

Strengthening Participatory MEL

Learning Brief

Feminist and localisation lens
on Outcome Harvesting



IMS 

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IMS is a non-profit organisation supporting local media in countries affected by armed conflict, human insecurity and political transition. We push for quality journalism, challenge repressive laws, and keep media workers of all genders safe so they can do their jobs. Peaceful, stable societies based on democratic values rely on ethical and critical journalism that aims to include, not divide.

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Executive Summary

Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) approaches that adhere to principles of participation, feminist evaluation and localisation might be better suited to detect changes contributed by development work to address the root causes of gender inequalities. This learning brief provides evidence and recommendations for one such approach.

Outcome Harvesting is a participatory MEL method that identifies ‘outcomes’ as behavioural changes in social actors and then works backwards to assess contributions to those changes. While its participatory nature lends itself to feminist evaluation and localisation, the linkages cannot be merely assumed.

Through the ‘Strengthening Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning’ project funded by Global Focus, IMS (International Media Support) tested the use of Outcome Harvesting as a feminist and localised MEL approach to identify transformative changes related to gender equality in media systems. We describe gender transformative changes as those that address the root causes of gender inequalities.

The testing was done through a pilot project in Pakistan in 2024-25 in collaboration with local partners working to support public interest journalism and the safety of journalists. In the process, we explored the practices that can shape the participatory method of Outcome Harvesting to be more locally led and aligned with the principles of feminist evaluation.

► Why this learning brief?

Gender equality is both an important area of international development as well as a key cross-cutting consideration for all aspects of development work. In the specific context of media development, the focus is on promoting gender inclusivity in news content, ensuring the safety of women journalists against gender-based violence, and increasing the gender diversity at news organisations.

However, the change measurement for gender equality in media systems is typically often reliant on traditional MEL frameworks that are sometimes limited to counting representation, may overlook the power dynamics that influence what is considered impactful and fail to capture effectiveness in fragile contexts where transformative changes can be complex, incremental and qualitative in nature.

This learning brief understands feminist MEL as a function of feminist intent rather than being a specific method. The intent is demonstrated through evaluation principles and actions. The brief argues

the case for participatory MEL as a strong alternative to traditional MEL for analysing gender-related results, in line with feminist evaluation principles. It attempts to share lessons from the pilot project so that the participatory elements of Outcome Harvesting can be further enhanced as a localised and feminist approach. Our hope is to provide practical and hands-on inspiration on ways to apply feminist principles in MEL practice and increase meaningful local participation.

► What does the learning brief offer?

- Guiding questions to translate the feminist MEL principles into practical evaluation actions through Outcome Harvesting
- Suggestions to modify the six steps and nine principles of Outcome Harvesting to apply the feminist and localisation lens.
- Tips for evaluators and facilitators of Outcome Harvesting to grow local ownership of the process.
- Recommendations for improving the meaningful participation of local partners in MEL activities.

► Who is this learning brief for?

The target audiences of this learning brief are civil society organisations and media development organisations. In particular, the learning brief is addressed to organisations that either have a strong focus on mainstreaming gender responsiveness in their development work or are interested in improving the participatory element of their MEL activities or wish to strengthen their ability to identify the changes related to gender equality influenced by their actions.

We also hope that this resource will be useful for evaluators and MEL professionals who intend to use participatory, localised, decolonised and feminist MEL approaches in their work. Finally, we believe commissioners of evaluations – donors, grant-makers and other implementing organisations of development programmes – can gain valuable lessons from the learning brief to support the growing demand to shift power in monitoring and evaluation processes to local communities and local partners.

Introduction

This section introduces the participatory Outcome Harvesting method, four feminist MEL principles, localisation ideals, and how they can all be connected.

Scholars, practitioners and civil society organisations have theorised and used participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches since the 1980s to engage local communities and partners in measuring the changes that occur due to development interventions.¹

Unlike conventional, top-down and linear MEL processes, participatory MEL lends itself naturally to ideas of localisation and transformational gender equality – ideas that directly question the dominant power structures and decision-making systems adversely affecting diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). This is because participatory MEL both empowers and enables local communities and local representatives to take ownership of development processes through identification and interpretation of change, having their say in planning and design, and building their capacities to manage local development.

To provide practical guidance on integrated MEL approaches that are based on feminist principles, localisation ideals and participatory philosophy, IMS tested the use of Outcome Harvesting to identify transformative changes related to gender equality in media development as well as Outcome Harvesting as a feminist participatory MEL method.

For the purpose of the project and the learning brief, gender transformative changes are defined as those changes that address the root causes of gender inequalities, often by contributing to alter discriminatory social norms and unequal power structures.

This is in line with the growing attention to gender equality in development work, where the emphasis in recent years has moved from gender sensitive MEL with an inclination of counting women's participation to a stronger focus on gender transformative changes that measure if and how programmes address and contribute to changing power structures.

While IMS does not work directly with grassroots feminist organisations and gender rights movements, its work to support quality independent journalism and keeping journalists of all genders safe is



underpinned by its adoption of the Human Rights Based Approach and its support for DEI through the current IMS global strategy as well as its non-binary and intersectional understanding of gender in media development through the most recent IMS strategy on gender equality.

At the same time, while implementing the project, IMS was mindful that its origin and positioning as an international organisation based in the Global North can lead to the same issues of power imbalance and extractive knowledge production that participatory, feminist and localised MEL approaches wish to eliminate. Therefore, IMS attempted to approach this project and learning brief with humility, self-reflexivity and a focus to create opportunities for local partners to take the lead in knowledge production and co-creation.

► Why Outcome Harvesting?

Outcome Harvesting (OH) is a qualitative and participatory MEL approach that first identifies evidence of change and then works backwards to determine if and how a development intervention contributed to the change.² In doing so, it distinguishes itself from other conventional monitoring and evaluation approaches, such as results frameworks etc., where progress is measured against pre-determined outcomes and targets.

The innovative OH approach is appropriate for complex contexts where pathways to change are unpredictable, causal linkages between outputs and objectives are difficult to understand, and unintended or unforeseen circumstances create the need for adaptive management. By focusing on outcomes (what was achieved) rather than activities (what was done), OH serves to support learning and is particularly useful for developmental, formative and summative assessments.

