



# Ten years of Outcome Mapping adaptations and support

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Richard Smith,  
John Mauremootoo &  
Kornelia Rassmann

'A common issue faced is the potential for planning and monitoring to be impractical or 'heavy' when all the steps and tools described in the OM manual are used. Users who are most satisfied with OM are usually those who adapt or simplify their use of OM from the ideal scenario'

**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.

**A**n analysis of how and where Outcome Mapping has been applied, how users have experienced OM and the support options available and required for its use.

The Outcome Mapping (OM) methodology was introduced to the development community by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) just over 10 years ago. In that time the use of OM has been growing exponentially, due in part to IDRC's open source policies but also the flexibility of the methodology and the support available through the OM Learning Community (OMLC). The OMLC Stewards, a voluntary group of members with responsibilities for governing the OMLC, commissioned a study in October 2011 to map the state-of-the-art of OM practice. This brief presents a summary of the findings.

OM is an approach to planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) that defines results as changes in behaviour of an intervention's direct partners. The OM manual, published by IDRC in 2001, describes twelve steps organised into three stages corresponding to conceptualizing and planning (called 'intentional design' in the manual), monitoring and planning an evaluation. Use of OM is supported by the OMLC, an informal group of over three thousand members. The study was commissioned to:

1. Extend the data available on OM applications, trainers and consultants and provide a stimulus for the development of updated tools to assist with information requests to OMLC.

2. Contribute to a fuller understanding of how OM is being applied through analysis of OM applications and user experiences.
3. Inform the development of training and other support for OM use by identifying gaps in the current support available for OM.

### Methods

Data on 123 case studies was captured from the OMLC website and forum (61 cases) as well as other sources (62 cases). Detailed interviews were conducted for a sub-set of 18 case studies with people who had used OM to gather more information on OM applications and to learn about the personal experiences and views of OM users. Interviews were conducted with 6 consultants to learn of their experiences in providing OM training and other related support. The interviews together with the summary data collected on applications and practitioners represent a significant advance on the data previously held by OMLC. This study is not, however, a comprehensive assessment of the status quo of OM. Rather, the data is indicative of OM applications, user experiences and support available and required.

### Scope of OM use

The data confirms that the **majority of OM applications have been in Africa, Latin America & Caribbean and Asia** (see figure 1), which makes sense considering OM was developed and has largely been promoted as a PME approach for international development interventions.

It is notable, however, that there are a number of multi-regional and global uses of OM and that there are examples of OM use in more economically developed regions; the report concludes that OM is useful in situations other than international development cooperation, including in more economically developed countries.

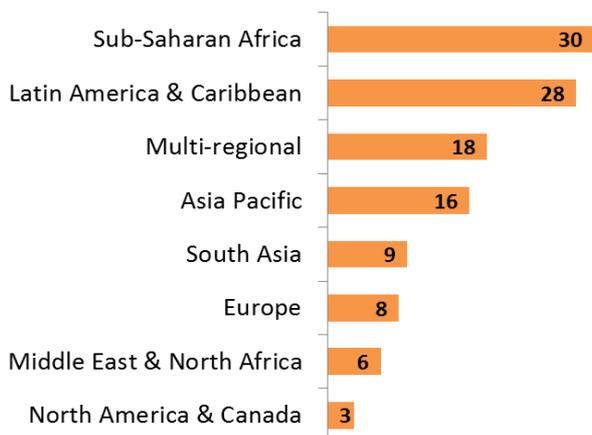


Figure 1: OM use by region

**The diversity of sectors in which OM has been used is striking.** The report identifies 22 in total, including policy, agriculture, health, trade, tourism and finance (see figure 2).

### Using OM: Benefits, issues, solutions

**Interviewees reported a high level of satisfaction with OM.** OM is widely held to have contributed to a paradigm shift in PME that enables interventions to be better focused, more realistic, participatory and sustainable. Many interviewees alluded to an “Ah ha!” moment when a person or a group grasped the power of OM.

