

Outcome and Impact Assessment in International Development

Zewo Guidelines for Projects and Programmes

These guidelines are designed to help project managers to assess the outcomes of their projects and programmes. They demonstrate how development agencies can implement an appropriate outcome and impact assessment system.



This 6-step guide explains how outcome and impact assessment can be integrated into the project management cycle. Several steps that are decisive for outcome and impact assessment need to be considered as early as the planning stage. The whole cycle lasts between three and five years - and even longer in the case of larger projects. The various stages may be gone through several times during the project cycle.

Definitions and some introductory explanations can be found in the sections Key terms and What is impact assessment for?. The guidelines also address the overarching goals of international development cooperation, as well as Organisational preconditions and Limitations on impact assessment.

The main methods are presented in a clear fashion in the chapter on Resources, which also contains some useful links on the subject.



Stiftung Zewo
Schweizerische Zertifizierungsstelle für gemeinnützige,
Spenden sammelnde Organisationen

Stiftung Zewo
Lägernstrasse 27
8037 Zürich
Telefon +41 (0)44 366 99 55

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Key terms and their usage

This chapter gives an overview of the key terms used in impact assessment and evaluation along with their definitions. It also explains how they are used in the literature and in particular in these guidelines.

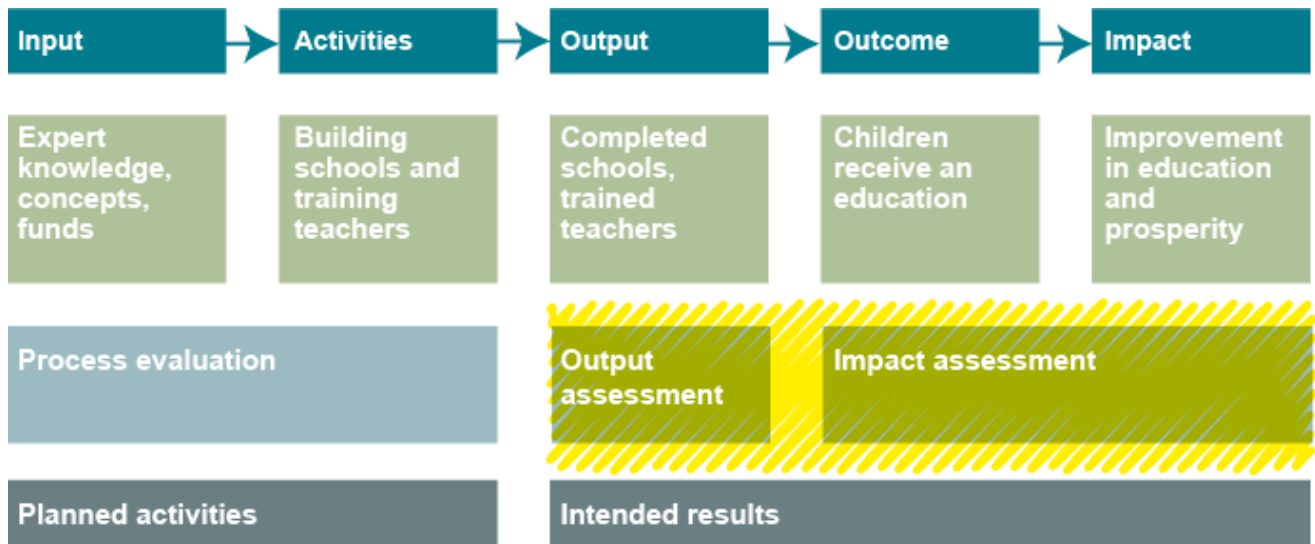
The glossary presents the appropriate terms in German, English, French and Spanish. It is based on the OECD definitions and their usage by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

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Impact assessment

The main aim of outcome and impact assessment is to record the direct effects (outcomes) that development agencies produce for the recipients through their outputs, along with the longer-term effects (impact) on others beyond the target groups. For simplicity's sake, we often use the term "impact assessment" to stand for "outcome and impact assessment" in general.



Input

The financial, human, and material resources used for the development intervention.

Source: OECD/DAC

Activities

Actions taken or work performed through which inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources are mobilized to produce specific outputs.

Source: OECD/DAC

Outputs

The products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention; may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.

Source: OECD/DAC

NGO's outputs include financial contributions, products, information and advice, training and the free distribution and lending of material (equipment, housing, etc.).

Outcomes

The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs.

Source: OECD/DAC

We define as effects on the target groups all outcomes that improve their economic well-being, their level of information, their education, their living standards, their awareness or their capacities.

Impact

Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

Source: OECD/DAC

Effects

Intended or unintended changes due directly or indirectly to an intervention. Effects include outcomes and impact.

Source: OECD/DAC

Results

The output, outcome and impact of a development intervention. Results include outputs, outcomes and impact.

Source: OECD/DAC



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Evaluation

The term 'evaluation' is used in both literature and practice to describe activities at different levels and with varying foci. According to the SDC/OECD glossary, the term 'evaluation' describes a systematic and objective assessment of a project, including its design, implementation and results. An evaluation is intended to pass judgment on a project's relevance, the achievement of its development goals, and its effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

In these guidelines, the term 'outcome and impact assessment' is specifically used to mean the recording and appraisal of a project's effectiveness. Therefore, impact assessment can be part of a comprehensive evaluation. Yet impact assessment can also be carried out separately or integrated into the overall project management.

Three-level planning and evaluation: an illustration

Illustration:
SDC

Efficiency

A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted into results.

Source: OECD/DAC

Effectiveness

The extent to which the development intervention's objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking account of their relative importance.

Source: OECD/DAC

Relevance

The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, global priorities, and partner and donor policies.

Source: OECD/DAC



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Glossary

Unfortunately, the terms associated with impact assessment are used in a very varied and disparate manner in both theory and practice. These guidelines follow the OECD/SDC terminology, although there may occasionally be some deviation from this.

You will find below a summary of the major terms used in these guidelines in four languages (German/English /French/Spanish).

Downloads

- OECD/DAC Glossary (extract as an Excel file)
- OECD/DAC Glossary (extract as a PDF file)

Links

You can find the complete OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management in various languages here.

- [Glossary of key terms in evaluation and results-based management](#)

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What is impact assessment for?

If an aid agency is to use its funds economically and effectively, it needs to know more than what the effect of its action on the target group should be. It also needs to ask itself the following questions on a regular basis:

Are we doing the right things?

- Are we improving the situation of the target group?
- Are we contributing to the achievement of overarching goals?
- Are we setting the right priorities?

Are we doing things properly?

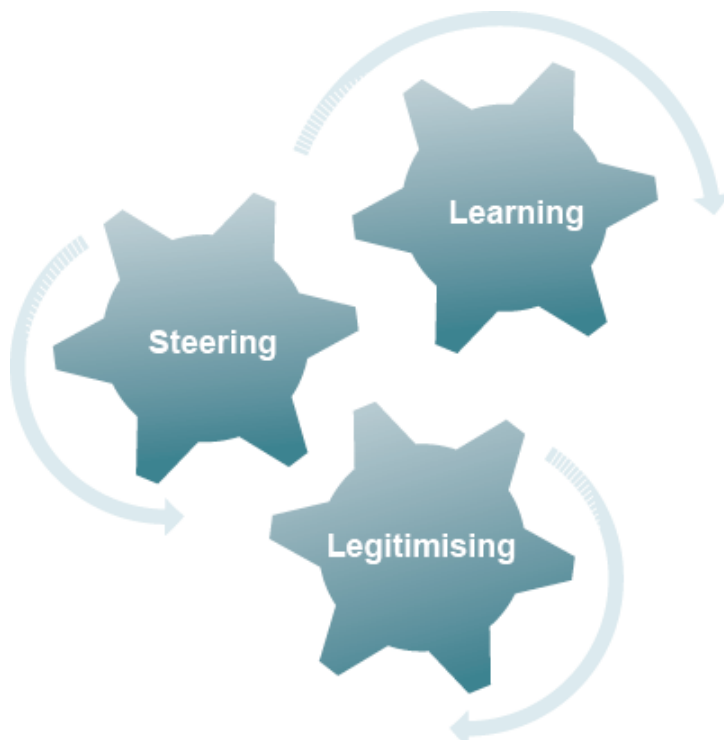
- Are we achieving our objectives?
- What have we done well, and what not?
- Have the target group's expectations been fulfilled?

How can we do things better?

- What should we do differently in future?
- How can we have a greater impact with the same inputs?
- How can we achieve the same impact with less inputs?

IMPORTANT

A systematic impact assessment helps to find answers to these questions. It is a good basis for an organisation to learn from its own experiences, steer projects by results, and legitimise its actions.



There should also be clarification of what the impact assessment findings are going to be used for. The requirements of a good impact assessment system will vary depending on whether it is meant to prove something, improve something or find out something. It also makes a difference whether a specific effect (outcome or impact) needs to be clearly attributed to one activity, or whether it is enough to make a case for the plausibility of the specific project or programme's contribution to achieving the objective.

N.B.

For an impact assessment system to be implemented properly, all the participants must be clear about its purpose and its usefulness from the very beginning. Transparent planning, with broad consultation and the involvement of partners, helps to break down resistance, as well as increasing people's sense of responsibility for the project and assisting their willingness to carry it through.



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Learning

For whom?

The organisation and other direct stakeholders use the results of the outcome and impact assessment. All levels of staff should find out what effect the outputs have had, and to what extent the set objectives have been achieved.

Why?

The organisation is searching for ways to optimise its action and wants to know whether it is doing things properly. It improves its performance by putting findings from the impact assessment into practice in its work. Impact assessment forms the basis of institutional learning and encourages a results-based approach at all levels of the organisation.

How?

Things are studied close-up. It is generally only a specific part of the results chain that is examined. A desire to change is crucial. The findings must be understood and accepted. The willingness to implement change is increased if participants deal with the results on a step-by-step basis. Scheduled 'learning events' promote learning, and the lesson learnt can therefore be processed and disseminated.

By whom?

The impact assessment can be carried out by the participants themselves. It requires a good knowledge of specific measures and short information paths.



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Steering

For whom?

An impact assessment provides those in charge of the organisation with an extra basis for decision-making.

Why?

The organisation wants to know if it is doing the right things. The findings of an impact assessment will help it to understand why its action has succeeded or failed. It can take appropriate measures where necessary to ensure that available resources are used sustainably.

How?

It is important that the results needed by decision-makers are available at the right time. The scheduling of the impact assessment must therefore fit in with existing decision-making processes. The preparation must be simple, intelligible and standardised.

By whom?

The impact assessment may contain both work steps carried out internally and by external experts.



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Legitimising

For whom?

The organisation needs to show accountability to the general public, funders, donors and other stakeholder groups. Development agencies are increasingly legitimising their activities towards their partner organisations and beneficiaries as well (downward accountability).

Why?

The organisation wants to demonstrate what changes its outputs have brought about for the target group and what contribution it has made to solving a problem. It wants to find out whether it was correct to implement the project and whether the activity should be continued. The organisation can gain additional legitimacy for its action with the findings from its impact assessment.

How?

Things are studied wide-angle, i.e. on the entire results chain rather than its individual components. It is crucial for the evaluation that the methodology is rigorous, the design good and the processing carried out correctly. The evaluation must be perceived as credible, technically competent and independent.

By whom?

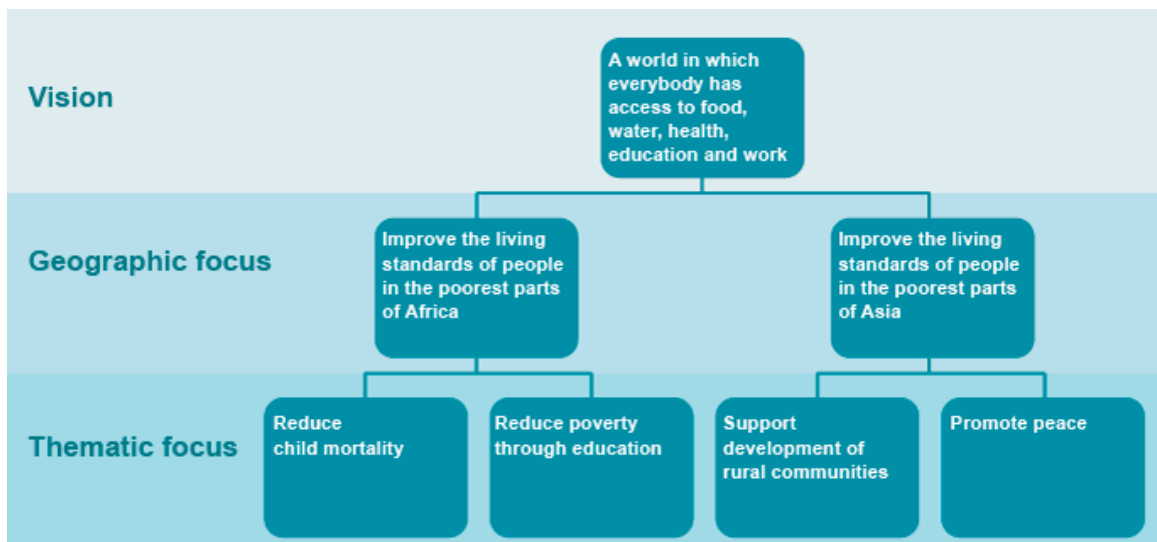
The demands on the impact assessment can be satisfied better if it is carried out by independent experts rather than by directly involved individuals.

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Overarching goals

The project planning must be in accordance with both the organisation's internal and external overarching goals. The Principles of international development cooperation, the efforts by project countries listed in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and donor strategies must be fulfilled along with the NGO's own objectives. Individual projects must therefore be integrated into the organisation's country and issue strategies. These in turn have to be aligned with the organisation's strategic focus, principles and purpose, and must be reviewed and revised in the medium and long term. Hence, results-based project planning also involves harmonising activities and objectives with other actors and aligning them with the partners' (or partner countries') own efforts.



The ZEW guidelines for outcome and impact assessment are intended for use at project and programme level. They show how to measure the outcome of individual projects and programmes on target groups and how to record their contribution to achieving the overarching goals.



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Principles of international development cooperation

There are a number of principles of international development cooperation on which there is a near consensus internationally and nationally:

1. **Participation**

The communities and authorities that benefit from projects and programmes must influence and determine how they are designed, implemented and managed.

2. **Partnership**

Projects and programmes should not be carried out exclusively by the NGO's own structures but also include local partners such as authorities, companies, civil society organisations or representatives of poor communities' interests. Aid is not about one-way giving and taking, but instead about cooperating with partners.

3. **Sustainability**

Projects and programmes should be designed so that they continue to have an impact after staffing and funding support have ended.

4. **Empowerment**

Many forms of development can only be promoted if the people concerned are able to organise themselves, articulate their interests and present them in political forums. NGOs call their support for this process of articulating one's needs 'empowerment'.

5. **Gender equality**

Development NGOs acknowledge that women and men have different opportunities and rights, and pay special attention to promoting and empowering women.

6. **Do no harm**

Development NGOs design their projects so that whatever happens, they do not harm the intended 'beneficiaries'. To do this they must understand the effects of their plans on the various reference groups in the field and take precautions in their programmes and projects that avoid stirring up unwanted conflicts or unintended preferential treatment of individual actors.

Source: Peter Niggli (2008): *Der Streit um die Entwicklungshilfe. Mehr tun – aber das Richtige*. Rotpunktverlag, Zurich.



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UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

UN member states committed themselves to achieving eight goals before the year 2015 in order to improve the fate of one billion people with too little for survival. These goals are now considered to be the international framework for development cooperation.

The eight Millennium Development Goals are:

- 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**
Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.
- 2. Achieve universal primary education**
Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education.
- 3. Promote gender equality and empower women**
Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education in all levels of education no later than 2015.
- 4. Reduce child mortality**
Reduce by two-thirds, by 2015, the under-five mortality rate.
- 5. Improve maternal health**
Reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality ratio.
- 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**
Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of these diseases.
- 7. Ensure environmental sustainability**
Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers. Soils, forests and coastal waters should be managed in a sustainable manner, and the principles of sustainable development integrated into country policies and programmes.
- 8. Develop a global partnership for development**
Develop, by 2015, an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system. Debt burdens should be eased for poor countries and state aid budgets increased.

Download

The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010

Link

Millennium Development Goals



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Paris Declaration

At their meeting on 2nd March 2005 in Paris, ministers representing industrialised and developing countries and the heads of multilateral and bilateral development agencies announced their determination to reform how development cooperation is conducted. In the 'Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness' they laid out the following principles:

- 1. Ownership**
Developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction, improve their institutions and tackle corruption.
- 2. Alignment**
Donor countries align behind these objectives and use local systems.
- 3. Harmonisation**
Donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication.
- 4. Results**
Developing countries and donors shift focus to development results and results get measured.
- 5. Mutual accountability**
Donors and partners are accountable for development results.

Link

Paris Declaration



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Accra Agenda for Action

A further forum on aid effectiveness was held in September 2008 in Accra, Ghana. This resulted in the publishing of the Accra Agenda for Action, which adds to the Paris Declaration in areas in which obstacles to the implementation process had arisen. The Agenda for Action places aid effectiveness in a wider development context. It sets out human rights, gender equality and environmental protection as key factors of effective development aid. In addition, issues of good governance are cited in the Agenda for Action as core factors for effective development aid, and it also states how effective aid can be organised in fragile states.

The key features of the Accra Agenda for Action are:

- **Predictability**
Developing countries will strengthen the linkages between public expenditures and results, and donors will provide 3- to 5-year forward information on their planned aid to partner countries.
- **Ownership**
Developing country governments will engage more with parliaments and civil society organizations.
- **Country systems**
Partner country systems will be used to deliver aid as the first option, rather than donor systems, and donors will share their plans on increasing use of country systems.
- **Conditionality**
Donors will switch from reliance on prescriptive conditions about how and when aid money is spent to conditions based on the developing country's own development objectives.
- **Untying**
Donors will elaborate individual plans to further untie their aid.
- **Aid fragmentation**
Donors agree to avoid creating new aid channels, and donors and countries will work on country-led division of labour.
- **Partnerships**
All actors are encouraged to use the Paris Declaration principles, and the value of South-South cooperation is welcomed.
- **Transparency**
Donors and countries will step up efforts to have mutual assessment reviews in place by 2010. These will involve stronger parliamentary and citizen engagement, and will be complemented with credible independent evidence.

Link

[Accra Agenda for Action](http://impact.zewo.ch/en/impact/overarching_goals/principles/accra_agenda)



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Alliance Sud

Alliance Sud is the umbrella development organisation created by the six Swiss aid agencies Swissaid, Fastenopfer (Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund), Bread for All, Helvetas, Caritas and HEKS (Swiss Interchurch Aid). It campaigns for coherent Swiss policies towards poor countries. The organisation's core policy question is whether development funding serves to meet the requirements of developing countries and the needs of the poorest, or other purposes such as the self-interest of industrialised countries or foreign policy operations that are financed out of the development budget. The members of Alliance Sud have therefore developed an Agenda for Swiss Development Cooperation to go alongside its own Development Policy Guidelines.

Alliance Sud's development policy agenda lists the following points:

Goals of development cooperation

1. Fight poverty and misery
2. Campaign for human rights
3. Facilitate development
4. Stand up for peace
5. Promote gender equality as the basis of development
6. Protect people's livelihoods and secure their rights

Concentrate on what development cooperation can achieve

7. Place the Millennium Development Goals at the centre of all action
8. Maintain a practice- and grassroots-led focus
9. Encourage the independence of civil society organisations
10. Support women's organisations directly
11. Tie government aid to conditionalities
12. Do not use development funds to finance political cooperation with emerging countries

'Paris Declaration': collaboration while retaining Swiss strengths

13. Offer conditional support to the 'Paris Declaration'
14. Reinforce ownership
15. Guarantee the autonomy of civil society organisations
16. Improve reliability and introduce mutual accountability
17. Participate on a selective basis in budget and sectoral aid
18. Factor in differences between donor countries

New possibilities in multilateral development cooperation

19. Take part in multilateral development cooperation by the UN, the World Bank and regional banks
20. Keep an open mind about new developments led by funding agencies based exclusively on developing countries, and be prepared to revise opinion and put the role of the World Bank into perspective
21. Abolish the economic conditionalities still demanded by the World Bank and the IMF and which are still a feature of national development and poverty reduction strategies
22. Make the World Bank commit to a coherent climate policy
23. Make the World Bank and the IMF more democratic

For a larger, targeted and transparent development budget

24. Strive to achieve a development budget that is proportional to Switzerland's position as a winner of globalisation

25. Test new instruments for development funding
26. Reverse the creeping erosion of bilateral development funding
27. Not finance foreign policy and foreign trade operations out of the development budget
28. Keep the development budget transparent

Downloads

- Agenda for Development Cooperation (in German)
- Development policy guidelines (in German)

Links

- Alliance Sud



Stiftung Zewo
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Human rights

There has been much emphasis given in recent times to the fact that basic human rights, as defined in the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', must, on the one hand, serve as the basis of development cooperation and, on the other, it must be a development objective to see that they are applied.

From the perspective of a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) to development cooperation, simple charity is not enough. With a Human Rights Based Approach, projects and programmes are based on a system of rights and responsibilities. Those who benefit from outputs move from being simple beneficiaries to true partners with rights (right-holders); while service providers have a responsibility to provide their services (duty-bearers).

