



Most Significant Change Step-by-Step Implementation Guide

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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

OneVillage Partners is a community-led development organization operating in rural Sierra Leone where projects are designed, implemented, and monitored by community members. Programs are monitored and evaluated using a mixed-methods approach which is led by and contributes to the fulfillment of the organization's values. Most Significant Change (MSC) is used to evaluate two OneVillage Partners programs, the Community Action program (ACT) and the Nurturing Opportunities for Women Program (NOW).

This guide is an update to the 2017 version written to enable practitioners and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) experts to envision their own process for MSC. OneVillage Partners adapted some aspects of the MSC technique that made implementation easier in a specific, rural context. We found that with some minor adjustments, MSC became approachable for all and engaged a wide range of participants. This guide outlines ways we have restructured our process based on organizational growth and lessons learned throughout four years of implementation. We hope this guide will complement the work put forward by others^{1,2} about implementing MSC and provide a case study of how a small-scale organization adapted the process to fit our needs while maintaining the rigor of the method.

ONEVILLAGE PARTNERS' MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE JOURNEY

OneVillage Partners piloted MSC in 2016 and has been implementing it since. The MEL team conducts annual reviews and updates of the MSC process, using information gathered from staff about successes, challenges, and training areas that need improvement. In 2016, we partnered with nine communities with a total combined population of 8,500. In 2019, we expanded to work with 22,500 people in 18 communities. By that point, we were four years into our community-led development model and had refined our Theory of Change (ToC) using evidence from previous rounds of MSC, organizational goals, and reports of observed outcomes from community members and staff.

We had grown as an organization and had multiple years of data from our mixed-method, participatory MEL strategy to validate certain areas of our ToC. However, we had identified evidence gaps in the medium and long-term outcomes included in the ToC. We no longer needed MSC as a formative evaluation tool to help us determine what outcomes the model created, we needed a summative evaluation tool that told us where we met our targets and where we fell short. Additionally, we faced challenges with the implementation of MSC. We conducted many rounds of MSC each year which led to the production of low quality, repetitive stories, more stories than needed for evaluation or communications purposes, a burdensome story selection process, and staff burnout.

Given the new focus of MSC and the challenges we experienced, we made implementation updates including:

- Used ToC to define MSC domains of change to better align with updated strategies and outcomes
- Shifted data collection timeline from directly post-project to after three years of partnership
- Increased sampling of general community members in focus group discussions
- Wrote fewer stories while collecting the same amount of data
- Revised story selection process to include story outlines instead of written stories
- Increased advance planning across departments to encourage staff motivation and buy-in



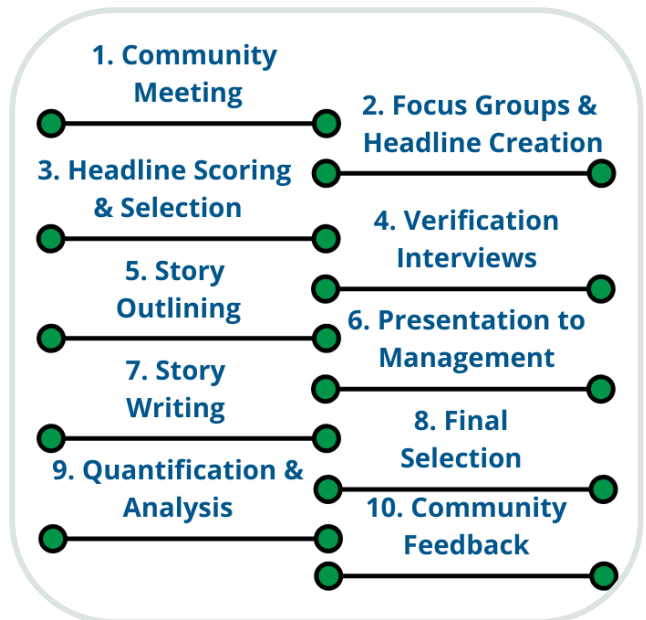
Most Significant Change Verification Interview

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE PROCESS

The guide outlines the steps OneVillage Partners takes prior to implementation, during implementation, and after implementation. At each step, the guide includes how we adjusted the process based on implementation challenges and feedback from participants and staff.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Staff training should be highly tailored to the expertise of the team. Intensive staff training is required to produce quality results.
- Cross-department engagement and planning early on increases leads to a successful implementation.
- MSC works best within organizations that have a culture of learning and critical thinking.
- Getting participants to think about change is difficult beyond material or tangible things.
- Headlines and story outlines are an effective way to gather a lot of content in a time-saving manner.
- The sampling method will impact the types and frequency of MSC stories. Choose a sampling method that allows multiple perspectives to be shared and make sure to review frequently for potential improvements.
- MSC should work within organizational goals and activities. If the process becomes too burdensome, re-evaluate.
- Making space for discussing challenges, brainstorming solutions, and updating the MSC process is crucial for its success.
- MSC results are bolstered when coupled with quantitative evidence.



OneVillage Partners MSC Implementation Process

CONCLUSION

MSC is a powerful tool which enables programmatic impact to be captured and measured through the voices of those most affected by the work. The process allows for honest and constructive feedback, shows respect and accountability to participants, and gives participants authentic ownership of the outcome. We hope that this guide provides an example of how the MSC process can be adapted for both community context and organizational priorities.



Most Significant Change Results Sharing Community Meeting

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Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
ACT	Community Action Program
CAG	Community Action Group
CLD	Community-led Development
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MSC	Most Significant Change
NOW	Nurturing Opportunities for Women
PME	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
ToC	Theory of Change
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Acknowledgements

OneVillage Partners would like to thank our partner communities who provided their time and valuable insight to help us undertake and refine the MSC process. Each person who shared a story has contributed to the improvement of the organization’s programs and work in Sierra Leone, helping us stay true to our values of community leadership, equity, sustainability, and discipline.

To our field staff, we are grateful for your steadfast dedication to your work and your commitment to engage in new methods. We also recognize the MEL team (past and present) that worked diligently to train staff, oversee field work, revise the MSC process, and compile this guide. A special thanks to Jill Lipski Cain and Kayla Mueller at The Improve Group, an evaluation consultancy firm based in St. Paul, Minnesota, for helping adapt the traditional MSC process to one that could work in our unique organization and context.

Introduction

The following section provides an overview of OneVillage Partners, the organization’s Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) strategy, the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique, the organization’s Theory of Change (ToC) and the programs evaluated by MSC.

OneVillage Partners

The cornerstone of OneVillage Partners’ approach is community-led development; interventions are inspired, created, and implemented by community members. The organization believes that local people are integral in developing community solutions to their self-defined needs, and that broad participation and local change agents are necessary for ongoing community development. The organization’s values of community-leadership, equity, sustainability, and discipline (**Figure 1**) aim to stimulate unity and a collective sense of ownership among community members.



Figure 1: OneVillage Partners Values

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Strategy

OneVillage Partners’ MEL strategy is highly participatory and serves two purposes. First, it serves to inform the organization’s programs to make strategic adaptations and improvements. Second, it serves to include community members in the monitoring and evaluation of their projects to promote learning, growth, and capacity development, as well as improved project outcomes and sustainability. The strategy is anchored in accessibility, participation, and accountability, with the community members as the ultimate user and driver of the data. The organization utilizes a mixed-methods approach to monitor, evaluate, and learn about the programs we implement and the outcomes they produce.

As part of the MEL strategy, OneVillage Partners developed this guide to outline the organization’s experience with the MSC technique. This document represents a piece of the overall mixed-method, participatory strategy. The implementation protocol was designed specifically for the communities the organization works with in Sierra Leone based on their desired skills, input, and cultural context and was coupled with a strong focus on staff facilitation techniques. The intent of sharing is to increase the use of community-led and participatory approaches within international development. For further information please visit our [website](#) or contact enquiries@onevillagepartners.org

Most Significant Change

MSC, a qualitative methodology, was developed by Rick Davies and Jess Dart in 2004 and utilizes stories told directly from program participants to assess programmatic outcomes and impact.³ Program participants lead the process by telling stories of significant change they experienced due to a program or intervention. By simply telling the stories and explaining why they are most significant, participants bring the results of OneVillage Partners’ work to life. The qualitative nature of MSC enables the capture and measurement of unintended outcomes which provides the organization with additional insight into the effects of its programs. OneVillage Partners has used MSC as an evaluation methodology since 2016 in 13 partner communities.

Theory of Change

OneVillage Partners Theory of Change (ToC) (**Figure 2**) is a conceptual and practical framework that underpins and unifies our programming. The original version was created in 2017 through collaboration between OneVillage Partners staff, board of directors, and program participants. It is a map illustrating how OneVillage Partners believes our investment first and foremost in people creates impact. The ToC intentionally does not state project-specific goals, such as improved health, but rather captures the umbrella of which all programs fit within. The ToC is used throughout the MSC process, as described later in the guide.

