

**Outcomes Working Group**  
**Brief on Session 11: The experience of Women’s World Banking**

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Headquartered in New York, Women’s World Banking works with 40 Financial Service Providers (FSPs) in 29 countries. Over more than 35 years, Women’s World Banking has provided technical assistance (TA) around development of credit, savings and insurance products to meet the needs of low-income women. Research is a growing part of Women’s World Banking’s work, as they seek to demonstrate the benefit of investing in women as clients and as leaders.

**3 broad approaches:** The webinar focused on 3 approaches to outcomes assessment that Women’s World Banking has explored with its partners, as follows

1	<b>Institutional Management Data</b>	Utilizing existing operations and data
2	<b>Additional Research</b>	Tailored methodology to answer specific research questions
3	<b>Mixed Methods</b>	Leveraging existing and new data to inform a more comprehensive view of client outcomes

One can think of the use of institutional management data as “process driven” – using data already collected as part of routine operations. Additional research is more “purpose driven” – to collect data that you need.

- Whatever the method used,
- there is a requirement for investment – resources, skills, time
  - it is important to be streamlined, to focus on key research questions
  - ensure that the findings have value for the FSP.

*Each approach has its benefits – but also challenges*

**Institutional management data** approach has the benefit of leveraging existing client data. Data collection and capture can be built into current operations and represents a relatively low investment.

However, the challenges – and associated costs relate to:

- Data collection – Focus on quality, rather than quantity, of data. Data points should be strategic: think about the business uses, and also what data you need to know about your client for outcomes or other purposes. Data outside the traditional fields may be seen as non-essential. While it is relatively easy to add fields to a loan application or account opening form, there are implications for the data processes and systems (training staff, adding to the MIS). Nevertheless, the addition of particular fields can be very beneficial when it helps to inform analysis and answer key questions. As an example, a Women’s World Banking partner in Malawi found it useful to add a question on whether a client already had a bank account.

There are **clear differences between group and individual lending when it comes to data**. FSPs with an individual lending methodology make credit decisions on the basis of a detailed cash flow analysis of the client business. This enables them to get fairly detailed income and asset information through their loan application process. In group lending, this type of information is not usually collected, however there are opportunities to collect other types of socio-demographic data.

- Data quality – This requires policies and procedures for data entry, and careful staff training with refresher training - including on how to ask questions, data definitions, and how the data will be used.
- Data archiving – FSPs may not store the data collected, and lack the systems capacity to do so - overwriting client data with subsequent loan cycles. This makes it impossible to track change over time.
- Analysis – It is important that the data to inform decision-making. There can be multiple uses for data analysis. For example, capturing data on the number and education levels of children can be used to assess the market for youth savings products, as well as understanding outcomes for families.

**Additional research – quantitative & qualitative** - has the benefit of providing a comprehensive view of outcomes, and can include a range of questions.

The challenges lie in:

- Cost considerations – If data collection is not integrated within operations, then there are costs in using internal resources (research department) or bringing in an external agency.
- Institutional capacity – Some FSPs have a research team, but many do not. Even when being conducted by external parties, it is important for the FSP to guide the development of research questions and provide input throughout to make sure the findings are useful. So relevant capacity is needed within the FSP.
- Research Methodology – It is important to be open about methodology, as long as it aligns with what you want to measure. However, it is important to think about:
  - Client interaction – when is the appropriate time and place to ask questions? Who is best placed to ask– research team, call centre, field staff, or an external team?
  - Sampling – this does not have to be representative of the entire client base: it can be limited to a particular area, and still be meaningful – as long as you are clear on the population to which the findings apply.
  - Attribution - Whilst we are looking at outcomes as ‘plausible correlation’, Women’s World Banking is also exploring ways to understand causality, when and if this may be appropriate.
- Data quality – Similar to institutional management data, data quality can also be a challenge in separate research: How to ensure that client responses are correct – does the client remember correctly? Is she thinking of the same time frame? Does she prefer to say what she think is expected? We have seen a mismatch, for example between client responses about savings and actual transaction data.

**Mixed methods** approach leverages existing information and supplements information with minimal burden on the institution.

A recent example of this is research conducted by Women's World Banking with its partner Microfund for Women (MFW) in Jordan. The aim was to assess the benefits from the hospital cash benefit scheme introduced by MFW. After 5 years, what had been the effects in terms of client retention and credit and insurance claims behavior? At the client level, had the product affected financial vulnerabilities around hospitalization, or ? Were there any empowering effects for women?

Transaction data on loans and claims was supplemented by a small number of qualitative focus groups and interviews to explore decision-making patterns, and experience with the product.

Women's World Banking and Microfund for Women will be presenting this as a case study during the SPTF annual meeting at Marrakech. Stand by for more details from that.

### **Key lessons**

In Women's World Banking's experience with its partners, effective outcomes management requires:

- **Management buy-in:** Commitment from the top, informed by clear purpose for and use of the data, which will ensure the required investment. There also needs to be participation across the institution (potentially through the identification of data analysis champions) and structures that support a learning culture.
- **Clarity on research purpose:** Defining research questions up front, and ensuring relevant data is collected to answer these questions and inform institutional decision-making.
- **Complimentary methodology:** Decided based on the research questions, with potential for technical partnerships.

FSPs can use outcome findings to:

- **Manage double bottom line performance:** FSPs have a clear understanding of financial performance, however social performance is less clear. Outcomes measurement enables FSPs to understand how clients benefit from services, potentially leading to questions for further research and analysis.
- **Innovation:** Outcomes tell us how clients currently experience our services, and enable innovation in products, services and delivery channels to improve that experience.
- **Engagement with external stakeholders –** By taking ownership of outcomes measurement, FSPs can define what success means and share with stakeholders such as investors and donors (rather than the other way around).

**A fundamental aspect for the use of outcome data:  
Is the FSP open to non-positive responses or findings?**

*A word of warning:*

there is a natural tendency to look for the results that reflect what we want to see, or just presenting the results we want to demonstrate.

## Discussion

- It is very relevant for FSPs to use existing data that they have, adding a few points/indicators. This can support a very robust system for outcomes measurement.
- Outcomes decisions should also be business decisions: there has to be a feedback loop for outcomes data, so that it can be used to improve results – through product development, or changes in service delivery.
- Outcomes findings can be used as a marketing tool – to target new clients, and inspire them with the examples.
- Experience sharing - use of quick research along with transactions data to assess different messaging approaches or techniques e.g. ways to encourage savings. (This is short-term research, to influence use of financial services; therefore, somewhat different from assessing the outcomes/benefits – of using the financial services.)
- Is there any experience of sharing outcomes information with clients? Using this information to report back achievements and issues to the key people involved? [OWG – we are seeing some examples – such as a letter to clients (by IDEPRO Bolivia – ref their case study). And the example of the Poverty Spotlight, developed by Fundacion Paraguay in the context of microfinance, and now being applied in other sectors too. ([http://www.fundacionparaguaya.org.py/?page\\_id=490](http://www.fundacionparaguaya.org.py/?page_id=490))
- Does outcomes measurement lead to research fatigue amongst clients? Using operational data reduces the touchpoints with clients. For any research, limit the revisits to the same clients, so as to avoid research fatigue, and avoid bias creeping into the responses. Nevertheless, there are always people who are not willing to be interviewed – this has to be respected. And one has to be respectful of clients' time, keep the interviews short, quick and focused.

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*The working group is open to all stakeholders:  
practitioners, networks, TA providers, investors, researchers, subject matter specialists – academics  
Contact us to share your experience and views: [info@sptf.info](mailto:info@sptf.info)*