Downloads

OHCHR, Frequently asked Questions on a Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation (2006)
Helvetas, Human Rights Based Approach (2010)



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Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP)

Support from countries in the North is not enough to combat poverty in Southern countries effectively. It is equally important that Southern countries be included in this endeavour as responsible partners. This is why the World Bank and the IMF suggested Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), which are drawn up by the government of the affected poor country. The participatory process to develop these papers involves local stakeholders and external partner organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. PRSPs describe the country's macro-economic, structural and social policies as well as their medium-term growth promotion and poverty reduction plans and the funds required to finance them. Every three years, a report is made on the progress achieved and the PRSPs are updated.

Link

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP)



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Donor Strategies

If projects and programmes are financed by public or private institutional donors, then their strategies must also be taken account of.

Link

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) strategies for specific development issues, to support specific regions and to cooperate with NGOs

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Step 1: Define the project objectives

The effect (outcome and impact) of a project can only be assessed and verified if it is clear what the effect of the planned project should be. Carrying out a situation analysis and defining the outcome and impact objectives form the basis of outcome and impact assessment.

How it is done

Activities Taking account of the environment and the context, the nature of the problematic situation confronting the target group, what has caused it and what the target group's needs are must be clarified. It is necessary to define the change the project is supposed to bring about. The target group must be included from the very beginning and overarching goals must be kept constantly in mind.

Questions Finding answers to the following questions can provide the first step in an impact assessment:

- What is the problem and what are its causes?
- What are the target group's needs and what do other stakeholders want?
- What do we want to change for the target group?
- What longer-term effects do we want to trigger?
- How does this contribute to the overarching goals both within and outside our organisation?
- Which external factors and forces might work against these objectives?

Results

- The project objectives are defined.
- The project goals are clarified.

Resources

- Logical Framework Approach: analysis of stakeholders, problems and objectives
- Outcome Mapping: Intentional Design
- Theory of Change: Identify Goals and Assumptions

IMPORTANT

A project's effects must be clearly distinguished from its outputs. Outputs are the services provided by the project and its products. Effects are the results on the target groups. We differentiate between direct, short-term project effects for the target group (outcomes) and indirect, longer-term effects (impact) for the community. The project's objective at the outcome level is called the project objective. The project's objective at the impact level is termed the project goal. In the ZEW Guidelines on outcome and impact assessment, we are primarily interested in effects at the outcome level.

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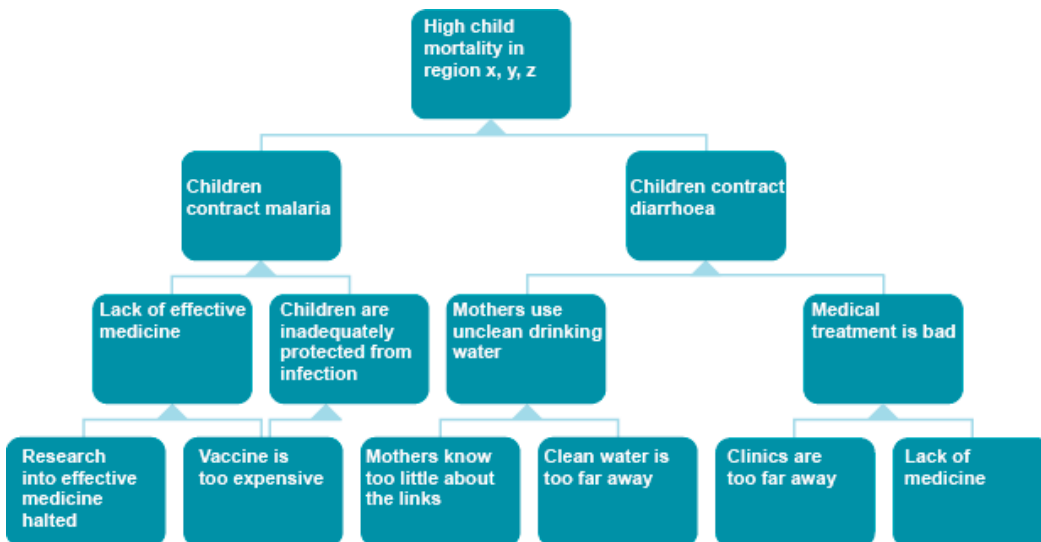
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Problem analysis

The problem tree is a commonly used tool for identifying problems and their causes. This technique forms part of the Logical Framework Approach. In an ideal scenario, the problem tree is elaborated in a multi-stage participatory group discussion. The first step is an open brainstorming round in which problems of importance to the participants are named and noted down on cards. Taking a selected main problem as the starting point, the cards are arranged into a hierarchy of causes and effects. The product of this discussion, the problem tree, should show an accurate, but simplified model of reality.

Example of a problem tree



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What is a project objective?

The project objective describes the project's outcomes: intended and direct, short- and medium-term effects on the target group. The project objective must lie within the scope of the project, and one must be able to directly attribute the effects to the project. The project objective is often formulated in terms of the project's utility for the target group: "*Better... higher...*" It also makes sense to formulate the project objective as a situation to be achieved in the future.

The project objective ought also to describe an outcome, meaning the effect or change that the project is supposed to cause for the target group. In practice it is often not quite so simple to distinguish outcomes from outputs, i.e. the project's products and deliverables. Well-formulated, genuine outcome (and impact) objectives are therefore of great importance if the outcome and impact assessment is to have any significance.

A well-formulated project objective

- Provides a concrete description of the project's effect at the outcome level;
- Was developed in a participatory process;
- Is accepted by the target group and other stakeholders;
- Is clear and concise.

N.B.

- Do not simply summarise the outputs, but describe the effects that should be triggered at a higher level.
- Distinguish clearly between objectives and indicators. There are various ways to distinguish between objectives and indicators. However, individual variants should not be mixed up.

Examples

- **Child health programme**
Improvements are made in the health of children in the poorest parts of the country.
- **Health course project**
Young mothers in regions x, y and z should use clean drinking water more often or boil dirty water.
- **Well-building project**
The population of regions x, y and z should have better access to clean drinking water.
- **Medical care project**
Children suffering from diarrhoea in regions x, y and z should be able to be treated successfully.
- **Education programme**
The communities have better access to formal and informal education.
- **Empowerment project**
Socially and economically disadvantaged people influence decision-making in the region.
- **Project to support farmers' organisations**

The farmers' organisations improve their institutional and organisational capacities.

The farmers' organisations improve the management of their business activities.

In practice, there are objectives for local partner organisations as well. It can be useful for a development agency that has no direct contact to the target groups to concentrate on this level. However, this is not the subject of the impact assessment as discussed in these guidelines.

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Objective and indicator

In practice, the terms ‘objective’ and ‘indicator’ are often defined and used in different ways. At bottom, we can distinguish between three variants, and these are presented in an example in the table below. All three variants are expedient, yet they should not be mixed up.

We shall use Variant 1 in these guidelines.

Variant 1 (e.g. EU)

	Objective	Indicator
Impact level	Less children in x die from diarrhoea	Child mortality in x <5% (by 2015)
Outcome level	Improved access to drinking water	Walk to next well <15 min for 90% of households in x (by 2015)
Output level	Build wells	100 wells operational

Variant 2 (e.g. World Bank)

	Objective	Indicator	Target
Impact level	Less children in x die from diarrhoea	Child mortality in x	<5% (by 2015)
Outcome level	Improved access to drinking water	% of households in x with <15 min walk to next well (by 2015)	90% (by 2015)
Output level	Build wells	Number of wells operational	100

Variant 3

	Objective	Indicator
Impact level	By 2015 child mortality < 15%	Child mortality
Outcome level	90% of households in x have good access to drinking water (by 2015)	% of households in x with walk to next well < 15 min
Output level	Build 100 wells	Number of operational wells

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What is a project goal?

A project goal describes the projects impact: the long-term effects that should (also) be triggered. The words “*The project will contribute to...*” are often used here. This reveals that the intended results at this higher level are in the main not concrete, nor can they be exclusively attributed to this project. The project goal provides the link between the project and its direct effects (project objective), and the overarching goals both within and outside the organisation.

A well-formulated project goal

- Provides a concrete description of the project’s effects at the impact level;
- Provides the link between the project (the project objective) to the overarching goals.

Examples

- **Child health programme**
It contributes to reducing child mortality in the country.
- **Health training project**
It contributes to improving child health in the poorest parts of the country.
- **Education programme**
A better level of education in the communities contributes to lowering poverty.
- **Empowerment project**
It contributes to improving living standards of socially and economically disadvantaged people.
- **Project to support farmers’ organisations**
It contributes to improving the economic situation of the rural population.

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Involvement of target groups

Participation runs through the entire project cycle, from the definition of a strategy and the identification of objectives, via the planning and implementation of activities, right up to the evaluation of the results and the use of the lessons learnt. This is the only way in which the Southern NGO can carry on working successfully after the departure of the Northern NGO. The voice of the South can express itself directly and not via an expert appraisal. Participation begins with the very first conversations.

Participatory definition of project objectives and planning

A whole range of approaches, methods and behaviour patterns about participatory situation and problem analysis, definition of objectives and project planning have been compiled under the title of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Yet it is more a style than an actual method. Some of the issues that form of the basic principles of PRA are:

- Empowerment: Knowledge is generated locally and remains available.
- Respect: Local intellectual and analytic abilities are respected.
- Localisation: Local materials and representations are extensively used.
- Inclusiveness: Special attention is paid to the participation of marginalised groups.
- Visual sharing: Information is presented visually.
- Iterative learning and action: Instruments are put into action step-by-step and on a coordinated basis.
- Triangulation: Research is validated through as many different perspectives as possible.
- Optimal ignorance: Unnecessary precision is avoided.



Photo: Ecosolidar

PRA depends to a great extent on the moderators, who must lead and be the catalyst for the process without dominating it.

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

PRA's style and toolbox are also used for monitoring and evaluation – and therefore for impact assessment. The inclusion of the target groups in the planning and implementation of an impact assessment is decisive for it to be accepted. This is especially true for the development of indicators and data collection, as well as the evaluation of a project's effects. This is the only way to ensure that local partners can also use the impact assessment's results to good effect.

Links

- Participatory Rural Appraisal on Wikipedia
- NGO Programme Karnataka-Tamil Nadu, Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: Field Experiences (2005)
- Feinstein International Center, Participatory Impact Assessment – A Guide for Practitioners (2008)
- eldis, Resource Guide «Participation»

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Step 2: Develop a results model

If one is to assess and verify the effects of a project, it must first be clear how the effects are to be achieved. The project's results model therefore forms a further basis for outcome and impact assessment. This describes the explicit and implicit assumptions about the project mechanism. It details with what means (inputs), measures (activities), deliverables (outputs) and through what interim results the project objective is to be attained. The results model is crucial for understanding and analysing successes and failures. It should be set out in either graphic or written form.

How it is done

Activities Results models should be developed jointly with the target groups. There are often several ways to reach a goal. In such cases, the results model forms a good basis for choosing the most effective or promising strategy of intervention.

Questions Coming up with answers to the following questions can form the second step in an impact assessment:

- How can we solve the problem and change the situation?
- What relation between cause and effect (impact hypothesis) do we base this on?
- What are the preconditions for the objective to be achieved?
- Which external forces work against these objectives?
- What are the conceivable side effects?
- What is the best strategy for reaching the project objective?

Results A graphic results models suitable for showing the complexity of a project:

- Simple Logic Model
- Expanded Logic Model
- Results Framework
- Conceptual Framework

Resources

- Logical Framework Approach: Problem and Objective analysis
- Outcome Mapping: Intentional Design
- Theory of Change: Backwards Mapping, Identifying interventions

IMPORTANT

Even if performance is primarily measured at the outcome level, there is a need for a hypothesis that describes how the effects on the target group (outcomes) contribute to achieving the longer-term development goal (impact). Often it is not possible to clearly attribute a long-term effect to a particular project or programme (attribution gap). There should however be a plausible explanation of how the project contributes to achieve the longer-term development goal.

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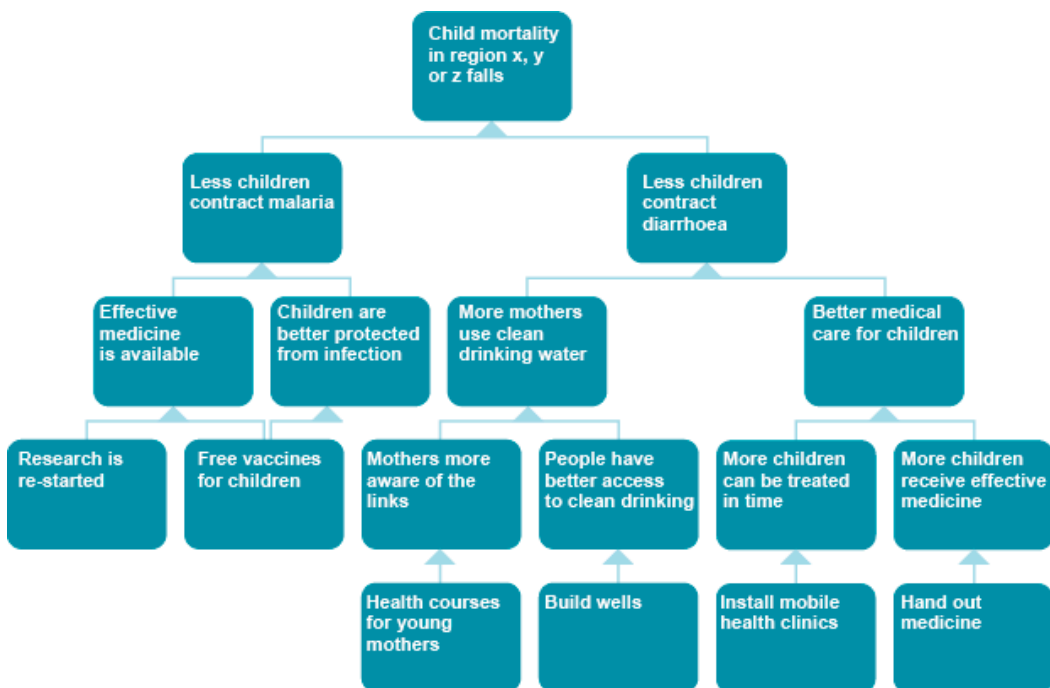
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Solutions

An objective tree is often drawn up in order to find solutions to the problems. This technique is taken from the Logical Framework Approach. The objective tree is often derived from the problem tree by reformulating the individual problems as positive and desirable future situations.

Example of an objective tree



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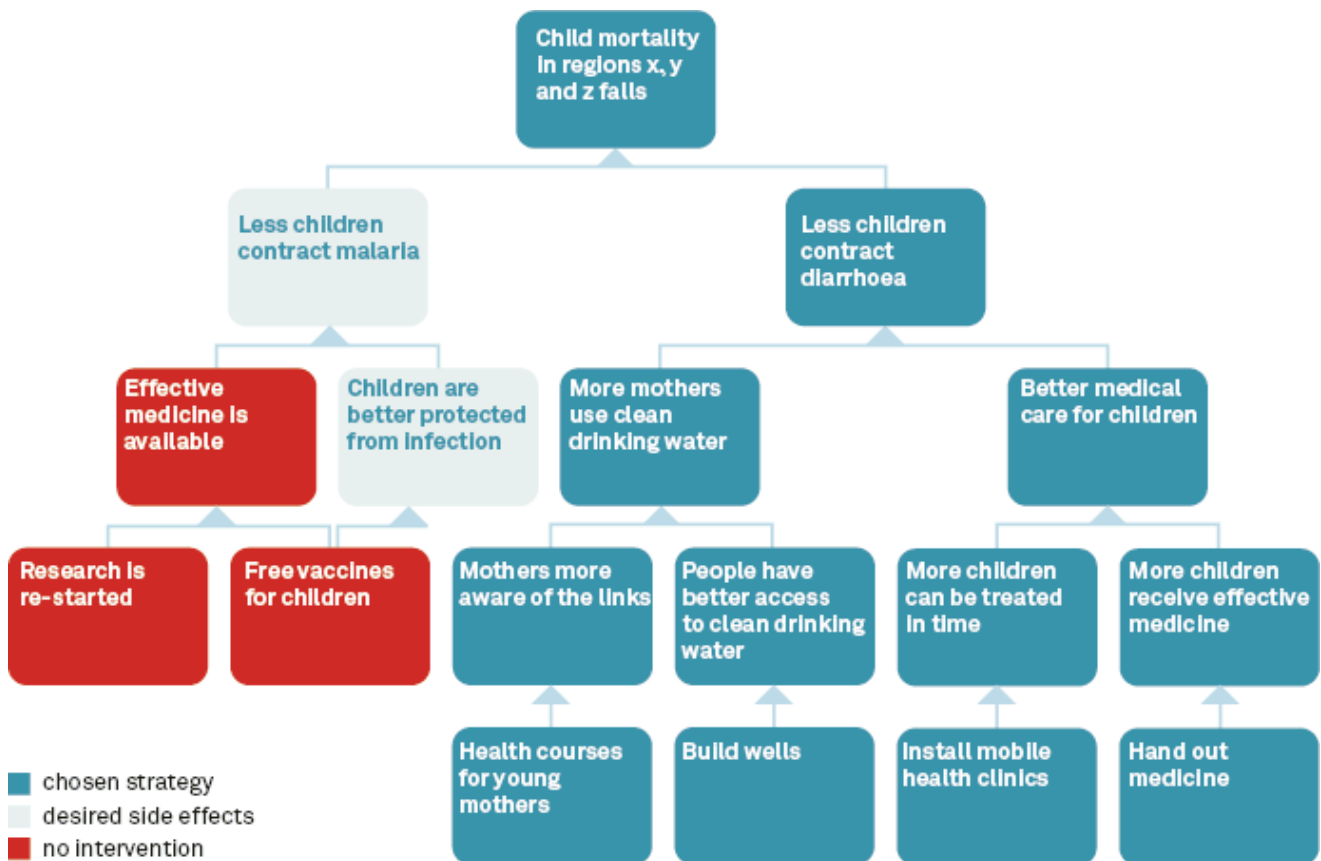
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Strategy of intervention

Problems are often complex, and there are generally several ways to improve a situation. Aid agencies must decide on a strategy of intervention. The objective tree can be a good basis on which to draw up the strategy of intervention.

Example of high child mortality



The following points should be considered to find the best path:

- What lies within our sphere of influence, and what does not?
- Is the cost proportional to the results?
- What are the preconditions for successful implementation?
- What risks are there? How likely is it that they will occur? Could the consequences jeopardise the success of the project?
- What desirable or undesirable effects are conceivable?

An intervention should be as effective as possible and the costs of carrying it through should remain proportionate. The necessary conditions for successful implementation must be realistically present. There should be no risks that

are highly likely to occur and thereby jeopardise the success of the project. Undesirable side effects should be avoided as best as possible.

Evaluation of various measures

Measure	Sphere of influence	Effect	Cost	Precondition	Risks	Side effects
Health courses	Education OK	Medium	Low	Realistic	Low	Positive
Well building	Infrastructure OK	High	High	Realistic	Medium	No negative
Medical care	Humanitarian aid OK	Medium	Medium	Realistic	Medium	Low negative
Malaria vaccinations	–	–	–	Not present	–	–
Malaria research	Not within our sphere of influence	–	Very high	–	–	–

Chosen strategy of intervention

We implement a programme containing the following projects in the poorest parts of Country A from 2008 to 2015:

1. **Health course project**

We offer preventive health courses for young mothers so that they may find out about the links between drinking water and health and adjust their behaviour accordingly.

2. **Well-building project**

We improve the infrastructure and build wells so that within a short space of time more people have access to clean drinking water and use it instead of drinking unclean water.

3. **Medical care project**

We improve medical care for children by introducing mobile health clinics and handing out medicine.

Contribution to longer-term development goal (impact hypothesis)

Less children falling ill with diarrhoea as a result of increased use of clean drinking water and ill children receiving better medical care are both contributions to reducing child mortality in the affected region (Millennium Development Goal).

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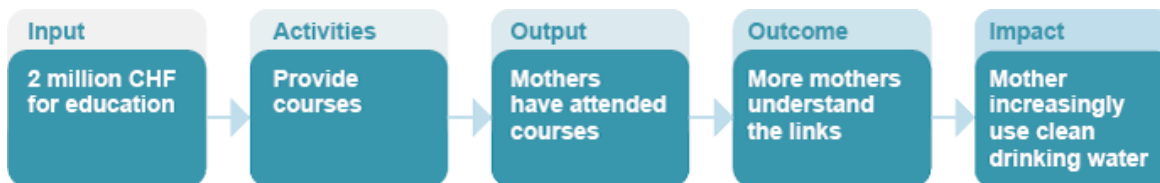
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Simple Logic Model

The Logic Model is a simple and widespread form of illustrating a results model. It depicts how a project is to function in the form of a linear chain of cause and effect. The illustration does usually not include external factors.

Example of a health course



Suitability

This model forms a good basis for monitoring and assessing the outcomes of simple projects in situations of low complexity.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Simple illustration	Reduces cause and effect to a linear chain
Focus on the project's core elements	Does not take account of external factors
Good basis for impact assessment	The process of change is not visible
Widely used	Risk of tunnel vision

N.B.

Do not confuse 'Logic Model' with 'Logframe'. The 'Logic Model' is an important part of the widely used Logical Framework Approach. It is the basis for the Logical Framework Matrix, known as 'Logframe', but 'Logic Model' should not be equated with 'Logframe'. Firstly, a Logframe contains more information than a pure Logic Model and secondly, far more complex and not strictly linear results models should be used to produce a Logframe. Cf. overview of the [Logical Framework Approach](#).

