



Case Study: VECO Indonesia

Towards improved planning, learning and accountability for sustainable agriculture chain development in Eastern Indonesia

Key features

- A distinctive of this case is that OM is applied across the organisation as the operational framework for learning and accountability.
- OM is integrated with the log frame approach.
- VECO Indonesia apply OM in the context of value chain development.



Background

VECO Indonesia (the Vredeseilanden Country Office in Indonesia) grew out of a small initiative of socially committed Flemish citizens to support the work of a Flemish priest in Flores, an island in Eastern Indonesia. Initially VECO played a predominant role in the implementation of the projects it supported, however from the early 90's the opening of a country office in Bali and rapid developments in Indonesian civil society made VECO review its policy and approach, and the programme became increasingly streamlined and coherent. From 2008 onwards, the focus of VECO's programme is to improve the livelihoods of organised family farmers through sustainable agriculture chain development with important thematic considerations of participation, institutional development, and gender. During recent years VECO's programme has engaged increasingly in policy advocacy and networking related to sustainable agriculture and agrarian reform. VECO Indonesia is part of the Belgian NGDO Vredeseilanden. Created from the merger of three Belgian NGDOs, Vredeseilanden operates 8 regional programmes in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Belgium.

For a number of years, VECO Indonesia used log frames to guide their work. However, it was criticised by a number of studies and evaluations. An internal assessment¹ learned that the previous M&E process was mostly oriented towards the compilation of the annual report for the main donor of VECO. There was a strong focus on the changes at beneficiary level and the collection of quantitative data. It was found that there were limited people involved in the analysis and use of data and that the M&E process was not sufficiently connected to the planning cycles. There was also a perceived need for better learning from field experiences,

¹ Part of the participatory action research development of a learning-oriented M&E system for VECO Indonesia



and so, facilitated by the expertise of the former country representative, a number of tools and frameworks for learning were experimented with. From the middle of 2006 staff began to develop the next phase of the country programme 2008-2013. This offered a window of opportunity, which they were able to capitalise on with the arrival of a new programme advisor, Steff Deprez, who had previous experience of OM.

Introducing and Applying Outcome Mapping

OM was introduced gradually to VECO and required key staff to understand and approve the methodology before wider roll out. The first step in this process was a short introductory session with three head office staff members to familiarise them with the approach. This was followed by a training workshop held at the Vredeseilanden head office for programme and management staff in which a set of guidelines for developing new country programmes was developed. Once these guidelines had been agreed, the country programmes began to implement the intentional design stages.

VECO Indonesia embarked on a strategic planning process in 2006 and was concluded with a final strategic planning workshop which kick-started the intentional design. This turned out to be very useful as it set the necessary strategic boundaries within which the OM programmatic framework could be developed. In some VECO offices, the intentional design stage was initiated without sufficient strategic planning and people were sometimes trapped in basic strategic questions.

With the necessary questions answered and clarified, the OM process could commence. This included a series of activities, involving different actors, such as OM training, two OM workshops for programme & management staff, a donor meeting, an OM workshop with partner organisations, management team meetings and coordination from the programme management unit at head office. The result was a programme proposal document, based on OM, for the VECO Indonesia programme 2008-2013 (August 2007).



At the time of publishing, the OM programme has been operational for 18 months and during its implementation, some changes have occurred in the Intentional Design:

- Parts of the outcome challenge and some progress markers have been adjusted in the course of the monitoring process
- After the first year, the respective set of strategy maps have been replaced by one master-set of 13 strategy maps which is used for the support of all the BP's for all the objectives



However, the main focus of the implementation went to the development of a new M&E system based on the principles of OM and a learning-oriented M&E practice. A one-year participatory action research process together with programme & management staff and partners representatives guided the development of a *Planning, Learning and Accountability system* (PLAs).

'The PLAs aims to establish a learning-oriented and utilisation-focused monitoring & evaluation system and provide a framework for systematic data collection, sense making and documentation which supports VECO 's planning & management process, facilitates organisational & institutional learning and fulfils VECO's accountability requirements' (PLA Framework VECO, 2008).

As part of this PLAs, VECO Indonesia designed the key organisational spaces within monitoring and learning process (e.g. home weeks, partner meetings, mid-year reflection, knowledge cafe's...), developed the appropriate reporting systems (e.g. field office reports, outcome journals,...) and initiated the establishment of useful information and knowledge management systems (e.g. database, 'living document' for value chain progress monitoring, ...). Ongoing efforts are made to improve the sense-making process (including progress review) during the mid & final-year multi-actor meetings.

This process generated a number of important lessons about introducing and applying Outcome Mapping:

- Beginning to use OM presented a steep learning for staff, many of whom had over a decade of experience with using log frames. Shifting the mindset of these staff members and ingraining the concepts and language involved institutionalising the approach and changing their planning, monitoring and evaluation activities.
- OM training resources in Indonesian local language would have facilitated this process much more effectively.
- Institutionalising OM takes time. The decision to use OM was taken quite late in the process and there was time pressure to submit the programme proposal for the donor's deadline. This meant that only a small group of staff could participate in the initial stages of implementing the framework, and not all of the programme staff were fully aware of the consequences of using an OM-based programme approach. On reflection, VECO staff felt that ideally one would introduce concepts earlier to allow OM to grow more organically over time.
- The experience of VECO Indonesia highlights the importance of being clear about what aspects of strategy and planning OM can provide, and ensuring adequate reflection and buy-in to buttress the implementation of OM. OM required considered reflection on the theory of change and strategic directions of the programme, and was therefore more 'involved' than other planning tools staff were used to. It is therefore important to reflect on your programme and its context before the OM workshop.



