



Adapting OM and Theory of Change with sustainable forest NGOs in Papua New Guinea

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OMideas is an Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC) initiative to generate new knowledge around the use and development of the OM methodology.

The papers in this series are authored by members of the OMLC, a global community of OM users dedicated to mutual learning and sharing of experiences around OM.

Natalie Moxham gives a personal account of facilitating a set of workshops with twelve NGOs working on sustainable forest management in Papua New Guinea. Combining techniques from Outcome Mapping with a participatory Theory of Change approach, the paper describes the process of conducting the workshops and the advantages and compromises needed in adapting the two approaches for building collaborative practice.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a place of rapid change with substantial pressure on natural resources and cultural ways. This pressure comes from national government as well as multinational resource extraction companies operating in PNG. As such, there is large scale exploitation of natural resources in forestry and mining that is generally foreign owned, export oriented and not linked to local economies.

Numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work in the area of sustainable forest management, with the aim of supporting integrated rural community development and sustainable resource use through a number of activities including advocacy and policy work, community development and campaigning, development of livelihood enterprises and access to fair trade markets. The efforts of these organisations is in the face of substantial pressure to extract resources from their forests, and increasing industry and deforestation that undermines the livelihoods of communities and their social stability.

It was with approximately twelve of these PNG sustainable forest NGOs that I facilitated a four-day meeting in

October 2010 and then a subsequent three-day meeting in October 2011. The twelve NGOs ranged from community- and regionally-based NGOs as well as national NGOs, and they were all supported by one international NGO.



Photo: Papua New Guinea flag, courtesy of Drew Douglas.

The key objective of these meetings was to encourage and enable each of these organizations, who traditionally operate very separately in PNG, to work together and align their efforts to more effectively achieve their shared goals. The first meeting worked to build more collaborative relationships between the groups, as well as develop an increasingly shared ownership of the lead INGO’s sustainable forest management policy for PNG. To do this, we explored whether they would have more impact on sustainable forest management through working more collaboratively with each other. There was also a need for the NGOs to analyse the meaning of the opportunity of being brought together by the INGO as opposed to feeling that they were brought together because the funder requested it. Did the NGOs see this meeting as an opportunity to further their work or as an obligation to the funder? With this question in mind,

we explored the potential for a shift in the dynamic of the groups to assert agency and ownership of the direction of the partnership with the INGO and amongst themselves.

Hence, the use of OM at this initial meeting was to:

- ☑ Use the OM steps of **vision** and **outcome challenges** to build shared goals
- ☑ Use the concept of **boundary partners** to identify who their common stakeholders were and what changes they hoped to collectively see in them
- ☑ Use **progress markers** to build clarity of what working together looks like, in a very practical way

In the two workshops, groups moved beyond stating a partnership intention to experiencing the logic of stronger partnerships (Theory of Change – [ToC]) and then bedding down their partnerships with practical alignment and planning (OM Progress Markers).

At the second meeting a year later groups reflected on their achievements against the progress markers that they had set for themselves the previous year.

Application, adaptation and creative thinking

Most of the previous annual meetings that the NGOs held had been run using a meeting format; so for the first of the two events I decided to shift part of the meeting to a workshop format to help alter the power dynamics. I adapted and tailored two planning processes to do this: I used a participatory Theory of Change (ToC) approach and elements of Outcome Mapping (OM), following these steps:

1. **Historical timeline:** each NGO identified the key events in working together around sustainable forest management that they had contributed to over the past five years. These gave an initial and visual panorama of where they had contributed to the same successes and also knowledge generation.
2. **Vision for Sustainable Forest Management:** in breakout groups, we developed a common, shared vision for sustainable forest management in PNG, one that each NGO felt represented the work that they did and their own institutional mandates, but that would also necessitate collaboration amongst the NGOs. This common vision was based on the types of successes they have already been contributing to, and with knowledge of present-day challenges in the sector. A common vision created a sense of solidarity and team spirit amongst the NGOs.

3. **Stakeholder Analysis:** in three sector groupings (Advocacy & Lobbying, Capacity Development, Trade and Livelihood NGOs), we undertook a stakeholder analysis, to identify the key actors whom the NGOs worked with to influence change towards sustainable forest management; this also helped to highlight common stakeholders that different NGOs were working with and their relationship to each other. Key stakeholders were identified and placed in a spheres of influence diagram to understand their importance to the NGOs (if they are boundary partners, desired boundary partners, strategic partners, or antagonistic actors) and thus how the NGOs needed to work with them.

4. **Outcome Statement:** for each key stakeholder (we called them key stakeholders, rather than boundary partners) the same sector groups developed statements of ultimate, desired changes in behavior. Working in sector groups meant that different NGOs were involved in each group, and therefore an agreed and shared understanding of desired behavior change was developed.

5. **Progress Markers:** following the Outcome Statements, the groups developed progress markers for each key stakeholder, to outline the “Expect to see”, “Like to see” and “Love to see” changes for each. Groups brainstormed progress markers and positioned them below their outcome challenge statements. It was this step in particular that really grounded the process, making relationship building and practical monitoring the key. It was at this point that I felt OM was particularly useful, as groups were able to relate to the practical and real aspects of the progress markers. I find that progress markers are a great way to ground the groups thinking to practical aspects from the intensely conceptual thinking that has so far occurred in the workshop.