In OH, an outcome is defined as a significant and observable behavioural change in the social actors and targeted stakeholders influenced by an intervention. The outcomes are ‘harvested’ using a process that involves six steps:

1. The design of the “harvest” – The design includes identification of the purpose, uses, users, and analysis questions of the evaluation.
2. Documentation review – The review helps identify potential outcomes based on existing programme documents and previously published evidence.
3. Engage with human sources – This step consists of interviews, workshops etc. with the people closest to the development intervention so they could formulate and review the outcomes.
4. Substantiation – The independent verification of the outcomes is conducted in this step.
5. Analysis – This step involves the classification of the outcomes and their interpretation in light of the analysis questions set during the first step.
6. Support the use of findings – The final step helps the intended users of the evaluation to utilise the findings for various identified purposes, including strategy adjustments and programme planning and design.

Outcome Harvesting is now commonly being prescribed by donors, including SIDA, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNDP and others. The interest in OH has also increased among Danish civil society organisations in recent years.

Outcome Harvesting is an appropriate choice for feminist and localised MEL because its participatory nature appears to align itself naturally with the collaborative, inclusive and self-reflective qualities of feminist research as well as the idea that local stakeholders should have ownership of evaluations. However, the challenge is to identify how these apparently inherent qualities of OH can be demonstrated and utilised during monitoring and evaluation with a feminist perspective.

In order to do that, we first need a better understanding of both feminist MEL and the localisation of

monitoring and evaluation.

► Feminist MEL in practice

Scholars have noted that there is “no consistent, decisive definition” of feminist MEL but a shared conceptual understanding of it among practitioners in terms of similar themes, such as “intentionality, addressing power dynamics, capacity-building, elevating the voices of those more vulnerable, inclusivity and participation”.³ According to evaluator Clara Desalvo, “feminist MEL does not care about the specific tool, but about how it is applied”.⁴ Wyatt et al. suggested that a feminist approach to MEL involves methods, processes and tools that are applied with a feminist intent.⁵ The intent is demonstrated through adherence to principles rooted in the feminist research tradition. Examples include the Principle Focused Evaluation-Feminist Evaluation (PFE-FE) principles developed by Dr. Donna Podems and the Oxfam International MEAL Principles.⁶ These principles address power relations, examination of structural and systematic discrimination, the political nature and social context of evaluation and knowledge production, respect for multiple ways of knowing, inclusivity, intersectionality and self-awareness, among other issues and concerns.

For the purpose of this pilot project and the learning brief, then, *Feminist MEL* is described as any MEL method, tool, approach or process that is applied with feminist intent using feminist evaluation principles.

This means that the links of Outcome Harvesting to feminist MEL cannot be taken at face value, as previously assumed. Rather, Outcome Harvesting needs to be applied with feminist intent and principles for it to become a feminist MEL approach. Therefore, the pilot project adopted a set of feminist MEL

“Feminist MEL does not care about the specific tool, but about how it is applied.”

– Clara Desalvo
Independent MEL consultant and former Senior Manager for MEL at FRIDA



principles to guide its use of Outcome Harvesting. These principles are described in detail below.

► Feminist principles for MEL

To use Outcome Harvesting as a feminist approach to identify gender-related changes, the pilot project adopted four feminist MEL principles. The principles are based on a literature review of feminist evaluation as well as the Human Rights Based Approach, the DEI approach and the intersectional feminist considerations that are mentioned in IMS policies and strategy. The four principles are:

1 Examine structural inequalities and power relations

Acknowledge that gender discrimination is structural, systemic and intersectional, and that MEL processes need to examine power relations to address it.

2 Ensure inclusion in creation and use of knowledge

Recognise that evaluations and knowledge production are political activities influenced by personal experiences and power structures. Be mindful that these influences do not lead to discrimination and gate-keeping in decisions related to what is defined as impact, who will own the knowledge, who will use it, and how. Ensure that evaluations are contextualised and knowledge is created in a way that is inclusive of, and useful to, local stakeholders (especially women and marginalised gender identity groups).

3 Acknowledge complexity of change and accountability

Understand that transformative changes for gender equality require interventions and accountability at different levels in relation to personal attitudes, sociocultural norms, policies and equitable access to resources. MEL approaches to measure these changes must discern the complexity involved and rely on meaningful participation from local partners and local stakeholders, especially rights-holders of development.

4 Focus on rights and DEI

MEL approaches, tools and methods should follow a human rights-based approach, respect multiple ways of knowing, reduce barriers to participation, encourage diverse sources and offer ownership of the MEL processes to local partners and stakeholders.

