

Outcome Harvesting Mid-Term Evaluation of NIMD Country Programmes in Colombia, Mali, Mozambique and Tunisia



Executive summary

Evaluation design and process

Evaluation method: Outcome Harvesting



A tool to identify, formulate, analyse and interpret outcomes to answer monitoring and evaluation questions

6 Outcome Harvesting steps:

1. Design the Harvest
2. Review Documentation
3. Engage with Human Sources
4. Substantiation
5. Analyse and Interpret
6. Support use of findings

Outcomes are defined as observable and significant changes in a social actor's behaviour (relationships, activities, policies or practice) that has been achieved and that has been influenced by NIMD.



Outcomes harvested through workshops with NIMD partners in 4 countries: Mali, Tunisia, Mozambique and Colombia

NIMD
Colombia



مركز الدراسات
المتوسطة و الدولية
Centre of Mediterranean
and International Studies

IMD
Mozambique



The period for collecting outcomes was from **January 2016- April 2018**. Mali was allowed to include 2015 due to internal challenges in 2016. Mozambique however argued during the workshop to include outcomes from earlier, because they were related to each other.



Evaluation questions:

1. To what extent do the outcomes — intended and unintended, positive and negative — achieved by the Mali and Mozambique SP programmes and the Tunisia and Colombia DfS programmes in 2016-2018 represent patterns of progress towards their respective SP and DfS programme objectives?
2. How well do the system-actor-culture outcomes match country-level ToCs?
3. How suitable is the Outcome Harvesting methodology for monitoring and evaluating NIMD's outcomes?



Primary users and uses:

For *NIMD management* and *programme managers* to be able to learn from the programmes' outcomes and better steer them; as well as to adjust the planning of the programmes.

For *NIMD partners* to understand better and strengthen effects of their work with the SP and DfS programmes with NIMD.

For *NIMD management, programme managers, and NIMD partners* to be able to assess and communicate the relevance and effectiveness of SP and DfS.

Conclusions and recommended points for discussion

This section describes our main conclusions per evaluation question, in as far as we could make them across the countries, as the political realities in the 4 countries are very different. Also, we cannot draw conclusions about the significance of what was achieved by NIMD in Colombia, Mali, Mozambique and Tunisia in 2016-2018 since we are assessing the achievement of programmatic objectives but not the merit or value of those changes.

Evaluation question 1

To what extent do the outcomes — intended and unintended, positive and negative — achieved by the Mali and Mozambique SP programmes and the Tunisia and Colombia DfS programmes in 2016-2018 represent patterns of progress towards their respective SP and DfS programme objectives?

The four NIMD partners have achieved outcomes in 2016-2018 that represent progress towards their respective programme objectives. All NIMD programmes influenced both expected and unexpected changes in political actors. They contributed to changes in the official rules and procedures governing politics, bolstered the legitimacy and capacity of political actors and influenced the behaviour of political elites in ways that strengthened political democracy. The table below gives an overview of the outcomes that were harvested.

Figure 26 Overview of the number of outcomes for all four countries

Country	Total outcomes	Outcomes between 2016-2018	Expected	Not expected	System	Actor	Culture	Inclusion (Gender)
Colombia (2015-2018)	25	21	18	7	11	4	5	5
Mali (2015-2018)	15	15	9	5	5	6	4	4
Mozambique (2013-2018)	24	16	21	3	14	5	5	1
Tunisia (2016-2018)	26	26	20	6	4	13	9	2

Evaluation question 2

How well do the system-actor-culture outcomes match country-level ToCs?

1. The four NIMD programmes achieved outcomes in line with their specific country-level theories of change (i.e., results areas/intermediate outcomes). NIMD's staff and partners consider that overall, they made "great" contributions to "highly significant" outcomes. In Colombia and Mozambique NIMD had notable incidence on influencing change in the official rules and procedures governing politics, i.e., NIMD's definition of "systemic" change. In Mali, NIMD's incidence on the number of outcomes representing change in the legitimacy and capacity of political actors and on the behaviour of elites was all similar, at least in terms of the number of outcomes. And in Tunisia, the proportion of outcomes representing systemic change was

considerably less. NIMD is having incidence in the area of gender and inclusion, although just barely in Mozambique and Tunisia. Both DfS countries achieve most outcomes related to the results areas of building trust between political actors. What stands out for Mali in comparison to the other countries, is that the outcomes are less connected to each other and not much follow-up was given to the outcomes (for example in terms of recommendations). Although it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to examine those divergent patterns, one conclusion we can reach, however, is that NIMD is not boxing in its programming to achieve similar patterns of outcomes across very different national contexts. On the other hand, the teams in Mali and Tunisia pointed out that actor and culture level change need to happen first before system level change can happen. We couldn't find reference for this logic in the ToC. Nevertheless, it would be good for NIMD to reflect on these different patterns and discuss if any changes need to be made to its programming.

