



**WELT
HUNGER
HILFE**



Shallom Mtakiwa from Gokwe district, Zimbabwe, attended Micro Entrepreneurship Training by the Agricultural Business Center (ABC). After the training, she initiated various income-generating activities, such as poultry and farming. The ABC, established by Welthungerhilfe, assists farmers in accessing agricultural inputs, acquiring the necessary crop-growing skills, and selling their produce at fair market prices.

Image source: Welthungerhilfe

DEFINING IMPACT: PRACTITIONERS' BRIEF

WHY NEW IMPACT DEFINITION?

Organizations in international cooperation and humanitarian action face pressure from donors and the general public to prove their impact and justify their funding. As a result, they are rushing to provide evidence of “causal effects”, or evidence that shows that their interventions lead to positive changes.

At the same time, as organizations tackle increasingly complex challenges amid the ongoing global crises, many are adopting system strengthening and transformation approaches. Such approaches are themselves more complex and require a systemic interpretation of impact: one that acknowledges that organizations interact with a system, and that their work affects not just the people in the system but also the system as a whole.

However, most impact definitions that are currently in use by organizations in international cooperation and humanitarian assistance neither recognize impact clearly as a “causal effect”, nor do they include a systemic interpretation of impact. Thus, Welthungerhilfe has developed a new and unique definition that satisfies both of these conditions.

HOW HAS WELTHUNGERHILFE RE-DEFINED IMPACT?

The new definition is based on an analysis of impact definitions from 41 organizations in international cooperation and humanitarian action. A reference group of staff and partners from 11 countries helped formulate the new definition. This brief offers practical guidance on the new definitions and their implications.

The new definition was published in the “*Defining Impact*” paper as part of Welthungerhilfe’s “Impact Paper Series”. The new terminology will be operationalized in further papers published in the paper series, specifically a guidance on method selection to measure outcomes and impact and a manual on how impact can be taken to scale.

NEW DEFINITIONS EXPLAINED

The updated definition describes **outcomes** as changes that are assumed to be caused by the intervention when a causal link is plausible but lacks proof through evidence.

Just because a desired change occurs in the presence of the intervention does not mean that it was caused by the intervention. This is not sufficient to prove a causal effect.

Snapshot of Welthungerhilfe’s new Impact and Outcome definitions

OUTCOMES

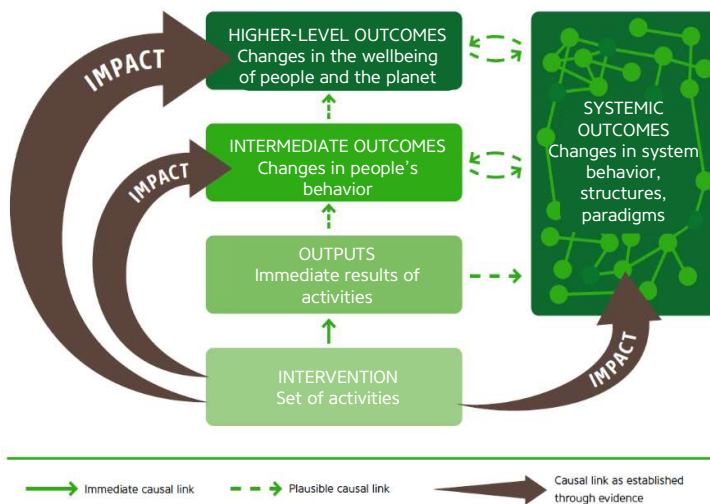
are changes in the behavior of people, the wellbeing of people and the planet, and in the behavior, structures and paradigms of the systems that they are part of, that are assumed to be causally linked to the intervention. Outcomes may be intended or unintended, positive or negative, and can be assessed along the dimensions of reach, size,

IMPACT

refers to outcomes that are contributed by or attributed to interventions, and that are relevant for people affected by hunger and poverty.

Therefore, Welthungerhilfe only labels an outcome as **impact** if it has strong evidence that the outcome was caused by the intervention. This requires examining the concrete role that an intervention, as well as other factors, have in leading to an outcome using right-fit methods. In addition, Welthungerhilfe's new definition emphasizes that an outcome can only be labeled as impact if it is relevant for people affected by hunger and poverty.

The new terminology includes an Outcome Classification Scheme that outlines three levels of outcomes: higher-level (changes in the wellbeing of people and the planet), intermediate (changes in people's behavior) and systemic (changes in system behavior, structures, paradigms). Outcomes at any level can be labeled as impact if a causal link with the intervention is proven.



WHAT DO THE NEW IMPACT AND OUTCOME DEFINITIONS MEAN FOR MY WORK?

We are careful to only use the label “impact” when we have evidence that the intervention causes the change partially or fully. We use methods that are accepted within the evaluation field to establish causality and claim impact. These methods will be detailed in the next episode of the Impact Paper Series, “Measuring Outcomes and Impact”. If we cannot prove a causal link, we do not use the term “impact”. By ensuring our claims are backed by solid evidence, we protect our credibility.

Impact assessment must **solicit the perspectives of** people affected by hunger and poverty to demonstrate that the outcome is relevant for them.

The definition recognizes our impact both on people's wellbeing and on systems as such. Any outcome may be labeled as impact if we prove it was caused by our intervention. Our definition opens up our understanding of impact from just changes in people's wellbeing to also

include changes in governance, markets and planetary wellbeing, which are crucial in ensuring that improvements in people's wellbeing are sustainable.

The new terminology has the following implications:

- **Welthungerhilfe's projects, programs and strategies** will focus even more on developing, applying and scaling impactful approaches; ensuring excellent project and program cycle management at scale; and investigating, justifying and learning from systemic change to realize lasting improvements.
- Projects and programs will be increasingly coordinated with partners and with system actors (e.g. civil society, market actors, governments) to address deep-rooted issues and facilitate sustainable positive change.
- **Technical and MEAL advisory** will provide guidance and support for the measurement, realization and scaling of impact, especially systemic impact.
- **People affected by hunger and poverty** will benefit from projects and programs of greater value and relevance that foster solidarity and collaboration and that address their long-term challenges.
- **Donors and the general public** will benefit from clearer and more convincing evidence that justifies funding and meets accountability expectations, also regarding systemic change.

OUTCOME AND IMPACT DEFINITIONS IN PRACTICE

Welthungerhilfe measures and observes **an increase in the number of households using at least basic drinking water services** under its monitoring framework, Measuring Success, in an area of its WASH intervention.

The change is an outcome when the causal link with the intervention is plausible based on priorly existing evidence (outlined, for example, in impact evaluations of similar interventions implemented elsewhere). For this specific project, impact evaluation has not been conducted to confirm that the change occurred because of the intervention. The change could have possibly occurred due to other reasons as well, such as pre-existing trends or interventions by other organizations.

The outcome qualifies as impact when we collect and examine right-fit evidence to show that it was caused or influenced by Welthungerhilfe's intervention. This can be determined, for example, by measuring and comparing the occurrence of the change in the intervention area to a similar (so called control) area that was not under the intervention, also considering other external factors and influences. If the intervention area shows a significantly higher increase in basic drinking water service use compared to the control group, it proves the impact of Welthungerhilfe's intervention.

This publication was a joint effort of numerous colleagues, most notably, Tereza Kaplan (Impact & System Evaluation Advisor), Marta Siebel (Evaluation Intern), Sebastian Schuster (MEAL Team Lead), Arno Bratz (Head of Sector Strategy, Knowledge and Learning).

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