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1. BACKGROUND

* Outcome Harvesting collects (“harvests”) evidence of what has changed (“outcomes”) and, then, working backwards, determines whether and how an intervention has contributed to these changes.
* It is a method that enables evaluators, grant makers, and managers to identify, formulate, verify, and make sense of outcomes.
* The method was inspired by the definition of outcome as a change in the behaviour, relationships, actions, activities, policies, or practices of an individual, group, community, organization, or institution the evaluator or harvester gleans information from reports, personal interviews, and other sources to document how a given program or initiative has contributed to outcomes.
* These outcomes can be positive or negative, intended or unintended, but the connection between the initiative and the outcomes should be verifiable.

1. **DEFINITIONS**

* A **change agent** is an individual or organisation that influences an outcome. In outcome harvesting the change agent is often an organisation running a project or programme.
* A **social actor** is an individual, group, community, organisation or institution that changes because of a change agent’s intervention.
* The **harvest user** is the stakeholder who needs the findings of an outcome harvest to make decisions or take action. This may include one or more people within the change agent organisation, or third parties such as a donor.
* The **harvester** is the person or people responsible for managing the outcome harvest. The harvester is often an internal or external evaluator. The harvester leads the outcome harvesting process, and facilities and supports participation within the process.

1. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES
   1. Advantages

* It overcomes the common failure to search for unintended outcomes of interventions
* It generates verifiable outcomes.
* Outcomes are verified through discussions with both internal and external stakeholders.
* It uses a common-sense, accessible approach that engages informants quite easily
* It answers actionable questions with concrete evidence
  1. Disadvantages
* Skill and time are required to identify and formulate high-quality outcome descriptions
* Only those outcomes that informants are aware of, are captured.
* Starting with the outcomes and working backwards represents a new way of thinking about change for some participants so it might require additional training.
* Outcome harvesting may be less useful if a development agency wants to know whether or how far specific objectives were achieved.

1. WHEN TO USE OUTCOME HARVESTING

* This method works well when outcomes, rather than activities, are the critical focus. It is especially useful when the aim is to understand the process of change and how each outcome contributes to this change, rather than simply to accumulate a list of results.
* It is suitable for evaluating complex programming contexts. In complex environments, objectives and the paths to achieve them are largely unpredictable and predefined objectives and theories of change must be modified over time to respond to changes in the context.

1. **STEPS TO IMPLEMENT OUTCOME HARVESTING**
   1. Design the Outcome Harvest

Identify and define the following categories of an Outcome Design:

* **Users of the Outcome Harvest**

For example - The primary intended users of the evaluation are the donor’s management team for the grant portfolio. In contrast, the grantee change agents would be one audience for the evaluation.

* **Uses of the Outcome Harvest**

For Example - There are two primary intended uses of this evaluation; First, to document the outcomes of 8 years of grant making and second, to improve the strategy of portfolios at the foundation that are oriented toward democratizing global governing institutions.

* **Useful Questions to be Answered**

For example - What has been the collective effect of grantees on making the global governance regime more democratic and what does it mean for the portfolio´s strategy?

* At the most basic level, Outcome Harvesting documents a change in a social actor. Sometimes it is enough to discover who changed what, when and where it was changed, and how the change agent contributed to the outcome. At other times, it may be essential to describe the outcome’s significance. It may be useful to include other dimensions such as the history, context, contribution of other social actors, and emerging evidence of impact on people’s lives or the state of the environment. Regardless of what is being collected, it is important that harvest users and harvesters agree on the detail required: Will a simple description suffice or should each dimension be explained? Will one or two sentences be enough or are several paragraphs required to describe each dimension?
  1. Choose Data Sources
* The chosen sources of data should be authentic, reliable, and believable
* The best informants are those with the most intimate knowledge of what changed and how it changed. These are known as the change agents.
* To handle possible vested interests of the change agents, triangulation of sources should be done.
* The nature of data and its sources should be decided upon and defined from the beginning to ensure credibility of data.
  1. Data Collection

5.3.1. Formulate Outcome Descriptions

* First, since outcome harvesting works in a retrospective manner, it is important to start by defining the outcome which has occurred. Indicative questions to define the outcome : Who has the change agent influenced to change what, and when and where was it changed? What is the observable, verifiable change that can be seen in the individual, group, community, organization, or institution? What is being done differently that is significant?
* Second, the contributing factors to the outcome should be defined. Indicative questions to define the contributing factors: How did the change agent contribute to this change? Concretely, what did she, he, or they do that influenced the change?
* Outcome and the change agent’s contribution are defined using the SMART strategy :

**Specific**: The outcome is formulated in sufficient detail so that the evaluation is easy to comprehend.

**Measurable**: The description of the outcome contains objective, verifiable quantitative and qualitative information, independent of who is collecting data.

