REPORTING CHANGE

Reporting on change is an important part of most monitoring and evaluation systems. This can be done in many ways. The most common is through written reports. The aim should be to provide enough information to allow people to make up their own minds about the importance of any changes reported. Many CSOs struggle to report changes concisely and accurately.

Most monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems require organisations to describe the changes they have helped produce. Changes can be reported in many ways including verbally or through audio-visual materials such as photographs, video and interactive media. However, the most common way is to produce written reports.

Unfortunately, this is something CSOs have often struggled with in the past. Too often, reporting on change has been inadequate. Specifically:

- reports focus entirely on outputs (deliverables) or activities, not changes;
- they focus only on positive changes, not on negative changes or areas where expected change has not happened;
- change is reported in an anecdotal way, with insufficient evidence; and
- reports claim that a CSO is entirely responsible for changes that are wholly or partly due to the efforts of other organisations or wider influences.

Sometimes this is because CSOs' M&E systems are not delivering the right kind of information. However, it is often simply a matter of how change is reported. When working within a project or programme it can be hard to assess how much information to provide. Too much, and the reporting

of change is buried within huge documents. Too little, and it is hard for someone without an in-depth knowledge of the project or programme to understand the importance or relevance of any changes.

Clearly, the level of detail required depends on many factors. These include the sector of work (e.g. health, education, governance), the type of work (e.g. service delivery, advocacy, capacity development), and the purpose of the report. For example, the level of detail required for an annual report to a donor will be very different from the level required when submitting evidence designed to influence a government policy. Equally, the length and format of a report designed to communicate changes to the public may be very different to one aimed primarily at experts in a particular field.

The questions below provide a convenient checklist of things to consider when reporting change. These can be adapted to different circumstances. Of course it will not always be necessary to report on each of these areas for every single change. The aim should be to provide enough information for an external audience (i.e. one without an in-depth knowledge of a project or programme) to make a considered opinion about any changes reported, and any resulting lessons.

Questions to consider when reporting on change

(These questions were first assembled using a variety of internal materials produced by Save the Children UK between 2003 and 2008. They have since been adapted many times for many purposes.)

Key questions	Criteria	Examples
What is the change?	The first key thing is to describe the change(s) accurately. This means describing exactly what changed, for who, and when. Changes could be positive or negative, or a mixture of both. In some cases it may be worth describing a change that was expected but that did not happen.	• Villagers living in Northern Dhaka now have improved access to clean drinking water following a water project which ran from 2012-2014. • Three supported CSOs have enhanced their capacity to work within networks and coalitions over the past year. • An advocacy project designed to raise public awareness of the rights of landholders has failed to attract the attention of local authorities.

