The Super Duper Self Monitoring Solution

Partnership Initiative of the International Budget Partnership

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Self Monitoring is one of the components of the Partnership Initiative's Learning Program. Self Monitoring allows you to track whether your strategies are working as you expected them to. It can help you to identify weaknesses in your strategy while it is still underway. You can then make adjustments to achieve better outcomes.[1]

When you design an advocacy strategy, you make assumptions about how change can be brought about. All advocacy strategies contain a chain of assumed links between your actions and the consequences of your actions. Advocacy strategies fail when these assumed links do not work as you thought they would. Therefore, it is essential to monitor these links between cause and effect even while you are busy implementing your strategy. If your actions are not bringing about the effects you expected, you can adjust your plans to ensure that you still reach your objectives. To make such strategic decisions, you need regular information about the effects of your budget research and advocacy work. Self Monitoring helps you to gather such information.

There are four steps in the Self Monitoring cycle:

STEP 1: Formulate a Theory of Change.

STEP 2: Formulate the indicators that can tell you if your Theory of Change is working.

STEP 3: Collect indicator data.

STEP 4: Use this data to adjust your Theory of Change.

[1] Self Monitoring is not an impact assessment tool. Impact assessment demands different information and different ways of collecting and interpreting information. Impact assessment is dealt with elsewhere in the PI Learning Program.

STEP 1 ► Formulate a Theory of Change

What is a Theory of Change (ToC)?

A ToC is an explanation of how you expect one of your organization's strategies to work. It shows the chain of cause and effect between one of the strategies or sets of strategies that your organization uses and the ultimate results that you hope to achieve. These assumed links between what we do and what we hope to achieve can also be expressed in diagrams.

Why do you need a ToC?

Apart from helping organizations to formulate and refine their strategies, a ToC is also useful to unpack the assumptions and linkages implicit in these strategies. Understanding these linkages is essential for designing a self-monitoring framework.

What if you don't know what your ToC is?

Most organizations already have a ToC for their key campaigns or areas of work, even if it has not been expressed consciously. It is difficult to undertake Self Monitoring when your ToC is not explicit. In order to "see" and make explicit the ToC of your organization, consider the following questions:

1. **Ultimate goal**: What is your organization ultimately trying to change? Your ultimate objective is usually not to see budget changes, but rather changes in peoples' well-being. Whose quality of life are you aiming to improve, and how will these improvements be seen? *The answer to this question usually forms the last block or linkage in your Theory of Change.*

2. **Budget changes**: To achieve your ultimate goal, it is usually necessary to bring about some changes to the budget process (participation, transparency) and/or to budget policy (increased allocations, reduced corruption). What changes in budget process and/or budget policy are you trying to bring about?

3. **Policy makers**: To bring about these budget changes, action may be required from one or more specific policy makers. Who needs to make a decision, change their mind or act differently before your desired budget changes can take place? Which specific policy makers (for example, Head of the Budget Office, or Chair of the Finance Committee in Parliament) are you trying to influence? In some cases these policy makers may include donors or international financial institutions.

4. **Activities to influence policy makers**: What are you planning to do (research, media briefings, marches, and so forth) to influence the decision makers targeted in 3 above?