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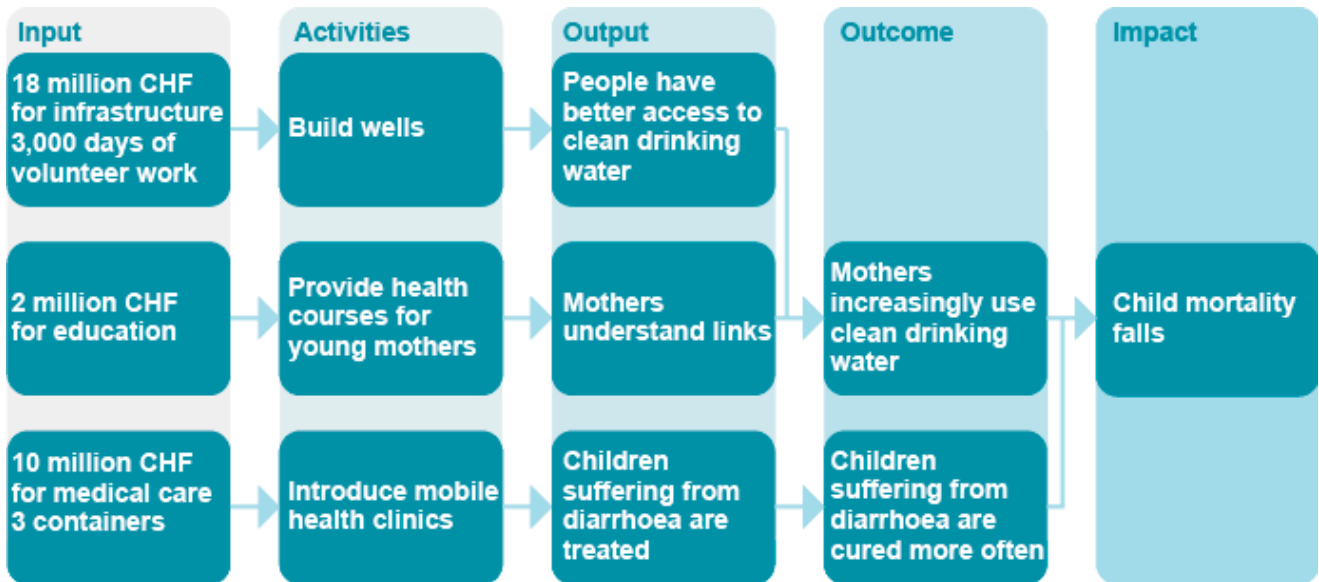
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Expanded Logic Model

A simple Logic Model often does not allow one to visualise the effects of more complex projects or entire programmes. It must be expanded when several activities lead to the same output. It can also be organised as several interlinking steps. This kind of expanded Logic Model is often used in practice.

Example of a child health programme



Suitability

This model is well suited as a basis for assessing the outcomes of simple programmes or detailed projects.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Relations between problems can be simply illustrated	
Focus on central elements	Does not take account of external factors
Good basis for impact assessment	The process of change is not visible
Widely used	Risk of tunnel vision

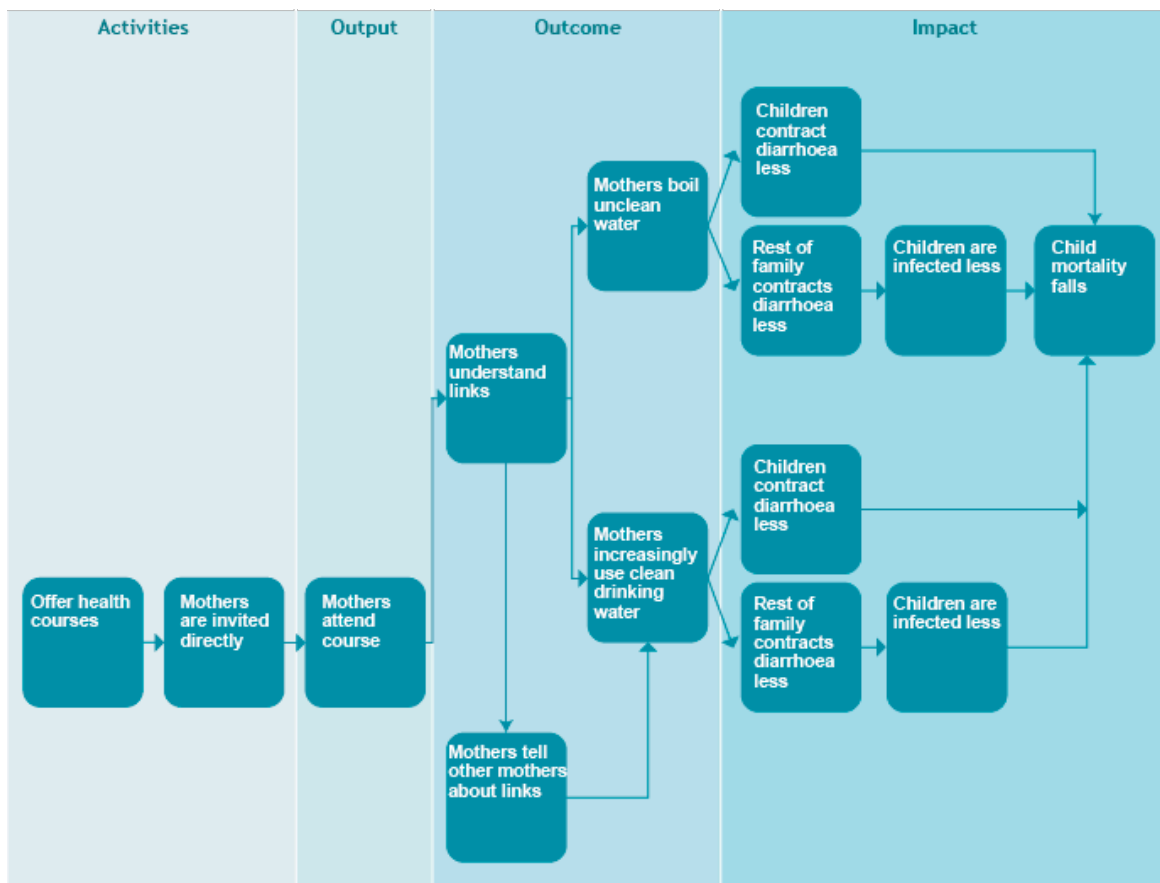
Further examples

The two examples of health courses and child health programme are also Logic Models, even though they have a higher degree of detail. In particular, they allow for several outputs and outcomes per results strand. It should also be noted that the outcome of a project may be an outcome from the perspective of a higher programme, just as an impact of a project may be an outcome of a programme.

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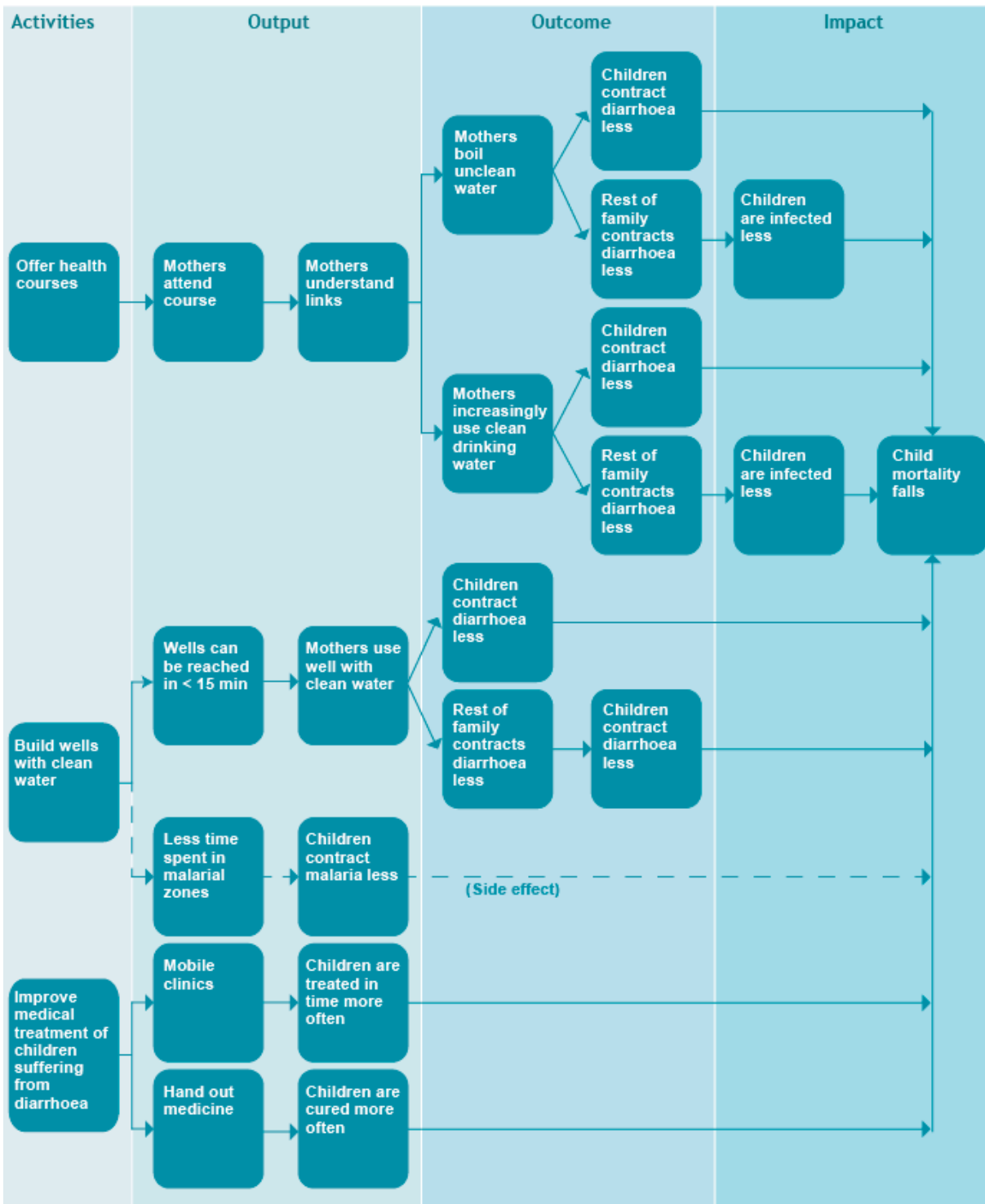
Example of health course project



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Example of a child health programme



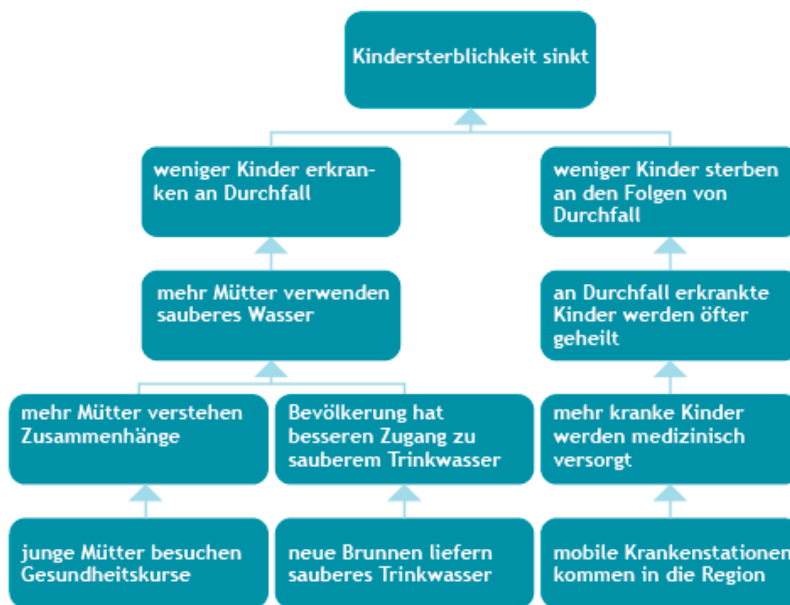
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Results Framework

A Results Framework presents the results of the project as a series of interim results to be achieved (effects, but also outputs). The activities needed for this are generally not mentioned explicitly.



Suitability

This model is often used to depict entire programmes with several projects that might be carried out by a number of service providers.

Advantages

- Relations between projects can be presented clearly
- Focus on the project's - or programme's - core elements
- Good basis for impact assessment

Disadvantages

- Takes no account of external influences
- Risk of tunnel vision

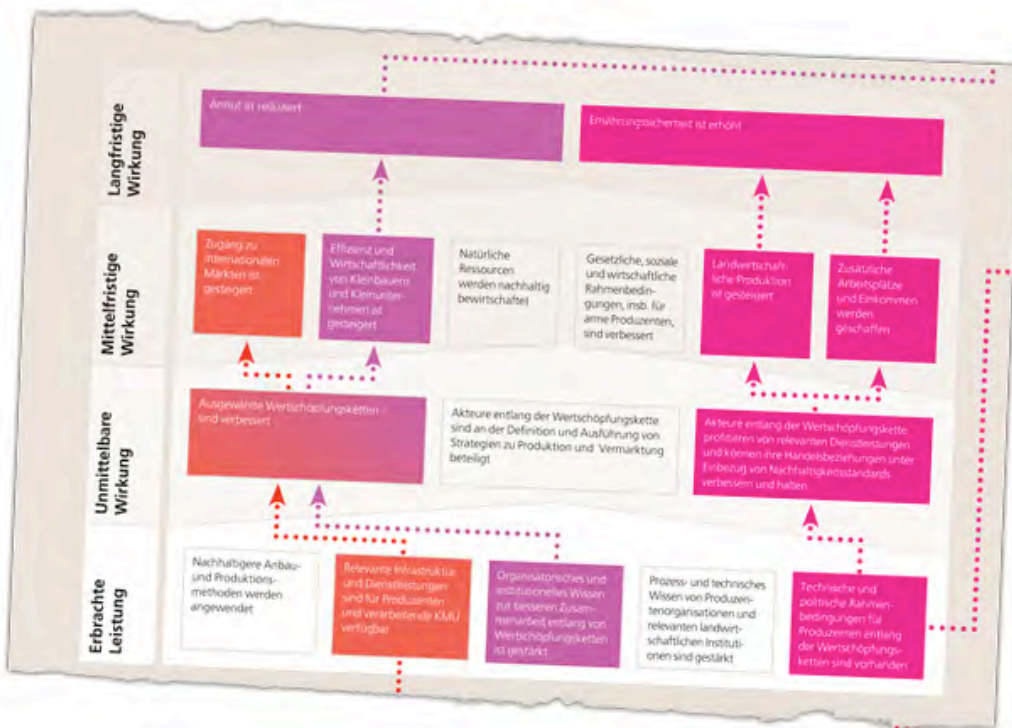
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Example of a value chain

Example of a Results Framework from the 2010 SDC Report on effectiveness in the Agricultural Sector (further examples in the report).



LINK

SDC (2010) – Report on Effectiveness: Swiss Development Cooperation in the Agricultural Sector

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Step 3: Plan the outcome and impact assessment

Even before the project is implemented, plans must be laid for how its effects are to be measured and assessed. The results of this step must be written down.

How it is done

Activities There must be clarification of what has to be answered to whom for what purpose. This gives indications of how findings of the impact assessment are to be compared, and who will later carry out the evaluation. The targeted outputs and effects must be converted into indicators and target values must be defined. For each indicator, the methods used to collect the necessary data must be planned.

Questions Coming up with answers to the following questions can be the third step in an impact assessment:

- What do we want to find out?
- What will we compare the results against?
- Who is to carry out the impact assessment, and who is responsible?
- Which indicators can we use to measure our outputs (deliverables) and outcomes (effects)?
- What are the sources of this data?
- How is the data collected and who is responsible for doing it?
- Has everything been considered in the drawing up of the terms of reference for the impact assessment?

Results

- Responsibilities have been defined.
- The indicators, data sources, collection methods, frequency and timing of the measurements are clear, as the reference figures for the purposes of comparison.
- The design, plan and terms of reference for the impact assessment have been formulated.

Resources

- Logical Framework Approach: Logical Framework Matrix
- Outcome Mapping: Outcome and Performance Monitoring, Evaluation Planning
- Theory of Change: Developing Indicators

Examples

- Well building: objectives, indicators, measurement
- Health course: objectives, indicators, measurement
- Medical care: objectives, indicators, measurement

IMPORTANT

There are important feedback loops within this step and also to the previous steps (Define the project objectives and Develop a results model):

- Formulating the objectives through indicators helps to check that the planned project objectives are realistic and achievable.
- Planning data collection helps to check whether the indicators can be measured in a timely fashion and at a justifiable cost.
- Combining the two shows whether the evaluation question can be answered.

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Comparisons

Planning an assessment always also involves defining a standard of comparison to evaluate the subject under study. How the standard of comparison is defined determines to a great degree how the measurements should be approached. The following dimensions must be kept in mind when doing this:

- **Timing**
The measurements can be taken before the project, at the end, or after completion. If the aim is to investigate what happens over the course of the project, then additional measurements need to be made during the project.
- **Reference values**
Actual performance can be compared with the objectives, the initial situation or with a control group.

Basic models

The following basic models can be used to measure the achievement of objectives, changes in the target group or the project's influence.

Target/performance comparison	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	
Target group		Measurement 1	
Before & after comparison	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion (ex post)
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 2	
Comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion (ex post)
Target group		Measurement 1	
Control group		Measurement 2	
Before & after comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion (ex post)
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 3	
Control group	Measurement 2	Measurement 4	

IMPORTANT

A rigorous impact assessment can in principle only be carried out with a before-and-after comparison combined with a control group. This makes it possible to clearly attribute observed changes to the project and to exclude external influences. In practice, institutional donors increasingly demand this kind of comparative model. However, they are hard work; at least four measurements are needed. The choice of the control group and the taking of samples are no laughing matter. Smaller organisations in particular will hardly have the necessary resources to carry out such rigorous impact assessments, and even larger organisations have to consider when and where they make sense.

We would like to argue here that simpler models may sometimes be appropriate. They are, for example, suited for learning within organisations. However, to enable before-and-after comparisons a measurement must be made at the beginning of the project (baseline study); to enable target/performance comparisons clear objectives must be set.

It requires rigorous impact assessment methods to clearly attribute a result to an intervention. Simpler approaches are sufficient to make a plausible case that an intervention has made a contribution to achieving overarching goals. Whatever the case, it must be clear how the impact assessment has been conducted and what conclusions can be derived from it.

N.B.

It is frequently the case that, in practice, only the final situation of a project is described. Yet, for an impact assessment, a simple description of the target group with no link to the objectives, the initial situation or a control group is not sufficient.

Expanded models

More complex models that allow for firmer assertions can be created by expanding and combining basic models.

Before & after and target/performance comparison	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 2	

Ex post comparison	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 2	Measurement 3

Ex post and target/performance comparison	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 2	Measurement 3

Ex post comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 3	Measurement 5
Control group	Measurement 2	Measurement 4	Measurement 6

Target/performance comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	
Target group		Measurement 1	
Control group		Measurement 2	

Before & after and target/performance comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 3	
Control group	Measurement 2	Measurement 4	

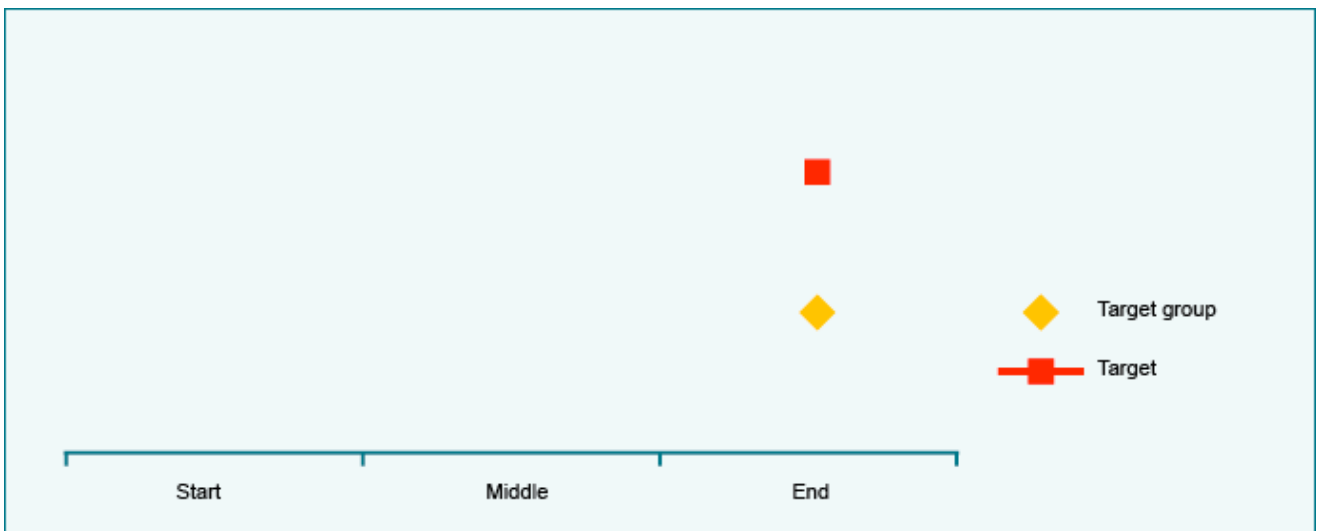
Ex post and target/performance comparison with control group	Before the project (ex ante)	At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Objectives		Definition	Definition
Target group	Measurement 1	Measurement 3	Measurement 5
Control group	Measurement 2	Measurement 4	Measurement 6

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Target/performance comparison



Characteristics

This is a snapshot that compares the actual situation of the target group at a specific point in time with the intended situation at that point in time.