The data suggests that **it is the intentional design stage of OM that has been used most often and has been most appreciated.** Users have valued it for being dynamic and motivational; actor-oriented; promoting a shared vision, ownership and an understanding of the contribution of various actors to the vision; the focus on desired results (outcomes), rather than activities and outputs; and for bringing clarity and realistic thinking to roles and responsibilities by focussing on changing only those institutions or people that can be influenced directly.

OM monitoring is also widely used and often seen as part of a valuable learning process. However, the findings suggest OM has been used less for

evaluation and that the evaluation planning stage of the OM manual would benefit from further development. Still, **OM has inspired innovative evaluation approaches**, including those such as Outcome Harvesting that can be used to assess behavioural change outcomes of interventions that had not used OM at the planning and monitoring stages.

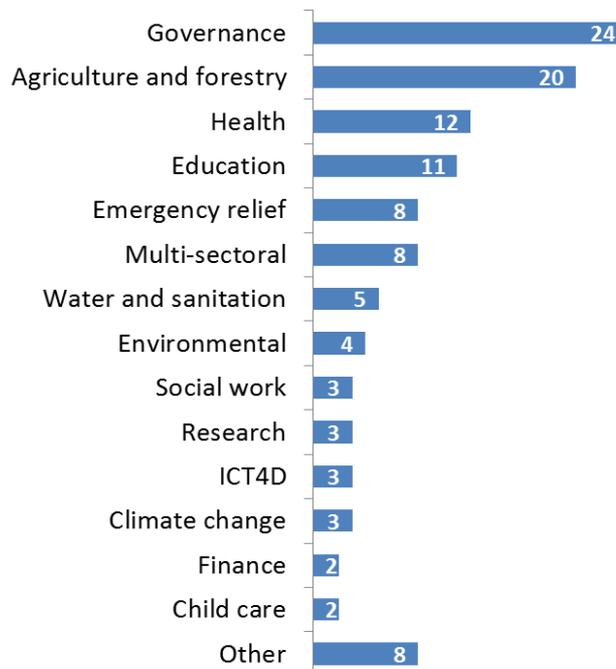


Figure 2: OM use by sector

### Challenges

A common issue faced is the potential for planning and monitoring to be impractical or ‘heavy’ when all the steps and tools described in the OM manual are used. **Users who are most satisfied with OM are usually those who adapt or simplify their use of OM from the ideal scenario presented in the OM manual.** Adaptation has taken four non-exclusive forms:

1. Use of some but not all of the 3 stages / 12 steps;
2. Use of one or more of the key concepts – such as outcomes defined as behavioural change - with or without any of the 12 steps;
3. Starting not with stage 1 (intentional design) but with monitoring or evaluation;
4. Using OM with other PME approaches, including the LFA and Most Significant Change.

## When OM works best

The report outlines eight enabling factors – three essential and five optional – which can help to determine if OM is appropriate and likely to be sustainable for a particular intervention. Understanding which enabling factors are present will allow potential users of OM to determine where their intervention (or part of it) and PME capacity is located along the proposed “OM receptivity continuum”. **Use of the proposed OM receptivity continuum can minimise the risk of OM implementation that is inappropriately complex and costly.** Where only essential factors are present, simple applications of OM would be optimal; if more factors are present, a more extensive use of OM steps and concepts may be optimal. The three essential enabling factors are:

1. **The existence of complexity in an intervention or a significant part of an intervention**, i.e. uncertainty about results and / or the processes by which they are to be achieved. In situations such as the provision of services in which results are more predictable, OM is unnecessary. However, many development interventions are likely to have components that could potentially benefit from some use of OM.
2. **Recognition of and willingness to act upon complexity and an understanding of the rationale for OM application.** Awareness of complexity is insufficient: implementers must be willing to move beyond the familiarity of linear cause-effect logic and understand the rationale for using OM, otherwise its use may be mechanistic and of limited value.
3. **The commitment of one or more champions and the availability of appropriate technical support.** Support for novel approaches such as OM takes time to build and without champions it is unlikely to be sustained.

