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## ACT – CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION (CSO)

### ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (OD) INFORMATION SHEET

#### MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (MEL)

The **purpose** of this OD Information Sheet is to introduce and to navigate CSOs through the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) process, supporting a better understanding of the design and application of knowledge and skills. The MEL OD Information Sheet will help to ensure that CSOs' activities and programmes are well monitored and evaluated and that learning is used in the development of future project activities, as well as to strengthen transparency and accountability.

All elements of the work of ACT mainstream Gender and Social Inclusion (G&SI) and a Rights-based Approach (RBA) to strengthen the sustainability of the work of CSOs. Throughout the planning and MEL process, G&SI and RBA are key components when measuring CSOs' effectiveness to bring about long-term and sustainable change.

#### **What is Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, and why do it?**

Project monitoring and evaluation is a combination of data collection and analysis to assess the extent a project or programme has, or has not, met its planned objectives. It should be stressed that **MEL** is now the more accepted acronym – and the L (for Learning) is very significant, as the most important outcome of M&E is the learning that it provides for the CSO's successful continuation of a project, or for the development of a new project. The findings and learning from MEL should also be shared with other CSOs and stakeholders.

#### **Monitoring**

Monitoring is the routine collection of data that takes place throughout the project implementation period, for the purpose of establishing whether activities are moving the project towards its set objectives. A monitoring plan is designed to ascertain whether or not the scheduled goals of the project are going to be achieved within the agreed period, and whether or not the approach is being used in the way that it was planned. It is a merely a descriptive process that gathers data in accordance with a predetermined plan.

#### **Evaluation**

Evaluation is not an ongoing process, it deals with wider questions that go beyond those of monitoring, such as whether or not the destination can be reached in the circumstances, or whether the course needs to be adjusted slightly or even changed completely. Unlike monitoring, evaluation involves a judgment component. Above all, it seeks to analyse data relating to the outcomes (immediate change) and impact (long term change) produced by your project.

Evaluation is a periodic, systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, programme, and is based on a full understanding of its context, design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and potential sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors. There are different types of evaluation, and they are differentiated by the time you carry out the evaluation. They include formative (to inform the next steps of the project), summative (to assess what worked, what didn't work and why not – the final learning from the project), and an ex-post evaluation (to assess whether the project has led to sustainable change). A formative evaluation usually takes place at the mid-term stage of a project; a summative evaluation takes place at the end of a project and an ex-post or impact evaluation takes place over a period of time after the project has ended.

### **Learning**

Learning comes from what has taken place. It is critical to understand what is working, what isn't working and why it is or isn't working, throughout the project's lifespan. Learning is informed by the monitoring and evaluation activities, as it informs the CSO how it can modify and improve its approach during the project, or plan for future projects. Learning is also very valuable to share with other CSOs and stakeholders. It is also good practice (when reporting) to include unexpected outcomes (good and bad), not to shy away from negative outcomes. This can show that learning has taken place and give insight as to how these could be mitigated against in the future. This demonstrates useful learning for the CSO (and others).