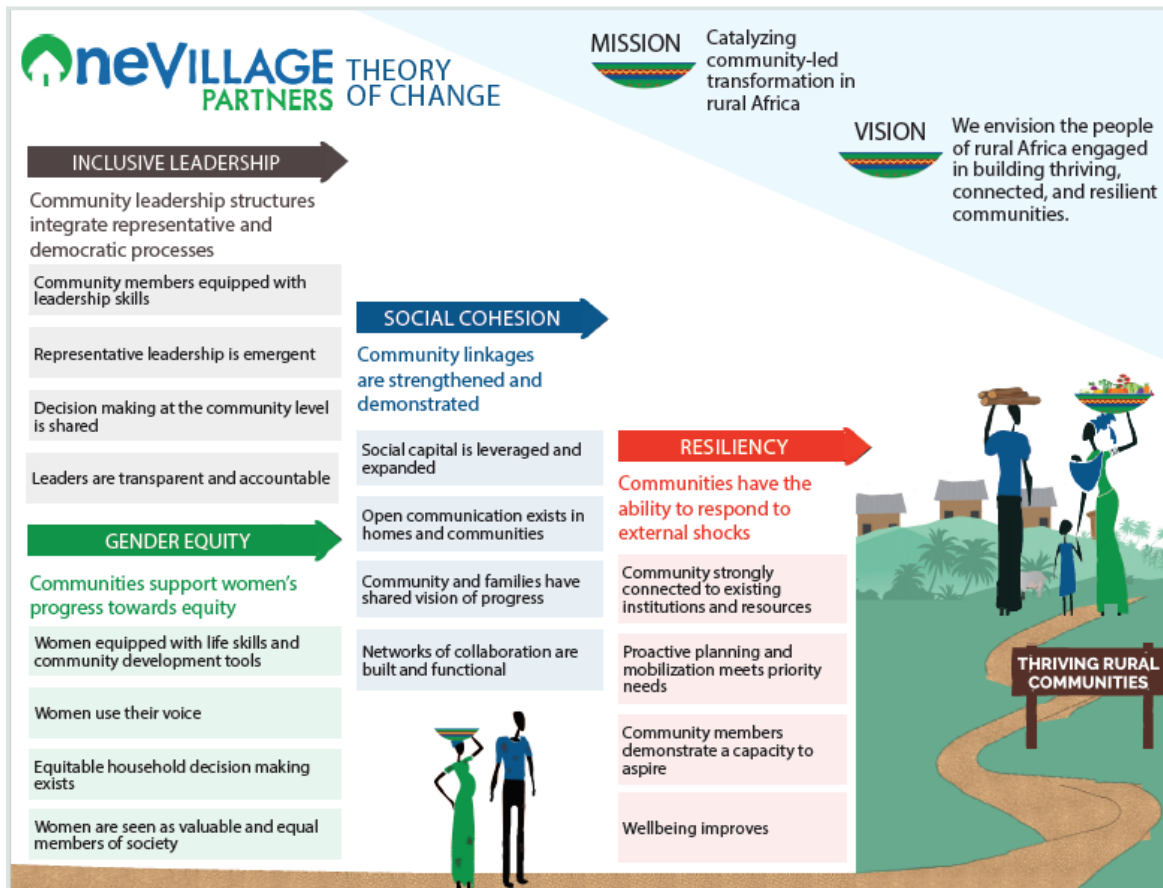


Figure 2: OneVillage Partners Theory of Change

Programs Evaluated by Most Significant Change

MSC is used to evaluate two OneVillage Partners programs, the Community Action program (ACT) and the Nurturing Opportunities for Women Program (NOW). ACT mobilizes, trains, and supports community members to achieve their vision of an improved standard of living for all. Community volunteers are selected by their peers to form the village's Community Action Group (CAG), a gender-balanced cohort that undergoes intensive leadership training to produce targeted development projects to effectively meet community-identified needs.

The NOW program has two components. NOW: Household Finances uses an entirely picture-based curriculum to teach participants basic financial principles including planning, saving, and budgeting to reach self-defined goals. The program also incorporates messages related to women's empowerment, family communication, joint decision making, and community engagement. NOW: Business Skills develops participants' ability to start and/or expand a business. Participants are taught how to record and track income, expenses, and profit, assess the riskiness of a business idea, and communicate about their business.

OneVillage Partners’ MSC Journey

OneVillage Partners believes local people are integral to developing community solutions to their own self-defined needs. As such, MSC felt like a natural step, as we wanted the voices of community members to be more than just valued and heard, but to be the very tool by which we measure and adapt our programs. Used as one piece of a larger Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) strategy, MSC enabled us to look at broad outcomes while community members led the process.

In 2016, the MEL team began planning how OneVillage Partners would implement MSC in accordance with our values and local context in coordination with an evaluation consultancy firm, frontline staff, and literature review. Through the tailoring of MSC for the OneVillage Partners context, we made one major revision from the Davies and Dart original model: to include ‘headlines’ in the story collection process. Headlines are condensed story ideas including information such as the participant name, role, community, and key facts from the story. Headlines allow staff to collect many stories in the field, with a selected amount of headlines later developed into full MSC stories.

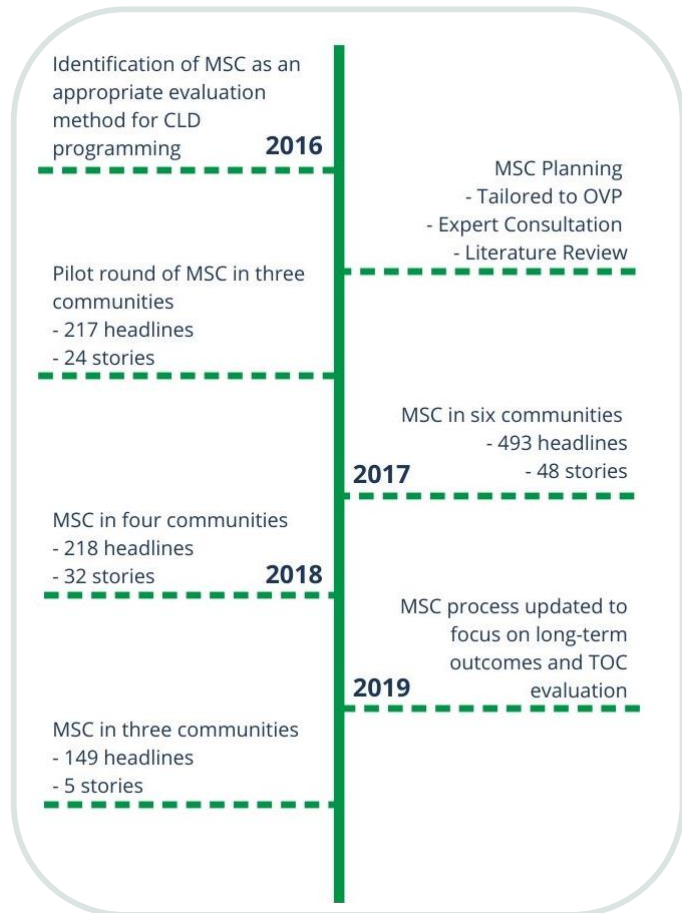


Figure 3: OneVillage Partners MSC Journey

Figure 3 outlines the timeline of OneVillage Partners’ MSC Journey. We piloted MSC in 2016 and implemented a very similar process in 2017 and 2018. The MEL team conducted annual reviews and updates of the process, using information gathered from staff about successes, challenges, and training areas that needed improvement. In 2016, when OneVillage Partners started implementing MSC, we partnered with 8,500 people in nine communities. We were in the first years of rolling out our community-led model. The MSC stories we heard in 2016-2018 focused on short term changes, mostly at the individual level and directly related to the NOW curriculum or a specific ACT project.

In 2019, when the MEL team began brainstorming how to update our MSC process, our programs had expanded to reach 22,500 people in 18 communities. We were four years into our community-led development model and had streamlined our ToC using evidence from previous rounds of MSC, organizational goals, and reports of observed outcomes from community members and staff.

We had grown as an organization and had multiple years of data from our mixed-method, participatory MEL strategy to validate certain areas of our ToC (**Figure 2**). However, we had identified evidence gaps in the medium and long-term outcomes in the ToC. At the time, our endline measurements occurred within 1-3 months after project/program completion; we hypothesized that we were not allowing enough time to pass for medium and long-term outcomes to manifest. We no longer needed MSC as a formative evaluation tool to help us determine what outcomes our model impacted, we needed a summative evaluation tool that would tell us where we met our targets and where we fell short.

Formative evaluation is typically conducted during the early stages of a program to inform strategic adaptations to meet program goals. Summative evaluation, however, is focused on determining whether or not the program achieved its intended outcomes and occurs at the end of a program. When we started implementing MSC, we needed to focus on the preliminary outcomes (both intended and unintended) the program created. However, in 2019, we had a solid idea of the early outcomes of our programs and were interested in mid- and long-term results.

Davies and Dart support the use of MSC as an evaluative tool in their guide and mention how it can be used in a theory-led approach. Using a deductive framework, they discuss how domains can “be defined in advance, applied at all levels and focused on existing organizational objectives.”³ With a shift to a summative evaluation approach, they recommend using a longer reference period and intentionally gathering stories from different stakeholder groups. They also justified the use of MSC as an evaluative tool for programming similar to that of OneVillage Partners, “MSC plays a pivotal role in evaluating programs with less predictable outcomes. For example, some programs have deliberately loose outcomes and participatory design, often yielding a multitude of complex and diverse outcomes. In such programs, the refinement of MSC domains over time could be seen as a product of the process, not just as part of the MSC technique.”³

“MSC plays a pivotal role in evaluating programs with less predictable outcomes.”

- Davies and Dart

Since our programs are community-led, each partner community chooses their priority needs and designs projects accordingly. Each of these projects is then implemented in its own microcosm of local politics and resource availability with support from OneVillage Partners staff. The nature of our work does not lend itself to stringent and predictable outcomes, which is why our ToC focuses on high-level change in core areas we believe contribute to resiliency and why MSC is a great tool to help us evaluate our ToC.

Most Significant Change Process: Pre-Implementation

Before implementing the MSC process, practitioners should ensure cross-department planning, decide on a sampling strategy, and develop a staff training tailored to their implementation process.

Cross-Department Planning

For organizations conducting MSC as an internal evaluation exercise, it is imperative to have buy-in from program staff from management to the field staff to guarantee the team is properly motivated. When planning field work logistics, program managers should be involved in selecting field staff to implement MSC as well as the timing of the exercise, so it does not conflict with other activities. This can also be a unique staff capacity building opportunity; experienced staff can be partnered with new staff or staff from different departments can be partnered together to implement MSC. **Appendix 4** includes a sample MSC Implementation Plan.

If MSC is conducted annually, the MEL team should incorporate learning from previous years when drafting field plans. For example, in 2019 we realized more time was needed for Verification Interview preparation as well as headline scoring and selection; we added time to those components in subsequent field plans.

Sampling Strategy and Data Collection Method

Prior to implementation a sampling strategy for who will participate in MSC and how their stories will be collected should be determined. At OneVillage Partners we collect MSC stories (in headline form) from individuals using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), followed by Verification Interviews of selected headlines. However, there are

multiple ways to collect MSC stories including Key Informant Interviews or a group deciding on a collective MSC story. The data collection method is directly linked to the sampling strategy.

When deciding on sampling and data collection method, consider the following questions:

- What change did the program/project hope to achieve?
- Who is most likely to have felt the effects of the program/project?
- What resource constraints exist? (time, money, staff capacity)
 - How does this impact the amount and type of data that can be collected?
- What recruitment strategies will be implemented to get the right people in the room?
- If conducting group activities, what is the most appropriate method of grouping participants? (i.e. gender, age, level of involvement in program, etc.)



