



ACCOUNTABLE NOW

LEARNINGS FROM OUR IMPACT AND EVALUATION PEER ADVICE GROUP

IMPAG

The IMPAG was launched at the Accountable Now AGM 2020. It brought together practitioners with an interest in CSOs' impact measurement. Four thematic areas of interest were identified by IMPAG participants: **Contribution vs. Attribution**, **Identifying impact indicators**, **Impact awareness culture**, and **Impact sharing & learning**. This document captures the resources, good practices and challenges that participants discussed and shared.

Contribution vs. Attribution

Whatever outcomes we achieve, they are always the result of multiple factors. How do we know whether our intervention was one of the critical factors contributing to such outcomes? And what cost-effective ways do we have to understand that?

All participants have shared their struggles with this question within their organisations, acknowledging attribution of impact to one single organisation is very challenging if not unfeasible. The questions pivoted to - how can we measure contribution? -

Below you can find what participants shared:



CIVICUS shared how [Outcome Harvesting](#) (particularly the substantiation phase) is helping to address the contribution vs. attribution questions. Generally, CIVICUS is focusing on contribution, as the organisation considers outcomes that result from working with many partners within a global alliance.



Amnesty International shared their *outcome types document* ([available in Natalia's post](#)), which outlines how Amnesty International conducted their latest impact review. It demonstrates how to capture smaller, incremental steps that fulfil the implementation of laws, policies and standards.



SOS Children's Villages shared their approach to Social Return on Investment (SRI). Calculating is resource-intensive and it comes with some challenges. For example, long timelines, which in some cases means people and communities are not part of any programme anymore. SRI is not immune to personal attribution bias.



ChildFund Alliance shared some of the challenges in supporting the 11 members of the network where each member has a MEL function on their own.

Outstanding question

Establishing attribution can be very costly. However, the same can be said for assessing contribution (approaches such as contribution analysis, if applied well, require time and resources).

What cost-effective ways are there for non-profit organisations to assess the impact of their work? What approaches can help NGOs identify their impact in a more nimble way?

Identifying impact indicators

How do we identify impact indicators, and aggregate those across different projects, areas of work, and even organisations? In other words, how do we develop a coherent impact measurement framework in our organisations?

The answers vary widely from one organisation to another. The insights participants shared showed impact indicators depend deeply on the nature of the organisations' mission and work. Measuring the impact of advocacy work usually poses a major challenge because of its qualitative nature and the complexity of finding cause-effect relationships.

It was also acknowledged that there is a challenge of aggregating 'impact bottom lines' resulting from indicators across regions and programmatic areas of an organisation.



For CIVICUS it is crucial to find critical learning questions and bring forward a qualitative perspective to enhance learning. The process to come up with organisation-wide indicators took a bottom-up approach, with teams coming up with their own indicators. Those organisation-wide indicators are intended to be used by everyone in CIVICUS. They are currently working with Greenpeace on developing common indicators.

The Amnesty International logo consists of the words "AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, positioned to the left of a stylized torch icon.

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Amnesty International's approach to [Human Rights indicators](#) was presented. Amnesty International is currently developing a new measurement framework that includes key progress measures for different areas of work. Each progress measure is established from a number of underpinning indicators.



SOS Children's Villages shared their approach to impact assessment indicators and how different levels of impact are assessed; Individual and community level impact assessments in the short and mid term and Social Return in Investment (SRI) in the long term.

Outstanding question

Identifying a menu of indicators that organisations can use to track the impact they achieve can be a challenge. However, a bigger challenge is to ensure that such indicators are meaningful and that they do not prevent an organisation from identifying potentially relevant pieces of information, simply because they are outside of what is being measured.

What approaches can we use to ensure that, as we track what's material to our stakeholders, we can collect other meaningful pieces of information?

Impact culture awareness

Beyond CSOs staff working on impact related areas (e.g. MEAL teams), how do we embed 'an impact mindset' across the whole organisation?