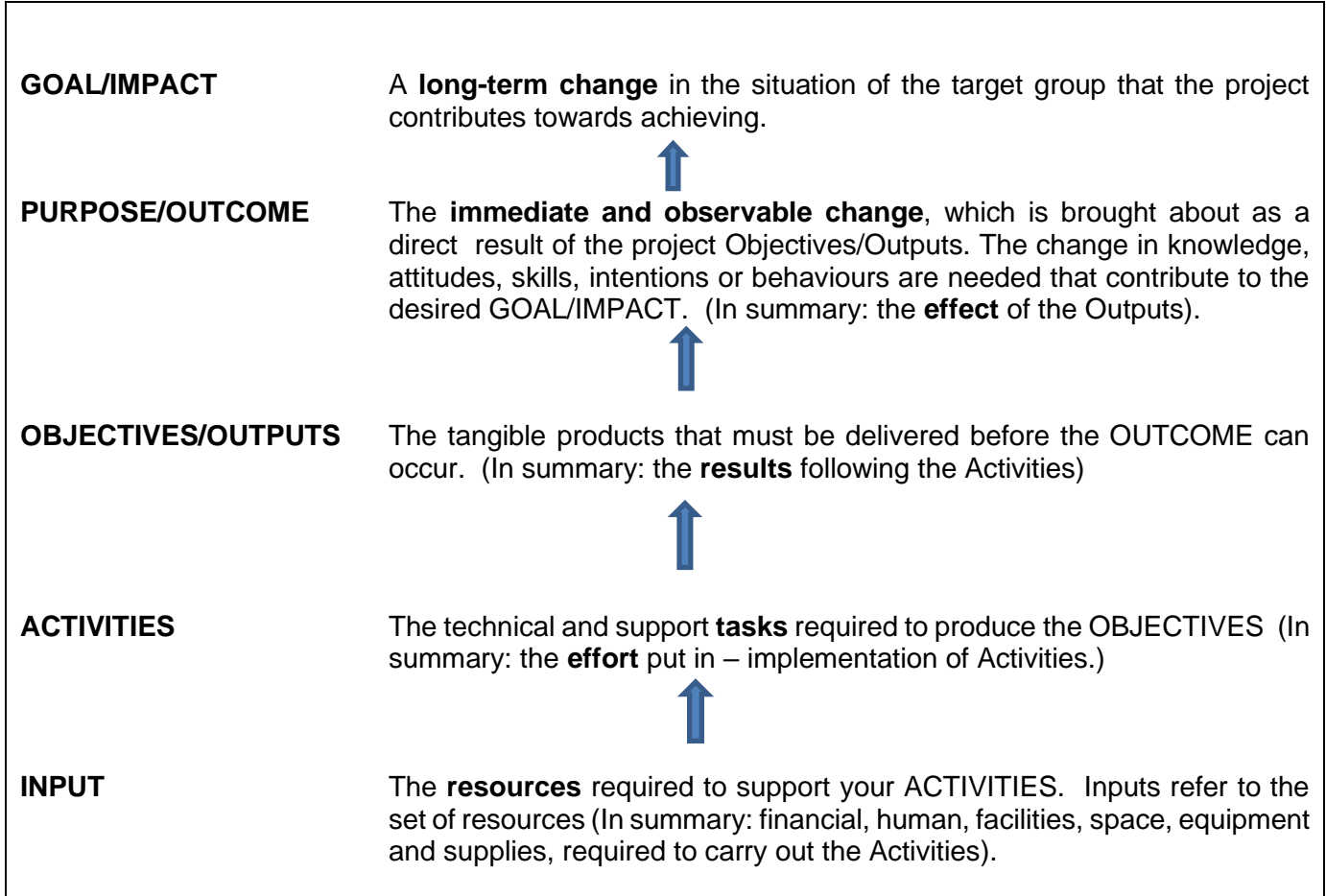
### **What do we monitor, evaluate and learn from?**

Monitoring and Evaluation targets different tasks. The CSO can carry out monitoring and evaluation of its projects, its programmes, its policies and its organisational strategy – all the resultant learning informs the CSO's future planning. The Causal Pathway is a useful tool to guide all MEL.

### **The Causal Pathway (what is it?)**

A Causal Pathway model is a useful way for the CSO to tell the story of its projects and programmes and is essential in developing a good quality evaluation. Drawing pictures of the pathway model enables a CSO to better understand how the project should operate and lead to results. The notion of causality is critically important to monitoring, evaluation and learning. Essentially it is a description of the chain of thinking of the CSO's project or programme: eg: If the CSO carries out its planned Activities → it will lead to the achievement of the stated Objectives; if it achieves its stated Objectives → it will lead to the stated Outcomes; if it achieves the stated Outcomes → it will contribute to the project or programme's Goal. This model helps the CSO to see at a glance just how its planned activities can lead to long-term change.

## The Causal Pathway Model



### Developing the Causal Pathway

Although this representation captures the big picture, it is not an exact representation of everything that's going on – it is a simplification of reality. It's an overview of the aspects of a project that can give a picture of the project the CSO would like to achieve, and a picture of the direction of the work to an external evaluator. A clear Causal Pathway represents those aspects of a project that, in the view of your stakeholders, are most important for understanding how the effort works. During its development, the CSO will go through several drafts before producing a version that accurately reflects the project's story. You may have more than one intermediate and short-term outcome.