Optional enabling factors are the support from an intervention’s funder; support from the executive of the implementing organisation; the promotion of an organisational learning culture; appreciation of the value of a results and learning-oriented PME system at multiple levels in the organisation; and availability of the resources required for the type of OM implementation.

## Training offered versus training needed

OM users interviewed were generally appreciative of the training they received and the current OMLC resources but a number of gaps in support and information resources were identified.

**Many users lack the confidence needed to adapt OM to their situation without external support and conclude that more needs to be done by trainers to equip potential OM users to adapt the methodology.** The report suggests introductory training could build confidence in adapting OM if it included a “step-0” component comprising of an exploration of situations where OM is / is not likely to be useful; and an introduction to both OM and other PME concepts and their relationships. In addition, many users indicated they would benefit from more context specific support in addition to a general introduction to OM. In this way OM may be understood less as a rigid and general method and more as a fluid and context-specific approach, as intended by the authors of the OM manual.

**The findings suggest a need for more trainers and consultants experienced in using OM in a range of sectors and of trainers and learning tools in the multiple languages and locations in the economic south.** Trainers with sector / culture / language specific experience are likely to be better able to help users move beyond general OM knowledge and develop custom OM solutions. More efficient use of the still limited pool of experienced trainers can also better meet support needs. Remote mentoring using email, Skype etc should be promoted by the OMLC as a cost effective approach to provide situation specific support, particularly to who are champions of OM in their organisation.

The OMLC website has grown into a very rich repository of experience, questions and debate with contributions from many members. To maximise its potential as a learning resource **the OMLC website should be rebuilt to provide an integrated, structured entry point into the OM manual, the extensive existing OMLC resources and some new resources.** Suggested functions of the new OMLC e-learning resource include: promotion of OM adaptation and non-linear use of the OM stages and steps, positioning of OM in the context of other PME approaches and publishing of “blueprints” that describe OM adaptation and use scenarios.

## Donor attitudes and LFA

Despite a strong preference particularly among public donors for LFA-based approaches to PME, **dissatisfaction with the LFA in some situations has motivated many to use OM for design and monitoring either in a fusion or in parallel with the LFA.** Interviewees described various benefits of using OM instead of or as well as the LFA. For instance, in a major hospital building project in which the LFA specified only the larger results, progress was slow until OM was introduced and the real scope of the wide-ranging behaviour change outcomes required before the hospital could be physically constructed became clear.

**From the data there was a total of 36 funders of interventions that used OM. However, the great majority of donors are probably often unaware when OM has been used** in interventions they have supported because of the strategies often used by OM practitioners. Some use OM “by stealth”, drawing on OM concepts and tools while avoiding OM terminology and making no explicit references to OM in their reporting to donors. More common is the use of OM internally for

planning and monitoring and of LFA for donor reporting. Both strategies suggest most donors are unwilling for OM to be used explicitly for design and monitoring. Some have, however, been willing to use OM for evaluations.

Ten years after the introduction of OM, there is a wealth of experience that can be used to share examples of OM-LFA adaptations as well as influence the behaviour of donors towards making a more receptive environment for OM. The OMLC and champions of OM should consider a multi-faceted outreach strategy to donors.

The information in the report is rich and useful for a number of different users, primarily the OMLC stewards and other members of the community. While the report in its entirety may not be pertinent for every single member or user of OM, there are important elements that practitioners can consider for their PME work. We encourage you to access the full report here: <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=379>, and stay tuned for additional outputs that incorporate results of this research.

## About the authors

**Richard Smith** (rdsmith27@gmail.com), **John Mauremootoo** (jmauremootoo@gmail.com) and **Kornelia Rassmann** (k.rassmann@rf-projektagentur.de) are independent consultants who share a passion for helping to bring about an environmentally and socially sustainable world. They enjoy supporting organisations, networks or funding agencies to develop situation-specific approaches to planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) that encourage participation and innovation, address learning and / or accountability needs and maximise the chances of achieving sustainable results. Consultancy services are offered particularly in the areas of international development, biodiversity conservation, climate change responses, sustainability issues and agricultural systems.

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