As the focus and nature of work of the different functions within a CSO varies, an impact mindset will be understood slightly differently across any organisation. For communication and fundraising teams, it is important to concisely and attractively convene the organisation's success stories. For frontline staff, MEL activities such reporting impact might be seen as a performance assessment of their work.

The group discussed the challenge for MEL teams to promote impact measurement and reporting beyond simply reporting on activities and outputs. The complexity of impact measurement, in addition to the sometime competing priorities from different functions as mentioned above, were the major barriers identified.

Context and cultural background were also highlighted as a crucial factor when considering how to approach and promote impact measurement and learning within organisations.



Amnesty International and Educo shared initiatives that their organisations are either considering or undertaking to encourage learning from failure or from things that do not work out the way we intended them to, a close sibling of best practices but potentially much more powerful as failure usually generates more learning than successes. "Fuck up nights" is a space for staff to share in a casual format a failure experience framed around learning and opportunity.

Outstanding question

Being able to identify and discuss failures is a core element of an organisation's learning culture. However, this may be tricky especially if huge "costs" (e.g., losing funding, losing partners, reputation damage etc) are associated with "failing".

How can the resistance to **recognise failure** be overcome?

Impact sharing & learning

Let's assume our organisation does not have a robust impact measurement framework yet, however insights and lessons are being captured. How do we make these insights actionable? How do we act upon these lessons? How do we share them?

The group acknowledged that capturing impact and learnings is a precondition for an organisation to become a learning one. But, sharing and uptaking, and ultimately, acting upon those learnings is the last frontier when it comes to impact measurement. Learning events seem to be the most engaging way to share and exchange learnings and impact (or lack thereof) stories. Interactivity, informality and having provocative content are great ingredients for a successful learning event.



How CIVICUS captures, acts upon and shares insights & lessons was shared. They go by a less is more mantra and use standardised tools for projects - the Grow Log Table. They are also intentional about creating space for teams to reflect on learnings at the organisational level.



Several initiatives that Amnesty International is leading on across the movement were shared. Country-specific case studies that might show different outcomes depending on contexts, provide the breeding ground for staff to reflect on extrapolation of learnings. Learnings events are held with sessions delivered in several different languages to maximise the audience base across the movement.



SOS Children's Villages' approach uses several channels that target different audiences for sharing and learning from [impact results](#). Key elements of the approach are that they follow-up upon learning check-in on how learnings were implemented after five years.

Outstanding question

Sharing learnings through events and other channels is key to ensure that findings reach key stakeholders, however, sharing does not necessarily lead to learning.

How can organisations ensure that findings are acted upon and learnings are integrated? Not just in the design/implementation of projects and programmes of work, but also in setting the strategic direction of the organisation?

Peer Advice Group participants

- **Natalia Gubbioni** (co-facilitator), Acting Deputy Programme Director, Head of Impact and Learning. Global Strategy & Impact Programme. Amnesty International.
- **Hector Payo Meiriño** (co-facilitator), Membership & Reporting Manager. Accountable Now.
- **Merle Rutz**, Impact and Accountability Coordinator. CIVICUS
- **Ana Isabel Jiménez Dato**, MEAL Global Coordinator. Impact and Organizational Improvement Department. Educo
- **Germain Houedenou**, Research and Learning Advisor. Programme & Strategy. SOS Children's Villages International
- **Rosalind Willi**, Research and Learning Advisor. Programme & Strategy. SOS Children's Villages International
- **Ronnie Dane Alonzo**, Advisor. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL). ChildFund Australia
- **Anastasia Roniotes**, Head Officer. MIO-ECSDE
- **Faith K. Nimineh**, Child-Friendly Accountability Coordinator & Advisor, CPiE. ChildFund Alliance
- **Amy Bhopal**, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Expert. Greenpeace International
- **Petra Kiel**, Evaluation Manager, CBM International



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