

# **ACTION RESEARCH PARTICIPATORY PM&E TOOLS 'I DEAL' INTERVENTION**

## **SUMMARY**



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## WHY AN ACTION RESEARCH ABOUT PM&E?

War Child Holland has taken part in a thematic learning programme on complexity oriented PM&E from 2010-2012, for several reasons:

- Difficulties in measuring (psycho)social changes in post conflict areas
- Need for strengthening evidence base of War Child methodologies
- Need for participative and child-friendly PM&E methods
- Ambition to better balance accountability and learning

This case description will elaborate on the pilot implementation of the innovative, participatory PM&E tools of War Child Holland's psychosocial life skills intervention 'I DEAL'. These PM&E tools were first piloted in 2010, further adapted with the input of all field offices in 2011 and rolled out in 2011-2012.

The action research aimed to identify ways that work best for I DEAL facilitators to learn and act on basis of their PM&E. The action research aimed to identify to what extent the participatory PM&E facilitates learning about the outcomes, for quality assurance of the intervention and its implementation as well as for accountability purposes.

Learning activities conducted within the learning trajectory were:

- a) reflection meetings with facilitators,
- b) an exchange meeting between Ugandan and South Sudanese facilitators and
- c) an international meeting, attended by almost all field offices to jointly conclude and draw an action plan on the implications for practice of the PM&E outcomes.

### I DEAL

I DEAL is WCH's creative life skills methodology for groups of children (11-15 years) and young people (16-20 years) in conflict-affected areas. The intervention provides a series of theme-based life skills workshops to improve children and young people's psychosocial wellbeing.

This is done through combining creative and participatory techniques, such as role play, drawing, games and group discussions. In I DEAL different psychosocial themes are addressed: identity, dealing with emotions, peer relations, relationships with adults, conflict and peace and the future.

Each theme is addressed in a module that consists of 2 to 5 sessions, each lasting 1.5 hour. The total length of the intervention varies between 4- 6 months, depending

on breaks due to school holidays and other factors delaying a cycle. The groups consist of 15-30 participants and are facilitated by social workers (hereafter facilitators).



## GENERAL LESSONS LEARNED REGARDING COMPLEXITY ORIENTED PM&E

1. The participatory PM&E tools tested in this action research proved to stimulate reflection and learning at various levels in the organization.

- Facilitators learnt about their role in achieving outcomes, in clarifying needs and expectations of participants and if facilitated and documented well the tools are suitable for measuring psychosocial outcomes at individual level.
- Trainers learnt about the need for continued and strengthened training and on the job coaching
- At the level of Head Office and management, War Child Holland learnt about the need for resources for capacity building on PM&E and for reflection meetings and about specific needs for further adapting the intervention and our PM&E approaches.
- At all levels, the added value of participatory PM&E became clear. The main challenge to ensure meaningful participation of children and young people in the PM&E was the limited documentation of their feedback. Ideally, exact quotes are documented to prevent misinterpretation from adults.

2. It turned out to be difficult to strive for uniform tools that are appropriate in all countries where War Child Holland works. Therefore, during the international learning event, a PM&E working group was set up to review the PM&E in 2013 and that better involves the end-users (facilitators) in shaping contextually appropriate PM&E tools. This ensures ownership and user-friendliness to facilitate correct, consistent use of the PM&E and ultimately learning.

3. Extra time needs to be planned for PM&E and documentation should be minimized.

4. Many participants shared that informal discussions and reflection meetings make it much easier to reflect and learn, instead of using set PM&E exercises and formal reporting forms, often causing social desirable answers. Reflection meetings also turned out to have a strong

capacity building potential, stimulate the use of PM&E and foster learning. Therefore it is worthwhile to always integrate reflection meetings as a PM&E tool, to create a space for learning and quality assurance.

**“The PM&E helps me in planning for my session, understanding the groups and deciding on areas to improve on so as I facilitate well.”**

Female Facilitator, Uganda

5. To stimulate consistent use of the tools, the PM&E exercises were integrated into the different modules of the intervention instead of described in an additional toolkit. However, in cases where I DEAL is only a small part of a broader programme, there should be less emphasis on its specific PM&E tools. Instead, tools should be added that can measure the outcomes of the broader programmes.

6. Continued training and support is needed in documentation and analysis and in implementing the PM&E in a true participatory manner.