Was the change intended or not?	It may sometimes be useful to state whether or not a change or set of changes was planned. Many changes are anticipated, but some may be unexpected ones that were never originally intended. These may be positive or negative.	• A supported community-based organisation went further than was originally planned, and used skills acquired in training to engage with local authorities. • Villagers supported through a savings scheme began to use their increased assets to lend money at high rates of interest to other villagers. This was an unexpected and unwanted consequence of the programme.
Who was primarily affected by the change?	A report should be clear about which groups, organisations or individuals were involved in, or affected by, the change(s). The more specific the statement, the better.	• Villagers earning below $2 a day, living in two slums in the Northern part of the city, now have greater access to clean water. • Three community-based groups set up to represent the interests of the farming community have successfully diversified their income following training.
How many organisations, groups or people were affected by the change?	Sometimes changes are reported across many organisations, groups or people. At other times, a report might focus on a small number of cases. In either circumstance, it is useful to report how many people, groups or organisations have been affected by the change(s). If exact numbers are not known than an estimate (or guess) may be useful.	• 325 out of 400 farmers (81%) have seen an average increase in crop yield of at least 50% over the past two years. • Seven out of ten supported community groups report that they 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that their capacity to engage with their constituents has improved since the last reporting period.
How did the change affect different sub-groups?	Change does not normally happen equally across all stakeholders. Some groups may benefit more than others. A report should be clear about which target groups were involved in the change(s), and should emphasise any differences between different target groups, if known.	• Government members are increasingly becoming more open to engaging with community-based CSOs, particularly district-level officers that work closest to the communities concerned. • There has been an increase of 10% in the number of families sending girls to school. This increase is slightly higher amongst female-headed households.
How significant was the change?	Some changes are relatively minor, whilst others are major and life-changing. Sometimes this is obvious, but at other times a report needs to emphasise the importance of a change, especially for audiences outside the project or programme under consideration.	• Representatives of a local CSO are now regularly meeting with a local representative. This the first time there has been any formal engagement between communities and the state in this area. • Family assets have increased overall by 20%. This is important not only because it has increased wealth, but also because girls have demonstrated that they can have a positive influence over family income.
How might the change result in further changes in policies, organisations or peoples' lives?	If reporting on a long-term sustainable change in the lives of individuals it is usually clear what the benefits are. However, many reports focus on outcomes – the immediate changes resulting from the work of a project or programme. In these cases it may not be clear what the eventual, hoped-for changes are. For example, a report might state that a government department has higher capacity; a new policy on adaptation has been developed; or there has been increased collaboration between different stakeholders. For an external audience it may be important to clarify why these are considered important changes, and what is the desired ultimate long-term result.	• The local hospital now has greater capacity to raise funds from commercial organisations. This is important because government cuts mean it is unlikely that the hospital will receive sufficient public funds from now on. • Exam results at year 11 in the district schools have improved overall by around 20-30%. For many pupils, this means they will have met the threshold required to apply to private secondary schools. • Successful operations have now been carried out on over 100 members of the community. Approximately 60% of these people are of working age and will now be able to resume their previous employment, thereby contributing to family incomes once more.
How does the change compare to the original situation or baseline?	If a report states that 75% of people in a location now have access to clean water, this could be considered an extremely important change. On the other hand, the situation might be worse than previously. Wherever possible, a report describing change should outline the original situation so that people can understand how large or important the changes are. This applies to both quantitative and qualitative changes.	• Maternal mortality rates in the area have decreased from 0.6% to 0.4% over the twelve months since the new campaign was launched. • The CSO reports that all staff now fully understand the gender policy. Prior to the latest training, only a handful of staff fully understood the policy, whilst the remainder understood some aspects of the policy. • More government representatives are beginning to engage in the advocacy campaign. Up until two years ago there had been no interest in the proposed new policy, and no champions amongst public officials.

