

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

2018 IMPACT & LEARNING STANDARDS

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INTRODUCTION

How does human rights change happen? How do we, as a global organisation supporting millions of supporters and activists, contribute to it? And how can we continually learn from our work and increase our impact?

Being able to answer these questions and to generate the knowledge that we need to adapt our strategies in an ever-changing external environment is a key ambition of our impact and learning system – that is a key component of Amnesty International’s overall approach to project management.

We believe that investing in impact and learning not only helps us understand how we can best support human rights change, but it also ensures that we are accountable to rights-holders, partners, the wider public, as well as inside the organisation.

This document provides an overview of our **impact & learning minimum standards**. These are the practices that we expect every staff at Amnesty International to follow in their day to day work.

THE PILLARS OF OUR IMPACT AND LEARNING PRACTICE

We recognise that, rather than the product of a single intervention, human rights change is the result of multiple, sustained efforts undertaken by different individuals and organisations over a long period of time.

As a result, we define impact as *any significant change – positive or negative, expected or not – that results from our direct intervention or contribution to improving a human rights situation.*

To understand **how** human rights change takes place, what role we play in it and what factors are likely to facilitate or hinder success, we have combined the strengths of two seemingly incompatible approaches: **theory of change** and **outcome mapping**.

A theory of change is a description of how a project is expected to produce a set of short, medium and long-term outcomes. In other words, a theory of change spells out the **causal mechanism** between a set of activities and their desired outcomes, and identifies the underlying assumptions we are making, for example, about the effectiveness of our tactics with a certain actor.

By “outcome” we mean any change in the attitudes, behaviours and action of the actors that we engage.

Actors are the individuals, groups or organisations that we work with, target or engage in order to achieve positive human rights change.

In spelling out how we think change is going to take place, theories of change help us unpack what is often referred to as the “**black box**” between a project and the ultimate change/s it intends to achieve (see below).



However, theories of change can lend themselves to very linear, “cause and effect” thinking (‘a’ leads to ‘b’, which leads to ‘c’ and so on) which does not fully recognise that change is continuous, complex, dynamic and multidirectional.

It is for this reason that we decided to integrate elements of **outcome mapping** into our impact and learning practice. Outcome mapping fully acknowledges that change is the result of a complex web of interactions between different actors, rather than something that can be attributed to a single organisation or, indeed, intervention.

Essentially, outcome mapping embraces the idea that “[i]dentifying [o]ur contribution and recognising the **contribution** of others is more realistic than searching for evidence of sole attribution...”¹ (Stern, p.12) and that achieving change requires understanding and shifting the attitudes, behaviours and actions of the key actors (individuals, groups, organisations) that may operate in a system. For this reason, the approach is often described as “**actor-focused**”.

¹ Stern, E. Impact Evaluation: A Guide for Commissioners and Managers. Bond, London, UK (2015) 35 pp.

OUR IMPACT AND LEARNING STANDARDS

1. ENSURING OUR WORK IS ALIGNED TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Like many other organisations, we seek to strike the right balance between responding to external events and pursuing a pre-planned strategy.

We plan our work to ensure that it is clearly aligned to our priorities, Amnesty International's global [strategy](#). Our projects set out a **small number of objectives** that they seek to achieve within an identified timeframe. These objectives, which are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound), are **clearly linked** to at least one of our [strategic priorities](#). This ensures that all our projects contribute, in different ways and to a different extent, to the achievement of one or more of our strategic priorities. This approach also helps us have a clear understanding of how our work is spread across our priorities and our level of investment.

2. ARTICULATING HOW WE ARE GOING TO ACHIEVE CHANGE

We articulate how we intend to achieve change by developing a theory of change and an influencing strategy at project level.

Whatever its final shape or form (i.e., visual, narrative, or both), every theory of change will be grounded in a solid understanding of the problem that we are trying to address, its **root causes** and its long-term impact. It will also identify the key **assumptions** underpinning the causal link between action and desired outcome: what assumptions are we making? How do we know that they are accurate? What kind of evidence are they based on? Are they reliable? Should we test any of these assumptions during our project? What kind of information will we need to do so?

A key component of a theory of change is an influencing strategy – which at Amnesty International we define as a description of the observable changes in the attitudes, behaviour or action that we would **EXPECT, LIKE and LOVE** to see in each of the **key actors** that we engage with as part of our work.

An assumption is something that is accepted as true or as certain to happen, without proof. Assumptions may concern any aspect of a project, including:

- How outputs and activities will lead to certain outcomes
- How the targeted actors will respond to certain tactics



What would we
EXPECT to see?

These outcomes represent the minimum changes in awareness, behaviour and action that we would expect to see in the actors we engage as a result of our project work.



What would we
LIKE to see?

These outcomes reflect changes in awareness, behaviour and action that are **more difficult** to achieve and are often dependent on external forces that are out of our control.



What would we
LOVE to see?

These outcomes are the most **transformative** changes in the awareness, behaviours and action of the actors we engage. These outcomes are ambitious but still realistic or achievable.

