



# The use of Outcome Mapping in value-chain development programmes

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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.

## The case of Vredeseilanden (VECO)

The Belgian NGO Vredeseilanden aims to contribute to viable livelihoods for smallholder farmers through improved income from sustainable agriculture with a particular focus on value chain development (from production to consumption). Vredeseilanden operates (under the name VECO) in 8 regions including 15 countries in Central and South America, Africa and Asia.

The VECO programme 2008-2013 (mainly funded by the Belgian Government) aims to set up innovative experiments to enhance the inclusion of smallholder farmers in sustainable agricultural chains and to use evidence from these experiments to simulate an enabling institutional environment and to scale-up results. The programme also emphasises the strategic importance of organisational and institutional learning in facilitating value chain development processes.

VECO subsequently chose to apply a learning-oriented planning and M&E system and decided to use core elements of *Outcome Mapping* (OM) for the programme design and its monitoring and learning processes. OM's actor-centeredness and the focus on changes in behaviour resonated well with VECO's multi-actor approach and the strengthening of farmer/producer organisations as central elements within the programme. In addition, because VECO's knowledge and expertise in facilitating value chain development programmes was not as developed in 2007, the inclusion and use of support strategies (OM's strategy maps) in the



design and throughout the monitoring would enable VECO to learn more about its facilitation and support role. By using OM, VECO aimed to develop a monitoring system that would move beyond the report mode and that would be more useful and relevant for the (re)planning of its value chain interventions.

### Intentional Design: Integration of Outcome Mapping & the Logical Framework

In line with VECO's overall strategy, the 2008-2013 programme is organized around three specific objectives:

1. Setting up innovative experiments (pilot chains) to enhance the inclusion of smallholder farmers (economic objective).
2. Use evidence from these experiments to stimulate an enabling institutional environment for these chains and to scale up results (political objective).
3. Influence consumer behavior in favor of smallholders and their products (consumer objective).

The three objectives are connected and interlinked, but require cooperation with different types of partners (see Table 1, below) and call for different intervention strategies.

### Phase 1: 2008-2010

During the first phase of the programme (2008-2010), VECO developed a contextualized OM-based programme framework for each objective for the respective regions it was operating in (e.g. VECO East-Africa, VECO Andes Region, etc.).

The OM Intentional Design approach prioritised the *type* of key actors (boundary partners) VECO needed to align itself with and work with to enable change, placing them in the very heart of the programme logic and design (table 1). Figure 1 visualises the different actors for specific objective 1 within the sphere of influence and the sphere of interest of VECO as implementing team.