## LESSONS LEARNED REGARDING PARTICIPATORY PM&E TOOLS

TOOLS PILOTED IN 2010	LESSONS LEARNED 2010-2011	LESSONS LEARNED 2012
Personal Goal setting by children and young people	Very participatory, empowering and useful information. One limitation was a 'ceiling effect' due to having only three answering options 'I entirely achieved my goal, 'I almost achieved my goal' and 'I didn't achieve my goal'. Hence, a continuous line of 10 cm was used from 2011 onwards to start measuring progress towards achieving their personal goal, more precisely before and after the intervention (to be quantified from 1-10 cm).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Useful for measuring outcomes</li> <li>2. Clarified expectations for the intervention for participants (beneficiaries)</li> <li>3. Facilitators learnt more about the expectations of the participants.</li> <li>4. Stimulated facilitators to reflect on their role in achieving the overall intervention objectives, and plan accordingly.</li> <li>5. Documentation of the specific learning objective turned out to be challenging for facilitators due to the large groups and limited time. Planning for an extra session for the personal goal setting may be needed.</li> <li>6. More data will be needed to conclude about the usefulness of the continuous line for measuring progress towards personal goal achievement. At the moment, there are contradicting findings; some found it very easy to use, some found it extremely challenging.</li> </ol>
Module Evaluations	Module evaluations were shortened in response to feedback that there was too much documentation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Participants felt empowered when asked for their opinion about the sessions.</li> <li>2. Limited documentation due to time and capacity constraints. Findings were shared during reflection meetings, which can be a good way forward but may at the same time limit the meaningful participation of children and young people in evaluating the modules</li> <li>3. Generates a lot of useful information regarding parts of modules that need adaptation according to participants and to increase user-friendliness for facilitators</li> <li>4. The method of group discussion was perceived as repetitive. More dynamic and easy to document methods for evaluating modules are needed.</li> </ol>
Final Evaluation	Informative regarding what was learnt, likes and dislikes of participants. To learn more about outcomes, observations from facilitator were added to the evaluation.	See lessons for module evaluations
Quizzes (conducted in group)	Quizzes were a useful tool to recap the modules, but resulted in limited information for learning about outcomes, since it concerned a group average knowledge score. Quizzes were left out after consultative process with all field offices.	NA
Impact Map (pre-post test and 3 months follow-up)	There was limited documentation about the results of the impact map and its usefulness to learn about outcomes. Impact map was left out after consultative process with all field offices.	NA

## LEARNING ABOUT OUTCOMES: PARTICIPANT-LED INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

The personal goal exercise gave insight into the needs of the participants, and in the outcomes of the intervention. Documentation of the personal goals and the scores turned out to be the main challenge. More data will be needed to be able to conclude how useful the new way of measuring progress is. The PM&E working group will further work on adapting the tools in 2013.

See examples below of personal goals of children and young people in Uganda and in how far they were achieved:

A girl who wanted to change her habit of quarreling, "I find my self quarreling all the time", shared that she had partly reached her personal goal after I DEAL: "**no more quarreling, but still working on fear.**"

"To settle conflict among friends at home"  
After I DEAL, this participant had explained he had achieved his personal goal because he "**can advise whenever there is a problem among the brothers**".

"To gain confidence". After I DEAL, one participant felt he/she achieved his goal entirely, by explaining "**able talk boldly without being shaken**"

**"The personal goal exercise helps you to know what type of children you're working with."**

Male facilitator South Sudan



## **LESSONS LEARNED FOR IMPROVED QUALITY, PRACTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

During the reflection meetings with facilitators, there was space to share pressing issues that affected the facilitator's ability to implement the intervention.

Additionally, during the international learning event, where 9 out of 11 field offices were represented, the main lessons learned resulted in an action plan for 2013 regarding general prerequisites for quality:

- Resources need to be available for
  - continuous capacity building, reflection meetings and coaching (regarding content, facilitation skills and in conducting, documenting and analyzing PM&E).
  - financial motivation of facilitators
  - for revisions of the modules and other DEALS packages (for adolescents, parents, teenage mothers, female sex workers, etc)
- Organize programme broad reflection meetings
- Ensure a creative and participatory approach in our PM&E
- Ensure support in storage and analysis of PM&E data

### **Lessons learnt regarding accountability**

1. Downward accountability (towards beneficiary/participant/community): Community closing events are a good practice to share and celebrate what has been achieved and provide a platform for discussion at the same time.
2. Upward accountability (towards donor): To account for development results and efficiency, improved PM&E tools and strengthened PM&E capacity are needed. Additional, more systematic and in-depth research will be needed. War Child Holland therefore also conducts an academic effect- and process evaluation research in Colombia and in the Republic of South Sudan.
3. Horizontal accountability (within organization)  
Both for upward and horizontal accountability, more systematic and detailed documentation of PM&E data will be needed. In addition, exchanging this information and sharing lessons learned needs to be further stimulated within the organization.





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