Module on Step-0: How to prepare for OM Intentional Design

Daniel Roduner
Agridea
&
Olivia Hartmann
Agridea

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OutcomeMapping
LEARNING COMMUNITY

Outcome mapping (OM) is gaining more and more importance in the area of programme and project planning, monitoring and evaluation. The OM method itself is described extensively. One difficulty found when trying to apply OM, however, is that existing manuals make a lot of implicit assumptions about processes and preparations that have taken place before actually applying the OM approach. This module makes those assumptions explicit by:

- a) outlining what actually happens during the so-called step-0 (see box), and

- b) by providing a handy checklist to ensure OM is applicable to the project and to provide a successful start with OM intentional design.

The module is based on experiences of and discussions with OM practitioners from across the globe. Your comments to this module are welcome at www.outcomemapping.ca.

The focus of the module is on preparation for OM intentional design. The requirements for an application of OM to monitor and/or evaluate a project not planned with OM are only marginally touched upon in this module.
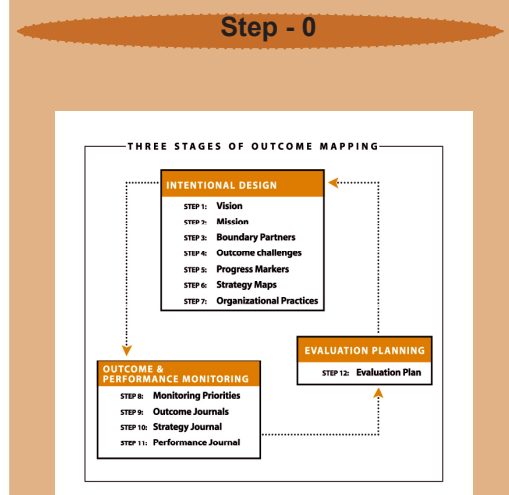
What happens during step-0?

Step-0 starts with the conception of a project idea, followed by a decision whether to further follow with the project idea. It ends as soon as OM intentional design starts. In between, it consists of negotiations, information gathering and constant lobbying for OM values. The following things take place chronologically or, at times, in an iterative way (see Figure 2).

- Conception of a project idea and decision to engage in it (donor-supported endeavour or other)

- Developing and agreeing a rough outline of the project or programme (main focus, strategic directions, primary programme areas)

- Laying a stable base for successfully applying OM (agreement on basic values and guiding principles for collaboration, seeding the OM attitude and a common understanding of the central concepts of OM, ensuring commitment and support to OM)

- Procurement of (further) necessary information (particularly important is knowledge about stakeholders)

