Harvesting the fruits of gender work

How to capture change for women's participation in the security sector

Learning Brief

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THE ELSIE INITIATIVE
FOR WOMEN IN PEACE OPERATIONS

DCAF 25 YEARS

Canada

Content

Introduction

This learning brief introduces Outcome Harvesting as a methodology for capturing and reflecting on gender equality outcomes. The brief is a practical tool designed to guide programme actors in applying Outcome Harvesting to advance women's meaningful participation in the security sector. It walks the reader through the steps of an Outcome Harvesting process and highlights the essential elements to make it work in their context.

This Learning Brief is a key deliverable of DCAF's Gender and Security Division's Elsie Programme, which is part of the Canadian-led multistakeholder Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations (in the following: the Elsie Initiative). The Programme currently works with security sector institutions to enhance gender equality in order to increase women's meaningful participation in United Nations peace operations.

Why is it important to capture change in the form of outcomes? Any programme or project aiming to achieve certain outcomes, results or objectives – depending on the language used. Ultimately, these terms refer to change.

A programme is implemented to change something to improve the conditions and/or life of a certain group of people in a given context.

Enhancing gender equality in security sector institutions requires transforming gender norms and power structures at the individual, group, and institutional levels. These changes can be attitudinal and more immediate, or behavioural and more intermediate changes. They can find expression in the use of language, policies, and everyday practices of leaders and staff across institutions.

All of them are needed to move an institution towards the ultimate goal of gender equality – equal opportunities for people of all genders in the security sector.

In the messy reality of everyday life, changes somehow occur simultaneously but also condition and enable each other: without changes in individuals' and groups' attitudes and behaviours, the institutional culture will not become more gender responsive. Likewise, without changes in leadership engagement and support for change, gender-responsive policies, and enabling institutional structures like gender focal point or gender adviser networks and gender offices, individual and group attitudes and behaviours are unlikely to change.

In brief, a lot is going on when a security institution moves towards gender equality, and it can be tricky to predict and measure through linear project plans and monitoring frames, what changes and how the change takes shape.

Making changes visible and acknowledging the role of changemakers can function as an accelerator of change itself, as it motivates staff across the institution and binds changemakers to continue their path. This can become a virtuous (self-reinforcing) cycle of leadership understanding the importance of change, supporting the creation of structures and policies to create enabling conditions for the institution to become gender-responsive, and eventually integrating gender-responsiveness in its operations both internally and externally.

Highlighting the positive examples to be inspired and motivated by is even more important in the context of a global gender backlash that is marked by resistance and pushback against progress on gender equality, women's rights, and feminist movements across societies. In this context, it is also noteworthy to think about change as context-dependent and to acknowledge that, in some contexts, maintaining the status quo and preventing backlash can be an important achievement, a type of change, and an outcome in itself.

What is Outcome Harvesting?

Outcome Harvesting is a participatory and flexible methodology for identifying, analysing, and learning from outcomes, regardless of whether these outcomes were initially planned or anticipated. It shifts our attention away from our activities (What did we do?) onto the observable changes in attitudes and actions carried out by the people, groups, and institutions a programme is seeking to influence (What do they do differently?). In other words, Outcome Harvesting aims to make changes toward gender equality tangible, visible, and therewith acknowledgeable.

The Outcome Harvesting methodology
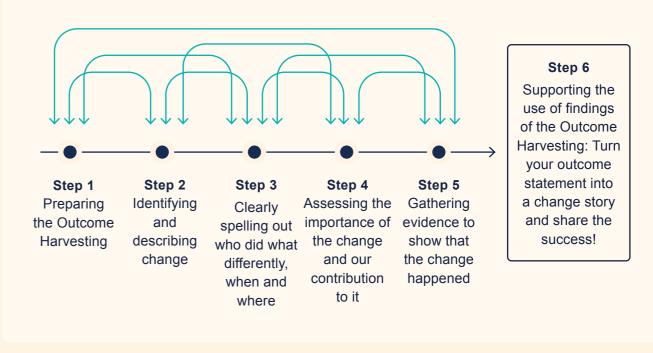
The Outcome Harvesting methodology, inspired by Ricardo Wilson-Grau and Heather Britt's (2012) approach, was introduced to the Elsie Programme in a mid-term review workshop. This workshop was organized over two and a half days with programme actors from five countries, where the Programme is currently working. Programme actors included national consultants, research and civil society implementing partner organisations, as well as representatives of the stakeholder security sector institutions. The Programme uses Outcome Harvesting to put changemakers, who experience changes or witness them, at the heart of the evaluation process. Outcome Harvesting empowers them by acknowledging their role in the process, highlighting their achievements, and validating their contributions. It also builds the storyline of a programme as it is implemented (through different change stories), instead of recreating it at the end.

In this learning brief, we introduce Outcome Harvesting as a practical tool, which readers can apply to their programming. The brief walks the reader through the iterative steps of the Outcome Harvesting process and instructs on the key elements for each step:

Table 1: Outcome Harvesting steps

Before the workshop	**Step 1:** Preparing the Outcome Harvesting
During an outcome harvesting workshop (Annexes 1 and 2)	**Step 2:** Identifying and describing change
	Step 3: Clearly spelling out who did what differently, when and where
	Step 4: Assessing the importance of the change and our contribution to it
	Step 5: Gathering evidence to show that the change happened
After the workshop (Annex 3)	**Step 6:** Supporting the use of findings of the Outcome Harvesting: Turn your outcome statement into a change story and share the success!

Source: *Outcome Harvesting approach DCAF, adapted from Wilson-Grau, Outcome harvesting | Better Evaluation.*

Outcome Harvesting is an iterative process. You might get to a certain step and then realize that you need to go a step or two back and complete the information, before being able to move on to the next step. You might also realize that the information needed is not yet available, because the change has not materialized fully yet, so you can plan regular checks for the information which you need in order to move on. Graphically, it can look like this:

Picture 1: Outcome Harvesting steps. Source: Outcome Harvesting approach DCAF, adapted from Wilson-Grau, Outcome harvesting | Better Evaluation.

We illustrate each step with fictitious examples from the imaginary country of Croplandia, through vignettes that draw on diverse real-life experiences and changes recorded across Elsie Programme countries. One of the core questions in an Outcome Harvesting process is whether the observed changes are confidential or whether they might be publicly shared at the moment of the Outcome Harvesting exercise. Since the outcomes we have been able to harvest to date in several Programme countries stem from ongoing change processes, we prioritize confidentiality and therefore use fictitious examples. Before walking through each step, we briefly introduce Croplandia.

