Recommended tools for PMER of advocacy

4. Most significant change

When should I use this? For periodic assessment of changes arising from our work.

What does it do? It is a participatory process that can be used in **monitoring** and **evaluation** that helps identify key changes resulting from our work and describe how the change happens.

Why is this useful? Documenting achievements will drive learning and allow teams to apply lessons to future action. Over time, an evidence base will be generated that can be assessed to understand contributions to change.

What is 'most significant change' and why use it?

Many of the issues and questions projects need to monitor, especially in relation to advocacy and influencing, cannot be easily measured or answered by using standardised, pre-determined indicators. 'Most significant change'[1] (MSC) provides a simple yet structured way to gather, process, learn from and use qualitative information. The method therefore suits capturing perspectives on complex and highly nuanced change associated with advocacy-type initiatives.

MSC is a participatory, open-ended approach that can be used throughout the implementation of a project. It allows people to express their own opinions about performance, success, failure and contributions to change. In this way MSC can bring out some of the unforeseen positive and negative consequences of our work. This can help project teams to understand whether they are doing the right things and how improvements could be made.

Features of the MSC tool

MSC captures stories of major advocacy successes and blockages in specific categories or 'domains of change' (such as changes in policy, legislation or behaviour). Categorising like this helps ensure we have clarity over the type of work being analysed.

For each domain, this approach builds up from detailed information captured by individuals to analysis at the programme level – at each level looking for the 'most significant' change.
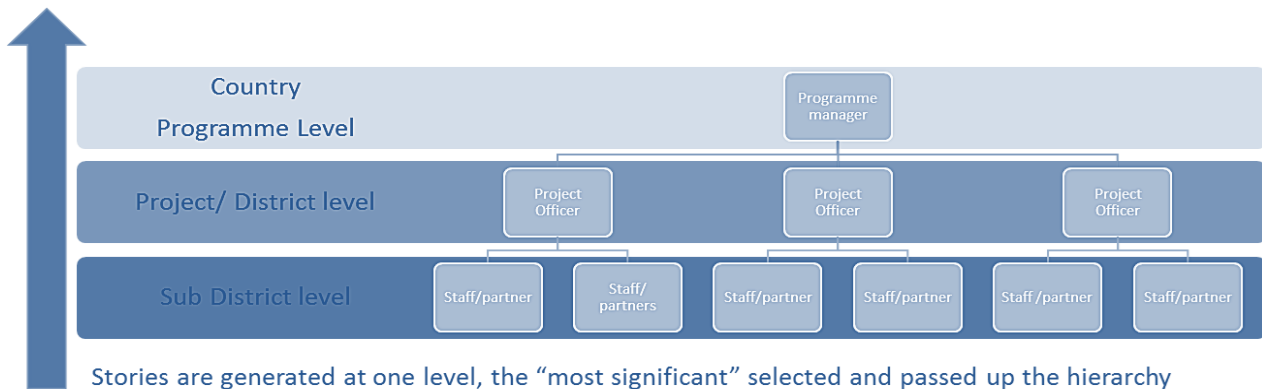
'Stories of change' prompt reflection about what is working, what is not, and where adaptations and changes can be made. Stories can also be used in reports and other documents to communicate the progress being made and how this has informed future action. The chosen stories could be published in a compendium or newsletter, and can easily be captured as an attachment in Project Center.

To ensure learning, information should be included alongside the stories about why they were chosen.

The below diagram shows the process within a Country Programme. Of course, team structures vary across WaterAid regions, members, and global teams.

Stories are generated at one level, the "most significant" selected and passed up the hierarchy

Step by step: what to do

Gathering 'stories of change'

1. **Identify 'domains' of change**. To ensure clarity, it should be clear about what kinds of change the project or programme is looking to assess, such as:

   - In leadership, coordination and collaboration within the WASH sector
   - In access to quality WASH services
   - In legislation, policy and regulation
   - Other

2. **Identify who will collect stories of change.** Examples can come from anyone who is involved in the programme or project, including the target group, staff or partners.

3. Answer the question: **'Looking back over the last period, what do you think has been the most significant change?'** It is also good to include **examples of failure**, to support learning and improvement in future programmes and projects.

4. **Briefly document these stories.** Keep it short. Summarise and record a clear change from each story (you can use the template form below).

Sharing and selecting stories (could be done in a quarterly reflection meeting)

5. Anyone identified to provide a story of change should be encouraged to **prepare** their most significant change story **in advance of the meeting**.

6. **Share stories of change**, starting from the local level or smallest team unit and working upwards (within country programmes, this would be **sub-district**, then **district level**):

   - **Share experiences** so that staff can learn from one another.
   - At each level, discuss and select **one story of change per domain**.

7. **Discuss the reasons for selecting each story of change – why was it the most significant or important?** Each level will pass up to the next:

   - A description of the most significant change they have selected for each domain.
   - An explanation of why they chose that story of change as the most significant out of all the stories during the reporting period.

8. **Send selected stories of change to the programme manager** to inform programme reflection and reporting (depending on how often reflections or reporting as needed, this could be quarterly, six-monthly or annually).

Using stories of change for reflection, monitoring, reporting and future planning

9. **Reflect on and analyse the selected stories of change.** The programme manager and team members should take the time to read the selected stories of change alongside the initial political economy analysis of the project, and summaries from reflect and review meetings. Reflect on these with a critical eye – did we make the right assumptions at the beginning about how change would happen? Is it true that our activity or intervention resulted in these changes, or did other, external factors influence what happened?

10. **Stories of change can be used to inform monitoring**. For example, participants in a quarterly reflection meeting should read these stories, alongside other evidence, in order to prepare for reflection on how a programme or project is going, what has been learned, and how you can improve the effectiveness of your advocacy going forwards.

11. **Your selected stories of change should be used to inform future programme or project planning**. For instance, understanding through these stories how change was achieved might bring clarity to a political economy analysis, or, when you are designing a project, help you to prioritise the tactics most likely to be successful.

12. **Collate and share stories of change** with communities, donors and other key stakeholders to show change and results, and to demonstrate transparency.

13. **Feed back results to staff verbally** so they can discuss and take action.

WaterAid

Template MSC reporting form

Story title:

This story is related to which type or 'domain' of change:
☐ Changes in leadership, coordination and collaboration within the WASH sector
☐ Changes in access to quality WASH services
☐ Changes in legislation, policy and regulation
☐ Other changes (open category)

Name of person recording story:

Position and site location:

Where did this take place?

When did it take place?

What happened?
(Note: If this space is not enough, you can use the back of this page. If it is a longer story, please underline the main change you feel the story illustrates.)

Why do you think this is a significant change?
(Note: This question should be answered by the author, as well as by each group that selects the story.)

Are there other changes that have happened as a result of the project/intervention?
(Note: Consider smaller, less obvious changes that have occurred in your daily life or everyday work and write them down briefly. This helps to compare to and challenge what is considered a 'significant' change).

---

[1] For greater detail of the MSC tool, see '*The most significant change technique*', by Rick Davies and Jess Dart, available at www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf

www.wateraid.org/ppa

WaterAid is a registered charity: Australia: ABN 99 700 687 141. Canada: 119288934 RR0001. India: U85100DL2010NPL200169. Sweden: Org.nr: 802426-1268, PG: 90 01 62-9, BG: 900-1629. UK: 288701 (England and Wales) and SC039479 (Scotland). US: WaterAid America is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization

4