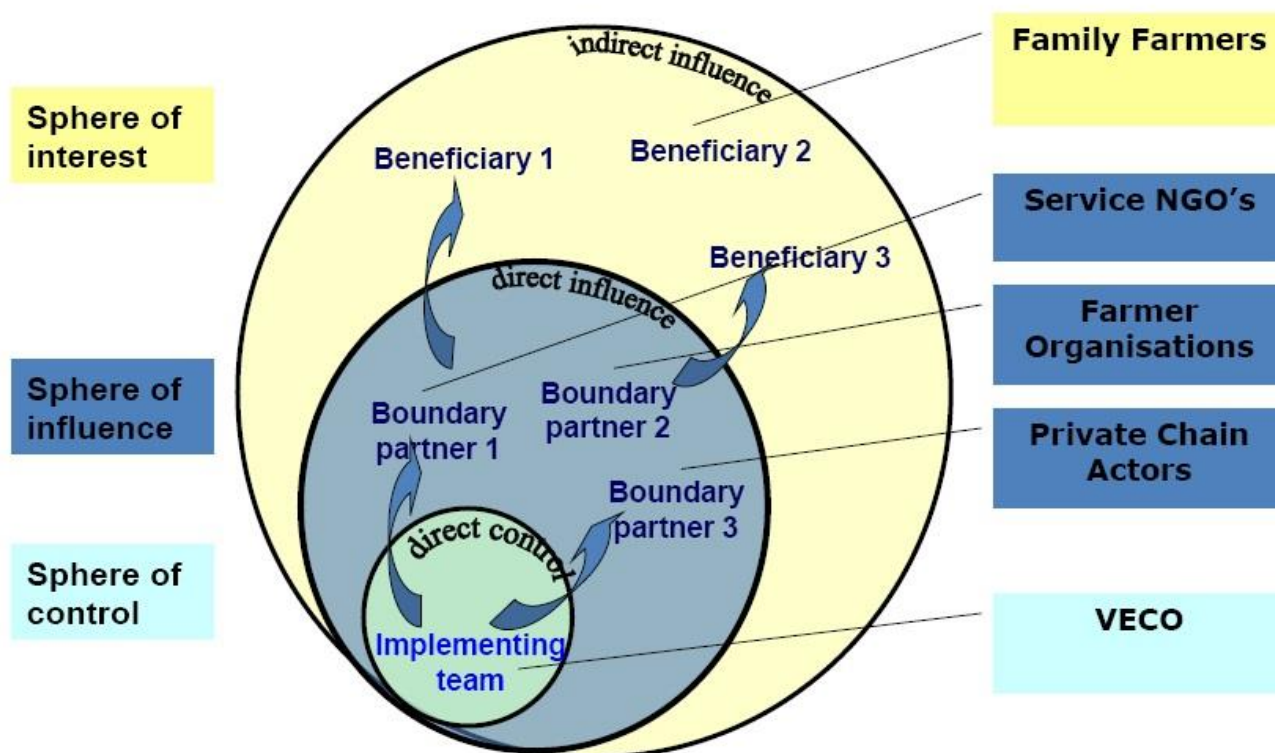
Together with the respective boundary partners of a specific region, VECO developed a standard outcome challenge and a set of progress markers for each *type* of boundary partner. Furthermore, strategy maps were identified for each type of boundary partner. This implied that a region (e.g. VECO Indonesia) working in different value chains (e.g. rice, cacao, coffee and groundnuts) would have its specific chain interventions but would cooperate with similar type of partners. The planning and monitoring of the outcomes of the boundary partners would be guided by the same set of progress markers per type of boundary partners, and be supported by a set of similar strategy maps.

Table 1: Overview type of boundary partners for each specific objective

VECOs Sustainable Agriculture Chain Development Programme 2008-2013		
Specific Objective 1 (Economic)	Specific Objective 2 (Political)	Specific Objective 3 (Consumer)
1. Commercial Farmer Organisations	1. Political Farmer Organisations	1. Consumer Organisations
2. Private Sector Actors	2. Network Organisations	2. Network organisations
3. Service NGOs	3. NGOs	3. NGOs

Organisational practices, as proposed in the OM manual, were not used in the programme logic. In fact, the intended practices were covered by VECO's cross-cutting objective on learning and knowledge sharing. Nevertheless, some VECO regions experimented with an alternative approach to organizational practices. They formulated an outcome challenge for themselves as an 'implementing team', reflecting their own ideal organizational practices in view of learning and knowledge sharing. It also included a set of progress markers to plan and monitor those practices.