- Additional roles and strategies require additional competencies and organisational conditions (staff, organisational structure, procedures, infrastructure...). OM was very instrumental in bringing up and making VECO aware of the necessary challenges as well as in providing input in the organisational change process.
- OM was not just a 'panel beating' job but more of an 'engine overhaul' which requires not only a mind-shift of the people involved but also induces changes at organisational and operational level such as the programme management approach, the M&E process, operational planning and even programme structures & procedures. Therefore, it became clear in VECO Indonesia and Vredeseilanden that it is crucial to install OM champions in the organisation, provide specialist support, create space to continuously communicate and internally promote the OM logic and move step by step into the integration process.

Developing the integrated framework

The development of the programme framework involved customising the methodology to fit the specific context and to comply with internal and external requirements. In the case of VECO Indonesia, the most important factor was the donor requirement to use a logframe-based format for the programme proposal and reporting. However, as Vredeseilanden made the strategic choice to develop a more learning-oriented programme management approach, it was decided to continue developing an OM-based programme framework. This required a complicated process of 'bricolage' to integrate the LFA with OM so satisfy both of these needs. A number of tensions between the two approaches made this a particularly difficult task, for example, the underlying paradigms and programme logic between the two models are very different, the language used is different with hardly any resonance in the meaning of the terms used, the LFA focuses on changes at beneficiaries level whereas OM is interested in changes at the level of boundary partners and LFA focuses on specific objectives & intermediate results whereas OM focuses on actors and respective behavioural changes.

But nevertheless, through persistence, VECO managed to develop a very innovative model on which to build its programme that served both of these purposes (figure 1). In line with the vision and mission, VECO organised its programme around three specific objectives which indicate the desired ultimate changes within the scope of the programme. The first focuses on sustainable agricultural chain development (SACD), the second on lobbying and negotiation for SACD and the third focuses on consumer awareness of sustainable agriculture products. A set of indicators for each objective were developed to monitor the progress and results made for each of the respective objectives.

Each of the specific objectives has its own set of boundary partners, for example, related to the first specific objective, VECO Indonesia identified its boundary partners as local farmer organisation, local NGO's and private chain actors. For each of the boundary partners a respective set of outcome challenges, progress markers and strategy maps were developed to guide the programme. Where a specific boundary partner featured for more than one objective then multiple outcome challenges were drawn up for that boundary partner linked to the each of the objectives.