Welcome to Croplandia – would you like to join the harvest?

Croplandia is a middle-income country with a stable democracy. While the country is far from achieving gender equality, there are senior leaders within the government, police, and armed forces who are strongly in support of the gender equality agenda. This is visible, for example, in the country's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) National Action Plans (NAP) and national-level policies for gender equality. It is worth mentioning that the term "gender" per se is not well perceived, so measures for gender equality are usually addressed as "women's issues".

Croplandia's security sector has shown openness to addressing gender inequalities at different levels: with regards to peacekeeping, all security sector institutions have conducted or are currently conducting a "Measuring Opportunities for Women's Meaningful Participation in Peace Operations" (MOWIP) assessment to understand the existing barriers and opportunities women face in the security sector institution.
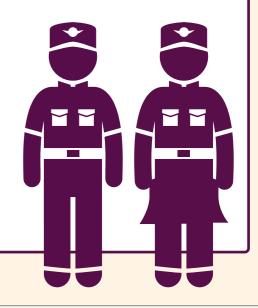
In line with national efforts, Croplandia has an all-encompassing gender strategy for the security sector and its implementation is steered and monitored by a technical committee, which is composed of the security sector institutions' leadership as well as gender focal points. It thus brings decision-makers and changemakers into the same room to create the best possible conditions for change.

Croplandia's security sector institutions have gender focal point networks, and the Ministry of Defence has a gender office, which holds an overarching coordination function, including for the MOWIP, gender strategy implementation, and gender focal point network coordination.

Besides the gender strategy implementation, Croplandia's security sector has research entities that have initiated complementary research projects to deepen the knowledge about what it means for women to be security sector personnel and create safe spaces for them to exchange experiences, bond, and strengthen mutual support networks. Through the Elsie Programme, DCAF is supporting these research projects.

Croplandia has partnered with DCAF for four years under the Elsie Initiative, and technical committee members decided to go through several outcome harvests throughout the implementation to understand what kind of changes were generated, why, and what they could learn from these.

To harvest outcomes, the technical committee members, gender focal points, key implementers of the gender strategy and related activities, national consultants and implementing partners, as well as representatives from the Elsie Programme get together for at least one or two days per outcome harvest. With the guidance of an external facilitator, they go through the steps of the outcome harvesting exercise, as described below. One of Croplandia's outcome statements is discussed in illustrative vignettes at each of the steps below.

Preparing the Outcome Harvesting

Step 1 helps to take preparatory measures that facilitate the Outcome Harvesting process. Ideally, you integrate these from the design stage of your programme, but it is never too late to add them along the way!

First, document what might be an outcome at every stage of the process. Every time a programme activity takes place, there is a possibility to observe or discuss changes that implementing partners, stakeholders, or programme beneficiaries experience.

It is important to establish a routine of notetaking early on, to record such observations, and to pursue interesting outcome leads. This can be done in different ways; the important thing is to co-construct what works best in each context and to apply it consequently. In the Elsie Programme, for example, we use note-taking templates with a section for observational notes in some contexts, and process journals in others.

This practice allows to collect bits and pieces of information about change, which can later be crucial for identifying an outcome or to substantiate outcome statements.

Include training on monitoring, evaluation, and learning in your collaboration to ensure everybody is aware of the differences between activities, outputs,

and outcomes. Then, you can build on a solid level of joint knowledge and facilitate an Outcome Harvesting workshop, following steps 2-5. Note that this workshop can be useful to train the programme team and to harvest outcomes at the same time.

Second, design the Outcome Harvesting workshop and exercises. You can use Annexes 1 and 2 to design and plan the workshop and identify what exercises are pertinent to engage the participants and help them identify changes. Icebreaker exercises can be useful to get everybody on the same page and ensure the basic concepts are clear; especially to clarify what an outcome is, who can produce and observe it, and how outcomes are aligned with overall programme goals. For example, you can include stakeholder and context analysis exercises as icebreakers or ask people to map out their theory of change and identify different outcome levels, including examples (which can lead you over to step 1). The more participatory and interactive the workshop, the better!

In brief, the preparatory step (Step 1) is for the programme manager; Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) experts; and potentially an external facilitator to prepare programme participants to observe and record potential changes throughout the programme and to design the Outcome Harvesting moments (workshops). Then, you move on to Step 2.

Identifying and describing change

Step 2, the first step of the Outcome Harvesting workshop, is to brainstorm about what changes in attitudes, behaviours, relationships, practices, or actions (the outcomes) have happened in a given timeframe in the stakeholder institutions, among key actors, or within the context of your project.

Remember that those changes, called outcomes, are at least partially a result or a consequence of what you did. They are not to be confused with your programme activities and the products, called outputs, which you produce through the activities.

For example, if a country conducts a MOWIP assessment to identify women's opportunities for meaningful participation in peace operations, the MOWIP report is the output. If the MOWIP recommendations are taken up by the leadership of the security sector institution, which commits to an action plan to address some of the barriers identified, this is an outcome. Outcome Harvesting aims to unearth all kinds of changes brought about by the programme, which are then linked to the programme's envisioned results. So, be open and ready for surprises!

How do you get started?

Ideally, you can meet with your programme team, partners, and stakeholders for at least one day to work together through steps 2–5. The richness of the exercise comes from having different perspectives in the room, particularly those of the individuals or groups for whom or with whom we want to see the change. For the Elsie Programme mid-term review, we conducted step 2 beforehand to prepare for the Outcome Harvesting exercise and then dedicated a full day to steps 3–5.

Depending on the kind of programme and the work you are doing, it could also be possible for you to harvest outcomes from programme documents and reports. For example, Global Affairs Canada's Elsie Initiative team uses the Outcome Harvesting methodology to analyse project reports from implementing partners and extract higher-level outcome statements, documenting changes that the Elsie Initiative and its partners have produced or contributed to through advocacy, research, and programming.

At this point, all the statements collected might not be perfect or complete. In fact, you might find that some are actually outputs, not outcomes. Don't worry, this is part of the process and completely normal in step 2. At a later stage, you will select and refine valid outcome statements.

As you start mapping outcomes, you can already prepare the outcome statement template (Annex 2), which serves as a simple but effective tool to write up the statements and record the importance and contribution of your programme to the described change.