Figure 1: VECO's spheres of influence and key actors for specific objective 1



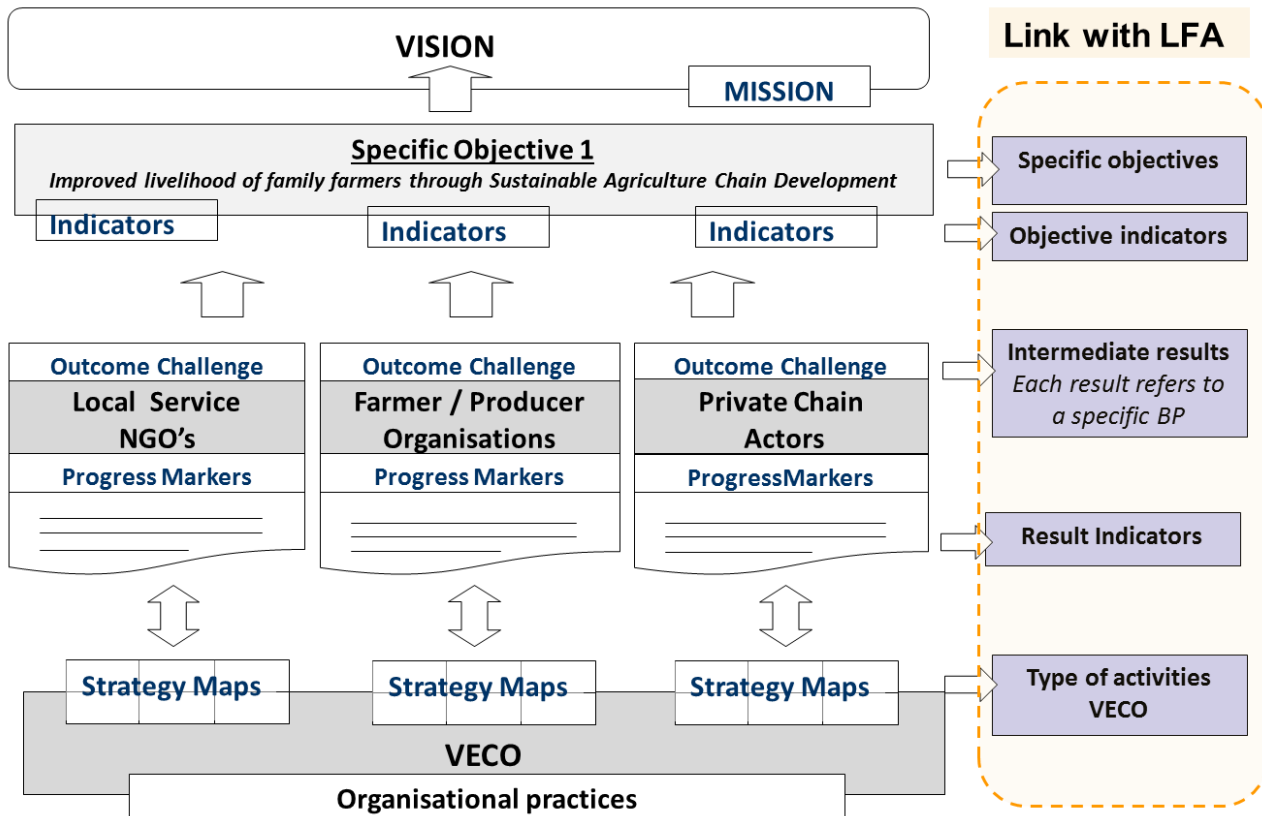


Figure 2: Programme logic VECO's SACD Programme (Phase 1) and the linkages with the logical framework

Although VECO developed a relevant OM-based programme logic that would guide its design, planning and monitoring processes, the main donor required a logical framework as the basis for the programme proposal and the annual reporting. Therefore, VECO needed to invest in an integration of both models. Figure 2 shows how the two models were connected. The logical framework was built up around three specific objectives (identical to those explained above). An intermediary result was developed for each type of boundary partners, referencing one core behavioral change and the respective result indicators were linked to some progress markers. Activities were derived from the strategy maps.

### Phase 2: 2011-2013

For the second phase of its programme, VECO made changes to the programme logic and the use of some of the OM elements.