Learning – Sampling

- In early rounds of MSC, we had a good distribution of direct program participants and community members, but as the rounds of MSC increased, direct program participant feedback was prioritized (especially in the NOW program). With the additional rounds of MSC, we did not have the capacity to intentionally recruit community members outside of direct program participants.
 - **This observation informed our 2019 MSC implementation update; we equally recruited direct program participants and community members.**
- In 2019, the team experimented with different groupings in FGDs to see if types or frequencies of stories changed based on sampling (i.e. in one community, leaders and community members were grouped together, while they were separated in another community).
 - We hypothesized one of two things could happen: 1) power differentials would affect the stories shared, with the powerful group dominating the discussion and the less powerful group agreeing, OR 2) the less powerful group would be candid in their assessment of the powerful group, with the FGD itself serving as evidence of change in areas such as increased confidence and accountability.
 - Unfortunately, power differentials did influence the stories shared. For example, in FGDs where leaders and community members were grouped together, leaders shared the majority of the stories and many of those stories were positive reflections on shifts to a more inclusive leadership style. In FGDs where leaders and community members were separated, community members were more critical of their leaders.
 - **This observation served as its own evidence that on the whole, communities did not feel comfortable enough to directly call out their leaders on questionable behavior.**

Staff Training

Once the data collection method, sampling strategy, and field plan have been finalized, a staff training can be developed. The outline of OneVillage Partners’ staff training can be found in **Appendix 1**; it consists of five trainings, each approximately three hours in length.

The training will be specific to the overall research design, but general topics to cover in the training include:

- MSC Overview: background of the methodology, purpose, value of qualitative data
- Why MSC was chosen for the evaluation

- MSC Domains: definitions, how they were decided
- MSC Implementation Process: Introduction to community, data collection (FGDs, headlines, Verification Interviews), analysis, results feedback
 - Depending on capacity level of staff, focus should be given to problematic areas
 - Application-based exercises and role plays are helpful tools in preparing for implementation
- Story Selection Process: criteria for scoring, who scores stories, timeline
- Story Writing Process (if applicable): Story outlining, story components, editing process



Figure 4: OneVillage Partners MSC Training

(A) Staff review the MSC implementation steps
 (C) Staff with their training completion certificates

(B) Staff practice writing headlines and key facts
 (D) Staff explain domains using local drawings



Learning - Staff Training

- At the end of each MSC implementation, the staff debrief on what worked well and what did not, and brainstorm solutions. Below is a list of challenges brought up in these debriefs along with how OneVillage Partners addressed them with additional training.
 - **Domain understanding:** Staff consistently classified headlines and stories into incorrect domains.
 - **We streamlined the domains to align with the ToC, a document very familiar to the staff. The team allocated more training time to domain explanation and activities on domain classification. For some domains, the team commissioned new drawings to represent the domain and workshopped the drawings with staff in before the training, making edits when advised.**
 - **Gathering evidence for stories of change:** Some stories claimed very large changes but did not include any evidence as to how or why that change occurred and how it was attributable to OneVillage Partners' programs. This issue was often not discovered until story writing, resulting in much time spent rewriting stories to address evidence gaps.
 - **We developed the Verification Interview protocol, created training activities to practice writing interview questions to ensure a complete story outline, and made story outlines mandatory prior to story writing.**
 - **Story writing:** Many stories had organizational issues; the timelines of the stories were hard to follow. Additionally, grammar, word choice, lack of clear language, and the dominance of the staff member's voice instead of the participant's voice contributed to poor quality stories requiring a lot of back and forth to get to the real story shared by the participant.
 - **We completely restructured the existing story writing training to focus on the noted problem areas (especially the story arc and story outlining). The team created many new training activities to practice difficult concepts. We added in training on MS Word Track Changes to assist staff in addressing comments during the story editing process.**

Domain Development

Throughout the rounds of MSC implementation OneVillage Partners has developed MSC domains differently, based on the goals of the evaluation. When MSC was used as a formative evaluation tool, before the ToC was finalized, domains were defined collaboratively with program participants and staff based on hypothesized impacts of OneVillage Partners' programs. The team conducted a domain development meeting with program participants and asked them to think about changes that occurred since OneVillage Partners' programs were implemented. Following that meeting, key staff met to define the main areas of change that were cited. Working through the ideas that were presented during the domain development meetings, staff used consensus building to categorize all the ideas into a few domains. Then, a catch-all domain was added to ensure unintended outcomes were captured.

When OneVillage Partners shifted to using MSC as a summative evaluation tool, we wanted MSC to evaluate our impacts as outlined in the ToC. We wanted to see where the gaps in evidence existed in order to improve programming. To do this, we used the ToC pillars (Inclusive Leadership, Gender Equity, Social Cohesion, and Resiliency) as domains (see **Figure 5**). We also separated out Wellbeing from the Resiliency domain as a good proportion of MSC stories specifically discussed how their wellbeing had improved due to OneVillage Partners

projects (i.e. more children in school because women had learned to save for their children’s education in the NOW program). It should be noted that the domains used in previous rounds of MSC were very similar to the ToC pillars, but not as broad. For example, a domain used in an earlier round of MSC was “Women Use Voice”. In later rounds of MSC, stories from that domain would be classified under “Gender Equity”, where women using their voice is one component of the larger concept of Gender Equity.

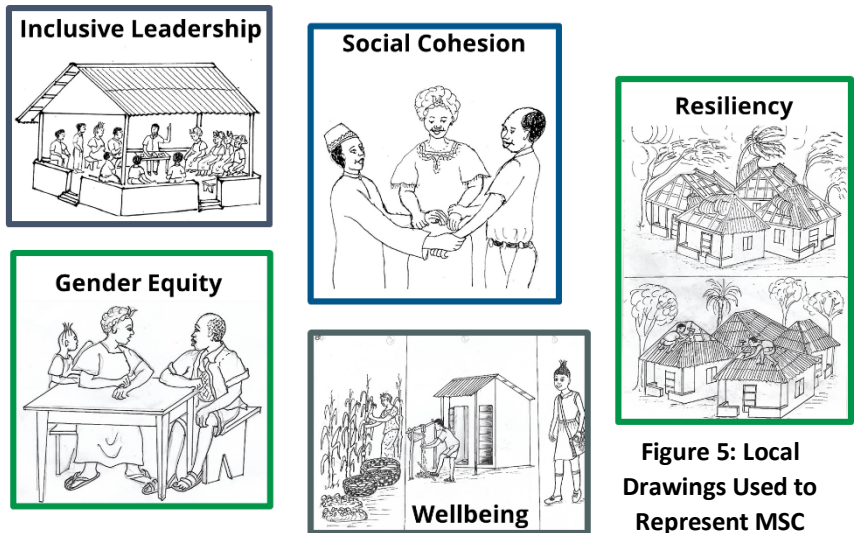


Figure 5: Local Drawings Used to Represent MSC Domains

Developing a Scoring Rubric

A scoring rubric can help standardize the story scoring process. The development of a scoring rubric is an involved and exciting process, personal to each organization. We developed our scoring rubric by talking through what success meant to us, both in terms of specific programs and the overall model. We looked at our Mission, Vision, and Values, and asked ourselves what we anticipated understanding about our impact through MSC.

OneVillage Partners’ scoring criteria are based on behavior change, needs being met, inclusion, and sustainability – all cross-cutting themes of our programs and values. We recommend assembling a leadership team to think strategically about the Mission, Vision, and Values of the organization and how that relates to the MSC process. Think about the expectations of what the MSC process could bring to light and then develop criteria with front-line staff. See **Figure 6** for the criteria we developed to score MSC stories.

	<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Score 0-3</i>
	Demonstrates behavior change related to an activity of the program	
	Demonstrates program contributed to change beyond the storyteller	
	Demonstrates program met a need	
	Demonstrates program included a marginalized person(s)	
	Demonstrates a change that will affect long-term development on a community or household level	
	Demonstrates self-reliance	
	TOTAL:	

Figure 6: OneVillage Partners MSC Scoring Rubric

Since the beginning of OneVillage Partners’ MSC implementation, the scoring rubric has remained mostly consistent as our Mission, Vision, and Values have not changed drastically. A minor change implemented in 2019 was to change the scoring range from a four-point to three-point scale. We made this change in response to the large variation in staff scoring of the same headlines. When we shifted to the simplified three-point scale with clearer point definitions (0= no evidence, 1 = some evidence, 2= strong evidence, 3= very strong evidence) we noticed increased interrater reliability.

Most Significant Change Process: Implementation

MSC implementation at OneVillage Partners is a 10-step process (see **Figure 7**). Over the years we have adjusted the components of the 10-steps to streamline and improve the effectiveness of the process. While written as a constant, we are always open to suggestions for improvement from our staff and MSC participants. We update our process on an annual basis.

Step 1: Community Meeting

Prior to data collection, the team holds a meeting to introduce MSC to the entire community. The purpose of this meeting is to generate excitement around the process, explain the purpose of MSC, answer community members’ questions, outline the timeline of data collection, explain FGD sampling criteria, and generate interest in MSC participation.

In addition to briefing the attendees on the purpose of MSC and how the process works, we introduce the domains, using images drawn by a local artist (see **Figure 5**). This meeting is very important to the success of MSC, as the whole process relies on the engagement and openness of community members to share their stories of impact and their feelings regarding changes in their community. In addition, this meeting serves to open up the MSC process to anyone who wants to participate, and not just those who have been directly involved in the work of OneVillage Partners.

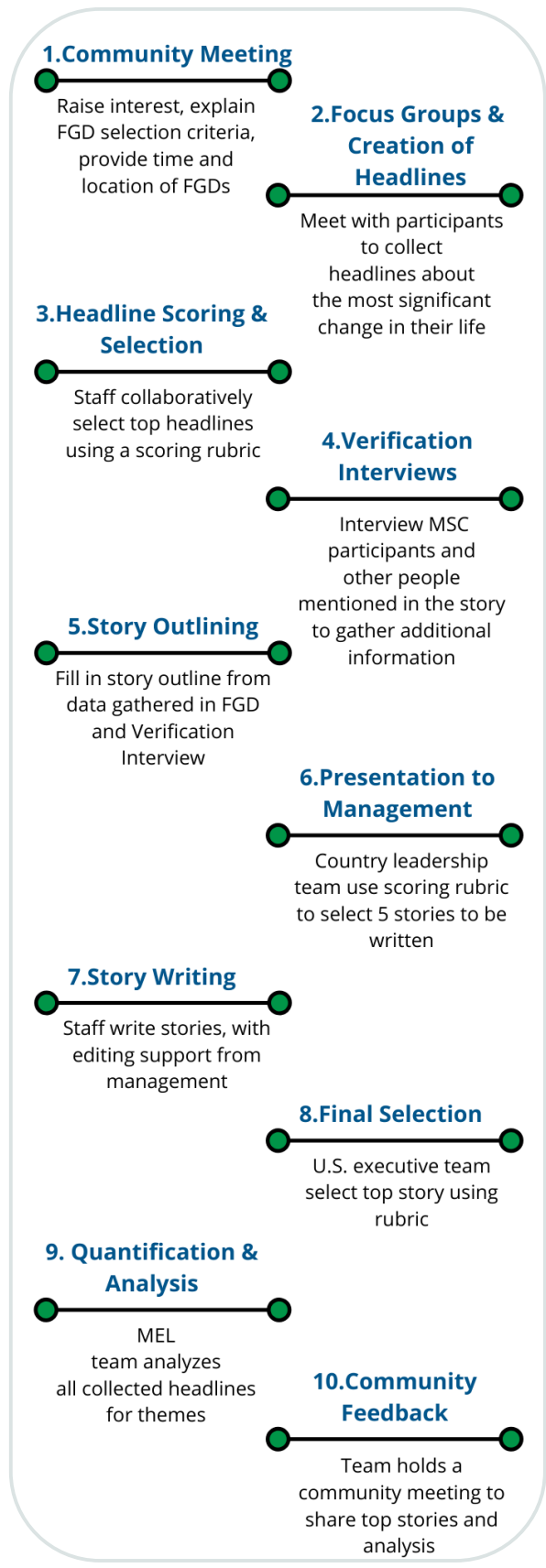


Figure 7: OneVillage Partners MSC Implementation Process



Learning – Community Meetings

To encourage broad attendance at the introductory MSC community meeting we have found it helpful to schedule the meeting on a day when there are no other planned activities (market day, community meeting for another purpose, etc.) and to notify the community in advance of the meeting. Key people from diverse groups should be notified to promote inclusion. If the attendance at the introductory meeting is not diverse, the sampling and overall data produced will be impacted.