Is the change likely to be sustainable?	Some changes are long-lasting, whilst others are relatively short-lived. In some circumstances, it might be useful to provide an estimate of how sustainable any reported change is likely to be, and to indicate any risks or assumptions that might influence that sustainability.	• Thanks to the income generation activities, households have managed to diversify their income sources. However, there are concerns that this will not last beyond the project lifetime. • The fact that CSOs and local authorities are now engaging with each other independently of the project provides reassurance that the improved relationships over the past two years will be maintained.
How do changes compare to what was hoped for, or considered realistic?	If a report states that 15 Southern research facilities now have the capacity to produce independent research, the implication is that this is a positive change. However, if the plan was to improve the capacity of 100 facilities, this casts the information in a different light. It is therefore often useful to describe what was originally planned, so that people reading a report can see immediately the scale of any change relative to the expectations.	• Twenty members of the refugee community have come forward to offer to lead groups within the programme. This is far less than the fifty hoped for. • Incidents of malaria have decreased from 15,000 to 10,000 in the past period – a drop of 33%. This is much higher than the forecast reduction of 10%. • Government have agreed to discuss the new proposed policy in the next Parliament. This is roughly what the campaign had expected, although it had hoped that time could be found during the current Parliament.
What is the evidence for the change?	This is arguably the most important piece of information to report when describing any change or changes. There is a big difference between describing the findings of a professionally-conducted, large-scale research study, and findings based on a conversation with a couple of people. Describing the evidence allows readers to make up their own mind about its value.	• Focus-group studies with agricultural extension workers suggest that there has been limited uptake of the new seed varieties. • Informal conversations with project stakeholders reveal that they cautiously welcome the new approaches. • A three-year formal research study into tree planting showed conclusively that financial incentives were needed if farmers are to move over to new drought resistant trees.
What was the contribution of the project or programme to the change?	In some cases a project or programme might be solely responsible for a change or set of changes. In other cases it may just have played a part. It is therefore useful to specify the contribution.	• Due entirely to the project, crop yields have increased by over 60% in the past year. • Government stakeholders have now agreed to cross-party talks. This follows extensive campaigning. Our CSOs' role in the campaign was to coordinate across the different groups, and to produce audio-visual materials.
What else contributed to the change?	Where necessary, it is useful to describe other factors or organisations that may have contributed to the change(s), and how.	• The change has come about partly because of the capacity training on engagement. Equally, however, local government showed a willingness to fully engage with communities, which also had a significant influence over the project outcomes.
What made the change happen?	For learning purposes it is often useful to know precisely how a change or set of changes happened, and what were the key processes involved. This enables others to replicate the work (or avoid mistakes in the case of negative changes). Reporting on the key processes that led to a change also helps substantiate any claims that the change(s) resulted from the work of a project or programme.	• 70% of the wells in the area have been decontaminated by government experts. This follows an intense campaign led by local communities and supported by a coalition of local CSOs. The fact that the campaign was timed to coincide with local elections had a large influence. • Three separate training sessions of between 1-2 days each have contributed to a 50% increase in community members' knowledge of, and attitudes towards, the transmission of HIV. Particularly influential were the in-depth case studies involving community members and the role play sessions.
What is the evidence for the contribution to the change?	Sometimes it is important to state the evidence that indicates contribution to change. This might be evidence of the contribution of a CSO's project or programme, but might also reflect evidence of wider influences. As with providing evidence for change, a simple statement of evidence will often suffice in a report on change.	• An evaluation using contribution analysis techniques concluded that the project significantly enhanced capacity amongst supported organisations, although a recent change in civil society legislation also had an effect. • Community members told project staff during informal interviews that they believed the changes would probably have happened anyway, but they happened faster and better because of the project.

How certain is the change, or contribution to change?	M&E systems often encourage people to be definitive in their opinions. For example, logical framework thinking encourages people to say whether a change has happened or not. In many cases, however, project or programme staff have some evidence that a change has occurred but may not be sure. Or they might be sure a change has occurred, but not sure how far the project or programme contributed towards it. In these situations, it is usually better to state the change anyway, and to add some qualifying statements that indicate the confidence in the findings. If there are other possible explanations these could be stated as well.	- A fully-implemented randomised control trial (RCT) showed beyond doubt that providing health services has lowered disease rates amongst targeted communities. - Evidence from focus group discussions and group interviews suggests that villagers' attitudes may be beginning to change. But it will be important to continue to monitor this going forward. - The programme is reasonably confident that it has had a major influence on policies in at least four targeted countries. There is some evidence of contribution change in another three, but here the evidence is less certain, and some elements are contradictory.
What other source material is available?	Many reports seek to summarise change as succinctly as possible. In some cases there is also a wealth of background information that could be used to confirm the change (or contribution). Some stakeholders might like to see this material. It is always useful to footnote or reference the material and make it available for others (provided issues around ethics and security of information are properly addressed).	

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INTRAC is a not-for-profit organisation that builds the skills and knowledge of civil society organisations to be more effective in addressing poverty and inequality. Since 1992 INTRAC has provided specialist support in monitoring and evaluation, working with people to develop their own M&E approaches and tools, based on their needs. We encourage appropriate and practical M&E, based on understanding what works in different contexts.