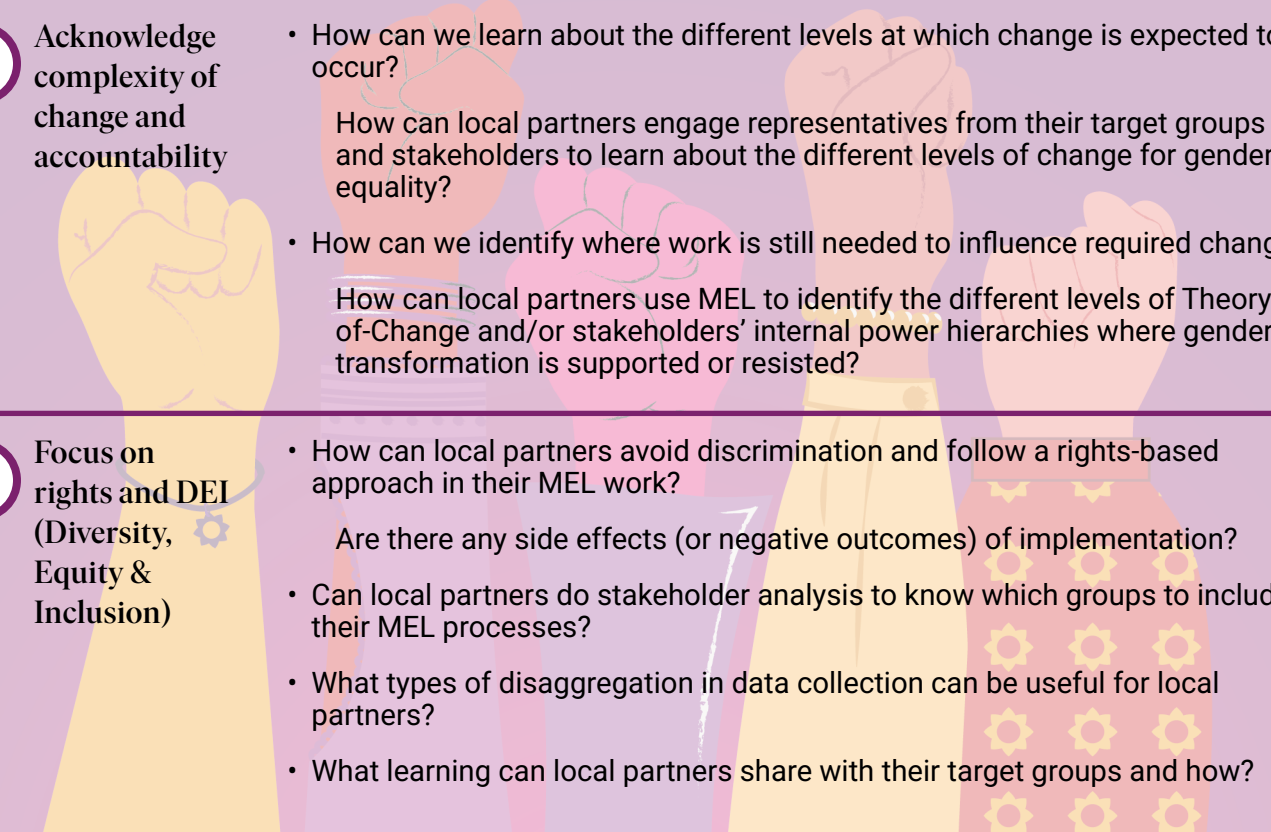


Tips and suggestions

The principles were discussed with local partners and finalised with their approval. However, even when the partners believed that the principles aligned with their organisational values of gender equality, they were more concerned about the programmatic application of the principles, which they felt would require considerable resources. The unavailability or reduced availability of these resources, including budgets and human resources, would make it difficult for development projects to deliver the results that evaluations could eventually measure, according to the partners. This discussion revealed a considerable pressure on the local partners about activity implementation and measuring impact against targets set elsewhere by donors. It also showed that meaningful participation, feminist principles and participatory approaches should extend to all areas of the Project Cycle Management rather than just to monitoring and evaluation. More recommendations for meaningful participation are given at the end of this learning brief.

► Practical questions for the principles

The feminist MEL principles embrace participatory methods and put an emphasis on local knowledge and capacity. For the practical application of these principles to evaluate media development work, the pilot project explored each principle with a set of guiding questions. The questions were designed to help facilitators to use the principles during the Outcome Harvesting process, especially at the design stage.

- 
- 1** Examine structural inequalities and power relations
- What is the power dynamic between local partners and donors?
 - Who defines impact?
 - Who defines what knowledge is of value?
 - Who owns the knowledge?
 - What are the internal power relations among users and/or human sources of the harvest?
 - How can the harvest facilitator navigate the internal power imbalance during evaluation?
 - Who are the power holders among the development stakeholders from the perspective of local partners?
 - How do local partners think they can examine these power relations?
 - What kind of monitoring data do partners need to know about the behaviour of power holders regarding gender equality?
-
- 2** Ensure inclusion in creation and use of knowledge
- Who creates knowledge and how?
 - Who (from partner staff, target groups and other stakeholders) should be included in the harvest?
 - Who is ignored from knowledge creation, and why?
 - Who is the knowledge created and documented for?
 - Who will use the knowledge?
 - How will knowledge be communicated to them?
 - How can local partners build internal or external participatory evaluation opportunities in their own MEL processes?
-
- 3** Acknowledge complexity of change and accountability
- How can we learn about the different levels at which change is expected to occur?
 - How can local partners engage representatives from their target groups and stakeholders to learn about the different levels of change for gender equality?
 - How can we identify where work is still needed to influence required change?
 - How can local partners use MEL to identify the different levels of Theory-of-Change and/or stakeholders' internal power hierarchies where gender transformation is supported or resisted?
-
- 4** Focus on rights and DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion)
- How can local partners avoid discrimination and follow a rights-based approach in their MEL work?
 - Are there any side effects (or negative outcomes) of implementation?
 - Can local partners do stakeholder analysis to know which groups to include in their MEL processes?
 - What types of disaggregation in data collection can be useful for local partners?
 - What learning can local partners share with their target groups and how?

► Localisation and MEL

Localisation is the goal of giving more decision-making power and increasing the transfer of funding to local actors, organisations and communities to lead and manage the development work within their own geographic area or community.

The issue of localisation has remained a prominent topic of discussion in international development, especially humanitarian assistance, for well over a decade now. Arguments in favour of localisation include financial considerations (development interventions are cost-effective when conducted by local actors), principles of equity and equality (local partners should not be treated as subordinates of donors) and strategic objectives (the goal of development is to enhance the capacities of local actors so they can respond to future crises on their own).⁷

Over the years, many international development aid agencies, civil society organisations and scholars have attempted to translate localisation principles into practice. IMS is among those organisations that have strategically adopted the localisation agenda. The IMS Global Strategy 2024-28 describes its value proposition foremost in terms of trust-based partnerships, of which localisation is a key element.⁸ The IMS approach to media development is “firmly

rooted in a profound belief in local leadership,” according to the strategy.

The belief in localisation for development should naturally extend to the MEL approaches that measure the impact of development interventions. In localised MEL, the monitoring and evaluation is done by the population for which the development programme was implemented.⁹ Local partners and beneficiaries get a say in deciding which MEL methods are valuable and what makes their participation meaningful. Through localised MEL, local actors can contribute rich contextual knowledge for evaluations and subsequently take ownership of the knowledge produced.

In summary, localised MEL encourages active local participation in knowledge production and ownership, gives importance to local expertise, creates non-extractive engagement with local stakeholders to decide what will be monitored and evaluated and who will benefit from the findings, and imparts MEL skills to local evaluators and partners for future use.¹⁰ Localised MEL, therefore, echoes feminist MEL in attempting to shift power and encourage inclusion for assessing the impact of development. This compatibility provides an opportunity to explore both the feminist promise and the localisation potential of the participatory Outcome Harvesting method.

“Partnership is at the heart of IMS’ vision, mission, identity and operations. We are guided by the fundamental belief that real social change requires concerted efforts between like-minded actors at international and local levels, with those directly affected taking ownership of the agenda and strategic direction of development initiatives.”

– From the IMS Global Strategy 2024-2028, in relation to the IMS trust-based partnership value proposition driven by localisation.



Applying the feminist and localisation lens to Outcome Harvesting

A pilot project helped determine the modifications needed for Outcome Harvesting to become a feminist and localised MEL approach.

