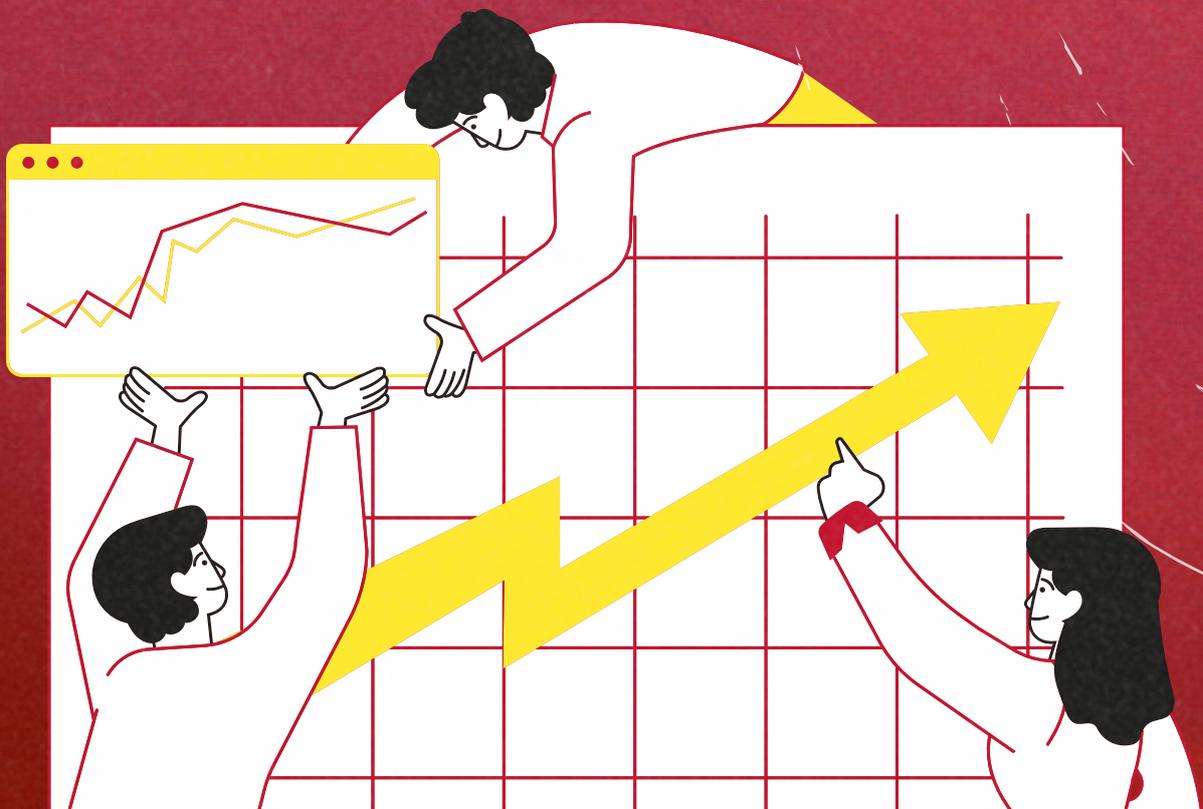


**RESTLESS
DEVELOPMENT**

Powershifting in Impact Measurement

Authored by Sharon Manenji and Dennis Mwesigwa
Designed by Abigail Amon

“By making evaluations and impact measurement techniques flexible, inclusive, and driven by those most affected, we get a more honest and powerful picture of what’s working and what needs to change.”



Introduction *

The traditional logframe method ticks the boxes for planning and monitoring a project, but it falls short of capturing the nuance behind how change happens. The logframe simplifies the underlying complexities of how change occurs into numbers and neat checklists, omitting the voices, stories, and experiences of communities that lend richness to shaping a programme's impact. In today's fast-changing world, where issues are complex and interconnected and communities are dynamic and intersectional, we need to go beyond rigid frameworks and linear thinking.

That's why we're pushing for a powershifting approach in impact measurement, one that puts young people and communities in the driving seat, values lived experiences and uses participatory tools to capture the change that matters to the community, including both successes and lessons learned. Forget a one-size-fits-all approach: by making evaluations and impact measurement techniques flexible, inclusive, and driven by those most affected, we get a more honest and powerful picture of what's working and what needs to change. It's time to move from a tick-box approach to one that is inclusive, participatory, and reflective of the changes that a programme has had on young people and communities by centering them throughout the process of measuring impact.

Level Up Your Impact *

Powershifting Strategies to Measure Change like a Pro!

We believe in a powershifting approach that can supplement the traditional logframe method with creative and innovative strategies to help capture the impact on young people and their communities, thereby strengthening the ways by which impact is measured. In today's complex and interrelated world, with inherent power imbalances, certain methods can be used to ensure that impact is captured in a holistic, inclusive and participatory manner.

One important alternative is the **Theory of Change (ToC)**. It involves a collaborative process that outlines the steps needed to achieve desired long-term results. It also considers external factors and allows for adjustments as needed. This flexibility supports adaptive management, making it ideal for complex development projects where results may change over time. At Restless Development, this approach is rooted in youth leadership, making it inclusive and engaging, along with putting young people in the driver's seat.

