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Promoting Stakeholder Participation in a Learning-Based Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

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Abstract

This research analysed monitoring and evaluation activities based on the Outcome Mapping methodology within the Zimbabwe Secondary Teacher Training Environmental Education Project (St^{2}eep), an education for sustainability initiative in Zimbabwe. The majority of donor-funded environmental education programmes use conventional monitoring and evaluation approaches based on the logical frameworks (logframe) that guide the programme designs and management. Although research indicates significant problems with the implementation of these approaches, there are only a few documented examples of experiences with alternative monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The case of St^{2}eep allowed us to compare three years of experiences with monitoring and evaluation based on the logframe, with two years of monitoring and evaluation based on Outcome Mapping.

We evaluate how the project team and the donor organisation, VVOB (the Flemish Office for Development, Cooperation and Technical Assistance), have perceived the performance of Outcome Mapping with regards to the two main aims of monitoring and evaluation activities: accountability and learning. This is complemented with an analysis of monitoring documentation. The project team refers to the collaborative nature of monitoring and evaluation in St^{2}eep, the principles of self-assessment and peer-assessment, combined with public recognition for project successes, as the key factors supporting learning and accountability through monitoring and evaluation in St^{2}eep. The Outcome Mapping-based monitoring and evaluation system is shown to enhance ownership and participation of local stakeholders in the project's monitoring and evaluation system.

Introduction and Background

The Zimbabwe Secondary Teacher Training Environmental Education Project (St^{2}eep) started in January 2003 and is a partnership between the Ministry of Higher Education, three teacher training colleges and the Flemish Office for Development, Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB). St^{2}eep supports the implementation of national environmental education policy within three secondary teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe. Project activities are

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coordinated by college based coordinating teams that work on a voluntary basis and consist of three lecturers in each of the three colleges. These three coordinating teams make up the St^{2}eep project team which is responsible for the management of the project. We refer to this particular team whenever we mention 'project team' in this paper. The main stakeholders of the St^{2}eep project include college lecturers, college administrations, pilot schools, the Ministry of Education, and the donor organisation (VVOB).

During its first phase (2003-2004), St^{2}eep has provided support towards the development of environmental education guidelines for secondary teacher training (St^{2}eep, 2005a), college-based environmental education activities, building environmental education capacity of lecturers and developing functional environmental education resource centers in the colleges. Between 2004 and 2008, St^{2}eep has put an increasing emphasis on the institutional environment in which the environmental education processes take place and has focused mainly on continuous professional development of college lecturers and integration of environmental education in the various subject areas offered in secondary teacher training colleges.

Until mid-2005, St^{2}eep's operations were guided by the logical framework approach or logframe. The logframe is the most widely used framework to plan, monitor and evaluate donor-funded development programmes and draws from a positivist approach towards the process of development (Morgan, 2005). It goes along with instruments, tools and procedures derived from the positive science and engineering sector and is characterised by breaking up a programme into predictable, logical and sequential activities to be achieved in a given time span. It is result-oriented and aims to enhance control and efficiency (Morgan, 2005).

However, after an in-depth self-reflection exercise (St^{2}eep, 2004; Van Ongevalle *et al.*, 2005), it was found that the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) framework was mainly used by the VVOB staff to meet the official budgetary and reporting requirements from the VVOB head office. Local partners were not involved in the monitoring and reporting process. Hence, the logframe and the associated monitoring and evaluation processes were divorced from the project and did not really influence or inform future planning.

This perceived gap between generating information through monitoring and evaluation and using it for future planning is an often acknowledged absence of mechanisms for learning in the design of monitoring and evaluation systems when using the logframe (Britton, 2003; Horton *et al.*, 2003). The logframe has the advantage of emphasising the importance of the planning cycle, but its rigidity makes it difficult to apply a learning approach that requires openness to the unexpected and flexibility to embrace change (Britton, 2005; Horton *et al.*, 2003).

During the first three years of St^{2}eep, an informal, unsystematic and more process-oriented monitoring and evaluation system emerged. This system was characterised by participatory self-assessment workshops and discussion sessions during planning meetings and project activities where key stakeholders were given an opportunity to express their views, negotiate meaning, learn and plan towards the future. The learning in this informal monitoring and evaluation system highlighted the need for a more participatory and learning oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation system to guide the second phase of the project (Deprez & Van Ongevalle, 2006; Van Ongevalle, 2007). As a result of these insights, Outcome Mapping was