► The IMS pilot project

The pilot project was conducted in Pakistan from July 2024 to February 2025 in collaboration with three local partner organisations of the IMS Pakistan programme – Freedom Network, IRADA, and the Women Journalists Association. The partner organisations had past work experience of gender-sensitive media development projects, having conducted relevant research, training and advocacy activities to promote gender diversity in the local media system. The IMS Pakistan programme and its partners had also previously undergone a gender audit in 2022 and subsequently implemented action plans to mainstream gender responsiveness in their projects. However, the partners did not have large MEL capacities and had never used Outcome Harvesting before, allowing for a capacity-building component to be built into the project.

The project objectives were:

- Develop and test the use of Outcome Harvesting as a participatory, localised and feminist MEL approach.
- Explore ways in which Outcome Harvesting can identify gender-related changes.
- Build the capacity of local partners to use Outcome Harvesting.
- Conduct a dialogue with partners to identify what meaningful participation in MEL looks like to them.

An orientation session was conducted with partner staff to introduce them to Outcome Harvesting. An IMS programme staff trained in Outcome Harvesting served as the facilitator of the process. In-person meetings and online correspondences were conducted with the partner staff to design the harvest. The design document included identification of social actors, description of the primary and secondary users, description of the intended principal uses of the evaluation, and the analysis questions to

guide interpretation of the outcomes. The scope of the harvest was set to cover the programme's and partners' work between 2021 and 2024, to increase likelihood of outcome identification. The participants of the harvest were limited to partner staff since they had first-hand knowledge of the programme interventions and their impact.

Subsequently, the document review was conducted using past reports, strategy documents and other partner publications. Rather than using the data to identify outcomes, it was used to write prompts that could assist the participants in outcome formulation. This was done to get the participants to take the lead in identifying outcomes, facilitate co-creation of knowledge, and also to help the participants learn by doing, as it was their first time using the method.

Engagement with the participants was conducted through a harvest workshop that was divided into two phases. In the first phase, participants spent two days formulating outcomes using group work, interactive discussions and outcome worksheets. The workshop identified 43 outcomes, including 21 directly related to gender. During the second phase, participants learned about substantiation, analysis and interpretation of the outcomes using the analysis questions.

Regarding the substantiation, the primary users agreed that the accuracy and credibility of the outcomes were sufficient since the project was aimed at learning rather than accountability. However, since the learning was mainly related to gender, it was decided that 50% (or 11) of the 21 gender-related outcomes will be selected through purposive sampling for substantiation to broaden the understanding of the outcomes and refine the outcomes if needed to further align them with the SMART criteria. Through the substantiation, more than 90% of the 11 outcomes were validated, and the significance and contribution statements of four outcomes were updated. The analysis helped the

partners understand that their media development work had limited engagement with duty-bearers within the media system to influence gender equality gains. This trend was most prominent in programme areas of public interest journalism and journalists' safety. Therefore, the IMS programme contribution for gender transformative changes was limited to around one-thirds of the gender-related outcomes whereas the local partners' own contributions largely influenced the remaining results. Among the local partners, the Women Journalists Association was a major driving force for the contributions because it works directly to support female journalists.

At the mid-term stage of the project, a follow-up orientation and learning session was organised for the partners to strengthen their understanding of participatory MEL, including ways to identify and shift power imbalances in MEL work. An external gender consultant also engaged the partners through a "river of life" activity and a visioning exercise to get their inputs on meaningful participation in MEL work. According to the project feedback survey, all 100% of the participants reported their knowledge and

understanding of Outcome Harvesting and feminist MEL principles had improved. Around 60% of the participants also reported that they were "somewhat" confident about using Outcome Harvesting within their organisations in the future.

► Suggestions for the six steps of Outcome Harvesting

Based on the pilot project activities, the learning brief offers the following suggestions to use Outcome Harvesting as a feminist and localised approach.

The six steps of Outcome Harvesting provide ample opportunities to apply feminist MEL principles and localisation, for which suggestions are given in the figure and table below. Overall, since feminist MEL principles recognise the political nature of evaluation and the power of knowledge production, Outcome Harvesting facilitators must be mindful of power relations and address these across all six steps. An iterative harvesting process is also encouraged so partner feedback can be used to adjust the harvest design where needed.