Step 2: Focus Group Discussions & Creation of Headlines

At the initial community meeting, the community is notified when the FGDs will take place and who is invited. In staying true to our values, we prioritize accessibility so that everyone in the community is eligible to attend at least one FGD. These focus groups should be a safe space for participants. We found it important to take time to ensure that everyone understands the need for respect and equal participation. Once all members are in agreement to these terms, our staff obtain informed consent, recap the MSC process (using the same images presented in the community meeting), explain the domains, and then ask participants the most significant change in their life since their community started working with OneVillage Partners.



Figure 8: MSC Focus Group Discussion

Two staff implement each FGD and rotate the responsibility of facilitation and note taking. All FGDs are recorded in the field to assist the team in filling out headline forms once back in the office. Then, two staff members complete headline forms for all MSC stories shared during the FGD. **Appendix 2** outlines the information collected in a headline form. Staff fill out information about the participant (name, age range, gender, role, community) as well as the type of FGD they participated in, the date, and the name of the staff who collected the headline. The Key Facts section contain the main points of the story: what was the situation before OneVillage Partners, what changed, what is the situation now, and how is the change attributable to our programs. The headline should be a reflection of all the key facts and give a good summary of what the story is about. In the last step, staff classify the headline into one of the MSC domains. For each MSC story shared in the FGDs, staff fill out an electronic headline form which gets placed into an MS Excel file for scoring and analysis.



Learning - Headlines & Key Facts

Many of the lessons learned from filling in headline forms highlighted issues with FGD facilitation, not the use of the form itself. Areas of improvement and solutions include:

- **Vague key facts:** Staff oversimplified and left out details in key facts, which resulted in lower scores due to lack of evidence of change (i.e. “improved communication” vs. “husband and wife discuss children’s welfare more frequently.”). We found this problem occurred for two reasons, 1) some facilitators did not ask probing questions in the FGD to understand the details of MSC stories and 2) some staff oversimplified key facts in order to complete headline forms quickly.
 - **During training, we augmented the role play of FGDs to model a participant with very vague responses; this allowed staff to practice asking probing questions. We then practiced filling out a headline form for the story shared during the FGD role play.**
 - **We provided more office time for headline form completion.**
- **Creating succinct and descriptive headlines that summarized the entire MSC story:** Often, staff would choose one key fact to use as the headline or would default to very vague and broad headlines that did not describe the story well.
 - **We added in additional headline creation exercises to staff training. We also created a formula to guide headline creation.**
 - **Headline Formula: Subject + Action + “for, to, etc.” + Key Fact (what, where) + “by, in order to, etc.” Key Fact (how)**
 - **Headline using formula: “Leaders Increase Accountability to Community Members through Creation of Community Bank Account”**
- **Headline Domain Classification:** The main issue that contributed to incorrect domain classification was that in one MSC story, participants listed many different changes in their life. This highlighted an issue with FGD facilitation, staff were not directing participants to think about the MOST significant change, rather they had simply listed all the changes they had experienced.
 - **We revisited the FGD facilitation training, role playing a participant that listed many changes in their life and had staff practice redirecting them to think about the most significant change.**

Step 3: Headline Scoring & Selection

The first step in our selection process determines which headlines should be turned into stories. The selection process begins with MSC implementing staff scoring headlines and ends with upper management scoring stories. All headlines are scored according to the degree of demonstrable evidence of the criteria detailed in the scoring rubric (see **Figure 6**). The total scores of each criterion are summed, and total headline scores from each scorer are added. The MEL team creates a master sheet with all headline forms and their overall scores. Headlines are sorted based on their scores, with the top headlines in each domain discussed until the staff agrees on which stories should move forward to the next round. At OneVillage Partners, the number of selected headlines varies annually based on the number of communities selected for MSC.

Step 4: Verification Interviews

Davies and Dart suggest verification to ensure that both the description and interpretation of the story are valid. We validate our stories through Verification Interviews with participants for several reasons. First, these interviews offer a one-on-one opportunity for staff to ask further questions and discover enough information to develop a full evidence-based story. Second, it allows our staff to ensure that the story really is true and uncover

any potential issues with validity. This interview should be an open and transparent dialogue, with the staff taking the time to repeat back the words of the participant to ensure accuracy and maximum ownership on behalf of the participant. Just as with any data collection and reporting process, accuracy is paramount.



Learning – Verification Interviews

Verification Interviews are crucial to fleshing out the story collected during FGDs and making sure the participant’s voice is heard. It is also the last touch point with the participant before story writing, so it is critical to use the opportunity to gather all evidence needed. In order to ensure the staff has the information needed to write a full MSC story, we have implemented the following practices.

- **Schedule time for staff to prepare for the interview:** Staff need to look at the data on the headline form and determine what questions they need to ask to gather all the evidence for a full MSC story. Lack of interview preparation results in incomplete MSC stories.
- **Go to the field with a partially filled story outline:** Taking the story outline to the field (with available data from the headline form filled in) helped keep staff accountable to getting all the information they need. Staff reported that they made sure they had something written in each box of the story outline before concluding the interview.
- **Interview other people (outside the original story teller) as validation:** Including multiple perspectives strengthens a story of change. We started doing this because we had men telling stories about changes relating to women (i.e. more women in leadership positions, more women involved in decision making etc.), but we wanted to hear what the women had to say as well. Now, we apply this approach to all MSC stories as it serves as a good way to triangulate data. Before interviewing anyone outside of the original story teller we ask permission from the story teller to interview others.

Step 5: Story Outlining

During the story writing training, staff are trained on how to structure a story using the story flow (see **Figure 9**). The points covered in the story flow are the same points that guide the story outline, the tool staff use to outline the main points of the MSC stories (see **Appendix 2**). Staff record key points and quotes in each box of the story outline, which they use later during story writing. This process helps ensure the story has enough evidence before the story writing process begins.



Learning – Story Outlining

While story outlines have always been a part of the MSC process at OneVillage Partners, it is only in recent rounds of MSC that we have formalized their use. We decided to make story outlining its own step and use story outlines as the basis of the first round of story selection mostly as a way to strengthen story construction and use of evidence. It is much easier to flag an evidence gap when the story is presented in outline form than when it has already been written in narrative form. Another bonus is the staff saved time; it takes much less time to fill out a story outline than to write a narrative MSC story.

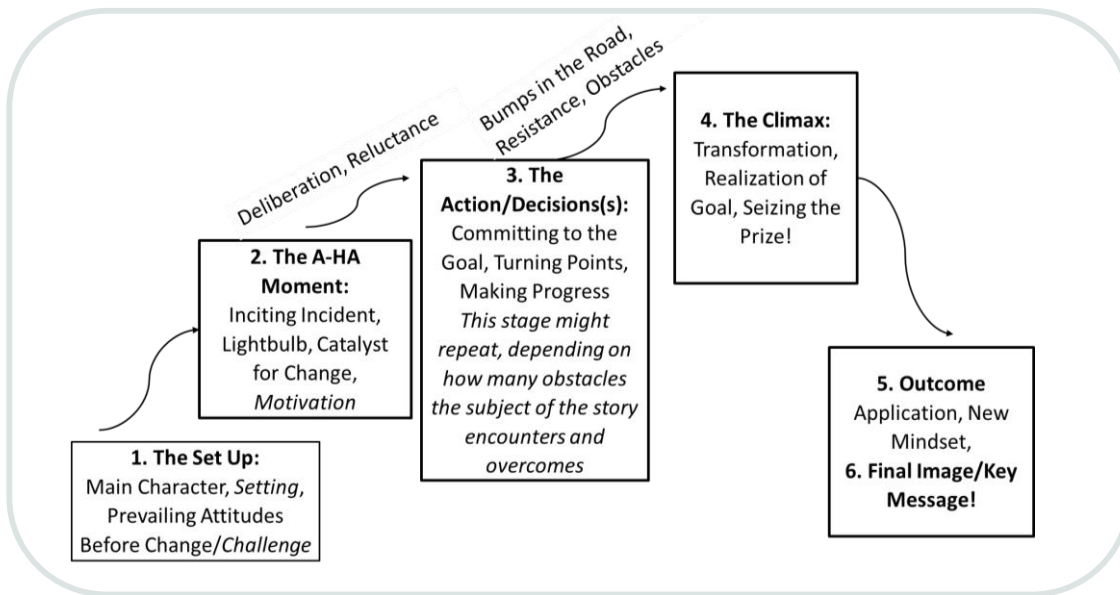


Figure 9: Story Flow

Step 6: Presentation to Management

The second round of selection occurs once the selected headlines have been turned into story outlines. The completed outlines are presented to the Country Leadership Team, who scores them using the same scoring rubric used in headline selection scoring. If anyone disagrees with the selection, we undertake consensus building exercises to agree on which stories advance. The consensus building has been really important for us, as some scorers might have additional information about stories that are not written on paper. The Country Leadership Team is composed of leadership staff across all departments in the Sierra Leone office. We have found it to be helpful to include a variety of perspectives at this point in story selection. Similar to headlines, the number of selected outlines at OneVillage Partners varies by year based on the number of communities included in MSC. Typically, the team chooses five to ten outlines to be developed into full stories.



Learning – Presentation to Management

The shift from the Country Leadership Team reading full MSC stories to reviewing story outlines resulted in better use of staff time. For context, in 2017, the Country Leadership Team read and scored over 40 full MSC stories, in 2018 they read over 30 stories. In 2019, when we shifted to story outlines, they reviewed 12 story outlines and reported spending much less time on the task than in previous years.

