CONNECTING COMMUNITIES?

A REVIEW OF WORLD VISION'S USE OF MSC

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Cambridge and Melbourne

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The "River of Life" exercise in Cambodia

Connecting communities?
A review of World Vision's use of MSC

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Glossary

ADP	Area Development Programs
APR	Annual Progress Report, required from all WV ADPs
CDC	Community Development Coordinator
CoP	Community of Practice
DME	Design, Monitoring, Evaluation
HUE	Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs
LEAP	Learning through Evaluation with Accountability & Planning
LfT	Learning for Transformation project, in Cambodia, Philippines and India
MSC	Most Significant Change
PQL	Programme Quality and LEAP
NO	National Office
SO	Support Office
TDC	Transformational Development Communications project, in Philippines, India, Cambodia
TDf	Transformation Development facilitators
WV	World Vision

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Background to this review

This review was undertaken by two monitoring and evaluation consultants, both with prior experience in the use of the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique. The review was commissioned by World Vision UK, with funding support from World Vision Canada. The consultants have been asked to "*focus on what has and has not worked relating to the implementation and piloting of MSC and why; establish if the MSC tools were helpful to communities that used them; will suggest ideas for consideration on how MSC could be implemented in an integrated way given WV's structure, systems and sponsorship approach; and what the structural, systems and staffing implications of those suggestions might be*". The review was undertaken in February-March 2011 using a mix of field visits (WV India and Cambodia), online surveys, Skype interviews, and document reviews.

MSC is now being used, *in one form or another*, in many WV National Offices (NOs). Fifteen countries using MSC were identified through document searches, interviews and an online survey, and other users may exist that did not come to our attention. Three of these countries have participated in a planned and systematic introduction of MSC as part of WV's Transformational Development Communications (TDC) project; namely Cambodia, India and the Philippines. Almost all of this use has emerged in the last four years, which is a very brief period of time. The ways in which MSC has been used varies widely, some of which we would call MSC in name only. Most notably, where the MSC question is being used, but where there is no subsequent selection process of MSC stories. Across almost all the users of MSC that we made contact with there was a positive view of the value of the MSC process and the stories can produce. There is clearly a basis here for improving the way MSC is used within WV, and possibly widening the scale of its use. However, it is important to bear in mind that our views are based on a largely self-selected sample of respondents, from 18 of the 45 countries we sought to engage.

1.2 Overview of how MSC is being used in WV

Purpose: At least fifteen National Offices are currently using MSC, in one form or another. Amongst these, the most common purpose for using MSC was for periodic monitoring of project progress while it was being implemented (i.e. repeated collection and selection of stories). The use of MSC to generate stories for communications was almost as common, and often occurred in parallel with its use for monitoring. Approximately half the NOs using MSC had used it as part of a mid-term or final evaluation. Where MSCs was being used, half reported using in all ADPs, whereas others were only using it in some. While the use of MSC within the TDC projects had a specific focus of transforming communities as well as WV and donors, this was to be achieved through its implementation as a monitoring tool and it also through the wider communication and dissemination of stories.

Management: The sections of WV reported as responsible for initiating and managing the MSC process varied widely (and so did the nomenclature to describe these sections). DME units (which tended to sit within Program Quality) were the most common, then Communications, then Operations Departments and Sponsorship units. In many cases two sections were reported to be involved, sometimes with the boundaries between the two being blurred.

Training: Almost all the current users of MSC reported that some form of training had been provided. The provision of training materials was less widespread. With the exception of the TDC countries and Malawi, it seems likely that much of this training was a once-off event, with no follow up. Pilot testing was also uncommon, taking place in the three TDC countries and possibly two others.

Story collection In almost all uses of MSC the MSC question focused specifically on changes caused by or associated with the WV project. In some countries domains were focused (via the MSC question) on different kinds of program areas. In others, stories describing kinds of outcomes were classified after they were collected, sometimes by selection panels. In some cases the MSC question asked about changes that had occurred since the WV project began, whereas in others the focus was on changes occurring in the last reporting period.

A large number of "MSC stories" have been collected over the past five years, most of which are undocumented, because they did not progress pass a community level selection process. Amongst those documented we viewed a casually sampled set of stories from seven surveyed countries. Many lacked a core feature of an MSC story: a clear explanation of why they were significant to the storyteller, as well as why they had later been selected as most significant by others. However, within these there were two notably good examples.

Selection and feedback: The inclusion of a selection stage in the MSC process, after collection of stories, was reported in most but not all of the NOs using MSC. Where this was being used, the selection processes seem to be most common at the community level. Selection processes involving NO staff were much less common, and those involving SOs may not exist. Documentation of the reasons for selections made was uncommon. Surprisingly, amongst the evaluations that reportedly included the use of MSC, none of those examined included a selection process, following the initial collection of MSC stories. Provision of feedback varied widely as did how it actually took place. The most common means was through story tellers' participation in community level selection processes.

Verification of stories was reported by half the users of MSC, and in many cases took place at the same time as stories were being collected and selected, through the use of a group process. Verification also took place during a home visit to the storyteller and consultation with friends and/or neighbours.

Quantification: Within the small sample of MSC stories there were some good examples of numerical details being provided. As far as we know there have been no attempts at quantifying the incidence of specific MSC type events, through rapid or single purpose surveys. These might have been expected in evaluations that had made use of MSC.

Secondary analysis of MSC stories was rare, and happened primarily in association with community level selection processes. This took the form of discussion about common themes in the MSC stories that were reported although it is unclear how this information was then documented and put to use In contrast, some form of content analysis of MSC stories was common to all evaluations that made use of MSC, though this was not without its faults. Meta-monitoring, in the form of tracking percentages of negative stories or numbers of stories coming from particular groups, did not seem to exist.

1.3 The findings: perceptions and outcomes of using MSC

Perceptions of MSC stories: The majority of the survey respondents, as well as those interviewed and met had a positive view of the credibility of the MSC stories, in the eyes of senior WV staff in the NOs and SOs. Only 8% of survey respondents picked a critical view, relating to the repetitive nature of some stories. However, we don't know how well founded those views are. One survey was undertaken of sponsor's views of the information provided to them by the Malawi NO in 2007 versus 2006 and reported positive findings overall (but the effects of the MSC stories could not be separated out). In the case of the TDC application of MSC, because it was a heavily community focused approach to MSC it was generally felt that the stories were believable and 'authentic' because they had been chosen by the community members themselves.

The impact of MSC on policies and practices: Approximately a third of surveyed WV staff said they could think of examples where learning from the discussion and selection of stories led to a decision to change WV project. However their ability to provide examples was more limited. Only one third (10% of all) of these were able to describe how the discussion of specific MSC stories (or types of) led to programme changes. This was also true for the TDC countries. These "stories about stories" are probably the most valuable of all and arguably the kind that should appear in LEAP reports.

Who benefits from MSC: The online survey asked WV staff about who benefits from the use of MSC, and gave them four categories to rate in degrees of benefit they received. While the opinions of the 39 respondents from 18 countries varied, in aggregate they thought "the donors, funding the project" benefited the most, then "the project staff, implementing the project", then "others, who will be reading about the project", then "the project beneficiaries participating in the project". Although these are opinions and not necessarily facts, this ranking is probably the reverse of what many in World Vision, and its donors, would like to see.

In comparison, WV staff interviewed as part of our review of the use of MSC in the TDC project in India and Cambodia believed that community has received considerable benefit, in additional to the NO and ADP. Beyond improved reporting to donors (which did not surface as a main benefit), the value of using MSC is seen much more in terms of its benefit to community. This is likely to be as a result of the transformation focus of the TDC, although the stated goal was to transform community, and WV and its donors. It was difficult to gauge how and in what ways the TDC may have achieved the latter.

Evaluations of the use of MSC: As far as we know there have been two evaluations, one of the MSC and APR pilot process in Malawi in 2007 and another of the TDC project in 2010. The findings of the Malawi evaluation were almost uniformly positive. While the evaluation focused on the workings of the MSC process rather than its impacts the report did express a strong view about the empowering effects of people's participation in the MSC process: "*Peoples' confidence in what they do and own. Initially many people in the program suffered from latent inferiority complex. They thought what they do and have is not worthy sharing and news for celebration but there is now realization that the opposite is true."*

Although the TDC evaluation found that the project had fulfilled its key objectives it was unclear from the report how these had been achieved. While it was clear that the MSC stories had been useful for marketing and communications, the extent to which they had been able to educate and transform WV and donors was hard to gauge. However, as in the Malawi evaluation, the TDC evaluation report highlighted the value of MSC as a model to empower and transform communities. The recommendations that emerged from the pilot evaluation were intended to consolidate the use of MSC during the final phase of the pilot (including how best to mainstream MSC) as well as to improve its potential as an M&E tool for organisational learning. This shift from a communications and transformation focus to a DME focus has yet to be realised. The mainstreaming of the use of MSC among ADPs has proved quite successful in Cambodia and less so in India which opted out of the final phase of the pilot.

1.4 Recommendations emerging from this review

One of the aims of this review was to suggest how MSC could be improved and implemented in an integrated way within WV. During the study a number of issues and areas for improvement have emerged associated with the current use of MSC, and in each case recommendations have been made by the authors to address these. For the purposes of this executive summary the recommendations have been grouped according to topic and therefore may not necessarily appear in the numerical order in which appear in the report. Our answers here are oriented towards the immediate clients for this review (WV UK and WVI). However many of the recommendations made

throughout the report have wider applicability, to other SOs and to NOs using or thinking about using MSC.

1. Purpose: How WV chooses to use MSC within the program cycle depends on WV's primary purpose for using it and the frequency with which you will implement the process. There are a whole range of ways in which MSC can be implemented, but a common feature to all applications of MSC is the inclusion of story collection, selection and feedback. While MSC is suited to both monitoring and evaluation, in both cases there should be a focus on learning rather than just accountability. Whichever you opt for it is important to understand that MSC is not a standalone technique, but an important addition to an M&E framework. It should fill the gaps and complement your other methods.

- **Recommendation 4.8**: Greater care should be taken with claims to be using MSC. MSC proper involves use of the MSC *question* along with a MSC *selection process* (and *explanation* of the selection).
- **Recommendation 5.6**: WV NOs should use stories that have been shared and selected within communities as the basis for further levels of selection at the ADP level and/or National office level. For example annual selection of stories could be built in to the annual meetings for ADP managers and staff. This would create a dialogue across the national organisation in terms of what *is significant* and what should they therefore be doing more of in the future.

Commissioners of evaluations within NO, SOs and WVI should take a rigorous approach towards the use of MSC for evaluation purposes, to ensure it generates meaningful and credible results. Poorly used it will undermine the credibility of both the method and its users. More specific recommendations are made below. One measure of success could be the number of evaluations using MSC that WV is willing to make public via its websites.

- **Recommendation 4.1**: When WV considers the use of MSC as part of an evaluation methodology there should be a clear statement of how this method fits the specific circumstances. Any use of MSC as a stand-alone method needs to be justified, ideally it would be used alongside other methods with compensating advantages, such as simple surveys or polls, that would enable generalisations.
- **Recommendation 4.13**: Evaluations of WV programs should seek to make use of any accumulated sets of MSC stories, before collecting additional MSC stories. Where those sets of stories exist the evaluators should use a participatory approach to the content analysis of the stories. This should be supplemented by an analysis of where the stories have come from, how the program responded to the issues in the stories, and the types of stories that have been neglected (not told or not selected thereafter).
- **Recommendation 4.9**: Using MSC type questions in an evaluation, without a subsequent selection process, represents a lost opportunity to engage different groups of stakeholders and to identify similarities and differences in their assessment of project outcomes. If WV offices are to require evaluators to use MSC they should require them to use both the MSC question and associated selection processes.
- **Recommendation 4.6:** At least in the case of mid-term reviews and evaluations using MSC participants should be asked at least two kinds of MSC questions, one relating to changes caused by the project and then another relating to causes arising from any other developments or events.

2. **Management**: Because MSC was designed as a monitoring method, and can also be used as part of evaluations, the DME units within NOs should be the default location for responsibility for the management of MSC processes. However, wherever possible other sections of NOs, including those

responsible for sponsorship reports and communications products, should be included in a selection process taking place at NO and ADP levels that then leads to any MSC stories being included in progress reports. (being **Recommendation 4.4**)**.** Management of the *process* of MSC should be seen as distinct from the *use of stories* for communications.

3. **Training and guidance:** Although the LEAP guidelines require MSC stories, there has been no process of rolling out training to NOs on how to collect and select these stories. A link was provided in the LEAP Guidelines to the Davies and Dart (2005) MSC Users Guide, but this should not be considered a substitute for staff training and guidance materials that customise the use of MSC to needs of WV NOs and programmes.

    - **Recommendation 4.7:** If LEAP reporting guidelines are to continue to ask for MSC stories, then the WVI Resource Materials Team needs to develop more detailed guidance, possibly as an adjunct document. The guidance should cover (a) the contents of MSC stories and (b) processes for collection and selection. This could be developed using existing MSC training materials already developed by different WV offices. More specific recommendations are made below. Measures of success could include: (a) numbers and proportions of these materials viewed/downloaded by WV staff, and (b) the range of WV staff viewing/downloading the resource materials.
    - **Recommendation 5.1**: Rarely in our experience has MSC been able to gain full momentum from a single training event. Where NOs are using MSC the staff involved would benefit from follow-up training events which included reflections on issues emerging from their uses of MSC. Responsibility for providing regular follow-up and support needs to be assigned to a designated person or team.
    - **Recommendation 5.2:** Frontline staff should be encouraged to document stories as they are told. At a minimum this should include the MSC stories selected by each sub-group, not just the story selected at the plenary level of TDC-type community meetings. Better still would be at least one-line recording of the *types* of change mentioned by each story teller within each of those sub-groups. Skills associated with documenting stories should in included in MSC training, with a focus on better capturing the storytellers' voice.

4. **Story collection:** The process of simply recording MSC stories has itself presented multiple challenges. Often, only those stories selected as significant were documented. There was also much confusion about the difference between different types of stories (i.e., success story, human interest story, case study) that have been introduced into WV over time. Consequently within WV it is unclear what exactly constitutes an MSC story. Among other things (see pages 20 and 41) what differentiates an MSC story from other types of story is the inclusion of significance to the story teller.

    - **Recommendation 4.10**: WV documentation on MSC should avoid any reference to collecting or selecting *representative* stories of change. [see page 24]
    - **Recommendation 5.3:** While the River of Life has obviously proved to be a useful tool to facilitate story telling in Cambodia it would be better adapted for use as a reflection tool to elicit the various changes that have happened, prior to identifying the *most significant* change amongst these.
    - **Recommendation 5.4:** Collecting of both positive and negative stories should be encouraged. One way to do this is to establish a 'negative changes' domain so that there is a recognised place for submitting negative stories. Until then, the absence of negative stories will suggests that WV's communications needs are being given higher priority than identifying ways to improve programme design and implementation.

5. **Story selection and feedback:** The MSC process enables stories to be used as a platform for dialogue and learning. Stories are an excellent vehicle for dialogue, because they are open to multiple interpretations and it is through the selection process that these multiple interpretations are surfaced and explored. This in turn can lead discussions about program intention, impact and ultimately future direction. Story selection is the very heart of MSC: "Without selection it is not MSC". While selection at the community level is resulting in dialogue and learning among those participating in story sessions, the full potential of MSC to encourage learning, particularly at an organisational level is not being realised in WV. In large scale programs multiple selection processes need to take place, both in different locations and within different levels (e.g. within communities and WV offices assisting them). Dialogue needs to be taking place not only within each selection process, but also between those involved in different selection processes.

    - **Recommendation 4.15:** The process for capturing lessons from stories (and discussions thereof) and applying to these to policy and practice needs to be more structured. For example, LEAP requirements for stories, which do refer to identifying story implications, need to ask more explicitly for recommendations and for information on what has been done about them.
    - **Recommendation 5.5:** Selection processes should be structured in such a way that true discussion and dialogue can take place; firstly, this means holding discussions in groups of no more than eight people. Secondly WV staff should explore alternative ways of structuring the selection process, other than using a single hierarchical approach. It is possible for a number of smaller groups to select from the same group of stories and that for each selected story to be considered significant for that particular group without ending up with only one story. This is often referred to as parallel group selection:
    - **Recommendation 5.6**: The use or reference to pre-defined criteria for selection should be avoided. If criteria are agreed in advance, then organisational learning remains focused on best ways of achieving those ends (stories describing the means). If the criteria are left open for discussion then learning can also take place at a higher level (sometimes described as second order learning) – are we pursuing the right objectives, or do they need to be changed?
    - **Recommendation 5.7**: WV NOs should use stories that have been selected within communities as the basis for further levels of selection at the ADP level and/or National office level. For example annual selection of stories could be built in to the annual meetings for ADP managers and staff. This would create a dialogue across the national organisation in terms of what *is significant* and what should they therefore be doing more of in the future.
    - **Recommendation 4.11**: All documented MSC stories should have a section which follows the story, explaining (a) who selected the story, and (b) why they selected it as most significant.

