

# “Methodologies should be people centred...”

## Lessons learned from applying Outcome Mapping within a farmer association in Switzerland

An interview with Walter Schläppi <sup>1</sup>  
by Carsten Schulz, Agridea

Outcome Mapping (OM) is a methodology for planning and assessing development programming. OM helps a project or program to learn about its influence on the progression of change in their direct partners, and therefore helps those to think more systematically and pragmatically about what they are doing and to adapt continuously to bring about desired outcomes. OM puts people and learning at the centre of development and accepts unanticipated changes as potential for innovation.

OM is used mainly in the context of development cooperation in developing countries although it is considered by its authors to be used in all over the world. Examples of using Outcome Mapping in developed countries are rather limited.

About an example of Outcome Mapping used in the context of a farmers association in rural Switzerland, Carsten Schulz has interviewed Walter Schläppi who has worked several years in applying OM as Project Cycle Management (PCM) tool in different countries about his experiences and lessons learned in Switzerland.

<sup>1</sup> Walter Schläppi worked in agricultural extension throughout his whole professional carrier. As son of a farmer family from Lenk in the Berner Oberland he studied agriculture at the “Swiss Federal Institute of Technology” in Zurich where he has obtained a PhD. in Agro-sociology and Agro-economy. Beside working several years in Agricultural Extension in Switzerland he gathered working experiences in Nepal, Kirgizstan, North Korea and several countries of East-Europe. Since 2007 he is retired and works on a voluntary base in the “Alpverein Simmental” in different projects.



*Walter, you have been involved in Outcome Mapping already in 2004. What was the reason to look for an alternative approach than the Logical Framework Approach (LFA)?*

In the centre of a Project Cycle Management with the Logical Framework Approach is the logical system of objectives: project activities are contributing to the outcomes, the outcomes are contributing to the overall objective. You have your indicators measuring the results and you have formulated some assumptions.

As soon as the project team starts with implementation, they should have to ask them continuously: who is doing what, for achieving the objectives? But development is not only caused by activities of a single project – it's the phenomena of different actors and effects.

When you are using the Logical Framework Approach, there is a need on the definition of whom is contributing to the objectives. The definition of the stakeholders involved for the development is important because of three reasons:

1. for the ownership and responsibility, during the project implementation as well as when the project has finished
2. for the efficient use of human and financial resources
3. for the monitoring of the progress and learning from experiences.

This ownership and the post project improvements are important criteria for development. It's not enough that somebody from outside is doing something new.

*What are your critics on the Logical Framework Approach?*

Once again: From my experience LFA focus too much on its inherent logic but too less in the involvement of people in order to make them active and accountable for the improvements of the project activities. Especially those individuals, who already contribute to the development of what the project is doing, but who are not participating in the planned project activities, they are normally not integrated in the planning while using the Logical Framework Approach. So they are not seen systematically as a driving force for development.

*What do you expect from an alternative PCM methodology?*

I expect from an alternative methodology that it puts the local people much more in the centre of development and gives them more responsibilities and influence in steering the project. And I expect a methodology that is more focused on a self-help approach and on personal contributions of local people – and that the external contribution is directed to create synergies. If we had more projects with local ownership, the development cooperation would achieve much more!

*You have applied OM in different projects in development cooperation and as well in your voluntary work – have you been satisfied with OM as new methodology?*

### The „Alpverein Simmental“

The „Alpverein Simmental“ was founded in 2002 by the initiative of local farmers in the Berner Oberland, Switzerland as a self-help-organisation. It counts on the initiative of the mountainous rural population and on the potentials of culture and economy in mountainous areas.

The “Alpverein Simmental” is carrying out projects in the context of local economic development, sustainable tourism, promotion of local entrepreneurs, promotion of locally adapted fruit species, and they have a twinning agreement with a mountainous area in Kirgizstan.

Further information is available under [www.alpverein.ch](http://www.alpverein.ch) (in German only)

I am satisfied with OM while using it for monitoring and evaluation. I am not so satisfied with using OM for planning. But the problem is not with OM, the problem is with me, or with the sometimes tough guidelines of the mandates.

When I started using OM in 2004 in the context of international development cooperation, the methodology was completely new for me. I had to learn it while reading the OM manual. For that reason, the first applications of OM have been quite complicated.

Another difficulty was, that the involved project staff was well trained in LFA or the donor insisted on a logical framework as a result of our planning exercise.