Firstly, instead of using OM to frame a value chain development programme in a specific region (e.g. East-Africa) covering different chain interventions, i.e. using a standard outcome challenge and set of progress markers for each *type* of boundary partner; it decided to use an OM framework at the level of a specific value chain intervention (e.g. a groundnut chain in Uganda, a banana chain in Senegal, a cacao value chain in Indonesia, etc.). As the issues and opportunities, the leverages for change and the intervention strategies are different

for each particular value chain, a contextualised and tailor-made intentional design is needed. Subsequently, the intended changes in behavior of the boundary partners are different and require a tailor-made approach. This resulted in the development of an OM-based Chain Intervention Framework (CIF) for each of the 42 value chains (2011) supported by VECO.

Secondly, an extra result level was added to the programme logic (CIF) to clearly spell out the targeted tangible changes that are expected in the value chain (e.g. increased production, improved quality of produce, increased % of products sold collectively, number of processing units, etc.) and to which the boundary partners are planning to contribute. These results come with indicators commonly used in a logical framework.

This resulted in a CIF built up around a specific objective, value chain results and outcomes as changes in behavior of the key boundary partners.

Thirdly, VECO uses a standard capacity development model to guide the strengthening of business capacities of commercial farmer organisations. Since these capacities are basically outcomes (as changes in behavior) at the level of the commercial farmer organisations, VECO opted to infuse a set of 4 progress markers (linked to the model) for each commercial farmer organization (in addition to the tailor-made progress markers). By doing so, VECO can aggregate the evolutions of capacity strengthening across the different chain interventions within a specific region or across regions.

Fourthly, VECO uses 9 categories of support strategies (strategy maps) divided in direct support strategies (corresponding with the 'I' strategy maps) and indirect support strategies (corresponding with the 'E' strategy maps). These categories guide the design of each value chain intervention. Every activity that is carried out by the VECO 'implementing team' can be linked to one of the 9 support strategies (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Categories of VECO support strategies

VECO support strategies	
Direct support strategies	
I1.	Funding of partners
I2.	Training & technical assistance
I3.	Coaching & backstopping
I4.	Monitoring & Feedback
Indirect support strategies	
E1.	Research & Study
E2.	Documenting & Sharing
E3.	Networking & exposure
E4.	Linking with chain actors
E5.	Linking with chain supporters

Although VECO uses a tailor-made CIF for each of its chain interventions, a logical framework is compiled – for the annual reporting to the main donor – to summarise the progression and results of the programmes in a specific geographical region. Figure 3 visualises the logic of the Chain Intervention Framework (CIF) and indicates how the integration with the logical framework is established.

In summary, the success of the pragmatic integration of OM and the logframe has been guided by:

1. *Stating clear objectives:* The vision of VECO was 'translated' in three tangible and measurable objectives (economic, political and consumer objective) which is beneficial for both the Intentional Design (OM) and the logical framework.
2. *Defining intermediate results:* During phase 1, the intermediate results in the logframe reflected the changes of the boundary partners (figure 2). The respective result indicators are added to the set of progress markers and these will be used for the data collection process and future reporting. During Phase 2, the intermediate results (and indicators) in the logical framework refer to the results in a value chain intervention framework (figure 3).
3. *Ensuring usefulness:* The logical framework is structured in such a way that it presents aggregated information across the different value chains (in one region and across different countries). It might appear that VECO Indonesia is using two programme models for the same