While one to one feedback is provided by SO on the Annual and Semi Annual Programme Management Reports which they receive, this tends to be centred around commenting on the stories and not their *significance*,(i.e. does the SO also think that the stories are significant for the reasons given, for different reasons, or do they perhaps not agree that they are significant. As selection is not occurring at the SO there is no systematic and collective feedback being provided on the MSC stories. Better feedback could help drive continual incremental improvements, both in the story contents and the processes used to generate them. If this approach is successful in generating improvements then its use could also be encouraged amongst Programme Officers working in other SOs supporting the same ADPs as WV UK.

- **Recommendation 4.5:** UK SO Programme Officers (to start with) could provide NOs with collective feedback on the stories they have provided each reporting period. This could be through the choice of what they see as the most significant change of all, along with an explanation of why they have selected it, in a communication to all the countries that have submitted reports (e.g. via an existing newsletter or website). Without such feedback it is unlikely that the quality of LEAP stories will improve.

6. **Dissemination and use of stories**: The WV UK Programme Officers should make the MSC stories available to other sections of their office e.g. sponsorship and communications) and to other SOs, via an interactive (i.e. Web 2.0 type) database. Measures of success could include: (a) the numbers and proportions of MSC stories used by others within WV for external communications purposes, and (b) the range of WV staff viewing /downloading the stories.
    - **Recommendation 4.3:** Where MSC is established under the authority of the DME staff one performance indicator for the process should be the number and proportion of MSC stories used by other sections of the NO and associated SOs.
    - **Recommendation 4.12:** The LEAP reporting requirements are generating large numbers of "MSC" type stories. For example, in Cambodia ADPs are generating 2 x 38 stories a year. If these stories were entered into an internal database, preferably with a blog-type structure, they would be accessible to other sections of WV (e.g. Communications, Sponsorship), and the blog could be a vehicle by which ongoing feedback could be provided to all ADPs on what SO think are most significant changes. As they accumulate they could also be subject to a detailed content analysis.
    - **Recommendation 4.14:** WV should investigate how community level experiences of development can be made much more accessible to WV SO and donors through Web 2.0 facilities, with an emphasis on enabling two way flows of information, starting with MSC stories and different forms of feedback about those stories. The online story datebase developed by Shawn Callahan could be trialled, or used to stimulate the design of a more customised in-house facility.

7. **Building on this review**: The WVI Resource Materials Team should facilitate the growth and functioning of the recently established MSC Community of Practice (CoP), as a major means of supporting NOs wanting to use MSC. More specific recommendations are made below. Measures of success could include: (a) numbers and proportions of active members, and (b) amount of contents uploaded and downloaded from a CoP intranet webpage.
    - **Recommendation 2.1**: All those who participated in the MSC review should be invited to join the WV recently created MSC CoP, with a view to sharing any comments or questions they may have about this draft report. Ideally that would be supported by a WV intranet page where supporting documentation could be provided. E.g. the WV & MSC Bibliography and WV Contacts database. Later developments could include uploading of training materials already developed by different WV offices, and a FAQ section.
    - **Recommendation 2.2**: The finalised version of this review should be followed by more specific investigations. Within the options we have outlined we recommend the following priorities: (a) review all available MSC training materials, (b) review all evaluations using MSC, (c) undertake an illustrative example of a content analysis of a set of MSC stories available from one country, where there is interest from the NO concerned.
    - **Recommendation 4.2:** Even if the current decentralised approach towards the use of MSC is continued, it would be useful if intellectual *leadership* could be provided to MSC

users across all NOs through the use of the newly created MSC CoP. Ideally this would involve the active participation of a small team of co-facilitators, representing different functional interests within WV, each of whom were enthusiastic about making better use of MSC.

1.5 Concluding comment about the use of MSC within WV

The defining core feature of MSC is the process of selection. The process of selection, when it takes place through a dialogue between two or more people, helps *surface participants' values*, about what is important in people's lives. An agreement reached between two or more participants about the significance of a change reflects the *discovery of connections between people*, in the form of their shared values and concerns, which can then be the basis for future joint or coordinated actions. This title of this report refers to MSC's potential for connecting communities in this way. By this we mean not only connecting different groups within ADPs, but connecting WV NO staff with those communities, connecting WV SO staff with NO staff and the communities they are working with, and connecting them all with supporting donors (individual and organisational). That potential has been only partially realised, most notably at the community level and then at the interface between communities and WV. The capacity of MSC to connect sections within WV, and WV with its donors (both individuals and organisations) remains wide open to development.

> *"My view is that this has such a potential for strengthening who we are as an organisation because of the connections it makes. But it's just one of these other good ideas that has only made so much progress"* (WV staff member)

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2. Review purpose and methods

This review has been commissioned by World Vision UK, with funding support from World Vision Canada. The Terms of Reference (ToR) were developed by Angela Kellett (Evidence & Accountability Manager, WVUK) & Seamus Anderson (Senior Resource Materials Specialist, WVI) in consultation with the review consultants Dr Rick Davies[1] and Tracey Delaney[2]. The full text of the ToRs is available in Annex A.

2.1 World Vision expectations

According to the ToRs, "World Vision has used the Most Significant Change tool in various projects and programmes throughout the globe. A number of pilots have been initiated with varying degrees of success. Informal networks have been established to share experiences but this has often not been joined up and organisational lesson learning to inform the future way forward has been limited".

The consultants have been asked to "focus on what has and has not worked relating to the implementation and piloting of MSC and why; establish if the MSC tools were helpful to communities that used them; will suggest ideas for consideration on how MSC could be implemented in an integrated way given WV's structure, systems and sponsorship approach; and what the structural, systems and staffing implications of those suggestions might be". The synthesis and analysis of this information is expected to "inform WVI on how MSC can most effectively be used and implemented in the future. In addition, this research will inform the future development of tools, training materials and products for rolling out MSC across the Partnership."

2.2 Review approach and methods

In summary, the review consisted of two parallel processes of inquiry. One consisted of a general review that has been undertaken of WV national offices using MSC. The other focused on the use of MSC as part of WV's Transformational Development Communication (TDC) pilot project which included field visits to participating WV National Offices in Cambodia and India.

In detail, the review process involved the following activities:

- Development of a *WV Contacts database*, starting with names identified by Hilary Williams and Seamus Anderson, and then persons identified by those names and others found via WV documents and reports. The contacts database now lists 146 people. Development of a *WV & MSC Bibliography*, starting with documents identified by Hilary Williams and Seamus Anderson, and then via others in the contacts database. The bibliography now lists 61 documents
- Online surveys of WV staff 12 selected National Offices (Bolivia, Cambodia, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). Responses were sought from at least three people per country. In reality 36 responses were received from 10 of the 12 countries[3]. Malawi and Zambia National Offices were particularly responsive. A shortened version of the online survey was sent to 36 other National Offices, and 13 responses were received from 8 of these. In total 18 National Offices responded, out of a total of 45 supported by the WV UK SO. The design of the online surveys was informed by a prior consultation with members of the MostSignificantChanges email list, hosted on Yahoo.com
- Skype interviews held with 23 people, including 13 staff with regional or international responsibilities and 10 staff working in 8 of the 12 selected National Offices.

[1] Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant, Cambridge, UK, www.mande.co.uk
[2] Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant, Melbourne, Australia, http://www.traceydelaney.net
[3] Although no response was received from Kenya or Sri Lanka responses were received from other staff who had been associated with programs or evaluations there.

- Two one-week long field visits to WV National Offices in Cambodia and India, including site visits to 3 ADPs in Cambodia and 3 ADPs in India and interviews with relevant national office staff
- Extensive email communication to facilitate all the above.

Until now, opportunities for participation in the review have largely been determined by the consultants and the two WV sponsors of the work.

  - **Recommendation 2.1**: All those who participated in the MSC review should be invited to join the WV recently created MSC CoP, with a view to sharing any comments or questions they may have about this draft report. Ideally that would be supported by a WV intranet page where supporting documentation could be provided. E.g. the WV & MSC Bibliography and WV Contacts database. Later developments could include uploading of training materials already developed by different WV offices, and a FAQ section.

2.3 The limitations of this review

There are three bodies of documents which deserve further attention:

- The sets of MSC and related stories collected within the various NOs. In Cambodia alone there were 139 stories on the WV Cambodia website, dating from November 2003 to January 2010, of which 16 are explicitly labelled as MSC stories. In each of the other countries using MSC stories are accumulating. We have read only a very small sample of these.
- The evaluations completed of WV programmes which have made some use of MSC type questions or processes. We have identified 13 so far but think that many others also exist[4]. We have only skim read those already identified.
- The training materials used by NOs and others to train staff in the use of MSC. We have accessed those used in a few NOs, but believe most NOs that have provided some form of MSC training have training materials of some kind.

  - **Recommendation 2.2:** This review should be followed by further more specific investigations. Within the options above we recommend that the following order: (a) review all available MSC training materials, (b) review all evaluations using MSC, (c) undertake an illustrative example of a content analysis of a set of MSC stories available from one country, where there is interest from the NO concerned.

[4] See the WV & MSC Bibliography for details

3. A quick summary of the use of MSC by World Vision

The table on the following page summarises some basic factual information about MSC use in 15 WV National Offices (NOs) gained from the online surveys, skype interviews and country visits. Participant's judgements and opinions about these uses are covered later in this report (see sections 4 and 5)

In summary:

- 15 of 18 responding National Offices reported they are currently using MSC. It is possible that the other 4, as well as other non-responding National Offices, are using some variants of MSC in response to the LEAP requirements. In its most minimal form this will be a one person affair, where the report writer reflects on their own knowledge of programs in the last year, and selects what they think is the most significant change.
- Amongst the MSC using NOs, the most common use of MSC was for program monitoring (12/15) and public communications (10/15). Half of the 15 users also reported its use for mid-term or final evaluations. Around half of the 12 NOs using MSC for monitoring purposes were covering all their ADPs, the rest only covered some ADPs.
- The sections of WV reported as responsible for initiating and managing the MSC process varied widely (and so did the nomenclature to describe these sections). DME units were the most common (6/15), then Quality and Communications (4/15 each), then Operations Departments and Sponsorship units (2/15 each).
- 7 of the 9 current users of MSC (who responded to the long survey) reported that some form of training had been provided, and responses from the other 2 countries were ambivalent. This was more than we expected, except in the case of the three TDC countries, where there were specific project objectives concerning the use of MSC. The provision of training materials was less widespread (4/9), but possibly under-reported.
- Pilot testing of MSC was uncommon, taking place in the three TDC countries and two others.
- The inclusion of a selection stage in the MSC process, after collection of stories, was used in at least half (4/9) of the MSC user NOs (responding to the long survey), and possibly in use in 3 of the others (where respondents' views differed).
- Verification of stories was more common than we expected (7/9), and associated in most cases with the use of selection. Provision of feedback was equally common, in 6/9 of the user NOs(responding to the long survey), but with wide variations in how it actually took place. The most common being through story tellers' participation in community level selection processes.
- Secondary analysis of MSC stories was rare, and happened primarily in association with community level selection processes. This took the form of discussion about common themes in the MSC stories that were reported. However, some form of content analysis of MSC stories was common to all evaluations that made use of MSC. Meta-monitoring, in the form of tracking percentages of negative stories or numbers of stories coming from particular groups, did not seem to exist.

Because of the limited number of respondents to the online survey, both across and within countries, the data we have presented in the table on page 15 is incomplete. However if there was a dedicated facilitator for the MSC CoP the coverage could be progressively extended and updated over time, and shared via the COP.

MSC use in selected WV National Offices

A summary of factual data from 49 online survey respondents from 18 countries

Uses of MSC	Cambodia	India	Bolivia	Ethiopia	Kenya	Lesotho	Malawi	Myanmar	Philippines	Sri Lanka	Zambia	Zimbabwe	Albania	Bosnia and H	Haiti	Lebanon	Mexico	Niger	PNG	Uganda	All
Currently using (Q.6)	1	1	1			1	1	1	1		0.9	1	1	0.7		1	1	1	1		15
Used in past (Q.6)					1		0.1				0.1			0.3							2
For monitoring (Q.8)	1	1	1			1	0.8	1	0.5		0.9		1	0.3			1	1	1		12
For mid-term review (Q.8)	0.5	0.5			1	0.5	0.1		0.5			1		0.7			1		1		7
For final evaluation (Q.8)	0.5	0.5	1			1	0.2		1		0.1					1	1		1		7
For public communications (Q.8)	1	1			1		0.6	1	1		0.4	1	1	0.3		1			1		10
All ADPs involved (Q.10)	0.5	1				1	0.9	1			0.3		1				1				7
Some ADPs involved (Q.10)	0.5		1		1		0.1		1		0.5	1		1		1			1		8
Ministry Quality Dept introduced it (Q.9)						1	0.4	1					1					1			4
Communications unit/dept introduced it (Q.9)	1	0.5							1				1								4
DME unit introduced it (Q.9)	1						0.1				0.5			1		1	1		1		6
Operations Department						1	0.4				0.2										2
Sponsorship introduced it (Q.9)		0.5	1				0.4														2
Training provided? (Q.11)	1	1			1	0.5	1	1	1		0.1	1									8
Training materials provided? (Q.12)	1					0.5	0.8	1	1		0.2										5
Pilot tested? (Q.13)	0.5	1			1		0.5		1												4
Selection of stories? (Q.19)	1	0.5	0.5		1	0.5	0.9	1	1		0.3						1				8
Verification? (Q.22)	1	0.5				0.5	0.7	0.5	1		0.7						1				6
Feedback is provided (Q.23)	1	1				1	0.8		1		0.7										5
Secondary analysis of stories? (Q.28)							0.1		0.5		0.1	1									2
Respondents	2	2	2	1	1	2	15	1	2		7	1	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	

Key

10 sampled countries
Field visit countries
Additional countries

1 = all respondents said yes
0.5 = proportion who said yes
Question not offered

2 respondents not included in the table (1 in UK and 1 duplicate submission)

4. How MSC has been used in World Vision

This section explores how MSC has been used across a wide range of WV national offices. The next section looks at the specific use of MSC as part of the TDC pilot project.

4.1 Objectives: Why MSC was being used

Twelve (80%) of the 15 NOs who responded to the survey reported using MSC for monitoring purposes. A similar proportion (but some different NOs) also reported using MSC for evaluation purposes (11/15) and somewhat fewer used it to generate stories for public communications (10/15). Respondents elaborated on these purposes in their responses to a question about the main reasons for introducing MSC in their country program.

Monitoring: Monitoring purpose included the production of mandatory semi-annual and annual reports; being able to report on the outcomes and impact of project implementation; supplementing quantitative data with qualitative data by using community's own perceptions of success; identifying innovations and informing project management of where programme changes were needed.

Community empowerment: This purpose emerges from the view that MSC provides a more participatory approach to monitoring. In the process it could facilitate community empowerment, development and sustainability. People would learn from hearing each other's stories, and other stakeholders who listened would also learn. In Malawi it was noted that MSC can enable "*Empowering the communities to participate and take charge of development activities taking place in their areas*". This was also a key focus of the use of MSC in TDC (see next section)

Public communications: The use of MSC would also help generate stories for public communications. "*The sponsors were thirsting to feel and hear about what's happening out in the field, and support office thought that the best way to quench their thirst is to share with them our stories through MSC*" MSC would capture "*true life impact stories which give evidence to the impact contribution of the programme*"

The achievement of these purposes are all potentially evaluable, through comparisons with ADPs (or on a larger scale, National Offices) not using MSC.

Evaluation: As noted above, MSC has also been used for evaluation purposes. Where possible we have obtained copies of these evaluations. In some cases the rationales for using MSC have been clearly stated. In the evaluations of WV's response to the tsunami the intention was to "understand how working for the tsunami affected our staff, as many of them were completely new to the NGO world". In the Lebanon MSC has been used as a small part of a baseline study, which will be revisited in a future evaluation. Elsewhere the purpose was less specific. In the 2009 evaluation of "World Vision Ministry Impact in an Islamic Context" in West Africa MSC was used because World Vision had requested the evaluator to do so. The 2007 "Evaluation of Children in Christ's Programs in Specified World Vision Kenya ADPs" cites the arguments for MSC found in the Davies and Dart guide, but does not relate them to programs under review. The same was the case for the 2009 Ol Meri Igat Namba Project– Final Evaluation in PNG. In most cases MSC was used as a stand alone method. A list of the evaluations using MSC can be found in the MSC bibliography (Excel version).