### So, what are the elements of a Project's Causal Pathway?

#### Goal

Following the CSO's assessment of the context and the real situation of its constituents through an in-depth Problem Analysis with stakeholders, the CSO must develop a clear notion of the change it believes it can contribute to – in other words, the Goal of its work. When the CSO has a full understanding of the problem it wishes to address based on an analysis of the context and following a participatory process to understand the root of the problem, then it must develop a clear route to the solution of that problem. For example, if the problem is related to the situation of children living in the streets in poverty, develop clarity on what their life should look like in the future. There must be a clear 'end' in mind. Often a CSO's Goals are linked to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a clear set of 17 Goals and 169 Targets

to be achieved globally by 2030. The CSO will contribute to the long-term change it wishes to at the Goal level. An important point to stress here - unless there is 'buy-in' from local stakeholders during the planning stage, then it is unlikely that the Outcomes and Goal of the Project will be sustainable.

### **Outcomes**

The CSO needs to know where it is going, why it is going there, and how it will know it is making progress to get there. The Outcomes reflect the actual changes the CSO wishes to see which will demonstrate that it is contributing to the change at Goal level.

These can be seen as - Short-term outcome(s): The initial expected 'changes' in the situation of the CSO's constituent group, after the implementation of the Activities, and following the achievement of Objectives. Using the example above, this could be changes that are evident in the children's level of safety and security, quality of life, welfare and education.

Or, Intermediate outcome(s): Those interim 'changes' that provide a sense of progress toward reaching the long-term objectives (eg: positive changes in the situation and behaviour of the 'target' group). This could be a number of changes, for example: reduction in the number of children on the street; the availability of policy to support homeless children.

### **Objectives/Outputs**

These are immediate 'results' which can be seen after completion of the planned activities. These are what the CSO should achieve that is within its management and control. Examples might include: numbers of communities reached, number of community health workers trained, number of market women trained, number of callers on radio programmes, number of former street children in full-time education, etc. Each of the activities identified, should directly link to the achievement of one (or more) of the Objectives/Outputs.

### **Activities**

After the CSO identifies the change(s) its project should deliver, it is crucial to agree on the essential activities that will lead to this change. The CSO should consider what exactly needs to be done to bring about the change(s). Often activities include such actions as: training workshops, dramas or radio plays (to raise awareness), campaigns (to advocate for change), Town Hall Meetings (to influence community thinking); developing accessible materials (to share information and messages at community level); linking with wider stakeholders, eg: Local Government officials, community leaders, religious leaders, etc, to advocate for support and change; forming community advocacy groups; establishing safe spaces for people at risk, etc.

### **Inputs**

Inputs include the resources, contributions, and investments that are required to achieve the goals of the project. What staff, funding, and materials are required to carry out the Activities and to monitor progress.

## **What does the CSO need to be able to monitor a project's progress effectively?**

### **Indicators**

When the Causal Pathway has been developed, it is important for the CSO to consider how it is going to know whether its Activities are leading to the achievement of its Objectives, and whether those Objectives are bringing about the necessary change at Outcome level. For this the CSO needs to develop 'Indicators' which are simply that. They will indicate whether the project is on the right track. It is important for the CSO to be able to ascertain that their work has brought about the change, and not something else

that they cannot attribute to their own activities. It can be difficult to know if your project has actually “caused” the change you see. It is usual to try to develop one qualitative and one quantitative indicator per Objective.

### How to develop locally-relevant Indicators

Each Indicator should be SMART – in other words, it should be **Specific, Measurable, Attainable/achievable, Relevant and Timebound**. For indicators to be able to indicate effectively, they must be valid (measuring exactly what it is supposed to), reliable (consistent and believable), and feasible (collecting the data for the indicator will be possible and affordable).