Step 7: Story Writing

As we rely on our staff to write the MSC stories, it is important to provide training on the art of story writing. A well-written story is not only more likely to captivate the attention of the reader but is able to reflect the sentiments of the subject in the most accurate way. Thus, it is important to equip staff with tools to make their stories engaging, accurate, and interesting. At OneVillage Partners, MSC stories are used for communications as well as evaluation. Therefore, staff are trained to consider the use of the final MSC story while ensuring the participant’s voice remains central.

The final training of the MSC staff training focuses on story writing. The learning outcomes of the training are:

- Understand audience and goal of MSC stories
- Identify components that make a great story (descriptive, relatable, emotional, etc.)
- Understand and apply the story writing framework using story flow
- Be able to write compelling MSC stories

At OneVillage Partners, the MSC implementing staff write stories due to the high level of illiteracy in our partner communities. If possible, the participant themselves should write their own MSC story. See **Appendix 3** for the top MSC story of 2019 in both story outline and narrative form.



Learning – Story Writing

The transformation of a MSC story from a headline form to a narrative story can be a difficult one. The investment in story writing training will be dependent on the capacity level of the implementing staff and will vary by context. Some helpful lessons we have learned include:

- **Build in enough time for story writing:** It is important to give staff time to complete the task of story writing, especially if it is their first time. It is just as important to provide support during this time, scheduling regular submission of drafts and one-on-one editing meetings. These measures help to keep staff accountable to deadlines and improve the quality of the story.
- **Receiving critical feedback can be challenging:** Providing constructive criticism requires the right balance of directness and empathy. Editors should present feedback in a way that teaches the writer what they need to improve and how they can improve it.
- **Ask questions about changes that seem “too good to be true”:** Hopefully, this check has happened earlier in the MSC process, but in case it has not, this is the time to push back on changes that seem unrealistic. Some staff are biased to portray their programs positively. Don’t be afraid to dig deeper into changes that seem unrelated to the program or that happened very quickly. In our experience, we have found that it wasn’t that staff outright lied about the change that occurred, but they left out a few details (mostly challenges in implementing the behavior change) that made the story more believable and accurate.
- **Create a list of words with local and foreign terms for improved readability:** Dependent on the context, it may be possible that some common vocabulary does not translate to a wider audience. For example, in Sierra Leone, a community meeting hall is called a “barry”. Some MSC story readers would not know what that word meant if they came across it. We created a list of vocabulary words and their more commonly accepted terms for our staff to use as a tool during story writing.

Step 8: Final Selection

In the final step of the selection process, the top stories selected by the Country Leadership Team are sent to the Executive Team in the U.S. to select the top story of the year. They use the same scoring rubric used for the headlines and story outlines. All scoring history is kept on file and outcomes of scoring at each level are communicated openly. As the selected stories will likely be publicized by the organization (we use them in our annual report, blog posts, and fundraising efforts), it is important that the entire team is comfortable with the stories selected and excited to use the stories for external communications purposes. We have found a tiered selection process including field staff and leadership in both offices ensures the inclusion of varied perspectives, and ultimately results in representative stories.

Step 9: Quantification & Analysis

After collecting headlines and key facts, we import the MS Excel file with all headlines and key facts into qualitative data analysis (QDA) software for thematic analysis. When we first started MSC, we used strictly inductive coding, since we used the process to explore what outcomes the programs had. Now, we use a combination of inductive and deductive methods. We start with the code book from the previous round of MSC and add or delete codes based on new data from the most recent MSC round. We take note of codes that appeared in previous rounds and not the current rounds. Currently, our code book is informed by the pillars of the ToC, however there is space for negative or unexpected outcomes. We go through the data set multiple times to ensure a uniformity of coding, and also keep notes on decisions made during coding with justifications. Ideally, qualitative coding should occur with multiple coders, checking with each other throughout the process to ensure inter-rater reliability. We also analyze the data set for descriptors including:

- Demographics of participants (age range, gender, role)
- Headlines collected by domain
- Headlines collected by community
- Headlines collected by FGD type (to review effects of sampling method)



Learning – Quantification & Analysis

- **Timing:** Analysis can technically start as soon as data is entered, but we have found it best to wait until story outlines are finalized because some key facts are updated after Verification Interviews.
- **Technical experience needed:** This component of the MSC process does require prior experience in qualitative coding. During the first round of MSC, we tried to have MSC implementing staff code stories as expected or unexpected – as a preliminary sorting step. However, we found this to be very challenging given the broad range of experience and understanding of intended and unintended outcomes amongst our staff and decided to have the MEL Manager lead the process of coding moving forward.

Step 10: Community Feedback

Sharing results with communities is integral to OneVillage Partners' values, and an important process that heightens trust and understanding between the organization and community members. It keeps the organization accountable to community members and serves as a final means of data validation. Given the high levels of illiteracy in the communities with whom we partner, we use visual representations to increase the understanding of feedback. The most effective way to deliver information will vary by community and will depend on the relationship the organization has developed with the community.

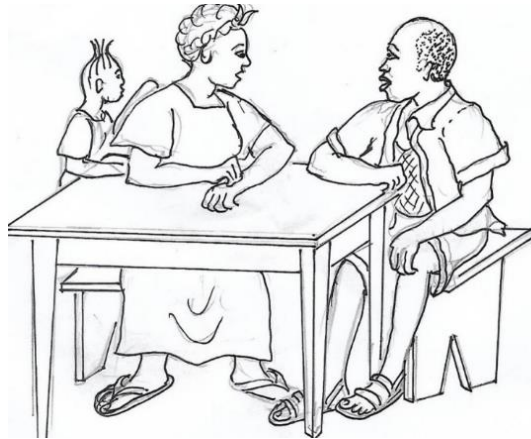
We have found a number of different visual tactics to be effective at communicating results, such as:

- Visually represent numbers or the percentage of change with people
 - Direct community members to move to opposite sides of the meeting space to represent a statistic or a percentage.
- Use a matrix with local materials to visually represent the numbers and percentage of changes.
 - Drawing a matrix in sand can be used with materials such as leaves and stones.
- Use either locally drawn images or photographs of actual community members to illustrate changes or themes (see **Figure 10**).

At OneVillage Partners we utilize the community meeting forum to share the top stories, the most prevalent themes, how many people participated (disaggregated by gender) and how many headlines participants shared.

The participants themselves share their stories of change with their own communities. Results from MSC have many applications – to improve programs and to inform communities of their progress. Another way to apply results from an MSC process is to integrate them into next steps for a program or community. When we share results from an MSC process back with the community, it opens the door for a vibrant discussion of the community’s vision for the future.

Figure 10:
Gender Equity
Theme
Represented
with a Local
Drawing and
Photograph



Learning – Community Feedback

- **Community members prefer photos of real people over drawings:** We use images to share the top themes of an MSC round within a community. We have found that using photos of people who live in the community is much more inspiring and relatable than a drawing. See **Figure 10** for an example.
- **Leave results in the community:** After the community meeting we leave the paper copy of the results as well as the printed photos in the community for them to decide how they want to display them. Some communities choose to display the results in the community meeting hall.
- **Having participants share their MSC stories is powerful:** When a participant shares their personal story of change, it is a moving experience. Often, community members shout out their support or confirmation of the story. The sharing of the story in the community forum can have unintended benefits for confidence and community building.

Reflection & Learning from MSC

Once a round of MSC is complete, Davies and Dart recommend conducting a revision of the process. We have found there is no perfect process for us, and a complex method like this requires constant iteration; as such, we have refined our process annually. Looking back on lessons learned and collaborating with key stakeholders has allowed us to improve and refine immediately, before crucial information is left behind.⁴ In order to ensure we capture important information about how to improve the process, we debrief daily with all staff after MSC field work. In the debriefs we discuss the successes and challenges as well as strategies to address challenges. Additionally, at the end of the entire MSC process we hold a final debrief with MSC implementing staff and program leadership to reflect on the process as a whole and how it can be improved. Using this feedback, the MEL Manager updates training materials and field plans for the next round of MSC.

Beyond revising the process, there is tremendous potential for organizational learning with MSC. We hold a workshop with key staff to review programmatic lessons learned, dive deeply into those lessons, and brainstorm ways that these lessons can be addressed in the following year of engagement. We also collate our learning in an annual MSC report.

Lessons Learned

The following section includes a summation of the lessons OneVillage Partners has learned over multiple iterations of MSC implementation.

Pre-Implementation

- **Staff training should be highly tailored to the expertise of the team. Intensive staff training is required to produce quality results.**

- We update our staff training annually to address challenging areas of implementation. We have found that making the training more participatory and application focused helps the staff understand difficult concepts and provides a space to discuss those concepts.

- **Cross-department engagement and planning early on leads to a successful implementation.**

- Of course, not all things can be planned for, but clear and early communication about what staff will be involved and what deliverables will be required from them contribute to smooth implementation.

- **MSC works best within organizations that have a culture of learning and critical thinking.**

- If staff are used to critically reviewing programs and looking for ways to improve their work, they already have the skills to dig deeper into stories that seem too good to be true or to guide participants to share stories of negative change. If staff are hesitant to critique programs, or defensive of their work, there might be a bias towards unverified positive stories of change.

Implementation

- **Getting participants to think about change is difficult beyond material or tangible things.**

- Many warm up activities and probing questions are needed to allow participants to think about significant, often times more abstract change. Staff need to practice these facilitation techniques prior to implementation.

- **Headlines and story outlines are an effective way to gather a lot of content in a time-saving manner.**

- Using headlines and story outlines enables staff to collect story ideas from many people with limited time and resources. It is important that staff are adequately trained on including descriptive information in headlines and story outlines, to ensure the accurate representation of key story components.