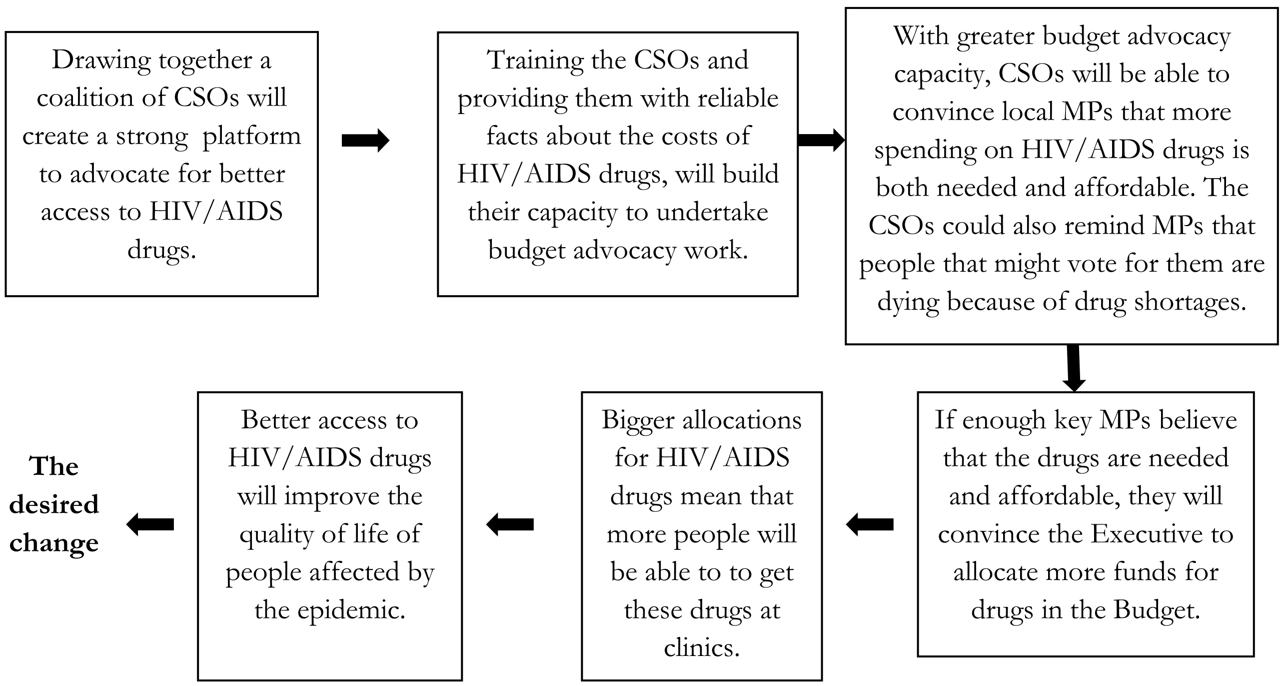
5. **Other stakeholders**: Sometimes 'budget CSOs' do not try to influence policy makers directly. Instead they influence and support other actors to do so. Which CSOs, media, donors, or other stakeholders are you trying to influence?

6. **Activities to influence other stakeholders**: What are you doing (training, coalition building, research briefings, and so forth) to inform, influence or support these stakeholders?

7. **Desired catalyst**: What do you assume these other stakeholders will be able and committed to do in terms of questions 1 to 4 above, as a result of how you have informed, trained or supported them?

Using your answers to the questions above, create a simple flow diagram to express your Theory of Change. For example, imagine a CSO that has the aim of ensuring that HIV/AIDS drugs are available at clinics in their area. To advocate for this change, they draw together a coalition of researchers, community groups and other CSOs. They undertake a costing exercise to work out exactly how much would be needed to provide the drugs at clinics. They then brief the coalition members on the results of the costing, and train them on how to use the findings to lobby local Members of Parliament on the issue.

The Theory of Change that underpins this strategy can be presented as follows:



STEP 2 ► Formulate indicators

The next step in the Self Monitoring cycle is to identify and formulate indicators that can tell you if your Theory of Change is working. What information could you gather about how your activities have been received by your target audiences? Such information will tell you how your target audiences have reacted after being in contact with you and your activities. Did they ignore you? Did they ask for more information? Did journalists come to your media conference? Did people make follow-up requests for information?

The table below presents some typical target audiences for budget advocacy work, together with possible indicators for monitoring their reception of your work.

Possible indicators of target audiences' responses to your activities

Possible indicators	**Citizens**	**CSOs**	**Media**	**Legislatures**	**Executive**	**Donors**
Number of people attending your events (hearings, training or briefings)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Number of times they invite you to briefings, hearings or meetings				✓	✓	✓
Feedback on whether they find your work useful and what they use it for	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Number of requests for information	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
No of Members of coalition	✓	✓				
Interviews with key members of target audience	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Number of articles written/programs aired			✓			
Number of times your organization is mentioned in the media			✓			
Number of times your organization is mentioned in Hansard (legislature records)				✓		

To formulate indicators, consider the various activities that make up your strategy, and then identify ways of monitoring the target audiences involved in each activity. The example on the following page illustrates how different indicators are needed for different target audiences.