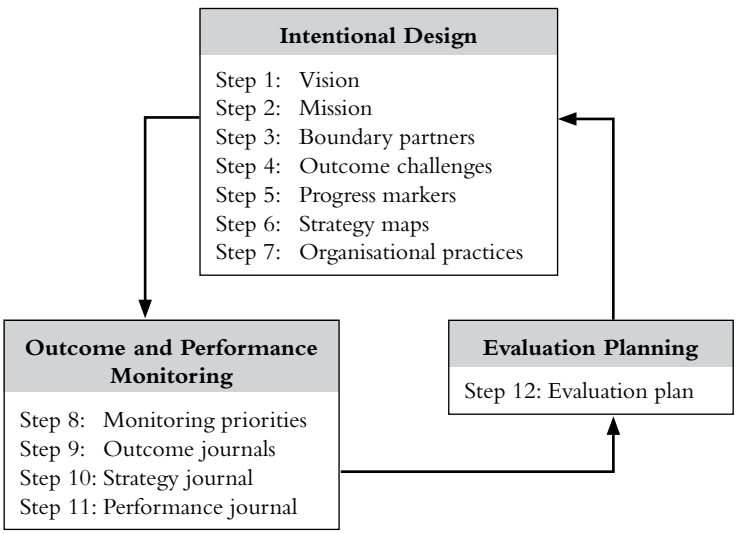
chosen by project stakeholders as project management system as it seemed to be more learning centred and participatory than the original logical framework approach.

Outcome Mapping as a Learning-Oriented Project Cycle Management Framework

The evaluation unit of the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) developed the Outcome Mapping methodology because it had encountered fundamental challenges in assessing and reporting on development impact (Earl, Carden & Smutylo, 2001). While development organisations are under pressure to demonstrate that their programmes result in significant and lasting changes in the well-being of large numbers of their intended beneficiaries, such 'impacts' are often the product of a confluence of events for which no single agency or group of agencies can realistically claim full credit. As a result, assessing development impacts, especially from the perspective of an external agency, is problematic. To address this challenge, a methodology called Outcome Mapping has evolved that characterises and assesses the contributions development programmes make to key partners the programme is trying to influence or trying to capacitate. It takes a learning-based and use-driven view of evaluation guided by principles of participation and iterative learning, encouraging evaluative thinking throughout the programme cycle by all programme team members.

Central to Outcome Mapping is the concept of outcomes, defined as 'changes in the behavior, relationships, activities, or actions of the people, groups, and organisations with whom a program works directly' (Earl *et al.*, 2001). The programme cycle in Outcome Mapping consists of three phases: (1) intentional design, (2) monitoring planning, and (3) evaluation planning (see Figure 1). This framework was used to restructure the planning of the St^{2}eep project.

Figure 1. The three phases of the Outcome Mapping process



(Source: Earl *et al.*, 2003)

Using Outcome Mapping to Restructure the Planning of the St²eep Project

Phase 1: Intentional design

The operational restructuring of planning of St²eep through the Outcome Mapping intentional design was done during an Outcome Mapping workshop attended by various project stakeholders in May 2005 (St²eep, 2005b). This re-planning process started with a dialogue on the development of a vision and a mission for the programme, followed by a stakeholder analysis and an identification of the boundary partners (see Table 1).

Table 1. New St²eep vision and mission and boundary partners

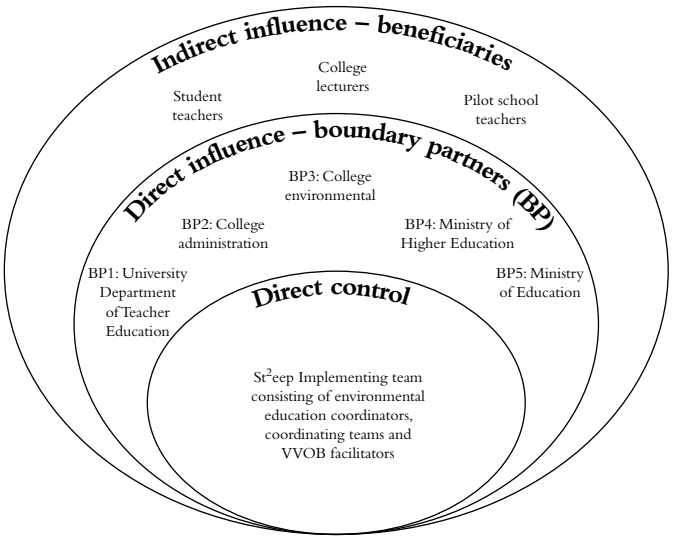
Vision	Mission	St²eep's boundary partners
Education in Zimbabwe is reoriented towards critical thinking, action competence and responsible behaviour by individuals and groups to achieve sustainable living in a healthy environment. In this way, the Zimbabwean community is empowered to make informed individual and collaborative decisions, which will ensure continual effective environmental management.	In support of this vision, St²eep will create an enabling environment for sustained environmental education implementation in Secondary Teachers' Colleges through the encouragement of active learning processes which promote participation, critical thinking, informed decision-making, action competence and responsible citizenry. St²eep will conduct ongoing pre- and in-service capacity enhancement, curriculum review and implementation, and strive for the reorientation of assessment of teaching and learning in line with principles of environmental education. St²eep will lobby for motivational strategies and policies to ensure that environmental education is institutionalised in the education system and encourage outreach programmes through networking with schools, communities and environmental interest groups. St²eep will ensure that graduates of the secondary teachers' colleges are able to implement environmental education in their teaching.	• Environmental education steering teams • College administrators • Ministry of Higher Education • Department of Teacher Education • Ministry of Education

