Outcomes Working Group Meeting Notes

Session Topic: Selection of Outcomes Indicators

4 February 2015

Please note!

**Please read the PowerPoint document prepared and presented by** **Frances Sinha** (director of EDA Rural Systems, SPTF board member, and the facilitator of the Outcomes Working Group), **Bobbi Gray** (Research and Evaluation Specialist, Freedom from Hunger), and **Anne Hastings** (Executive Director of the Microfinance CEO Working Group), to review the content presented in the first part of the meeting. You may download the document from the SPTF website working group page: http://sptf.info/sp-task-force/working-groups. The notes that follow cover only the discussion that took place after the presentation.

You may email either of our guest speakers for further information:

* Bobbi Gray: bgray@freedomfromhunger.org
* Anne Hastings: ahastings@accion.org

Summary of Meeting:

The meeting began with a PowerPoint that covered the following topics:

* 1. Theory of Change is a useful framework to think through the assumptions of which products and services (outputs) lead to which changes (outcomes)
  2. Guidelines for selection of indicators
  3. Introduction to the criteria that Freedom from Hunger applied to selecting indicators relevant to measuring health outcomes for clients
  4. Lessons learned testing these health indicators with four microfinance institutions
  5. Findings from a collective review of numerous outcomes research projects done by different MFIs
  6. Future plans of the Microfinance CEO Working Group (MCWG) related to development of outcomes indicators.

The following points were raised during the discussion that followed the presentation:

* The microfinance sector does not yet have a strong understanding, or alignment, on what outcomes indicators to use. This working group seeks to build our knowledge in this area.
* There is a link between the Universal Standards and outcomes indicators, but they are not the same thing. The Universal Standards are management practices. They say that an institution should have a system in place to select outcomes indicators, use them to gather data, analyze the data, and make decisions based on those data. But the Universal Standards do not say which specific outcomes indicators to use. The SPI4 tool assesses how well an institution is implementing the management practices found in the Universal Standards, but again does not state specifically what outcomes indicators to use.
* The MCWG is currently raising funds to do research that would develop a set of outcomes indicators related to several different outcome areas. If this project does get funded, the MCWG will share the results publicly. These results will be intended as suggestions, not a mandatory set of indicators, as each MFI will be interested in a indicators that are specifically relevant to its goals, capacity, and local context.
* Freedom from Hunger is developing health indicators that should be measured using a sample of clients, and that do not require the MFI to hire any external support.

Detailed Notes:

* Despite the number of years that microfinance has been in existence, there is still confusion and dissimilarity in the ways different entities are approaching measuring and monitoring client outcomes.
* Frances suggests that our next steps are to develop a list of specific, practical indicators to use to measure outcomes.
* Participant from Grassroots Capital Management: Grassroots has been focused on the SPI4 tool, and is participating in a working group to create a "SPI4 light" version. How does all of the research on indicators described by Anne align with the indicators in the SPI4 tool?
  + The SPI4 tool measures how well the Universal Standards for SPM are being implemented within a given MFI. Many of the indicators in the SPI4 ask questions like, "Do you have a system for measuring client outcomes?" Meaning, do you know who your clients are? Are you measuring changes in clients' lives over time? And when you gather that information, are you analyzing it and using it to modify your products and services? If you have such a system in place, you would score well on those standards and indicators.
  + Although the SPI4 tool asks if you are using indicators, it does not specify which indicators. The work that the MCWG is proposing to do will identify which specific indicators are good to use.
* If the MCWG does get funding to do the work it is proposing to develop specific outcome indicators, the results are something it would offer widely to the industry as a whole, as well as to its own affiliates. The goal of the project is NOT to say, "here are the tools you must use," because each entity has its own goals and systems. So the work product would be something offered to the industry, but not mandated.
* The MCWG hired a consultant to do an analysis of 69 separate outcomes research papers that various members of the MCWG had previously commissioned to see if the group could identify common outcomes indicators that had proved effective. But in the end the projects were very dissimilar and no common set of indicators emerged.
* Bobbi: Freedom from Hunger's intent behind developing health indicators is to select those that an institution can implement itself, and would not require hiring outside expertise to use them. You may want to do this if it is part of your intent to engage more with health professionals outside of the microfinance sector, but otherwise you would not need to consult with outside expertise.
* Factors to think about when designing how to design a sample of clients for collection of data on health indicators: gender, age. Freedom from Hunger hopes that the process for collecting and analyzing health indicators will build on top of existing systems to collect data on the PPI indicators or other poverty indicators.
* Example of difficulty faced by Freedom from Hunger: there is a large focus on improving maternal and child health outcomes. The Millennium Development Challenge Goals do suggest some health indicators in this area, but one challenge of these indicators is they are relevant only to women who can become pregnant, are pregnant, or have a child under the age of five. And some female clients don't fit in that group.
* The health indicators suggested by Freedom from Hunger are not intended to be collected as a census. Think about sampling annually or biannually.
* Certain indicators can be compelling but very complicated to collect. Other indicators can be compelling but less complicated. So select the indicators you use based on an understanding of your institution's capacity to use complicated indicators.
* Still some confusion about what we mean by the different in "impact" and "outcomes." This working group is looking at outcomes, short-term (e.g., increased savings, increased in business level, improved access to health services) and long term (poverty reduction, improved health, management of risk). Longer term outcomes are what the shorter term outcomes lead to. "Impact" is change that is attributable to a particular intervention. In order to assess impact, you need randomized control trials and a good control group. Outcomes do not specifically attribute causality. Microfinance is one of many influences in clients' lives that can contribute to changes in their lives.
* If your institution is wanting to start measuring health outcomes for clients but doesn't know where to begin, you are welcome to contact Bobbi Gray at Freedom from Hunger for guidance.
* One future topic this working group will address is tools to use, which will complement today's discussion of how to choose appropriate indicators.

Questions asked in the Chat Box:

1. Do we need to hire a staff who are expertized in health or a MFI can partner with a specialized NGO who specializes in health?
2. Does an MFI have to train its clients on health issue?
3. There are a lot of issues in health sector; how can we select the right indicators?
4. To assess or measure the change in term of health, does an MFI do the census study or just a sampling?
5. Is the analysis that the MCWG did of the 69 outcomes studies done by its members a public document?
   1. Answer: no, but you can email Anne Hastings individually for further information on this analysis: ahastings@accion.org
6. This is a question for Anne. Once the draft indicators are agreed and ready for testing with the chosen MFIs will they be published and available for other MFIs also to test?
   1. Answer: yes, though please note that the MCWG has not yet secured funding to develop the draft indicators. But if it does, all results of the project will be public.
7. We need technical assistance for baseline setting and develop study in health outcomes...hope that the study carried out in northern India would be more or less similar to our country Nepal.
8. What are differences between client outcomes and clients impacts, in your research? Will be there another phase to assess the MFI impacts on clients?
9. How do you do to prevent from "interest conflict" whether only the officers of the MFI collect datas of client outcomes?