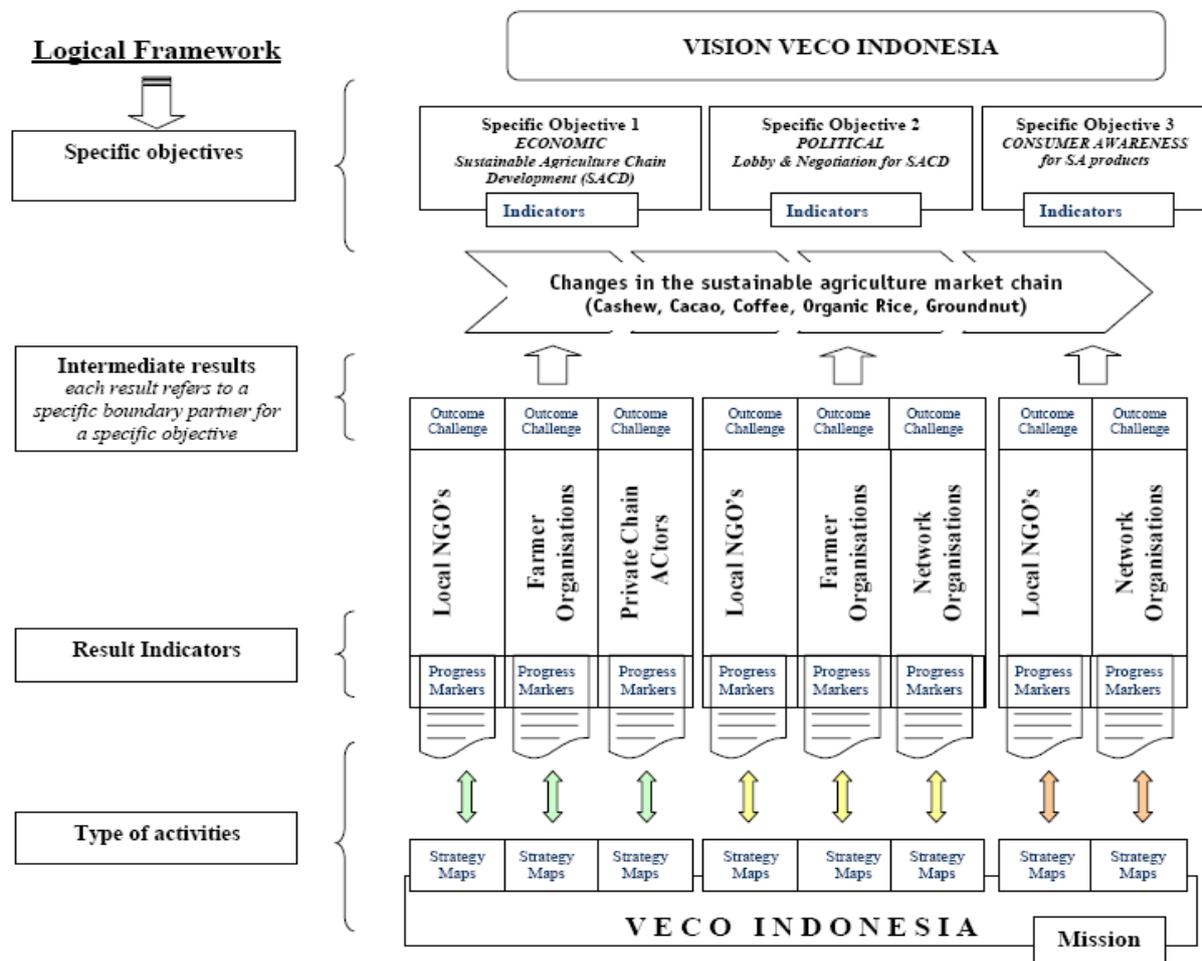


Figure 1: The OM/LFA integrated model

One aspect of OM that VECO decided to tweak was the organisational practices step. This refers to the activities and habits that an organisation adopts in order to foster creativity & innovation, to seek the best ways to assist its partners and to maintain its niche. (Earl et al., 2001: 69). Rather than going through the step as described in the OM manual to develop organisation practices, VECO decided to create a fourth specific objective on organisational learning. It is a unique objective in the sense that it describes a change at the level of VECO Indonesia and therefore, it has no boundary partners, although in one sense VECO is its own BP. Therefore, an outcome challenge and a respective set of progress markers was developed for VECO Indonesia which reflects the developmental process of VECO Indonesia and its partners towards becoming a learning organisation.

A number of lessons emerged about adapting OM to the context:

- Customising the methodology to fit the specific context and complying with internal and external requirements has been crucial for VECO.



- VECO developed their own way of fitting OM in alongside a log-frame to satisfy the need to report to donors and the desire to build learning into their programmes. This shows that while there are some inherent tensions (e.g. around keeping in the 'impact' level) these tools can be used in conjunction with each other to a certain extent².
- The 'logic' of OM fitted very well with the VECO Indonesia country programme 2003-2007, which had been gradually reshaped around 3 levels over the last years – the programme itself, its partners, and the ultimate beneficiaries (farmer households).
- Supporting the local intermediary actors had become an important focus of the programme, and OM helped orient the learning process towards VECO's interactions with them instead of towards measuring impact on the end beneficiaries.
- OM's focus on actors allowed them to be more strategic about crucial areas. It was hugely important to decide who it is important to influence in order to achieve change, who to work with as strategic partners and how to involve them. OM helped the team prioritise between actors, and by working to define roles and responsibilities added further clarity to their work.
- VECO staff felt that looking at behaviour change gave them a better chance of understanding their direct influence, as the interactions between you and your boundary partners is something that you can really play a part in controlling. This helped them become more systematic about the task of capacity building, contributing towards a shift towards more qualitative approach, and a clearer specification of what is expected and what changes are aimed at.

Concluding remarks

Over-all, OM was chosen as the guiding framework to design the new VECO Indonesia programme. However, because of its particular logic and set-up it initially facilitated critical self-reflection on the previous and existing programme objectives, approach, structure and assumptions on which the programme was based. This is itself was already a valuable process and clearly shows the potential of OM to be used as assessment tool in addition to programme design.

Programme members also found OM to be of 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 total M&E process and there is a more realistic viewpoint on how far impact can be measured.

² For more detail on VECO's integration of the 2 frameworks see [\(link\)](#), and other resources providing guidance for this task can be found [\(link\)](#).



The reflection, analysis and decisions about the new role of VECO Indonesia as supporter of specific partner organisations had lead to changes in the organisation and future programme. By identifying a wider scope of strategies for capacity development of partner organisation - based on the strategy maps tool provided by OM – some strategies became more prominent in the programme design such as facilitating multi-stakeholder processes, facilitate market chain assessments, generate and document evidence and lessons learned, tailor-made capacity building, provision of market information and networking.

During the last decade, VECO Indonesia supported mainly local NGO's in Indonesia towards improved livelihoods for organised family farmers. Because of the new directions of the programme, VECO realised that new types of partner organisation should enter the partner-mix. OM turned out to be very helpful through its concept of boundary partners as crucial actors in the programme framework and resulted in the selection of new partners and an *improved partner-mix* for VECO.

Further information

For more information about VECO, visit their website: <http://www.vredeseilanden.be>.

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

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