An important assumption underlying Outcome Mapping is that local structures (boundary partners) control change. 'Boundary partner' is a crucial concept in Outcome Mapping, and is defined as those individuals, groups or organisations with whom the programme interacts directly and with whom the programme can anticipate opportunities for influence (Earl *et al.*, 2001). External agents, like development programmes, 'only facilitate the process by providing access to new resources, ideas, or opportunities for a certain period of time' (Earl *et al.*, 2001:2). Using Outcome Mapping allowed St²eep to centre its project logic around its boundary partners, and not around the desired final change of state (e.g. environmental education integrated in the subjects, environmental education learning materials produced, environmental

education resource centres operational), as in the original logframe. By thinking in terms of influencing endogenous actors (boundary partners), Outcome Mapping integrates sustainability thinking and capacity development processes directly into the design of the programme. A linear cause and effect relationship is replaced in Outcome Mapping by a view of development as a complex process that occurs in open systems (Van Ongevalle, 2007).

The three circles in Figure 2 illustrate the different players in St^{2}eep and their relationship (control, direct influence, indirect influence).

Figure 2. Relationship between different stakeholders in St^{2}eep



(Adapted from Earl *et al.*, 2001)

The equivalent of logframe indicators in Outcome Mapping are called progress markers, and are developed for each boundary partner in dialogue between the project team and the boundary partner. They provide a graduated set of statements describing a progression of changed actions of the boundary partner. In contrast with the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) indicators in the logframe approach, they do not represent targets to be reached, but rather points of reference to motivate stakeholders' reflection, learning and consensus, and to guide their actions and interaction (Ortiz, 2004). Table 2 illustrates a set of progress markers of one of St^{2}eep's boundary partners.

Phase 2: Using outcome mapping for monitoring and evaluation planning

A two-day workshop was organised in December 2005 to develop St^{2}eep's monitoring and evaluation system based on outcome mapping (St^{2}eep 2005c). The monitoring and evaluation framework of Outcome Mapping is based on principles of (1) monitoring via self-assessment (by the programme stakeholders), (2) encouraging feedback, reflection and learning, (3) promoting internal and external dialogue, and involves (4) following-up on unintended

effects. This is operationalised through three parallel monitoring processes stimulating critical reflection about:

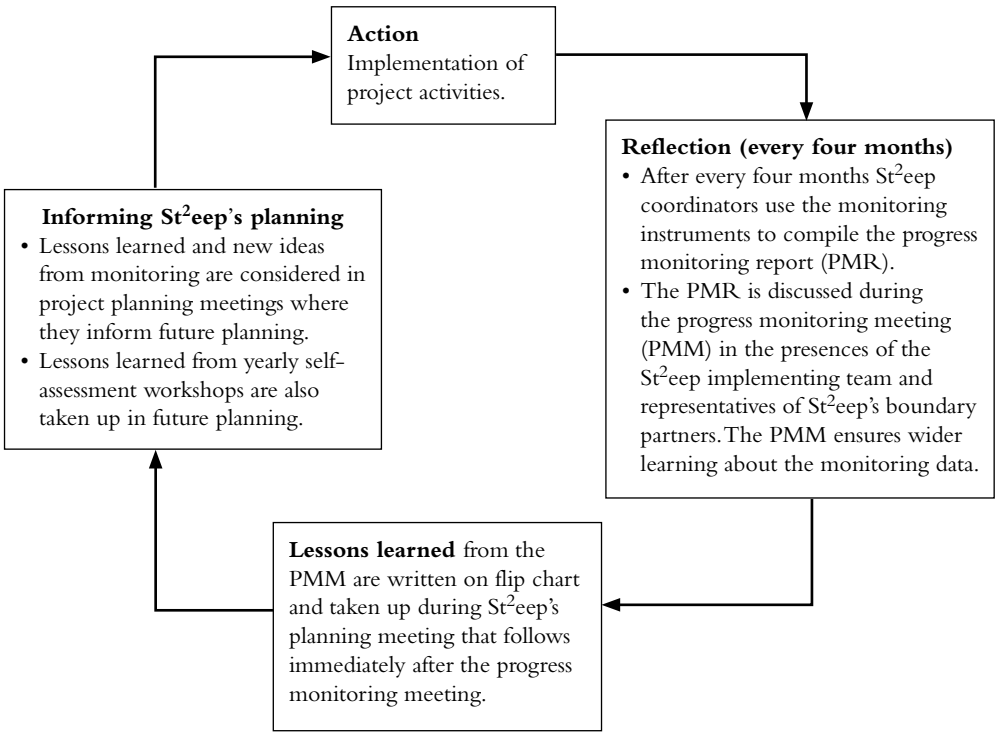
- The strategies carried out by the St^{2}eep implementation team in support of the boundary partners.
- The observations on the changes in actions (i.e. progress markers) of the boundary partners.
- The internal performance of the programme.