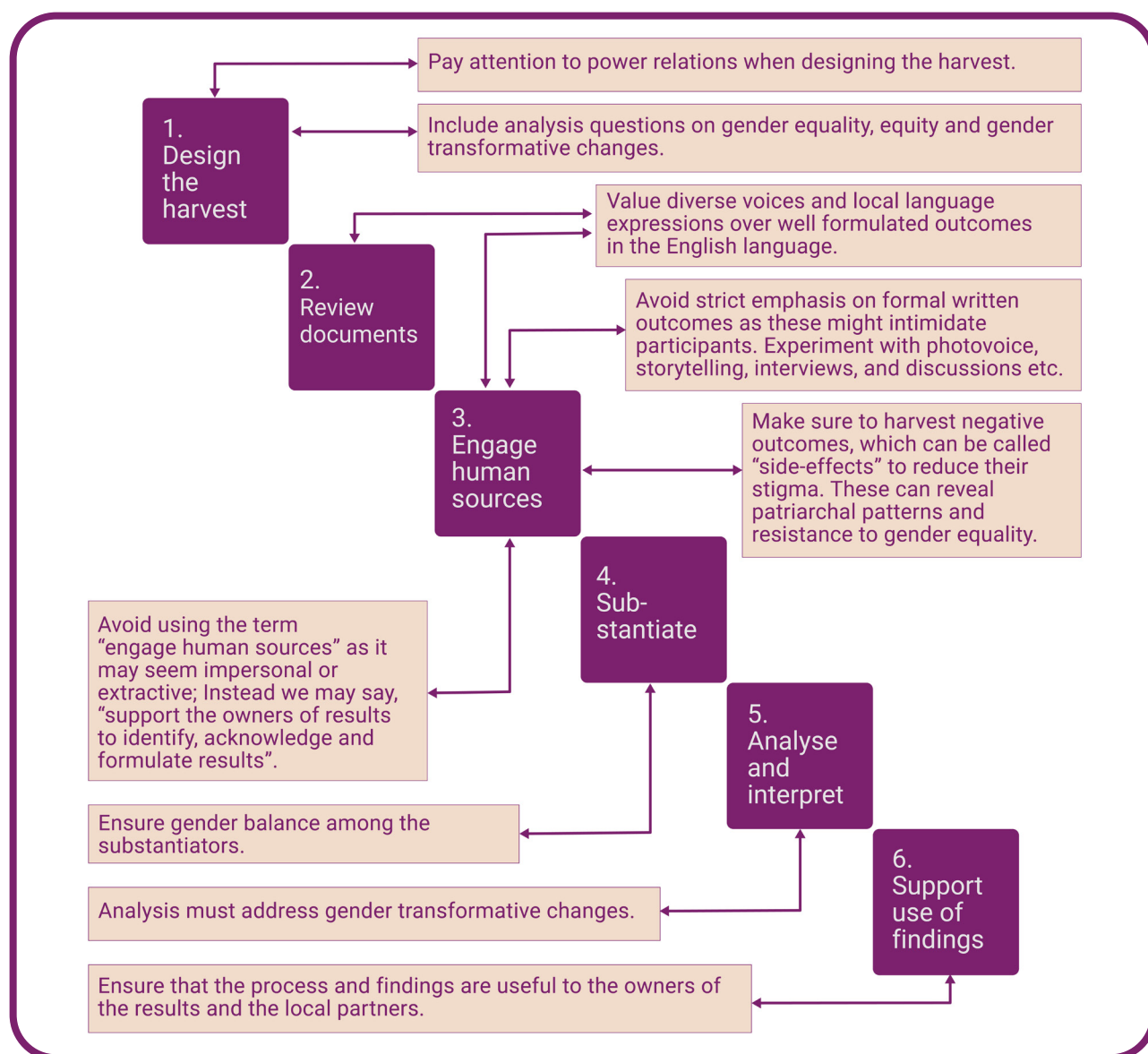


Figure: Suggestions for harvest facilitators to apply feminist and localisation lens during the six steps of Outcome Harvesting

Table: Suggestions for the six steps of Outcome Harvesting

OH Step	Alternative Terminology	Feminist lens	Localisation lens	Notes
Design the harvest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-design; Collective vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frame the exercise as a collaborative identification of impact so it becomes a joint learning process with the local participants rather than a control or compliance activity. This will facilitate ownership and trust. Make sure to include analysis questions on gender (including equality, equity and transformation) to create a direct focus in the harvest for identification of gender transformative changes. Pay close attention to and be explicit about power relations when designing the harvest. Include an intersectional perspective for users, uses, and participants to examine discriminating factors other than gender. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build capacity of local partners through pre-harvest orientation on the method. Facilitate local partners to define what impactful development looks like to them, to inform the analysis questions. Facilitate local partners to identify who should be invited to participate in the harvest. Involve local partners meaningfully by discussing and mutually deciding roles and responsibilities for the harvest. 	<p>Use powerful questions:</p> <p>What are the power dynamics between local partners and donors?</p> <p>Who defines impact?</p> <p>Who defines what knowledge is of value?</p> <p>Who owns the knowledge?</p> <p>Who creates knowledge and how?</p> <p>Who from partner staff, target groups, and other stakeholders should be included in the harvest?</p> <p>Who is ignored and why?</p> <p>What are the power dynamics within partners, within stakeholders, and among them?</p> <p>Who is the knowledge created and documented for?</p> <p>Who will use it? How will it be communicated to them?</p> <p>How to identify the different levels of the project at which change occurs or is required?</p> <p>Useful link: Sample harvest design</p>
Document review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiential wisdom Recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise and use different sources of knowledge. For example, traditional project documents are a typical source, but local knowledge about the intervention might also be available through other formal and informal sources and formats, for example, songs, heritage archives, radio broadcasts, community newsletters etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with primary users and local partners to understand documented information. Check documents for indications of provision and availability of resources to local partners in the past. 	<p>It may not always be possible to do an exhaustive search of non-traditional local information sources. However, a participatory approach that involves listening to local users, partners and participants can help facilitators identify potential sources for quick review. Rather than use the review to write complete outcomes, it can be used to generate prompts that guide participants and give them more control to identify outcomes in the next step.</p>
Engage human sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the term “owners of results” instead of “human sources” This step can be called “support owners of results to identify, acknowledge and formulate outcomes” instead of “engage human sources” Use the term “Side effects” instead of “negative outcomes” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitators should be aware of their own power, biases and positions as these could affect the harvest process. Include diverse owners of results in the harvest. Be mindful of power, language and accountability as well as the responsibility of recording or documenting outcomes (who writes down outcomes and how these are shared for feedback and approval will affect the use). Make sure to harvest “side effects” as these can reveal patriarchal patterns and resistance to gender equality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage use of local languages and creative ways (e.g., audio, photos, storytelling) to formulate outcomes, as strict focus on written outcomes in proper English can intimidate participants and fail to capture nuances and local insights. Facilitate partners to understand and frame SMART outcomes, where valuable to them. 	<p>To avoid an extractive approach to knowledge and results, the term ‘sources’ may be avoided. The participants are not passive sources; they are owners of the results.</p> <p>Similarly, the term ‘negative outcome’ may give the perception of failure or error that could lead participants to self-censor, so perhaps use the term “side effect” instead and use these powerful questions to assist with the discussion:</p> <p>Were there any un-intended consequences?</p> <p>Could we reflect on our duty of care and the do-no-harm principle?</p> <p>What should be done to mitigate backsliding? What lessons did we learn?</p> <p>Useful link: Sample workshop agenda</p>

OH Step	Alternative Terminology	Feminist lens	Localisation lens	Notes
Substantiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building trust about achievements • Broaden our understanding of outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure gender balance among the substantiators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer-to-peer review of outcomes among partners can replace the engagement of external stakeholders. 	Ethical and political issues must be checked thoroughly during the selection of the substantiators to ensure that their biases do not affect the integrity of the outcomes.
Analysis and interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers • Findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The analysis should address the gender transformative changes and the challenges and barriers to these changes. • Be mindful of the risk of “gender washing” of results. This means that claims of supporting gender equality are unfounded or exaggerated. This can be mitigated by substantiation and tracking changes over a period of time. It is also useful for change agents to ask ‘so what really changed?’ or ‘so who really benefitted?’ to test gender washing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer-to-peer or collective sense-making of outcomes can help interpret results in a participatory manner where knowledge use can be maximised. 	One of the outcomes in the pilot project was about the formation of an anti-harassment committee at a press club on the demand of women journalists. However, during substantiation, it turned out to be an example of gender washing as the press club’s leadership had merely announced the formation of the committee, but it had not actually formed an independent and permanent committee whose composition would be known to the members and which would operate in a transparent manner in accordance with federal law. In actual practice, a new and different inquiry panel was formed every time a complaint of harassment was lodged to the press club’s office bearers.
Support use of findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solidarity • Community building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute the findings of the harvest among the users and stakeholders using creative ways, for example podcasts, videos, audio, community meetings etc. • Distribute the findings in local languages. • Avoid extracting results and knowledge. Make sure that the participants hear back about the results and how to use them. Explain to partners who else other than them will use the information and how. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test if and how the process was meaningful and useful to the local participants. • Discuss with local partners how they would like to replicate the process in the future for their organisational or community learning. 	Extractive and exploitative evaluation can be avoided by involving local partners in all steps of the process to give them ownership.