STEP 2

For one of the planned outcome harvesting exercises in Croplandia, key stakeholders (technical committee members, gender focal points, and others involved in the implementation), have gathered during a full-day workshop. The Outcome Harvesting expert facilitators asked all participants to write on flipcharts the changes they had experienced or witnessed since the Elsie Programme started. Participants wrote:

- Overall, some progress was made to recruit more women following the adoption of the Gender Strategy.

- Gender trainings were introduced, which changed the trainees' awareness about gender.

- Working on gender in a coordinating role has helped a female participant for her promotion.

- A research project on women was authorized by the leadership only after they started collaborating with the Elsie Programme.

Remember that outcomes are not about what you did, but about what has changed because of what you did.

Clearly spelling out who did what differently, when and where

In this step, ask "Who did what differently, when, and where?". The outcome should be formulated as one sentence that clearly explains all elements.

Try to be very specific and keep in mind that all elements you include in the outcome need to be verifiable. Beware of outputs disguised in outcomes! Remember that an outcome statement should describe a change, not a simple description of an activity done as part of the programme.

First, formulate the outcome statement or the change statement. Then double-check if it fulfils the two criteria of specificity and verifiability. Can you answer the questions in the description column below with YES?

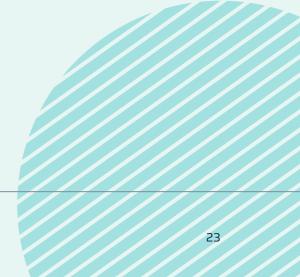**Table 2.** Key questions to check for specificity and verifiability

Criteria	Description	Yes/No
Specific	Is the outcome statement specific and clear enough for someone without special knowledge of the subject matter or the context to be able to understand and appreciate its meaning? Who is concerned with the change? Is it clear whether the change concerns an individual, group, community, organisation, or institution? Does the change take place at the local, national, or maybe even regional or global level? What did they do differently? Is the nature of the change specified (behaviour, relationships, activities, policies, or practices)? When did the change happen and where? Is the outcome statement clear about the date/timeframe and the location where the change took place? Does the change statement specify whether the change was intended or not? Can some aspect of the change be quantified to communicate its size or scope? Do we have numbers that illustrate the change?	
Verifiable	Does the outcome statement build on facts? Does the outcome statement include the details necessary for an independent observer to find other proof to support the claims? (Remember the facts to be verified are: Who changed what? When and where?)	

You may find here that out of the many statements you drafted initially, only a few of them have successfully passed the criteria, which is nothing to worry about. Continue with those that passed the test to step 4.

STEP 3

With the help of the facilitator, the participant who had contributed the first idea reformulated their statement as: "Since the signing of the Gender Strategy, the head of the human resources department took ownership of the recruitment of women into police forces and in March 2024, launched a specific assessment of gaps in recruitment policies, which resulted in three measures being implemented as soon as September 2024 to reduce barriers to recruiting women within the institution". This statement is valid as it refers to the WHO (the head of the department), the WHAT IS DIFFERENT (launched an assessment that resulted in measures being implemented), the WHEN (March/September) and the WHERE (across the whole institution). The outcome statement thus provides the necessary information to situate the relevant change, the "three measures being implemented".

The other three statements were roughly drafted as well, but the group decided to pursue the recruitment measures as the key change to focus on in this round of outcome harvesting. They kept a record of the other outcomes, though, which you can find in Annex 6.

Assessing the importance of the change and your contribution to it

The third step is more evaluative than descriptive, as it consists of determining how important the change you have identified is, and what you did to make it happen (your contribution).

Therefore, ask the following questions:

- How important is the change in the context of your country and in view of your programme's objectives? Is it deeply transformative? Or is it rather a step toward a wider change?

- What was your contribution? What was your programme's role in making this change happen?

These questions will help you to assess the importance of the change and the programme's contribution to it. To help assess how important the change is, you may want to use a ranking (high – moderate – low). Likewise, you can rank your programme's contribution to the outcome as low, moderate, or high. You should be able to explain clearly how and why you attribute a rank to your change, so write not only the rank (high – moderate – low) but also a sentence to explain your reasons.

Third, after ranking the importance and contribution, dedicate some time and don't hesitate to get an external critical friend to evaluate your choices in line with the proportionality and plausibility criteria: Can you answer the questions in the description column below with YES?
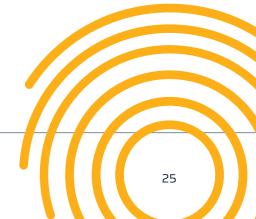
Table 3. Key questions to check for proportionality and plausibility

Criteria	Description	Yes/No
Propor-tionality	Is the importance of the outcome in view of the programme's objectives and context clearly described? Did you provide a solid explanation for why you attribute a specific ranking (high – moderate – low) to the importance of the change?	
Plausible	Is the programme's role in influencing the outcome well described? Does it answer the question: "How did the programme inspire, persuade, support, facilitate, assist, pressure, or even force or otherwise contribute to the change?" Is there a logical, believable link between the described change and the programme's contribution? (Note that the contribution can be direct or indirect, intended or unintended, expected or unexpected). Has consideration been given to other factors that have contributed to this change? (These can be the work of other organisations/programmes, but also political changes or personnel changes in the security sector institution, for example. Did you provide a solid explanation for why you attribute a specific ranking (high – moderate – low) to the contribution of the programme?	

Participants then discussed how significant this change was in the context of Croplandia and in view of the objective of the Elsie Programme, which is "enhancing women's meaningful participation in the security sector, including in peace operations". Some thought it was a huge step forward, considering that this decision came from the leaders of the institution. Others argued that it was important, but that the truly transformative change was ultimately the implementation of the proposed measures, and that it had to be seen whether this would lead to a tokenistic increase in the number of women recruited, or whether women would actually get more opportunities to access leadership positions within the institution. They therefore agreed to rank this as a "moderate" change. When discussing how much the programme did to influence the head of department's decision, they agreed that the Elsie Programme had played a useful role through the MOWIP and their advocacy efforts, but that there were other factors that played in too such as the objectives of the gender strategy and Croplandia's WPS NAP. They agreed that they had a "moderate" contribution to this change.

Gathering evidence to show that the change happened

In step 5, you should focus on identifying and compiling sufficient and valid evidence to support your claims of change. Evidence is the data that is used to support the claims you are making about the change your programme has created. A single anecdote or personal view from one expert is not considered credible evidence, so you need to find other sources that verify the claim.

The following questions should help you do so:

- What data is available to support the claims? Do you have proof for the facts you listed in the previous steps?

- Do you have different sources to verify this information? Evidence is stronger when you have different sources and different types of sources.