Outcome Mapping provides specific instruments such as strategy journals, outcome journals and performance journals that assist data collection about these processes.[1] It also provided St^{2}eep with guidelines for developing a monitoring and evaluation plan that promotes learning from the monitoring data (St^{2}eep, 2005c). Yearly self-assessment workshops constitute the main process of learning-based project evaluation of the project's internal performance. Figure 3 illustrates St^{2}eep's planning and monitoring and evaluation cycle, which consists of four-monthly cycles of progress monitoring, reporting and reflection meetings. Lessons learned from the monitoring feed into planning for the future activity period.

Table 2. Set of progress markers to monitor changes in behaviour of college administrations

Boundary Partner: College Administrations	
St^{2}eep expects to see the college administrators:	
2	Providing office space and equipment for the environmental education coordinators.
3	Authorising lecturers to participate in environmental education activities.
4	Chairing the National Management Team.
5	Facilitating a reduced teaching load for the college coordinators.
St^{2}eep would like to see the college administrators:	
6	Attending environmental education activities.
7	Supporting college environmental education policy development and implementation.
8	Providing transport, finances and other resources for environmental education activities.
9	Including and positioning environmental education high on the agenda of staff meetings.
10	Including and positioning environmental education high on the agenda of academic board meetings.
St^{2}eep would love to see the college administrators:	
11	Incorporating environmental education in the college strategic plan.
12	Appointing full time environmental education coordinators.

Figure 3. The planning and M&E cycle for St^{2}eep



(Adapted from Deprez *et al.*, 2007)

Research Method

The research in this paper aims to gain insights into the monitoring and evaluation process that was developed on the basis of Outcome Mapping in the St^{2}eep project. The case of St^{2}eep allowed us to compare three years of experiences with monitoring and evaluation, based on the logframe (2003-2005), with two years of monitoring and evaluation implementation, based on Outcome Mapping (2006-2007). Therefore, a qualitative case-study design was selected as methodology for the research. The following research questions were put forward:

1. In the context of St^{2}eep, how is the new monitoring and evaluation system performing in the area of team/organisational learning?
2. How is the new monitoring and evaluation system performing in the area of accountability?

The field work for this research was done by one of the authors (Van Ongevalle) who is employed by the donor as the lead facilitator of the St^{2}eep project. Document analysis was mainly carried out by Huib Huyse who, as country representative of the donor organisation, had the St^{2}eep project in his portfolio from 2003 to 2007. This of course raises a number of

epistemological issues, notably the difficulties in researching your own working environment and, more specifically, processes that you have initiated yourself, as this can be challenging in many ways since it requires ongoing reflexivity (Van Ongevalle, 2007). When collecting data from interviews with project beneficiaries, for example, it is up to the practitioner-researcher to try to assess to what extent answers to critical questions will be influenced because of donor-recipient dynamics. The trust relationship that has been built up over the years within the project team makes it possible to discuss many things in a frank and critical way, but it remains a point of attention (Van Ongevalle, 2007). Also the St^{2}eep project embraces a research orientation, and various studies have been done in the context of the project already, so it is not an unusual experience (Chimbodza, Van Ongevalle & Madondo, 2004). Abbott, Brown and Wilson (2007) argue that reflections and research by development managers can form the basis of transformations in learning if they embed their reflections within their work and develop their relations with other stakeholders beyond operational management challenges towards joint learning opportunities. Different forms of triangulation of data – for example, by interviewing different groups within the project, comparing these with results of participant observation, and asking outside experts to review certain data and findings (like monitoring and evaluation reports) – did not only increase the validity of the research, but also gave additional insights in the processes at hand. Working with a research team (the co-authors of this paper) has also helped to enhance the rigour of the research.