- **The sampling method will impact the types and frequency of MSC stories. Choose a sampling method that allows multiple perspectives to be shared and make sure to review frequently for potential improvements.**

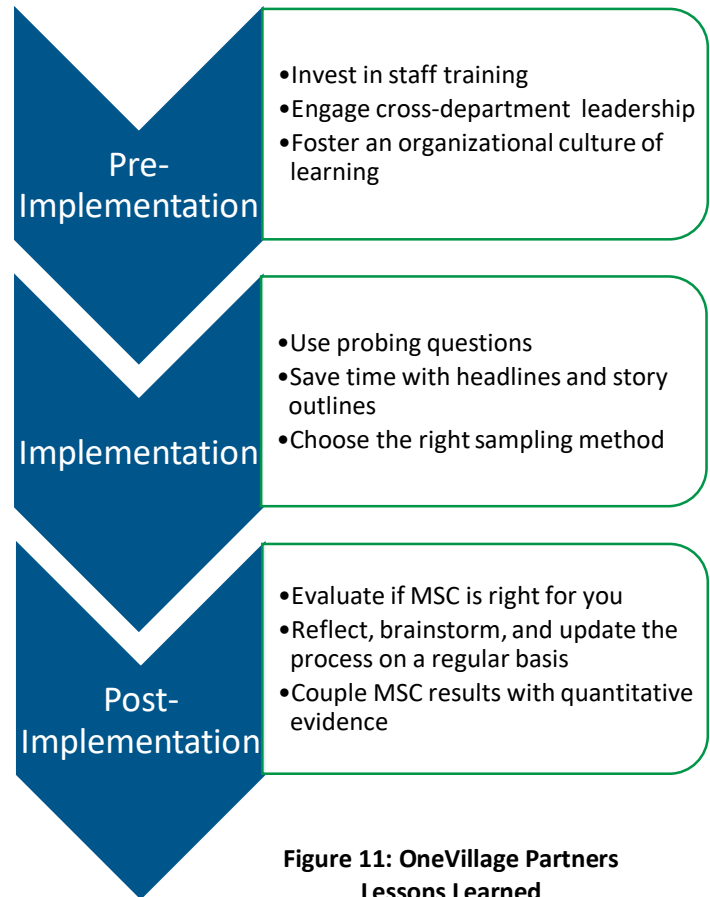


Figure 11: OneVillage Partners Lessons Learned

- Power differentials in the community and social desirability bias are barriers MSC facilitators need to overcome to gather accurate MSC stories. A well thought out sampling plan can contribute to their success in this task.

Post-Implementation

- **MSC should work within organizational goals and activities. If the process is becoming too burdensome, re-evaluate.**
 - If MSC is being implemented within an organization, not just for a program or project, leadership staff need to weigh the pros and cons of the method and make decisions that work within organizational priorities. Over time, we had to find the right balance of conducting MSC and other MEL and program activities. We made this decision based on our evaluation needs, staff availability/capacity, and respect for community members' time.
- **Making space for discussing challenges, brainstorming solutions, and updating the MSC process is crucial for its success.**
 - Reflecting on lessons learned is necessary for improvement. It is because of this reflection and the flexibility of OneVillage Partners, that we could update our MSC process in 2019 and achieve the following outcomes:
 - The MSC process is now targeted to collecting stories of long-term change in addition to project-specific outcomes, evidence that is critical to measuring our impact.
 - Less staff time used throughout the year on MSC and staff time is used more efficiently during the process.
 - With less staff time spent on MSC, we created new feedback mechanisms specifically targeted on project/cohort learning and negative feedback. These focus groups are more informal than MSC but occur more often and have contributed to updates in programs and organizational policies.
 - Conducting Verification Interviews with multiple people led to richer stories from multiple perspectives.
- **MSC results are bolstered when coupled with quantitative evidence.**
 - Inevitably, MSC cannot be used as a standalone evaluation method. At first, it can be used on its own to explore outcomes of complex programs, but once a general idea of impact is understood, it should be coupled with quantitative data to triangulate those impacts, especially if a program is attempting to prove impact at community-level. As we shifted to using MSC to evaluate our ToC, we introduced a complementary household survey to see if the impacts from MSC were reflected at the community-level.

Looking Forward

In the future, we will continue to thoughtfully consider improvements and updates to our MSC process to make it more participatory and community-centered. One idea we are currently considering is how to involve community members more in the story ranking process. Currently, the multiple rounds of story ranking are conducted by different OneVillage Partners staff based on a rubric informed by our programmatic goals. It would be interesting to see if the community themselves ranked stories in the same way our staff does and if not, where the disconnect lies. The major concern in involving the communities in story selection is the additional time requirement in a process that is already very time consuming. We are also considering how to incorporate visual mediums into storytelling, especially considering the low literacy levels of our program participants and the increased interactive factor of visual storytelling.



Figure 12: Community Member Explains MSC Domain

Conclusion

MSC is a powerful tool to enable programmatic impact to be captured and measured through the voices of those most affected by the work. The process allows for honest and constructive feedback, shows respect to participants, and gives participants a greater sense of ownership. This understanding is integral to OneVillage Partners' work and we believe the trusting and transparent relationship we have developed with communities leads to successful and sustainable projects.

The data collected during MSC may reaffirm existing assumptions or bring to life unintended outcomes that were unforeseen. The learning that comes from MSC can impact both the programs and the organization as a whole, in a transparent and accessible manner.

While it can seem daunting at the onset, MSC is a flexible methodology, with room to iterate and adapt it based on your own needs. It also provides incredible opportunity for programmatic growth by uncovering outcomes that are difficult to measure.

For further information about the results produced from the MSC process, check out our annual MSC reports at www.onevillagepartners.org.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Training Outlines

The following is a condensed outline of OneVillage Partners' MSC training. Please note that this outline does not contain the many application-based activities conducted in order to increase understanding of key concepts. All trainings are approximately three hours in length.

Materials: Training power points, training activity handout, flip chart paper, markers, tools hand out¹

Training 1: Understanding MSC

Intended Learning Outcomes

1. Understand what MSC is
2. Recognize the value of qualitative data
3. Describe why, when, and how we use MSC
4. Understand and identify the MSC steps, their order, and key components

Training Components

1. History of MSC & MSC Overview
2. Quantitative vs. qualitative data (dependent on previous staff capacity)
3. Using stories effectively & stories in evaluation
4. Why are stories impactful?
5. MSC in practice
 - a. Review other organizations' use of MSC
 - i. Outline the reasons MSC was used, what changes they were hoping to see
 - ii. Read a MSC story from the project and reflect as a group
6. Why is MSC right for this evaluation?
7. How is MSC implemented? Facilitator presents 10 step process and explains key implementation activities
8. **Activity: MSC Homework** for participants to complete prior to Training 2; participants are asked to reflect on the "most significant change in your professional capacity since coming to work for organization x"; participants should be ready to discuss in Training 2
9. Feedback, revisit learning objectives, questions and update on further trainings

Training 2: MSC Domains and Focus Group Discussions

Intended Learning Outcomes

1. Understand how MSC fits into organization evaluation processes
2. Understand the MSC domains
3. Understand components of the introductory community meeting
4. Understand how to conduct FGDs with participants

Training Components

1. Review why the evaluation is choosing MSC. Review what the MSC stories are used for.
2. Introduce key vocabulary used in MSC (domain, headline, story outline, story, focus group discussion, etc.)
3. Domain explanation
4. Review MSC implementation steps
5. Provide detailed information about introductory community meetings
6. Introduce FGDs (or relevant data collection method for MSC stories)
7. Explain sampling strategy, including what the benefits and consequences of different groupings could be
 - a. Discuss recruitment strategy

¹ At OneVillage Partners, the Tools Handout contains the ToC, FGD guide, FGD participant selection criteria, domain definitions, FGD notetaking template, headline form, headline/story scoring rubric, Verification Interview protocol, story flow diagram, story writing template, and MSC field plan

8. Review FGD guide in detail, go over parameters of FGDs, role play a FGD using homework responses, debrief FGD role play
9. Review FGD note taking template and tips
10. Present the MSC implementation calendar, discuss any questions or concerns the participants have, figure out solutions and logistics for any issues that come up.
11. Feedback, revisit learning objectives, questions and update on further trainings

Training 3: Headline Creation and Selection

Intended Learning Outcomes

1. Understand how to fill out a headline form
2. Understand components of a good headline
3. Understand headline scoring
4. Understand how to guide participants to talk about changes in their life

Training Components

1. Review first five MSC implementation steps
 - a. Give overview of steps that will be explained in detail in the training (Headline Creation and Headline Selection)
2. Lead discussion on how trainees can encourage participants to talk about changes in their life
3. Explain headline form, discuss methods of gathering data needed for headline form. Present note-taking tips including what information is crucial to gather.
4. Review what should be included in the key facts and emphasizes their importance since these are what are used in the qualitative data analysis for themes.
 - a. Present how to create a headline, best practices learned from previous rounds of MSC. Discuss what makes a strong headline, what components are necessary to give an overview of the story.
 - b. Presents examples of pairs of good and bad headlines. Participants discuss as a group which headline is better, why it is better and what domain it should be classified in to.
5. Introduce the headline scoring rubric, explain each component of the rubric and the scoring system
6. Discuss headline scoring process
7. Feedback, revisit learning objectives, questions and update on further trainings

Training 4: Verification Interviews and Story Outlines

Intended Learning Outcomes

1. Understand how to prepare for and conduct interviews with participants
2. Understand the information needed to write a good MSC story (and fill out a story outline)
3. Understand lessons learned from previous rounds of MSC

Training Components

1. Review what makes a good headline and supporting information
2. Review the MSC steps the group has received training on, state this training will focus on Verification Interviews
3. Present the purpose of Verification Interviews in MSC. Discuss what type of information is needed to write a good MSC story (who, what, when, where, why, how).
4. Review the Verification Interview Protocol in detail, stressing informed consent and asking for permission to interview other people mentioned in the story.
5. Discuss story flow and the information needed to complete the story framework.
6. Review how to prepare for Verification Interviews and how to use the information to fill in the story writing outline.
7. Discuss how to outline a story and review the story writing outline and its different components. Also review when story outlines are due and how participants should plan their work accordingly.
8. Practice Writing Verification Interview Questions
9. Role play Verification Interview, debrief the activity

10. Discuss the importance of accurate translation and using the participant's own words, not development jargon or flowery language.
11. Present lessons learned from previous rounds of MSC, discuss ways that these issues can be mitigated.
12. Feedback, revisit learning objectives, questions and update on further trainings

Training 5: Story Writing Workshop

Intended Learning Outcomes

1. Understand audience and goal of MSC stories
2. Identify components that make a great story (descriptive, relatable, emotional, etc.)
3. Understand and apply the story writing framework using story flow
4. Be able to write compelling MSC stories

Training Components

1. Review the purpose of MSC and the goal of stories to build interest, awareness and empathy in order to evaluate programs, create an emotional connection to the work, and communicate success.
2. Discuss the audience of the MSC stories. Discuss how the audience will impact the type of writing. Discuss what it means to write to a diverse audience.
3. Outline the elements of storytelling:
 - a. Character, objective, obstacle, evidence
 - b. Discuss: what helps someone connect to a character, what are examples of internal or external obstacles, why is a story more impactful if it includes evidence?
4. Present story writing tips after a brainstorming session on what makes effective MSC stories, the purpose of MSC stories
 - a. Focus: every sentence should have a purpose, story should be relatable, specificity and authenticity are important, emotion appeals to the audience's heart, need to explicitly call out how the program contributed to the change, story should follow one main person
5. Discuss the definition and importance of evidence in story writing, including what makes "good" evidence, different types of evidence and why it matters
6. Review story flow; discuss strategies on how to write stories; i.e. outline story, write in sections, read through for clarity (does it make sense? Is it chronological?), emotion, and copy editing (including peer review).
7. Review what to look out for in the story editing process before stories are submitted; includes- clarity, emotion, copy editing, etc.
8. Review the use of Track Changes in MS Word. Why we use them and how we use them. (*may not be applicable*)
9. Practice Story Writing; participants write a 100-word story to support a headline (20-25 minutes). Writers should keep in mind the story flow, topic & conclusion sentences, use of evidence, story components (characters, objective, etc.) and appeal to emotion.
10. Review MSC implementation calendar, being very clear on deadlines for first and second drafts, discusses time management and checking in on tasks to make sure you don't fall behind schedule.
11. Feedback, revisit learning objectives, questions
12. Present certificates of training completion 😊

Community Feedback Prep (occurs after analysis and results are ready to be shared)

Purpose: understand how to present MSC results back to the community

1. Discuss community feedback session outline; review results to be shared with the communities. Participants generate ideas for presenting information back to the community and how to keep them engaged.