Important for me was my experience in my voluntary work in the Simmental and not in the international development cooperation. Here in my home valley, the Simmental, I had to translate the methodology and terminology into the language of the people here, which is as well my mother tongue. And here I had to simplify the methodology and to adapt it towards the problems of the people, and not to adapt it towards the demand of a donor agency.

*Can you explain – what is the essence of your voluntary work in Switzerland, in which you are applying Outcome Mapping?*

In most of the projects of the “Alpverein Simmental” there is no external donor money involved. That means that the character of our projects is different than in international development cooperation.

Within the “Alpverein Simmental” we have to agree on issues, that we think are relevant and which could have an immediate output and improvements. For the realisation of the projects we need to have an idea how it could function in the future. In Outcome Mapping we call it “vision”.

Then we have to look for active and responsible people. We have to discuss about priorities and the feasibility. And last but not least we have to agree on steering and planning possibilities. That is the way how we develop our simple and strategic project concept. In the past, I always tried to visualize this situation with LFA or Outcome Mapping. By visualizing with LFA I wasn't satisfied, because the logic was in the centre, but the contributions from the team members lost their importance.

While using Outcome Mapping, the project formulation was getting too complicated for me. Suddenly I came to the conclusion that our simple and strategic project concept matches with the adapted utilisation of OM.

*Are there differences in the self-conception of organisations in Switzerland and in other countries where you have worked before?*

Yes, it is quite interesting to observe certain differences. First of all you have to mention the different context between a self-help association in Switzerland and a project with donor-funded and donor-driven activities where I have worked.

The ownership of the stakeholders in our Swiss projects is extremely high. If not, the project is not ready to start or will not run successfully. Ownership is the big challenge. Our current projects are managed by active and initiative people, mostly working on a voluntary base. They are rural farmers and have an interest in an improvement of their household economy – so they are quite pragmatic and result oriented. They are not interested in losing time with understanding new approaches or using a new and difficult terminology.

*Is there external money involved in the projects you are working in?*

No, in most of the projects there is no external money involved. So we can focus in our project management

on lean and very pragmatic ways of decision and implementation. In one case money from a Swiss foundation is involved. But this donor does not ask us for any special planning approach – so we still continue working with our adapted PCM.

#### The essence of a good PCM for projects

- Work with people who have a vision and who are motivated!
- You cannot anticipate change processes! For that reason:
  - Prepare lean strategic plans only
  - Plan your activities in Yearly Operational Plans (which are continuously updated with the strategy)
  - Set priorities and implement according to them using a step-by-step approach (don't try to change too much...)
  - During implementation apply the principle of “trial and error”
  - During implementation apply the principle of continuously “learning by doing”
- Use the language of people who are working together with you

This corresponds to a PCM approach which combines Outcome Mapping, the approach of “Steering Evolution” and the Kaizen principle of “the Process of Continuous Improvement”.

*Do you see a difference in working with Swiss or for example – Nepali farmers?*

In principle, farmers are farmers. As I already mentioned before, both farmers in Switzerland and Nepal are quite pragmatic and measure the success of working with a project on its immediate outputs that are favourable for them. They want to be involved in discussions and decision making.

*What does this mean for you as a facilitator for choosing the right methodology or approach?*

It means, that I have chosen what I think we need for the better planning and realisation of our projects: And I had the feeling that we have to use a lean and comprehensive project cycle management tool with a lot of flexibility.

### Example of a project supported by “Alpverein Simmental”: Promotion of Alpine Tourism in the Simmental

Alpine Pastures, the alpine agriculture, customs and traditions of the native people in the Simmental are a good potential to attract tourists to visit the Simmental. Hiking, visits of Alps and guided tours, information and special attractions, alpine culinary specialities and cultural events are only some example, what you can do in the Simmental.

The project idea is to enable a better collaboration through forming a network of small tourism providers and farmer families in the Simmental. This network could better link with the official tourism association of the Simmental. Living traditions of native people will enrich the conventional packages of the official tourism bureaus.

This integrated marketing of conventional and individual offers is going to attract more tourists through directed information in the Internet, in catalogues and tried to coordinate the collaboration as well with other platforms of tourism bureaus in the region.

The platform [www.voralpen-ohne-grenzen.ch](http://www.voralpen-ohne-grenzen.ch) (in German and French only) is a concrete output of the project.

*And what have been the requirements for PCM tools for the projects in the “Alpverein Simmental”?*

The requirements to adequate PCM tools are, that

- they can be explained and used in the own language of the people
- they are well adapted to the real problems, and not vice versa: fitting the problems to the methodology.

