

Series of blogs on Outcome Harvesting put out by the American Evaluation Association as part of its weekly blog series.

AEA365:

[Outcome Harvesting Week: What is Outcome Harvesting? Barbara Klugman, Heather Britt and Heidi Schaeffer](#)

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Barbara Klugman Heather Britt Heidi Schaeffer

Hello, we are your blog series hosts, **Barbara Klugman, Heather Britt and Heidi Schaeffer**, colleagues of Ricardo Wilson-Grau, the originator of Outcome Harvesting. Ricardo mentored and inspired many members of the AEA community. Sadly, he passed away on December 31, 2018. This series of posts on Outcome Harvesting is in his honor. In this first blog we use his own words to introduce Outcome Harvesting (OH).

“Outcome Harvesting is designed for grant makers, managers, and evaluators who commission, manage or evaluate projects, programs, or organizations that experience continual change and contend with unexpected and unforeseeable actors and factors in their programming environments.”

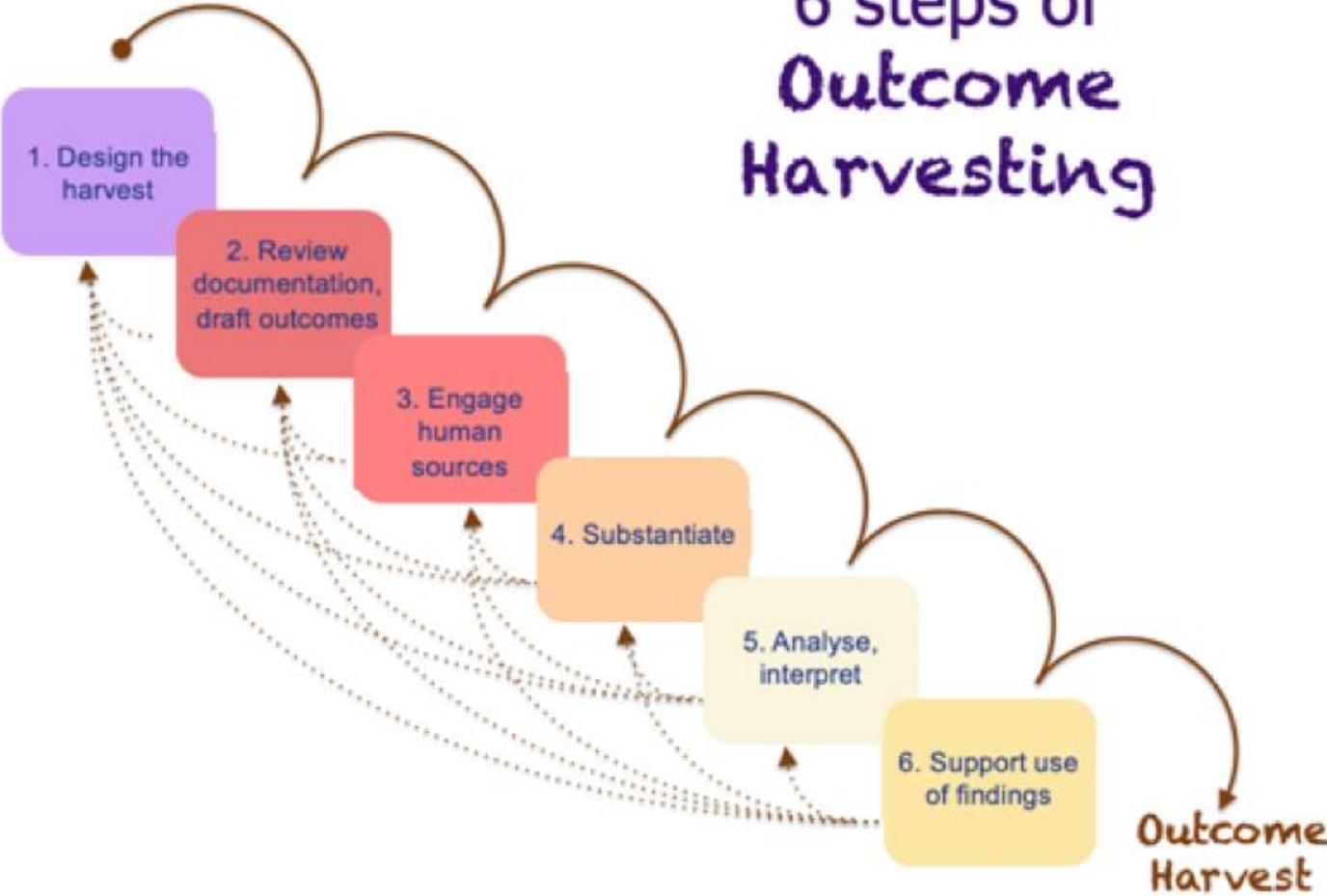
“Unlike other monitoring and evaluation approaches, Outcome Harvesting does not necessarily measure progress towards predetermined objectives or outcomes, but rather, collects evidence of what has changed and then, working backwards, determines whether and how an intervention contributed to these changes.” (2019, p1)