- **Recommendation 4.1**: When WV considers the use of MSC as part of an evaluation methodology there should be a clear statement of how the method fits the specific circumstances. Any use of MSC as a stand-alone method needs to be justified, ideally it would be used alongside other methods with compensating advantages, such as simple surveys or polls, that would enable generalisations.

Please note: In the rest of this section the default focus is on the combined use of MSC for monitoring, empowerment and communications purposes. Exceptions relating to evaluation use will be highlighted.]

4.2 Processes: How MSC was being used

This section walks through all the stages of MSC used spelled out in the Davies and Dart (2005) MSC Users Guide, but also addresses associated management issues and training in MSC

Management

The online survey and skype interview responses show that responsibility for managing the use of MSC varies widely across NOs. As noted above, DME units were the most common (6/15), then Quality and Communications (4/15 each), then Operations Departments and Sponsorship units (2/15 each). Shared responsibilities with Operations existed in at least three countries, and possibly more. This diversity may reflect the fact that decisions about whether to use MSC have been made by individual NOs. This decentralisation has probably had some benefits, in the form of strong local ownership of the idea of using MSC, an important factor given the time demands that thorough use of MSC requires. The downside risk is various fragmented understandings of MSC, weakening its value and thus undermining the potential for its sustained and wider use.

- **Recommendation 4.2:** Even if the current decentralised approach is continued, it would be useful if intellectual *leadership* could be provided to MSC users across all NOs through the use of the newly created MSC CoP. Ideally this would involve the active participation of a small team of co-facilitators, representing different functional interests within WV, each of whom were enthusiastic about making better use of MSC.

MSC stories are only a small sub-set of a much larger number of stories being collected by different groups of staff within NOs. Sponsors of children require their own stories, documented in the Annual Progress Reports (APRs) produced by NO staff; SO require their own stories, documented in a section of Programme Management Reports produced by DME staff; and various sections of WV require stories for communications and advocacy purposes, to be filed in the SHARE database in the first instance. In the NOs we have been in contact with these processes are not entirely separated from each other, there is some borrowing, but nor are they totally integrated. The latter may be an unrealistic expectation, since different audiences require different kinds of stories. However, the risk of being so responsive to different audience's needs is that WV could easily be communicating contradictory messages about the challenges of development and how WV is responding. This risk is accentuated further by the fact that ADPs in a given country are typically funded by multiple SOs, each with their own information needs.

In these circumstances if a single MSC story ended up being used for multiple purposes e.g. DME reporting sponsorship and communications, and for multiple SOs, this could be an indication of achievement. That is, achievement in the form of harmonisation of messages (assuming any associated text commentaries were also consistent).

- **Recommendation 4.3:** Where MSC is established under the authority of the DME staff one performance indicator for the process should be the number and proportion of MSC stories used by other sections of the NO and associated SOs.
- **Recommendation 4.4**: Because MSC was designed as a monitoring method, and call also be used as part of evaluations, the DME units within NOs should be the default location for responsibility for the management of MSC processes. However, wherever possible other sections of NOs, including those responsible for sponsorship reports and communications products, should be included in a selection process taking place at NO and ADP levels that leads to any MSC stories being included in WV reports.

  This recommendation is made while knowing that some interesting work was done in Malawi in 2007 using MSC as a means of making sponsorship reporting more developmental, less extractive and less time consuming. That could still be the case if sponsorship reporting was able to use MSC stories from a process managed by DME.

Training

Training in MSC has been provided in 6 of the 7 non-TDC NOs we surveyed[5] Training was provided by staff within the same NOs (5) and or by staff of other NOs (3). Not by external consultants. Almost all of the NOs had their own training materials, although in some cases like Lesotho and Laos these materials were borrowed from other NOs.

In the course of this review we have obtained copies of some of the training materials used by various NOs but we have not had time to systematically review them. However, feedback was provided to WV Laos on the strengths and weaknesses of a training video produced by WV Philippines (see Annex F). Reflecting on the MSC training in Malawi, Brett Pierce suggested that a second round of training would have been very useful, after participants had an opportunity to practice the process in the field. Misunderstandings could have been corrected, and local adaptations encouraged. In practice follow up can be difficult, as one trainer commented: "*I planned a week long training and then delivered it, and then you know,…WV…. the next 400 things came along. I sort of heard from X intermittently that things were going well and they were collecting stories…"*

Although the LEAP guidelines require MSC stories, there has been no process of rolling out training to NOs on how collected and select these stories[6]. However, a link was provided in the LEAP Guidelines to the Davies and Dart (2005) MSC Users Guide. In the online survey about half the respondents mentioned using the Davies and Dart (2005) MSC Users Guide. In future a short list of WV resources on MSC could also be included in the LEAP guidance note.

- **Recommendation 4.5:** UK SO Programme Officers (to start with) could provide NOs with collective feedback on their view of the significance of the stories they have provided each reporting period. This could be through the choice of what they see as the most significant change of all, along with an explanation of why they have selected it, in a communication to all the countries that have submitted reports (e.g. via an existing newsletter or website). Without such feedback it is unlikely that the quality of LEAP stories will improve.

Domains of change

Domains are broad fuzzy categories used to describe sets of stories. They have two uses. One is to direct the respondent towards an area of change that is of special interest to the inquirer, such as changes caused by the project, or changes relating to one or more project objective. Here the domain is built into the question (e.g…..most significant change in people's livelihoods'). The other is to help pool stories into manageable groups, from which further selections can be made. Here stories may be sorted into domains after they have been collected. It would be difficult for anyone to read 20 stories and select what they think is the most significant of all. And even more so, for multiple people then to come to agreement on that question.

Actual practice within WV NOs varied. In some cases domains were created around project interventions (Some ADPs in Malawi). In others no sorting into domains took place (Myanmar, Zimbabwe). In Zambia it appears that stories were sorted into categories by a person responsible to analyse all the stories, after the selection process had taken place (see Secondary Analysis below). There was one commonality across NOs. In almost all uses of MSC the MSC question focused specifically on changes caused by or associated with the WV project. This is understandable from two perspectives. At the community level participants may be expecting such a focus, so asking more open ended questions to start with may not work. It is also understandable from a marketing

[5] The short version of the online survey, which was answered by 5 other NOs, did not ask about training.
[6] WV UK have pointed out that there has been some rolling out of MSC training, within the local level advocacy training run by WV International which was conducted in 4 countries (Brazil, India, Uganda and Armenia).

point of view. Donors will want to know how project activities have benefited people. However, used on its own this approach will provide an unbalanced understanding. Changes arising from non-project events can be critically important to people's lives, and to appropriate management of development activities. Often development projects are actually a minor part of people's lives.

- **Recommendation 4.6:** At least in the case of mid-term reviews and evaluations using MSC participants should be asked at least two kinds of MSC questions, one relating to changes caused by the project and then another relating to causes arising from any other developments or events.

Related to the choice of domains is the reference period built into the MSC question. In a number of NOs, including the TDC countries, the MSC question asks about change since the WV project began. In contrast, in Myanmar, and possibly others, the MSC question asks about changes in the last six months. The former is really only appropriate if the MSC process is being used in a mid-term or final evaluation but not for more frequent periodic monitoring. Even for sponsorship reports a shorter reference period would be appropriate, a year given the fact that Annual Reports are required. It is possible that some staff or community members may complain that there will be no significant changes within a shorter reference period. If so, this signals their misunderstanding of the type of change reporting that is being sought (see Background Briefing below). The widespread use of a longer reference period may also reflect the influence of marketing demands within WV. Even here, in the age of Twitter type micro-monitoring of events, it could be argued that this approach is outdated.

Story collection

According to survey responses and Skype interviews, methods used to collect stories varied widely:

- Staff interviewed beneficiaries one to one
- Community leaders interviewed beneficiaries one to one
- Groups of beneficiaries shared their stories with each other
- Group discussions were followed up by one to one interviews
- Staff wrote down stories about beneficiaries, based on their recent contact with communities
- Staff wrote stories about themselves

In some cases beneficiaries wrote up their own stories, in others staff or other interviewers wrote them up. In some ADPs community level MSC committees had the responsibility of producing the stories with the help of WV extension staff. Specific approaches have also been developed for eliciting stories form children (e.g. discussion of drawings done by children)[7].

One respondent reported that "*At the initial implementation stage staff initiated group discussions from which stories were collected. Over-time the lengthy processes were cut to a point where staff wrote stories, more to satisfy a reporting requirement but not following the basic MSC principles*". This is probably not an isolated experience.

What could be considered good practice here depends very much on the purpose for which MSC is being used. If community empowerment and advocacy are important, then a group process would be better than one to one interviews. If gathering information for donors and managers is important then a thorough one to one interview could be best. While gathering stories direct from beneficiaries would seem best gathering staff members own stories may be useful for management

[7] Mentioned by Brad Pierce. See section 5 on TDC uses of MSC

purposes, shedding light on how staff see the community and the programme. This was the approach taken in an evaluation of WV's tsunami response. The one approach that does seem doubtful is using community leaders to interview beneficiaries.

What is important is clear documentation of how stories were collected, and making that available along with the stories themselves. This should include number and types of participants, and the total number of stories collected from them. In a group meeting context, where the number of stories is less than the number of participants then an explanation is needed. Either some people did not produce any stories, or there has been a tacit selection process. If the former, then there is probably a misunderstanding of "significance" (See the Background Briefing below). If the latter then that selection processes needs to be made transparent through adequate description. This all helps contextualise the stories and make it easier for others to understand them and weigh their importance.

The process of simply recording MSC stories has itself presented multiple challenges. Often stories are told in local languages but then need to be translated into national languages[8]. Doing so while retaining fidelity is a challenge for most translators since it requires familiarity with nuances in both languages. The skill of accurately recording a story even in one's own language cannot be taken for granted: "*People would tell the most fantastic story, then it would get recorded in such a summary level that the story would not be selected*". One way of responding to this challenge is to explore the potential uses of participatory video to the collection of MSC stories, as used by groups like InsightShare. However these approaches are not applicable to the large scale collection of stories. For example, Brett Pierce noted that 3000 sponsorship stories were being collected each year in Malawi.

Evaluations can provide opportunities to testing innovatory approaches to collecting MSC stories. Rob Kilpatrick of WV Australia reported trying to *randomise* the choice of people from whom they would seek MSC stories. A random sampling process built into a MSC monitoring process could ensure wider coverage of impact experiences.

Background Briefing: Understanding an MSC story and significance

What is a story? One of the most basic ideas is that a story has a beginning, middle and an end, in other words there is a clear sequence of events. However, what makes an MSC story from other types of story is the inclusion of *significance.*

A Beginning	A middle	An end		Why is this significant?
What was the situation *before* the change happened? (background/ context e.g. before they contacted or received support from x organisation)	What happened? What was the change? And how did the project help contribute or hinder this change?"	The situation *after*. What difference did it make? How is their life different?	+	(captures the perspective of the storyteller i.e. why they value the change)

Of course many people will then ask…

[8] Practice between countries varies widely. In Vietnam almost all of the MSC process was in Vietnamese, then the results were translated into English, whereas in Uganda local languages were used on at the community level, if there at all, and English thereafter.

Q: What is significant?

A: In any period of time there will always be some changes, and amongst those some will be *relatively* more significant than others, to an observer. In absolute terms however these changes may not be very momentous. MSC asks for changes which are most significant in *relative* terms.

Q: Why is it significant?

A: It is commonplace for most story providers to expect the listener to understand why an event is significant, especially if they are from the same community, organisation or culture. But MSC stories frequently travel long distances and are read in very different contexts. Readers there need help understanding the significance, especially the meaning behind the events described, as seen by the participants. This why those eliciting MSC stories must make a conscious effort to ask seemingly "naïve" questions: "Why was that change significant?" Often even they will be surprised by the answer. The storyteller's answers then need to be included within the story text.

Shawn Callahan (of Anecdote.com) has suggested some other important features of stories (versus other kinds of texts)[9]:

- Time marker: stories often start with a time marker such as "In 1991 ..." "Just the other day" "Last Tuesday ..." "When we last spoke to the Peter ..."
- Place marker: sometimes a story will start with a place marker such as "We were outside Jim's office ..." "At basketball ..." "On our way to the client ..."
- Characters: stories feature people (or other people-like entities such as Thomas the Tank Engine) doing things. They have names, speak and take action.
- Events: stories have one or more events. These events might be moments in time or scale up to eons.

Ideally, an MSC story would incorporate the features listed above and end with why the story was significant to the storyteller

A review of some stories documented in WV reports

Success stories: LEAP guidance advises that MSC stories should not confused with Success Stories. In practice there is can be considerable overlap in their contents. Annex D includes a series of explicitly labelled "Success stories" found in the SHARE database. The first recounts a series of facts, *not a sequence of events*, and has little in common with MSC stories. The second provides an overall picture of a family assisted by WV. There is a sequence of events, involving a change in family circumstances, which appears to be associated with assistance provided by WV. But there is no explanation of *why this story was selected* from amongst many others. The third story provides information on the situation of children in DR Congo, and then describes one child, as *an example*. The fourth story has the potential to become a MSC story, because it describes a sequence of events, including the situation in the past, some information about how WV subsequently supported the community concerned, and then an event that appears to have been triggered by that assistance: "23 trained herd boys marched to the principal chief of a province to present their petition" In summary, the most important missing elements are: (a) a clear and detailed storyline, (b) an explanation of why this story was selected out of many others that could also have been told.

[9] http://www.anecdote.com.au/archives/2010/03/thestorytest_re.html

LEAP report stories: WV UK has provided a sample of stories from LEAP reports provided by NOs in Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, India, Malawi, Myanmar and Zambia. The first two NOs did not respond to the online survey, the second two were the focus of field visits because of their involvement in the TDC project and the last three responded to the online survey as active users of MSC. In the Ethiopian progress report three stories have been place under a heading "Illustrations of Progress", without any associated information about how the stories were chosen, who by or why. The individual stories have a simple structure: the person's situation before WV became involved, what WV provided, and how the person's situation changed thereafter. In the Sri Lanka report one story is presented under the heading Most Significant Change. Although no explanation is given as to how or why the story was selected it has some positive features. It is written in the first person, and describes events in some detail, and as a result it is more engaging.

In the Cambodia report one story is presented under the heading "Illustration of Progress" (singular). This is a longer story, and includes some direct quotations in with what is mainly second person reporting. Because the story teller is providing such a comprehensive description of the changes that took place one wonders which changes were most significant[10]. In the India report one story is provided under the heading "Illustration of Progress (Success Story)". This second person story is relatively simple, describing the past in limited detail, then multiple assistance received and the various changes in the person's life since then. One change is given prominence, by comparisons with its absence in the lives of other members of the same village (receiving a college education)

In the Malawi report one story is presented under the heading "Illustration of Progress". The story is told in detail, with extensive first person quotes. Not only are actual figures quoted concerning the returns on the enterprise assisted by WV, but the subject of the story is quoted *explaining the significance* of those figures: "*It was like a dream to our family to realize such amount of money because it was our first time in our family to get such amount of money in a short period."* The only limitation to the story is that the event that triggered a serious of improvements was described in very brief terms (possibly because the reader was presumed to have known about it). In the Myanmar report one story is presented under the heading "Illustration of Progress". This story is detailed, with a mix of first and second person reporting. The main problem is that the events are recounted in a jumble, rather than a clear sequence over time. Amongst the various events described it is not easy to see which was the most significant. In the Zambia report one story is presented under the heading "Illustration of Progress". This story is detailed, with a clear sequence of events, including plenty of facts but also the voices of those involved, describing their reactions to events that take place. There is however one problem that was described and then left hanging as an unknown.

My choice of the most significant change story, amongst these seven, was relatively easy[11]. The Malawi and Zambia stories were convincing because of the factual detail plus the voice of the actors involved. These stories were credible and verifiable. The Malawi story struck me as most significant of all, because the change arising from WV support had been realised, whereas in Zambia it was still on its way, and some uncertainty remained. This was not just an intellectual judgement. Despite having read a lot of aid agency rhetoric over the years, these two stories affected me. And on a practical level, if I had to do anything, I would seek more information about the Malawi story, because the WV intervention there sounds worth sustaining and replicating. (The two stories can be found in Annex E)

[10] In some of the MSC guidance produced by WV care has been taken to get participants to think about various forms of change that have taken place, before then selecting what they think is the most significant of these changes. This process of focusing in may need re-iteration, even after a draft account of the story has been produced or read back to the participant.

[11] Rick Davies, in this instance.