Example

At the end of the process, 40% of young mothers in the region know about the link between clean drinking water and health. That is markedly less than planned (target).

Advantages	Disadvantages
A simple way of recording that the objective has been achieved.	There is no link to the initial situation – it is not known whether and how the target group's situation has changed since the beginning of the intervention.
The investment in data collection is low.	It is not known whether and how the target group's situation would have changed without the project.
The methodological know-how is available internally or can be learnt.	No assertions can be made about the effects.
	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.

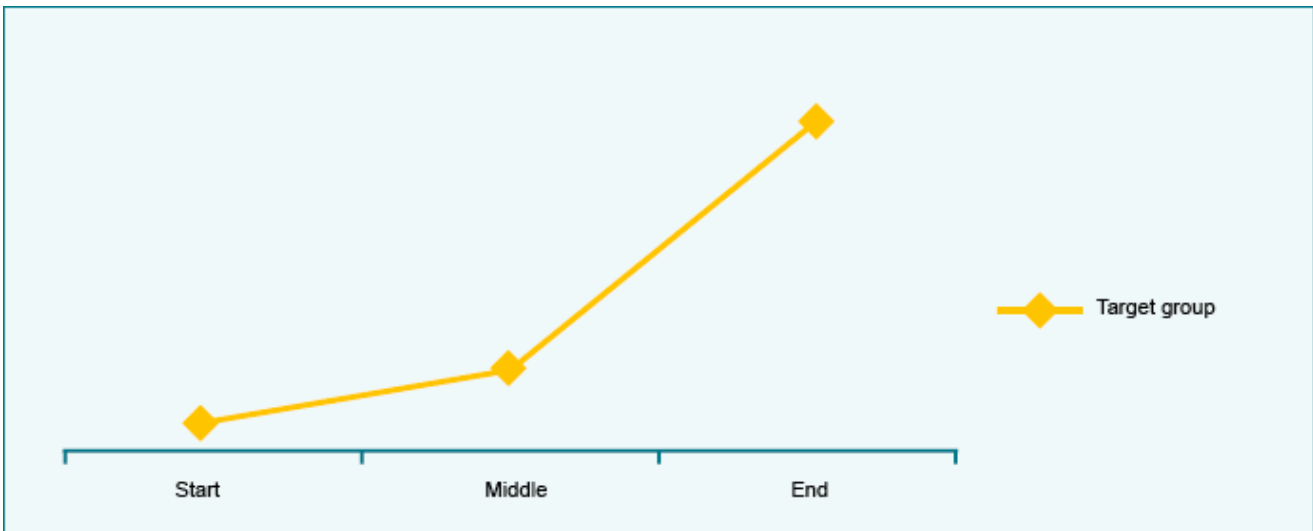
Suitability

This model is partly suited for steering by the organisation and for learning within the organisation. It is suitable for legitimising when there are agreed objectives. It is of particular use when there is a lack of data about the initial situation and a lack of suitable control groups – or when these can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost. A one-off target/performance comparison is not suitable for an impact assessment.

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Before & after comparison



Characteristics

It describes how the target group of a project or programme develops, for example from the start and until the end of the project. Additional measurements provide information about the evolution of the project.

Example

70% of the rural population in Region x is within 15 minutes' walk to drinking water. At the beginning of the project, only 10% of the population was within 15 minutes' walk of clean drinking water.

Advantages	Disadvantages
A plausible case can be made whether an intervention has contributed to the targeted effects or not.	It is not known whether and how the situation of the target group would have changed without the project. It is not possible to clearly attribute the results to the intervention.
The effort required for data collection can often be justified.	There is no link to the objective. It is not known whether and to what degree the organisation has achieved the planned results.
Methodological know-how is often available internally or else can be learnt.	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.

Suitability

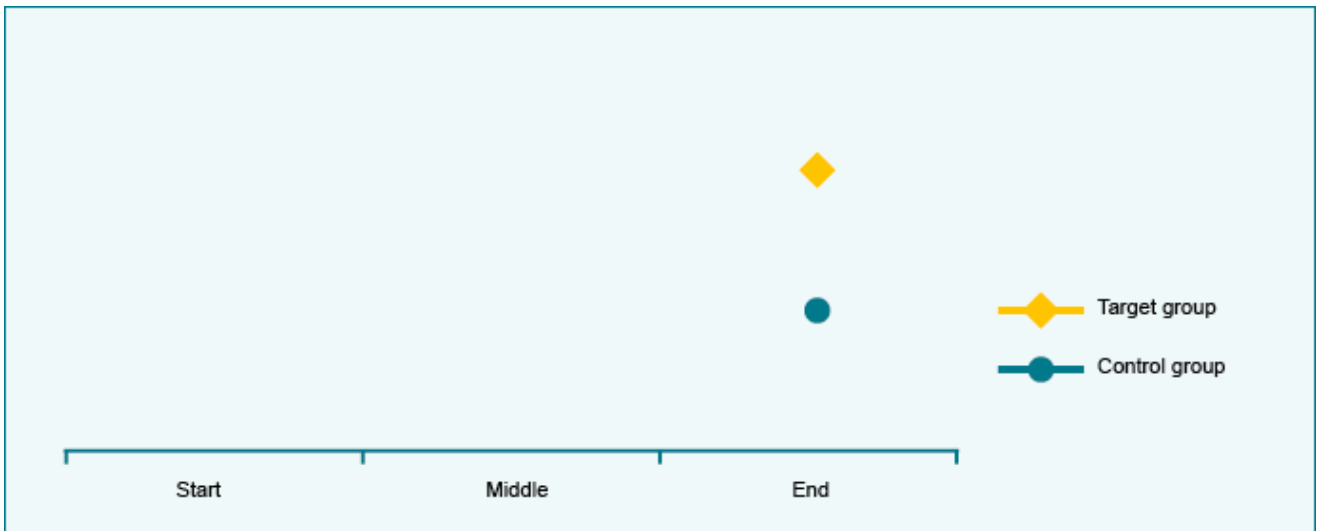
This model is suitable for learning from the observed changes, as well as for legitimising the project when making a plausible case for effects is enough. It is of use when there is data about the initial situation or else can be reconstituted at an acceptable cost, and if there is a lack of suitable control groups or if these can only be put together with a disproportionate amount of effort, or else if there are ethical reservations about a comparison with control groups.

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Comparison with control group



Characteristics

This is a snapshot in which the situation of the target group is compared with the situation of the control group at a particular moment in time.

Example

90% of children suffering from diarrhoea in Region x received successful medical treatment. In the control group in Region Y, only 60% of the children suffering from diarrhoea received successful medical treatment.

Advantages	Disadvantages
A plausible case can be made whether an intervention has contributed to the targeted effects or not.	There is no link to the initial situation. It is not known whether and how the situations of the target and control groups has changed since the start of the intervention.
If the target and control groups were identical at the start, it is possible to make assertions about the effect of the project on the target group.	Often there are no identical groups and methodological know-how is required if control groups have to be reconstituted. The choice of the control group is no small matter.
The cost of data collection (2 measurements) is often justifiable.	There is no link to the planned objectives. It is not known whether and to what extent the organisation has achieved its objective.

Es sind keine Aussagen zur Nachhaltigkeit möglich

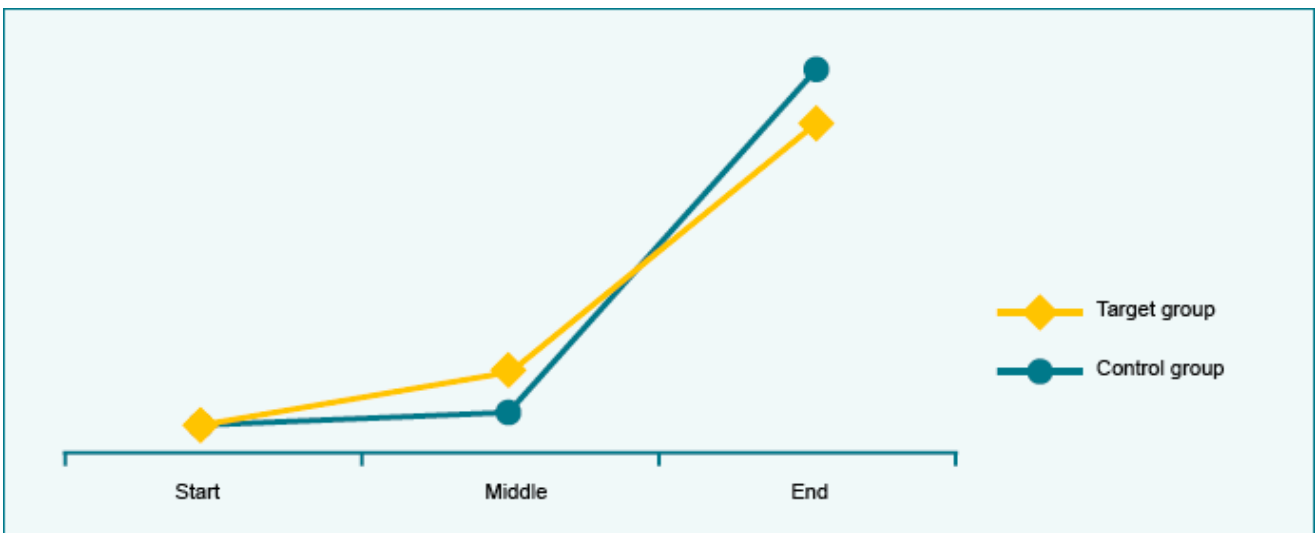
Suitability

A comparison with a control group is more meaningful and therefore better suited to legitimising a project, as long as suitable control groups are available or can be constituted, and as long as there are no ethical reservations. It is used in cases where there is a lack of data about the initial situation or where these can only be obtained at great cost.

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Before & after comparison with control group



Characteristics

The development of the target group is compared with that of the control group. Additional measurements provide information about the evolution of the project.

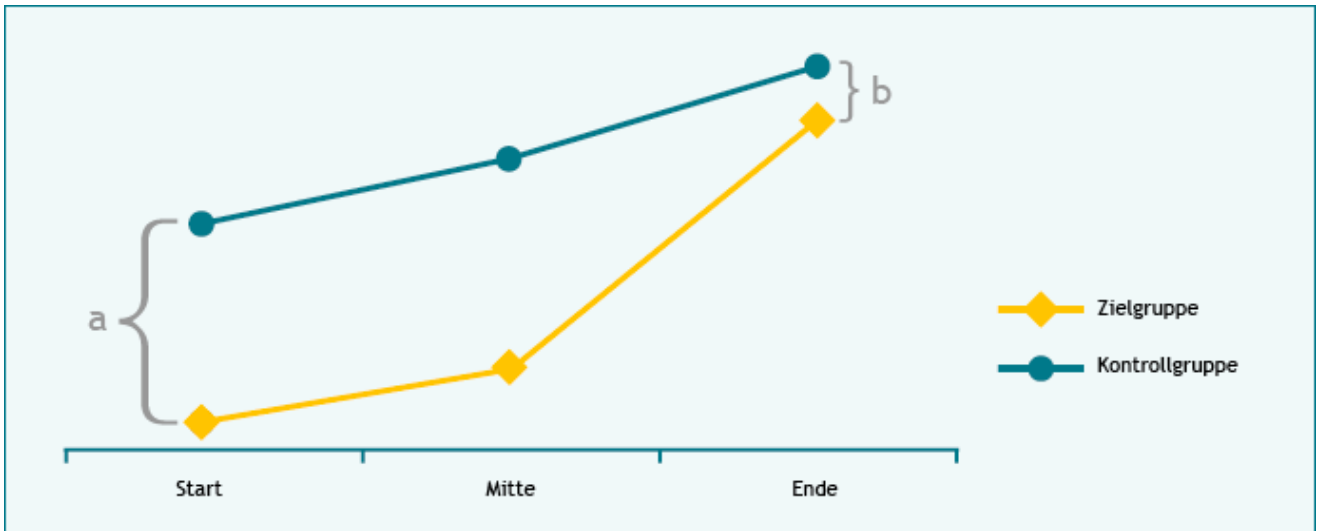
Example

90% of children suffering from diarrhoea received successful medical treatment. That is far more than at the start of the project, but the situation of the control group has improved even more over the same duration without any intervention.

Advantages	Disadvantages
A certain effect can be attributed the intervention or denied.	Data collection is difficult and at least 4 measurements are required.
The approach has a sound methodological basis.	This method is methodologically demanding.
	The achievement of the objectives is not measured.
	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.

Suitability

This model is well suited to legitimising projects, but also for steering and learning inside the organisation. It is used when the effect needs to be proved clearly and there are no ethical reservations about comparisons with control groups. It must be possible to define or constitute suitable control groups.



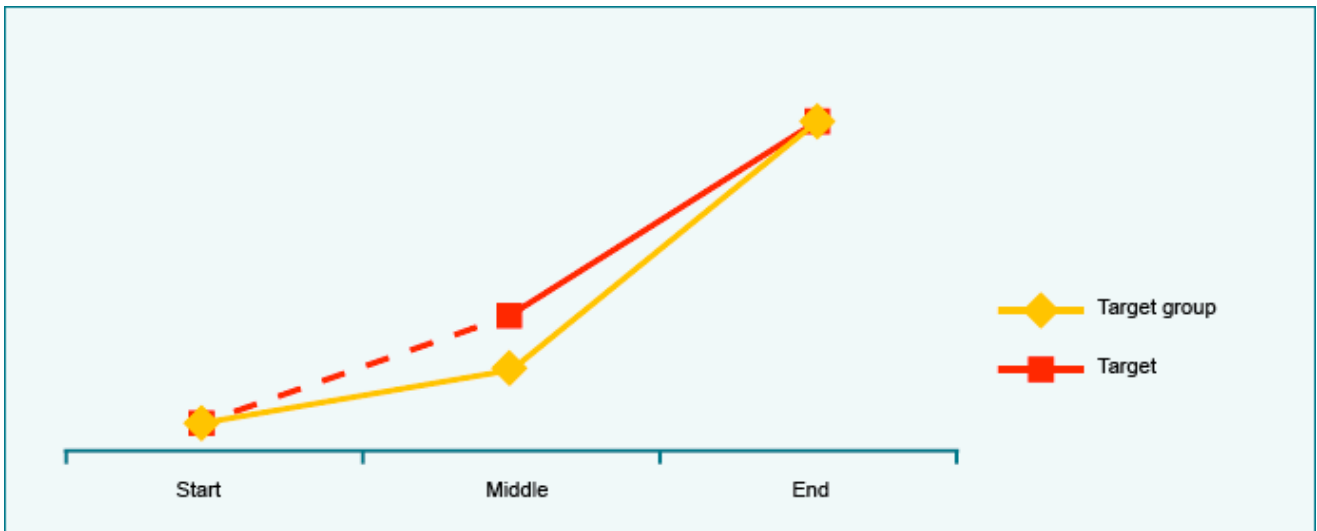
If the initial situation of the control group is not identical with that of the target group, then the difference between the target and the control group must be defined at the start (a) and at the end (b) of the project. The assertion about the effect of the project depends, in this case, whether the difference has increased or decreased. This method is known as "difference in difference".

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Before & after and target/performance comparison



Characteristics

The target group's actual development is compared with the target group's planned development. Additional measurements provide information about the evolution of the project.

Example

80% of young mothers in Region x know about the links between clean drinking water and health. That is three times as many as at the start of the project and as many as intended.

Advantages

It shows the degree to which the set objectives could be achieved.

A plausible case can be made whether an intervention has contributed to the targeted effects or not.

The investment in data collection (2 measurements) is often justifiable.

The methodological know-how is often available or can be learnt.

Disadvantages

It is not known whether and how the situation of the target group would have changed without the project. It is not possible to clearly attribute the effects to the intervention.

No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.

Suitability

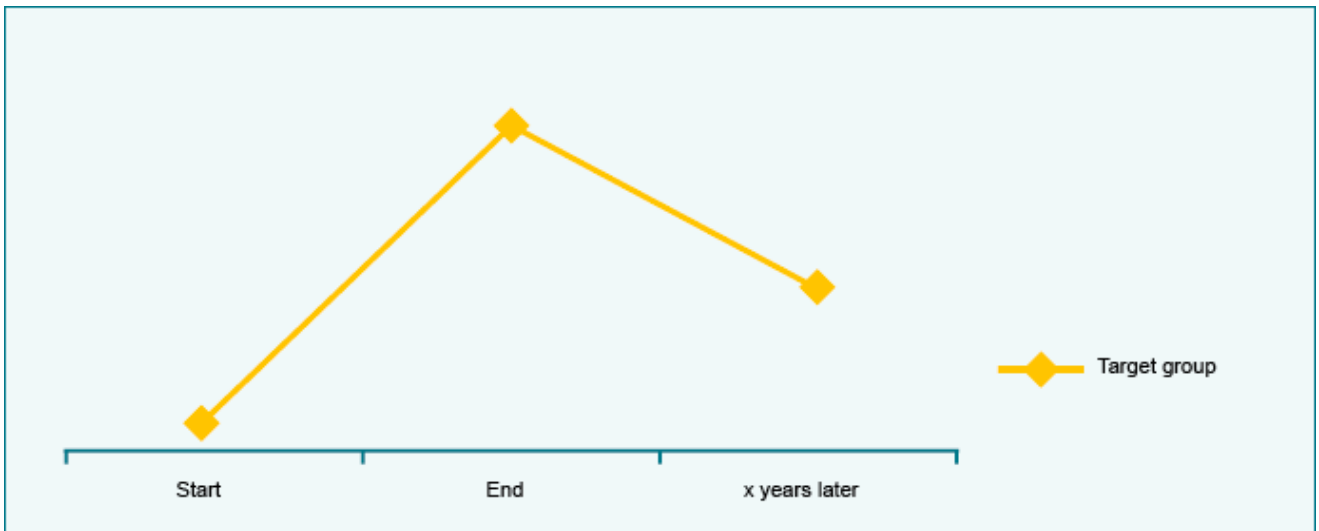
It is suitable for learning and especially for steering the organisation. It can also serve legitimation purposes when the agreed objectives require only a plausible case for effects and data about the initial situation is available, and if there are no suitable control groups or if there are ethical reservations about the comparisons with control groups.

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Ex post comparison



Characteristics

The target group's development is examined beyond the end of the project.

Example

Three years after the end of the project, 70% of the rural population of Region x live within 15 minutes' walk of clean drinking water. That is more than before the project, but less than at the end of the project.

Advantages

The investment in data collection can often be justified.

The methodological know-how is often available internally or can be learnt.

A plausible case can be made for whether an intervention has made a contribution to the planned effects or not.

It can show whether the intervention was sustainable or not.

Disadvantages

External influences cannot be excluded, as there is no comparison with a control group.

It is not clear whether the set objectives have been achieved.

The findings only become available years after the completion of the intervention.

Suitability

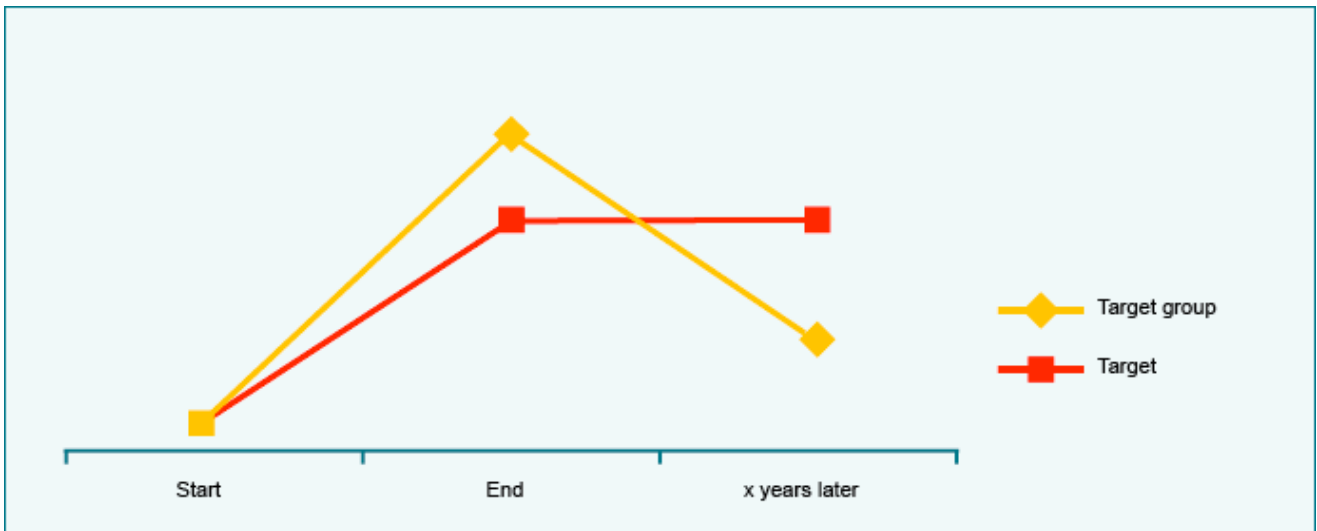
It is put to use when the sustainability of an intervention needs to be studied. Due to the time lag, the information is generated too late for short-term legitimising and for immediate steering and learning. It can, however, be used for the organisation's long-term development and strategic direction.

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Ex post and target/performance comparison



Characteristics

The target group's actual development is compared with the planned development beyond the end of the project.

