Determining which data to collect to measure your impact

1. What are "outputs" and "indicators" in the context of impact management?

Indicators are measurable data points or metrics that help to show how you are performing.

In impact management, **"outcome indicators"** are the specific data that show whether an outcome is being achieved. For example, the number of people reporting increased knowledge (indicator for the outcome "increased knowledge"). Outcome indicators can be quantitative or qualitative.

"Output" refers to the product that results from a programme/service. Outputs can usually be measured quantitatively, e.g.: a research programme that produced 3 publications. For services such as training courses or day-care centres, the main output is often the number of people receiving the service.

In effect, **an "output" measures your activities in the same way that an "outcome indicator" measures your outcomes**.

Example:

Activity *(what we do)*	Output *(immediate results of our work)*
Conduct R&D	List of reports produced, events held, projects undertaken etc as relevant this year
Establish and run early learning centres	Number of new centres established this quarter
	Total number of active centres
Provide scholarships	Number of full /partial scholarship students this year
Recruit and train teachers	Number of teachers attending training this month
	Total number of teachers employed
Provide information and training to parents and others	Number of households reached by our magazine
	Number of people attending our public events in the last year
	Number of unique visits to our website this month

Outcome *(what we do)*	Indicator *(how we measure it)*
Children achieve greater skills at reading and learning	% children achieving level one within 6 months of starting the programme
	% children achieving level four before leaving the programme
	% parents reporting the child has developed better skills through our programme than they otherwise would have done
	Stories of children developing greater reading and learning skills
Children have greater interest in reading and learning	Video of children talking about their interest in reading and learning
	% students whose concentration in class improves measurably after 6 months (teacher observation)
Parents have a better understanding of how to support their child	# of parents saying we have helped them have a better understanding of how to support their child
	Stories from individual families/teachers about parents developing a better understanding of how to support their child

2. Tips for specifying indicators

2.1 Indicators can be either quantitative or qualitative – it is often helpful to have a mixture of both:

Quantitative examples:

- Number of people experiencing the relevant change/outcome
- % of participants experiencing the relevant change/outcome
- Average test results for a cohort of participants (e.g. literacy test)
- $ amounts – e.g. income increased; cost saved
- Number of web-hits, media mentions, tweets etc.

Qualitative examples:

- Stories – e.g. the experience a beneficiary who experienced change
- Photos
- Video

2.2 Indicators must be feasible to measure and appropriate to the context. For example:

- If you are collecting the data for internal purposes to help your team learn and improve, then you may not need to use complex tools drawn from academic research (these tend to give more robust data, but take more time and money). Conversely, complex research tools may be appropriate if your goal is to prove the effectiveness of your programme so that others e.g. government will adopt it at scale.
- If you are working in a particularly sensitive context (e.g. hospice care), then there may be some indicators and related data collection methods that are less appropriate.

2.3 When setting your indicators, it helps to be really specific so you know exactly what you are going to measure

Indicators that are too general	Examples of more specific wording
Level of financial literacy	% of training participants scoring over 70% in the standardised financial literacy test (pre- and post training)
Evidence of improved facilities	Photos of the community centre before and after the renovation, showing specific improvements and changes
$ increased income	Average $ increased income for all participants over the past 12 months

2.4 You do not need to measure everything!

If you have a lot of activities and outcomes in your theory of change, it might be too much to try to measure all of them, especially at first.

- If you want to keep it very simple, just pick **three main indicators** and stick to measuring those

- If you want a more detailed overview, pick a longer set of activities and outcomes to measure, but not necessarily all of them. Remember that the assumptions section of your Theory of Change helps to show how your immediate outcomes lead to longer term outcomes – so it may not be a priority to measure the longer term outcomes.

- It is better to collect no data at all than to waste time on misleading or meaningless data.

EXERCISE

1. From your Theory of Change, write out each of your activities and outcomes on a post-it note.

2. Put the post it notes in one long line on a big piece of paper. Put the activities under the heading "activities" and the outcomes under the headings "short-term outcomes"; "medium-term outcomes" and "long-term outcomes".

3. Work down the list and put a star by the activities and outcomes that you think are the most important to measure.

4. For each activity with a star, think of one or more outputs that would be useful to measure. Write each one on a post-it note and stick it next to the relevant activity.

5. For each outcome with a star, think of one or more indicators that would be useful to measure. Write each one on a post-it note and stick it next to the relevant outcome.

6. Look at your overall list: how many indicators have you created? Is that too many or too few? Are they all feasible and appropriate to measure? Are there any duplications? Refine your list of indicators accordingly.

7. Select three main indicators from the list and highlight those.

8. When you have agreed your list, type it up in a table.

Indicators checklist:

✓ Are they all feasible to measure?

✓ Are they precise? (ie. Is it really clear what you mean to measure?)

✓ Are they appropriate to measure?

✓ Do you have a mixture of quantitative and qualitative measures?

✓ Do you have the right number? (sometimes less is more)

✓ Have you identified three main indicators?