Only one of the seven stories seems to be following the LEAP guidance to produce something at least called a "Most Significant Change" story. The rest were titled as "illustrations" which has connotations of being a representative example. As explained above, this has a very different meaning from being the "most significant". None of the stories have any associated explanation of how or why they were selected. This may be partly due to the fact that the LEAP guidance does not require this information. On the other hand, LEAP guidance does ask that implications for further action be identified. However that was not done in the case of the stories sampled here.

- **Recommendation 4.7:** If LEAP reporting guidelines are to continue to ask for MSC stories, then more detailed guidance needs to be produced, possibly as an adjunct document. While the Davies and Dart (2005) guide is referred to, it is too long to serve this purpose. The guidance should cover (a) the contents of MSC stories and (b) processes for collection and selection. This could be developed using existing MSC training materials already developed by different WV offices.

Story selection

In our opinion story selection is the very heart of MSC: "Without selection it is not MSC". The process of selection, when it takes place through a dialogue between two or more people, helps *surface participants' values*, about what is important in people's lives. An agreement reached between two or more participants about the significance of a change reflects the *discovery of connections between people*, which can then be the basis for future joint or coordinated actions.

Up to eight of the nine NOs reporting they were using MSC may be using some form of selection process [12]. Selection at the community level was most common, taking place in five of the countries. Selection took place amongst WV staff in four countries, and appears to have happened at multiple levels within these countries, though respondents' views on this were divided. In Lesotho selection appears to have only taken place at the WV staff level, whereas in Myanmar it appears to have only taken place at the community level. In Zimbabwe it appears there was no process of dialogue at all. Elsewhere it was reported that: "*The selection ideally supposed to be done in a participatory way, however, in most case it has been left to one person."* This experience was probably not unique.

When MSC has been used in evaluations selection process have rarely been used. MSC type questions have been asked and the contents of the answers analysed in terms of common themes, but structured selection processes seem rare. The PNG use of MSC seems to be the exception, and even here the results of the selection were given secondary attention, relative to the evaluator's content analysis of the story themes[13].

- **Recommendation 4.8**: Greater care should be taken with claims to be using MSC. MSC proper involves use of the MSC *question* along with a MSC *selection process* (and *explanation* of the selection).
- **Recommendation 4.9**: Using MSC type questions in an evaluation, without a subsequent selection process, represents a lost opportunity to engage different groups of stakeholders and to identify similarities and differences in their assessment of project outcomes. If WV offices are to require evaluators to use MSC they should require them to use both the MSC question and associated selection processes

Organising selection processes can take time and effort: "*Getting people together to select is a challenge".* Organising selection processes involving different sections of a WV NO was reportedly more difficult than organising community level processes. This was so because these meetings were seen to be additional to already heavy workloads and busy schedules, often involving movement to

[12] In four countries there was disagreement between respondents: India, Bolivia, Malawi, Zambia
[13] 'Voices of Change' Ol Meri Igat Namba Project– Final Evaluation. World Vision Pacific Development Group, 2009

different parts of the country. Lack of authority to organise one's peers may have also been a problem. Nevertheless selection processes involving different groups of NO staff have been organised in some countries. Organising selection processes that also engage SO staff does not seem to have been attempted as yet. It is possible these could be organised on the back of international meetings of WV staff organised for other purposes. The other alternative would be to opt for a different form of dialogue than face to face contact and make more use of WV intranet facilities, using Web 2.0 functionalities.

The description of the selection task is as important as the structuring of participation. In responses from at least three NOs[14] we have seen references to the selection process involving the search for stories that were "representative" The same language is also present in some of the LEAP guidance: "Please note that only one story per programme should be included here; therefore, the best story from all the constituent projects must be chosen to *represent* the entire programme"[15]. This is a very different task to selecting stories that are most significant. Representative implies being average or most common. MSC is not the tool for finding averages or central tendencies.

- **Recommendation 4.10**: WV documentation on MSC should avoid any reference to collecting or selecting *representative* stories of change.

After the completion of a selection process it is important that the process is well documented, for the same reasons as explained above in relation to story collection. Information needs to be on file about the selection process: who was involved, the number of stories considered and selected, and how decisions were reached. In addition specific information needs to be *attached to the selected story*, explaining why the story was selected. As story passes through multiple levels of selection additional information should be appended at each stage showing why the story was selected at each level. The appended explanations are where successive participants can add their value to the process. Their contributions help tell the story about the story, and helps others fully appreciate what has been selected and why so.

This aspect of the MSC process seems to be consistently neglected when MSC processes are used by NOs. Most of the WV MSC stories we have seen exist as free floating objects, devoid of history or context. The exceptions have been some of the MSC stories in the evaluation reports, as in WV PNG, where the selection criteria have at least been briefly listed. MSC stories should have a readable "provenance", this is one way of distinguishing them from "success stories" and anecdotes.

- **Recommendation 4.11**: All documented MSC stories should have a section which follows the story, explaining (a) who selected the, and (b) why they selected it as most significant.

Explanations of significance can be of two kinds. One consists of lists of *value criteria* describing the types of changes that have been described. They could be sustainable, wide ranging, in-depth, etc. In one PNG evaluation stories were selected that had the following attributes:

- Personal change in attitude and behaviour demonstrated through action
- Ability to influence family, peers and the community
- Enhanced understanding of GBV and HIV/AIDS and the link between
- Actions taken or the impact s/he had in the community
- Personal commitment to the issues demonstrated through actions

The other can be a description of the kinds of *actions* that the story implies should be taken. For a negative story, how this type of change can be avoided in the future. For a positive story, how this type of change can be sustained or replicated. The failure of a nuclear reactor in Japan may be

[14] Present in a Philippines WV MSC video, WV PNG evaluation report and one online survey response from Malawi.
[15] Learning through Evaluation with Accountability and Planning (Semi) Annual Programme Management Report Guidelines 2nd Edition, page 14.

significant both because of the number of people it could harm (a value concern), but also because it implies some useful action could be taken by other owners of similar reactors (an action implication). This second kind of explanation tends to get less attention than the first. Fortunately, the current LEAP guidance on MSC highlights the need for these kinds of explanations: "*Reflect on the story and what it means to the programme design. For example, if the story is negative regarding the impact of the programme, should the design change?* ". In the Myanmar NO they ask an equally useful question about positive changes: "*How can it be sustained*?"

Verification

In five of the responding countries there were procedures for verifying the contents of MSC stories. Those involved in the process varied widely, including Ministry Quality Assurance, Communications Department, Sector heads, M&E Officers, ADP project coordinators, field staff and community coordinators. This process is important for two reasons: to check existing facts, and to elaborate the story into more detail. Our impression is that WV staff take this task relatively seriously, possibly because they know selected stories will be widely publicised. Error filled stories could have a cost for WV and for individual staff. Verification visits also have their risks. If they are used to re-edit the original story, its authenticity could easily be lost. If extra information has been added, then it should be clearly signposted. This issue is discussed further below, in section 5 on the use of MSC in TDC countries.

Feedback

Feedback to story tellers is often a neglected practice by organisations using MSC, as is feedback within other monitoring and evaluation approaches. At a minimum story tellers (whether staff or beneficiaries) should be told what story was selected, by whom and why. Ideally they would also be told how the story was used and what other actions it might have triggered.

Providing feedback can positively affect people's willingness to actively participate in MSC processes in future, it shows that others have read and engaged with the SC stories. When well written, feedback about why a particular story was selected can expand or challenge participants' views of what is significant. Feedback about the selection process that was used can help participants to assess the quality of the collective judgments that were made.

Feedback is also important structurally. At best, adjacent levels of a selection process become connected by communications that flow in both directions. Where these loops are functioning they help expose the dialogue going on within each selection panel to the dialogues taking place in other panels. Those other dialogues may be either challenging or supportive of existing views about what are the most significant types of change. Ensuring that this is actually happening can be a challenge where large organisations are involved, with multiple layers of decision makers. Breaks and delays are more likely to occur in the chain of communication. In these circumstances it may be more realistic to use newsletters to provide feedback from the highest level of the selection process directly to all the original story providers, and those in between.

According to the online survey there was some form of feedback in most (6/9) of the countries using MSC. However, very few story providers were told who has selected their MSC story (2/16 respondents in Malawi only). They were told why their stories were selected more often, in 4 of the 9 countries. However, the question's reference to story providers may have conflated the original story tellers with others who subsequently passed the story on to higher levels within WV. If so, the responses may over-estimate how much feedback was being provided. Information from interviews suggested that while participants in community level selection processes received direct feedback from other participants, feedback from even the next level up (involving WV NO staff) was more generic, at best. As will be discussed below, feedback on the eventual uses of MSC stories in reports, and by report readers, seems to have been sporadic at best.

Quantification

The 2005 MSC Guide by Davies and Dart includes a specific step on quantification. This can be in the form of numerical details within the story (see story contents above), analysis of the numbers of stories of a particular kind (see content analysis below) and information about the frequency of a kind of event seen in a particular story. " For example, if the most significant of all stories referred to a woman buying land in her own name (as in Bangladesh), all [project] participants could then be asked for information about all other instances of this kind of change that they are aware of. This one-off inquiry does not need to be repeated during subsequent reporting periods." Sometimes one incident of a kind of change is enough to prompt a change in policy or practice, but in other cases information on the frequency of these kinds of changes is also important. For example, with problems of debt rollover in savings and credit projects. As far as we know, no follow up this kind has been carried out by NOs using an MSC process. Yet in many cases it could make up a useful recommendation to be attached to an MSC story.

Secondary analysis

One concern that seems common amongst participants in MSC processes is about the focus just on the selected MSC story and the apparent neglect of all the rest. This concern can be allayed partly by pointing out that all the unselected stories remain most significant *in a local sense*, for the person who reported the story. In the same way as stories in a local newspaper remain locally significant, despite the nature of the headlines in the national newspapers. The other possible response is to do some analysis of the whole set of stories, selected and unselected.

Secondary analysis includes analysis of the contents of stories (content analysis) and analysis of who has provided and selected the stories (meta-monitoring). This would typically occur after a period of time during which a substantial number of MSC stories had been accumulated. According to the online survey no NOs are carrying out any form of secondary analysis of their MSC stories collected as part of a periodic monitoring process. In contrast, from our reading and interviews it seems that all the evaluations using MSC have undertaken some form of content analysis, but this has typically been only of stories collected during the evaluation process. In our view this neglect of the accumulated stories is a lost opportunity. Selected stories are the tip of a larger iceberg, which can be inspected. Areas worth investigating would include:

- What kinds of stories are not being selected?
- Where are MSC stories not coming from (kinds of locations and people)?
- What follow up action has been taken after MSC stories were selected
- Are there certain recurrent themes of concern, which might justify wider investigation?

For this kind of analysis to be possible there needs to be some systematic documentation and storage of MSC stories. WV practice in this area is variable. The most common practice is to hold copies of stories locally, where they were first selected. Centralised collections tend to be only of the stories selected at that level, though some are more comprehensive. Only one quarter of the survey respondents reported that all MSC stories were documented. In the other cases it was only the stories selected as most significant, from an initial pool of stories, which were documented. While this may save staff time[16] it means the total number of stories available for later analysis will be substantially diminished, possibly by as much as 80% or more[17]. An additional problem is that the most common means of storing the selected stories is as hard copies.

[16] In interviews a number of people referred to the amount of labour time needed to write up all stories put forward in community meetings, versus just the selected story. An evaluator reported the challenge of interviewing and writing adequate notes at the same time (in the absence of digital recording, not use because of transcription costs)

[17] Assuming, for example, a small group generates an initial pool of 5 stories, only one of which is selected as most significant.

- **Recommendation 4.12:** The LEAP reporting requirements are generating large numbers of "MSC" type stories. For example, in Cambodia ADPs are generating 2 x 38 stories a year. If these stories were entered into an internal database, preferably with a blog-type structure, they would be accessible to other sections of WV (e.g. Communications, Sponsorship), and the blog could be a vehicle by which ongoing feedback could be provided to all ADPs on what SO think are most significant changes. As they accumulate they could also be subject to a detailed content analysis.

As noted above, where MSC has been used as part of WV evaluations content analysis has been widespread. Content analysis was part of the Tsunami evaluations, evaluations organised by Rob Kilpatrick of WV Australia, and the WV PNG evaluations. The challenge within evaluations taking place in a short window of time is to obtain enough MSC stories on which to build a substantial analysis. Somewhat surprisingly, most of the examples of content analysis that we have seen used in evaluations involve outsiders coding the story contents, or at best a small panel of local staff. There is clearly room here for innovations involving more participatory approaches. One approach involves asking story tellers to self-categorise their own stories using a pre-defined common set of labels which enables clusters of stories with multiple similar attributes to be found[18]. Another more open ended process is to have a group of storytellers share their stories, and then do sorting exercises to create groups of stories each sharing a common theme. Participatory content analysis may be one means of getting around the loss of nuance and detail when stories are first translated into English[19] and then subject to content analysis by third parties using NVIVO for example.

- **Recommendation 4.13**: Evaluations of WV programs should seek to make use of any accumulated sets of MSC stories, before collecting additional MSC stories. Where those sets of stories exist the evaluators should use a participatory approach to the content analysis of the stories. This should be supplemented by an analysis of where the stories have come from, how the program responded to the issues in the stories, and the types of stories that have been neglected (not told or not selected thereafter).

Use of MSC stories

While the process of selecting stories is important, so is the use of the selected and unselected stories. In the online survey respondents were asked how MSC stories were used. The most common choice was "*By WV NO staff to inform WV SO staff about their work*" followed by **"***By journalists and/or other visitors to the ADP/projects involved*". Both are external stakeholders. Then "*By WV NO staff to revise their implementation plans and ways of working with participants*" and "*By participants to help plan their own development activities".* The use by WV staff to revise implementation was followed up by asking "*Can you think of any examples where learning from the discussion and selection of stories led to a decision to change WV project implementation*?" Nine respondents from four countries could do so. Supporting comments explained as follows:

- "*Stories regarding the plight of orphans helped both communities and WV to change decisions regarding the scope of support. MSC presented in-depth details on everyday life of orphans and this attracted both community and WV leadership attention and response efforts*"
- "*The ADP at the time changed the operating model to village based-planning Second was introduction of village monitoring system that should still be on, though no longer using MSC Third was creating of village-based funds to create safety-nets especially for emergent needs*

[18] See for example see the account of storytelling as used by Pfizer at http://cognitive-edge.com/ceresources/articles/110218_Using_stories_to_increase_sales_at_Pfizer.pdf

[19] An issue identified by Rob Kilpatrick, amongst others

within the community.. all these were reflections from MSC review processes at community level"

One respondent noted that *"if the recommendations don't affect positive change in the project, MSC loses value quickly"*, implying that non-usage of the stories has been a problem.

Information about the wider use of MSC stories is potentially available. TDC MSC stories were uploaded on to a dedicated TDC website[20]. MSC and other stories collected in Cambodia have been uploaded onto a dedicated WV Cambodia website. There is also the SHARE database which all NOs can "pitch" stories to[21]. All WV offices have access to the contents on this site. Unfortunately, a common feature of all three facilities is the lack of feedback mechanisms to the story providers[22], some which could easily be provided, if only on an automated basis. For example counts of numbers of visitors reading a story, average time spent by visitors viewing each story, numbers of visitors downloading the story, thumbs up/down rating options, tweet options, etc . More qualitative feedback could be obtained by including a Comment facility under each story.

- **Recommendation 4.14:** WV should investigate how community level experiences of development can be made much more accessible to WV SO and donors through Web 2.0 facilities, with an emphasis on enabling two way flows of information, starting with MSC stories and different forms of feedback about those stories. The online story datebase developed by Shawn Callahan could be trialled, or used to stimulate the design of a more customised in-house facility.

Integration with other WV NO and SO functions

Integration of MSC with other NO and SO functions can happen in two ways. One is that aspects of the MSC process get absorbed into other processes. For example, the LEAP reporting process now requires MSC stories, but not the use of the whole MSC process: "Though there is constant reference to an "MSC story, the stories are often just mere success stories and not stemming from the MSC process"[23]. MSC stories get uploaded into SHARE and other databases, but without any contextual information. MSC questions get incorporated into baseline surveys, but without any subsequent selection process. In some respects this is a kind of "death by a thousand cuts", where the name is claimed but much of the content is discarded. This type of integration needs careful monitoring because it could ultimately undermine support for the use of MSC processes in WV.

A reverse process also qualifies as a form of integration. That is to involve WV staff from different levels and functional units within WV in structured selection processes, specifically with the intention of having their interests and perspectives represented in the selection process. This does seem to happen in a number of NOs using MSC, but its scale and effectiveness is hard to assess. This form of integration has the potential of enabling MSC processes to contribute towards a unified understanding within WV offices, about what development really looks like (or not!).