Example

Three years after the end of the intervention, 30% of young mothers in Region x know about the link between clean drinking water and health. This is more than before the project, but less than at the end of the project, and less than planned.

Advantages

It shows to what degree the set objectives were achieved.

A plausible case can be made for whether an intervention has made a contribution to the planned effects.

It can show whether an intervention was sustainable or not.

The methodological know-how is available or can be learnt.

Disadvantages

It is not known whether and how the target group's situation would have changed without the project. It is not possible to clearly attribute the effect to the intervention.

Suitability

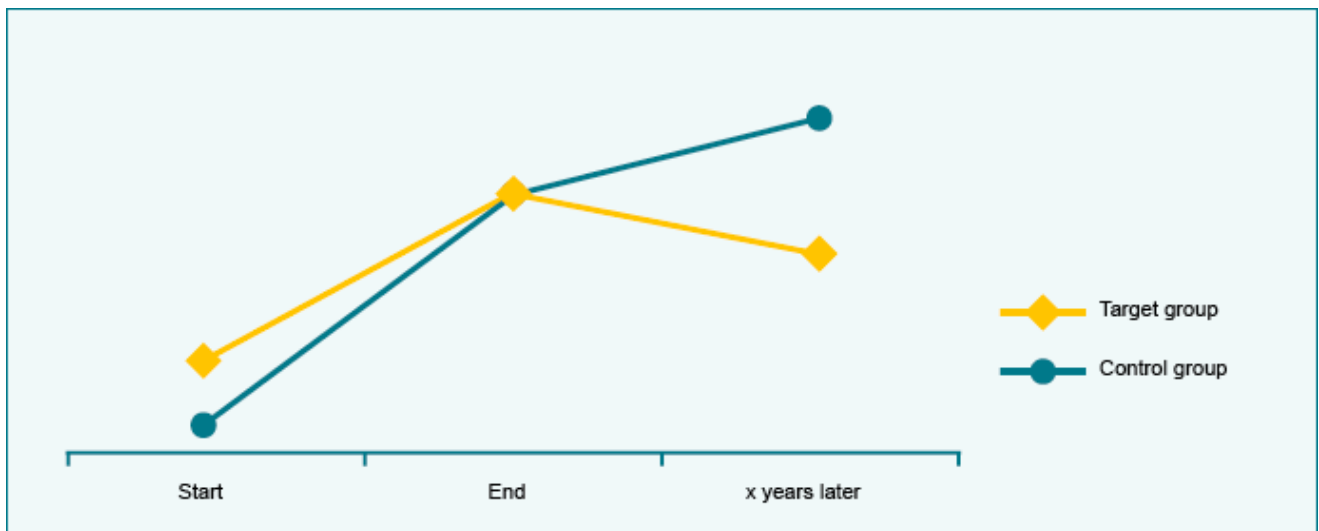
It is suitable as a legitimising factor when there are agreed objectives or when it is enough to state a plausible case for an effect. It is put to use when the sustainability of the intervention needs to be studied, and when a comparison with a control group is too much work or ethically questionable. Due to the time lag, the information is available too late for immediate legitimisation and for short-term steering and learning. It can, however, be used for the organisation's long-term development and strategic direction.

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Ex post comparison with control group



Characteristics

The target group's development is compared with that of the control group beyond the end of the project.

Example

30% of young mothers in Region x know about the link between clean drinking water and health. That is more than before the project, but less than at the end of the project. The level of knowledge of the control group has progressed from a weak initial position to the level of the target group over the same period, and is continuing to improve.

Advantages

It can be scientifically proven whether an intervention had a sustainable effect or not.

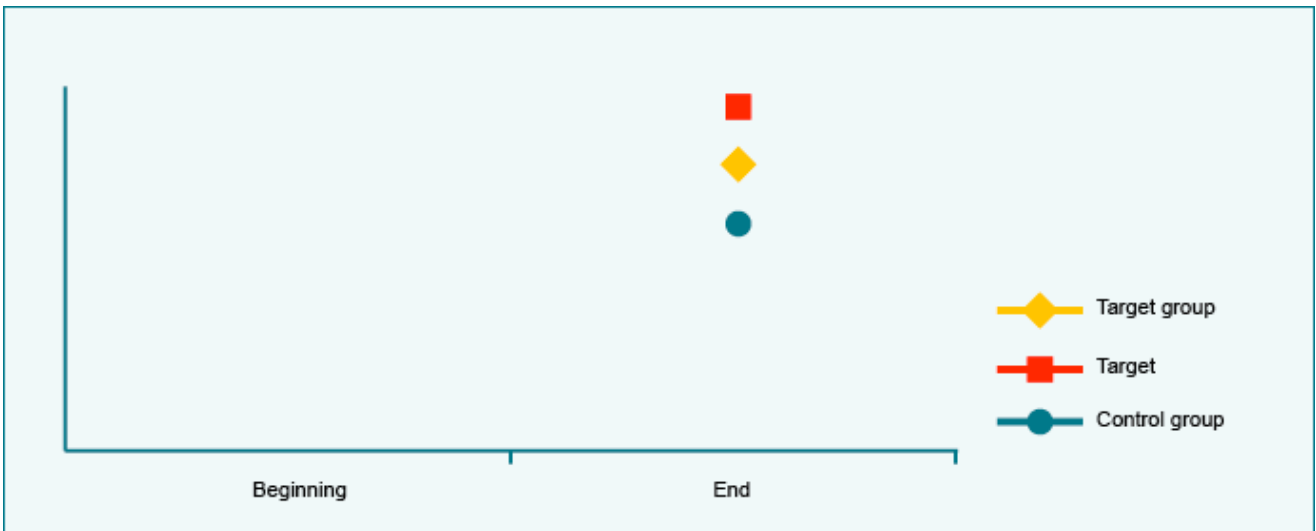
Suitability

This model is suitable when there needs to be a scientific examination of whether the intervention has had a sustainable effect. It is put to use when there are no reservations about comparisons with control groups and suitable control groups can be defined or constituted. Data about the initial situation might have to be reconstituted. If the initial situation of the control group is not identical with that of the target group, then it is the difference between the target and the control groups that needs to be analysed. Assertions about the effects depend in this case on whether the difference increases or decreases. Due to the time lag, the information becomes available too late for legitimising the project in the short term and for immediate steering and learning. It can, however, be used for the organisation's long-term development and strategic direction.

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Target/performance comparison with control group



Characteristics

This is an occasional examination, whereby the situation of the target group is compared at a specific point in time with the objectives and with the situation of the control group.

Example

70% of young mothers in Region x know about the link between clean drinking water and health. That is more than in the control group, but less than intended.

Advantages	Nachteile
The investment in data collection is often still justifiable.	There is no link to the initial situation. It is not known whether and how the situation of the target and control groups has changed since the beginning of the intervention and whether they started from the same initial position.
It is a simple way of recording the achievement of objectives.	There are often no identical control groups.
If there are identical control groups, then assertions can be made about the effects of the project on the target group.	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.

Suitability

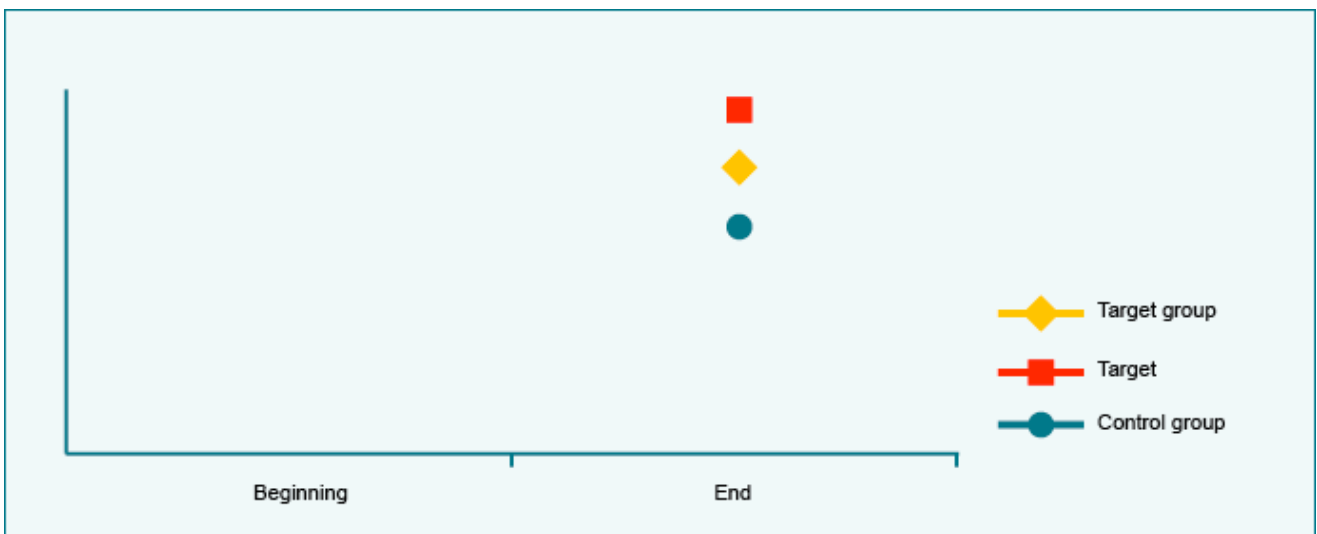
This model is only partly suitable for steering and learning within the organisation. It can however be used for legitimisation purposes with agreed objectives. It is used in practice when data about the initial situation is lacking or can only be obtained at a disproportionately high cost, and when there are suitable control groups.

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Before & after and target/performance comparison with control group



Characteristics

The development of the target group is linked to that of the control group and the objectives.

Example

50% of the rural population in Region x lives with 15 minutes' walk of clean drinking water; at the beginning of the project it was only 30%. The improvement of 20 percentage points is just as good as in the control group in Region y, whose access to drinking water improved over the same period from 50% to 70% of the population. The target of 60% could not be achieved.

Advantages	Disadvantages
It can be shown what changes the intervention has brought to the target group	Data collection is difficult and requires at least 4 measurements.
It can be recorded whether the objectives have been achieved.	The approach is methodologically demanding.
The approach is methodologically sound.	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.
It is possible to attribute the effect to the intervention.	

Suitability

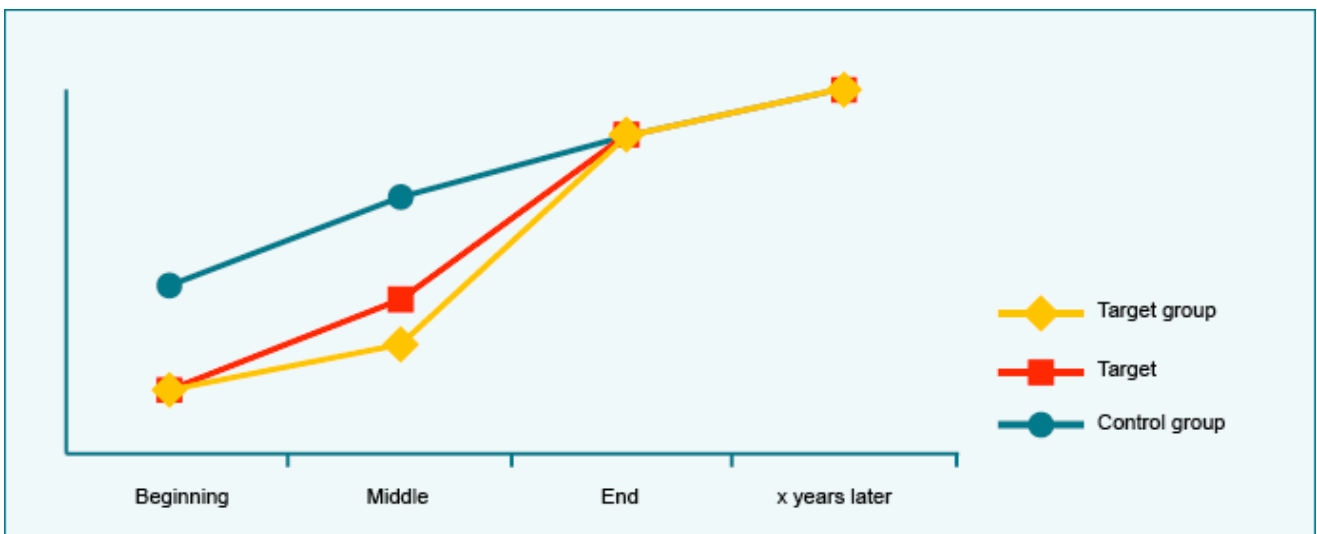
This model is suitable for learning, steering and legitimation. It is used for agreed objectives and in particular applied when effects must be clearly demonstrated and there are no ethical reservations about comparisons with control groups. Suitable control groups must be able to be defined or constituted. If the initial situation of the control group is not identical with that of the target group, the difference between the target and the control group must be established at the beginning and at the end of the project. Assertions about the effect depend in this case on whether the difference has increased or decreased. This method is known as “difference in difference”.

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Ex post and target/performance comparison with control group



Characteristic

The development of the target group is compared with that of the control group beyond the end of the project and linked to its objectives.

Example

55% of children suffering from diarrhoea received successful medical care. That is 25 percentage points more than before the project. Over the same period, the situation in the control group only improved by 15 percentage points. After the end of the project the development of the target and control groups runs in parallel. The project achieved its target objectives.

Advantages

It can be scientifically proved whether an intervention was effective and sustained, and whether the objectives were achieved in the long term.

Disadvantages

Data collection is very difficult (at least 6 measurements).

The approach is methodologically demanding.

Suitability

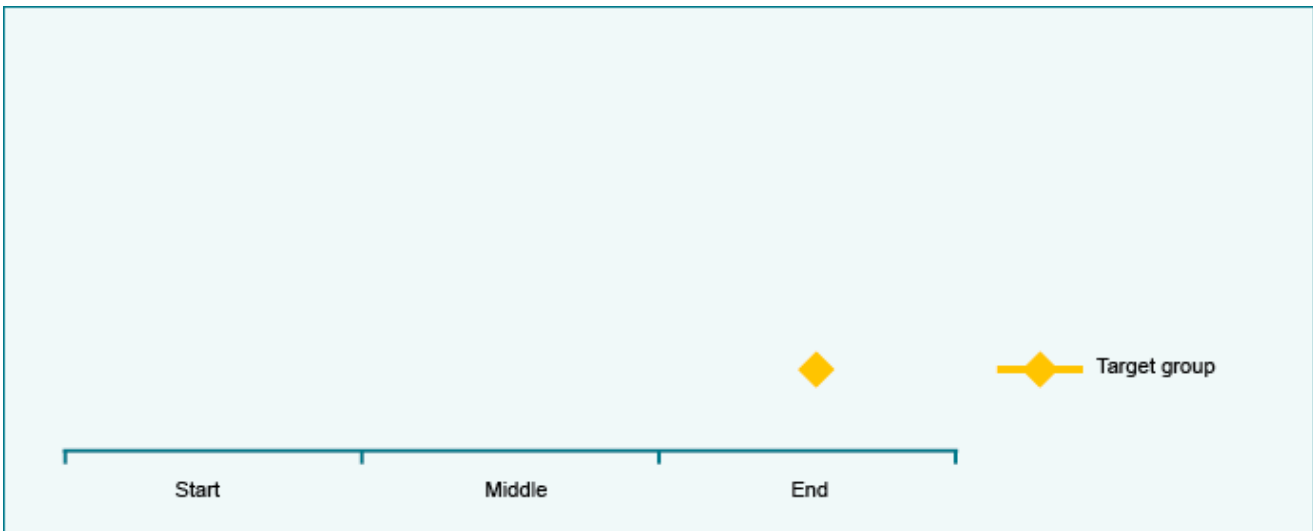
This model is suitable for testing the organisation's long-term development policy and its strategic direction. It is well suited for legitimising the sustainable results towards third parties. Due to the time lag, this approach is less appropriate for immediate steering and learning. It is used whenever sustainable results need to be demonstrated and there are no reservations about comparisons with control groups. One must be able to define or constitute

suitable control groups. If the initial situation of the control group is not identical with that of the target group, the difference between the target and control groups must be looked at. Assertions about the effects depend in this case on whether the difference increases or decreases.

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Description



Characteristics

This is a one-off observation, which describes the situation of the target group at a specific point in time.

Example

70% of the rural population in Region x live within 15 minutes' walk of clean drinking water.

Advantages	Disadvantages
The investment required for data collection is low.	There is no link to the set objectives. It is not known whether and to what degree the organisation has achieved its objectives.
The methodological know-how is available.	There is no link to the initial situation. It is not known whether and how the target group's situation has changed since the beginning of the intervention.
	It is not known whether and how the target group's situation would have changed without the project.
	No assertions can be made about the effects.
	No assertions can be made about the project's sustainability.

Suitability

Due to its limited meaningfulness, one-off descriptions are less suitable for organisational steering and learning. In practice, organisations tend to resort to one-off descriptions when no objectives have been defined and data about the initial situation and control groups are lacking, or if these can only be reconstituted at a disproportionately high cost. However, a simple description of a situation is not suitable for an impact assessment.

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Planning and suitability

The timing of the measurements must be planned. Frequent measurements increase the accuracy of the results – but also the amount of work. The following table shows when what type of measurement is needed, what they are suited to, and how widely used they are in practice.

Planning the timing and frequency of measurements

Timing	Before the project (ex ante)	During the project	During the project At the end of the project	After completion of the project (ex post)
Necessity	Necessary when data about the initial situation is missing	Necessary if processes need to be overseen	Necessary if success of project needs to be evaluated	Necessary if the sustainable effect of the project needs to be evaluated
Suitability	Suitable to take a decision about implementation	Suitable for monitoring and steering implementation	Suitable for steering and for accountability	Suitable for reviewing strategy and policy
Use	Seldom used, and if so for major programmes	Frequently only used at the output level (monitoring)	Also used at the outcome level	Seldom used, and if so at the impact level

Merely describing a situation says as little about the effects as traditional target/performance comparison. If it is to be possible to make statements about the effects of a project or programme, then the situation achieved by the target group must be related to its initial situation or to a control group. The combination of the two is sometimes described as the 'gold standard' of impact assessment. The following table gives an overview of which comparisons are possible and what they are suited to.

Suitability of comparisons

Meaningfulness	Achievement of objectives	Effects	Contribution	Attribution	Sustainability
Basic models of comparison					
Target/performance comparison	OK				
Before & after comparison		OK	OK		
Comparison with control group		OK	OK		
Before & after comparison with control group		OK	OK	OK	
More complex models and combinations					
Before & after and target/performance comparisons	OK	OK	OK		
Ex post comparison		OK	OK		OK
Ex post and target/performance comparison	OK	OK	OK		OK
Ex post comparison with control group		OK	OK	OK	OK
Target/performance comparison with control group	OK	OK	OK		
Before & after and target/performance comparison with control group	OK	OK	OK	OK	
Ex post and target/performance comparison with control group	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK
No comparison					
Description					



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Implementation

An impact assessment can be implemented in various ways. There must be planning as to who will collect the data and evaluate it. The impact assessment can in principle be carried out by project managers themselves (self-evaluation) or by independent third parties (external evaluation). There are a range of mixed forms in between (hybrid evaluation).

The following must be borne in mind:

- **Independence**
Depending on the purpose of the impact assessment (e.g. for legitimising or learning), external experts or project managers must have the necessary independence so that they are perceived as sufficiently impartial and unprejudiced by those who use the results of the assessment
- **Credibility**
The team must have the requisite specialist and methodological competence to be able to carry out the evaluation correctly.
- **Acceptance**
The team must have the requisite sensitivity and experience so that it can be accepted by those who use the results.

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Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is a method whereby the experts directing the practical work are identical with the assessors. This means that the actors check their own activities - they are therefore at the same time responsible in practice and responsible for the appraisal.¹ In terms of content, the questions in a self-evaluation are no different from those in an external evaluation. The focus is on appraising a project's relevance, effectiveness and economic viability. In a supported self-evaluation, a recognised institute or a recognised expert assists the project managers in planning, implementation and reporting of the self-evaluation.

Advantages

Greater motivation of those being evaluated

Insider knowledge can be used

Evaluators are familiar with the subject

Ownership of results leads to swift implementation

Greater acceptance of results within the organisation

Less costly to organise

Disadvantages

Less distance

Fundamental questions asked less

Lack of evaluation knowledge

Less legitimacy for outside world

Suitability

Self-evaluation is particularly suitable for appraisals that are carried out for the purpose of learning. It is well suited to analysing processes and to bring about step-by-step improvements. Self-evaluations can also be carried out when funds are tight.

¹ Source: Hildegard Müller-Kohlenberg, Wolfgang Beywl (2003): *Standards der Selbstevaluation, Begründung und aktueller Diskussionsstand. Zeitschrift für Evaluation 1/2003, Cologne.*

IMPORTANT

Attention must be paid even in self-evaluations to ensuring that there is enough time and resources, the requisite know-how exists or is made available, and responsibilities are clearly defined. Self-evaluations will otherwise often fail due to the complexity of the methods and a lack of resources.



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External evaluations

The responsibility for carrying the evaluation lies with people who have not been involved in the implementation of a measure. Experts obtain information about the subject of the evaluation and provide feedback to the managers about what they think about it.

Advantages

No “insider blindness”
Impartiality
Methodological competence
Greater acceptance by others

Disadvantages

Little involvement to the field of work
No link to the context and lack of expert knowledge
Less legitimacy within the organisation

Suitability

External evaluations are particularly well suited to evaluations that are carried out to legitimise a project. External evaluations are used if the organisation’s own staff resources are tight or if there is little evaluation know-how within the organisation itself.