### What are the types of Indicators?

Quantitative Indicators: These should determine the quantity of each type of response, it informs the CSO about the scope of the project, eg: the number of people reached or the number of activities, like training, or meetings conducted and the degree of change, and, for example, *the numbers of women and girls who are reporting incidents of violence against women and girls (VAWG) to the authorities, the proportion (%) of women who feel safe in their communities; increase in numbers of perpetrators of VAWG being charged to court and prosecuted*. When measuring proportions or percentages, it is necessary to have Baseline information developed at the start of the project. This means that there can be comparisons made against the baseline as the project progresses.

Qualitative Indicators: This type of indicator is not numerical, it is based on the quality of the change taking place, and the effectiveness of the project. The indicator should demonstrate the changes in quality of life – linked to the quantitative indicators. It helps the CSO to understand “how” and “why” their activities are working towards achieving the objective. For example, the provision of training and advocacy action around sexual based violence towards women and girls (VAWG), may require an indicator such as: *Women and girls feel more secure at home and on the streets; the police understand that VAWG is a violation of human rights and are prepared to address it; men are influencing other men to reduce domestic violence, reducing VAWG tolerance; stigma shown to survivors of VAWG is reducing*. These indicators would require feedback/verification from women, girls and men in the community, as well as authorities such as police, courts, schools, that would indicate that women and girls are safer as attitudes of men, police, etc, are changing, resulting in increased reporting and resultant action and reduced violence and abuse. The CSO cannot assume positive change based on limited feedback.

### Means of Verification

After the CSO has determined what would be the indicators of progress towards achieving their objectives and outcomes, it needs to consider how it can use these indicators to verify their effectiveness, and who they need to engage with to access the information needed. This is known as the Means of Verification. The processes of this are varied and many, and for qualitative indicators might include: quotes and testimonies from women and men in the community; case studies (before and after the project scenarios); the development and activation of policies to protect people at risk of violence; the changing perspectives reported by community members towards the issue; the ease with which people with disabilities can engage with community decision-making, feedback that demonstrates a reduction in stigma or discrimination of others, etc. For the verification of quantitative indicators, these may include: records of reported cases of abuse; feedback and surveys from women in work; feedback from people with disabilities who are in employment.

### Data Collection

Developing and using appropriate indicators ensures the gathering of data is relevant to monitoring and evaluation, because without data the CSO’s knowledge is founded on opinion and speculation, not on factual information. CSO project managers have a responsibility to gather both opinion and fact to make

a reasoned judgment on the achievement of its results. Data sources will vary according to whether the information is required before, during or after the project. A focus needs to be on the accuracy of the information (validity), the stability of the measures (reliability), the ease (and therefore cost) of collecting, collating and understanding the data, as well as of the risks to the data source and to the data collectors.

Primary Data Sources: these sources refer to data collected directly for the express purposes for which they will be used, eg: A survey of people with disabilities used to ascertain PWDs' needs for appropriate (and not assumed) support and employment assistance. This is an example of primary data collected specifically for a baseline study of People with Disabilities (PWDs), and this will help the CSO to plan its activities, objectives, outcomes and goal.

Secondary Data Sources: These sources refer to data that has already been collected, usually for a different purpose, but are available for MEL. Census data is an example of secondary data, but is very useful for baseline study or a formative evaluation.

### Documenting and Reporting MEL Results

MEL systems provide information to help CSOs to gather the appropriate information and to address the problems and challenges they face, and to achieve the results they aim for. Documenting and reporting results and learning from them are very important tasks of a MEL system. Amongst other reasons, donors require evidence that demonstrates the role of the CSO grant applicant to bring about appropriate change through its activities – comprehensive MEL reporting can provide this evidence – and lead to grant support.

### Logical Frameworks

What is a Logical Framework: A Logical Framework, or Logframe, also known as an MEL plan, represents an overarching plan for undertaking MEL functions for the life of a project and includes a step-by-step guide to its implementation over time. The Logframe is developed as a matrix while in the latter stages of developing a project plan.

The content of the Logframe, includes the items discussed above – it comprises the Causal Pathway, Indicators and Means of Verification. It is, therefore, developed in the final stages of research and planning of the project, before implementation begins. Often it is used as a Fundraising Tool and can be shared with potential donors. It demonstrates to the donors that the CSO has carried out an in-depth planning process and has an MEL plan firmly in place. In addition, developing a Logframe requires the CSO to consider any Assumptions that they are making when developing the project, and to consider any Risks that they may have to contend with during the project's implementation.