- Check all sources and decide if the outcome statement is complete, coherent, and sufficiently verified to qualify as a change.

Evidence is stronger when it relies on multiple data sources. Data sources may include research studies, personal anecdotes, surveys, interviews, user feedback, and social media. Because of this importance of using different kinds of proof, we use the criterion diversity of sources to validate the evidence.

There is also the important role of substantiators, people who were not directly involved in the programme but are familiar with the context or the changes you are trying to make. Identifying substantiators and asking them to corroborate the outcome statement is an important step towards a strong outcome statement. Their confirmation of the change can be especially crucial to harvest outcomes in contexts like security sector reform, where changes might

be politically sensitive and not publicly disclosed, or when you want to record changing attitudes or behaviours, which are observable in everyday worklife but not always institutionalized in writing.

> *The more sources and the more diverse they are, the better. At minimum, you should find at least two different sources to verify an outcome statement.*

Once you know which sources and substantiators exist to strengthen your evidence, give your plan a double-check: Can you answer the questions in the description column below with YES?

Be critical with yourself or rely on a critical friend to double-check the criteria. If the evidence is deemed too thin (it would not stand up to external scrutiny), you might not yet be ready for a full-fledged outcome harvest, but you should keep your outcome statement and regularly monitor the development of the change. Once more sources of proof or substantiators become available, you can then continue the process.

Table 2. Key questions to check for diversity of sources and substantiators

Criteria	Description	Yes/No
Diversity of sources	Does your proof come from different types of sources? Are perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders reflected?	
Substanti-ators	Are there people who can confirm the change you describe in the outcome statement?	

In step 5, participants listed the different sources to prove the claim of the outcome statement. They tried to secure a diversity of sources by combining different types of documentation of the change. To document the change from "no recruitment policy" to "three measures to improve women's recruitment", they suggested to collect the following sources; from the human resources department, the assessment report including recommendations, and the policy installing the three measures to improve women's recruitment; from the technical committee, any meeting notes that document conversations about the need to improve women's recruitment conditions or the MOWIP recommendations for recruitment, and; from all workshop participants, any further documentation that can support the claim, such as meeting notes, consultations of the gender focal points, etc. The participants also decided to collect recruitment statistics, disaggregated by gender and rank.

Then, participants identified as substantiators the head of the human resources department (though not independent of the programme) and the lead researcher of the assessment). Further in the future, they will also try to speak with some of the women positively affected by the three measures, both new recruits and women whose access to promotions was improved by the measures.

Confidentiality
may be the key

During step 5 discussions, the Elsie Programme team asked about confidentiality and anonymity needs. A problem was raised: participants feared that the required information could be too sensitive and confidential and might not be shared by the human resources department with the external facilitator or the Elsie team. The Elsie Programme team explained that change stories are a useful tool, especially for the people making the change, and that it is therefore important to record the change, but that the change stories should work for the changemakers and that they can decide what will be shared with whom, when, and how. They made clear that the primary purpose of getting access to the information would be to verify the proof of the outcome statement and make it stronger. They underlined that no information would be shared externally without explicit authorization from the human resources department. It was thus agreed that any change story resulting from the outcome harvest would be kept confidential until further notice/approval and that substantiators would remain anonymous.

Whenever possible, try to combine different types of sources to strengthen your evidence!

Supporting the use of findings of the Outcome Harvesting

Turn your outcome statement into a change story and share the success!

Once you have constructed an outcome statement and strengthened it with additional proof through steps 2-5, you are ready to bring it into a format that is understandable and interesting for your audience.
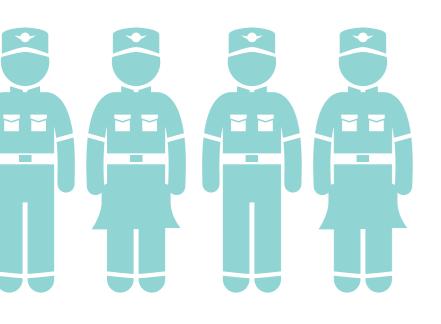
While Outcome Harvesting is a methodology used for monitoring, evaluation and learning purposes in programme implementation, the change stories that result from this process can be a very useful tool to communicate about the real changes that are being made as a result of your work and communicate your success to a wider audience. Your audience can thus be the changemakers whose stories you are telling, the security sector institutions which you have recorded the change in, other Elsie Programme countries, security sector institutions in general, programme donors, or even a wider public you want to reach through social media.

How can you narrate this change in an accessible and compelling way?

First, determine your audience and then think about how the change story can be useful for them. That will give you the focus on and how to tell it, but also to plan for how to disseminate the change story with the relevant stakeholders. In this step, you decide whether and how the change story will be useful beyond reporting, and who and how it can be useful to support further actions, or decisions to promote change.

Second, you can use a change story template, which allows you to tell the story about your outcome in a specific logic flow. Annex 3 provides you with a sample template, but note that there are many different templates available, and your choice may depend on your audience. Before publishing or sharing a change story, make sure you are aware of any confidentiality issues and political sensitivities that you need to consider, and that you have the permission to share the change story with your chosen audience!

After the Outcome Harvesting workshop...

After the Outcome Harvesting workshop, the change story lead author took the outcome statement from the workshop (Annex 4) as the basis to conduct the necessary follow-up substantiation (collecting more proof) and then to write the change story, using the change story template (Annex 3). Annex 5 shows the resulting change story, which she produced and then validated with participants of the outcome harvest.

After having collected the outcome statement and defined its relevance, contribution, and the proof, programme participants also discussed who they want to tell the change story to and how. They concluded that it would be good to formulate a change story about the new measures, as a positive change in recruitment policies, which they can use for donor reporting and also share within the security sector through their intranet. They also agreed to use the outcome statement to write a change story for a broader public and disseminate the knowledge about the recruitment measures in their awareness-raising activities.

They decided that the head of the gender office collects the proof, ensures that the plan is in the interest of and approved by the human resources department, and then drafts the change stories, together with the national implementing partner. Then, they will be shared for review with all participants of the workshop, before disseminating them. This is an additional step, but participants concurred it will be useful to make sure everybody agrees with the content and identifies with the story.

As a very last crop of the day, the participants settled on who disseminates which story when, where, and how, to facilitate a dissemination plan and make sure that the crops of the outcome harvest can be widely shared. They used the outcome statement template (Annex 2) to register the agreements. Annex 4 shows the final outcome statement of the Outcome Harvesting workshop in Croplandia.