Recommendation 4.4 above proposes a version of this approach, where there is a single unit responsible for the management of MSC processes within a NO, but this is associated with a supporting mechanism for involving other representatives of units in decisions about its use.

Online survey respondents had varied opinions on the extent to which MSC had been integrated with other monitoring or evaluation methods used by WV, but the majority were positive.

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[20] Which now appears to be in limbo, not managed or used by anyone.
[21] But which Programme Officers in SOs rarely visit or use, according to one Programme Officer
[22] However, Brett Pierce of WV Australia did report on a market testing exercise carried out in Germany on sponsors' views of Annual Progress Reports produced in one year versus the next (which included MSC stories plus other changes). The latter was seen as better by 80% of respondents.
[23] Online survey response to Question 29. *How well has MSC been integrated with other monitoring or evaluation methods used by WV?*

Respondents in three countries felt MSC has "*MSC has simply been added on top of existing processes"*, whereas respondents in six countries felt "*Both existing processes and MSC have been adapted to fit together"*[24]. The ambivalence amongst the 15 respondents from Malawi is of concern because MSC was pilot tested in 2007 with the explicit intention of integrating it with the APR process.

4.3 Outcomes: Experiences and Impacts

Evaluations of the use of MSC

As far as we know, the 2007 evaluation of the MSC and APR pilot process in Malawi is the only evaluation of the use of MSC in non-TDC countries[25]. The Malawi report listed four possible outcomes of the results of using MSC, relating to increased transparency and accountability, improved feedback to management, improved program quality and empowered communities. While the findings are generally positive the evaluation focuses on the workings of the MSC process rather than its impacts. The report is however very clear about the empowering effects of people's participation in the MSC process: "*Peoples' confidence in what they do and own. Initially many people in the program suffered from latent inferiority complex. They thought what they do and have is not worthy sharing and news for celebration but there is now realization that the opposite is true."*

Associated with the Malawi pilot process was an online survey of the opinions of German sponsors of children in Malawi[26]. They were asked to compare the merits of the 2006 (pre-MSC) and 2007 (MSC) Annual Progress Reports, and a significant majority preferred the 2007 reports. However the MSC based stories in these reports were not the only changes that had been made to the contents.

Experiences of MSC stories

In the online survey we asked respondents about their reactions to the MSC stories. To our surprise, very few thought the stories were "Mainly what you expected to hear"[27]. The vast majority thought the stories were "A mixture of expected and unexpected" This suggests the process is working as expected. A similar response was provided by WV Australia, when describing their experiences with evaluating WV's Christian Commitment programs, using a MSC type process[28].

Respondents were also asked "What do senior WV staff in NOs and SOs think of the MSC stories that have been selected?" Again their views were surprisingly positive. However two points need to be noted. We don't have the views here of non-respondents in the same country, who may be more sceptical, and we don't have the view of the actual NO and SO staff the respondents are speculating about. Their views may differ, especially in the case of the more distant SOs.

[See table next page]

[24] Opinions were mixed in Malawi and Zambia where there a larger number of online survey respondents
[25] *Most Significant Change and APR Pilot Process Evaluation Report*, World Vision Malawi, 2007
[26] Results of Survey Regarding Changes in Annual Progress Reports (APR), 2008
[27] 12% of respondents, located in Zambia, Myanmar, Zimbabwe
[28] Skype call with Rob Kilpatrick, WV Australia

They are credible in the eyes of others, within and outside WV	50.0%
They are largely based on the facts, about what has really happened	37.5%
They continue to identify new and interesting changes	16.7
They were interesting to begin with, but now they are becoming repetitive	8.3%
They are treated with skepticism, within and outside WV	0.0%
They are largely fictional accounts, about what people would like to see happen	0.0%
Don't know	20.8

N=24

Who benefits

Question 30 of the online survey asked "Please indicate the extent to which you believe each of the different groups have benefited from this use of MSC? Respondents rated four different groups of stakeholders on a five point scale (1= most benefit) as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean rating	N
The project beneficiaries participating in the project	9	**12**	9	7	2	**2.5**	39
The project staff, implementing the project	12	**16**	8	3	0	**2.1**	39
The donors, funding the project	**15**	14	6	2	0	**1.9**	37
Others, who will be reading about the project	6	**17**	7	5	1	**2.4**	36

While participating in MSC processes may have empowering effects for project beneficiaries, other stakeholder groups are seen to benefit more, donors particularly. Although these are opinions and not necessarily facts, this ranking is probably the reverse of what many in World Vision, and its donors, would like to see[29].

Impacts on policies and practices

As noted above, respondents were asked how the MSC stories were used, and approximately a third of respondents said they were used by WV NO staff to revise their implementation plans and ways of working with participants. When they were later asked for any examples where learning from the discussion and selection of stories led to a decision to change WV project implementation the same proportion were able to do so. They were also asked for examples, in effect stories about the use of stories. Three of the responses explicitly linked changes to discussion of MSC stories:

- *The ADP at the time changed the operating model to village based-planning Second was introduction of village monitoring system that should still be on, though no longer using MSC Third was creating of village-based funds to create safety-nets especially for emergent needs within the community.. all these were reflections from MSC review processes at community level*
- *Stories regarding the plight of orphans helped both communities and WV to change decisions regarding the scope of support. MSC presented in-depth details on everyday life of orphans and this attracted both community and WV leadership attention and response efforts*

[29] There may be a fair amount of supposition involved in the answers about donor benefits, since it seems unlikely that NOs get much feedback from donors.

Another participant commented that "*While discussion and selection of stories had the potential to change WV project implementation, the resource has in my view been under-utilised. This could be due to WV's introduction of various initiatives, as result focus becomes a challenge*"

- **Recommendation 4.15:** The process for capturing lessons from stories (and discussions thereof) and applying to these to policy and practice needs to be more structured. For example, LEAP requirements for stories, which do refer to identifying story implications, need to ask more explicitly for recommendations and for information on what has been done about them.

Summary assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of using MSC

At the end of the online survey we asked respondents "*Looking back at all you have seen and heard about the use of MSC by WV, what do you think are some good reasons for WV staff to consider using MSC in the future?*" . We have grouped the responses below, into a number of recurrent themes:

- **Stories help build community capacity, to learn and manage.**
  - MSC stories build capacity of community to identify programme achievement and provide them with alternative means of monitoring programme progress.
  - Selection process of stories, created a competitive spirit that propelled uptake of development initiatives within the community
  - It empowers the community to always reflect on the improvement in their communities.
  - It also helps to build the capacity of both staff and the community.
  - This helps in registering what community members can learn from each other from practical stories from fellows. MSC is a live teacher on its own
  - The process, itself, is transformational. It fits our culture well because Filipinos are natural story-tellers. It is child-friendly because children love telling stories.
- **Stories provide good descriptions of what is happening**
  - I like the tool personally because it provides an honest-to-goodness assessment of where we are now as an organization
  - MSC taps on real life experience and presents a true reflection on ground where such stories are captures.
  - The stories tell what the communities feel are the impact of what the projects are making than what the project staff think would be achieved
  - Gives a personal touch to documentation (reports) because it talks about what has happened at a personal level,
  - It can give both positive and negative feedback. It also provides qualitative data.
  - It is evidence based and value adding. It is transparent to all stakeholders. It will increase the credibility of our evaluations
  - MSC is factual and not mere statistics and as such reflect what transformation has actually taken place in an individual, household or community.
  - They summarise the benefits/impact of programme interventions in a vivid manner, especially with photo
  - It gives a clear picture of what impact has occurred in the life of the beneficiaries.
  - We are excited to roll out MSC as an impact monitoring tool to help us translate statistical outcome indicators into meaningful experiences of beneficiaries and staff involved in our programs.
  - MSC if used effectively can assist in measuring in qualitative terms how projects are impacting on the lives of people
- **Stories tell us things that might have otherwise not been noticed**
  - MSC stories bring to light some hidden achievements worth celebrations.

- We sometimes undermine [under-estimate?] impact realized by implementer even before evaluations, MSC can help
- It allows identification of innovative and promising practices that if adopted and scaled by program would certainly address the felt needs from the community
- It provides salient information that some M&E systems that are in place may not capture.

- **Stories provide more timely information**
  - In our capacity building efforts for monitoring, managers within programmes are requesting feedback about the effectiveness of programmes without having to wait three years for an evaluation.
  - It can help us track progress without waiting for evaluation.
- **Stories provide staff with motivation**
  - The tool itself is very powerful - you learn a lot if what you are doing in the community is making a difference or not from the stories of the people in the community. MSC allows you to understand the people and the dynamics in the community you work with and helps build your relationship among the people. As a staff, listening to a story of how a child's life has changed, is a very inspiring, it encourages you to do more.
- **Stories help improve the management of the project**
  - It is a good lens to use to improve programming.
  - It will help us to change approach while there is still time if a need arises
  - For tracking down progress made so far in the implementation of the projects.
  - MSC informs programming in a substantial manner. Through collection of stories, program staff will be in a position to make self assessment of whether their efforts are impacting on the lives of those being served. Additionally, the tool informs program staff on pertinent issues that affect community members which in most cases could have been overlooked in the design documents.
  - MSC often brought a mechanism for me as supervisor at the time to get feedback on the quality of messages that were shared at community level.
  - It helps WV to make sure that they deliver according to the needs of the communities.
  - Base on the feedback, we can change our intervention accordingly. We have discussed the collection of MSC stories as one way to understand the impact of the work, while it is ongoing. It also helps to build the capacity of both staff and the community.
- **Sponsors can see what is happening in a direct and meaningful way.**
  - Sponsors are able to hear and see the impact their assistance is making in the lives of people
  - The stories are narrate by the beneficiaries of the project and are credible. Quotes are used in the process.
  - The stories were seemingly preferred by donors much as we had no direct feedback other than one or two comments from the Support Office
  - It helps staff and other stakeholders to learn the impact of WV interventions.
  - They help sponsor appreciate what happing in the field since not all have an opportunity of visiting the field.

Respondents were also asked "*On the other hand, what are the potential problems they should know about, before making any final decisions*?" Again, we have listed these below in full, because they are the summary statements of each respondent's views. Themes that are present include:

- **Staff may ignore stories they don't want to hear, e.g. negative changes**
  - It becomes MSC only when it is positive
- **Story collectors may not accurately capture what the story teller was saying**

- The tool can be abused in the sense that the views expressed in the story could be of the one collecting the story and not the one providing the story.
- It requires total understanding of people involved in story collection to be able to collect good stories. It also needs people who are good at story writing as one would have the facts but may fail to communicate
- The story must not be modified by others to make it sound better it must be original
- Photos at times don't community the truth on the ground.
- But in the whole collection process we need to be sensitive that we do not downplay some stories and pick up some of them as it fits to what we want to hear. Each person's stories are special to them.
- The potential problem is that there can be generalization of a fact and yet the truth may not that way.

- **Verification of stories is essential**
  - MSC tend to be subjective in terms of measuring impact, sometimes if the stories are not verified it may mislead and hence communicate wrongly.
  - Subjectivity that comes with primarily abstract stories. To refine such stories, on spot verification should be mandatory for all key players.
- **Stories must be used to influence programming or it the effort will be wasted**
  - One big question is - is the organization ready to take on the issues? Because from our experience, the tool loses credibility when management does not act on issues raised. A lot of people and staff tell us that they will no longer share because often nothing is being done. It is not because we are indifferent to issues, but staff are too overworked to deal with them.
  - To effectively use the approach, there is a need to use the stories in improving programming.
- **MSC requires time and attention**
  - The process can be costly.
  - Yes MSC does require time - you really have to make time to listen.
  - The process is not supposed to be rushed through because it hinders proper community contribution
- **MSC may not be properly implemented**
  - Biggest issue is doing the work sloppily (i.e. not paying enough attention to the method), and confusing the objectives of monitoring a programme with collecting stories for communications and monitoring. Because the idea is straight forward, sometimes people underestimate the effort required to do it properly. And most of our programmes collect too much information already that they don't use - so even thinking about collecting something else is difficult
  - The process of using MSC should be made clear to everyone involved, from the community to the final users of the information. If this is not done, the MSC will be seen as a mere administrative data collection undertaking and not as an exercise that is beneficial to programming and the community at large.
  - When one fails to understand or integrate MSC in his regular monitoring work, it becomes additional work. If one's intention is to just use MSC to comply with the reporting requirements, one misses out on the learnings he can get from the stories.
  - There is widespread use of MSC as an impact story collection tool, but very little understanding of the purpose and value addition of story selection and feedback.
  - How to feedback to stakeholders can cause some complications
- **There needs to be investment in training and capacity building**
  - [Its uses] Can be too simplistic, needs thorough training its use.
  - Training of staff collecting stories is very cardinal
  - Need to invest in capacity building of frontline staff, and continuously monitor how this is being done to address quality issues.

- Roll-out an issue. LEAP has placed this as a condition to have all programs attach MSC stories to annual reports with no active mechanism of ensuring this is matched with appropriate capacity and monitoring Secondly, roll-out of MSC should have been championed by Ministry Quality (DME) specialists other than Sponsorship / Operations department to allow continuity of the capacity building support as well as Meta-monitoring championed through the concept MSC also require advance planning at the community level other than reactionary process to comply with reporting deadlines.
- There is need to have simplified tools to track down how MSC is being used at all levels.

- **Attention need to be paid to community capacity and understanding, as well as WV staff**
  - Cost and implications of community engagement need to be seriously considered before rolling out.
  - They [communities] should be well informed why MSC is used. The impact of MSC to SO's, Donors and Partner agencies.
  - [There needs to be] Capacity of local leaders to properly collect MSC stories
  - [There is an need for a] Set plan of providing feedback to stakeholders on the stories.

5. How MSC has been introduced and used in TDC countries

5.1 Objectives: Why MSC was being used

As part of the Transformational Development Communications (TDC) Project a planned and systematic introduction of MSC was undertaken in three countries. TDC was a three year pilot project launched in August 2007 in three national offices (World Vision Cambodia, World Vision India and World Vision Philippines) with the objective of "Transforming Lives through Sharing Stories of Transformation". The goal of the TDC project was that:

> *"Communities are educated, empowered and transformed through the process of sharing stories of Most Significant change as a result of partnering with WV and donors, who in turn are educated, empowered and transformed by the stories themselves."*

What is significant about this goal is the clear intention to use MSC as a vehicle for community empowerment and transformation, which we believe is taking MSC beyond the traditional applications of the technique. What is interesting is that the goal also emphasises the organisational learning potential of MSC through the transformation of WV and donors.

5.2 Process in TDC: a comparison across countries

This information for this section has been gathered during field visits to India and Cambodia and by a review of TDC documentation, such as mid-year and annual reports (LEAP) and TDC evaluation report. As no visit was made to the Philippines the information relating to this country is based on more limited data than for Cambodia and India.

Management and coordination of MSC process

As discussed in section four above, responsibility for managing the use of MSC varies widely. This was also true for the three TDC pilot countries. The roles and responsibilities for MSC are discussed below in relations to the three countries.

Cambodia

Cambodia's TDC communicator was based inside the Program Quality and LEAP (PQL) Department and is assisted by a 'Learning for Transformation' (LfT) officer, also within PQL, on trainings, conduct of activities, coordination and documentation. TDC in Cambodia agreed to work closely with the LEAP and Learning for Transformation (LfT) teams who provide technical support to the TDC communicator in trainings.

At the ADP level, the Transformation Development (tdf) staff[30] , who are the primary frontline staff at the ADP level, are responsible for coordinating and conducting the MSC process with support and oversight from the TDC communicator.

India

In India staffing problems caused a set-back in initial management and coordination of MSC within the TDC pilot. Responsibility for TDC originally sat within the Communications Department. However, the TDC communicator was re-assigned as NO communicator with focus on TDC-support (which was not the previous set-up). During this initial phase, India was not able to do any coordination nor link with the Sponsorship team due to the resignation of the TDC communicator.

[30] Comprising a Tdf coordinator and up to 5 tdf facilitators

After the midterm evaluation of the TDC, responsibility for the TDC pilot shifted from communications to DME. An evaluation manager was assigned to support the project and a re-orientation and review of the understanding and use of the tool was again done to 25 Canada-funded ADPs with the full support of the DME team, led by director of Ministry of Quality. The Evaluation Manager then led the conduct of MSC activities with support from communications department.

At the ADP level, responsibility for coordinating and conducting the MSC process sits with the Management Information Systems (MIS) coordinator.