Throughout the lifespan of a project the Logframe is used to guide the planning of activities, and to monitor progress that the activities are making against the objectives and the outcomes. The content of the Logframe can be modified in agreement with stakeholders and as a project progresses and learning increases. The Logframe is also an important tool at the evaluation stage of a project, at mid-term, or at the end of the project. It is developed by the CSO, with the appropriate project team including development staff and finance staff. The details within the Logframe will determine the resources (inputs) required to undertake the project, so it is important that the finance team are involved in order to develop a Project Budget, against the planned activities. Both plans use a matrix layout, which organises the programme objective and sub-questions within rows and identifies appropriate measures and data within respective columns.



## What do CSOs need to be able to evaluate their effectiveness?

CSOs need all of the above – all the information required to monitor a project is needed to evaluate that project. Monitoring generally takes place at Activity and Objective levels, to assess ongoing progress. Whereas, evaluation is used to assess the results at Outcome level, ie: what change has taken place and whether it can be directly attributed to the work of the CSO and the achievement of their objectives, and whether these outcomes have contributed to the long-term and sustainable change expected at Goal level.

An evaluation usually examines the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, impact and sustainability of a project. To ensure objectivity, often these are carried out by an external body. Usually an evaluation takes place mid-way through a project (to ensure it is on track and to make recommendations for its improvement), and at the end of the project (to gather learning, to disseminate learning and to ensure future projects are based on learning).

Evaluation is an important management and learning tool. It helps the CSO to:

- Review its performance (against plans and budgets)
- Participatory evaluation can verify that a project has been designed to meet the real needs of its beneficiaries/constituents
- Make informed decisions (about next steps)
- Learn from experience (what it should continue doing, stop doing, and what it could do better)
- Identify unexpected outcomes
- Be accountable for its actions - it supports accountability by providing stakeholders with information to assess the activities and to learn and agree ways of improving with the CSO

An **Impact Assessment** can take place after a project has been completed to assess whether the Project has brought about sustainable change at Impact level – this can be up to 5 years following its completion.

The Logframe is an important tool for Monitoring, Evaluating and Learning.

## Developing a Logical Framework (matrix)

	<b>Project description</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Means of Verification</b>	<b>Assumptions</b>
<b>GOAL</b>	<i>The overall broader impact that the project will contribute to</i>	<i>What are the key indicators related to the Goal?</i>	<i>What are the sources of information for these indicators?</i>	<i>What are the necessary factors that are necessary to sustain the benefits in the long term?</i>
<b>OUTCOME(S)</b>	<i>The immediate development Outcome at the end of the project (that will contribute to the Goal)</i>	<i>What key indicators show how the outcome(s) have been achieved?</i>	<i>What are the sources of information that exist or can be collected? How will the CSO collect this information?</i>	<i>Which factors and conditions are necessary to achieve that objective? (external conditions)</i>

<b>OBJECTIVES/ OUTPUTS/ RESULTS</b>	<i>What are the deliverable results (that will lead to the Outcomes)</i>	<i>What are the indicators that measure whether the activities have achieved the objectives?</i>	<i>What are the sources of verification of these indicators?</i>	<i>What external conditions must be met to obtain the expected results on time?</i>
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<i>What are the key activities to be carried out and in what sequence to achieve the outputs.</i>	<b>Means</b> <i>What are the means required to carry out the activities (human resources, equipment, etc)</i>	<i>What are the sources of information about process of _____</i>  <b>Costs</b> <i>What are the costs of the activities?</i>	<i>What pre-conditions are required before the action starts?</i>