An analysis of project documents involved a review of six progress monitoring reports (PMRs) over the period 2003-2007. They were analysed in terms of: (1) presenting a balanced account, (2) readability, and (3) clarity on responsibilities and duties. This allowed the authors to probe the performance of St^{2}eep's monitoring and evaluation in terms of reporting and accountability. A survey questionnaire capturing experiences with the monitoring and evaluation system was completed by key stakeholders (two lecturers and one donor representative) in the project. The information that emerged from the small-scale survey was used to prepare a semi-structured interview for use within a focus group with three other key stakeholders of the St^{2}eep project. Via participant observations during monitoring meetings over the period 2003-2007, additional data was produced on the monitoring and evaluation processes and the group dynamics associated with the Outcome Mapping methodology. We use extracts from various data sources throughout the paper to illustrate our arguments. 'PMR' refers to progress monitoring reports and is followed by an indication of the year when the report was written. The letters 'S' and 'I' refer to survey and interview extracts respectively, with particular numbers referring to specific individual respondents.

Summary of the Research Findings

Outcome Mapping and learning

The rich metaphor of organisational learning as a 'crime' (Britton, 2005) provides us with an interesting framework to investigate whether St^{2}eep's monitoring and evaluation system provides the minimal requirements for organisational learning. In other words, does St^{2}eep's monitoring and evaluation system provide a 'motive', the 'means' and the 'opportunity' for

organisational learning to take place? And how do people learn within St^{2}eep's monitoring and evaluation system?

Does Outcome Mapping provide a motive for learning?

The involvement of local stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation processes can be witnessed in several ways. For example, different St^{2}eep teams from the various colleges fill in the progress monitoring instruments on a quarterly basis and deliver PowerPoint presentations at the monitoring meetings with boundary partners. Outcomes from the semi-structured survey and focus group interview provide some insight in what motivates St^{2}eep members to be actively involved in the monitoring and evaluation processes:

- S1: 'It allows my college administration to see what I have achieved in environmental education, which is one of my college duties.'
- S1: 'it becomes embarrassing at monitoring meetings when certain agreed programmes are not undertaken.'
- S2: 'I participate because of the conducive atmosphere which allows free participation and values individual opinions.'
- S3: 'For the coordinators it gave some confidence to see that some of their problems were not specific to them or their college but could be widespread'
- I1: 'Leads to "activation" of the boundary partners, which is very motivational'
- I1: 'There is strong peer assessment. … This resulted in strong improvement in one college and colleagues admitting embarrassment [for failing to do what was agreed upon] outside the meeting.'

The data show that St^{2}eep members enjoy the group recognition of individual or group achievements during monitoring meetings. At the same time they find it reassuring that problems can be discussed in a non-threatening atmosphere, where suggestions for future planning can also be formulated. This safe environment allows for peer assessment which strengthens accountability among project partners.

Does Outcome Mapping provide the means for learning?

Using Outcome Mapping, St^{2}eep developed a two-way monitoring system. St^{2}eep monitors the changes in behaviour and actions of its boundary partners. Accordingly, the boundary partners are able to give feedback about the support strategies implemented by St^{2}eep during the monitoring meetings. The monitoring reports are also presented during management meetings in which key boundary partners participate. In this way, the monitoring process and results are used as a tool for reflection and learning and inform decisions on future planning and action. Finally, the various lessons learned from the monitoring process are compiled into one report which is sent to project stakeholders. Table 3 shows an extract from an outcome journal which is one of St^{2}eep's progress monitoring instruments. The bullets describe changed behaviour (in the form of actions) of the environmental education steering teams in the colleges (one of the boundary partners) that St^{2}eep observed during a specific monitoring period.

Table 3. Extract from the progress monitoring instrument of term 1 (2007) showing observed changes in one of St^{2}eep's boundary partners, i.e. environmental education steering teams

Description of the changes for this period for the environmental education steering teams
National level • Supporting lecturers with environmental education implementation through Environmental Education Action Support Team (EEAST) workshops organised by steering teams. • Steering Teams facilitated in the livelihoods programme to enhance food security through the empowerment of schools in five districts of Zimbabwe. • Greater involvement in planning and execution of environmental education workshops by steering teams. **Belvedere Technical Teachers College level** • Assisting lecturers to identify their needs and expected support for environmental education implementation. • Supporting lecturers with environmental education implementation through EEAST workshops. • Empowered some pre-service teachers to incorporate environmental education in their teaching. • Participated in the livelihoods programme for orphaned and vulnerable children in five districts of Zimbabwe. • Successfully carried out college community environmental education awareness workshop.

