

Guidance for “Harvesters”

in the identification and formulation of outcome statements in the Civic Engagement for Open Contracting program

In the Open Contracting programme Outcomes are understood to be observable changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities, policies or practices of an individual, group, community, organization, or institution (“social actors”) that have contributed, or potentially contribute to the achievement of your programme’s overall or specific objectives and that are plausibly influenced by the activities of that programme.

These changes in other actors are beyond your control but they must be reasonably linked to your interventions, i.e. to your lobbying and advocacy activities although they did not necessarily directly cause them.

Outcomes differ from outputs.

Outputs are the immediate results of your work, which you fairly well control. That is, outputs are the processes, goods and services that you produce, such as publications, campaigns, advocacy, and support for capacity-development, that result from your activities. Outputs are very important; in no way are they ‘inferior’ to outcomes. Without outputs, no outcomes would be realized. They simply are a different type of result.

Outcome Harvesting begins with the identification and formulation of Outcome Statements. An Outcome statement describes the outcome, i.e. the observable change in another social actor; it briefly explains its relevance and the way in which your programme contributed to that change. Each outcome statement has four sections. To formulate an Outcome Statement, follow the instructions below and use the attached Template.

Outcome: Describe in one sentence the change in the social actor – who changed what, when and where. If you need to add facts to explain the outcome so that an outsider can fully understand and appreciate the change, you can add more sentences, but you need to be concise.

Relevance

Briefly explain why the outcome you just described is important:

- does it contribute to any of the outcome areas of the Open Contracting programme (see Annex 1) and if so, how?
- or does it contribute to network/coalition building, and if so, how?
- or is otherwise important for the objectives of your programme, and if so, how?

Please note that a change could also contribute negatively. Such changes should also be described.

Contribution: Describe which activities of your organisation contributed to this outcome. This contribution can be direct or indirect, small or large, intended or unintended, but needs to be plausible and verifiable. In a paragraph or maximum two, describe what was done, by whom, when and where as specifically as possible.

Sources: Mention sources of your evidence for the facts in the outcome, in the contribution and the source of the opinion on the relevance.

When formulating outcome statements, keep in mind that:

- Influencing a social actor not to take action – avoiding something undesirable from happening – can be a significant outcome. For example, if you influence Parliament not to pass a law, that is an outcome. These outcomes are formulated as the social actor changing its expected behaviour.
- Often you work in concert with others. Therefore, frequently your activities will contribute indirectly and partially to one or more outcomes.
- Outcomes often take time to emerge and some activities may never lead to one.
- Outcomes may be generated unexpectedly. These unintended outcomes contribute to your programme’s theory of change or objectives and you contributed to them with your activities but you did not plan for this change to happen.
- Outcomes are often part of a larger process of change. All outcomes in such a change process should be described separately. This allows you to reveal the steps of this whole process of change that you are influencing.
- Outcomes may be negative, changes that undermine rather than enhance progress towards realising your theory of change or accomplishing your objective. You should share negative outcomes when the damage caused or what you learned was relevant.

Quality of Outcome Statements: SMART

The formulation of outcome statements (description of the outcome, its relevance, your contribution and the sources) should be sufficiently concise and concrete so that third parties will be able to appreciate what has been achieved without being bogged down in text. Aim for 1-2 sentence descriptions of the outcome, its relevance and your programme’s contribution. The outcomes must also be sufficiently specific and measurable to be verifiable.

As a rule of thumb, your outcome statements should be S.M.A.R.T.¹:

S: Specific

Each outcome is formulated in sufficient detail so that a reader without specialised subject or contextual knowledge will be able to understand and appreciate what changed.

- When — day, month and year that the change happened?
- Full name of who changed?
- What concretely did they do that is significantly different?
- Where — located on a map?

¹ Note that SMART here applies to Outcome Statements (and not to objectives).

M: Measurable

The description of the outcome provides verifiable quantitative and qualitative information, independent of who is collecting data.

For example:

How much, many, big, far, fast ?

What size, weight, age, shape, colour?

A: Achieved

The outcome was achieved by your activities, albeit perhaps not fully attributable to your activities alone, but your activities have contributed to this outcome. This relates to the section on Contribution. A plausible relationship, a logical link between the outcome and what you did that contributed to it.

What was done, when and where that contributed — wholly or (probably) partially, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unexpectedly?

R: Relevant

The outcome represents noteworthy progress towards the programme's theory of change, or, other, more specific objectives.

T: Timely

The outcome occurred after your activities or outputs have taken place. The outcome may have occurred months or even years after the activities but not before.

As an example you may look at the two sample outcome statements:

Sample outcome 1 - from a Hivos programme

Outcome: In November 2011, EU Commissioner for Development, Andries Piebalgs, strengthened the EU policy regarding access to renewable energy by publishing a Green Paper which, among others, addressed the issue of energy access.

Relevance: "The recently released European Commission Green Paper on Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development addresses the issue of energy access. This paper states that "one of the many challenges of sustainable development [is] access to sustainable energy for all citizens." Hivos fully endorses the view of the European Commission. This new position is a substantial change in EU's position regarding access to energy. Furthermore, the EU is an important policy actor and donor. It has direct influence with regard to contributions to developing countries and it is one of the key players of the UN Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) initiative.

Contribution: In 2010 Hivos, in cooperation with EEPA, published a report assessing the EU policy regarding sustainable energy in developing countries in order to influence the evaluation of a number of country strategy papers. Hivos also initiated a hearing of the EU parliament based on this report. Besides MPs also Piebalgs attended this hearing. Hivos also participated in the public consultation on the Green Paper.

Sample outcome 2 –from a programme by Woord en Daad

Outcome: In August 2010, during a visit to earthquake devastated Haiti taken on his own initiative, the Dutch Member of Parliament Joël Voordewind formulated a set of constructive recommendations about housing and the link between emergency aid and structural assistance. The recommendations especially point out the added value of Haiti's agricultural sector and food security and give support to small and medium enterprises, especially in the agricultural sector.

Relevance: The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs embraced four of the eight recommendations, potentially contributing to private sector development in Haiti with involvement of Dutch enterprises. Another positive change is that Dutch NGOs, also encouraged by the MFA, gave more attention to the link between emergency assistance and long-term development.

Contribution Woord en Daad: W&D has a good relationship with Mr. Voordewind and his ChristenUnie party. WD offered logistical support to Mr. Voordewind if he would undertake the visit to Haiti and then developed the program for the field visit, in close collaboration with the Dutch honorary consul in Port-au-Prince. Finally, WD gave advice to Mr. Voordewind in the formulation of his recommendations.

First Step

As was indicated above, the Identification and Formulation of Outcome Statements is the first step in the process of Outcome Harvesting. Subsequent steps in Outcome Harvesting are Substantiation, Analysis & Interpretation and Use of Findings. They are not covered in this Guidance note.

Annex 1: Outcome Areas of the Open Contracting programme

Theory of Change of the Open Contracting programme

The Open Contracting programme seeks to influence changes in the following outcome areas:

1. International bodies and agencies have (further) opened up their contracting processes
2. International bodies and agencies (to be further specified) have included Open Contracting principles in their interactions with and support for their partners.
3. The Dutch government has taken steps to harmonize Open Contracting related activities across the responsible agencies and is a supporter of the Open Contracting Partnership's mission.
4. Governments have initiated specific (access to information) reforms to improve local conditions for efficiency, effectiveness and integrity of public contracting.
5. Governments create mechanisms for oversight authorities to respond to and act upon public feedback related to public contracting