IMPORTANT

The purpose and the questions to be asked during the evaluation must be clearly defined. The choice of suitable external evaluators is decisive for the success of the evaluation. Evaluators must of course bring with them the requisite specialist knowledge, but they must also show the necessary sensitivity in contact with stakeholders and be accepted by them. Lastly, schedules and budgets must be realistic.



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Hybrid evaluations

A combination of self-evaluation and external evaluation can be termed a hybrid evaluation. This combines the advantages of a self and an external evaluation. The focus of this approach is a systematic process of self-evaluation assisted by an independent evaluation team. The evaluation team supports the project managers for the self-evaluation and the critical evaluation of the project. The data and information on which the evaluation is based are verified by the evaluation team, thereby bringing up additional questions and posing alternative hypotheses for data interpretation. This method guarantees that the evaluation is closely aligned with the needs of the project team, while still maintaining the necessary distance.

Advantages

Information can be made available for the project at the right time
Atmosphere focused on learning

Disadvantages

Roles not always clear
Takes time for everyone to get used to their roles

Suitability

Hybrid evaluations are suitable both for learning and for legitimising. A hybrid appraisal is the best option if the organisation's own resources are tight or if there is little evaluation know-how available internally, and yet it does not wish to lose the advantages of a self-evaluation.

IMPORTANT

The purpose and the questions to be asked during the evaluation must be clearly defined. The choice of suitable external evaluators is decisive for the success of the evaluation. Special attention should be paid to allocating roles and defining responsibilities.

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Indicators

To measure effects and review whether objectives have been reached, then these must be expressed in concrete, objectively measurable quantities. This kind of objectively measurable quantity is known as an indicator. An indicator answers the question “How are we going to find out whether what we have planned has actually occurred and that we have achieved our objectives?” An indicator for an intended objective therefore announces how we measure the effects and when we consider the objective to have been achieved:

Objective	Indicator
Improved access to drinking water	Nearest well is within 15-minute walk
Child mortality falls	Child mortality falls from x% to y%

IMPORTANT

A good indicator ought to be **SMART**:

- Specific: the indicator must be unambiguous and clear.
- Measurable: the indicator must be measurable and the costs for measurements appropriate.
- Achievable: the target value given by the indicator must be achievable.
- Relevant: the information provided by the indicator should be relevant for the project manager.
- Time-bound: the indicator must show when the objective ought to be achieved.

Source: European Commission, PCM Guidelines

Coming up with and selecting good indicators is a crucial factor for an impact assessment to be able to supply useful information, but it is by no means an easy task. Participatory development is especially important here; a good indicator will be accepted and considered significant by the target group in particular.

It is often necessary to define several indicators for an objective. In practice, quantitative and qualitative indicators are frequently combined. Fundamentally, though, one should confine oneself to as few indicators as possible to avoid producing an unnecessary amount of data.

One constant feature of an indicator is information on the data sources and the methods used for data collection. This ensures that the indicator is measurable. If in the process it becomes apparent that the data for the indicator cannot be collected or only with disproportionate effort, then the indicator must be replaced by a simpler one. The possibility must also be considered of resorting to existing sources, e.g. national statistics or data from partner organisations.

N.B.

In practice, too little attention is often paid to sources and the data later turns out not to be available, rendering the indicator meaningless. An indicator without a true data source is not measurable and therefore cannot be used in impact assessment.

In practice, there are various ways of defining objectives and indicators and/or differentiating them in practice. They are all equally valid. One should nevertheless always bear the chosen definition in mind and use it in a consistent fashion. This is an unavoidable subject of discussion. Attention should be paid to the fact that an indicator in the sense it is used here (the indicator shows whether the objective has been achieved or not) always contains a target and therefore implies selecting a method of comparison.

Indicators should be set not just at the outcome and impact level but also at the output level.

Examples

- **Child health programme**
Objective: Child health in the poorest parts of the country should be improved.
Indicator: By 2015, child mortality should be reduced to ...% in Regions x, y and z.
- **Well-building project**
Objective: People in Region x, y and z should have better access to clean drinking water.
Indicator: By 2015, 80% of people in Regions x, y and z live within 15 minutes' walk of clean drinking water.
- **Education programme**
Objective: Communities have better access to formal and informal education.
Indicator: 70% of the 14,000 people who have learnt to read and write confirm that their livelihood has been improved by this.
- **Empowerment project**
Objective: Socially and economically disadvantaged people influence decision-making in the region.
Indicator: Public hearings are held for 90% of local political projects.
- **Project to promote farmers' organisations**
Objective: The farmers' organisations improve their institutional and organisational capacities.
Indicator: 100% of the farmers' organisations describe their institutional and organisational capacities as medium or good in their self-evaluation.
Objective: The farmers' organisations improve the management of their economic activities.
Indicator: 60% of the farmers' organisations describe their outputs regarding the development of a partner network as medium or good in their self-evaluation.



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Example of well-building project

New and repaired wells improve the local population's access to clean drinking water.

	Objective	Indicator	Measurement
Outcome objective (O1)	Improved access to clean drinking water	Walk to nearest well is <15 minutes for 80% of households	Observation
Performance objective (P1)	Build new wells	50 new wells in the region	List
Performance objective (P2)	Repair faulty wells	80 wells repaired	List



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Example of health course project

A course is offered for mothers with small children to inform them about the link between clean drinking water and health.

	Objective	Indicator	Measurement
Outcome objective (O1)	Participants know the link between clean drinking water and health.	Participants can use the information they have learnt in a role-playing game.	Video, evaluation by project managers
Performance objective (P1)	Provide courses	100 courses	Project report
Performance objective (P2)	The courses are well attended.	At least 35 participants per course	Attendance list



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Example of medical care project

With the introduction of mobile health clinics, children can be successfully treated for diarrhoea.

	Objective	Indicator	Measurement
Outcome objective (O1)	Children suffering from diarrhoea can be cured more often.	95% of children with diarrhoea are treated successfully.	Case studies
Performance objective (P1)	Children suffering from diarrhoea are medically treated.	1,000 children with diarrhoea treated per year.	Treatment statistics
Performance objective (P2)	Mobile health clinics come to the region regularly.	3 operational mobile health clinics	Timetable, schedule of operations

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Example of project logframe

Health courses

	Strategy of intervention	Indicator	Source
Impact	Contributes to mothers' making increasing use of clean water	90% of households mainly use water from clean sources	Survey
Outcome	Mothers know about links	Participants in the courses can use the information received in a role-playing game.	Video, evaluation by project managers
Output	Mothers attend courses	100 courses offered with an average of 35 participants per course	Project report Attendance list
Activities	Give courses for mothers		

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Example of programme logframe

Child health

	Strategy of intervention	Indicator	Source
Impact	Contributes to improved child health – child mortality falls	Child mortality in Regions x, y and z reduced from 10% to 2%	National statistics
Outcome	1. Mothers know about links	Course participants can use the information received in a role-playing game	Video, evaluation by project managers
	2. Sick children can be successfully treated	95% of children are successfully treated for diarrhoea	Case studies
	3. Improved access to clean drinking water	Walk to nearest well <15 minutes for 80% of households	Observation
Output	1. Courses	100 courses given	Project report
	2. Treatment	1,000 children treated per year	Treatment statistics
	3. Wells	50 new wells in the region	Project report
Activities	1. Give courses		
	2. Run mobile health clinics		
	3. Build wells		



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Data collection methods

Various data collection methods can be employed as part of an outcome and impact assessment. As a rule, one can distinguish between qualitative and quantitative collection methods. Aside from the choice of data collection methods, it is important to consider, as a second step, whether all or only a part of the affected units, target groups or cases are represented in the data collection for the impact assessment (unit of analysis). Furthermore, it is important to conduct a critical review of the quality of the collected data (data quality).

Package of methods

It is normal in contemporary research routine to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in order to benefit from the advantages of both methods. This is what people call a package of methods, or triangulation. The usefulness of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is undisputed and has become regulation practice in meaningful impact assessment. This means, for example, that the effectiveness of a programme is measured firstly by distributing a standardised questionnaire to the target groups and, secondly, by conducting interviews with staff or holding a group discussion with experts. The specific form the collected data takes (minutes of interviews, minutes of conversations with experts, percentages from a survey, frequency of observation, etc.) depends on the collection methods chosen. The data must therefore be analysed using appropriate analytical methods.



Quantitative Methoden

Quantitative methods involve describing and recording behaviour and changes in numerical form as precisely as possible.

Number of units of analysis	Many
Assumptions	Clear idea of relevant links
Starting point	Verifying ideas
Focus	Researchers' knowledge is central
Intention	Evaluating theory

Suitability

Due to their standardised form of questioning and observation, quantitative methods are suitable for researching large samples and for applying statistical evaluation methods to measure and quantify facts in an objective manner. They are ideal for comparing objective data over time and for interpreting change. Quantitative data collection methods make it possible to examine a large amount of information using predefined methods. The information gained can be analysed and compared using statistical methods and analytical techniques.

Collection

Quantitative data is collected using the following techniques:

- Structured observation, measurement, counting
- Analysis of secondary data (statistics, process data)
- Various forms of surveys and experiments

Sample size

The choice of sample size depends on how precise the results of the survey are supposed to be. The easiest thing, therefore, is if all the units of analysis can be surveyed. This is known as a total population survey. In a total population survey, there is no need for any statistical tests on the significance of differences because the data is not based on a sample that is extrapolated to the whole population. It can be seen from the table below that a total population survey is the best option for units of analysis containing less than 300 cases. It also shows that 300 surveyed units allow one to make relatively reliable statements about large populations.

N = size of population	n =	n =
Size of population	Minimum sample size with a margin for error of +/-3 percentage points	Minimum sample size with a margin for error of +/-5 percentage points
100	92	80
200	169	132
300	234	169
400	291	196
500	341	217
1000	516	278
5000	880	357
10 000	964	370
100 000	1056	383
1 000 000	1066	384

Analysis

With quantitative data collection methods, analysis is carried out using various statistical methods and figures including frequency, percentages and means, as well as more complex statistical methods.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Precisely quantifiable results	No flexibility during the investigation due to the standardisation of the investigation situation. The questions are determined in advance, and it is not possible to listen to the individual test people.
Makes it possible to ascertain statistical links	Does not reveal what caused a result or an attitude such as dissatisfaction. The use of open questions is recommended in order to reduce this problem.
Makes it possible to investigate a large sample and obtain representative results	Gives no suggestions for improvement. This disadvantage can be reduced by including open questions.
High external validity through large sample	
Greater objectivity and comparability	

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Qualitative methods

Qualitative methods are used to describe, interpret and understand connections.

Number of units of analysis	Few
Assumptions	Less hard-and-fast knowledge about how results are connected
Starting point	Need for detailed information
Focus	Actors' knowledge is central
Intention	Constructing theory

Suitability

Qualitative data collection methods make it possible to study a specific subject of investigation in detail and in depth. This can also reveal new and unexpected information. This can lead to a deeper understanding of the subject of investigation, but does make it more difficult to make generalisations about matters beyond the subject itself. Qualitative surveys and observations are characterised by an approach that delivers undistorted and comprehensive information and is therefore suitable in all situations in which a differentiated and detailed description of individual opinions and impressions is called for. Qualitative methods are particularly ideal for collecting detailed suggestions for improvement and for discovering causes (for facts such as dissatisfaction).

Data collection

Qualitative data are collected by the following methods:

- Various forms of interviews (individual conversations, group interviews, focus groups)
- Analysis of documents

Sample size

There is no unanimity in the literature about the number of conversations that should be conducted. The opinion of what constitutes a suitable sample size varies between a few conversations and about 200 people, although - depending on the questions being investigated - theoretical saturation sets in beyond a certain number of conversations. This means that the gain in terms of knowledge cannot be further increased through additional conversations. The required sample size is in general distinctly smaller than when using quantitative methods. The principles of theoretical sampling apply to the composition of the sample, meaning that the sample should be adapted to the theoretical considerations and the evaluation questions, put together heterogeneously and contain representatives that are as typical of the population as possible.

Analysis

In qualitative data collection, analysis is carried out using various forms of content analysis. These are based on summarising and gradually reducing the data-set. Important: Data that has been collected qualitatively can also be assessed quantitatively.

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Unit of analysis

The choice of units, target groups and cases for the impact assessment depends substantially on the design and/or the comparisons.

Ideally, all relevant units, target groups and cases are taken into account during data collection for the impact assessment. Such cases are called a total population survey. In practice, total population surveys are not always possible for specific reasons or due to the cost. There must therefore be a decision as to which cases should be taken into account for the impact assessment. With quantitative methods this is known as a sample.

The disadvantage of samples compared to total population surveys is that information is only ever collected for a portion of the interesting observations. As a result, it must be considered whether the results of the sampling hold for the whole of the unit of analysis. If this is not the case, then the sampling has not been carried out correctly and/or the cases have not been correctly selected.

Selection criteria for qualitative methods

It is not only for quantitative methods that the sample selection is an issue. One must also consider when using qualitative methods which cases or units should be studied. The number of units to be considered is generally automatically determined by the selection criteria. One would generally seek to consider one or two units per selection criterion. From a theoretical point of view, the number of cases or units is sufficient when the principle of saturation sets in. A selection or sample is said to be saturated when additional cases bring no new data and knowledge gains are saturated with the material already collected. One can use a three-step approach to work out the correct selection of cases:

- The first recommended step is to specify what facts are required from specific groups;
- The second step is to make sure that every possible form and feature of the unit of analysis have been considered during the selection process;
- The third step involves verifying again after data collection which constellations and features do not feature in the data already collected. That also means that the choice of the cases should not be carried out in one step as is the case with quantitative methods.

Selection criteria for quantitative methods

To avoid mistakes or biases due to choosing the wrong cases, it is necessary to clarify who or what is included in the population under investigation. Special attention is to be paid to taking adequate account of groups that are difficult to reach (e.g. geographically) and marginalised groups such as religious minorities or women during sampling. There is also a need to determine the size of the sample, the main criterion being how accurate the results need to be. The size of the population – at least for fairly large populations – has little influence on the minimum sample size (also cf. quantitative methods). Of course, in practice, the time available and the costs also play an important role.

There are various samples to choose from when using quantitative methods. Fundamentally, one must differentiate between “random sampling” and “non-random sampling”, which are put together according to specific criteria. If the sample is to be composed randomly, everyone in the population has the same likelihood of being “picked” for the sample. Some of the main selection methods are described in the next section.

Random samples

- **Simple random samples**

Each unit in the population has the same likelihood of being picked (e.g. names drawn from a pot or every nth house).

- **Layered random samples**

The units of analysis are subdivided into groups (layers) according to a particular feature (e.g. villages, courses). Samples are then taken randomly from these sub-populations.

- **Graduated random samples**

First, the graduation criteria (e.g. Regions A-D) are determined. The population is then divided up and a random selection made (e.g. Regions B and D) and limited to a certain number of primary units, which are then investigated (e.g. 10 wells per region). The remaining sub-populations are ignored. From the randomly selected primary units (e.g. 10 wells), random sampling of the units with the feature (each of 20 households in a 15-minute radius) is now carried out. In each of the two regions are 200 households are surveyed, which are then grouped together into an overall sample.

Non-random samples

- **Quota samples**

First, the elements of the population are divided into groups. The sample now has to be drawn so that the group relation in the sample looks as identical as possible to that in the population, in an attempt to imitate the desired population structure within the sample. The interviewers are also provided with guidelines as to which characteristics those to be interviewed should have. Yet it is up to the interviewer whom he or she chooses.

- **Homogeneous and heterogeneous case selection**

The observations are selected for the sample in such a way that they display as similar/ - or dissimilar - characteristics as possible. In case studies (which, by definition, do not constitute samples), two observations are for example often investigated with the most contrasting characteristics possible.

- **Selection of typical cases**

This involves selecting the observations for the samples that one knows - or assumes - to have typical, average or no extreme characteristics.

- **Selection of critical cases**

The study deliberately includes cases whose inclusion are known - or assumed - to be crucial to the study's credibility or acceptance.

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Data quality

Information or data quality is the term used to describe the relevance and correctness of information. It provides clues as to how well the data describes reality or actual situations. The quality of the collected data is crucial for an impact assessment to be able to supply exact results. There are two criteria for quality that the collected data needs to satisfy according to scientific data collection methodology:

- **Reliability**

The term “reliability” refers to the relevance and correctness of information. A data collection method is deemed reliable if a rerun of the data collection or measurement in the same conditions leads to the same results.

- **Validity**

Data collection is valid if it measures what it was intended to measure. A measurement or survey is valid if the data collected provide fitting figures for the question under investigation.

Checking data and data sources

Data and data sources should be checked for reliability and validity. That is especially necessary when there are outside data sources or if new data sources are being used. New collection and processing methods should also be checked. It can be worthwhile doing a test run for data collection. It should also be checked whether the surveys deliver the desired information.

Identify and minimise sources of error

There are various sources of error that should be avoided when one is collecting or recording qualitative and quantitative data. If an organisation carries out its own data collection using qualitative and quantitative collection tools, then these tools (questionnaires, conversation guidelines, etc.) should where possible be pre-tested. This involves checking the collection tools on test individual or test cases. These should, where possible, be similar to the target group in the survey or the cases to be analysed. In addition, the pre-test should be carried out under conditions that are as similar as possible to the planned survey. Depending on the results of the pre-test, these collection tools might need to be revised or adjusted. It is therefore important that the time this takes is taken into account at the planning stage. Sources of error often come from the selection of the unit of analysis.

Advantages

Flexible application of methods; the method is adapted to the subject of investigation and not the other way around.

The openness of the method makes it possible to discover new and previously unknown facts.

Since the participants have no guidelines, one receives fairly truthful and complete information about the subjective view of the interlocutors.

The focus is determined by the participants themselves and is therefore directed towards facts that are of relevance to them.

The personal interaction offers the possibility to ask for background information and to clear up uncertainties.

High validity of content through non-predefined approach

More in-depth information through open questioning

Greater subjectivity of results

Disadvantages

The required qualifications of the people observing or interviewing are really quite high. The quality of the data also to a certain extent depends on these qualifications.

Analysis relatively intensive, especially compared to quantitative methods.

One cannot derive any numerical figures from qualitative data.

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Formulating the terms of reference

If effects are to be measured and evaluated by an internal team, but especially if an external or mixed team is in charge, the terms of reference and the planning of the impact assessment should be set down in writing.

The terms of reference for an impact assessment may follow the following structure for evaluations in general:

Template

Rationale and purpose

Why is the evaluation being conducted and what will the findings be used for?

For example:

- To optimise processes or methods,
- To further improve strategy or policy,
- To decide on the future conduct of a project or programme,
- To show accountability to funders or the public.

Objectives

What is the evaluation supposed to show?

For example:

- To confirm that the project has had a particular output, achieved a particular outcome for the target group or made a contribution to the overarching goal;
- Assess whether a specific intervention was efficient, effective and relevant;
- Present observations, conclusions and recommendations about a specific project or programme.

Scope

The scope of the evaluation needs to be clearly defined, with a clear description of the key framework principles.

For example:

- The topics investigated,
- The time period to be studied,
- The activities to be studied,
- The resources already employed,
- The geographical scope,
- Target groups.

People involved and affected

Who is involved in the evaluation and affected by it? Which interests and needs do these individuals/groups have? How are these taken into account?

For example:

- Project managers and staff,
- Mediating organisations,
- Target group,
- Partner organisations,
- Government.

Reporting

How are the findings reported? Are there other “deliverables” alongside the conventional report?

For example:

- Conventional report,
- Workshop with people involved,
- Debriefing with project managers,
- Presentations for line managers,
- Lessons learnt in writing.

Budget

- Are the costs proportionate to the complexity of the questions asked and the value of the desired information?

What agreements need to be set down in writing?

- Write down objective, rationale and point of view of the evaluation;
- Formulate evaluation questions;
- Agree deadlines and budget;
- The terms of reference can be based on quality standards (e.g. DAC, SEVAL, SDC);
- Define the reporting format.



Stiftung Zewo
Schweizerische Zertifizierungsstelle für gemeinnützige,
Spenden sammelnde Organisationen

Stiftung Zewo
Lägernstrasse 27
8037 Zürich
Telefon +41 (0)44 366 99 55

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DAC Evaluation Quality Standards

The OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has published guidelines for good practice in development evaluation. These standards are designed to improve the quality of evaluation processes and products, and to facilitate cooperation. The principles behind them were developed internationally on a consensus basis. They are organised according to the typical stages of an evaluation and include all aspects of the process – from the description of the rationale, the point of view and the context as well as planning, design, implementation and reporting right through to learning and using the findings – that are crucial for a high-quality evaluation.

Download

DAC Guidelines and Reference Series Quality Standards for Development Evaluation, 2010. Unabridged

Link

Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD-DAC)



Stiftung Zewo
Schweizerische Zertifizierungsstelle für gemeinnützige,
Spenden sammelnde Organisationen

Stiftung Zewo
Lägernstrasse 27
8037 Zürich
Telefon +41 (0)44 366 99 55

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SEVAL Evaluation Standards

The Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL) is a multidisciplinary organisation that actively engages in improving the quality of evaluation and its diffusion. The Swiss Evaluation Society's goal is to foster the exchange of information and experience in the field of evaluation between politics, administration, academia, NGOs and the private sector. SEVAL's evaluation standards are meant to contribute to the professionalization of evaluation in Switzerland. They define the quality requirements for evaluations and are addressed to both evaluators and those commissioning evaluations. The guidelines are for evaluations of all kinds, with the exception of personal appraisals. They are divided into four subject groups. The utility standards ensure that the evaluation is oriented towards the information needs of its intended users. The feasibility standards ensure that an evaluation is conducted in a realistic, well-planned, diplomatic and cost-conscious manner. The propriety standards ensure that an evaluation is conducted in a legal and ethical manner and that the welfare of the stakeholders is given due attention. Lastly, the accuracy standards ensure that an evaluation produces and disseminates valid and usable information.