The use of the progress monitoring instruments and the monitoring meetings are characterised by team work and are perceived by the project team as making the monitoring and evaluation process more systematic and based on actual facts instead of individual assumptions. They also enhance individual competencies, and build interpersonal relations and trust. Extracts from surveys and focus group interviews illustrate these observations:

- I2: '[PMR instruments provide] clear guidelines on what to monitor.'
- S3: '… using the PMR instruments brought focus to the exercise. Without the PMR instruments this was not done in any systematic way but more anecdotally … This often left out important points. Progress monitoring reporting is helpful in planning because it points our critical areas…. Through presentation and discussion issues were clarified and there was usually immediate follow-up to look at the way forward.'
- S3: '…makes people think about the project, … [progress monitoring reporting] helps to uncover problems within the running of the project … [the] document is structured but leaves room to report freely on issues through the narrative reports … [A] section to specifically bring out unanticipated changes encourages people.'
- I1: '…[progress monitoring reporting exposes] people's expectations against ground experiences – [it is] based on factual data instead of assumptions.'

People involved in the monitoring and evaluation process also go through a process of individual capacity development in terms of monitoring and evaluation, as is illustrated by the following statement:

- I1: '… it is difficult for people to use the instruments if they are not familiar with the Outcome Mapping terminology … colleagues explain to each other …. [it] doesn't need an expert for monitoring and evaluation.'

Although very positive signals could be observed from the project team on how Outcome Mapping provides a supportive framework for learning, a review of the monitoring and evaluation reporting brings up a number of challenges. In the intentional design phase of Outcome Mapping, significant efforts are made to develop a coherent story that links strategies with progress markers and outcome challenges. It is our impression that the project team is challenged by the multitude of progress markers and strategies, and is not always managing to bridge the gap between everyday realities (activity-based) and the more long-term strategic thinking (overall progress). Although there is no need to monitor all progress markers at every monitoring session, the reporting on the boundary partners in the St^{2}eep process was not systematic in following up important progress markers. In addition, descriptions of changed behaviour were quite often vague and repeated in subsequent reports, with little contextual information and few references to tangible evidence. The following extracts from the PMRs of the first and second quarter of 2007 (PMR 1-2007 and PMR 2-2007) illustrate this:

- PMR 1-2007: '… increased use of environmental education resource centre by both students and lecturers.'
- PMR 1-2007: '… empowered some pre-service teachers to incorporate environmental education in their teaching.'
- PMR 2-2007: '… more interest in joining St^{2}eep activities and support of St^{2}eep.'

These examples illustrate how the project team is facing difficulties in qualifying and quantifying the observed changes against observations from earlier monitoring periods and presenting a story of change that makes sense for readers who were not involved in daily project activities. While some of this information is discussed in progress monitoring meetings and is available in the files and records of individual coordinators and facilitators, a systematic analysis of the overall changes in the boundary partners, as specified by the list of progress markers, seems to be missing, as does more in-depth theoretical and contextual interpretations of what these might mean in terms of development and educational objectives of the programme.

Does Outcome Mapping provide the opportunity for learning?

The data collected through the progress monitoring instruments are presented by the environmental education coordinators during four-monthly progress monitoring meetings. Linking St^{2}eep's progress monitoring meetings with project-planning meetings provides a learning opportunity where lessons learned from the monitoring and evaluation process inform planning and decision-making by the project management team, as is shown by the following extracts from interviews and survey questionnaire data:

- I1: 'Greater room during progress monitoring meeting to discuss, analyse, allowing informed planning during operational management meetings and developing factually loaded reports during national management meetings…'
- S3: 'Progress monitoring reporting is helpful in planning because it points to our critical areas … People are encouraged to be critical. If certain things have not been achieved, they are also brought out. Discussion then tries to get to the bottom of the case on why something did not work out. From this a better plan follows.'

Specific lessons learned, recommendations for future actions and action plans are captured during progress monitoring meetings and presented during management meetings where specific decisions for future action are taken.

Besides regular progress-monitoring reporting and meetings, each end-of-year evaluation includes a self-assessment workshop where the St^{2}eep team, its boundary partners and strategic partners engage in critical reflection. Elements of the self-assessment are determined in advance by the St^{2}eep team and may include St^{2}eep's internal performance towards relevance and viability of the project (i.e. St^{2}eep's organisational practices), leadership issues, partnerships and resources or a reflection on the intentional design of the project. The self-assessment workshop outcomes inform the yearly operational planning by the St^{2}eep management teams as reflected in the following extract from a survey questionnaire:

- S3: '… certain parts of the PMR instrument become outdated after some time while new items, not yet covered, may crop up. The system is flexible enough to review the document from time to time and make changes.'