Philippines

Challenges were also encountered in staff hiring and subsequent resignation communicators from the Philippines. In the Philippines, TDC worked in tandem with DME, Communications, Sponsorship and Operations where key staff were trained on MSC facilitating skills. The TDC communicator (on secondment to TDC) led the process with support from time to time by Ministry Quality manager and available communicators who provide assistance when there are many stories for pitching and verification. Due to shifting of positions, DME has provided DME manager to provide technical support to TDC. No information was available on who is responsible at the ADP level.

Experience in the TDC supports the earlier recommendation regarding management of the MSC process by DME units (see Recommendation 4.4). In the TDC project MSC was found to function well when there is a clear individual and section responsible for coordinating and overseeing the process. Although it has been fruitful for MSC to be situated in Communication in terms of generating stories for this purpose, the true value of MSC as an M&E tool appears not to have been utilised. While we suggest that the process of MSC should be managed by the DME department, close coordination with Operations will ensure ownership at the ADP level. It will also be important to ensure that a clear process is established for the stories generated by the process to be channelled to Communications and Sponsorship for wider use and dissemination either as MSC stories or to be developed further into case studies.

Training and support

As part of the TDC pilot a training program was rolled out in the three participating countries, although how this was done varied from one country to another.

Cambodia

As indicated above, the TDC communicator was assisted in providing training and support by a 'Learning for Transformation' (LfT) officer based in the National Office. Regular MSC activities were conducted in all Canada-funded ADPs with the locally based TDFs as support facilitators in coordination with LEAP and LfT teams. This ensured ongoing support and training in MSC was provided to the ADPs as well as a consistent approach to MSC across participating ADPs.

At least 3 ADP staff and the ADP manager in all Canada-funded ADPs have undergone MSC training. MSC orientation was also conducted during the NO ADP Forum attended by all the Operations directors and managers, which was also attended by staff from Advocacy and Communications.

In addition, a range of materials and resources have been produced to assist the understanding and implementation of MSC as part of the TDC pilot (and beyond). These include a TDC video that supports MSC orientation. In Cambodia, video consultants were hired to produce an MSC training video and video segments on MSC stories. In addition, field and NO interviews were filmed to form part of plan promoting MSC interactively. Video materials were completed and shown at the NO ADP Forum along with other video clips on MSC. Altogether, 1 training video and 3 interview clips were produced to aid trainings. A pocket guide on MSC has also been produced in both English and Khmer as part of a tool kit of resources to assist with MSC which included:

Tools to support MSC

- MSC – Pocket guide
- Story recording template
- Plus, Minus, Interesting – thinking tool
- Story Chord – facilitating story preparation
- Home visit – facilitating story preparation
- Overnight Stay – facilitating story preparation
- River of Life – facilitating story preparation
- Strategic Questions – facilitating analysis
- Circles – facilitating group engagement
- The creative cycle – facilitating group engagement

Lessons Learned and Planning meetings were also conducted in Cambodia and the Philippines, as well as, the regional one held in Bangkok in September 2008.

India

In India the TDC Project Manager was brought in from the Philippines to provide training to the Management Information Systems (MIS) coordinators from Canada-funded ADPs. Key mid-level managers also attended the trainings and field practice sessions in order to promote MSC within the strategic operational areas at the NO; these key areas included Sponsorship, Human Resources, Capacity Building Initiative, DME and HEA. As mentioned above the after the Mid-Term Evaluation responsibility for the TDC pilot shifted from Communications to DME and a re-orientation and review of the understanding and use of the tool was again done to 25 Canada-funded ADPs with the full support of the DME team led by director of Ministry of Quality.

In contrast to Cambodia only one individual (the MIS) was targeted for training from each ADP, who was then in turn expected to provide training to the local front-line staff (CDCs). No support or follow-up appears to have been provided to these individuals and I was not able to access any MSC resources or materials that they could use. In most cases, those MIS that I spoke to indicated that they had not been given any resources for MSC, other than a copy of the slides used in an MSC training nor was it clear whom they could turn to for additional support or training.

- **Recommendation 5.1**: Rarely in our experience has MSC been able to gain full momentum from a single training event. Where NOs are using MSC the staff involved would benefit from follow-up training events which included reflections on issues emerging from their uses of MSC. Responsibility for providing follow-up and support needs to be assigned to a designated person or team.

Philippines

In WV Philippines, orientation training on MSC was conducted with HEA (Humanitarian Emergency Affairs), Marketing and Communications teams, in addition to ADP staff in Canada-funded ADPs. Review trainings with ADP staff conducting the MSC activities were later conducted in 9 Canada-funded ADPs. Constant monitoring of MSC activities and stories produced were consistently done by the TDC communicators, making sure that stories are verified and pitched in SHARE.

A separate orientation of Sponsorship team (also attended by the Marketing team) was also conducted for the children's Annual Progress Reports (APRs). MSC capacity building has gradually been shared in many departments through an open invitation for teams to attend if they can. The Marketing, Micro-Finance and Christian Witness teams were trained and have used MSC in their research work and case studies.

As occurred in Cambodia, WV Philippines produced a training video and MSC video materials, ADP history book (video and print) as well as MSC storybooks. All the materials were presented and launched at the regional Reflection on August 2009. Brief segments were produced into video clips that will be used to promote the tool in various media. The video clips will later be turned over to WV Canada Donor Engagement team for website use. Both the new and old MSC video will be made available to interested publics[31].

Where a suite of resources or tools has been made available it has facilitated a common understanding of MSC and a more consistent application of the technique. The resources generated as part of the TDC in Cambodia and Philippines could be packaged into a general MSC resource pack for wider dissemination. This idea supports 'Recommendation 2.1' which proposes that the recently established MSC CoP is developed to ensure ongoing leadership and support to improve the use of MSC in WV NOs.

Use of domains

Similarly to the general findings in the previous section, in all three TDC countries, domains were often decided in advance and informed who participates in the MSC process each time. In this case the domains are usually aligned with the project activities within each ADP i.e. nutrition, food security, HIV/AIDS, peer education. Occasionally an 'open' domain is used. Early on during the pilot years the open window approach was more commonly used, but it was found that more specific questions based around a domain were easier both in identifying participants to invite to the story sessions and also for storytellers to reflect on changes. In Cambodia there was also occasions where the domains were community generated (Children of Hope ADP).

Story collection

Story collection invariably begins by searching for the answer to a simple question, such as:

> *"Looking back over the last year, what do you think was the most significant change as a result of your involvement in the 'xx project?".*

This initial question forms the basis of the information being sought and places some boundaries around the focus of the story. One such boundary is the domain (see above), which can guide the storyteller as to the broad category of change being investigated. Another is the time period. The time period used as part of the TDC tended to depend on the stage of the ADP. For example where the ADP was in the final or transition stage, questions tended to focus on the whole period of implementation i.e. over the last 10 years; where the ADP was in the earlier stages the questions tended to focus on a more recent time frame, such as the last six months or year.

The story collection process, which was developed as part of the TDC pilot, involved community members who had participated in WV activities sharing stories in groups and this was the common practice across all three countries (although the size of the group tended to vary). There were some examples of stories being collected as part of individual interviews, or being written by staff themselves but they tended not to be considered MSC stories (see discussion below on what constitutes an MSC story).

Cambodia

In Cambodia the frontline staff (Tdf) decide who will participate in the MSC session, and this choice was often governed by the domains they had chosen to use (see above - i.e. economic development = savings group members; food security = community involved in related project activities e.g. vegetable cultivation). The Tdf usually conduct home visits to invite participants and explain the

[31] See Annex F for comments on the Philippines video, as provided by Rick Davies in February this year.

objective of the session[32]. In most cases participants are asked to think in advance about their story. Key stakeholders such as local authority, school principals are also invited to attend as observers.

What makes the Cambodia implementation of MSC unique is its use of specific tools to enhance story sharing such as the "Story Chord" and "River of Life"; the latter being the preferred method with children. Stories are told in small groups using these tools and in each group, one person takes notes and another facilitates. Then selected stories are shared prior to a final selection being made (see Story Selection below).

Unfortunately, it is only the final story that is considered as a *most significant change* story and as a result in most cases this is the only story documented. The TDC communicator based in the National Office is the person who documents the story, usually after a verification/info gathering visit to story teller. In Cambodia, most Tdf staff consulted had facilitated the MSC story process between two and eight times and were comfortable with the process. To date, the MSC training has emphasised the facilitation of story sharing, which is to be applauded but it has been at the cost of neglecting to adequately document stories of change. This result is a loss of valuable data about project outcomes, but perhaps reflects the community transformation focus of MSC within TDC.

India

In India it was also the frontline staff (CDC) within the ADP who decided who will participate and organise the MSC sessions in the community either by village or setting i.e. children's clubs, non-formal-education centres, youth groups, or Self-Help-Groups such as savings groups. Most ADPs consulted tended to rotate around different groups at different times, thus the focus of the MSC sessions tended to change over time. This reflected the decision to focus of domains on interest, depending of what had been the focus of activities.

As in Cambodia, in India participants were first organised into groups, although they tended to be larger than in Cambodia e.g. 10-15 people. The groups were usually homogenous according to age or gender as most ADPs had found this to be a more useful way to generate stories. Placing people in homogenous groups limited the potential for power dynamics to dominate and also tended to make those sharing stories more at ease; this was especially true for women and children. Group members then shared their stories with each other before selecting one as most significant. Again, as was the case in Cambodia one CDC documents in note form the small group discussion and only the final story is documented in full, usually by the MIS.

Philippines

There was limited information available for this review on the identification of participants for story sharing in the Philippines although it seemed to be based on domain as per India and Cambodia. In the Philippines the participants were organised into much smaller groups (3-5 people) and encouraged to share their stories. Each group then selects one story. This may happen on multiple occasions, generating a number of selected stories. There was limited information available in the reports reviewed regarding the documentation of stories from these sessions; however it would appear that the TDC communicator documents selected stories only.

[32] This approach to finding people to tell MSC stories raises questions of sampling. It could be argued that random sampling of people (who would then tell their MSC stories) might be more likely to throw up new and unexpected changes. Where staff select the people who will tell MSC stories they are to some extent becoming co-story tellers.

Emerging issues regarding story collection in the TDC project

❖ ***What constitutes an MSC story***

What constitutes an MSC story is also discussed section 3. Among those consulted in Cambodia and India there was much confusion about the difference between a 'case study' and an MSC story. The 'case study' had been introduced in WV prior to MSC as a way of capturing qualitative data. In India the issue was discussed during a reflection on MSC and it was decided that "case study is evidence and MSC is a tool for community to discover their own change and is used as a monitoring tool." In Cambodia, the emphasis on the process also seemed to be what distinguished MSC from a case study, although the final story that was documented was in my opinion a case study and not an MSC story as it is written up after a verification visit during which time additional information is included and does not include why it is significant. For me the difference between the two is explained in the table below:

MSC story	Case Study
✓ Is one person's story	✓ Often uses multiple sources of information
✓ Focuses on a particular change	✓ Is more comprehensive, sometimes describing many changes
✓ Includes some subjectivity, especially the views of the storyteller[33]	✓ Seeks to be an objective account of a situation
✓ Ends with 'Why significant' to the storyteller	✓ Does not articulate why it is significant

Much emphasis in the MSC training within the TDC pilot has been on facilitating the MSC process. This is to be commended as it is often overlooked. However, little focus has been being given to documenting stories with responsibility for documentation then largely falling to one individual; usually the TDC coordinator/communicator based in the national office. This places a heavy burden on a small number of individuals and also, in our opinion, encourages the writing of a more case study style story than MSC story. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly the stories are not captured at the time they are told and therefore are rarely in the first person format. The second reason is the fact that when they are finally documented they are being viewed through the lens of Communications needs.

Because the final story is usually documented after the verification step, this process is used to expand on the story as much as to verify it. In all countries, the TDC communications officer conducts home visits to verify selected stories. Sometimes additional information is captured that was not available when story was first told. As well as talking to story teller, other members of the family and neighbours are consulted.

- **Recommendation 5.2:** Frontline staff should be encouraged to document stories as they are told. At a minimum this should include the MSC stories selected by each sub-group, not just the story selected at the plenary level of TDC-type community meetings. Better still would be at least one-line recording of the *types* of change mentioned by each story teller within

[33] Note that the storyteller could be community or staff

each of those sub-groups. Skills associated with documenting stories should in included in MSC training, with a focus on better capturing the storytellers' voice.

- **Recommendation 5.3:** While the River of Life has obviously proved to be a useful tool to facilitate story telling in Cambodia it would be better adapted for use as a reflection tool to elicit the various changes that have happened, prior to identifying the *most significant* change amongst these.

The review of the TDC also supports the earlier recommendation (Recommendation 4.11) that states that all stories include a final section of why that story is significant to the story teller and it made clear who the storyteller is (i.e. staff's perspective or community member perspective).

❖ ***Lack of Documentation of unselected Stories***

As noted above, the final story which is selected on the day is the only one that is documented (see discussion under story selection for a more detailed understanding of why). While in both India and Cambodia an ADP staff member was usually present and taking notes during the story sharing in groups, these notes are rarely, if ever turned into stories. This represents a huge loss of valuable data on outcomes experienced in the community.

> *"MSC stories are filed well, but SC stories are not. I'm not sure where they are – notes are taken during session but I'm not sure what happens to them. That's a weakness – there's no interest in a story that's not selected."* ADP staff member, India

As mentioned in 'Recommendation 4.7', there are certain requirements in documenting an MSC story that need to drawn out in updated LEAP guidance. This should include a re-articulation of what constitutes a significant change story so that all stories told are valued and captured. All the stories generated as part of the MSC sessions with community should be seen as a resource for subsequent evaluations of the ADP and ideally documented and stored locally. In order for this to occur, the above recommendation regarding building capacity in story documentation would also need to be implemented.

Another common feature in both India and Cambodia was that although negative stories are sometimes told, they are almost never documented. This is perhaps a result of MSC being introduced as a communications tool as opposed to an M&E tool. Despite the fact that they are not documented, there was a commonly held view that they were "heard" and discussed by ADP staff during meetings. While this is of benefit to that particular ADP who may learn and adapt their program as a result, such lessons may not be shared with other ADPs if negative stories are not documented in any way.

- **Recommendation 5.4:** Collecting of both positive and negative stories should be encouraged. One way to do this is to establish a 'negative changes' domain so that there is a recognised place for submitting negative stories. Until then, the absence of negative stories will suggests that WV's communications needs are being given higher priority than identifying ways to improve programme design and implementation.

❖ ***Quality of stories documented***

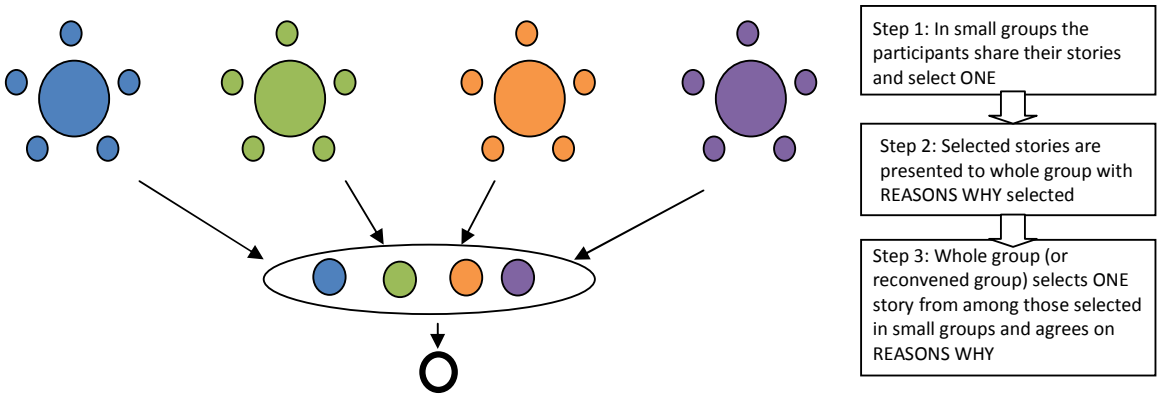
The general impression of those who reviewed MSC stories as part of the Annual (LEAP) Reporting process in both India and Cambodia was that there was a lot of variance in the quality of stories across ADPs. It was felt that sometimes there is 'not much flesh' or the story is unclear especially 'WV's impact and what has actually changes or how it has affected the child'. These issues are clearly related to the previous two points.

As per recommendation 4.7, this report should enable the development on specific guidelines on story documentation as part of the LEAP framework buy taking on board the discussions about what

constitutes an MSC story. This recommendation is also closely connected with the earlier one regarding building capacity in story documentation among frontline staff.