OH is an appropriate method when the evaluation is asking “who changed and what changed?” It is not the right method for evaluation questions such as: “Did the training program increase participants’ knowledge and skills?” It is a good method for asking questions such as: “What are the participants doing differently after acquiring new knowledge and skills?” And, “What do the organizational policy and/or practice changes look like since the training program began?”

OH describes an outcome as an observable change in behavior (relationships, actions, activities, practices or policies) of an individual, group, community, organization in civil society, corporation, government, media, or member of public. In every outcome harvest, the intended users of the harvest findings define what constitutes an outcome. An OH should seek outcomes that relate to the evaluation question, but also note unintended or unexpected outcomes and both positive and negative outcomes.

Outcome Harvesting follows six interactive steps:

6 steps of Outcome Harvesting



An outcome description includes:

- summary: who, when and where changed their behavior;
- contribution: how the intervention contributed, directly or indirectly, towards influencing that change in behavior;
- significance: of the outcome in relation to the organization's or initiative's goals.

Harvesters compile and categorize outcome descriptions (e.g. by type of actor, location, or other useful grouping). Then, harvesters interpret the patterns in the aggregated outcomes to answer monitoring and evaluation questions. Harvest users should be deeply engaged throughout analysis and interpretation.

By the end of 2016, Outcome Harvesting had been used by over 400 networks and associations, NGOs, community-based organizations, research institutes, and government agencies in 143 countries on all seven continents.

Hot Tip: Ensure that the initiative is at the point of influencing outcomes, as it can be inappropriate and disempowering to do an OH too early.

Lesson Learned:

It takes practice to confidently and accurately identify and draft outcomes and to engage the users in the whole process. If using OH for the first time, consider working with a co-facilitator or mentor familiar with the method.

Rad Resources:

- [Outcome Harvesting: Principles, Steps and Evaluation Applications](#) (IAP, 2018) by Ricardo Wilson-Grau
- World Bank, [Outcome-based Learning Field Guide](#) (2014)
- [Outcome Harvesting website](#)

*The American Evaluation Association is celebrating **Outcome Harvesting** week. The contributions all this week to aea365 come from colleagues of the late Ricardo Wilson-Grau, originator of Outcome Harvesting, and these articles are written in his honor. Do you have questions, concerns, kudos, or content to extend this aea365 contribution? Please add them in the comments section for this post on the [aea365 webpage](#) so that we may enrich our community of practice. Would you like to submit an aea365 Tip? Please send a note of interest to aea365@eval.org. aea365 is sponsored by the [American Evaluation Association](#) and provides a Tip-a-Day by and for evaluators.*

Outcome Harvesting Week: Outcome Harvesting Principles by Michael Quinn Patton

[Leave a Comment](#) / [Uncategorized](#) / [By Sheila Robinson](#) / [March 25, 2019](#)

I'm **Michael Quinn Patton**, author of *Principles-Focused Evaluation: The GUIDE (2018)*. Chapter 32 in that book presents the Principles of Outcome Harvesting by Ricardo Wilson-Grau.

Since Ricardo is tragically no longer with us, excerpts from his chapter allow him to contribute to this series, which he had planned to do.