Combining the motive, means and opportunity for learning in St^{2}eep's monitoring and evaluation system

It is the combination of the motive, means and opportunity for learning provided by St^{2}eep's Outcome Mapping-based monitoring and evaluation system that promotes learning within the project. Outcomes from the surveys and focus group interview provide insight on how St^{2}eep members experience this learning process:

- S1: 'I learn from others and they learn from me. I go back to college and improve on my weaknesses …'
- S2: '… getting insight in the running of the whole programme in general and not just the components.'
- S3: '… coordinating teams learn from each other. Approaches used in one college can be tried in another as well.'

The data show that there is an element of team learning whereby St^{2}eep members and boundary partners are able to learn from each other based on discussing issues that emerge from the monitoring and evaluation process. The principles of self- and peer-assessment in a non-threatening atmosphere combined with being able to celebrate successes and collaboratively look for answers to problems seems to strengthen the learning process by motivating people to become involved.

The fact that the monitoring framework focuses specifically on the project implementation team (strategy maps) and the boundary partners (progress markers), makes it easier to motivate St^{2}eep members and boundary partners in the monitoring and evaluation process. As a result, participation in the monitoring and evaluation activities strengthens ownership of the project and stimulates both St^{2}eep members and boundary partners to become actively involved in the project.

The problems with the rather vague descriptions and the lack of systematic analysis of the behaviour changes could be partly explained by the fact that not all the in-depth discussions in the meetings are captured in the reports, or it may also be a deeper underlying problem with behaviour modification assumptions in development logic. However, to increase the

learning curve of the monitoring process there would be a need to deepen the quality of the data collection, to unpack the progress markers into clearly defined changes of behaviour, and to push critical reflection at a higher level – including the systematic follow-up of which strategies seem to work and which don't in view of contributing to behaviour changes of the boundary partners. It may also require theoretical probing of the underlying assumptions of the Outcome Mapping approach. By focusing on the understandings, perceptions and behaviour of the people involved in the project, Outcome Mapping has shifted St^{2}eep's monitoring and evaluation system towards a more interpretive perspective instead of the functionalist perspective characterised by a linear planning logic of the logframe earlier in the the project. This requires monitoring and evaluation maturity on the part of the stakeholders involved, sufficient time and resources, and a supportive and critical framework. If those barriers to learning are not actively mediated, applying Outcome Mapping methodology will not really allow 'frank dialogue about successes and failures' (Ortiz, 2004), as is needed for successful Outcome Mapping implementation.

Outcome Mapping and accountability

St^{2}eep's monitoring and evaluation system was developed in such a way that the information generated through the various monitoring and evaluation processes would satisfy accountability requirements towards various stakeholders, e.g. the donor (VVOB), Ministry and college administrations (local authorities), the boundary partners and beneficiaries (lecturers and college students). In this respect we asked a number of St^{2}eep implementation team members to share their viewpoints about accountability and quality of reporting. We also asked an independent reviewer to critically look at the monitoring and evaluation reports and give her opinion on these issues.

A balanced account?

Members of St^{2}eep's coordination team felt that the PMR gives an objective and balanced account of the successes and challenges of the project. At the same time they highlight that the accountability to the donor is improved because VVOB gets monitoring data from various sources. They also indicate that the quality of reporting has improved because the report contains the viewpoints of different operatives, as is indicated in the following comments:

- S3: '… in the early stages the narrative reports were little developed. "Change" is a specific term in Outcome Mapping but not clear once used by people who no longer remember the special meaning or who were not part of the Outcome Mapping process … St^{2}eep definitely has a clear picture of its problems and successes. The process also seems to happen in a fairly honest way.'
- I2: 'Degree of objectivity is high – different people input in the report … not based on one individual … e.g. in one college, two members go through the report … draft circulated to other members who were able to input as well.'

Because the overall monitoring and evaluation process of St^{2}eep is a multi-stakeholder process with participation of various layers of the project, final reporting products can be considered

to provide a balanced account. Overall, accountability has increased with the introduction of Outcome Mapping in comparison with the logframe-based monitoring and evaluation system (where the main contributors were the development workers).