Download

SEVAL Standards, Evaluation Standards of the Swiss Evaluation Society, 2000. Unabridged. In German.

Link

SEVAL



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Guidelines for SDC Evaluations

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) plans to commit **0.6-0.8 percent** of its total annual budget to evaluations and reviews in order to show accountability for its actions. This is in line with the average for other development agencies. Bilateral donors devote between **0.1 and 2.5 percent** of their total budget to evaluations. The SDC publishes its annual evaluation schedule and the completed evaluations on its website.

The SDC's evaluation policy underscores the importance of evaluation and places it in a wider context. It reveals the main national and international trends in evaluation and provides an overview of its evaluation framework. This policy is normative in nature and lays the foundation for the definition of minimum quality assurance standards. It deliberately does not go into a detailed discussion of individual evaluation methods. The DAC/OECD standards, the standards for humanitarian aid (ALNAP Standards) and the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL) standards together form the binding framework.

The SDC's evaluation policy is organised around 10 guiding principles that reflect the core values of SDC's evaluation activities and form an overarching and binding framework for all its employees. They are as follows: independent evaluation teams, impartiality, objectivity and credibility, transparency, partnership, feasibility, utility, complementarity, subsidiarity, controlling, and data protection and confidentiality.

Downloads

- SDC Evaluation Policy, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2008. Unabridged. In German.
- ALNAP Standards – Evaluating Humanitarian Action Using the OECD-DAC Criteria, 2006.

Links

- SDC
- ALNAP

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Step 4: Collect data

The data necessary for the outcome and impact assessment should be collected before or during the project implementation. If this is not planned, then any reliable assertions about the effect will only be partly possible. Later data collection requires a great deal of effort and might not be possible at all. Therefore the collection of effect indicators is ideally included in the monitoring system. Depending on the planning, the requisite data is collected once or twice over the course of the project, sometimes more often, e.g. on a quarterly basis.

How it is done

Activities The implementation of activities is supervised as part of monitoring. The data required for the outcome and impact assessment is collected, checked and recorded at the same time.

Questions Coming up with answers to the following questions can form the fourth step in an impact assessment:

- Are activities that are crucial for the project's effects controlled through monitoring?
- Is data relevant for the impact assessment collected in the process?
- Are responsibilities and interfaces for the collection of data clear?
- Does the collected data deliver the desired information?
- Is there any deviation that might jeopardise the achievement of results?
- Which corrective or enforcing measures are necessary?

Results

- The necessary data is collected, checked and recorded.
- Interim analyses are carried out.
- Where necessary, corrective measures are taken.

IMPORTANT

Properly functioning monitoring requires responsibility to be taken. The person in charge must supervise the collection and analysis of the data on an ongoing basis. If the project managers do not collect the data themselves, they must ensure that the people in charge of collecting the data know for what purpose the data is being collected. Experience shows that this increases their willingness to record the necessary data accurately and reliably.

N.B.

It is not sufficient to record deliverables at the output level to judge a measure's outcome and impact. An inventory of services rendered is however a condition for being able to measure the effects at a later stage.

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Monitoring

Data about the specific indicators is collected as part of an ongoing process during the implementations of the project. This provides constant information on the project's progress, the objectives achieved and the use of the available means.

Many organisations have introduced deadline, cost and quality controls for this purpose. They compare the activity plans with the interim reports about the outputs as well as budgets with expenditure. From time to time they take a look at the on-site implementation of activities for themselves.

One of the roles of monitoring is to ensure that the data required for outcome and impact assessment is being collected and recorded reliably. Interfaces with project and risk management might need to be clarified. There is no consensus among experts about whether a monitoring system should only include the output level while outcome and impact data can be added later, or whether the monitoring system should include the outcome and impact levels as well, as proposed for example by the World Bank's Results-Based Monitoring approach.

If it is noticed that actual service provision diverges from the planned output, then the reasons for and consequences of this should be analysed. Corrective measures can then be taken so as not to jeopardise the planned results.

N.B.

In practice, there is a danger that the monitoring system can be either too superficial or too complicated. In the first case there is too little data; in the latter this leads to so-called "data cemeteries" that are never used - planning is often too ambitious and the set indicators cannot be measured. This sort of monitoring system is quickly abandoned. As early as the planning stage, adequate attention should be paid to ensuring that the monitoring system is feasible and the effort commensurate.

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Data recording

Once collected and checked, the data should be systematically recorded and saved in an appropriate form.

IMPORTANT

Reporting should be agreed with local partners in advance using, wherever possible, common report formats. This means that data can be harmonised and the workload minimised.

Example of health course project

A course is offered to mothers with small children to enlighten them on the links between clean drinking water and health.

	Objective	Indicator	Measurement
Outcome objective (O1)	Participants know about the links between clean drinking water and health	Participants can use the information they have learnt in a role-playing game.	Video, analysis by project managers
Performance objective (P1)	Provide courses	100 courses	Project report
Performance objective (P2)	The courses are well attended	At least 35 participants per course	Attendance list

Data recording: health course project for young mothers

Phase 1: 2009-2012, produced by project leader

Objectives	Indicator	30.06.09	31.12.09	30.06.10	31.12.10	30.06.11	31.12.11	30.06.12
O1	Use in role play	Good	-	genügend				
P1	Number of courses	1 (pilot)	22	18				
P1	Number of participants	45	779	702				
	Kosten	15,000	100,000	85,000				

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Completed logframe

Child health programme

	Strategy of intervention	Indicator	Source	2009	2010
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributes to improved child health: child mortality falls 	Child mortality in Regions x, y and z falls from 10% to 2%	National statistics	x: 10% y: 10% z: 10%	x: 5% y: 7% z: 12%
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mothers know about links Ill children can be successfully treated Improved access to clean drinking water 	<p>Participants in the courses can use the information learned in a role-playing game.</p> <p>95% of cases of children treated for diarrhoea are successful.</p> <p>Walking time to nearest well <15 minutes for 80% of households</p>	<p>Video, analysis by project managers</p> <p>Case studies</p> <p>Observation</p>	<p>Good</p> <p>89%</p> <p>50%</p>	<p>Satisfactory</p> <p>80%</p> <p>60%</p>
Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courses Cases treated Wells 	<p>100 courses provided</p> <p>1,000 cases treated per year</p> <p>50 new wells in the region</p>	<p>Project report</p> <p>Treatment statistics</p> <p>Project report</p>	<p>23</p> <p>955</p> <p>12</p>	<p>42</p> <p>1,112</p>
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide courses Introduce mobile health clinics Build wells 				



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Interim analysis

Interim analysis is carried out as planned in Step 3. The reasons for any potential deviations must be explained, and there should be some analysis of which corrective or reinforcing measures are required. As soon as an analysis at the output level is available, the possible consequences on the project's effects can be anticipated. It is then possible to concentrate the corrective and reinforcing measures on the critical success factors and to start learning lessons already during the implementation of the project.

Interim analysis of health course project

Phase 1: 2009-2012, produced by project leader

Objective	Indicator	Target	Performance	Difference	Comments
O1	Use in role play	Min. good	Good	---	Analysis easy
P1	N° of courses	1 (Pilot)	1 (Pilot)	---	
P2	N° of participants	35	45	+ 30 %	High demand
	Cost	10,000	15,000	+ 5,000	Higher attendance, higher costs
	Deadline	May 09	Juni 09	1 month late	Finding speaker harder than expected

Legend for colour code

	Result	Measure
Green	Satisfactory	Plan reinforcement and ensure continuous success
Red	Critical	Take steps to correct
Yellow	Still uncertain	Keep under observation
White	As planned	None needed



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Step 5: Evaluate the effects

The effects for the target group are now assessed as foreseen in the planning. This can be carried out by external experts (external evaluation) or by project managers (self-evaluation). Mixed forms are also conceivable. Participatory approaches involve the target group in this phase.

Whatever the form of evaluation, the aim is to gather together the collected data, to analyse it and to disseminate it in a clearly intelligible form. The conventional means of doing this is a written report. Depending on the rationale for the outcome and impact assessment, a presentation or a group discussion may be appropriate. As part of their reporting, project managers inform their organisation about the project and the results of the impact assessment.

How it is done

Activities Project managers or external experts make comparisons and find out the project's effect on the target group using the available data. This task should be carried out according to standard evaluation practice. The findings are generally recorded in writing.

Questions Coming up with answers to the following question forms the fifth step in an impact assessment:

- Is all the necessary data available in a suitable format?
- What was the effect or change on the target group?
- What would have changed for the target group without the project?
- What are the reasons for any deviation from the project objectives?
- Which assumptions and hypotheses have proved true, and which were false?
- What foreseen and unforeseen side effects were there?
- Is there a plausible case to be made that the project has contributed to the overarching goals?
- Which effects can be clearly attributed to the project?
- Which recommendations are needed?

Results • A report or a presentation has been made about the effects of the project or programme.

N.B.

It is generally at this stage that external experts come into play. However, there should already have been clarification during Step 3, i.e. during the planning of the impact assessment, which questions need answering and who will carry out the impact assessment. This important point is often neglected in practice, making it difficult or even impossible to assess the effects.

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Analysis

If the collected data is to be converted into usable information, then it must be consolidated and interpreted.

Consolidation

If an overall picture needs to be produced from many different individual surveys or data from various sources and methods needs to be assessed, then the raw data first of all needs to be prepared accordingly. It is obvious how quantitative data is consolidated. The data is entered into tables or presented in the form of graphs. Quantitative data is analysed statistically. Consolidating qualitative data is a slightly more complex matter and depends on the type of analysis. Qualitative data can be analysed with various methods of content analysis. The results must be graded and assessed.

Interpretation

Analysing and interpreting the data forms the core of outcome and impact assessment. It is a matter of assessing the effects of the project on the basis of the comparisons that have been made and revealing potential weaknesses. Discussing the findings helps to explain or fill in contradictions or gaps in the data. Analysing data is an especially important element of participatory methods. It helps stakeholders to internalise and accept the conclusions, and their motivation to commit themselves to change increases.

IMPORTANT

The following are generally accepted standards that need to be adhered to:

- External teams should be allowed to work freely. The organisation should not put any pressure on the assessment.
- Differing perspectives within a team are disclosed and documented.
- Sources of information are published and are reliable.
- Data is meaningful and systematically checked.



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Quantitative data

Statistical methods of descriptive analysis are especially suitable for analysing quantitative data. They include counting frequencies, analysis of percentage distributions and comparison of averages. Descriptive analyses aims to present available data clearly in tables and diagrams, describing it and ordering it.

The available data is subjected to validation through a descriptive analysis and the first interpretations of content can be undertaken.

IMPORTANT

Save and store copies of the raw data. This enables one to go back to the original data if material is changed during analysis.

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Qualitative data

Qualitative data is generally analysed according to the principles of content analysis. For the data to be analysed, it needs to be put into a standard format that allows for comparisons. This often means various kinds of minutes.

These are the different kinds of minutes:

- **Transcript**
All statements are taken down in full, word for word. This type of minutes serves as the basis for comprehensive, interpretative analysis.
- **Annotated minutes**
This contains information other than the transcript, e.g. pauses, emphasis, particularities of speech or additional comments.
- **Summarised minutes**
This is a systematic summary of content that is of the most relevance to the central questions. It involves harmonising all the material and aggregating it to the same level of detail. This kind of minutes is used primarily when there is an abundance of data and when interest is mainly on the thematic content of the material.

N.B.

Interviews and minutes should not be interpreted in a free (non-systematic) fashion, since it will limit other people's comprehension of the interpretation.

The analysis of minutes involves four stages:

1. Checks are made that the data being analysed is all to the same level of detail. If this is not the case, then not all of the pieces of data can be analysed using the same template.
2. The information must be sorted according to standard criteria – generally questions – so that the various pieces of data can be compared with each other. Various forms of tabular presentation are appropriate here. Alternatively, passages in the minutes can be highlighted in different colours or using a variety of signs.
3. For the actual analysis of the prepared data, the content can be attached to the main questions. It is also possible to quantify statements or answers that occur several times. Information from the analysis can be recorded in a separate document or an extra column in a table.
4. Checks are made that the summarised or aggregated results still match up to the question to which an answer must be found. If this is not the case, then Steps 2 and 3 must be reviewed.

IMPORTANT

Every operation must be documented. Intermediate products such as summaries or tables should be kept. This increases the transparency of the aggregation process and allows for corrections. It also means that additional questions can be analysed at a later stage.

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Attribution gap

Even if an effect has been observed and measured, one should not deduce from this that the result came about through the project alone. And even if the direct effect (outcome) can be clearly attributed to an intervention, this does not prove that this contributes to an overarching goal (impact). This state of affairs is known as the attribution gap.

However, it is not always thoroughly necessary to prove that a particular input has had a specific development impact. Depending on what the impact assessment is to be used for, it is often sufficient to make a case for the fact that the project has contributed to the observed change. A good results model plays an important part in this.

Attribution vs. Contribution Analysis

A distinction should be made between whether an effect needs to be proved and attributed to a development measure for purposes of legitimation (attribution), or whether a case needs to be made for a project or programme having contributed to improving a situation (contribution), e.g. for purposes of organisational learning or steering within the organisation.

Rigorous impact assessment methods are needed in order to attribute an outcome to an intervention. There must be a comparison with a control group to record what would have happened without the project. The analysis requires scientific, statistical methods. This makes it possible to exclude external factors and to clearly attribute the findings to a specific intervention. However, such comparisons are expensive.

Contribution analysis can be made using simpler approaches. It is already a good approach if a baseline study is carried out to enable before & after comparisons to be made.

It is only possible to say whether an intervention has had an impact at a higher level if the links and effects at this level have been proved through rigorous impact assessment methods. That is barely possible in practice. It is therefore all the more important to make a plausible case for further impact hypotheses.

Examples of how to formulate effects

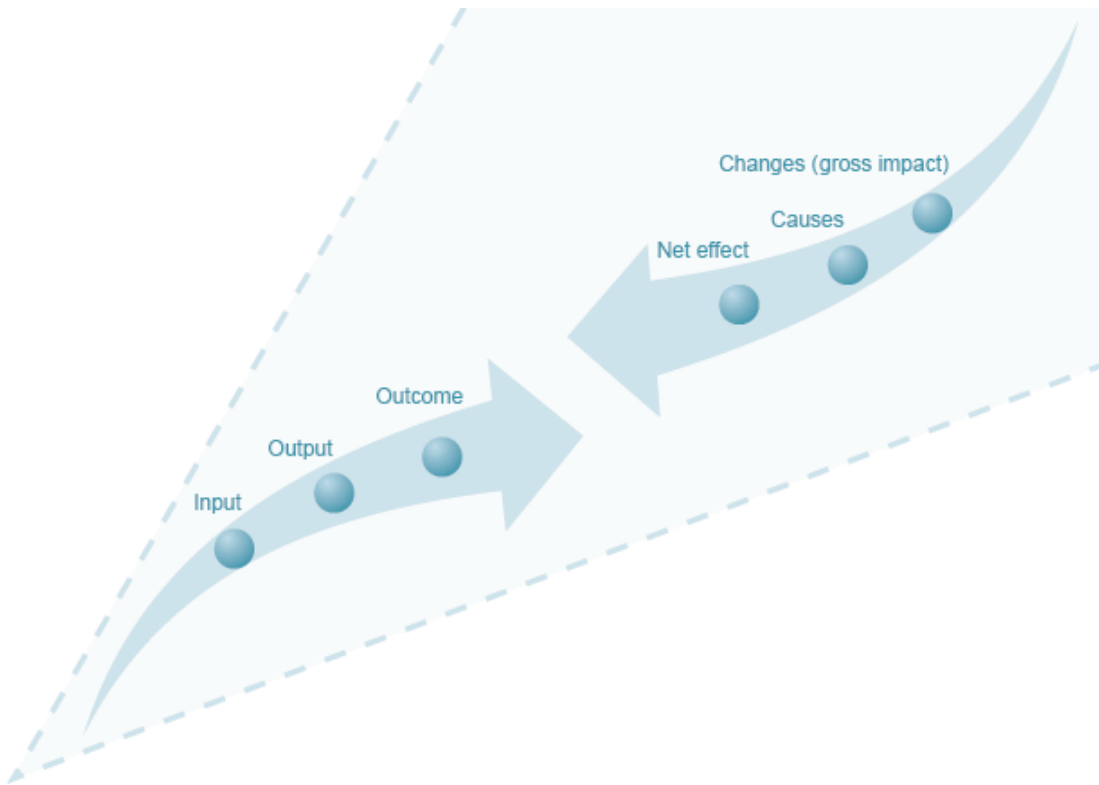
The report should disclose which assertions can be made on the basis of the completed impact assessment.

- **Clearly attributable effects**
The project or programme has effects in a x% fall in child mortality in Region A from ... to ...
- **Plausible effects**
The project or programme has contributed to a x% fall in child mortality in Region A from ... to ...

Alternative approaches

It is expensive to close the attribution gap using rigorous impact assessment methods and, notwithstanding enormous effort, it is often impossible. Furthermore, the simplification to a link between cause and effect on which this method is based comes in for a great deal of criticism.

Participatory methods offer an alternative or complementary approach to this and can provide qualitative information about the effect of a development project. These centre primarily on asking the target groups what has changed for them as well as to which influences and to which actual project they attribute this result.



This approach takes the opposite perspective to a strict input/output model. First of all, it records the total change (gross impact), which encompasses external factors and side effects. Next, the causes of these changes are investigated using participatory methods. The aim is to ascertain the net effect that a specific project has had on the target group. Some of the models for this context-specific approach include MAPP (Method for Impact Assessment of Programmes and Projects) and Most Significance Change. These methods focus primarily on the changes in the target groups and/or their experiences. Alternative approaches are often rather controversial in practice, but they can be used in combination with the Logic Model. In particular, they allow one to complete quantitatively proven changes (What has changed?) with qualitative information (Why did it change?).

N.B.

Due to the pressure to legitimise development projects, impact assessments are often carried out too early and in too much detail. Often, expectations of impact assessments are too high – and cannot be fulfilled.

If funders have unrealistic ideas about proving results, or if different funders have different conceptions, then the organisation should seek to agree on an appropriate impact assessment system with them. Aid agencies that have implemented an impact assessment system are better placed than organisations that have not yet developed any ideas of their own on the subject.



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Aggregation

If the success of development efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals is to be measured, then the impact assessment models employed need to enable the findings to be aggregated and assessed at various levels. Also, if one is to answer the question as to the effects of a project on target groups in different geographical areas, or the effect of different projects on the same target group, the data and information need to be summarised.

Aggregations could possibly be made on a thematic or geographical basis if quantitative methods or scoring-based methods have been used. It is a necessary condition that the same indicators be used. If the indicators have been developed locally with the target group as part of a strong participatory process, then generally binding key indicators must be used in all the studies as a minimum to allow the findings to be aggregated.

There are often challenges in practice when it comes to aggregation. To date, there are only a few approaches, and no fully tried-and-tested methods to analyse the effect of country programmes, sector-wide programmes or programme-oriented community funding.

Meta-evaluation

Another means of summarising data is to produce a meta-evaluation (an evaluation and summary of evaluations) of existing evaluations on a particular subject or a specific region.

Links

The two overviews of impact assessment methods listed below assess various methods in terms of how suitable they are for aggregation (cf. [Resources](#)).

DeGEval, Wirkungsanalyse – Eine Landkarte für die entwicklungspolitische Praxis (2008)

ACT Development – A Guide to Assessing our Contribution to Change

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Reporting

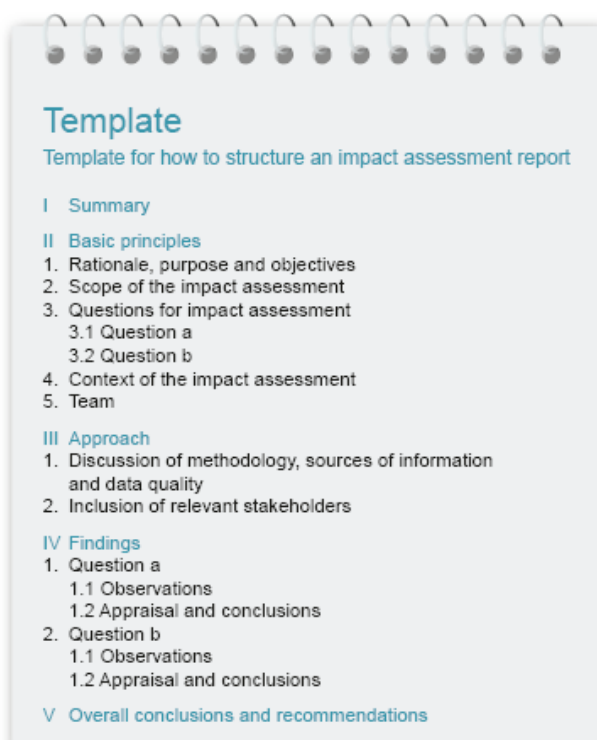
The findings of an impact assessment should be published in an appropriate form for them to be used further and disseminated. If the outcome and impact assessment is carried out by the project managers themselves, then the resulting insights can be integrated into the organisation's general reporting system. If the impact assessment is conducted by external experts, then they will generally produce a written report. Even in this latter case, the main findings ought to feed into the general reporting system. Whatever the case, project managers should report on the effect of their project, even if they did not conduct the impact assessment themselves.