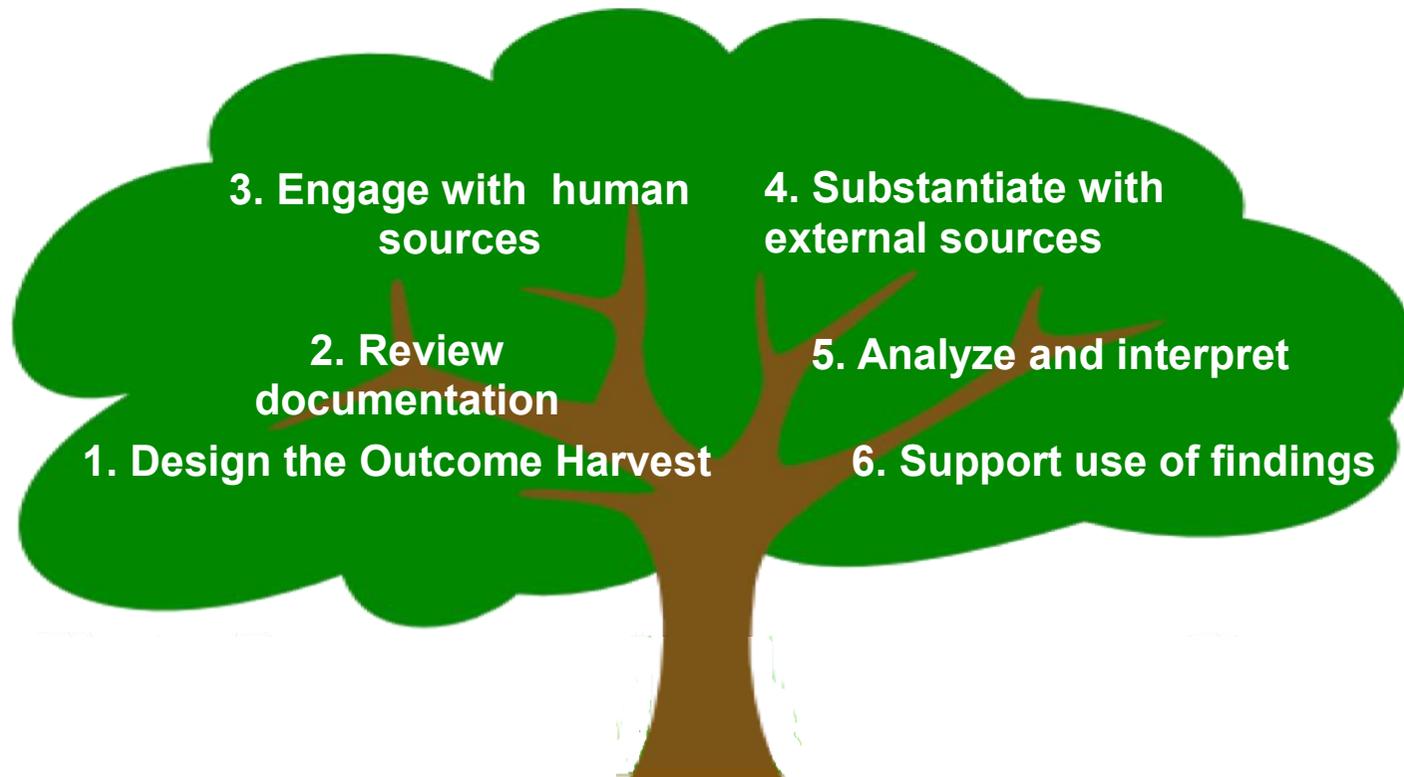
The essence of Outcome Harvesting is achieving outcomes understood as (1) observable changes in the behavior of individuals, groups, communities, organizations, or institutions, plus (2) what the intervention did that plausibly contributed to them. Ricardo wrote: *I want to articulate why I resonate so strongly to a principles- based approach to evaluation. Over the decade that I developed Outcome Harvesting, there have been three constants that I believe explain the importance of the 9 principles. The first constant was that all the 40+ projects, programs, and organizations I evaluated operated in substantially complex and dynamic situations...Their managers had found that conventional evaluation approaches were unworkable... because complexity was so substantial that managers had to change their plans so much that it made no sense to assess if they had done and achieved what was in their original plans.*

The second constant in the experience of developing Outcome Harvesting was the wide diversity represented by the projects I did ranging across the seven continents and a variety of social change and development topics.

The third constant was having to develop a mode of evaluation that responded to very different content needs while ensuring evaluation rigor. The participatory evaluation solution I found was to customize and adapt evaluations, while maintaining fidelity. That led to identifying and elaborating outcome harvesting principles

Complexity, dynamism, and diversity plus a highly participatory process were the crucible in which the six steps of Outcome Harvesting were forged, along with the awareness that each of those steps had to be customized for each evaluation design and adapted in the course of the evaluation process. But, I became concerned if not anguished to find as many misuses and abuses of Outcome Harvesting as creative advances in developing it further.

Therefore, to ensure fidelity and rigor, Ricardo identified the principles underlying the six steps of Outcome Harvesting and communicated them through the image below.