**Achieved**: The description establishes a plausible relationship and logical link between the outcome and the change agent’s actions that influenced it.

**Relevant**: The outcome represents a significant step towards the impact that the change agent seeks. Those who identify and formulate the outcome and the contribution must be well placed to assess both. They should have a special position or experience that gives them the requisite knowledge to describe the outcome and how they contributed.

**Timely**: While the outcome occurred within the time period being monitored or evaluated, the change agent’s contribution may have occurred months, or even years, before.

* To define the above two categories, the harvester should use the following mechanisms:
* Reported (and validated) observations such as progress reports, evaluations, and case studies.
* Direct critical observation, for example, what is seen in writing, heard during telephone conversations, or observed during a field visit.
* Direct or simple inductive inference from reported and direct observations, for example, insider information given to a journalist and published leads to international pressure

**5.3.2. Engage with informants to formulate outcome descriptions**

* Harvesters must ask change agents to report intended and unintended, positive and negative outcomes.
* Harvesters must inform change agents that if only positive outcomes are reported, one of two interpretations may be assumed: (1) the claims are not credible, or (2) the change agent is not taking enough risks.
* Harvesters must emphasise to the change agents that they require specificity.
* Using the information gathered from the change agent informants, the harvesters must update the draft outcome descriptions or develop new outcome descriptions, as needed.

**5.3.3. Care to be taken while collecting data:**

* Harvesters must seek concrete observable outcomes that can be verified.
* Harvesters must seek contribution by the change agent rather than attribution. Influencing another social actor to change does not necessarily mean that the change should be attributed to the change agent. Interventions by change agents are rarely the sole reason for change in a social actor; in most cases, a change agent contributes to an outcome indirectly, partially, or even unintentionally.
* Harvesters must establish credible contribution. Since there is rarely a linear, straightforward relationship between change agent actions and the changes by these actions, the challenge is to establish a plausible relationship of cause and effect.
* Harvesters must recognize non-action as an outcome. Influencing a social actor not to take action – that is, preventing something undesirable from happening – can be a significant outcome.
* Harvesters must report negative outcomes. A change agent may inadvertently contribute to changes that significantly detract from, undermine, or obstruct a desirable result. When self-reporting, change agents are less likely to recall, track, document, and report negative outcomes.
* Data should be collected as frequently as required
  1. Substantiate Outcome Descriptions
* To substantiate the outcome descriptions, the harvesters must obtain testimonies and feedback from independent substantiators.
* The substantiators should be credible and have sufficient knowledge on the policy being evaluated.
* The harvesters must present the final outcome formulation to that individual or group of individuals and record their opinions and recommendations on the outcome descriptions.
  1. Analyse and interpret
* Depending on the program context and monitoring or evaluation purpose, harvesters may analyse the data at any of the following levels :
* For each outcome
* For all the outcomes of a single change agent
* For an overarching program or systems change initiative to which the various outcomes of multiple change agents relate
* To help understand the meaning of the outcomes, harvesters should employ interpretative tools and approaches
* The interpretive lens may be focused exclusively on the harvest user´s vision and mission, institutional goals, theory of change, or strategic or annual plans. On the other hand, the field of vision may be broad, allowing the harvesters to apply their theoretical knowledge or professional judgement and expertise to make sense of the outcomes.
  1. Support use of findings
* Harvesters propose issues for discussion to harvest users grounded in the evidence-based answers to the harvesting questions. They facilitate discussions with users, which may include how they can make use of the findings.

# READY REFERENCE

Wilson-Grau, R. (2015) Outcome Harvesting. BetterEvaluation. Available at: <http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/outcome_harvesting>

Grau, R. and Britt, H. (2012). *Outcome Harvesting*. 1 Osiris Street, 7th Floor Garden City, 11511 Cairo, Egypt: Ford Foundation. Available at: <https://www.outcomemapping.ca/download/wilsongrau_en_Outome%20Harvesting%20Brief_revised%20Nov%202013.pdf>

<https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Outcome-harvesting.pdf>

**OUTCOME HARVESTING TOOLKIT**

This toolkit has been prepared as a ready reference for M & E practitioners. Outcome Harvesting is used to collect evidence of what has changed and, then, working backwards, determines whether and how an intervention has contributed to these changes.

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