► Suggestions for the nine principles of Outcome Harvesting

The nine participatory principles of Outcome Harvesting also offer space for guidance to be provided for evaluators and facilitators to use the method as a feminist and localised approach. These suggestions are shown in the figure below.

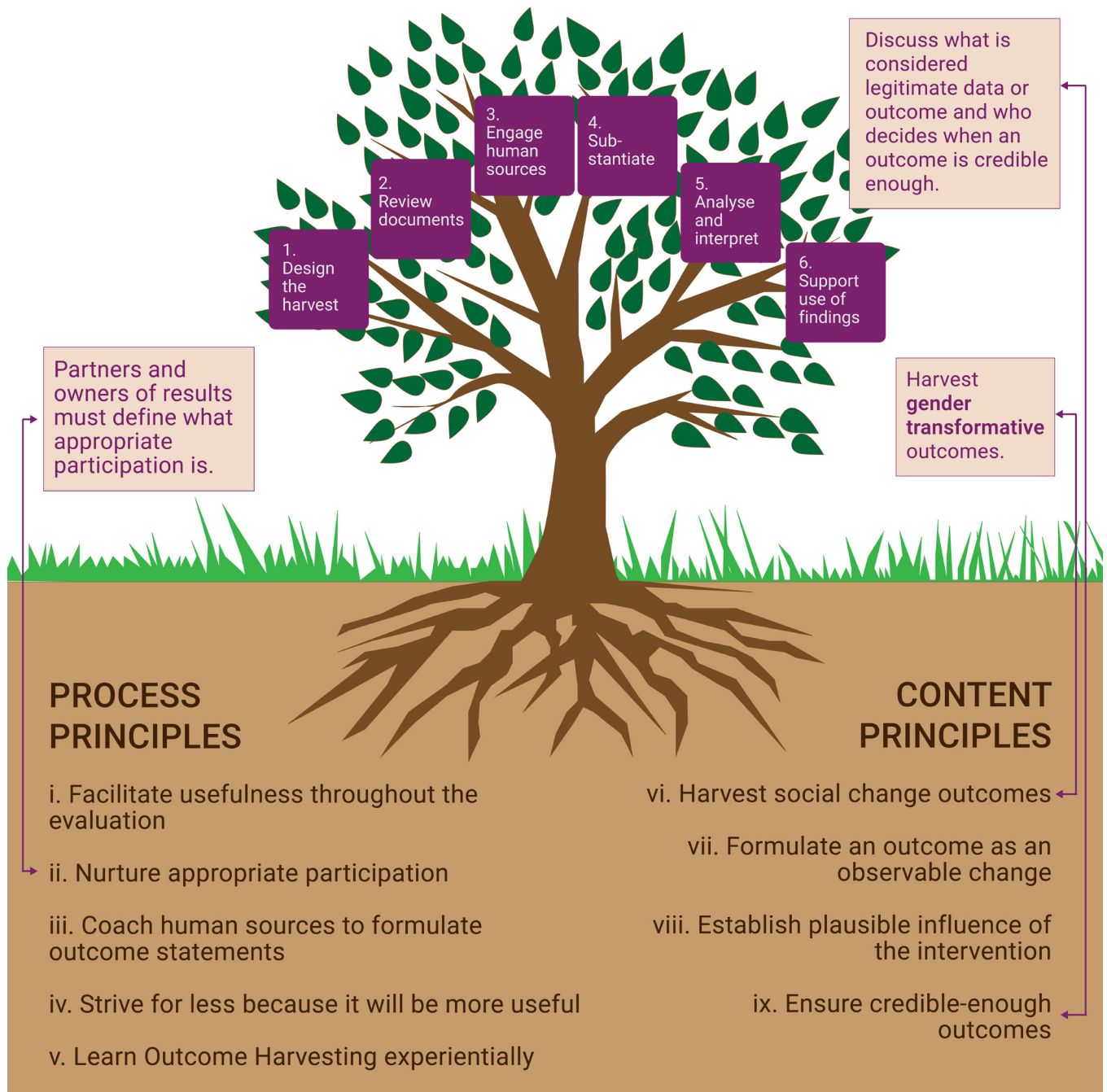


Figure: Suggestions for harvest facilitators to apply feminist and localisation lens to the nine principles of Outcome Harvesting

Additionally, the terminology for the second principle can be edited to read “Nurture appropriate and meaningful participation for all involved”. To nurture meaningful participation, once again the power imbalance between participants must be addressed directly during design and facilitation in order to reduce its effects on the harvest findings.

Similar to the six steps, if ‘primary sources’ are called ‘owners of results’ instead, then the third principle can be modified to read, “Facilitate and engage with owners of results to formulate outcome statements”. Finally, for feminist evaluations using outcome harvesting where the intended objective is to identify gender transformative changes, the sixth principle can be applied with more specificity so as to mean, “Harvest gender transformative and social change outcomes”.

► Examples of outcomes

The following are some examples of the outcomes generated through the pilot project.

► Case 1: Gender transformative change in law or policy

The federal Parliament of Pakistan amended the Christian Marriage Act in July 2024 to raise the minimum age of marriage for Christian men and women to 18 years.

Significance: The pre-dominant family laws in Muslim-majority Pakistan are based on Islamic jurisprudence and do not apply to religious minorities. Each religious minority group requires its own specific set of legislation for the registration of their marriages and divorces according to their religious principles and customs. The unavailability or inadequacy of family laws can lead to many problems, including making it difficult to prevent child marriages – one in every six girls in Pakistan is married in childhood, according to UN Women – and creating problems for spouses stuck in abusive relationships to seek divorce. For the Christian religious minority community in Pakistan, marriages are registered under the Christian Marriage Act, a colonial-era law dating back to 1872 when the British ruled the Indian Sub-continent. Under this law, the minimum age of marriage was set at 13 years for girls and 16 years for boys. The law was among several that the new state of Pakistan adopted from its imperial predecessor after gaining independence from the British in 1947. In the absence of legal reforms, the law had continued to remain enforced for over 75 years, creating issues of child marriages in the Christian community and endangering the lives of young girls and boys.

