustainable income and a better position in the labour market for the poor and vulnerable	No indicators. This will be measured through impact studies
<b>Outcome</b>		
Utilisation	Improved skills training and (self)employment opportunities, leading to more sustainable income and a better position in the labour market for the poor and vulnerable	2a. Nr of TVET trainees and JBS clients who find employment 2b. Nr of TVET trainees and JBS clients who are self-employed 2c. Nr of TVET trainees who continue in further education
Access	--	1. % of TVET trainees and JBS clients that work under fair labour conditions
Organisation	Strengthened role of actors (parents, community) in education  The target group organises itself in different groups and associations	3. Social Capital Score  4. Number of partners providing TVET and/or JBS with an active network of ex-trainees and/or JBS clients
Quality	The TVET and JBS providers and/or training institutions have effective qualitative programmes for the training and income needs.	5a. Quality score for TVET providers 5b. Quality score for JBS providers 6a. The percentage of total costs of the TVET project that is covered by project income 6b. The percentage of total costs of the JBS project that is covered by project income
<b>Output</b>		
Service delivery	To provide effective and high quality TVET	7a. Number of trainees enrolled in TVET programmes 7b. Number of TVET trainees who successfully completed a TVET programme 8. Annual number of JBS clients receiving individual services
Civil society strengthening	To strengthen the capacities of schools, partners and CBO's	9a. Number of staff capacity development training units 9b. Number of person-days training 10a. Number of partner organisations that participate in networks relevant for the programme 10b. Number of networks relevant for the programme
Advocacy	Relevant advocacy initiatives are actively undertaken by TVET and JBS providers and by rural communities	11. Number of partner organisations that have an implemented advocacy programme or are actively involved in the advocacy programme of a network

Source W&D, 2010