PROCESS PRINCIPLES

Facilitate usefulness throughout the harvest

Nurture appropriate participation

Coach human sources to formulate outcome statements

Strive for less because it will be more useful

Learn Outcome Harvesting experientially

CONTENT PRINCIPLES

Harvest social change outcomes

Formulate an outcome as an observable change

Establish plausible influence of the intervention

Ensure credible-enough outcomes

Lessons Learned: Principles provide grounded guidance for implementing OH in the face of complexity. Ricardo explained in correspondence: “Because adapting Outcome Harvesting’s six steps varies case by case, the guidance of the underlying principles is essential. In my experience, faulty application of Outcome Harvesting is due mainly to evaluators misunderstanding, misusing, or simply not taking into account all of the principles.”

Hot Tip: All 9 principles, adapted to context, must be consciously considered to ensure an effective Outcome Harvest.

Rad Resource: Ricardo Wilson-Grau (2018). Outcome Harvesting Evaluation: Practical Application of Essential Principles, chapter 32 in *Principles-Focused Evaluation: The Guide*, by Michael Quinn Patton, Guildford Press.

https://aea365.org/blog/outcome-harvesting-week-outcome-harvesting-principles-by-michael-quinn-patton/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+aea365+%28AEA365%29

Outcome Harvesting Week: Outcome Harvesting as a Monitoring Approach by Goele Scheers

[Leave a Comment](#) / [Uncategorized](#) / [By Sheila Robinson](#) / [March 26, 2019](#)

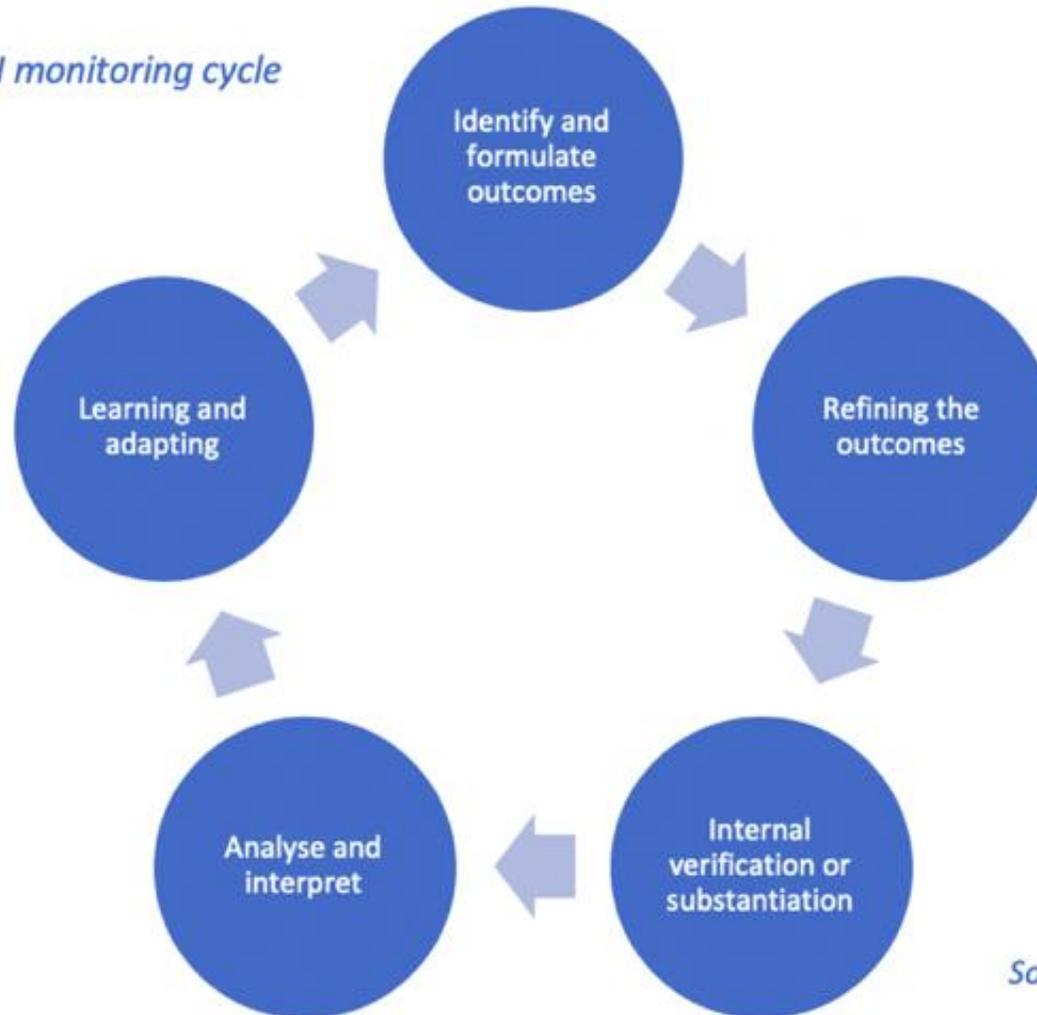
Hi, I am **Goele Scheers**, an independent M&E consultant based in Belgium. I have worked closely with Ricardo Wilson-Grau since Outcome Harvesting (OH) was being developed and was working on an OH evaluation with him throughout his final year of life. I have always used OH for both monitoring and evaluation.