Contribution: IMS supported the production of over 200 news reports on the rights of religious minorities between 2021 and 2024 through its partners IRADA and the Digital Media Alliance of Pakistan, whose members reach around 6.3 million users on social media. The news stories covered Freedom of Religion or Belief, human rights violations, and other legal and social issues that were affecting the various religious minority communities in the country. One issue that was highlighted by the local Christian, Hindu and Sikh citizens regularly through the news stories was the absence or inadequate nature of family laws, which either prevented them from observing their religious rituals, created risks of harm to community members or led to challenging situations regarding citizenship records related to marriage and divorce registration. Even though IMS and its partners did not engage directly in public advocacy related to the family laws, the public interest journalism content provided a smaller contribution in keeping the topic in the spotlight, allowing community groups and

religious leaders to use the content for their advocacy with policymakers for legal amendments.



Tips and suggestions

The pilot project devoted one analysis question to social actors. This was to identify which social actors demonstrated change with respect to gender and/or other programme objectives. Facilitators of Outcome Harvesting should encourage the participants to think of the duty-bearers among their identified social actors to identify policy-related changes.

► Case 2: Gender transformative change in media system

Two local press clubs welcomed women journalists as members for the first time in 2023.

Significance: The press clubs in the city of Quetta in the Balochistan province and the town of Landi Kotal in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province did not have any woman journalist member previously. Conservative cultural practices sometimes discourage women's active participation in public life in these regions. Women journalists from these areas also have to contend with male-dominated news organisations and press associations.

Contribution: IMS partner Freedom Network provided gender sensitivity training to leaders of press clubs and trade unions in 15 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan in 2023. During the training and associated research, it was noticed that some press clubs had no women journalist members. Freedom Network's discussions with the press club office-bearers helped two press clubs to open their doors for women journalists working in their area. As a result, the Quetta press club gave membership to three women journalists and the Landi Kotal press club welcomed one woman journalist as its member.



Tips and suggestions

Gender transformative changes are often thought of as landmark actions that radically address systemic issues. However, facilitators should adopt a contextual approach to such changes: a change that might seem minor in one context might be monumental in a different context. For example, a few women journalists joining the news industry might be an unremarkable occurrence in an ideal media system. However, a few women journalists resuming their news jobs in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover is highly significant because the regime prohibited their professional work.

► Case 3: Side effect

During the harvest workshop, participants were encouraged to reflect on any negative outcomes for gender equality from their programmes. Participants discussed the stigma around communicating negative outcomes for fear of being judged by donors for poor implementation. It was suggested that a relatively non-threatening term such as “side effect” can be used to reduce the sentiment associated with negative outcomes. Using the term “side effect” was inspired by a suggestion from Søs Nissen, Team Leader at DIGNITY, a human rights organisation.

Furthermore, participants learned that it is useful to document and analyse side effects because these can indicate how un-intended harm might have arisen from the development intervention, also acknowledging that confronting gender inequality can create push-back as it challenges existing patriarchal power structures. The identification can help with strategies to avoid or mitigate harm in the future. Using exercise worksheets, participants identified three side effects (7% of the total 43 outcomes).

Side effect outcome description: A broadcast news organisation fired its women employees who had demanded an independent inquiry and punitive action against a male staff member who had harassed their female colleague in 2022.

Significance: The women employees of the news organisation were demanding their legal right to anti-harassment measures at the workplace and action against a male staff member who worked as a driver for the organisation and had harassed and assaulted a woman journalist colleague. When the employer set up a prejudiced inquiry committee to investigate the incident, the women employees felt they would not get justice through the internal inquiry. They filed a complaint with the office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Protection against Harassment at the Workplace. The ombudsperson’s office took up the case and decided in favour of the female journalist who was harassed and assaulted. As a result of the intervention, the news organisation was forced to terminate the employment of the male staff member for misconduct. However, soon after, the news organisation also dismissed from service the women employees who were vocal about the harassment incident. The women employees, who had worked as news reporters and producers, believed this was done to punish them for raising voice about the injustice and because the administration now viewed them as nuisance for not acquiescing with the prejudiced internal inquiry and taking the matter public.

Contribution: The women employees of the news organisation who were fired were also members of the IMS supported Women Journalists Association

and had previously successfully lobbied their administration to put up staff awareness notices at their office about the provisions of the 2010 federal law for protection against harassment at the workplace. Despite their best intentions and efforts to get justice for their colleague and create deterrence against future incidents of gender-based violence, they ended up losing their jobs. Subsequent legal efforts to challenge the termination orders also failed due to the nature of their employment contracts, which allowed the employer broad powers to end the contracts at short notice.



Tips and suggestions

Facilitators of Outcome Harvesting should encourage participants to use the identification of side effects as an opportunity to document learning and suggest adaptive measures.

► Challenges and tips to avoid them

Evaluators and facilitators of Outcome Harvesting may face certain challenges that could impede their ability to use the method as a feminist and localised approach. The following discussion offers tips to overcome such challenges.

Decolonising the use of Outcome Harvesting: While Outcome Harvesting is grounded in participatory ethos, the method can be constrained by the Western gaze due to the way the monitoring or evaluation is initiated or commissioned. If the decisions about what constitutes impact and who will use and own the knowledge are made by donors or international organisations, then the feminist and localisation potential of the method will be undermined. This risk can be mitigated by supporting local capacity building on outcome harvesting, the use of local evaluators and consultants, and consultation with local stakeholders to identify desired development impact and knowledge use.

Simplifying the technical jargon: MEL work can be a highly technical exercise that can seem overwhelming and intimidating to local communities and partners, who also feel the pressure of being judged against professional standards of MEL skills. Outcome Harvesting comes with its own jargon that may seem confusing to new participants and practitioners. How is an “outcome” different from a “result”? Is “behavioural change” the best way to explain who took what actions due to the influence of our work? Participatory MEL should acknowledge that language can also become a tool for power and oppression. Facilitators can prioritise the use of local language for outcome harvesting over English.

Esoteric terminology can be unpacked in native phrases so that the meaning is understood. Participants who might struggle with writing the outcomes in a standard format might be more comfortable speaking about them, allowing for oral storytelling approaches to be integrated in the harvest design.

Use small-scale harvest: The Outcome Harvesting steps can be modified to fit the needs of the local participants, as evidenced from the pilot project where the harvest was divided into two phases without compromising the integrity of the process or skipping any step. Organisations and commissioners should avoid to instrumentalise and NGO-ify smaller organisations and movements through extensive MEL requirements that might create a burden on local resources. For example, a small-scale harvest can be rolled out instead of a comprehensive approach to all Outcome Harvesting steps, unless it is meaningful for the partners.