I have used tools of Outcome Mapping and I have adapted and translated the terminology of OM into a language Swiss farmers understand.

*Have you tried to combine Outcome Mapping with other approaches?*

Yes, I have used essences from Outcome Mapping and have combined them with the approach of “Steering Evolution”<sup>2</sup> and the Kaizen principle of “the Process of Continuous Improvement”.

*What can OM practitioners in development cooperation learn from your experiences in Switzerland?*

First of all, the precondition of a successful project is, that there are people with a strong vision to change something in order to make it better. Together with other interested people they work out a concrete idea. Without local ownership – no project can start or be continued!

Secondly, people have to prioritize what they want to change – and they have to be realistic, on what they are able to achieve. The same applies of course for us. Use a step-by-step approach. Be careful not to overload project implementation and as well the expectation of your project team members.

Thirdly, and very important: The external supporters (project team) have a limited influence on the success of the intended project activities!

*You have been talking a lot about ownership and the influence of project supporters? What’s about the methodology?*

Approaches and methodologies should be people centred, as Outcome Mapping is.

Adapt and modify the methodology regarding to your reality and your context, in which you are working in. Do not try to adapt your environment just to follow step by step the instructions – or the manual. Don’t forget: A methodology should assist the people, not vice versa!

*Being more concrete: What have you changed by using Outcome Mapping in Switzerland?*

We have changed the wording of the OM terminology, because talking about a “boundary partner” or a “progress marker” to a Swiss farmer is not the right expression. So I have used the words and expressions people in the Simmental are using in their own language.

<sup>2</sup> Article about „Gelenkte Evolution“ – Strategiearbeit in Situationen erhöhter Unsicherheit. Prof. Dr. Christoph Lechner, University of St. Gallen, and Dr. Lukas E. Bär, Abegglen Management Consultants, published in the Magazin „Strategie“ ([www.scorecard.ch](http://www.scorecard.ch)) in German language

### The wording of “Outcome Mapping” simplified and translated into the language, people in the Simmental do understand

	Simplified wording used by “Alpverein Simmental”	steps of Outcome Mapping
strategic planning	What is not working well?	step 0 <sup>3</sup>
	What? And how should it work better than before?	Vision
	Who is able to do it? – Does everybody contribute his part, including we our-selves?	Boundary Partner
	What are the challenges?	Outcome challenge
	Is assistance needed from outside? What exactly do we need? And from whom?	Mission
yearly operational planning	Which progress is planned for the next year?	Progress marker
	Which support activities are planned?	Strategy plans
	Which organisational practises?	Organisational practices

<sup>3</sup> The so-called step 0 of Outcome Mapping tries to describe what happens before the actual Outcome Mapping starts. Step 0 basically consists of conceiving, developing and agreeing on the rough outline of the project/programme and of laying a stable base for a successful OM. It is mainly a step of negotiations and information gathering.

Further we have split OM into two parts, the strategic part and the operational part. The strategic part is slim, clear and easy to memorise in the heads. The operational part is the Yearly Plan of Operation (YPO). The strategy is regularly checked based on new experience. The YPO consequently follows the strategy. By following this principle, we don't have complicated project documents.

*Make an example: Which expression have you used instead of “boundary partner”?*

I tried to replace the expression “boundary partner” with a longer expression: “Who is able and in the right position to do it?” We have to make sure that everybody, who has a role to play, is involved instead of everybody expects others to do it.

*Are “no or low budget” projects more efficient than projects, that are externally financed by a donor agency?*

I do not want to criticise projects with external money involved. I only want to mention, that with high amounts of money the risk that changes are not sustainable is high. It is crucial, what the money is used for. Crucial question: Do we follow a comprehensive strategy of empowering people?

The institution that pays the project should not be the strongest part in the project realisation. A lot of project implementation is done to satisfy the donor agency. And from what I have seen I should say that most donors don't like the “step-by-step” or “trial and error” approach, although development as such is unpredictable.

*What do you want to share with the readers of the “Rural Development News” at the end of this interview?*

In our Swiss context, we have used a lot of time for reflection: During the implementation of a project, time should be earmarked for “learning from mistakes”. A “trial and error” component is important for the continuous learning and a parallel adaptation of the strategy. And this is my advice to all actors in development cooperation all over the world – give everybody more time to learn from mistakes – and change consequently what you have learned. This means not loss of time, but allocation of time for better results in change processes.

*Walter, thank you very much!*