Outcome Harvesting works well for monitoring because staff engaged in implementing and monitoring the program can easily grasp “outcomes” as defined by OH, and take part in data collection, analysis and use of findings. OH can be combined with other methods to strengthen a monitoring system.

In a few ways, the use of Outcome Harvesting for monitoring is different than for evaluation. In an ongoing monitoring process, the steps occur in a cycle and don’t end with the use of findings. Instead of an external consultant who coaches the sources in formulating their outcomes, an organization will need to carefully consider who will harvest outcomes from who and on which level of the organization, network or partnership the ‘pingponging’ or refining of the outcomes will take place. Different methods for harvesting the outcomes (e.g., workshops, virtually) can be used within a single organization or program, depending on the use and the context. Most of my clients have found that identifying outcomes from documentation is less useful for monitoring, as the outcomes are being captured by the informants when they occur, that means on a continuous or at least frequent basis. Substantiation may not be included in every harvest cycle or it may even be left for evaluation. In some cases, I include a step on cross-organizational verification (very useful in networks or partnerships) or internal verification (checking the outcomes between different programs). In an ongoing monitoring

process, the organization will need to decide at which point to analyze and interpret the harvested outcomes. For example, it may be that the informants upload their outcomes into a database at any point in time, but the analysis and interpretation only take place twice a year. Contrary to an external evaluation, the sources can be involved in the interpretation.

Example of an OH monitoring cycle



Source: Goele Scheers

Lessons Learned: When using OH for monitoring, it can be challenging to keep the enthusiasm from the first harvesting round in subsequent rounds. Use of the harvest findings is the best motivator! Program staff are most likely to remain actively engaged in harvesting outcomes when they are able to use the findings to strengthen the program and its results.

Hot Tips:

- Incorporate the harvesting and sensemaking moments into existing spaces in the organization so it is not experienced as something additional that needs to be done.
- Organizations that use OH on an ongoing basis, will sooner or later need a database to store all the outcomes. Look into the tools the organization is using already to see if they can be adapted for OH. I've found Podio a very useful tool for harvesting, refining and storing the outcomes.

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Outcome Harvesting Week: Using Outcome Harvesting Principles to Enhance Equity and Inclusion by Heidi Schaeffer

[Leave a Comment](#) / [Uncategorized](#) / [By Sheila Robinson](#) / [March 27, 2019](#)

Hi, I'm **Heidi Schaeffer**, chair of the global Outcome Mapping Learning Community and mentee of Ricardo Wilson-Grau, author of [*Outcome Harvesting: Principles, Steps and Evaluation Applications*](#). My consulting focuses on multi-partner strategy, monitoring and evaluation for community health and wellbeing. I use an equity-informed Outcome Harvesting approach to monitor health equity with healthcare organizations that privileges the participation and inclusion of equity-seeking groups. The primary users and uses of this type of equity-informed Outcome Harvesting approach include people and groups, usually living in proximity, that are experiencing systemic discrimination, stereotyping and bias in the healthcare system.



(Adapted from original concept by Craig Froehle <https://plus.google.com/+CraigFroehle/posts/AdKcNKesXwa>)

Hot Tip: In order to learn what outcomes are being achieved in a large healthcare organization you can use Outcome Harvesting to monitor who is changing, and in what ways the changes demonstrate significant patterns of progress towards inclusive and culturally safe healthcare experiences for equity-seeking groups.