Lessons Learned

In this section, we want to highlight some key advice on how to make the most of an Outcome Harvesting process. We draw on lessons from the DCAF Elsie Programme's mid-term review workshop as well as from our broader experience with Outcome Harvesting.

☑ At every step of the Outcome Harvesting exercise, write your explanations down as if you were to explain this to someone without special knowledge of the subject matter or the context. This helps you be precise and clear, but it also allows you to double-check if you have all important details. If you cannot name it, you might not have all necessary information yet and your observed change might not yet be ripe for an outcome harvest.

☑ Experience shows that this exercise is truly valuable when different perspectives are collected, as it allows for a more holistic understanding of the outcomes. Different stakeholders, especially those who are affected by gender inequality in their daily life, may observe and experience results in different ways.

☑ Outcome Harvesting requires us to shift our attention from predictable results to unintended ones, which is not easy to do in practice. The risk of focusing solely on the intended outcomes or only on positive results may lead to a skewed understanding of a programme's impact, or to overlook potential negative consequences generated by it.

☑ To recognize a change, you need to be able to compare it to a different situation in the past. It is generally always important to describe changes in relation to a "baseline", the specific situation before the change happened. This allows us to recognize changes. If your outcome statement describes an intended change, your baseline is likely described in your programme plan and your indicators will measure progress (positive change) against this baseline. So, you can just refer to this and describe it for the change story (template in Annex 3).

☑ If you describe a surprising, unintended outcome, then your programme documents will not tell you anything about the baseline. And this is fine, because Outcome Harvesting is mostly about getting to those surprises and identifying results that were not planned beforehand! It does not mean that you cannot understand the baseline situation, though: usually, the people describing the change to you will somehow respond to the question: "What was the situation before the programme intervention started?". Therewith, they indicate the baseline with their change description, because they tell you what has changed in relation to an earlier point in time. Make sure you record this information and bring it up in your change story.

☑ You may be tempted to miss step 5 (gathering evidence to show that the change happened) from the process, but it is the most important, as accepting outcome statements at face value without validating them through multiple sources or stakeholder engagement can undermine the credibility of the findings.
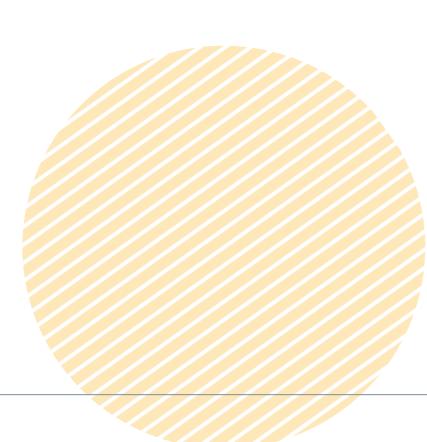
☑ Make sure you always ask about confidentiality and anonymity needs, when you interview substantiators or request information. Make sure you explain well that the outcome statement and change story help identifying changes and show how changes happen and why they are important. They are a useful tool for the people making the changes and should first and foremost work well for them. It is important to record the change. You can always decide together what to share with whom, when, and how.

☑ The work on gender equality and women's meaningful participation in security sectors across the world is complicated and subject to constant changes. In such complex contexts, changes can be difficult to recognize, prove, and tell. Outcome Harvesting helps you understand changes within complex realities and acknowledge small steps of progress, which might otherwise go unperceived because they remain below the success threshold of intended outcomes (such as indicator targets).

For example, if the global gender backlash is also closing the space for gender work in Croplandia, both in terms of funding and in terms of the leadership commitment, then Outcome Harvesting can help record small successes, such as maintaining the status quo against efforts to change it and upholding the conversation about gender equality within security sector institutions. While initially foreseen actions to implement MOWIP recommendations as part of the Elsie Programme could not be implemented after a change in leadership, Outcome Harvesting can bring to fore that the trust-building dialogues and awareness-raising work with the new leadership has kept the doors open in the face of overall gender backlash: constant engagement in the background has allowed individual and cautious engagement, such as some smaller training workshop activities.

This example shows that it is of crucial importance to conduct and sustain the often-invisible background work of trust-building and diplomatic political engagement, and to make it visible and acknowledged. In the face of overall gender backlash, a door that remains half-open can already be an important change to record!

Outcome Harvesting is a fantastic tool to grasp changes beyond the planned and expected, by putting the target groups into the centre of attention and valuing their experiences of change. Be ready to be surprised!

Conclusion

In brief, we see enormous value and potential in using Outcome Harvesting in security sector focused gender equality programmes. Outcome Harvesting is a fantastic methodology for capturing and reflecting on gender equality outcomes in programmatic work in the security sector, as it puts the experiences of target groups (in this case: women in the security sector) into the centre of attention, values, and validates their stories of change.

Outcome Harvesting allows us to strengthen and enrich our evidence about intended outcomes, while allowing us to be surprised by other, unintended, outcomes of our programmes. Therewith, it is a useful tool to capture nuanced changes that are often missed in traditional evaluation methods.

Outcome Harvesting can be more than that: the practice of building on critical friends to double-check, verify, and critically inspect observed outcomes also makes it a great tool to build a community of practitioners. The Elsie Programme practitioners from different countries will repeat their Outcome Harvesting exercise on a regular basis, submit their outcome statements to the scrutiny of critical friends, and use each other as sounding boards to bounce back change observations. Beyond the fruit of enhanced quality of resulting change stories, the Elsie Programme is also harvesting knowledge exchange in the Elsie community of practice.

Annexes

Annex 1: Outcome Harvesting workshop facilitation sheet

> **Outcome Harvesting is a participatory monitoring and evaluation method. It collects ("harvests") evidence of what has changed ("outcomes") and, working backwards, determines whether and how an intervention has contributed to these changes.**

What do we like about Outcome Harvesting?

It is a straightforward and easy-to-understand method of shifting attention away from activities (what did we do ourselves?) and onto the practical and observable shifts in actions by the people, groups, and institutions our programmes are seeking to influence (what did they do differently as a result?).

It places those who experience changes or witness them at the heart of the evaluation process and values their understanding of what constitutes a change and why it is important.

The harvesting process can be done at any point in time. It is a great tool to build the storyline of your programme or intervention as you go along, instead of recreating it at the end.

There is plenty of easy-to-read guidance on how to carry out Outcome Harvesting online. This facilitation sheet does not detail this process but simply summarises the core steps (steps 2–5 of the Outcome Harvesting process) that we suggest covering during a one to two-day Outcome Harvesting workshop.