Creating a balance with donor requirements: As experts have pointed out, Outcome Harvesting is not directly aligned to a traditional results-based management approach with specific metrics and indicators that may be expected by some donors. However, Outcome Harvesting can be used as a bridge between the need for detecting nuanced changes and the strict requirements of donor reporting. For example, IMS uses Outcome Harvesting as an annual monitoring exercise to identify results across the institution that may then be tallied up against the indicators in a grant or programme results framework. Similarly, IMS programmes are integrating the Outcome Harvesting format of describing significant results in partner reporting templates so partners can regularly formulate ‘outcomes’ outside of a formal assessment. To strike a balance with donor requirements and ensure that data is meaningful to partners and the sector, using Outcome Harvesting as part of a mixed method approach is recommended. In the media sector, data on news audiences and media viability statistics are relevant calls for more quantitative data collection methods, where Outcome Harvesting may not be the best suited method. However, in such instances, Outcome Harvesting can reveal qualitative information about the impact of news content on diverse audiences or the meaning of media viability achievements made by news organisations.



Recommendations for meaningful participation in feminist and localised MEL

The following recommendations are intended to help improve the experience of local partners and communities in participatory MEL processes.

1. Develop a long-term MEL learning strategy

Work with partners to develop a comprehensive learning strategy that spans 3 to 5 years. This strategy should be aligned with the programme's vision and mission and include:

- Clear indicators and implementation guidelines.
- Flexible resourcing to accommodate changing needs and unforeseen challenges.
- Long-term planning capabilities for partners to move beyond yearly cycles of uncertainty.

2. Institutionalise participatory feminist MEL practices

Move beyond piecemeal support and adopt a systematic, organisation-wide approach to participatory feminist MEL. This includes:

- Resourcing MEL staff and supporting capacity building through training and mentorship.
- Creating a sustainability plan for systematising best practices and documenting the outcomes of feminist MEL approaches.

3. Ensure stability in partner support and funding

To address the instability caused by yearly funding agreements:

- Advocate for multi-year funding agreements with donors to provide greater planning stability for partners.
- Strengthen partner accompaniment, ensuring that partners receive consistent and adequate support throughout the year.

4. Address knowledge gaps due to staff turnover

Given expected high turnover of staff and the knowledge gaps it creates:

- Provide consistent, ongoing training to ensure that new staff can quickly integrate feminist MEL practices into their work.
- Facilitate knowledge-sharing spaces where partners and staff can engage in continuous learning and reflection.

5. Mitigate power dynamics and promote collaboration

To ensure meaningful participation:

- Explicitly address power imbalances in the funding relationships with partners, ensuring that partnerships are equitable and mutually beneficial.
- Develop tools and practices that prioritise collaborative knowledge creation and joint decision-making.
- Foster an environment where feedback from stakeholders is genuinely integrated into planning, decision-making, and learning.

6. Institutionalise decolonising practices in MEL

Support partners in institutionalising decolonising practices across organisational policies and practices, ensuring that feminist and participatory approaches are not isolated but integrated into the core functioning of partner organisations.

Resources

The following resources can be useful for civil society organisations, commissioners, evaluators and researchers to learn more about Outcome Harvesting, feminist MEL, and meaningful participation of local partners in MEL processes.



Outcome harvesting: Principles, steps, and evaluation applications by Ricardo Wilson-Grau. Information Age Publishing: 2018.



Outcome Harvesting videos by the Danish Institute for Human Rights. <https://bit.ly/ohplaylist>



Outcome Harvesting community of practice: <https://outcomeharvesting.net/>



Feminist approaches to Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning: Overview of current practices by Alyna Wyatt, Dr. Donna Podems, Monet Durieux and Kirra Evans. Equality Fund & Genesis Analytics. June 2021. <https://equalityfund.ca/learn/feminist-mel/>



Expanding our understanding of evidence for meaningful participation by Trimita Chakma, Georgia Booth and Ruby Johnson. Closer Than You Think collective & Porticus. May 2024. <https://www.closerthanyouthink.co/porticus-report>



What if MEL tools could talk? By Wanjiku Kariuki. <https://bit.ly/meltoolspwk>



Localising monitoring evaluation and learning by ITAD. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_cYCK1hx2k



Decolonizing knowledge in philanthropy: What does it mean? By Shama Dossa, Clara Desalvo and Boikanyo Modungwa. Alliance for philanthropy and social investment worldwide. <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/decolonizing-knowledge-in-philanthropy-what-does-it-mean/>



Notes

- 1 Napier, A., Simister, N., & Jain, N. (2017). Participatory M&E. INTRAC. <https://www.intrac.org/app/uploads/2017/01/Participatory-ME.pdf>
 - 2 Wilson-Grau, R., Britt, H., Dewata, Y., Rogers, P., & Stevens, K. (2024). Outcome Harvesting. Better Evaluation. <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/outcome-harvesting>
 - 3 Wyatt, A., Podems, D., Durieux, M., & Evans, K. (2021). Feminist approaches to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning: Overview of current practices. Equality Fund & Genesis Analytics. <https://equalityfund.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Feminist-MEL-Research-Overview-Paper-FINAL-1.pdf>
 - 4 Based on notes from interview with Clara Desalvo by learning brief authors in August 2024.
 - 5 See Endnote #3.
 - 6 See “Making feminist evaluation practical” by Dr. Donna Podems in [eVALUation matters, fourth quarter 2018](#). Oxfam MEAL principles can be found in this [July 2017 discussion paper](#).
 - 7 Van Brabant, K. & Patel, S. (2018). Localisation in practice: Emerging indicators and practical recommendations. Action Against Hunger, CDAC, Start Network and UK Aid. https://www.preventionweb.net/files/59895_localisationinpracticefullreportv4.pdf .
 - 8 IMS Global Strategy 2024-2028. <https://www.mediasupport.org/publication/ims-global-strategy-2024-2028/>
 - 9 Kindler, B. & Voltolina, G. (2022). Facilitating change: localising monitoring, evaluation and learning. ITAD. <https://www.itad.com/article/facilitating-change-localising-monitoring-evaluation-and-learning/>
 - 10 Ibid.
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IMS (International Media Support) is a non-profit organisation working for global press freedom by supporting local media in countries affected by armed conflict, human insecurity and political transition.



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