2. Mali followed by Colombia have the largest percentage of unforeseen outcomes. All four countries faced considerable political uncertainty in the past few years, and therefore unexpected outcomes may be a sign that in these two countries NIMD is daring to take more risks and be more audacious than in Mozambique and Tunisia. Said differently, the danger with achieving mostly expected outcomes is that NIMD is achieving what they know can be achieved and not daring to achieve the unknown. We hasten to add that the context in which NIMD operates is steeped in threats and dangers, both political and physical, and thus caution is certainly understandable. Of course, the achievement of unexpected outcomes could as well be due to poor planning.
3. We tried to link the outcomes to the causal pathways in the country ToC's. We found out that the outcomes could directly be linked to the 'if statements', but not to the 'then statements'. The 'if statements' in their turn correspond with the results areas/intermediate outcomes in the results tables on which we elaborated above and therefore will not repeat here. The reason they can't be linked to the 'then statements' is not necessarily because NIMD is not achieving any change on that level, but because either the step from the 'if' to the 'then' statements is too small or repetitive. Take this example from Tunisia or the step from the 'if statements' to the 'then statements' is too big or not detailed enough.

Evaluation question 3

How suitable is the Outcome Harvesting methodology for monitoring and evaluating NIMD's outcomes?

3.1. What can be said about the substantiation step: are outcomes easily substantiated? Are sufficient numbers of substantiators generally available? Are there patterns in the extent to which they positively are able to substantiate outcomes?

Outcome Harvesting is a utilization-focused approach. The substantiation process is based upon the question: What would make the whole set of outcomes credible enough for NIMD's use? Therefore, it are the users who decide on the criteria for substantiation.

The Outcome Harvesting process is always adapted to the different contexts and also considers data sensitivity during the substantiation process. For this reason, the number of substantiators and number of outcomes selected for substantiation may differ between the countries. The overall criteria agreed with NIMD was that we would try to substantiate all the outcomes. This was not possible in all

the countries. In the 1-2 days following the harvest workshop, we substantiated a selection of the outcomes with third parties. We asked the partners and the programme managers to give us the names and titles of up to 5 people who were knowledgeable about the outcomes, but as independent as possible. In some cases, additional substantiators were added during the harvesting workshop.

Overview table of substantiated outcomes:

Country	Number of outcomes harvested	Number of substantiators	Number of outcomes selected for substantiation	Number of outcomes substantiated	Outcome descriptions Substantiated?	Significance Substantiated?	Contribution
Colombia	25	3	13	12	yes	yes	Not fully
Tunis	26	10	12	12	yes	yes	yes
Mozambique	24	3	13	13	yes	Not fully	Not fully
Mali	15	4	15	15	yes	yes	Not fully

Generally, in Outcome Harvesting the substantiators are selected after the outcomes have been harvested, simply because it is hard to predict how many and which outcomes will be harvested. For practical reasons, we decided with NIMD to schedule the substantiation interviews during the in-country visits straight after the harvesting workshop. This proved to be challenging as it was difficult for the partners to select substantiators, without having gone through the harvesting process first and having their outcomes at hand. Once they had formulated their outcomes, it appeared to be relatively easy for the partners to identify possible substantiators. For us as evaluators, it was challenging as well to substantiate immediately after the harvest. We could only prepare the outcomes in the right format for the substantiators during the evening, but there was not enough time to prepare more detailed questions on specific outcomes.

The possibility of substantiating NIMD's outcomes is problematic due to the political sensitivities of the work NIMD and its partners do and the trust that is so vital to their success. The mere act of consulting with independent third parties about NIMD's success in influencing other societal actors to change their behaviour carries serious risks of misunderstanding and distrust. Due to this, we could in some countries (e.g. Mozambique) not substantiate the contribution. This is not unusual in such highly political contexts, but needs to be taken into account by NIMD in future substantiation processes as this defines the boundaries of what can reasonably be substantiated. Documentation can also be used to verify the contribution statements as we did in this evaluation as well. Nevertheless, for these reasons we agree with NIMD that substantiation is best done in person and not via e-mail. Keeping in mind though, the remark made by the CEMI, that substantiators can also be sceptical of sharing information with people outside their country.

Due to delays in receiving the last details on the outcomes, no time was left to discuss the results of the substantiation process with the NIMD user group to agree that a sufficient level of credibility was reached. The decisions on this was now taken by us as evaluators. However, since this was a pilot project, this evaluation should provide a good basis for NIMD to discuss further what should be changed to the substantiation process in the future.