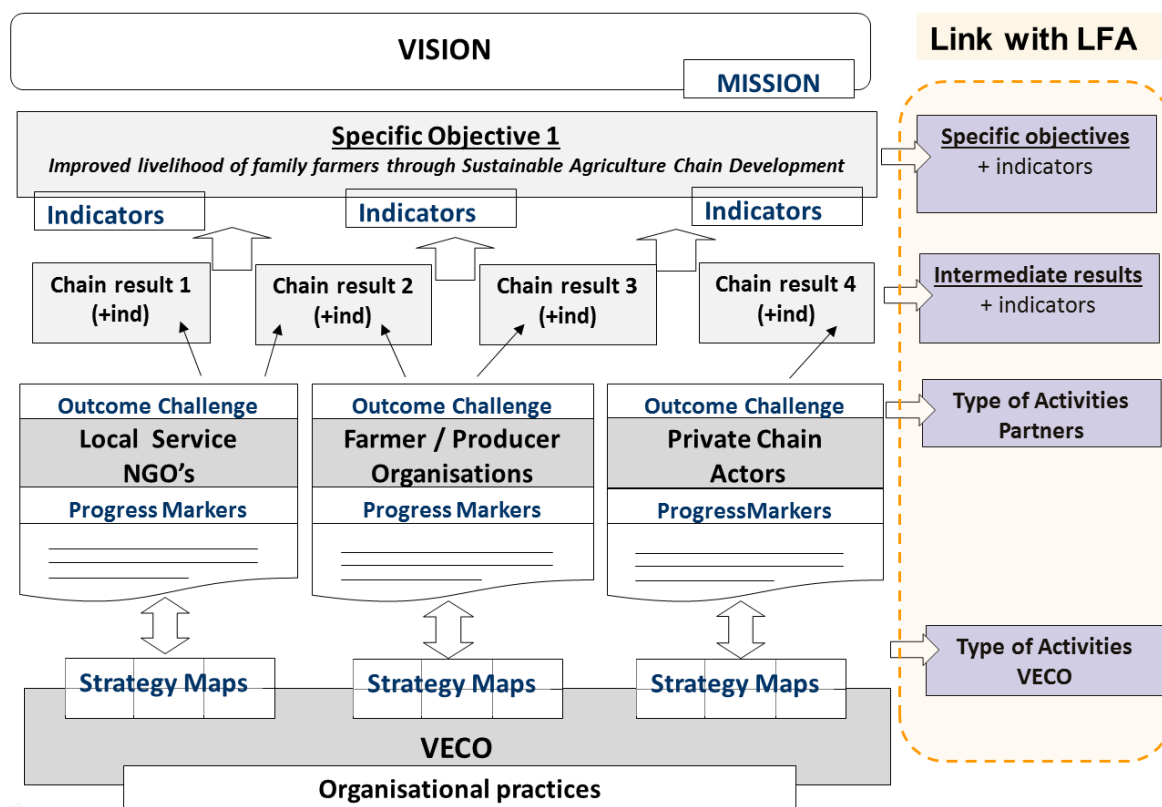


Figure 3: Programme logic of VECO's chain intervention framework (CIF) and the linkages with the logical framework (Phase 2)

programme; however, VECO Indonesia takes a pragmatic approach to this and views the OM-based *Chain Intervention Framework* as the core framework for ongoing programme steering and learning while the logical framework is seen as an important way of presenting and reporting aggregated progress and results (as well as being a necessary requirement for the main donor).

### Planning, learning & accountability

Outcome Mapping has been an inspiration for the development of the planning, learning and accountability system (PLAs), which is VECO's M&E system. The Planning, Learning and Accountability system is defined as the systematic data collection, sense-making and documentation process that supports VECOs planning & management process, facilitates organisational and institutional learning & fulfills VECO's accountability requirements.

Based on the theory and practice of Outcome Mapping, Participatory M&E, Action Learning and Utilisation-Focused Evaluation, a seven step model (table 3) was developed and is used to facilitate the inquiry and development process of the PLAs. The first three steps of the process are crucial for the further development of the PLAs and need to be discussed and negotiated thoroughly with the actors involved. By doing so, they automatically provide direction for the timeframes, the depth and type of data collection, the sense-making process and the documentation. By implication, any changes in the first three steps during the implementation of the programme will have a direct effect on the process of the next steps.

This first step aims to create a common understanding on the main purposes and the intended uses of the M&E system (planning, learning & accountability). The second step is the identification of VECO's key moments and events for planning, learning and accountability. If M&E is to foster and facilitate organisational and institutional learning, it needs to be built into the regular organisational processes so as to become integral to the thinking and doing of the organisation and embedded in those **organisational spaces and rhythms**, which are central to sharing, debate, learning and decision-making.

