

## How to Differentiate Outputs and Outcomes

### Measure Outputs and Outcomes

When drafting strategic plans, outputs and outcomes should be measurable and you should be able to evaluate them. What does this mean? Measurement and evaluation are very complicated concepts. It can take up a whole year to study how to measure and evaluate outputs and outcomes, but here we will just give you a brief introduction. What we will introduce now can help you integrate the ideas of measurement and evaluation in the process of drafting the outputs and outcomes for your strategic plan.

1. First, measurement has two methods: qualitative and quantitative measurement. How are they different?
  - Quantitative measurement uses numbers, percentages or statistical data to describe changes.
  - Qualitative measurement uses more general comparisons, collecting interviewees' thoughts or opinions to conduct non-numerical case studies, etc. Qualitative measurement is a more impression-based method that looks for a general pattern.

To choose between quantitative and qualitative measurement, you need to assess: (a) the target; and (b) the capacity to collect data. If you cannot gather enough data to conduct quantitative measurement, then you should choose qualitative measurement.

Examples :

### **Qualitative**

1. Fewer sex workers underwent education through labor compared with last year.
2. More pregnant women showed satisfaction with our services than in the past.

### **Quantitative**

1. The number of sex workers undergoing reeducation through labor has decreased by 10%.
2. 65% pregnant women were "Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied" with our clinic's services.

2. Both outcomes and outputs are measurable but through different methods. When you are drafting outputs and outcomes, you should adopt different methods. How are the methods different?

- Outcomes: means the change happened to the environment, society or the community that are noticeable but not necessarily measureable with numbers.

For example, the goal of a program you are in charge of is to improve the ART (Antiretroviral therapy) condition for PLHIV. As you work, you are helping PLHIV to strengthen their treatment compliance and also conducting advocacy work to increase treatment access (for example, to increase the number of available medicines). How can you generally describe the outcome of a program like this?

**Example:** The treatment environment for PLHIV has seen some improvement. PLHIV in our community have various types of anti-virus medicines to choose from. The reported cases of side-effects from the medicine have decreased. The treatment period is also longer than before.

**Explanation:** The change described in the example can be evaluated by observation, but there is no specific data to quantify the change.

- **Outputs:** means the more detailed and specific results of your program. It can be described with measurable indicators such as numbers, time periods, the number of people, or cost.

Take the ART program as an example, if the outcome of the program is “the treatment environment for PLHIV has seen some improvement.” Then how should you describe the outputs of the program?

**Example 1:** Over the course of two years, the treatment compliance of the PLHIV covered in our program has increased by 50% overall.

**Example 2:** The cases of PLHIV giving up treatment as a result of the medicine’s side effects and other complications have been decreasing by 50 each year.

**Example 3:** Our advocacy work has successfully increased access to one more type of available anti-viral drugs for PLHIV.

## Comparison Exercise

You can learn the differences better through a case study below. Please spend 5 minutes to read and understand the scenario.

**Scenario : You are working at a CBO striving for better living standards for People who use drugs(PWUD) in the local community.** During the daily outreach, you found out that the members of the **PWUD** would get fired or rejected by employers once their identities were revealed in the recruitment process or at work. As a result, most community members don't have jobs, which causes problems for their basic livelihoods. In order to improve this situation and make it easier for them to find a job, your organization conducted a vocational training program supported by an international NGO. After the training, the donor asked you to report the outputs and outcomes of your program.

Review the examples here for 5 minutes and think whether they are outputs or outcomes:

1. The relapse (meaning that people go back to drugs after temporary recovery) rate has dropped.
2. 60 people have participated in the training.
3. PWUD are accepted by employers and society. Their employment situation has improved.
4. The incidence of poverty has decreased by 15%.
5. More PWUD have been following our program and the number of our program participants has increased by 30 people.
6. The local Center for Disease Control (CDC), leaders of the labor bureau, and representatives of companies attended the vocational training graduation ceremony.
7. PWUD started a vocational skills sharing group and hold monthly meetings.
8. 25 PWUD have found a job.

**Answers:**

1. Outcome.
2. Output.
3. Outcome.
4. Outcome.
5. Output.
6. Output.
7. Output.
8. Uncertain, because we cannot tell whether it is a direct result of the vocational training or not. For instance, if you have organized a job fair targeting PWUD, it is likely that some people will end up with a job afterwards, if so, this should be a output. If the activity is vocational training, securing a job might take long-term and other efforts lasting for a year or more to achieve.