The **Most Significant Change (MSC)** technique complements the Theory of Change (ToC) in capturing impact through stories from stakeholders. This method focuses on narratives to reveal significant, long-term, and sometimes unexpected and unintended changes that numbers can miss. MSC prioritises involving stakeholders, which helps everyone understand how change happens in complex social systems.

Outcome Harvesting is another valuable tool for identifying and analysing significant changes that occur as a result of an intervention, even if those changes don't align with the original goals. This method is beneficial in unpredictable or complex environments. It examines actual evidence of change and the role of the intervention, eliminating the need for a direct cause-and-effect relationship. Restless Development has established open communication channels with all stakeholders involved in our work, enabling them to provide feedback and input. This approach allows us to address the challenge of measuring long-term impacts and unexpected results that traditional logframes may overlook.



The **Results-Based Management** (RBM) approach further advances monitoring practices by emphasising results at all levels—outputs, outcomes, and impact—integrating continuous learning and adaptation (OECD, 2002). RBM promotes iterative planning, monitoring, and evaluation cycles, enabling projects to respond flexibly to unforeseen challenges and emerging opportunities. This approach counters the rigidity of static logframes, fostering a culture of ongoing reflection and adjustment. In practice, Restless Development prioritises dynamic accountability through listening exercises, which enable making informed decisions based on feedback provided by young people and communities.

Participatory evaluation methods, such as Appreciative Inquiry, Participatory Action Research, and Social Accountability Dialogues, that involve stakeholders at various stages of the evaluation process should be considered. These methods enhance relevance, foster ownership, and facilitate understanding of change from diverse perspectives. They are beneficial for capturing long-term impacts in complex social situations where top-down evaluations may be ineffective.

Using **comparison groups** is crucial in program evaluation to accurately assess an intervention's impact. By comparing outcomes between those who received the intervention and those who did not, evaluators can directly link differences to the program, thereby enhancing internal validity. Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) are the gold standard for minimizing selection bias, but when randomisation is not possible, matched comparison groups can be a viable alternative. It's important to consider ethical issues, such as withholding interventions from control groups, and to ensure consistent data collection to uphold the study's integrity.

Whatever be the method used, we believe incorporating the following can enhance the richness and relevance of our findings.

1. Using Mixed Methods

Combining quantitative and qualitative data provides a more comprehensive understanding of outcomes, capturing both measurable impacts and nuanced contextual details. The process should not be extractive; it should be engaging and simplified. The tools should use clear, concise language to avoid being perceived as extractive and burdensome to those collecting the information and those providing it.

2. Stakeholder Engagement

Involving partners, local communities, and other relevant actors enhances the relevance and ownership of the findings. Involving those who are directly affected by the programme in data collection helps understand the real-world impact by allowing participants to identify what is important to them, making the experience more rewarding and less extractive.

3. Invest in Building Local MEL Capacities

Investing in the capacities of local actors in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) enhances data quality, sustainability, and the uptake of findings. Evaluating projects is crucial for assessing their effectiveness and impact, which helps identify strengths and weaknesses for informed future decisions. Communities should be empowered to lead in this process through deliberate investment in community-driven M&E, which should be a part of programme budgets.

4. Leveraging Technology

Digital tools, such as KoboCollect, can improve the timeliness, accuracy, and accessibility of information through real-time data collection, analysis, and visualisation. Shifting from MS Office tools reduces reporting fatigue and financial expenses, while promoting engagement.



5. Emphasising Learning and Adaptation

We need to assess and improve the way we work with communities continually. This involves gathering routine feedback from communities on what is working and should continue, what is not working and needs to change, and what should be stopped. This process not only provides valuable evidence of the changes being observed but also enables continuous refinement of the way we work with communities, ensuring that it remains responsive to their emerging needs. Integrating listening exercises and investing in developmental evaluation methods can be useful by allowing us to make real-time adjustments in complex situations.

In conclusion, these alternative frameworks collectively address the limitations of traditional logframes by emphasising flexibility, stakeholder involvement, contextual understanding, and long-term impact. Their combined use can provide a richer, more realistic assessment of development initiatives, particularly in complex and dynamic environments.

Why should you invest in community-led monitoring?

- It deliberately shifts power to the communities, ensuring sustainability. The community develops a sense of ownership and agency over the process.
- It promotes ownership and fosters greater engagement and accountability, as community members see their voices reflected in outcomes.
- It enhances accuracy and trust as community-led assessments tend to be more accurate because local stakeholders are familiar with subtle social dynamics, language nuances, and cultural sensitivities. Trust and familiarity reduce biases associated with outsider evaluations, leading to more honest and comprehensive data.
- It enhances inclusion as impact measurement that originates from within the community captures diverse viewpoints, including those of marginalised

groups that are often overlooked by external assessments. This inclusivity ensures that the impact reflects the experiences of all community members, not just those with formal representation, power and access.

- It promotes community resilience by enabling continuous monitoring of progress and advocating for necessary changes that extend beyond the lifespan of specific projects.
- It prioritises community needs. Community-led metrics are more likely to focus on outcomes that matter most to the community, such as social cohesion, trust, or cultural preservation elements that external evaluators might not prioritise. This alignment fosters more meaningful evaluations and supports interventions to be genuinely responsive.
- It ensures sustainability. Solutions co-created with communities have a greater potential to be embraced, adapted, and championed by those directly affected, thus ensuring that they remain relevant and usable for the groups for which the interventions are designed.