Preparing the Outcome Harvesting **1**

Identifying and describing a change **2**   **3** **Clearly spelling out who did what, when and where**

Assessing the importance of the change and our contribution to it **4**   **5** **Gathering evidence to show that the change happened**

6 **Supporting the use of findings of the Outcome Harvesting**

> **Remember: an outcome is an observable change in the behaviour, relationships, practices, or actions taken by a social actor influenced by you as part of the Elsie Programme.**

During the outcome harvesting workshop...

2   Identifying and describing a change

- The first step to this process is to identify what changes have happened in a given timeframe. It is important not to confuse what you did (activities) and what behaviours, relationships, practices, or actions a certain actor has made as a result (outcomes).
- Changes can be of different types: policy developments, political commitments, transformed beliefs or attitudes, increased capacity, knowledge acquired or shared …

3   Clearly spelling out who did what, when, and where

- As a journalist would report facts, we invite you to formulate in a sentence or two: who is concerned with the change, what did they do differently and when and where did the change happen.
- It should be specific and clear enough that a person without knowledge of the subject matter or the context will be able to understand and appreciate its meaning.

4   Assessing the importance of the change and our contribution to it

- The statement should specify the actor (a person, a group, an institution) and the nature of the change (behaviour, relationships, activities, policies, or practices).
- Once a change statement is fully written, we would like you to think about how important this change is in the context of your country and in view of your objectives. Is it incredibly significant? Is it a good step forward, but not deeply transformative?
- We also invite you to think about what your role was in making this change happen (your contribution). How much of this change can we credit back to you? All of it or some of it? How did you inspire, persuade, support, facilitate, assist, pressure, or even force the change?

5   Gathering evidence to show that the change happened

- Evidence is how you pull together and present the data that is used to support the claims you make about the change you have created.
- Evidence is stronger when it relies on multiple data sources. A single anecdote or personal view from one expert isn't considered credible evidence, but multiple views from people who make up a representative, appropriate sample of the community are a potential source of experiential evidence.

Annex 2: Outcome Statement template

Step	Outcome statement #	
	Country	
2, 3	**Outcome description:** Explain the change in terms of "WHO does WHAT differently, WHEN and WHERE?"	
4	**Level of importance** (high – moderate – low)	
4	**Level of contribution** (high – moderate – low)	
5	**Evidence** **Proof #1:** [add source of information] **Proof #2:** [add source of information] **Proof #3:** [add source of information] **Substantiator #1:** [add name and title] **Substantiator #2:** [add name and title] **Substantiator #3:** [add name and title] List all sources of information you have, but at least 2-3 different ones. If confidentiality agreements do not allow you to use real names, for example, please make this explicit.	
6	**Change story planning** **WHO** writes the change story? (author) **WHO** does the change story speak to? (audience) **WHERE** will you publish or distribute the change story? (donor report, social media, institution-internal documents, etc.)	
	Comments: Add any important comments, for example, on confidentiality agreements.	

Annex 3: Change story template[1]

Change story #	
Title of the change story Mention the change and actors	
Introduction What is the main point the story intends to make or illustrate? You can use a sentence from the outcome statement that explains the "WHO does WHAT differently, WHEN and WHERE?"	
Context in which the change took place Provide information that helps the reader understand the programme context. Whether your change story describes a planned change or an unintended one, it is useful to explain here: "What was the challenge that the programme helped to address and of which the described change is a positive example?". Describe the programme briefly. If you have the information, explain the baseline: "What was the situation before the programme intervention started?". You can use a quotation from a beneficiary describing the situation they faced before the intervention. Note that baselines can be difficult to establish for unintended outcomes, and it is fine to not have them in those cases. If this happens to your outcome statement, then just make explicit in your change story that it is an unintended outcome and you don't have baseline data.	

Change story #	
Results – What change occurred? Use this section to describe in detail the identified change (outcome statement). See step 3 of the Outcome Harvesting process. Include in your description the programme activities (What was done, by and with whom?) and explain how these contributed to producing the change. Rate and explain the importance of the change (high – moderate – low). Rate and explain the degree of the programme's contribution to the change (high – moderate – low).	
Evidence State clearly what kind of proof you have for the change story. List at least two to three, but as many sources of information as possible (remember: diverse types and a mix of written sources and people's testimonies are better).	
Conclusion Wrap up by reflecting about where the change story leads the programme. For example, ask: "What's next? What was learned and what are the wider implications of the story? How will these be applied in the project? What is next for the people described in your story? How do they move forward now and what challenges remain?".	
Reference list If you cited people or documents directly, you can list them here or provide links in footnotes.	

1 **This template is adapted from the guidance by Global Affairs Canada (2018):** "International Assistance Results Reporting Guide for Partners", pp. 19-20.

Annex 4: Outcome Statement example from Croplandia

Step	Outcome statement #	1
	Country	**Croplandia**
2 & 3	**Outcome description:** Explain the change in terms of "WHO does WHAT differently, WHEN and WHERE?"	"Since the signing of the Gender Strategy, the head of the human resources department took ownership of the recruitment of women into police forces and in March 2024 and launched a specific assessment of gaps in recruitment policies, which resulted in three measures being implemented as soon as September 2024 to reduce barriers to recruiting women within the institution".
4	**Level of importance** (high – moderate – low)	moderate. Some thought it was a huge step forward, considering that this decision came from the leaders of the institution. Others argued that it was important, but that the truly transformative change was ultimately the implementation of the proposed measures, and that it had to be seen whether this would lead to a tokenistic increase in the number of women recruited, or whether women would actually get more opportunities to access leadership positions within the institution.
4	**Level of contribution** (high – moderate – low)	moderate. Elsie Programme had played a useful role through the MOWIP and their advocacy efforts, but that there were other factors that played in too such as the objectives of the gender strategy and Croplandia's WPS NAP.