Appendix 2: Most Significant Change Data Collection Tools

Headline Form

Headline: _____				
Community: <input type="checkbox"/> INSERT <input type="checkbox"/> INSERT <input type="checkbox"/> INSERT		Participant Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	Age <input type="checkbox"/> Youth (18-35) <input type="checkbox"/> Adult (36-59) <input type="checkbox"/> Elder (60+)	Participant Role: <input type="checkbox"/> CAG <input type="checkbox"/> NOW Participant <input type="checkbox"/> NOW Relative <input type="checkbox"/> Village Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary Leader <input type="checkbox"/> General Community Member
FGD Type <input type="checkbox"/> CAGs <input type="checkbox"/> Village leaders <input type="checkbox"/> Community member <input type="checkbox"/> Village leaders and community members <input type="checkbox"/> NOW participants and husbands <input type="checkbox"/> CAGs and NOW participants		Domain: <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Gender Equity <input type="checkbox"/> Social Cohesion <input type="checkbox"/> Resiliency <input type="checkbox"/> Wellbeing <input type="checkbox"/> Catch-all/Negative		
_____ Staff Name		_____ Participant Name		_____/_____/_____ Data Collected MM/DD/YY
Key Facts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 				

Verification Interview Protocol

Topic	Description	Time
Welcome	<p>Facilitator welcomes participant</p> <p><i>This session is to ask follow up questions on the story you shared in the focus group discussion. We would like to use the information you provide to us to write a full MSC story. During the group session we asked for the most significant change that has occurred since OneVillage Partners started working in your community. From that information we wrote down a few key facts of your story. Now, we would like to expand on those key facts to gain a complete understanding of this change in your life.</i></p>	5
Informed Consent	<p>Facilitator explains the idea of consent and obtain verbal consent from the participant.</p> <p><i>We at OneVillage Partners are very grateful that you are taking time to assist us in evaluating our work. We want to make it very clear that this process is voluntary and no one is required to be here. We also want to let you know how we plan on using the information you provide us with today. The stories you share are used to help us learn about the work OneVillage Partners has done and how the organization can improve its work. Additionally, there is a possibility that your story could be shared to help communicate the work that the organization does to people living outside Sierra Leone. We will not sell your information or use it for outside audiences without your permission. Do you consent to participate in this conversation and letting OneVillage Partners use the information you share for these purposes? Do you give us permission to record this interview so we can refer to it during the story writing process? If participant does not give consent, DO NOT conduct interview</i></p>	5
Interview Questions	<p>Facilitator asks the prepared interview questions. Gain a comprehensive understanding of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who: Who was involved before the change, during the change, after the change? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>If the interviewee mentions other people involved in the change, ask them if it would be ok to interview them</i> - What: What was the change? Be specific (i.e. “learned to use my voice” from key facts could change to “spoke at a community meeting about children’s education”) - Where: Where did this change occur? In the household? At the community-level? Within a community group? - When: At what point in time did this change occur? How long did the process take? - How: How did the change occur? - Why: What was the reason for the change? Gain an understanding of the situation before OneVillage Partners, during OneVillage Partners, and after the OneVillage Partners project finished. - How is the change related to OneVillage Partners: What is the link between the change and OneVillage Partners programs? What specifically did the participant take from OneVillage Partners that was a part of the change? - Challenges: When this change was occurring what challenges did the participant face? How did they deal with those challenges? Did anyone support them during this time? <p>Note-taker writes notes for each of the prepared questions.</p>	30
Closing statements	<p>Thank participant for their input. Confirm that their participation is valued and assists OneVillage Partners greatly.</p> <p>Let the participants know that their story will be presented to the community when we have completed all data analysis. Also let them know that it is a possibility that their story will be shared online and with organization leadership in the United States.</p>	5

Story Writing Template

Beginning: The Set Up and The A-HA Moment

1. The Set Up:

Describe your subject, your setting, and the context for your story. What are the prevailing attitudes in your subject and in the community? Set up the “before” of your story...what was the challenge?

2. The A-HA Moment:

What was the motivation/catalyst for your subject’s change? Was it an inciting incident, a conversation...? When did it happen? What led to this moment and how did it start to create the change?

Is your subject reluctant to embrace his/her A-HA moment? Why? How do they make the decision to continue forward?

Middle: The Action/Decisions, Obstacles, and Resiliency (more actions and decisions in the face of challenges)

3. The Action/Decision(s)

What decisions did the individual or community make and the actions they took to make progress toward change? How did these decisions enable change to occur?

Challenges and Obstacles

What challenges to achieving change did they face? Why did these challenges exist? What were the new actions the person/community had to take to overcome challenges (return to The Action)? How did they feel when they overcame an obstacle?

The “Challenges/Obstacles” section might repeat depending upon number of challenges the person/community encounters, and the decisions made to at each point to continue towards change.

End: The Climax and The Outcome/Key Message

4. The Climax:

When did the final realization of the change occur? What was the change/transformation that was finally realized after the process? What was the goal that is finally met? Why?

5. The Outcome/Final Image:

What is the person/community doing differently now? How are they applying this change in their lives or seeing this change being in action now? What is their new mindset after this change and why?

What is the key message? What is the significance of this change? How does this capture the impact of OVP’s work?

Appendix 3: 2019 OneVillage Partners Top MSC Story

This appendix includes the top story of 2019 in both the story outline and narrative form.

Learning from OneVillage Partners Sent my Children Back to School- Story Outline

Participant Name: Watta Moriba

Village: Gbeka

Domain: Resiliency

The Set Up:

- Watta Moriba, approximately 36 years, general community member, single mother, has five children.
- Watta used to spend unwisely and lacked the knowledge to save for children's welfare.
- Watta engaged herself in back yard gardening and groundnut farming to support her children's schooling but struggled a lot due to her poor saving habits.
- Children dropped out of school due to less parental saving for children schooling. When her two boys dropped out of school and stayed with her in the village they impregnated neighbours' daughters. She was therefore summoned to the chiefs with her sons and charged a high fine she couldn't afford which forced her to loan to pay the fines since she had no money saved.
- Used to take loans with high interest from other women in the village and was mostly unable to pay. With every Le 100,000 loaned, she uses to be charged Le 25,000. She therefore used to go into hiding when the lender comes to collect the money from her because she didn't have the money to pay back her debt.
- Miata Koroma a NOW participant and Watta's friend said "I helped pay back a debt of Le 100,000 she took from Yea Mamie and was unable to pay."
- Was dependent on husband for all household responsibilities leading to frequent quarrels between them. Husband died in 2016 and since then has had to support herself.

The A-HA Moment: Miata Koroma visited her in 2017 and shared business and saving skills she learned from NOW training session with her.

- The NOW participant (Miata Koroma) loaned her Le 50,000 with no interest to start selling palm oil like she (Miata) have been doing herself.
- Watta decided to start new income generating activities including soap and palm oil.

Is your subject reluctant to embrace his/her A-HA moment? Why? How do they make the decision to continue forward?

- As she started saving to support her household and business idea, she still was going back to take the money from her savings box and used it unwisely. She sought support from her friends who advised her to save in multiple places.
 - "Instead of keeping my money at home where I will go back and pick from, I learned better saving habit by joining a saving groups and reduced my expenditure on high priced clothes for me and my children" Watta said.

The Action/Decision(s):

- Watta bought five gallons of palm oil from neighbouring village of Taninahun to sell in Gbeka. She continued saving profit from her palm oil business for her two boys' schooling.
- She saved money from backyard gardening and started selling soap to meet other financial needs of her children. This way she used the profit from her palm oil business to reinvest in the business and save for her children's schooling.
- She paid back all loans and didn't take any new more loans.
- Sent her two boys back to school and completely paid fees and met all responsibilities while she continues selling palm oil for future incidences.

- Started sharing her knowledge from NOW training (which she learned from Miata Koroma) with other women and encouraged other women to do so too.
- Watta decided to continue saving money from her business by reducing her expenditure on luxury dresses and jewelleryes.
- She joined a women's saving group with 10 other women where savings were shared only after a year of contributing Le 5,000 per week. with the advice of Miata Koroma who was a member as well, Watta kept contributing and successfully completed the group's contribution cycle.

Challenges and Obstacles:

- Delayed to start a business because she lacks start-up capital but Miata Koroma offer her a generous loan of Le 50,000 without interest.
- Money saved from the palm oil business was still insufficient to send children back to school and Watta was tempted to choose another business because she always sad to see other children going to school while her own children stayed at home.
- Her limited experience in business meant she still needed Miata Koroma's help to maximise enough profit from business and strengthen the practice of saving.
- Watta's business skill was still low and her first palm oil business failed. She then became afraid to start a second business for fear of losing her money for the second time. She however met Miatta Koroma for a review of skills she taught her. Watta then used money saved from previous sales to buy additional 10 gallons of palm oil and continued selling and saving from it proceeds.
 - "I thought my business would fail for the second time, but the skills I gained from Miata Koroma kept me going without giving up".
- Watta loaned other women from her savings who failed to pay back as they promised.
 - "I found it challenging to refuse loaning other women from my business proceeds which distorted my savings a lot. But instead of being debtor, I felt proud to be able to loan other women from my savings" Watta added.

The Climax:

- Finally realised the worth of her saving when her eldest son sponsored from her palm oils business savings graduated from the University and her second graduated from secondary school and is preparing to gain admission into the University. "It's hard to believe that I now wake up every morning without thinking of someone's debt I owe. I become even happier and proud that I have these boys educated from my saving as a single mother".
- She gained back respect from the community when she sent back her children to school and can contribute to funeral rites of deceased family members.