Readability of the monitoring documents

One of the VVOB development workers indicated that the quality of the report is improving over time with better narrative analysis included in the report. The external review of the progress monitoring reporting also found a learning curve in the readability of Outcome Mapping-based reporting over time. When compared with the initial logframe-based reporting (2003-2005) the situation becomes more complex. Because of the contributions of multiple persons to the Outcome Mapping-based monitoring and evaluation report, combined with the large quantity of information to be completed for each boundary partner, it is almost unavoidable that the readability of the report is hindered. The extremely condensed form of reporting by local stakeholders (often in bullet form and without contextualising) also decreases readability. Comparing the readability of the Outcome Mapping reports with logframe is complicated because the two processes and their intentions were so different. It is understandable that lecturers approach the report writing more pragmatically because all the work done for this project is done in addition to their usual lecturing duties (unlike for the development workers).

Concluding Reflections

There are signs that Outcome Mapping has made St^{2}eep's monitoring and evaluation cycles more learning oriented, making it more exciting, useful, relevant and transformative. In this paper we have illustrated why this is the case, and conclusions can be summarised as follows:

- Outcome Mapping methodology has helped to make the monitoring and evaluation process more actor-focused in its approach, enhancing motivation for learning. Ownership of St^{2}eep's monitoring and evaluation system, and of its programming, has become more endogenous, as environmental education coordinators in each of the colleges increasingly become the leaders of St^{2}eep and are able to clearly identify where their actions should be focused, further increasing ownership and results through the changed actions of the identified boundary partners. Outcome Mapping has also been able to draw the boundary partners into the monitoring and evaluation processes, which has resulted in a deeper understanding of their expectations and responsibilities, has strengthened their partnership with the project team and has enhanced their commitment towards the project.
- The application of Outcome Mapping in St^{2}eep has stimulated the project team to craft a monitoring and evaluation system that provides useful monitoring and evaluation tools (learning means) and offers specific learning spaces (opportunities for learning) for meaningful dialogue and reflection on the progress of the project. Because of the strong local leadership in the organisation of these learning spaces, the learning practices employed are more based on a learning style that is relevant to the cultural context of

the local practitioners (Britton, 2005). The strong feeling about the motivating effect of monitoring and evaluation meetings that provide a non-threatening space for team learning through critical reflection and inspired by elements of self- and peer-assessment reported on above, provide evidence for this argument.

- We also observed a major challenge in St^{2}eep's Outcome Mapping-based monitoring and evaluation system. Outcome Mapping seems to assume a higher level of monitoring and evaluation maturity than in logframe monitoring, and that could possibly be expected in the St^{2}eep context. We observed that the project team is challenged by the multitude of progress markers and strategies, and how to bridge the gap between the reality of the day (activity-based) and the more long-term strategic thinking (overall progress). These observations pose a challenge for both accountability and deeper learning about the broader change processes that the project is trying to influence. We also noted a need to probe the assumptions of Outcome Mapping theoretically since they are based on behaviour-change assumptions which have also been the subject of critique in social theory, and indeed in environmental education.[2]

In order to continually strive for a balance between accountability and learning, this case study concludes by summarising two key questions a project, programme or organisation could ask itself, based on St^{2}eep's experience:

- Is there enough monitoring and evaluation maturity on the part of the monitoring and evaluation implementers to fully exploit the advantages of an Outcome Mapping-based monitoring and evaluation system, and at the same time to reflexively critique its underlying assumptions of social change? The St^{2}eep case has shown that while Outcome Mapping helps to promote local ownership of the monitoring and evaluation process, this does not automatically translate into adequate monitoring and evaluation capacity to ensure that all learning and accountability needs are met. Development of monitoring and evaluation capacity is a process that may need active support that could be included in future operational plans.
- Do the various stakeholders have a shared understanding about the learning and accountability needs that the Outcome Mapping-based monitoring and evaluation system seeks to address? In the case of St^{2}eep, the project coordination team was not aware that all learning and accountability needs were not fully met. They were also not fully realising that they could learn more about the overall progress of the project by monitoring specific change processes more systematically. A clearer strategy on what data has to be collected when, for each progress marker, would support this idea. Also, regularly checking if all internal and external accountability and learning needs are met by the monitoring and evaluation system through feedback from various stakeholders could be helpful.

Finally, all of the effort being put into Outcome Mapping approaches to monitoring and evaluation would have little meaning unless they could show outcomes in terms of the

development of environmental education theory and practice, a question which remains to be answered in another paper (i.e. how such an approach to project management and evaluation has outcomes in terms of field-related praxis).

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Endnotes

1. St^{2}eep's progress monitoring instruments and monitoring and evaluation plan can be accessed on http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=109
2. See, for example, Robottom (1987) who was one of the earliest authors to alert the field to the problems associated with behaviour change assumptions in environmental education.

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