Story Selection

The process used in the TDC Project was very community centred, with story collection and selection occurring at the community level in a highly participative way. Typically the process is conducted during a half or full day in the community. Approximately 20-40 participants are identified in advance and invited to attend an MSC session. The session can take place in the community/village or in specific settings such as a school, children's group, non-formal education centre. In most cases this involved a two level process with stories being first shared in small groups (of 5-8) with each group deciding on the *most* significant for their group. These selected stories are then shared with the larger group.



All participants, or in some cases a representative group, then take part in deciding the *most significant* change from among the selected stories[34]. Where all participants take part in the final selection it tends to take place at the same time as the story sharing and small group selection. In some cases the selection of the final story is done by a representative committee formed with key community stakeholders or a sub group of representatives from step one reconvened at a later date (example schools A, B, C and D each share and select their own stories, then a final selection session is organised with representatives from all four schools)., whereas the representative group or committee may reconvene on a separate occasion to select the final story. The final story is then documented as the *most significant change story*.

This process is conducted at least twice yearly to feed into the semi annual and annual [LEAP] reports submitted by each ADP.

In all ADP participating countries selection occurs at two levels (see diagram above). In both India and Cambodia both levels of selection were done by community, whereas in the Philippines the second level of selection was done by the ADP. In both Cambodia and India there was a belief that selection 'had to' occur in the community for it to be MSC. This however is not the case; with the first use of MSC by Davies in Bangladesh, selection was only done internally by program staff and the community were not included in the process. It should be noted that there is no 'right way' to do selection (it depends on who is expected to benefit most from participating in the process). The important thing is that selection occurs!

Cambodia & India

[34] In the Philippines, this level of selection was done by ADP staff

In general, Cambodia and India followed the same format for selection. The first level of selection took place in the small groups after each person (or most people) had shared their stories. In one ADP in India, a modified form of the 'ten seeds technique' had been used to facilitate this process.

The second level of selection usually took place immediately following the small group story sharing and selecting exercise with the aim being to select one story from among those stories selected in each group. The most common approach seemed to involve a whole group process – often with up 50 participants, although selection was sometimes done by a representative committee. This inevitably raises issues of quality of participation. The purpose of the selection process is to engage in a dialogue about what *is* significant. It is questionable what level of engagement is possible with such a large group of people. Staff interviewed reported that the group would share and discuss then come to a conclusion in large group. The final decision was usually taken by a show of hands.

In the case of a committee being formed, criteria were often set by the committee or large group prior to selection process. Unfortunately, setting criteria in advance of the discussion tends to limit the value of debating what *is* significant; this means participants are unlikely to discover new (unexpected) criteria of significance, and rely (perhaps too much) on their existing views.

In Cambodia one ADP reported that Zonal level selection was happening quarterly from among stories selected at the community MSC process from each of the ADPs in that zone, but it was unclear what the purpose of this selection was. One manger reported that it '*was a requirement but not sure from who'* and was to *'get a story to represent the zone',* but he wasn't sure what happened to that story.

In India two of the ADPs indicated that selection took place at the ADP level but it was explained as them sharing stories in groups or during staff meetings and "picking out the best". This raises the question of 'best' according to who and for what purposes. It is our view that the 'best' story and the 'most significant' story are not necessarily the same thing.

Philippines

Selection also occurs at two levels. However in contrast to Cambodia and India, selection took place at the ADP level as well as at the community level. At the Community level, the process was similar to the other two countries where by story tellers were placed into small groups (3-4 people) to share their stories and select one per group. However, as well as selecting the MSC they also looked at common themes in the stories. At the ADP level selection tool place as part of the ADP evaluation and involved WV staff that were relevant to the stories being reviewed e.g. if stories are about sponsorship then sponsorship officers are invited. Local govt people were also included from time to tome e.g. if story is about health. Stories that were not chosen were also discussed. At end of project evaluation there were 2-3 groups doing selection in parallel.

Emerging issues regarding story selection in the TDC

❖ ***Understanding of role and purpose of selection***

There was a clear emphasis on getting to one final story is to the detriment of the valuing non-selected stories.

"The most means only one – the perfect one– when introduced looks like no choice because we can select only one, a lot of benefit can be missed, some changes are not captured" – ADP Manager, Cambodia

This view of the purpose of selection suggests that the role of dialogue that is at the heart of choosing one story over another appeared to be little understood. The fact that the final selection

of one story often took place in a whole group process consisting of up to 50 people highlights this point.

The value of stories as a platform for dialogue is important to understanding MSC. Stories are an excellent vehicle for dialogue, because they are open to multiple interpretations and it is through the selection process that these multiple interpretations are surfaced and explored. Thus, story selection is the very heart of MSC: "Without selection it is not MSC". The process of selection, when it takes place through a dialogue between two or more people, helps *surface participants' values*, about what is important in people's lives, which in turn leads to a discussion about program intention, impact and ultimately future direction. This dialogue is at the very heart of the technique and where the true value in using it lies.

It is important to understand that selection is not solely about the *choice* or the last story standing, but also about the *discussion* that happens in reaching a decision about which *is* the most significant. "In fact all stories are significant, at very least to the person who first told the story" Furthermore, a given story may be both significant to one small group of people, but not to a wider group of people - when they are comparing that story to others."

There was a general perception among those consulted in both India and Cambodia that *the most significant* change story was the final story selected and as a consequence that other stories told and heard but not selected were not significant. This is to the detriment of the usefulness of the other stories, which were all locally relevant at some level.

- **Recommendation 5.5:** Selection should be structured in such a way that true discussion and dialogue can take place; firstly, this means holding discussions in groups of no more than eight people. Secondly WV staff should explore alternative ways of structuring the selection process, other than using a single hierarchical approach. It is possible for a number of smaller groups to select from the same group of stories and that for each selected story to be considered significant for that particular group without ending up with only one story. This is often referred to as parallel group selection:

Selection by parallel sub groups

Here significant change stories are selected from a number of small group sessions resulting in four or five most significant change stories. In the next level of selection small groups (either the same as for the previous exercise or different) then selecting which of the four or five they think is the most significant and why. If selection occurs in homogenous groups you would then have the most significant change according to children, the most significant change according to youth, the most significant change according to teachers and so on. It may be that the same or different stories are selected but each group would have its own reasons for selecting a particular story over others.

The value of using this approach to selection is that similarities and differences in perceptions of *significance* by particular stakeholder groups can be identified.

❖ ***Use of criteria***

There were several references made during the interviews both in Cambodia and India to criteria being used for selection. For example if all the following criteria were met than a story was selected: economic development, spread to others, family behavioural change. The setting of criteria in advance of selection goes against the purpose of selection itself. The values on which a story is judged to be significant should emerge from the dialogue and discussion. While it is possible to identify criteria post selection – often being documented as the reasons for selection it is not advisable to set them in advance.

- **Recommendation 5.6**: The use or reference to pre-defined criteria for selection should be avoided. If criteria are agreed in advance, then organisational learning remains focused on best ways of achieving those ends (stories describing the means). If the criteria are left open for discussion then learning can take place at a higher level (sometimes described as second order learning) – are we pursuing the right objectives, or do they need to be changed?

❖ ***Documenting the reasons for selection***

Although the final story selected tended to be the only one that was documented, the reasons for selection rarely, if ever appear with the story. Staff consulted for this review indicated that the reasons were always captured on the day, but due to the way if which stories get documented (see earlier discussion), the reasons why there were selected appeared to get lost in the process. This was also the finding of the review of the general use of MSC discussed in section four above, and is covered in Recommendation 4.11.

❖ ***Organisational learning potential not being realised***

The goal of the TDC pilot was that *"Communities are educated, empowered and transformed through the process of sharing stories of Most Significant change as a result of partnering with WV and donors, who in turn are educated, empowered and transformed by the stories themselves."* This goal clearly emphasises the organisational learning potential of MSC in addition to the value of using MSC to empower and transform communities. However, the lack of systematic selection and feedback of stories within WV (at the ADP level, National level and also SOs) means that the organisational learning potential is not being fully utilized. The current bottom up approach to MSC, is recognised as being an extremely useful as a community mobilisation or transformation tool, but the implementation of MSC could be extended further and improved upon so that its potential to facilitate change within WV could be better realised. Many of the recommendations already made in this report are likely to improve this aspect of MSC. These include that addressing:

- ✓ Use of pre-defined selection criteria (recommendation xx – p 42)
- ✓ Lack of documentation of the many stories told at the community level, therefore no possible other uses of these stories (recommendations x and x p.39) and recommendation 5.13)
- ✓ Lack of feedback to NO from SO on selected stories (recommendation 5.5)
- ✓ No selection process involving NO staff, and no feedback to field staff and community on stories they have selected (see recommendation below.

- **Recommendation 5.7**: WV NOs should use stories that have been selected within communities as the basis for further levels of selection at the ADP level and/or National office level. For example annual selection of stories could be built in to the annual meetings for ADP managers and staff. This would create a dialogue across the national organisation in terms of what *is significant* and what should they therefore be doing more of in the future.

Feedback on MSC stories

In the TDC design, the feedback loop was included as part of the field practice activity towards. Thus, feedback on 'which stories were selected and why' formed part of the MSC session with the information about selected stories being shared among community participants as part of the process.

As no systematic selection was being done beyond the community level selection (except in the case of the Philippines as part of the ADP evaluation), there appeared to be no clear process for feedback

from the NO to the ADP other than as part of the review process of annual and semi reporting for LEAP.

Feedback was also considered to be part of the staff reflection process that followed the MSC session in the community. This allowed staff to reflect on what is good in the process, and what could still be improved or avoided. However, feedback among staff on the MSC process, although useful for improving how MSC is done, is separate to the Feedback step in MSC.

See earlier Recommendation (4.5) regarding the importance on feedback on stories, particularly in respect of improving the quality of stories submitted.

Use of MSC stories

While much of the discussion relating to the TDC so far has been related to the *process* of MSC the *product* (in this case the story) is of equal importance. Indeed, one of the most common drivers for deciding to use MSC is to generate stories of impact. These stories of change, once generated can be used for a variety of purposes.

Reporting

One of most commonly cited reasons for using MSC among those consulted for this review was for reporting. Stories generated via MSC were seen as useful to '*know the impact of our work'*. One respondent highlighted the fact there had been a recent shift in reporting to qualitative data and impact and felt that MSC had been very useful to address this shift in reporting requirements. The fact that an MSC story is built into the current semi-annual and annual reporting framework (LEAP) appears to have raised the profile of the need for stories. However, as discussed above (review of WV stories pp.18), stories submitted under this requirement do not necessarily fulfil the criteria of an MSC story and further guidance is needed (see Recommendations 4.8, 4.10, 4.11, 4.15 regarding guidance on MSC stories).

Some stories generated via the MSC process are also being used as part of the Annual Progress Reporting for sponsorship (see annex. G. Newsletters/Annual Progress Reports to Donors**).** Unfortunately, the stories do not make reference to the process that led to the stories being captured, why they were significant to the story teller, if they have been selected nor the reasons why. Based on the discussion of 'what is an MSC story' earlier in this report, it is questionable whether they are in fact MSC stories.

As pointed out in **'**Recommendation 4.8'**,** stories should not be referred to as MSC stories unless they fulfil the requirements of one. As stated earlier MSC stories are only a sub set of a much larger number of stores being collected by different groups of staff within NOs for different purposes.

Communications, dissemination and marketing

TDC MSC stories were uploaded to a dedicated website[35] during the program implementation. In each country the TDC coordinator/communications department was responsible for uploading stories from their respective countries. It is not clear what the process was for deciding which stories to upload and if those on the site were selected stories or not. Again, no reference has been made to the process that led to the stories being captured, why they were significant to the story teller, if they have been selected nor the reasons why. Despite this drawback, the site contains some useful resources for MSC but unfortunately, knowledge/awareness of this site seemed to be restricted to communications staff. Unfortunately, use of the website seems to have now lapsed as no one is providing further content or monitoring its use.

[35] http://transformation.wvasiapacific.org - an internal website which was maintained during the duration of the project and contains a range of resources

There is also the SHARE database which all NOs can "pitch" stories to. All WV offices have access to the contents on this site. In the case of Cambodia stories were drawn from the TDC story collection process, primarily though not exclusively the final selected story or generated during a separate interview conducted by the TDC communicator. This person then decides which to 'pitch'. Stories are also posted on the World Vision Cambodia Website.

In India, a separate database for MSC stories was also being managed by the communications department called "TALK INDIA". Unfortunately there was limited information available on this database as the person who had been coordinating it had left.

At least one ADP in India reported having their own bank of stories from the MSC process which they used to respond to requests for information from the media department or from visitors (internal or external) to their ADP office. As such, it was felt that MSC had provided them with useful resources to be able to proactively respond to requests or demands for information placed on them.

Despite the goal of the TDC being for '*WV and donors…[to be] educated, empowered and transformed by the stories themselves',* it was unclear from this particular research, what impact the stories were having beyond the National Offices visited. What was clear is that there seemed to be multiple, possibly competing, means of disseminating and communicating the stories and a lack of a common structure within WV.

Community level awareness raising

In both Cambodia and India staff at the ADP level reported the stories, particularly those selected as most significant during MSC group session, were being used for awareness raising and advocacy at the community level. The following examples were provided:

- Children sharing their stories with others during events in the school (Cambodia)
- Storytellers (both adult and children) sharing their stories during community events/meetings i.e. human rights day (Cambodia)
- Targeted awareness by inviting storytellers to share their stories with particular families – a child who told an MSC story about the value of school accompanied frontline staff to visit a family who did not send their children to school (India)
- Selected stories were shared in monthly CBO meetings (India)

Inviting key local stakeholders such as local government or school directors to hear the stories during the story sharing sessions was also used as a means of raising the profile of local issues and informally advocating for a particular change to occur or issue to be addressed. An example of this was given in Cambodia where teachers were regularly taking money from students making it difficult for children to be able to go to school. Although it was 'known' to be a common practice, hearing the story first hand as told by the child raised the profile of the issue for those who had the capacity to act. (Note: it was not clear at the time of the research if this had led to the issue being addressed)

Emerging Issues regarding use of stories in the TDC

The issues of storing, tacking accessing and using MSC stories within a NO is also discussed in section four of this report. One of factors that contribute to how MSC stories are used or how other types of stories are used and referred to as MSC stories is that MSC stories are only a small sub-set of a much larger number of stories being collected by different groups of staff within NOs. In the NOs visited these processes are not entirely separated from each other, there is some borrowing, but nor are they totally integrated. While databases do exist, their continued use, management, and access as a resource is inconsistent and they appear to lapse into redundancy, particularly when key staff leave of change positions. Clearly a better way of managing MSC stories both nationally but

within WV internationally is needed so that they can be better used. Recommendation 4.12 (in the previous section) suggests that a web-based facilities be investigated to facilitate the management and flow of stories. Systems need to be put in place to track where stories go and what happens to them (See earlier Recommendation 4.3: Where MSC is established under the authority of the DME staff one performance indicator for the process should be the number and proportion of MSC stories used by other sections of the NO and associated SOs.)

Furthermore, there is also scope to enhance the use of stories as a community based resource for awareness and advocacy. While there were examples of where this was working, it was not consistently the case and staff in both Cambodia and India admitted that this was a potential that they had not tapped into and they were not using the stories at the ADP level very well. One of the factors that may contribute to this lack of use at the ADP level is the fact that selection is only done at the community level in Cambodia and India as well as the fact that only the final selected story tends to be documented. Both of these issues are addressed earlier in this section and addressing them is likely to go some way to increasing use of MSC stories by the ADPs.

Role out of TDC pilot – extending the use of MSC to all ADPs

During the final phase aimed at mainstreaming MSC the TDC pilot was scaled back from three countries (India, Cambodia and the Philippines) to the two latter ones. The implications of this decision in India together with an outline of how the transaction stage has been managed in Cambodia and the Philippines are discussed below.

India

India had suggested that MSC was being mainstreamed in various ways at the end of the project evaluation in 2009 and therefore did not need assistance in the role out of MSC. However, as the quote below indicates, there did not appear to be a coordinated approach in India to extend the use of MSC to non-TDC ADPs

> *"WVI requested all ADPs to use MSC, but they don't know the steps, had no formal training as such. It was just explained informally" (Evaluation manager, India)*

Given the large number of ADPs in India it was beyond the scope of this research to establish the extent to which MSC had been taken up by non-TDC ADPs. However a visit to one such ADP demonstrated that although they were using MSC there was less understanding of what steps should be involved in MSC. The MIS had received training from another MIS who had been trained as part of the TDC. No MSC resources appear to have been shared and MSC was being applied in a more ad hoc manner. Stories were collected based on individual interviews, by probing for changes associated with certain activities – leading questions used such as "since you got a solar lamp you are saving money?" Stories are then selected during a Village Development Committee (VDC) meeting – with story with largest coverage or impact being selected as the *most* significant; no reasons for selection are not documented. It was also suggested that the VDC could also add their own input to the story and decide if it is right or wrong. This raises questions as to whose story it is. For child sponsorship criteria is used to select e.g. economic development, spread to others, family behavioural change – if all criteria met then story is selected. When the coordinator visits family to document story, probes for other things would like to highlight in story. Interestingly though, this ADP had many examples of how MSC had contributed to improved program planning.