Example ► Different indicators for different target audiences

Think back to the HIV/AIDS coalition used as an example under Step 1. This organization wanted to use budget advocacy tools to ensure that HIV/AIDS drugs were available at local clinics. To pursue this aim, they undertook three main activities:

Activity 1: Create and train a coalition of community groups, researchers and other CSOs to advocate for this change.

Activity 2: Cost the provision of these drugs and brief the coalition on the findings.

Activity 3: Use the costing and the coalition to convince MPs that these drugs are needed and affordable. (Their ToC assumed that the MPs would then convince the Executive to make the necessary changes to the Budget).

The target audience for Activity 1 and Activity 2 is the same, namely civil society. In order to monitor the response of civil society to their activities, the organization identified the following potential indicators:

- Questionnaire to capture feedback from participants in coalition-building and training events.
- Interviews with coalition partners about the value of costing the drugs.
- Number of times the findings of the costing exercise are used in the advocacy campaign.
- Survey to gauge levels of awareness in broader civil society as to the value of using costing to support advocacy.
- Number of CSOs that asked for training in costing.
- Number of new subscriptions to their newsletters and other media.
- Number of hits on the relevant parts of their website.

The target audience of Activity 3 was Members of Parliament. In order to monitor whether this part of their strategy was working as planned, the organization used the following indicators:

- Number of requests for information from MPs & other policy makers.
- Number of invitations from government to attend meetings or hearings.
- Periodic interviews with some MPs on the use and value of this CSO work.
- Number of new parliamentary subscriptions to their newsletters and other media.

STEP 3 ► Collect indicator data

The indicators you identified under Step 2 only become useful once you start collecting the data. Keep the following guidelines in mind as you tackle this next step:

1. **Be realistic.** Start by collecting information on *some*, rather than all, of your key activities or campaigns. Start with 3 to 5 indicators, and rather track too few than too many in the beginning. Once your Self Monitoring system is established, you can always add to your indicators.

2. **Go beyond what you already know**. Discard indicators that don't reveal anything new or interesting about your ToC. If you know you get many requests for information from the Executive of government, counting such requests is unlikely to tell you anything of interest. Interviews with key members of the Executive about how they use such information may tell you more. Likewise, if you know you receive a lot of media coverage, simply counting media reports may not tell you anything new. Monitoring whether you get more coverage after important media briefings or reports will tell you more about the success of each of your activities.

3. **Look for information that is cheap and easy to collect**. For example, it may be easier to ask a quarter of conference participants to complete a feedback questionnaire than getting the whole group to respond. Following up with four or five key participants a few months later, could give you some idea of whether the impact lasted Similarly, getting feedback from one or two carefully selected people in the Executive or Legislature, may be more feasible than monitoring all contact with or reaction from these institutions.

4. **Clarify who is responsible**. Give one person in your organization overall responsibility for the collection of this information. This person may need to ask others for help, but is responsible for ensuring that everyone is contributing as required.

5. **Put systems in place**. In most CSOs, people are very busy. They may not want another task added to their duties. If you are going to collect information for Self Monitoring in an on-going way, you will need to find easy and regular ways of doing so. Some ideas:
   - Place a sheet of paper next to every telephone for people to tick when they speak to the media or another partner or policy maker.
   - Create a central email address where members of your organization can send emails to record such information.

- Create a standard feedback form for your workshops and/or briefings.