The third step is to clearly define and prioritise the required **information needs**. Information has to be used and made usable for action. Therefore, defining and prioritising information needs to be linked with the outcomes of step one (the *intended uses*), and step two (the *organisational spaces*) in order to decide upon the importance and relevance of specific information needs.

Table 3: Seven design steps of the Planning, Learning and Accountability system (PLAs)

1. Purpose and scope	Identify, clarify and share the main purpose and scope of the PLAs
2. Organisational spaces and rhythms	Identify the key moment/events and their frequency for planning, learning & accountability
3. Information needs	Define and prioritise the monitoring and learning questions and specific information needs
4. Plan for data collection and synthesis	Plan how the data will be collected, stored and Synthesized
5. Plan for sense-making	Plan for critical reflection, analysis and conceptualization
6. Plan for documentation and communication	Plan how monitoring results will be documented and Communicated
7. Plan for creating organisational conditions	Plan how the necessary organisational conditions and capacities will be established in support of the PLAs

As social interactions are crucial sources for sense-making and critical for organisational and institutional learning, it is important to ensure that the organisational spaces are well-planned and facilitated. Increasingly, the key organisational space is the bi-annual *value chain meeting* during which farmers, boundary partners, VECO staff and other actors working in a specific value chain - i.e. a multi-stakeholder meeting - gather to share information, update each other on the progress and results in the value chain, discuss the role and contributions of partners and VECO, and to agree on joined chain interventions. Outcome Mapping's learning character lies in the fact that it calls for reflection and analysis of the connections between changes at the level of the boundary partner (progress markers) and the support strategies of VECO's programme team.

Table 4: Necessary organisational conditions for successful implementation of the PLAs

CREATING MOTIVES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Formulate guiding ideas for a learning-oriented M&amp;E system</li> <li>2. Ensure support from management for (organisational) learning</li> <li>3. Create a culture of learning</li> <li>4. Install the necessary incentives to participate in or manage the M&amp;E process</li> </ol>
CREATING MEANS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Strengthen human capacity (M&amp;E, learning, reflective practice, reporting...)</li> <li>6. Provide specialist support (M&amp;E, Learning, Knowledge Management, facilitation...)</li> <li>7. Develop and use appropriate concepts, methods &amp; tools</li> <li>8. Ensure adequate financial resources for M&amp;E and learning</li> </ol>
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Integrate the PLAs into the management &amp; operational processes</li> <li>10. Ensure clear and transparent structures, responsibilities &amp; plans for M&amp;E and learning</li> <li>11. Develop a responsive information management infrastructure</li> <li>12. Build relationships of trust among staff and partners</li> </ol>

VECO acknowledges that the OM approach or the PLAs alone will not lead to learning-oriented M&E practice. Real people in the real world have to ‘translate’ the principles and systems into action. Therefore, VECO concluded its PLAs design process with a critical analysis on the existing **organisational conditions** and the development of a plan for the institutionalisation of the PLAs. To do so, it developed an approach based on theory and practice of organisational learning in NGOs and the ‘learning organization’ (Deprez, 2009), i.e. that an organisation can develop a practical strategy for learning if it creates the right *motives, means and opportunities* to do so (see table 2). The three elements generate a synergy that doesn’t occur when attention is paid to only one of the elements alone. For each of the three elements, four crucial organisational conditions were identified which need to be installed and maintained to ensure a successful implementation of the PLAs.