Considerable work is going into reducing health disparities and advancing organization-wide strategies and tools aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination and oppression. However, healthcare organizations will not be able to see their way out of a system that is blinded by historical discrimination and invisible dominant perspectives. The changes that are needed to build more inclusive and culturally safe healthcare organizations must be informed by ongoing connections with people and groups with differing experiences of privilege, inclusion and discrimination.

Hot Tip: The principle of “*nurturing appropriate participation*” in the implementation of Outcome Harvesting can be based on inclusive leadership practices that support anti-racist, culturally safe and accessible participation.

Hot Tip: To advance equity and inclusion, the OH principle of “harvesting social change outcomes” needs to focus the monitoring or evaluation questions on outcomes that describe shifts in power relationships and allyship practices.

Rad Resource: Indigenous Allyship toolkit: https://gallery.mailchimp.com/86d28ccd43d4be0cfc11c71a1/files/102bf040-e221-4953-a9ef-9f0c5efc3458/Ally_email.pdf

Many changes in the organizational culture may appear as small actions, such as a rainbow sign in the waiting room declaring a safe space for LGBT people, a gender-free symbol on the washroom door and including an Indigenous land acknowledgement before each

staff meeting. These changes may be difficult to recognize as outcomes.



Hot Tip: The OH principle of “formulating outcomes as an observable change”, when carried out with equity-seeking groups, can help healthcare organizations document, appreciate and advance less visible outcomes.

In the paper, “*The Waters of System Change*” the authors, John Kania, Mark Kramer and Peter Senge, state, “Real and equitable progress requires exceptional attention to the detailed and often mundane work of noticing what is invisible to many”

Lesson Learned: Equity-informed Outcome Harvesting steps and principles make hard to see organizational outcomes more visible and is a promising approach to evaluating health equity in healthcare systems.

Rad Resource: “Waters of System Change” https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change

Cool Trick: Ask for help. A generous community of Outcome Harvesting and Outcome Mapping practitioners answer questions and provide feedback at www.outcomeharvesting.net and www.outcomemapping.ca

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Outcome Harvesting Week: Outcome Harvesting: Revealing types and patterns of change over time by Barbara Klugman

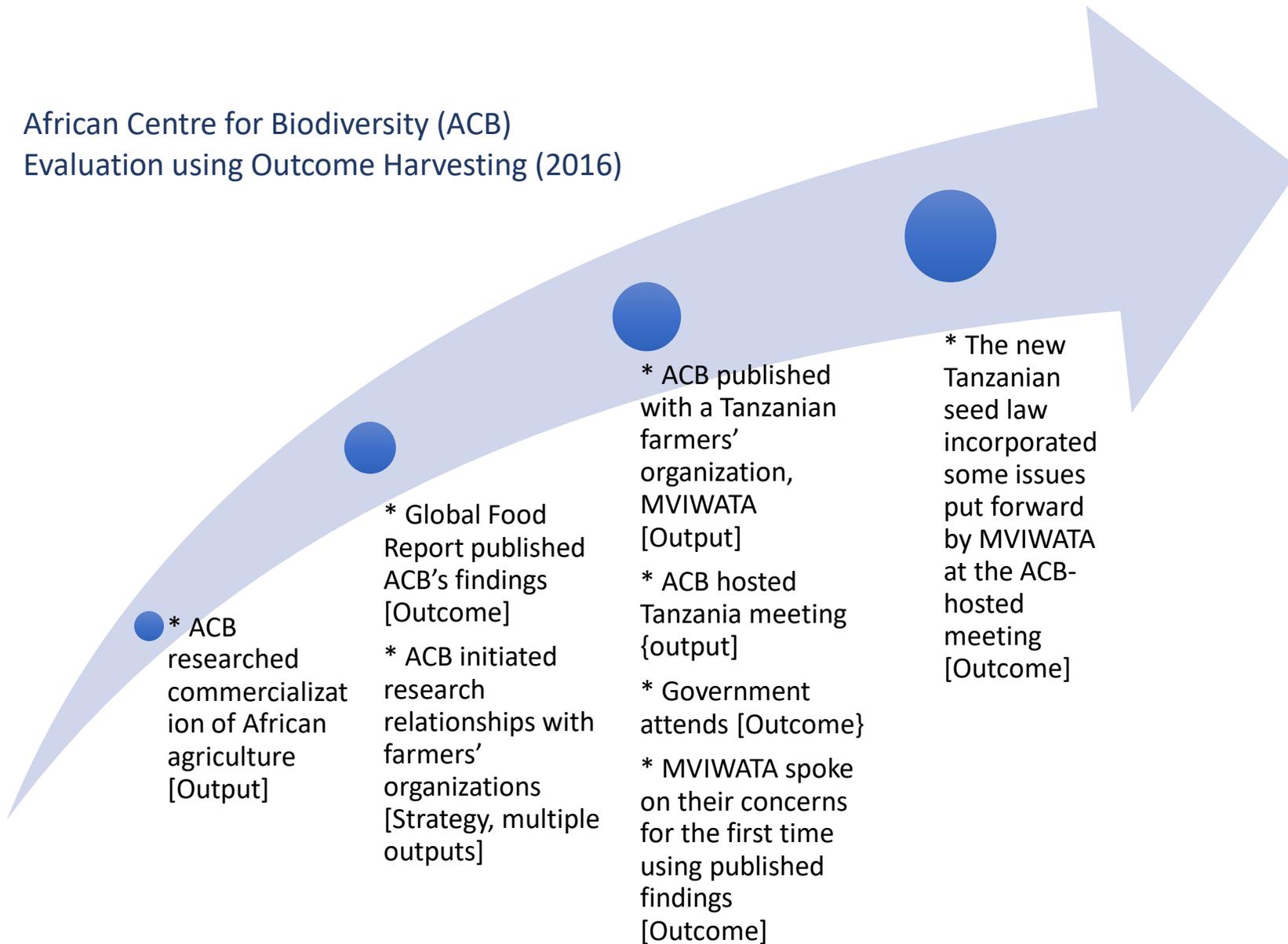
[Leave a Comment](#) / [Uncategorized](#) / [By Sheila Robinson](#) / [March 28, 2019](#)