3.2 What have been successful and efficient steps in the Outcome Harvesting approach as piloted in NIMD? How can weaknesses and threats be addressed in the future?

1. NIMD programme managers and staff involved in piloting Outcome Harvesting in Colombia, Mali, Mozambique and Tunisia, with the limitations suggested above for substantiation, consider it a potentially useful tool for NIMD. After piloting the method in the four countries, as evaluators we note a consensus amongst NIMD's staff and partners that they consider the method more effective than NIMD's current monitoring and evaluation tools for identifying their results and learning from what works. In addition, they appreciate the facilitative and coaching approach that Outcome Harvesting brings and the fact that they 'own' their outcomes. This is important, as their participation in the process is a crucial factor in its success. We experienced, that in all the countries, the partners understood very quickly what an outcome is in Outcome Harvesting and how to formulate outcomes.
2. We have found that harvesting outcomes from NIMD staff through workshops, as we did during the field visit, is more effective than harvesting through e-mail, which we did following the workshops, as there was a delay in receiving information virtually from the partners. For the workshop in Tunisia, there had been discussions with NIMD as to who should be present during the workshop. There is no general rule as every context is different. Should NIMD consider to continue harvesting in workshops for monitoring purposes, then it is advisable to keep the number of participants from NIMD head office - as well as external people - low, since there is (in most NIMD countries) a funding/power relationship. Partners may otherwise feel pressured to formulate many outcomes and big outcomes. This is even more important to consider for monitoring, where the person facilitating the workshop will be internal.
3. The actual harvesting took place during two days, which was an ideal amount of time. With less time, not enough outcomes would have been harvested. More time would have been too exhausting for the participants. In some countries (e.g. Tunisia) more outcomes could have been harvested with more time. Nevertheless, the aim in Outcome Harvesting is not necessarily to be exhaustive. The outcomes harvested should be sufficiently representative of the most important changes during the period being covered, which was the case in Tunisia. This was also the only partner that mentioned the method is time-intensive, because they were involved throughout the week. This could be shortened in the future. The introduction on Outcome Harvesting might not be necessary (if the people are the same) and the partner does not need to be involved in the substantiation. Half a day might be sufficient if it is done on a regular basis for monitoring.
4. The partners rated their contribution and the significance high. We would like to point out, that this is not a general trend. We noted that the 5-point scale for the contribution was too much for the participants to digest. More advisable would be to have a 4-point scale both for the significance and contribution, so that participants are not tempted to choose the middle one.

5. NIMD is working in a highly politicised context. In case NIMD continue to use Outcome Harvesting for monitoring they should make sure to closely involve the partner in how the harvesting information is captured, where it is stored, who it is shared with etc. to make sure they don't undermine the trust between their partners and the people they work with.
6. We noted some confusion and frustration amongst partners and substantiators around the different evaluation processes that were going on at the same time, which had at times an influence on the Outcome Harvesting process.
7. Lastly, we want to point out that it is extremely important that Outcome Harvesting is customised to concrete, country specific realities. This may mean, that the approach is different in the various countries. The challenge is to be true to the Outcome Harvesting principles while adapting to each national context.

Recommended points for discussion:

- Why does NIMD not streamline the terminology used in the results tables for the different countries?
- Do the divergent patterns followed by NIMD and her partners in achieving system, actor or culture outcomes require changes in NIMD's programming?
- Why are the Mali outcomes not followed-up?
- Could the ToCs be revised to focus more on behavioural changes or in any case to be more detailed and have clearer boundaries between the 'if' and 'then' statements?
- Were this indeed the right substantiators in terms of their knowledge, independence and number.?Country by country, is this the right mix so that the findings are credible enough for NIMD's primary intended uses for this evaluation?
- How will NIMD deal with the political sensitivities around the substantiation of the contribution descriptions?
- NIMD should consider leaving 1-2 days between the harvest and the substantiation
- Setting aside more time after the substantiation for a discussion on the results of the substantiation process.
- Carefully consider who should be present during the harvesting workshop and why, so that partners feel comfortable in formulating their outcomes.
- In addition, the partners should be closely involved in deciding how the harvesting information is captured, where it is stored, who it is shared with and other issues of confidentiality, to make sure they don't undermine the trust between their partners and the people they work with.
- Finally, should NIMD decide to use the approach for monitoring, more decisions need to be taken such as: which people are best placed to serve as harvesters, the M&E person at the partner office, programme managers? How often should the harvest take place and who will analyse the outcomes?