### Monitoring and learning: principles and practice

Throughout its monitoring and learning practice, VECO aims to live and act upon some core principles. From the outset, VECO aimed to install a monitoring practice

that is realistic to organize, cost-effective, pragmatic and above all, that makes sense for the people involved. For example, the PLA system needs to be useful for the programme actors who produce and use the information. Data and information that is collected, discussed and synthesized by people need to be useful for those people. ‘Which information is required, in what form, for who and at what time?’ is a central and critical question during the design and the actual M&E practice which assist in prioritizing the ‘nice-to-know’ from ‘must-know’ information. Linking the required information to the key PLA events and making use of insights generated during these events for programme planning and decision-making ensure that the M&E process is embedded in the programme management cycle. VECO puts a lot of emphasis on (facilitated) self-assessment as an important sense-making approach, rather than external assessments or ‘complicated’ information gathering processes.

### Challenges and lessons learned

Introducing the principles of Outcome Mapping to programme and partner staff is in of itself great value in prompting debate. For example, OM fostered an interesting and necessary debate on the purpose and relevance of impact assessment and actually influenced the organisation to rethink its approach to M&E - although impact measurement still remains an important aspect of the M&E system of VECO, it is less prominent in the total M&E process and there is a more realistic viewpoint on how far impact can be measured. Although VECO focuses a lot on the process of its development processes and the contributions of actors involved, it still invests in getting good insights and relevant data on the more tangible chain results and impact changes.

*“Defining ‘spaces and rhythms’ is to sit down with the people involved and ask them to list when they interact to share information and make sense of what is happening for their planning, learning and accountability processes. These moments are then listed and categorised followed by a mapping out of the rhythm, i.e., how often and when these spaces occur and what type of sense-making – sharing, debate, learning, decision-making – occurs”* (Workshop M&E in OM, Guijt & Ortiz, 2007).

Some existing PLA events in VECOs programmes are home weeks or regional meetings (4-6 times per year), bi-annual (multi-actor) chain meetings and bi-annual VECO steering team meetings.

In addition, because of the particular logic and set-up of OM, it initially facilitated critical self-reflection on the previous and existing programme objectives, approach, structure and assumptions on which the programme was based. This was already a valuable process and

clearly shows the potential of OM to be used as assessment tool in addition to programme design.

By using OM as a guiding approach for its chain intervention programmes - both at the level of the Intentional Design and the ongoing monitoring process - VECO programme staff and partners have a better understanding of the value chains and the roles, contributions and expectations of the different key actors in the programme. The continuous value chain intervention and outcome monitoring has already resulted in a series of strategic programme adjustments in the last years such as new value chain results, more focused chain interventions, new types of boundary partners, and phasing out existing partnerships.

Although there is a general feeling that the PLAs is well designed, that it fits the realities of the programme and can potentially lead to a meaningful practice, the monitoring and learning process remains fragile and can easily erode if not carefully taken care off. In general, one can conclude that developing an Outcome Mapping Intentional Design with partner organization is an inspiring and motivating exercise. However, the big challenge lays in 'translating' the OM spirit into the monitoring practice. While the Intentional Design – often guided by external facilitators - is still a safe and rather straight forward process, the monitoring practice is heavily influenced by the internal procedures, the organizational culture, established ways of working, capacities of staff, and quality and nature of relationships with boundary partners. Moving towards a learning-oriented monitoring process is therefore not a simple 'panel beating' exercise but requires in many case an 'engine overhaul' as it touches the core of how people look at and run their programmes and partnerships. Based on VECO's experience, critical factors to change the established ways of working are full support from programme management, strong internal champions and continuous support to the learning dimension of the monitoring process. Within the context of VECO, the latter involves a continuous investment in preparation, methods, facilitation, motivation and keeping momentum for the face-to-face meetings.

Upward accountability is still dominant and tends to direct the monitoring and learning practice towards an intra-organisational monitoring perspective - focusing on VECO's own monitoring needs, learning process and information flows – and can, if not consciously paid attention to, undermine the monitoring process which aims to facilitate a change process based on the viewpoints of and in collaboration with the local chain actors, i.e. institutional monitoring and learning.