### Call to Action: Steps to developing a logical framework

- **Goal:** Starting at the top write the overall objective/Goal of the project. This may be beyond the reach of this project on its own, for example: “To contribute to the safety, security and empowerment of street children in Kano State”
- **Outcome:** It describes the desired outcome that the project will achieve. This should be clear and brief. For example: “Street Children in Kano city have access to education projects”.
- **Outputs:** Describe the results the CSO expects to see from the project intervention strategy. There may be several outputs. For example: 1) Increased numbers of street children able to read and write in x state, by x date; 2) Policies developed for the security and protection of street children in x state, by x date;.
- **Activities:** These are the tasks that are needed to achieve the outputs stated above. There may be several for each output. Statements should be brief and with an emphasis on action words. Examples: 1.1) Conduct baseline survey of numbers and situation of street children in Kano; 1.2) Establish basic skills training for x no of street children in x State. 2.1) Advocate for safe and secure residential care for x no of street children in x State. 2.2) Hold meetings with key decision-makers in x state; 2.3) Hold meetings and seminars with community leaders, religious leaders and schools on the importance of accessing education to the improvement of the situation of street children in x state.
- **Inputs:** Based on the needs of the project, gather information on the means and costs required to fulfil the planned project activities. It is important to also consider the staffing needs, the material needs, the office needs and related costs.

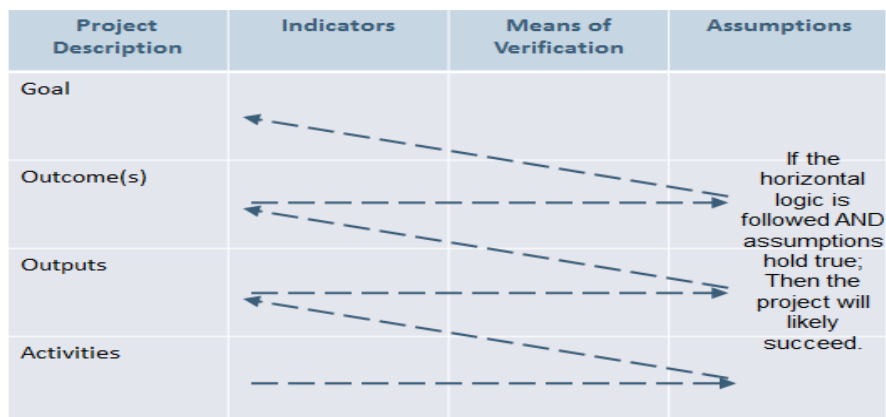


- **Assumptions:** Once the logframe matrix has been completed, and the Indicators and Means of Verification are included, based on each of the Outcome and Objectives, then consider the Assumptions that are being made at each level.

Then, reflecting up from the bottom of the logframe, consider how, if each assumption holds, it will be possible to move to the next stage of the project. Assumptions are external factors that have the potential to influence (or even determine) the success of a project, but lie outside the direct control of project managers.

Assumptions are usually identified during the project planning phase, and written in a positive way. The initial analysis of problems, stakeholders, objectives and strategies will have highlighted a number of issues that will impact on the project, but over which the project may have no direct control. In the street children example, important assumptions may include: 1) local authorities are willing to support the education of street children without paying fees; 2) the street children are willing to attend lessons; 3) the State wishes to reduce the number of children living on the streets and wish to enforce policies that provide safety, security and opportunities for street children.

Finally, **checking the feasibility of the project** - by assessing the project design quality the CSO will be able to find inconsistencies with the logic, gaps in information and other problems. The logframe should be checked in two ways – the first to check the vertical and horizontal logic and the second to check the quality. To check the logic, appraise the Project Description from bottom to top: using the IF, THEN process, as follows:



**IF** the activities are carried out and the Assumptions hold, **then** the Outputs will be achieved. **If** the Outputs are achieved and the Assumptions hold, **then** the Outcome(s) will be achieved. **If** the Outcome(s) are achieved and the Assumptions hold, **then** the project should contribute towards the achievement of the Goal.

### In Conclusion:

MEL is essential to all CSOs projects and programmes. Through the MEL process CSOs collect and analyse data and determine if their approach is valid, and effective and is contributing to their overarching Goal. Monitoring begins from the outset and continues throughout the lifespan of a project.

Evaluation comes later to assess how well the project has performed, and often provides recommendations for how it could improve in the future. And finally, an Impact Assessment looks back at the work of the CSO and assess how all the hard work has led to sustainable change. All of these processes are critical to the on-going and future learning in the CSO.

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