Step	Outcome statement #	1
5	**Evidence** **Proof #1:** [add source of information] **Proof #2:** [add source of information] **Proof #3:** [add source of information] **Substantiator #1:** [add name and title] **Substantiator #2:** [add name and title] **Substantiator #3:** [add name and title] List all sources of information you have, but at least 2-3 different ones. If confidentiality agreements do not allow you to use real names, for example, please make this explicit.	**Proof #1:** from the human resources department, the assessment report including recommendations **Proof #2:** from the human resources department, the policy installing the three measures to improve women's recruitment **Proof #3:** from the technical committee itself, any meeting notes that document conversations about the need to improve women's recruitment conditions or the MOWIP recommendations for recruitment **Proof #4:** meeting notes of consultations with the gender focal points about the three measures **Proof #5:** recruitment statistics, disaggregated by gender and rank **Substantiator #1:** head of the human resources department **Substantiator #2:** the lead researcher of the assessment
6	**Change story planning** **WHO** writes the change story? (author) **WHO** does the change story speak to? (audience) **WHERE** will you publish or distribute the change story? (donor report, social media, institution-internal documents, etc.)	**WHO writes?** – Head of the gender office collects the proof and drafts the change stories, together with the national implementing partner. **WHO is the audience?** – Change story 1: Elsie Programme donor, security sector institution staff (internal). Change story 2 (if approved by human resources): broader public in Croplandia. **WHERE to publish?** – Change story 1: donor report, intranet of the security sector institution. Change story 2 (if approved): social media posts of the security sector institution and the implementing partners.
	Comments: Add any important comments, for example, on confidentiality agreements.	Check confidentiality and anonymity requirements with human resources department. Ask them about target audience for the change story when interviewing them as substantiators. Note for the future: identify and try to speak with some of the women positively affected by the three measures, both new recruits and women whose access to promotions was improved by the measures.

Annex 5: Change story template: Example from Croplandia

Change story #	1
Title of the change story Mention the change and actors	Croplandia's police introduces measures to improve women's recruitment
Introduction What is the main point the story intends to make or illustrate? You can use a sentence from the outcome statement that explains the "WHO does WHAT differently, WHEN and WHERE?"	Since 2023, the Croplandia's police has changed the way the police are promoting gender equality by creating better conditions for women to join the service and make a career within all areas of service. The policy changes have taken place in a rather short timeframe (2023 to date) and are driven by leadership commitment.
Context in which the change took place Provide information that helps the reader understand the programme context. Whether your change story describes a planned change or an unintended change, it is useful to explain here: "What was the challenge that the programme helped to address and of which the described change is a positive example?". Describe the programme briefly. If you have the information, explain the baseline: "What was the situation before the programme intervention started?". You can use a quotation from a beneficiary describing the situation they faced before the intervention. Note that baselines can be difficult to establish for unintended outcomes, and it is fine to not have them in those cases. If this happens to your outcome statement, then just make explicit in your change story that it is an unintended outcome and you don't have baseline data.	These changes take place in the framework of Croplandia's broader gender mainstreaming efforts. While the country is far from achieving gender equality, there are senior leaders within the government, police, and armed forces who have supported the gender equality agenda for years. The country also has a WPS NAP and national-level policies for gender equality, including the all-encompassing security sector gender strategy, which also mentions the small number of women in the police service. In collaboration with DCAF's Elsie Programme, all security sector institutions have conducted a "Measuring Opportunities for Women's Meaningful Participation in Peace Operations" (MOWIP) assessment between 2020 and 2024, to understand their status quo and develop measures to improve women's meaningful participation. The MOWIP assessment of the police showed significant barriers for women to join the police forces and make a career within, and recommended actions to mitigate those. Besides the MOWIP assessments, DCAF's Elsie Programme has been supporting Croplandia's security sector in the overall implementation of the gender strategy and strengthening of the gender focal point network.

Change story #	1
Results – What change occurred? Use this section to describe in detail the identified change (outcome statement). See step 3 of the Outcome Harvesting process. Include in your description the programme activities (What was done, by and with whom?) and explain how these contributed to producing the change. Rate and explain the importance of the change (high – moderate – low). Rate and explain the degree of the programme's contribution to the change (high – moderate – low).	Since the adoption of the Gender Strategy, the head of Croplandia's police human resources department has taken ownership in taking steps to improve the recruitment of women into police forces. In March 2024, he launched a specific assessment of gaps in recruitment policies, which resulted in three measures being implemented as soon as September 2024. The measures aim to increase the number of women recruited and promoted into different positions at all levels of the Croplandia's police. The measures include awareness-raising campaigns in high schools and police academies to increase the pool of female applicants; adaptations of the physical requirements in the entrance exams; and an acknowledgment of "communication and negotiation skills" as part of selection and promotion criteria. The assessment is already an indication of change. While statistics will reveal soon whether more women are being recruited and promoted into different positions, the resulting measures can be considered as a change of moderate importance to the overall objective of enhancing women's meaningful participation in the police service of Croplandia. It is an important change in that it shows strong leadership commitment – a decisive factor for driving change in the hierarchical institution of the Croplandia's police.

Change story #	1
Results – What change occurred? (continued)	The leadership support is perceived by key informants as stronger than before, to which the evidence provided by the MOWIP could have positively contributed. The change is ranked as moderate rather than high, however, as implementation of the measures has barely started and hence the truly transformative change still must show: will the measures be implemented as proposed and will women really gain greater access to positions at all levels, including leadership positions, within the institution?

The contribution of the Elsie Programme to the recruitment policy assessment and consequent introduction of the three mitigating measures can be considered moderate. On the one hand, the Elsie Programme played an important and useful role, as the MOWIP report provided recommendations to strengthen the eligible pool of women and increase their career prospects within the Croplandia's police. This incited the human resources department to conduct their own assessment to better understand the gaps and identify what needs to happen to mitigate existing barriers. However, there were also other factors than the MOWIP, which positively influenced the leadership to prioritize recruitment policies, such as the objectives of the sectoral gender strategy itself and the priorities laid out for the security sector in Croplandia's WPS NAP, as well as a political decision to increase the overall number of police officers in the country. |

Change story #	1
Evidence State clearly what kind of proof you have for the change story. List at least two to three, but as many sources of information as possible (remember: diverse types and a mix of written sources and people's testimonies are better).	For building this change story, the head of the gender office at the Croplandia's police worked closely with Elsie Programme implementing partners, DCAF, and an external reviewer. Two high-level officials from the human resources department were interviewed to substantiate the outcome statement, which had emerged during an outcome harvest in early September 2024. Further proof was collected in the form of documents: the team consulted the recruitment policy assessment report, the policy installing the three mitigating measures, as well as different meeting notes provided by the technical committee of the gender strategy and gender focal points, which document conversations about the need to improve women's recruitment conditions or the MOWIP recommendations for recruitment and the three proposed measures. The team also consulted recruitment statistics, to understand the baseline and be able to track any changes that the three measures will produce in the coming months.
Conclusion Wrap up by reflecting about where the change story leads the programme. For example, ask: "What's next? What was learned and what are the wider implications of the story? How will these be applied in the project? What is next for the people described in your story? How do they move forward now and what challenges remain?".	In brief, the measures introduced by the human resources department constitute an important step towards the right direction. They reveal greater leadership commitment to enhancing women's meaningful participation. Alongside other actors and factors working with the Croplandia's police on gender equality, the Elsie Programme has contributed to this change through the MOWIP research and its ongoing support to the implementation of the sectoral gender strategy. We can thus stay on the lookout for the impact on women's recruitment numbers and hopefully their effective access to higher-level roles within the Croplandia's police forces in the future!