Example ► Gathering indicator data on success of capacity-building

A civil society budget group has mounted a campaign for greater transparency during the drafting stage of the budget. They think that greater transparency at this stage of the budget process will help CSOs to lobby for bigger allocations for pro-poor programs, and that increased pressure from the media and CSOs will force the Executive to make the desired changes to their budget proposals. To further this goal, the budget group first determined exactly who controls the flow of information about the budget and what might be the most effective entry points for lobbying. They then adopted three main activities:

> **Activity 1**: Building the capacity of the media and encouraging them to produce stories about the benefits of greater transparency in the preparation of the national budget.
> **Activity 2**: Using the Open Budget Index as a tool to publicize the issue of budget transparency through briefings, short papers etc.
> **Activity 3**: Training civil society allies on how to use the OBI and other tools in their advocacy campaigns to influence the Executive's budget proposals.

With respect to **Activity 1**, the budget group gathered indicator data as follows:

- They tracked the number of journalists trained.
- They gathered feedback from participants on the value of the training.
- They monitored the number of relevant stories in the media that were authored by their media-based trainees.

For **Activity 2**, the budget group gathered the following indicator data:

- They kept careful records of all the events they convened where the OBI was discussed and used to promote greater transparency. [not sure about this one, as it is simply recording their activity.]
- They recorded who attended these events.
- They tracked the number of requests for information that they got from policy makers subsequent to these events.
- They sought anonymous feedback from attendees of their briefing events [You probably need to discuss the question of whether indicators need to be quantitative.]

For **Activity 3**, the budget group collected the following indicator data:

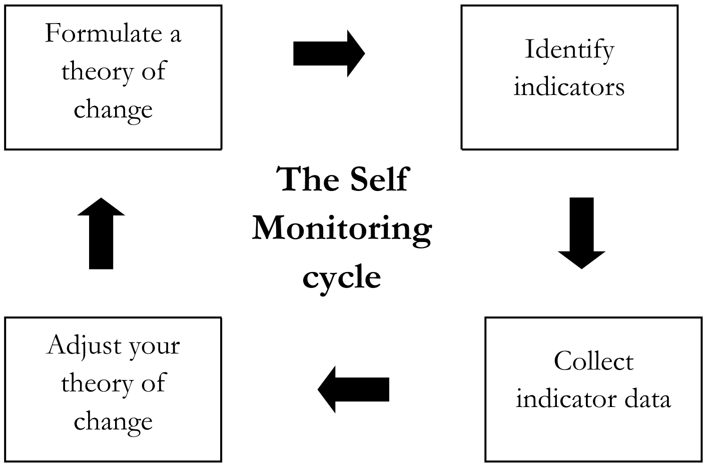
- They monitored the advocacy strategies used by their civil society partners to see whether or not these organizations were using the information about entry points and which government officials control the flow of information.

STEP 4 ► Use this data to adjust your Theory of Change

The information collected for Self Monitoring only becomes useful if you reflect on what it tells you about your ToC. Collecting masses of information and only using it to report to the IBP or other donors defeats the main purpose of the exercise. Here are some ideas about how to use this information:

- Haki Elimu and the Omar Ashgar Kahn Development Foundation hold quarterly and annual meetings where they reflect on how effective their work has been. These would be useful occasions to reflect on Self Monitoring information.
- Could your IBP mentor or contact help you to draw strategic conclusions from your Self Monitoring information?
- Is there another organization in the Partnership Initiative that does similar work to you? Would it make sense to twin with them and to schedule quarterly or six-monthly phone calls to discuss your respective Self Monitoring information?
- How can you use IBP or PI meetings as occasions to reflect on your Self Monitoring information? Consider asking to have a session where you present your strategy and Self Monitoring information for the whole group to reflect on.
- If you find this whole exercise boring and arduous, go back to the indicators you chose and see if you can think of information that is of more strategic value to you. Self Monitoring only becomes exciting when it starts telling you things that you didn't know before.

When the Self Monitoring cycle is operating optimally, this final step should lead you straight back to the beginning with a new Theory of Change: [This sounds as if it is a completely new ToC. What happens if your first theory was perfect??]


Formulate a theory of change
Identify indicators
The Self Monitoring cycle
Collect indicator data
Adjust your theory of change