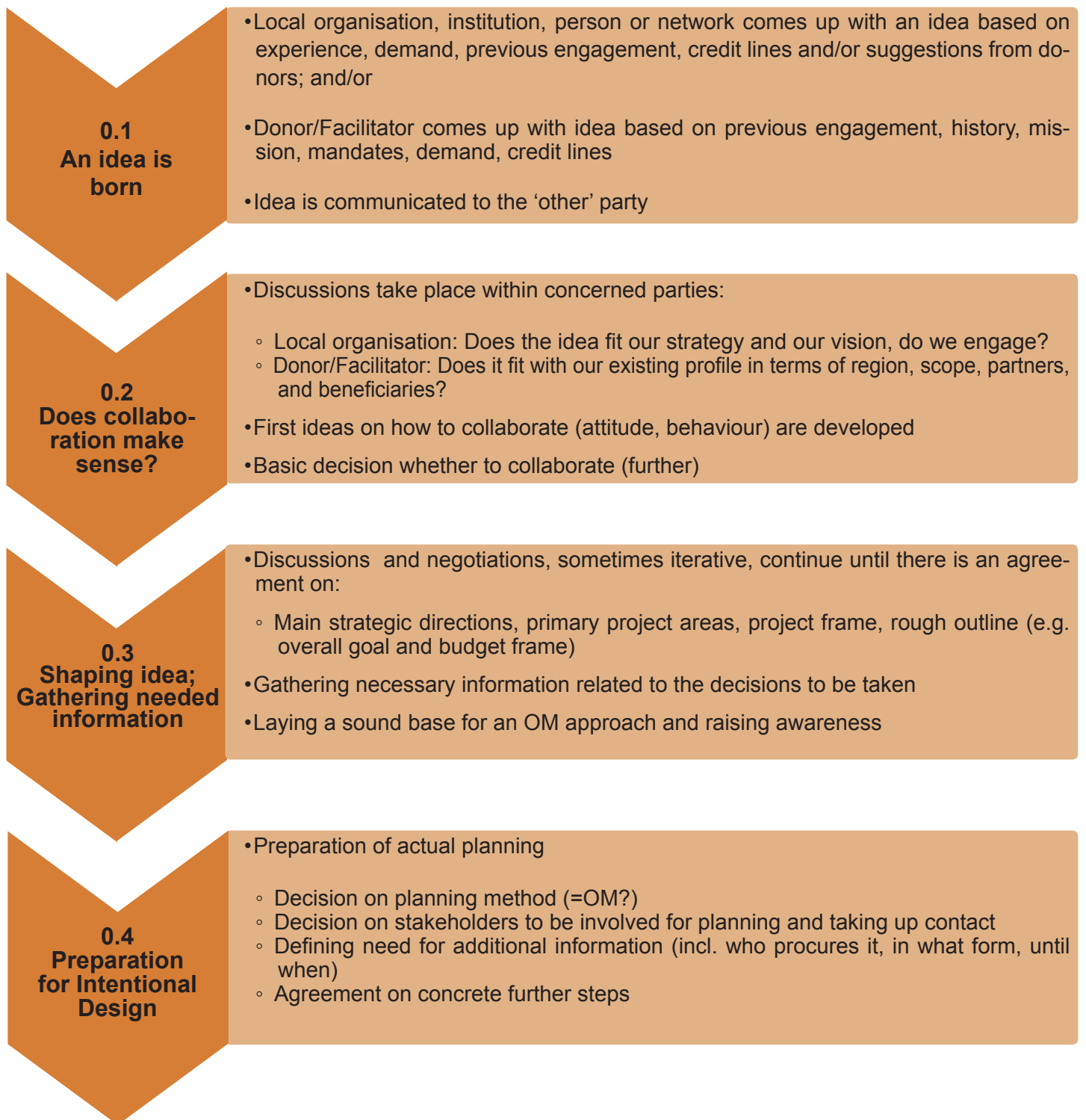## Figure 1: Defining Step - 0

Step-0 is the step that occurs before the actual intentional design of OM starts. It includes all processes and actions that take place from the conception of a project idea to the preparations for intentional design.

Figure 2: Step 0 – The four Sub-Steps before OM Intentional Design starts

0.1 An idea is born

- Local organisation, institution, person or network comes up with an idea based on experience, demand, previous engagement, credit lines and/or suggestions from donors; and/or
- Donor/Facilitator comes up with idea based on previous engagement, history, mission, mandates, demand, credit lines
- Idea is communicated to the 'other' party

0.2 Does collaboration make sense?

- Discussions take place within concerned parties:
  - Local organisation: Does the idea fit our strategy and our vision, do we engage?
  - Donor/Facilitator: Does it fit with our existing profile in terms of region, scope, partners, and beneficiaries?
- First ideas on how to collaborate (attitude, behaviour) are developed
- Basic decision whether to collaborate (further)

0.3 Shaping idea; Gathering needed information

- Discussions and negotiations, sometimes iterative, continue until there is an agreement on:
  - Main strategic directions, primary project areas, project frame, rough outline (e.g. overall goal and budget frame)
- Gathering necessary information related to the decisions to be taken
- Laying a sound base for an OM approach and raising awareness

0.4 Preparation for Intentional Design

- Preparation of actual planning
  - Decision on planning method (=OM?)
  - Decision on stakeholders to be involved for planning and taking up contact
  - Defining need for additional information (incl. who procures it, in what form, until when)
  - Agreement on concrete further steps

During each phase of step-0 there are crucial things that enhance or hinder the chances of successful use of OM. These issues are pointed out at the end of this paper in form of a basic checklist that also serves as a guideline when planning a process: The more positive answers, the greater the chance of successfully applying OM. Some of the points are absolutely essential. They are marked in bold. If you cannot answer these questions with a solid 'yes', you will most likely find it difficult to apply OM in a convincing way.

About OMideas and the OMLC

This paper was produced by members of the Outcome Mapping Learning Community (http://www.outcomemapping.ca). The website is updated frequently with new resources and knowledge on the Outcome Mapping approach, a tool designed to enhance planning, monitoring and evaluation of development interventions.

If you have an OMidea or other insight, please contact Simon Hearn at **s.hearn@odi.org.uk** for more information on how to contribute to the series.

Table 1: Checklist to successfully plan for OM Intentional Design

Issue for the use of OM as planning tool	yes	no	not sure
Generation of first idea and decision to engage			
The idea was generated or genuinely owned by local actor(s).			
There is a clear need for support by a donor.			
Negotiations			
Project outline (main focus, strategic direction, primary program areas, other key aspects) are negotiated and clearly defined with donors and local partner(s).			
General responsibilities, commitments and engagement procedures during OM implementation are clearly defined for each party (donor, the local partner(s) and the project implementation team).			
Information gathering			
Information on stakeholders, powers and relationships is available & used.			
Other information is/will be gathered as needed according to the nature of the project/programme.			
Preparations for planning with OM, Preconditions			
A participatory approach like OM is feasible and wanted by involved parties.			
All involved are clear for what purpose(s) and how OM will be used (e.g. programme improvement, decision-making about organisation; accountability to stakeholders; performance/result monitoring, generating knowledge; capacity building, etc.).			
The programme involves people who will use OM for planning, steering, learning and accountability.			
Who and what (policies, trends, situations) influences the work of the project/programme OM users is checked to ensure that people in key positions at all levels are informed or appropriately involved from the very beginning.			
The people in charge of the resources are committed to OM (min. one strong local person who believes in/lives the OM principles and respects actor-oriented planning!) **AND willing to provide the necessary resources (funds, time).**			
People are willing to learn and to focus on learning processes.			
There is an awareness of and an ability to handle any need for facilitated un-learning of personal, professional and organisational values AND/OR there is enough time to allow for the above processes of unlearning and familiarisation OR there is an opportunity to jump in with a pilot.			
When using OM for M&E on an endeavour that was not planned with OM			
Objectives of the endeavour have been translated into statements of desired behaviour changes.			
Changes found were compared with and put in relation to the goals/objectives of the endeavour.			
Total			