Through the monitoring of progress markers and strategy maps, OM tends to generate an overload of data. For example, the time spent on collecting, recording

and reporting this data limited at first the attention for other monitoring processes such as sense-making. A related challenge for programme staff is the compilation of accurate, useful and presentable synthesised information, from the data generated during value chain meetings or through other data collection methods. If data is not presented in a synthesised and 'digestible' way, it has a direct influence on the quality of the interpretation.

Having an OM-based programme framework is no guarantee for 'dealing with complexity'. It definitely has elements in its design, which support a *process-oriented* monitoring process, allowing for adjustments and to anticipate to important unintended changes in the course of the programme. However, it is still possible to use the OM-based programme framework as a linear and causal programme model based on a set of pre-determined information needs, whereby indicators and progress markers are used as a checklist and yardstick for success. Using OM to its full potential for guiding/managing complex processes depends entirely on the quality and nature of the monitoring practice.

There is a difference in using OM for a single programme or for bigger and more complex programmes. The latter often operates in different geographical regions across the world, covers different thematic foci and involves different types and bigger numbers of boundary partners. In those cases, it is important to carefully reflect on the use of progress markers. While general and standard progress markers applicable for the entire programme will be useful for tracking progress across geographical regions and for a specific type of boundary partners, they might be less (or even not) useful for the individual projects and their actors. The latter can result in projects that do not find the outcomes relevant and lose the motivation to use an OM approach.

If OM is merely seen as an approach to guide and steer local projects and their actors, it is better to use tailor-made progress markers that make sense to the respective actors. However, in that case, aggregation to a higher level (e.g. at head office level) will be more challenging and attempts to collect the detailed data (e.g. from progress marker review of the individual projects) will result in an overload of information that is often not useful and relevant for their purposes. An exercise of synthesis will be necessary.

A rather simple but often neglected key question in the design of such programmes is: '*For what purpose and for the benefit of who do we want to use OM?*'

## About the author

Steff Deprez is the Global Coordinator Planning, Learning & Accountability (PLA) at VECOs head office (Belgium) and works as freelance consultant supporting development organisations/programmes in the design and implementation of relevant and purposeful monitoring and learning practices. He has used OM since 2005 in Education, Agriculture & Value Chain programmes in Latin-America, Africa and Asia. Find out more about Vredeseilanden at [www.veco-ngo.org](http://www.veco-ngo.org).

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## Annex: Further readings on the application of Outcome Mapping within VECO

### Articles on the OMLC

Deprez S. (2010). Towards Monitoring that makes sense: Planning, Learning and Accountability for Value Chain Development. Case study presentation at the Evaluation Revisited Conference, May 2010, Utrecht

Deprez, S., Nirarita E. & Shatifan N. (2010). Outcome Mapping: Jejak perubahan menuju keberhasilan. Denpasar: VECO & ACCESS. (The Indonesian OM manual)

Deprez, S. (2009). Creating the (organisational) conditions for an OM-based M&E and learning practice. Paper compiled for the Outcome Mapping Learning Community

Jones, H. & Hearn S. (2009). Case study on VECO Indonesia's use of Outcome Mapping. Paper compiled for the Outcome Mapping Learning Community

Deprez, S. (2008) Development of a planning, learning & accountability system for a sustainable agriculture development programme in Eastern Indonesia: Outcome Mapping in action. Paper presented at the EASY-ECO Conference, March 2008, Vienna.

### Further illustrations of VECO's application on Outcome Mapping can be found in:

Deprez, S. (2011). Planning, learning and accountability for sustainable agriculture chain development in Eastern Indonesia. In Hardi P. & Martinuzzi (Eds). *Governance by Evaluation: Institutional Capacities and Learning for Sustainable Development*. EASY-ECO Book series

Hummelbrunner R. & Williams B. (2010). Systems Concepts in Action. A Practitioner's Toolkit. (Ch 4). Stanford University Press.

Funnell, S., & Rogers, P. (2011). Purposeful program theory: Effective use of theories of change and logic models. (Ch 7). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.



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