Cambodia

In Cambodia a non-TDC ADP was also visited along with ADPs which were part of the original TDC pilot. In contrast to India, the same team were initially responsible for providing training and support to ADPs as part of the role out. This meant that a more consistent approach was being taken to MSC based on common materials, such as the field guild to MSC which explains the steps involved in running an MSC process.

Extending MSC to all ADPs obviously placed resourcing constraints of the TDC coordinator. In response to this a' training for trainers' was conducted for all key field staff and managers in all four ADP zones of Cambodia in collaboration with the DME group. From this training, each zone is in the process of forming a core group consisting of a TDF staff, Sponsorship Facilitator and Child Monitoring Coordinators (CMC). These core groups are intended to be point people responsible for the implementation of MSC in the field. It is hoped that this structure will help move MSC into a field led activity which is what it should be and away from one that was solely conducted by someone from the NO HQ. A total of 120 key NO and field staff participated in these MSC trainings and most ADPs are reportedly now facilitating MSC activities at their respective ADPs, but the TDC coordinator is still being called in for support and in capturing stories. This aspect of MSC has been discussed earlier in this section with a recommendation that responsibility for documentation of MSC stories should be transferred to the frontline staff.

Philippines

A major drawback in the implementation was the decision of the DME/Strategic Planning and Management team to opt out of the lead role in the mainstreaming of the tool due to staffing issues. The implementation has remained in the hands of the TDC communicator and the Advocacy and Communications team. Nonetheless, under this set up, the team have reportedly been able to push for the use of MSC as one of the tools in evaluation of 12 transitioning ADPs and the end of project evaluation of the Empowering Children as Peacebuilders Project (ECAP). The evaluation process proved to be a good opportunity to promote MSC among ADP field managers who spearheaded the evaluation processes. An MSC facilitation guideline was developed to be specifically used for these evaluation activities and staff who had been previously trained on MSC supported the evaluation teams. It is unclear how MSC will be adopted in newly established ADPs and taken forward beyond this evaluation phase.

Interestingly a combined training on MSC and feature writing was also carried out during the final year for sponsorship staff in all of the six field offices with the use of the training video. A total of 161 field staff and CBO partners were trained. The inclusion of a focus on writing is a useful improvement to the MSC training and one that was suggested as a recommendation earlier in this report .

According to the Final TDC Report (2010) this strategy proved effective in securing the buy in of field staff and an effort to build their capacity in writing, which was identified as a problem during the pilot period. While a number of them expressed an interest in contributing raw stories to the TDC website, they haven't been able to do so due to the competing priorities at their respective work assignments but a number have started using MSC in their child monitoring activities and in preparing sponsorship correspondence such as APR and farewell letters of the children.

The final report goes on to explain the "*Overall, the past year has seen the increasing engagement of the Communications team in using MSC as a resource gathering tool. However, apart from the evaluation process and the familiarity of key field staff, MSC remains widely unused in DME. While it is said to be part of LEAP reporting, there is no organizational mechanism in place to make it mandatory for ADPs to use. As have been raised in the pilot year, management support is key in ensuring that MSC will be maximized as a DME tool and unless this happens, it will just be one of the many trainings or initiatives that is being introduced in the ADPs..*"

Integration and/or adoption of MSC into other sections of the NO

While it is hard to gauge to what extent MSC has been integrated into other sections within each of the participating national offices, there was evidence that awareness and training in MSC has been extended beyond the TDC. Where a core team or individual was responsible for MSC (Cambodia and India) the reach and take up seems to have been greater.

Cambodia

- MSC has been promoted within other sections of WV Cambodia during an MSC workshop attended by various teams including Reducing Gender-Based Violence (RGBV), Mobilizing Communities for Child Protection (MCCP) and LEAP WV Laos Communications team also attended with the goal of using the tool in their activities.
- MSC has also been discussed consistently by the TDC communicator in various team and special projects meetings – with the support of LEAP and TfT teams.
- Stories generated by the MSC process at the ADP level are also being used by Sponsorship as part of the Annual Performance Report to donors. However, only one report is produced each year (per ADP?) and only one story included. The decision regarding which story to include is made by the Sponsorship Program Director and Communications.
- MSC was shared at the annual ADP Forum in Cambodia.
- MSC has been incorporated into the curricular for Learning for Transformation

India

- MSC has been incorporated into the weekly devotion in India along with the sharing of one MSC story by a staff.
- Stories generated by the MSC process at the ADP level are also being used by Sponsorship as part of the Annual Performance Report to donors. However, only one report is produced each year (per ADP?) and only one story included.
- Key mid-level managers also attended the trainings and field practice sessions in order to promote MSC within the strategic operational areas at the NO; these key areas included Sponsorship, Human Resources, Capacity Building Initiative, DME and HEA.

Philippines

- Sponsorship Officers from the six Field Offices ensure that MSC is integrated in the sponsorship monitoring activities in their respective areas of responsibility.
- MSC is also integrated in the Core Competency plan of WV Philippines with HR using it as part of the recruitment process.
- The Marketing staff has produced a research report on Church Partnerships using MSC as a tool and this was shared around the NO and also in the Partnership.
- MSC was shared at CIM dialogues and management meetings in the Philippines.
- MSC was also shared with micro-finance team in the Philippines.
- MSC was also used for a regional project on Children in Development which will later be produced into a compendium and presented at the Global Centre
- MSC was also used as a training evaluation tool during the APRO/RDMT Disaster Communications training in the Philippines last November 2008.

General

- Coordination with the Global Centre has resulted to a special project using MSC to generate Spiritual Nurture stories from 6 NOs – Cambodia, India, Philippines, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. The MSC stories shall be published into a compendium of stories on the impact of spiritual nurture activities on children.

5.3 The outcomes of using MSC in the TDC

This section draws on the interviews conducted during field visits to India and Cambodia. No visit was made to the Philippines, however it is likely that the introduction of MSC in that country will have produced similar results as in was based on a common TDC process.

Experiences and reactions to MSC

The response to MSC, particularly among ADP level staff was very positive with all those consulted indicating that they thought it was a useful tool.

MSC is a good tool, not only in the community, but also for staff. It can be used everywhere so it's an excellent tool (ADP manager India)

I really like the tool, it is directly connected to the community and the impact is visible (CDC staff, India)

It's very important in helping people to transform their lives (ADP Manager, Cambodia)

It's simple not difficult and we're happy to do (TDF, Cambodia)

As the last quote demonstrates, it was found to be an easy method to use; this perhaps reflects the value of focusing on how to facilitate the process during MSC training sessions. While some respondents commented that the process took time (normally half to a full day), it was generally thought to be worth the time it took as it was a useful exercise and the community benefited from and enjoyed the process. Staff felt that MSC allowed the community an opportunity to be heard and reactions from storytellers were equally positive. For them it was seen they them as an opportunity for sharing and learning from others as well as to meet new people.

I'm very happy to share my story and meet many people that I never know before (Student, Cambodia)

I like a lot the activity of sharing stories. I can see and know about the river of life of my friends and other children as well. (Student, Cambodia)

It was so good to be able to share each others' stories and learn from the experiences of others. I hadn't done anything like this before. (Women's self help group member, Cambodia)

There was also a common perception among ADP staff that the process generated believable and authentic stories because they were being selected by the community. Some staff in India suggested that it was much easier to get stories using the TDC MSC process as it no longer fell to the staff to seek out and capture stories, but instead the community were coming up with and sharing their own.

The only issues that were commonly raised (in both Cambodia and India) were the challenges associated with story selection. When it was first introduced into a community, participants struggled with the concept of choosing one story and it was felt that if a story is not selected sometimes people can get discouraged. The idea of the selection process being seen as a competition was mentioned in both Cambodia and India. In most cases, time had been taken by those facilitating the process to better explain the purpose so that this perception was overcome.

Also related to selection, was the concern that nothing happens to unselected stories and this was seen as a loss my many of the frontline staff who felt that all of the stories were significant and important. This issue is discussed earlier in the report, but is again highlighted here as it is a factor that can impact on the reaction to MSC as a tool at the field level.

Who has benefited and how

The review of WV's use of MSC in general (see section four above) found that *while participating in MSC processes may have empowering effects for project beneficiaries, other stakeholder groups are seen to benefit more, donors particularly*. In comparison, the review of the use of MSC in the TDC project in India and Cambodia has found that the perception among those interviewed is that community have reaped considerable benefit. In fact, beyond improved reporting to donors (which did not surface as a main benefit), the value of using MSC within the TDC is seen much more in terms of its impact on community than the potential benefit to WV and donors. This is likely to be a result of the community focused, bottom-up approach of the TDC. Although the stated goal of the TDC was to transform community, WV and donors, it was difficult to gauge how and in what ways the

TDC may have achieved the latter but a discussion on the effects on both community and WV locally and nationally is provided below.

WV Communities

Community Empowerment

In both India and Cambodia, one of the most commonly cited benefits to community from the introduction of MSC was community empowerment. Community empowerment refers to the process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives. Communication plays a vital role in ensuring community empowerment. The particular way in which MSC was implemented as part of the TDC involved bringing groups of community together to share and reflect on changes in their lives. Participatory approaches in communication that encourage discussion and debate result in increased knowledge and awareness, and a higher level of critical thinking. Critical thinking enables communities to understand the interplay of forces operating on their lives, and helps them take their own decisions.

Central to this concept of empowerment was the importance of community based learning. It was felt that the MSC process enabled those who participated an opportunity to reflect and learn and in turn transform their lives. *"Community can learn from each other"* was the most common response by WV frontline staff to the questions of how community may have benefited from MSC. This was also corroborated by the limited number of community consulted as part of this review who reported being inspired by others stories and being able to take lessons and apply to their own lives. Often, other people's stories were an 'eye opener' to how things could be done differently, or the impact that a particular action could have on others (e.g. a man hearing about a story of domestic violence being told by a woman, a parent hearing the impact that allowing/or not allowing a child to go to school could have). In this way participation in the MSC *process* acted as a catalyst for change with learning from each other being seen as a more powerful means of bringing about change than being 'told something' by an organisation.

Relationship building

Another commonly cited benefit for community was that of relationship building among (and sometimes between) communities. This was particularly evident in urban settings where the concept of 'community' is less tangible. Through hearing each others' stories, participants were able to *'know each other better'* and *'feel compassion for each other'* when a particular story touched the heart. Consequently staff felt that the process of MSC facilitated unity and encouraged mutual support. Because of the openness required in the sharing of stories, particularly in the small group structure used in the TDC MSC process, many staff reported that trust was built between individuals who perhaps otherwise would not have known each other.

Feeling heard and valued

Because in MSC it is the storytellers themselves that decide what information to share as opposed to being asked a number of closed questions which seek to 'prove' the effects of an intervention, the result is that people often report that they feel heard. MSC gives community the opportunity to tell their story from their own perspective. This approach values what each individual has to say and was highlighted by both community and staff who were interviewed as being an important benefit. One group of women in Cambodia said that they had not been asked to share their views in this way before and that they felt proud to tell their stories.

Recognition of social capital within a community

At least one example was provided in Cambodia of the MSC process leading to recognition of individuals within a community. In one ADP a storyteller whose story was selected was heralded by his local community for being able to bring about change and be an example to others. As a result

he was voted to be a leader of a local CBO. Whilst in India, because selected stories were often shared in local CBO meetings the CBOs were able to hear about changes in their community that they might not be aware of and draw of those individuals as a resource for informing or implementing their own activities.

World Vision - Individual level (ADP staff)

Building capacity and knowledge of staff

The learning opportunities generated through the MSC process were not limited to the community members who participated. All ADP frontline staff interviewed felt that they had also gained in some way from the being part of the process and hearing the stories and discussions. This form of capacity building of staff took a number of forms. Firstly, the MSC sessions allowed staff a better appreciation of the situation of the communities in which they were working. The hearing of community members stories allowed staff to ' *better understand the real needs of the community and their life situation'* and thus increase understanding of context by building a better picture of the lived experiences of those they were working with. Secondly, the stories provided for a greater understanding of what was working and some insight into the actual results or outcomes of their work. This thinking about and understanding of impact represents an important shift in development thinking from activities and outputs to outcomes. Finally, the introduction of MSC was reported to have improved active listening and reflection skills among staff by increasing their involvement in M&E.

Motivation and encouragement for staff

Most staff said that hearing how people had been transformed thorough WV activities gave them inspiration and motivation to continue with their work. One frontline staff member felt that the MSC sessions were a '*time to celebrate what has been achieved*'.

World Vision – local programming level (ADP)

Evidence based programming

When used well, MSC has the potential to impact on policies and practices. This involves closing the learning loop by applying lessons from stories and/or discussions about the stories to programming decisions. Similarly to the findings regarding the general use of MSC within WV, staff involved in the TDC project reported that MSC had been useful for adapting their programs, but as with the previous findings, it was not always possible to get concrete examples (or MSC stories about MSC) of this. That is not to say that it was not happening but it may be that such learning was implicitly applied as opposed to explicitly. The lack of documentation of stories (particularly negative ones) and the discussions that led to the selection of certain stories over others is likely to contribute to this paucity of evidence of the impact of MSC on programming. Nevertheless some examples were provided at the ADP level (more so in India than Cambodia) including:

- A story about child labour highlighted the issue of difficulty with transport to school and led to inclusion of bicycles as a new activity (India)
- Sponsored child story highlighted the benefit and value placed on exposure trips by those who participated which led to an increase in that activity being included in programming (India)
- Check dam[36] story highlighted that improved access to water had had a negative and unexpected outcome. Men were taking the water from the dam and using to make alcohol. The women were therefore opposed to the dam as it had led to increased drinking and domestic violence. This story led to increased community consultation of proposed activities

[36] A check dam is a small dam, which can be either temporary or permanent, built across a minor channel or drainage ditch

- ❖ Story about solar lamp demonstrated that families with children in higher education could get greater benefit from solar lights (wider benefit) so this information was used to prioritize families for the intervention.

Note: improving the process of capturing lessons from stories (and discussion thereof) is addressed in recommendation 4.15.

WV – organisational level

Generates useful resources for communication and promotion
As discussed above in the section on 'Use of Stories' (p. 47-48), the stories generated by the MSC process provide a useful resource for communications and promotion. While weaknesses in the management and dissemination of stories were identified, there were nevertheless many examples of stories being used positively to demonstrate the impacts of WV's work. MSC stories were regularly used in Annual progress Reports and newsletters to donors and offered living examples of changes in individuals lives.

Those ADPs that were better organised in terms of documenting and locally storing their own MSC stories, reported that they provided them with a 'bank' of information that could be used to fulfil requests for evidence from donors or visitors to the ADP. While not yet being used to their full potential, there were also some examples of the stories being used as a local resource in project activities to reinforce awareness messages and sensitize community to specific issues.

Improved reporting to donors
The use of MSC stories has been incorporated into semi and annual reporting (LEAP) and Annual Performance Reports (Sponsorship). Recently, WV has undergone a shift in reporting requirements to a more results based approach focusing on impact. While the limitations to the use of MSC in these reports has been discussed in earlier this report, there was a common perception among those interviewed that MSC had improved reporting by highlighting actual changes that had occurred. It was also suggested that the process of generating stories via MSC resulting in more authentic data as the stories had been identified and selected by community.

Contributes to better development practice
Due to the participatory nature of MSC, many staff felt that it had contributed to better development practice; firstly by making M&E more inclusive and participatory, and secondly by encouraging reflective practice.

5.4 Conclusions about the TDC pilot

Although approaches to the management and coordination of MSC within the TDC project have varied from country to country, the process of facilitating MSC at the community level were largely consistent. The fact that MSC was introduced under the auspices of a Transformation Development Communication project has resulted in a focus on facilitating the process at the community level to bring about transformation and change for the participants. In many ways, MSC has been introduced in the TDC as a community mobilization and empowerment tool, which is an innovative application of the technique and one which offers much potential into the future.

On the downside, the strong communications and community transformation emphasis has resulted in organisational learning from MSC as a DM&E tool not being realised in full. Nevertheless we believe that MSC has much to offer WV and by building on the current uses, particularly in respect of strengthening systems and processes for managing MSC there is no reason why it cannot fulfil both purposes within the organisation.