Hi, I am **Barbara Klugman**, an independent evaluator based in South Africa. I use outcomes harvesting mostly for evaluating progress of social justice advocacy initiatives and outcomes of training initiatives. I also support funders in using it for monitoring progress and strategic learning about their grantmaking portfolios.

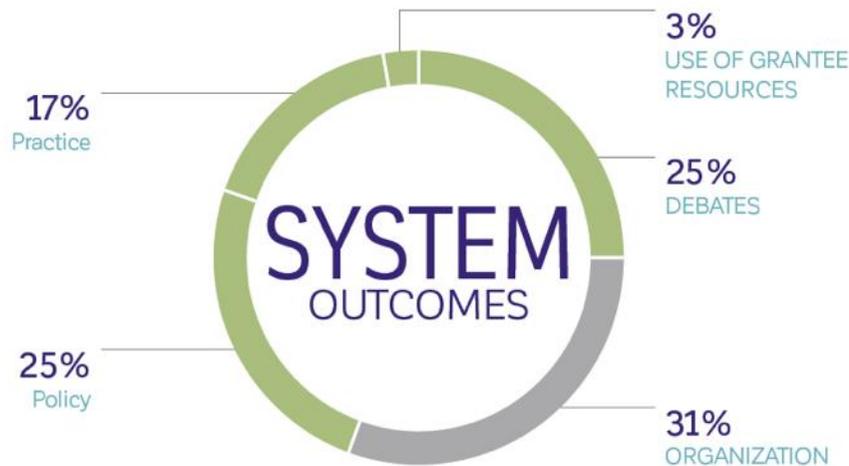
OH can reveal processes and patterns of change over time by analyzing sets of outcomes. Ricardo Wilson-Grau, the originator of OH, notes that, *“The true value of an outcome harvest is not collecting individual outcomes but demonstrating how sets of outcomes reveal processes and patterns of change over time. So, the evaluator must take care not to be drowned in outcome detail and ensure that the story or picture of change emerges.”* [[Outcome Harvesting Principles in Practice](#) 2016] This can be done in diverse ways.

Cool Trick: Collect and analyze small outcomes over time. When collecting outcomes over time, OH tells the story of how one group, in collaboration with others, influenced specific outcomes over time as illustrated by the example below.

African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB)
Evaluation using Outcome Harvesting (2016)



Cool Trick: Categorize outcomes by type. During analysis, categorize the outcomes into different types. For each harvest, the types are developed based on the question being asked. For example, a harvest user tracking outcome of an advocacy initiative sorted outcomes as illustrated in the figure below. Analysis revealed the proportions of outcomes aimed at influencing government that were actual changes of policy versus changes in narrative and debates, versus changes in organizational capacities, among others, again something unpredictable in advance and across very diverse organizations and regions. It is this kind of quantitative data that gives an overview of what is happening in a large multi-issue, multi-organizational initiative and surfaces strategic questions going forward.