"I finally realised how to make myself financially secured on the very day Miata started teaching me saving and business skills. Now that I have both skills and practicing it, I have more peace of mind, free from debts and confidently sponsor my children's education at all times." Watta Moriba opined.

The Outcome/Final Image:

- She now saves money and have Le 500,000 saved for future needs and children's schooling from her palm oil business.
- Unlike before she now has business skills, doing business, debt free and gained respect from community members while children are back to school and one son already graduated from the University.
- Watta is now a determined entrepreneur and saving and even teaching other women to do like her and Miata Koroma who taught her all her business and savings skills.

What is the key message? What is the significance of this change? How does this capture the impact of OneVillage Partners' work?

- Realised that the work of OneVillage Partners is beyond donating money and doing everything for community members, but guiding them to be independent and providing for themselves and their family by practicing what they learn from their programs.
 “Everyone must save for the future to help them from the problem of asking ‘how can I handle this?’ This happens if we all practice what we learn from our NOW sisters who have gained the skills and are ready to share with others” Watta stated.

Learning from OneVillage Partners Sent my Children Back to School- Narrative

Domain: Resiliency

Community: Gbeka

Participant: Watta Moriba

Staff: Nabieu Senesie & Emmanuel George

Watta Moriba is a 46-year-old single mother of five who lives in Gbeka. The village is located in Jahn Chiefdom in Kailahun District, Eastern Sierra Leone. Like many mothers, Watta wanted to educate her children and save for the future. The family’s sole bread winner was her husband. Crisis hit in 2016 when Watta’s husband died, leaving her to fend for herself and her children. She tried to support her family with subsistence farming, but that didn’t cover her expenses. Watta was forced to borrow from other women to provide for her basic needs and her children’s tuition. The loans and their mounting interest started to weigh on her, putting the family into further financial difficulties. “I used to go into hiding when the lender came for her money with fear that I could be summoned and fined by the chiefs because I didn’t have the money to pay back my debt,” Watta said.



Since Watta knew nothing about budgeting or saving, the situation worsened. Watta could no longer pay her children’s tuition and rent in the nearby city of Kenema where they attended secondary school. Her two boys had to leave school and move back to Gbeka. After returning to Gbeka, one of Watta’s sons impregnated a young girl. She and her son were summoned to the Town Chief who imposed a large fine of Le 400,000 (\$50) and charged them with caring for the girl during her pregnancy and her education. With an additional person to care for, Watta took out another loan and fell further into debt. Alone, with no income and no technical skills Watta faced a bleak future.

Fortunately, Watta’s prospects began to change when connected with her friend, Miatta Koroma, who was a participant in OneVillage Partner’s Nurturing Opportunities for Women (NOW) program. NOW teaches women financial management skills related to personal savings, household planning, and business. Watta hadn’t been selected for the program but Miatta was willing to pass along the lessons to her friend. “Seeing Watta struggle with such a huge burden as a single mother was a sad experience,” Miatta said. “I realized that Watta needed these lessons even more than me.” Miatta visited Watta to share the first lesson on planning, setting goals, doing business and saving for the future. Watta was interested, enthusiastic, and wanted to continue. After a few lessons and seeing that Watta was engaged and serious about learning, Miatta lent Watta Le 100,000 (\$12.50) interest free to start a small business. It was a way to help her friend and to test Watta’s newly learned skills.

Using Miatta’s loan, Watta bought palm oil from local farmers and traveled to nearby villages to resell her product at a higher price. She started saving small amounts from her farming efforts and began making and selling homemade soap to generate even more income. Watta found it difficult to save the additional income. She wasn’t in the habit of saving and it was still very new to her. She often used the money for expensive food items or fancy

clothes. Again, friends came to Watta's aid and suggested that she put her earnings in different places. "Instead of keeping my money at home where I would take from it, I learned a better way by joining a saving group and I also reduced my spending on high priced clothes," Watta said. Watta's savings began to grow. She paid back all her debts, invested in her business, provided for her family, and was even able to provide small loans to other women. "Instead of being a debtor, I could lend to other women from my savings," Watta said. "I felt proud."

Despite her success and the positive changes in her behavior, Watta encountered some setbacks. Her palm oil business failed and the two women she'd lent money couldn't pay her back. She was afraid to start a second business for fear of losing her money again and she started blaming herself for not being strict with her money. Watta went to see Miatta to review her skills. Watta's limited business experience was the source of most of her troubles. She needed more skills and decided to continue learning how to maximize profits and strengthen her saving habits with Miatta. Watta took some money from her soap making business to buy 10 gallons of palm oil. This time she was able to resell her product and save some earnings. "I thought my palm oil business would fail for the second time, but the skills I gained from Miatta kept me going without giving up," Watta said.

Watta has now learned how to manage her finances. "It's hard to believe that I now wake up every morning without thinking of the debt I owe somebody," Watta said. She gained back the respect of her community, sent her children back to school, and contributed to other family expenses, such as funerals. With a growing business, her family cared for, and a new-found confidence, Watta boldly decided to share her knowledge with other women. Mamie Saffa, a Gbeka community member, is one of the women who benefitted from Watta's desire to pass along her skills. "I learned about saving and business from Watta Moriba," said Mamie Saffa. "She taught me what she was doing herself."

One of the best rewards for Watta's hard work was one son's graduation from college and the other son's graduation from high school. "I become happy and proud that as a single mother, I have educated these boys from my saving," she said. Watta's savings now totals Le 1,000,000 (\$125) which she'll use to pay her second son's upcoming college expenses. From her experience Watta learned she is capable of working hard to solve her own problems, "Everyone must save for the future, they must ask 'how can I handle this?' This happens if we all practice what we learn from our NOW sisters who have gained the skills and are ready to share with others," Watta stated with a broad smile. Watta's newfound financial independence has brought many benefits; "Now that I have the skills and am practicing them, I have more peace of mind, am free from debts, and can confidently sponsor my children's education at all times." Watta said.

Appendix 4: Sample MSC Implementation Plan

Below is the OneVillage Partners 2020 outline for the training, field work, story selection, and story writing components of MSC. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the MSC exercise was postponed, but the planned dates can serve as a reference for field work.

Communities: Yandohun, Majoe, Ngolahun, Maloma, Pejewa

Dates:

- **Staff Training:** April 20-24
- **Notify community about MSC Introduction meetings:** April 28- May 1
- **Community Meetings:** May 4-5
- **Fieldwork (Focus Group Discussions)- 3 FGDs per community:** May 6-8; 11-12
- **Headline Data Entry:** All headlines to MEL department by May 15
- **Headline Scoring:** All scored headlines to MEL department by May 19
- **Top Headline Selection:** May 20
- **Verification Interview Planning:** May 21-22

- **Fieldwork (Verification Interviews):** May 25-29
- **Story Outlining:** All completed story outlines submitted to MEL Department by June 3
- **Story Selection:**
 - o Country Leadership Team meet June 12, select top five MSC outlines
 - o Story writing from June 15-July 27 (with deadlines for first and final drafts)
 - o Top story selected July 27 by U.S Executive Team

Appendix 5: References & Further Resources

References

1. Lennie J. *Most Significant Change Technique: A Manual for M&E Staff and Others at Equal Access.*; 2011. doi:10.4135/9781412950558.n354
2. MEASURE Evaluation. *Experiences and Lessons Learned : Implementing the Most Significant Change Method.*; 2020. https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/publications/fs-19-410/at_download/document.
3. Davies R, Dart J. *The ‘ Most Significant Change ’ (MSC) Technique.*; 2005.
4. Oakden J. *Evaluation Rubrics: How to Ensure Transparent and Clear Assessment That Respects Diverse Lines of Evidence.*; 2013. [https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/Evaluation rubrics.pdf](https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/Evaluation%20rubrics.pdf).

Further Resources

1. Dart, J and Davies, R. (October 2003). *MSC Quick-Start Guide*
 - a. This is a useful interactive guide that can complement Davies and Dart’s main MSC guide. It asks the reader questions about how MSC could be designed and implemented in their specific context.
 - b. https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/msc_quick_start_guide.pdf?acsf_files_redirect
2. Equal Access. (February 2011). *The Most Significant Change Technique: A Manual for M&E Staff and Others at Equal Access*
 - a. This manual designed for Equal Access staff is a useful guide to the MSC technique, with a mixture of theory and hands-on work and examples. It provides a detailed overview of how this organization (Equal Access) was been able to execute MSC. This guide breaks down each step and provides both answers and examples for why MSC should be conducted in a certain way.
 - b. <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/iesf/documents/most-significant-change-technique-lennie-2011>
3. Institute for Sustainable Futures. (June 2004). *'Most Significant Change' Pilot Project*
 - a. This report provides an excellent executive summary, detailing the benefits and limitations of MSC and how it can and should be adapted to varying contexts. This guide explains the real and tangible benefits of MSC.
 - b. http://petersigsgaard.dk/PDFfiler/mscfinalreport_listserv.pdf
4. Olivier Serrat. (January 2009). *The Most Significant Change Technique*. Knowledge Solutions
 - a. This guide provides a very concise overview of MSC and how and why it should be implemented in a certain way. Both the benefits and draw backs of MSC are explored succinctly with a useful timeline for implementation and explaining the broader purpose of each step.
 - b. <https://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1202&context=intl>
5. Krueger, R. A. (2015). *Using Stories in Evaluation*. In *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*

- a. This book chapter concerns how stories can aid the evaluation process for organizations. This can prove to be a very useful tool when originally educating staff about the benefits to MSC. It provides an overview into when and how to use stories in evaluation, and how they can work together to complement other forms of data.
- b. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781119171386.ch21>
6. Plan Canada. (March 2014). *Youth Microfinance Project, Most Significant Change Stories: Voices of Youth*
 - a. This comprehensive report includes explanations of MSC and the applicability of this tool in the context of microfinance. It provides a good in-depth explanation of their process and a section of training staff in MSC and how to encourage buy-in. It also provides a good overview of the benefits and limitations of MSC, and there is a useful MSC questionnaire in the annex.
 - b. https://mangotree.org/files/galleries/1437_2014_YouthMicrofinanceProject_MSC_Web.pdf
7. Safer World. (January 2016). *Doing Things Differently - Rethinking Monitoring and Evaluation to Understand Change*
 - a. This paper provides a detailed insight into how to uproot and change a global Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy. The report highlights the organizational thinking that led to the decision to transition to an approach inspired by *Outcome Mapping* and *Outcome Harvesting*. Despite not strictly being MSC, it provides organizational process learning and a step by step guide to the stages of change to a more participatory M&E approach.
 - b. <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1027-doing-things-differently-rethinking-monitoring-and-evaluation-to-understand-change>