Setting out an influencing strategy at the project level helps us to understand and communicate *who needs to do what so that we can move closer to our objectives.*

3. MONITORING OUR PROGRESS ON AN ON-GOING BASIS AND MAKING ADJUSTMENTS AS NECESSARY

Monitoring our progress on an on-going basis is central to our ability to adjust our plans according to the results that we achieve and the things that we learn. The progress of our projects is expected to be **monitored** against their objectives and influencing strategy on an on-going basis, so that teams can make adjustments during the implementation phase, rather than waiting until closure to identify lessons learnt and recommendations for the future.

4. ALLOCATING TIME, SPACE AND RESOURCES TO LEARNING AND EMBEDDING IT INTO OUR PROJECT PLANS

We believe in the value of learning and it is important that sufficient time and resources are dedicated to it.

This is why we encourage our projects to think about their **learning strategy early** in the project life cycle. A learning strategy can simply articulate what a team wishes to learn or know more about, how they are going to do so and who should they need to share their learnings with – this could be for example about a new tactic that has never been tried before with a certain target or wanting to test a specific assumption in our theory of change.

Throughout the lifespan of a project, teams should use regular meetings or debriefing spaces to remind each other of their learning priorities so that reflections can be captured overtime – and finally shared both with internal and external stakeholders.

5. TAKING STOCK OF OUR WORK AND REFLECTING ON THE IMPACT WE ACHIEVED

Every year we ask teams to reflect on the work they have done over the course of the past year, assess the impact they may have contributed towards, reflect on lessons learnt and potential project adjustments. To facilitate this reflection process, we ask them to consider:

The forces that have affected their work: teams reflect on the **forces** which may have affected their work throughout the year, either positively or negatively. This helps them to place their progress within a wider context and enables us to have an overall view of the main factors that may have affected our work.

- **Three most significant outcomes:** teams identify (up to) **three most significant outcomes** that each of their projects has contributed to over the past year and reconstruct how those outcomes have taken place (e.g., what tactics and activities led to each of these changes, who was involved, how partners and other organisations contributed to it.)
- **Our contribution to change:** teams reflect on, and describe, the role that Amnesty International and others played in achieving each of the three most significant outcomes. We use **four contribution statements** to help teams think contribution through:
 - The change would have not occurred at all without Amnesty International
 - There were other forces/actors that contributed to this change, but Amnesty International accelerated the change
 - There were other forces/actors involved in achieving this change, but Amnesty International's contribution improved the quality/depth of the change
 - Amnesty International's inputs made no difference – the change would have happened anyway in the way it did
- **Lessons learnt:** teams generate and gather reflections on what they have learnt throughout the year. These can be about **any aspect of their work**, from the way in which they worked with partners and rightsholders, to the effectiveness of a new tactic they employed, and the problem they were trying to address.

6. INVOLVING EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS INTO OUR IMPACT ANALYSIS

We encourage teams to involve external stakeholders (e.g., rightsholders, partners) in their reflection process, so they can test and refine their own impact analysis – reducing some of the biases that may come with self-assessment.

However, the way in which they decide to do so **entirely depends on the specific circumstances** of their projects, including rightsholders and partners' preferences. For example, some projects may decide to bring rightsholders, partners and the project team together, while others may decide to seek rightsholders and partners' feedback separately and share that at a final review workshop. In line with our participatory approach to project development, we encourage teams to discuss this with external stakeholders themselves.

7. CONSIDERING CONDUCTING A FULL PROJECT EVALUATION

Once a year our teams reflect on the delivery of their work and the difference it makes. However, some projects may want to dive deeper into their work and impact and **undertake a full project evaluation**. This may, for example, be the case for projects which:

- May have tested a new approach for the first time and feel that a **robust assessment** of its effectiveness should be undertaken
- Would like to explore aspects, such as your project's value for money, that are **not covered** in their annual review
- Would like to use their project's results to influence an actor (for example, a decision maker) and feel that an in-depth evaluation would increase the credibility of their findings with that actor
- Would like to undertake an **independent assessment** of their project

HOW DO WE BRING THIS ALL TOGETHER?

Every year, Amnesty International's National Entities and International Secretariat teams provide information on the impact they contributed to over the year. This is analyzed centrally by the Global Strategy and Influence Programme (GSIP) to give an overview of the impact that we are making across our strategic priorities – enabling us to understand where we are having the biggest impact and how exactly we contribute to human rights change.

Not only we can produce a picture of our impact per strategic priority, but we can dive into regional trends and patterns. And to bring our impact to life, we use **stories of change** which we gather from across the organization – identifying key themes in the lessons learnt that we have captured.

Our analysis is then summarized into an annual **Impact & Learning Review** which is shared and disseminated across the organization in a variety of formats and through a multiple of channels.

Additionally, the information collected through the Impact & Learning Review is also used to report against **12 Accountability Commitments** that Amnesty International, as a member of Accountable Now has signed up to. All reports that have been submitted to date to the Accountable Now can be found by following [this link](#).

Accountable Now (previously known as International NGO Charter of Accountability) is a global platform that supports civil society organizations (CSOs) to be transparent, responsive to stakeholders and focused on delivering impact.

Amnesty International is a member of Accountable Now, alongside many other advocacy, humanitarian, development, environmental organisations and networks.