6. **Visual representation of outcome map – the Sticky Wall!:** all the aspects and statements were then arranged on a sticky wall (I use a shower curtain sprayed with repositionable glue which creates a large wall space where cards can be stuck and moved around) in a Theory of Change cause-and-effect diagram. This creates a large visual representation of the groups’ thinking, from which they can then examine their thinking and the linkages between all aspects of the model.

7. **Looking inwards:** the entire group then developed expect to see, like to see and love to see statements for themselves, as a group of NGOs, related

to how they need to work together collaboratively. Unpacking the “us” as an actor is especially pertinent in this work of networks and messy partnerships. In this instance ‘us’ was a complex network of groups. The groups naturally wanted to analyse their network and highlight the different roles each cluster of groups played.

8. **Action plan:** each NGO then developed an action plan of activities that would contribute to the outcome challenges and the progress markers, as well as their own, internal practice of working collaboratively.

At the second meeting in 2011 the groups:

- Undertook an oral story telling process, borrowing from the Most Significant Change methodology. Organisations described a significant change for their organization over the last year, and the most significant organisational learning stories were selected.
- In the original groups they reflected on their achievements and challenges against the progress markers and planned activities over the last year. They then reported this progress to the broader groups. Journals were not used.
- Planned new activities for the coming year.

Outcome Mapping was adapted in a number of ways for this exercise. Reflections on that process include:

Focus on visualisation: Throughout both workshops, visualisation was a key element when working with OM. We did not focus on drafting detailed textual statements; I find that doing this deadens the energy of the workshop and privileges those with more literacy skills and people with particular thinking styles and personality. So the visual representations of NGO work involved instead groups drafting the work on cards that are then placed in a diagram on a sticky wall, which everyone could then engage with. In effect the wall becomes a life-sized illustration that allows people to physically engage with aspects of the diagram; it becomes a group tool that takes the written word from a personal space to a shared group space. In my experience, I have found that this is essential in a cross-cultural situation and it is the aspect of the workshop that brings people and different personalities and thinking styles together, building relationships and the team. Facilitating alignment of effort and developing a shared ownership with a group of people also includes elements of motivating them and ‘team building’. Having the workshop more focused on visual representation of the aspects that are challenging enables people who do not have strong written skills to express themselves.

Those that are more prolific writers can then take the work of the group and fine tune it into words later on (see presentation – link below - for these visual images).

Good planning: For me, a number of steps in OM are similar to other planning processes. Most planning exercises begin by looking back, building on the strengths of the network, identifying challenges and obstacles and developing a shared vision to establish a clear direction amongst the network. I always facilitate a stakeholder analysis focused on the vision, to ground the thinking in the people we need to work with. OM techniques tend to assume that the participants have a good understanding of their stakeholders but often this is over looked; ultimately, how we work with people is the center of our work and the site where we can affect the most change. Stakeholders need to be analysed in relation to power relationships and how we can influence them, to select who are the key actors that should be the focus of an Outcome Map.

Looking at the complexity and picking out what we are going to work with: At step six (described above) we arranged draft key stakeholder outcome statements in a Theory of Change diagram. I find that this visual step really crystallises a group’s thinking and brings out the ‘light-bulb moment’ for participants. Groups wanted to analyse the complexity of the situation and make their own sense of it; the discussion generated by developing a complex diagram and the conversation amongst the group to decide on outcomes, change pathways and key actors, is the place where the most collective learning or group understanding was built during the workshop. I often say to groups (whilst looking at their complex diagrams on the walls) if I had a handful of spaghetti and threw it on the wall (the spaghetti representing all the interconnect pathways between outcomes) that would be representational of the situation but to make this practical we need to decide which pieces of spaghetti we want to highlight as our priority focus. I also remind them that to be able to communicate this priority, audiences will only be able to take in the top three to eight pathways and relationships.

Changes in OM terminology: The reason that I changed the name from Outcome Challenge to Outcome Statement is two-fold; the first being that I did not want to introduce another term at this stage, as groups can get overwhelmed with too many new terms and processes. Secondly, I find that the term ‘challenge’ is associated with a problem tree analysis. I follow a strength-based approach, and appreciative inquiry underpins my workshop processes; I find that this leads to a more motivational workshop. I have also dropped the use of the term Boundary Partners as I find that there are often a number of boundaries at varying lengths related to the

group or programme and that in reality there are often actors that cannot be considered partners but are targets for change. I have a discussion with the group as to what they would like to call their key stakeholders that are their key sites of change and then adopt the term they prefer. So in this instance, I am the one that has to adapt and learn their term, not the participant learning my term.

Using ToC with OM: The first workshop enabled us to combine a stakeholder analysis with ToC pathways and then use OM to focus attention on key relationships including boundary partners and the complex dynamics amongst the network of the twelve NGOs. Although the progress markers grounded the practical side to the collaboration, it was the work on the ToC that lead to

the participants' realisation of the need to work more collaboratively with each other to better achieve their goals. Hence OM was adapted to include logic thinking pathways as I find that these pathways embody the alignment of effort thinking better than OM.

One of the objectives was to develop ownership of the sustainable forest management policy by the partners. This was achieved and articulated in detail through the Outcome Map including the interrelationship between NGOs and interdependence on each other's activities. In the second year less time was allocated to this exercise and hence less was achieved but one surprise was the extent to which the activities and progress against the markers was achieved.

About the author

Natalie Moxham is an independent consultant in program design, monitoring and evaluation. Her work has included facilitation, design and evaluation work in community development contexts, both internationally, and with Indigenous Australians. Natalie's participatory approach uses Appreciative Inquiry, Program Logic, Outcome Mapping and the Most Significant Change technique (MSC).

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