Change story #	1
Reference list If you cited people or documents directly, you can list them here or provide links in footnotes.	**Proof #1:** from the human resources department, the assessment report including recommendations **Proof #2:** from the human resources department, the policy installing the three measures to improve women's recruitment **Proof #3:** from the technical committee itself, any meeting notes that document conversations about the need to improve women's recruitment conditions or the MOWIP recommendations for recruitment **Proof #4:** meeting notes of consultations with the gender focal points about the three measures **Proof #5:** recruitment statistics, disaggregated by gender and rank. **Substantiator #1:** head of the human resources department **Substantiator #2**: lead researcher of the assessment

Annex 6: Other potential outcomes identified in Croplandia

Here are some other outcomes that Croplandia's outcome harvests pointed to. All of these could be taken and fleshed out into outcome statements and then change stories. We list them here for illustrative purposes, but they can also provide good practice examples, if you and your teams would like to practice filling the templates for outcome statements (Annex 2) and change stories (Annex 3) with a fictitious example, before harvesting your own outcomes. If you use them to practice, use your experience and imagination to come up with plausible details to flesh out the examples and fill the templates!

1. Training-related outcome statement

☑ **Outcome statement:** Selected male and female officers within Croplandia's police change their perceptions of the role women play in operational duties following the delivery of a gender awareness training in June 2024.

☑ **Some context/details:** Following the MOWIP recommendation to integrate gender training more systematically into the police curriculum at all levels, to enhance awareness about gender equality and skills for gender mainstreaming, the police, in collaboration with the national implementing partners and DCAF, developed and delivered tailored trainings on specific gender topics for gender focal points, operational police, and staff at the ministry level. Selected female and male participants of the gender in operational policing training showed higher awareness and knowledge about the relevant gender topics, and more confidence in applying them in their everyday work. Follow-up training sessions revealed that this application is not without barriers and resistances, but that confidence and awareness are higher.

☑ **Relevance:** moderate. It would be better to have an integration of gender mainstreaming across the police curricula for all staff, combined with leadership training. But it is a good step and immediate implementation, while curriculum integration is a longer-term endeavor.

☑ **Contribution:** The contribution of the Elsie Programme is high, as the MOWIP research provided the necessary evidence and recommendations to trigger the change, and the Elsie Programme supported the training development and implementation, as well as the monitoring of the effects.

2. Capacity-building and career development outcome statement:

☑ **Outcome statement:** Elsie Programme participation provides career push for women in Croplandia's armed forces in 2024, as leadership recognizes their capacities and trusts their expertise more.

☑ **Some context/details:** Involvement in the MOWIP assessments and with the Elsie Programme more broadly have been identified by two women in Croplandia's armed forces as an enabling factor for their career development. In their perception, the coordination of related activities between the sectoral gender strategy's Technical Implementation Committee and the external partners (national consultants, research organisations, Elsie Programme) provide a platform for gaining credibility and trust of the high-level commanders. They also see this as a unique capacity-building opportunity for the coordinators of gender work, be it heads of gender offices or gender focal points, and feel more knowledgeable, recognized by the leadership, and equipped with more authority to influence policy making and operational decision-making. One found easier access to deployment to peace operations in a leadership position, which after her return to Croplandia gave her an entry point to a higher-level position within the armed forces.

☑ **Relevance:** high, these women are key figures in the security sector institution's gender work and role models for others.

☑ **Contribution:** medium. The MOWIP / Elsie Programme engagement does not create the career opportunities or the structures – they pre-exist – but it potentially accelerates and strengthens them.

3. Leadership commitment opening the door to deeper gender work, Elsie Programme the key?

Outcome statement: After starting the collaboration with DCAF's Elsie Programme and a national consultant, Croplandia's gendarmerie leadership endorsed a research project on women in the gendarmerie in 2024, enabling for the first time qualitative research on women's roles and experiences as women in the gendarmerie.

☑ **Some context/details:** This research project had been proposed several years ago, to complement ongoing quantitative gender equality research, which is focused more on statistical recording of changes for women, such as the evolving percentages of women in higher-level positions in the security sector institution.

The gendarmerie leadership had been reluctant to endorse the project. After the inception of the collaboration with DCAF's Elsie Programme and a national research institution, they decided to authorize the research project, led by an experienced gendarmerie colonel. The research project will strengthen the qualitative knowledge about how gender equality has evolved and what it means within the security sector institution.

☑ **Relevance:** high. The leadership endorsement authorizes the project, creating the enabling conditions for an important research project to create the necessary evidence to improve women's conditions in the gendarmerie on the longer term.

☑ **Contribution:** high. While the research project had been in the pipeline for long, the trust-building work with the Elsie Programme and a national consultant have decisively contributed to convincing the leadership and opened the door for the research project to kick off.

References for further guidance

Relevant Elsie Initiative publications

- Carlsson, Karin, Implementing a MOWIP assessment: practitioners' insights, (Geneva, Switzerland: Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance DCAF, 2023).

- DCAF: Global MOWIP Report: Fit-for-the-Future Peace Operations: Advancing Gender Equality to Achieve Long-term and Sustainable Peace, (Geneva: DCAF 2022).

- Elsie Initiative Fund, Total MOWIPs completed as at 31 December 2024, (The Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations, 2025).

Recommended online guidance

- Berríos, Yahoska, Embracing change: Outcome Harvesting in peacebuilding practice, (London, UK: Conciliation Resources, March 2024).

- Garred, Michelle, and Min Ma, Change Inside and Out: An Evaluator's Guide to Outcome Harvesting + Attitude Change, (Ripple Peace Research & Consulting, 2024).

- INTRAC, Outcome Harvesting, (UK: INTRAC, 2017).

- Wilson-Grau, Ricardo, and Heather Britt, Outcome Harvesting, (Ford Foundation, 2012).

Websites on Outcome Harvesting

- www.outcomeharvesting.net
- www.betterevaluation.org

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