Cool Trick: Look for patterns. OH reveals patterns that of change not predicted in advance. For example, an outcome harvest was part of an evaluation of Ford Foundation's 2012-2017, \$54million *Strengthening Human Rights Worldwide global initiative* (SHRW). The initiative aimed to influence the human rights movement internationally, in particular the agency and influence of groups in the global south. The grantees developed their own strategies to achieve this broad objective. Not surprisingly, the actual outcomes targeting governments or inter-governmental human rights bodies demonstrated most changes were at the international level (42%) or at national level (35%). What was unanticipated was that 23% related to regional human rights institutions. This unintended and unexpected finding alerted the evaluation users to the extent to which human rights groups are now focusing attention at regional level.

Lessons Learned: Harvesting over a number of years reveals the nuances of organizations' contributions towards high level goals. Harvesting across a diverse portfolio of organizations demonstrates their cumulative influence on different types of outcomes.

Rad Resource:

- Further demonstration of how the method reveals patterns can be seen in the report of the Ford Foundation Review

https://aea365.org/blog/outcome-harvesting-week-outcome-harvesting-revealing-types-and-patterns-of-change-over-time-by-barbara-klugman/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+aea365+%28AEA365%29

Outcome Harvesting Week: Commissioning and Managing an Outcome Harvest: Optimizing participation and adaptation by Heather Britt

[Leave a Comment](#) / [Uncategorized](#) / [By Sheila Robinson](#) / [March 29, 2019](#)

Hello! I am **Heather Britt**, Senior M&E Specialist with Social Solutions International, the contractor for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Expanding Monitoring and Evaluation Capacities Building Task Order (MECap). I co-authored the [*Outcome Harvesting*](#) brief with Ricardo in 2012 and I have been supporting the use of Outcome Harvesting (OH) and other complexity-aware approaches in USAID programming since 2013.

Donors, evaluation commissioners and managers play a critical role in creating an enabling environment for complexity-aware approaches such as OH. They structure evaluation processes and provide resources that support participatory and iterative processes of design and implementation.

The OH evaluator and primary intended user co-design the OH and collaborate on major decisions throughout the harvest. A launch workshop is often central to OH co-design. In the workshop, the primary intended user provides the OH evaluator with information about the evaluand, its context, and the decisions that will be informed by the OH. The evaluator coaches users about OH and facilitates the design to ensure that users make informed decisions. The co-design process ensures that the OH meets the specific information needs of the primary intended user.

Many institutionalized processes for planning, contracting and managing evaluations are not well suited to participatory and adaptive approaches, such as OH. In some organizations, processes for planning and procuring evaluations may hinder co-design by making important decisions without the input of the OH evaluator or setting aside insufficient resources and time for co-design. In others, the organization hands key decisions to the evaluator thereby limiting organizational buy-in.

Hot Tip: Evaluation commissioners and managers support a successful OH by including participation and adaptive management as guiding principles in the evaluation scope of work, funding a co-design launch workshop, and ensuring primary intended users take part in co-design at launch and at key points during the harvest.

The harvest process will inevitably require adjustments during implementation. The evaluation plan should allow evaluator and primary intended users to adapt the plan together. Large programs with multiple stakeholders may struggle to implement OH adaptively. Decision making slows as the number of stakeholders and their degrees of separation from the evaluation increases. Evaluation managers should be proactive about facilitating effective and efficient decision making to keep the OH moving forward.

Hot Tip: Distinguish who will take an active role in evaluation decisions (primary intended users) from those consulted or informed. Convene an evaluation steering committee and clarify members' roles.

Rad Resources:

Outcome Harvesting: Promises and Pitfalls of Participatory Design: This AEA presentation outlines ways that evaluation commissioners and evaluators can work together to overcome common challenges to commissioning and managing successful OH evaluations.

Eight Promising Practices for M&E in Support of Adaptive Management: This document presents early findings from research on USAID's use of complexity-aware approaches (including OH). Consider findings #6 and #7 when drafting an OH work plan and schedule. Finding #5 is relevant when recruiting members of the evaluation team.

Hot Tip: Contact the [OH forum](#) to identify a qualified OH practitioner to lead or mentor you in the harvest.

https://aea365.org/blog/outcome-harvesting-week-commissioning-and-managing-an-outcome-harvest-optimizing-participation-and-adaptation-by-heather-britt/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+aea365+%28AEA365%29