It is just as important when producing a report to consider the needs of potential users as to include only essential information. The hallmark of a good report is that it answers the emerging questions in a clear, factual and intelligible manner. The evaluation process should be described with full transparency and the meaningfulness of the results needs to be discussed. Opinions and assessments must be highlighted and must not be presented as facts. Conclusions must be substantiated and recommendations must be oriented towards results. The stakeholders should also have an opportunity to comment on the findings, judgments, conclusions and recommendations.

The findings of an impact assessment should always be reported, regardless of whether the findings are expected or unexpected, negative or positive. What is particularly important, though, is an ability to communicate negative results. The reasons for the result, along with the corrective measures that have been planned or implemented, need to be described. Good recommendations are ones that are formulated in a way that encourages their implementation.

N.B.

It would be wrong to restrict communication of the findings to publishing a report. Other forms of communication might well be appropriate, depending on to whom the information is addressed and what it is to be used for.



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Step 6: Use the findings

The findings of the assessment can be used to build up organisational knowledge and to learn lessons for the future, to steer the organisation's activities towards effects, or to legitimise its activities towards donors, intermediaries and the target groups.

How it is done

Activities If the findings of the impact assessment are to be used properly, then the necessary conditions need to be created and appropriate forms of communication found. These should be adapted to those receiving the information.

Questions Answering to the following questions can form the sixth step in an impact assessment:

- Who is to use the findings and to what end?
- What can be done to encourage use of the findings?
- Which forms of communication have proved their worth?

Results

- Learning sessions completed, findings articulated
- Information prepared for strategic discussions and decision-making
- Achieved effects reported and accounted for

Examples

- WWF Switzerland: Performance Report
- SDC: Wirkungsbericht im Wassersektor
- SDC: Wirkung im Fokus – Einblick in DEZA-Programme
- Helvetas: Performance Indicators for Helvetas
- Helvetas: Organic Cotton changes producers' lives

IMPORTANT

The use of findings has to be planned systematically from the beginning. Learning events, for example workshops with stakeholders, must be organised at an early stage. It should also be considered in advance in what form the findings should be disseminated more widely - for example by summarising the findings as lessons learnt.

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Learning

The findings of the impact assessment are a good basis for the organisation to expand its knowledge and to learn from its actions. As a result, the organisation's processes, projects and programmes, as well as its strategic direction are improved and adjusted to new insights.

Positive factors

- **Willingness to learn**

It requires readiness from management and a corresponding strategy to institutionalise learning within an organisation. Appropriate strategies must be forged, and the necessary Tools and Resources must be made available.

- **Learning culture**

In an environment where people are keen to learn, information is made available, mistakes are accepted and understood as an opportunity to learn, both individually and as an organisation. There is no looking for the guilty party and calling them to account for mistakes. This only hampers the flow of information and people's readiness to learn from mistakes.

- **Time**

Phases of learning should be a scheduled part of the organisation's project management and overall management system so that they do not get squeezed out under the pressure of the day-to-day running of the organisation. There can be a tendency to take shortcuts under time pressure, especially in the planning and decision-making phases. In such cases, integration of previously made experiences and insights is easily neglected.

- **Continuity**

A constant feedback process should be instituted that also includes the stakeholders. It does, however, take time before the consequences of one's actions become apparent. If staff and consultants have switched to a different task or a new project or another organisation in the intervening period, then there is little incentive for them to learn from the findings. Regular staff turnover and short-term involvement of advisors make the learning process more difficult. To minimise potential knowledge drain, findings and insights need to be documented.

- **Spirit of innovation**

Insights gained from the impact assessment can be used to grasp the unknown and to understand the known better. Organisations should not give in to the temptation and become stuck in a rut by simply sticking to what they know and to the tried and tested.

- **Intelligibility**

If changes are necessary, then the reasons for them must be intelligible and the process must be explained transparently. If an organisation changes its direction or priorities too often and too quickly, it has a negative effect on its readiness to learn.

Suitable forms of communication

- Discussion forums or workshops with staff and stakeholders,
- Regular discussions about project reviews,
- Formulate the lessons learnt and make them available,
- Draw up good/best practice guidelines and integrate them into training and planning.

IMPORTANT

For knowledge-building and the learning process to be successful, it is important that the findings of the impact assessment immediately feed back to all parties involved. This allows them to recognize how the outputs affected the target group. Staff, partner organisations and stakeholders need to discuss together what went right, where the problems were and what reasons for success and failure were. They can thus seek solutions and improvements together and establish what additional training or technical assistance is needed. The new insights should be written down; if they are embedded and accepted within the organisation, then they can be taken to heart in the future.

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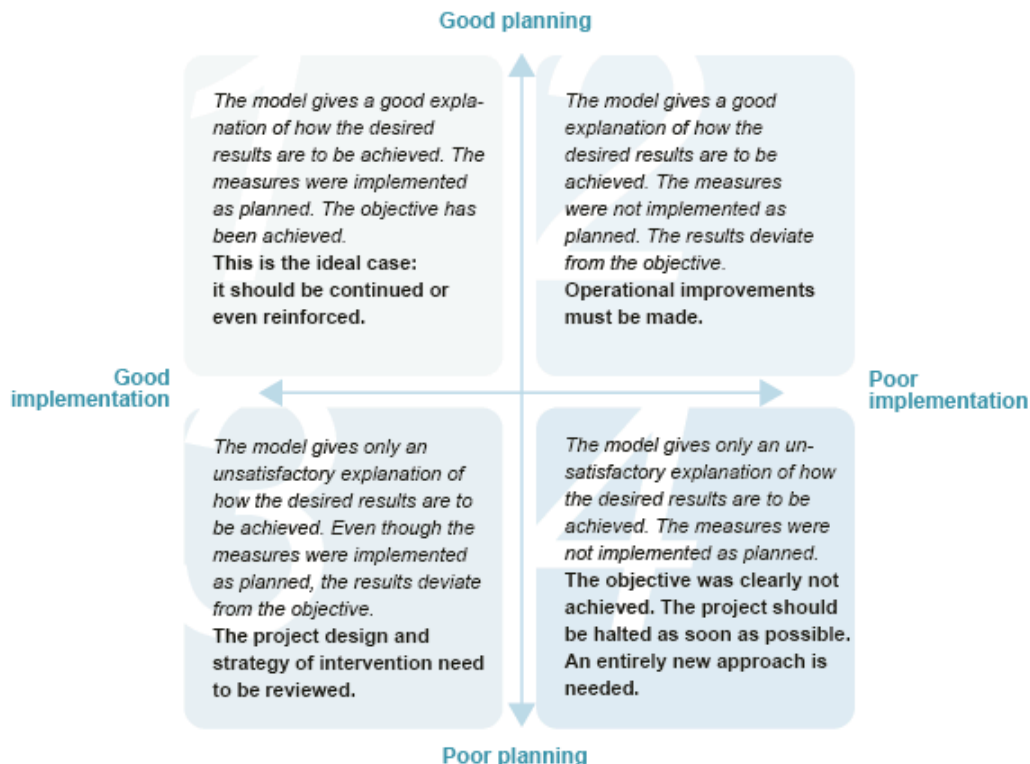
Steering

In order to have the greatest chance of achieving the planned effects, organisations must react to changing circumstances and new information and steer their projects and programmes accordingly.

The findings from an impact assessment need to be presented in such a way that it is clear how well a project or programme has been planned and implemented, i.e.:

- How good were the results model and its underlying assumptions, hypotheses and assessment of the risks or side effects? How good was the strategy of intervention that was derived from it?
- Were the outputs timely, with the planned level of quality and at the budgeted cost?

This information provides the organisation with a basis which can help to set priorities for checking the strategies, allocating resources and developing improvement measures.



Positive factors

- **Window of opportunity**
It is more likely that impact assessment findings will be used when they are available at a when external conditions are favourable to change. This can for example be the case when there are changes in the management team, during a periodic review of organisational strategy or if public events coincide strongly.

Suitable forms of communication

- Presentations to the board or to management
- Project portfolio
- Internal reporting

IMPORTANT

It takes more than systematic implementation of impact assessment at all levels of an organisation to promote results-oriented thinking and action within it. Creating a climate of transparency and trust is just as important. Critical reflection involves participants and stakeholders. This critical reflection is oriented towards discovering where there is potential for improvement, rather than looking for someone to blame.

N.B.

An organisation should not subordinate its decision-making entirely to impact assessment or else it runs the risk of only doing things that can be measured and attributed as clearly as possible to an effect. The insights offered by impact assessment are only one basis on which decisions can be made.

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Legitimising

The findings from the impact assessment form an important basis for demonstrating what an organisation has been able to achieve for its target group with the means at its disposal.

Upward Accountability

Aid agencies are accountable to public funding bodies as well as private and institutional donors. They must demonstrate that they have used the funds put at their disposal in a purposeful, efficient and effective manner. Impact assessments conducted with this in mind are often based on a Logical Framework Approach.

Positive factors

- **Independence**
The greater the independence of the body carrying out the assessment, the better suited the evaluation's findings are for legitimisation purposes.
- **Scientific soundness**
The public - and often the strategic decision-makers too - accept findings more readily if they have been produced by acknowledged and recognised institutions.
- **Communication**
The better the form of communication is tailored to the user group and the more targeted the selection of findings, the higher is the legitimising effect likely to be.

Forms of communication

- Performance report with impact assessment findings
- Report on the impact assessment of a project, for one subject area or a region

Downward accountability

It is increasingly recognised that aid agencies also have a responsibility and are accountable to intermediaries and their target groups. Target groups should therefore not only be included in the planning and implementation stages of development projects, but also have a right to demand good performance from aid agencies. This alters the relationship from the aid agency giving and the target group taking to a truly equal partnership. This is part of empowering the target groups.

Downloads

Both approaches are justified; the challenge is to combine them. The examples provided below show how this can be accomplished.

Accountability Learning and Planning System (ALPS) von Action Aid
Standards für Humanitarina Accoutability Partnership (HAP)



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Good Practice

There is no one single impact assessment system. Every organisation must develop a plan that is adapted to its own circumstances. For this to be a success, ZEWO recommends that an organisation should follow the following principles for high-quality assessments and disclosure and dissemination of results:

Quality

- **Plan**
The organisation has an impact assessment plan that is adapted to its circumstances. This provides information about who uses which methodology when and how often to assess effects on the target groups.
- **Frequency**
The organisation regularly measures the outcomes on the target groups.
- **Budget**
The organisation devotes between 0.5 and 2.5% of its annual project budget to implementing and carrying out impact assessments.
- **Level of comparison**
The organisation interprets an outcome or impact assessment as at the very least a before-and-after comparison. A description of a state of affairs is not considered to be an impact assessment.

Disclosure

- **Plan**
The organisation discloses the principles of its impact assessment system, the time schedule and the methods it uses.
- **Results**
The organisation publishes the results of the impact assessments carried out according to plan during the reporting year in its annual performance report. This includes in particular statements about:
 - Outcome and impact objectives: the intended results for the target group;
 - Outputs: a presentation with reference to the inputs and the achievement of the objectives;
 - Outcomes: a description of the changes for the target group as well any changes compared to the control group;
 - Impact: if possible, a description of the contribution to the overarching goals and longer-term impact.
- **Reports**
Reports on the outcome and impact of individual projects and programmes are disclosed to funders at the very least.
- **Costs**
It is also desirable to reveal the expenses related to impact assessment.

Assertions

- **Summary**

The findings may be aggregated by subject area or region as long as the chosen methods permit this.

- **Accuracy**

Assertions about the outcomes and impact achieved are adapted to the meaningfulness, accuracy and reliability of the chosen methods. In particular, it is clear whether the effects of a specific project or programme can be proved beyond doubt or whether a plausible case has been made for it.

- **Completeness**

No essential information has been withheld that might distort the overall picture. This means, in particular, that it is not simply positive examples that have been presented while negative aspects have been omitted.

- **Correctness**

If assertions are used for advertising or fundraising, then the facts must be verifiable.

- **Time period**

The organisation discloses when the assessment was conducted and to which period of time the respective assertions refer.



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Performance Report

The Swiss accounting and reporting recommendations for charitable, social, non-profit organisations (Swiss GAAP FER 21) state that a performance report is an integral part of the annual accounts. Swiss GAAP FER 21, Clauses 42 and 43 present the minimum requirements for a performance report as follows:

The performance report provides information about the effectiveness and the efficiency of charitable, social, non-profit organisations in an appropriate format.

It must disclose:

1. The purpose of the organisation,
2. The directors/trustees and their term of office,
3. The members of the management team,
4. Connections to related parties,
5. The defined objectives, a description of outputs with regard to the defined objectives, and the use of the available funds.

The explanations (Clause 59) contain the following regulations:

1. The performance report is governed by the principles and guidelines of general accounting and reporting. Particular attention should be paid to consistency.
2. Declarations in the performance report do not need to be audited by the auditors.

In general, the outputs are described and often backed up with statistics and key figures. These performance reports are often included in the annual report. To avoid duplication they are not usually repeated in the annual accounts.

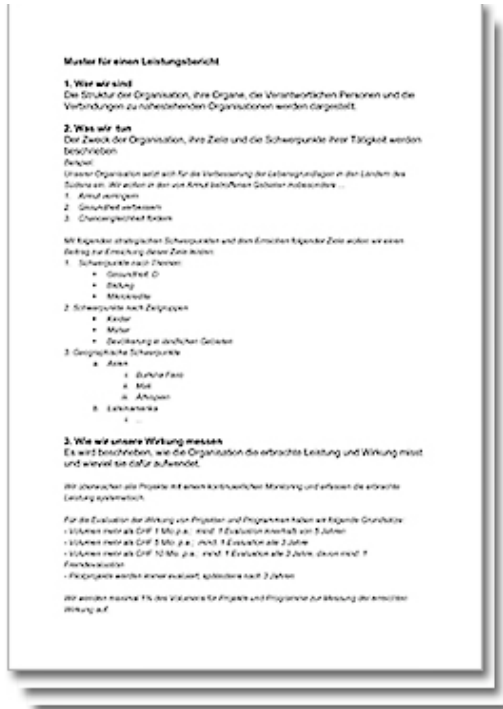
The term “impact” is not explicitly mentioned in the Swiss GAPP FER 21 requirements, but it can be subsumed under the term “effectiveness”. There is a need for clarification of what might be an appropriate form in which to provide information about an organisation’s effectiveness, meaning the outputs and the effects.

IMPORTANT

For the reader to be able to gain a complete picture of an organisation’s effectiveness and efficiency, he or she requires information about its outcome objectives and data showing how much progress the organisation has made towards achieving them. He or she must also be able to see some relation to the means employed.

Example

The example below shows how the results of an impact assessment of projects and programmes may be included in a performance report.



Download

Model performance report. In German.



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Organisational preconditions

A clear declaration by management

The senior management of the organisation must clearly express its desire to carry out an outcome and impact assessment of the organisation's activities. It requires continuous effort to create the necessary preconditions.

A plan and a handbook as a foundation

The introduction of an impact assessment system is a matter for all of an organisation's departments involved with the planning, implementation, steering and evaluation of development measures as well as learning and knowledge management within the organisation. The basis for this is a clear and binding institutional plan as well as a practice-oriented handbook for implementation purposes. This explains the concepts, formats, instruments and methods to the users and defines the standard forms for planning, monitoring and reporting.

Capacity and know-how

Implementing an impact assessment system is a multi-year process that requires the corresponding capacity. Partner organisations should receive special support in areas in which they are insufficiently developed in order to build up their monitoring skills, and it makes particular sense in development terms to ensure that both capacity and qualifications are sustainable.

Training

Partner organisations and staff must be trained. This requires a flexible programme of further training as well as a scheme for training new staff.

Time

Participatory impact assessment in the field requires that enough time be scheduled. Adequate attention must be paid to methodological questions in the preparation stages for impact analysis. External experts must also be introduced to the concepts and methods used.

Budget

Impact assessment requires resources. The cost should be included in the budget under project monitoring. It makes sense to budget yearly about **0.5-2.5%** of the overall costs of projects and services for impact assessment. In years when actual expenses are lower, the unused funds can be allocated to an impact assessment fund held in reserve. This allows specific impact assessment projects to be carried out on a regular basis, e.g. every four years.

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Limitations of outcome and impact assessment

The question of a project's effects is as important and legitimate as it is difficult to answer in any definitive, comprehensive and explicit way.

Methodological limitations

Even if it can be proved that an individual project or programme has an effect, it is particularly difficult for aid agencies with many different projects to make assertions about the effect of the entire organisation is having or to determine positive macroeconomic and social outcomes of development work. In an ideal world, effects would be clearly proved for the entire system with the involvement of stakeholders and using rigorous impact assessment methods. That entails the use of quantitative methods supplemented by qualitative methods so as to obtain a comprehensive explanation of the links and processes. In reality, though, it is virtually impossible to meet these high standards. In addition, budgets are usually tight. It is crucial that every organisation sets priorities and fulfils the main demands with a mix of methods that is adapted to its circumstances.

Financial limitations

There is growing concern that reporting duties that are increasingly based on quantitative impact and outcome indicators will become so expensive that too many resources will be used up on project monitoring rather than for the target groups, and that they are hindering the flexibility that is necessary in participatory development projects. It makes sense to budget between 0.5 and 2.5% of the total annual cost of projects and services on project monitoring for impact assessment. In years when actual expenses are lower, the unused funds can be allocated to an impact assessment fund held in reserve.

This allows specific impact assessment projects to be carried out on a regular basis, e.g. every four years. Organisations with many small projects must choose which projects they want to assess. The following criteria can be applied to make this choice:

- The scale of the project;
- The size of expectations regarding the impact;
- The degree of political significance;

As a general rule, more resources should be set aside for impact assessment in especially innovative projects in which little is known about their effects and results chains than for routine projects.

Normative limitations

An impact assessment system that is adapted to the organisation's individual circumstances helps to find answers to important issues regarding its activities. Impact assessment should not, however, assume such importance that aid agencies subordinate their entire decision-making to impact assessment findings and only do things that are measurable and present good findings.



Stiftung Zewo
Schweizerische Zertifizierungsstelle für gemeinnützige,
Spenden sammelnde Organisationen

Stiftung Zewo
Lägernstrasse 27
8037 Zürich
Telefon +41 (0)44 366 99 55

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About these guidelines

To whom are these guidelines addressed?

These guidelines are a practical tool for development agencies that are looking to introduce an outcome and impact assessment system.

What is the utility of these guidelines?

They offer users a quick and simple introduction to the complex subject of outcome and impact assessment. This resource is structured on a modular basis. In it, existing knowledge, tried-and-tested methods and practical examples are clearly arranged and vividly presented. It allows organisations to develop and implement - in a few steps and in line with their practice - a system that is adapted to the circumstances.

Why were these guidelines drawn up?

The ZEWO Foundation would like to promote widespread adoption of systematic impact assessment in practice and encourage aid agencies to develop and implement tailor-made outcome and impact assessment systems.

Who developed these guidelines?

These guidelines are based on the insights provided by the inventory and needs analysis of impact assessment for Swiss NGOs, which the ZEWO Foundation conducted for 220 aid agencies in partnership with Interface Policy Studies, Research and Consulting. ZEWO and Interface continued their partnership to develop these guidelines. A working group made up of experts from development circles and from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) collaborated with us and had a significant influence on the production of this tool. We would like to thank the members of the working group - Bernard Du Pasquier (HEKS), Diether Grünenfelder (EcoSolidar), Maya Natarajan (IAMANEH Switzerland), Constanze Bunzemeier (Enfants du Monde), Peter Schmidt (Helvetas) and Gerhard Siegfried (SDC) very warmly for their committed work and their valuable contributions. We would also like to thank the SEVAL Development Cooperation working group, led by Ruedi Felber (ETH NADEL), for their constructive feedback during consultation. Our thanks goes out to the expert support team of Herbert Ammann (SGG), Ernst Buschor (Jacobs Foundation), Christian Varga (Caritas Switzerland), Michael Meyer (University of Vienna) and Mark Zumbühl (Pro Infirmis) for their scientific monitoring of the project.



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Resources

Factsheets

The main impact assessment approaches and methods that are widely used in practice are presented in a series of clear summaries:

- Logical Framework Approach

The Logical Framework Approach is THE most widespread standard for results-based project planning in development circles. For that reason, the present guidelines are largely based on the logframe model. The Logical Framework Approach is not per se a specific method for assessing impact; rather, it makes outcome and impact assessment possible.

- Outcome Mapping

Outcome Mapping is an approach to developing a system to record the (qualitative) effects of projects and programmes. As an approach, it is based on an alternative understanding of outcomes and it proposes practical instruments to record outcomes. It is also a project-planning instrument.

- Theory of Change

Theory of Change is also an approach to results-based project planning and is based on a somewhat more open results model than the Logical Framework Approach. Like the Logical Framework Approach, it contains no instruments for assessing outcomes, but is designed instead simply to make outcome and impact assessment possible.

- Most Significant Change

Most Significant Change is a very specific, qualitative and participatory technique for recording the effects of projects and programmes. It is based on the systematic analysis of individual experiences and thus dispenses entirely with indicators and figures.

- MAPP

MAPP is likewise a specific, participatory method for recording the effects of projects and programmes. It is based on group discussions during which effects and developments are analysed retrospectively following a set programme.

Link: General information

Rick Davies (the man behind Most Significant Change) runs a private blog containing a great deal of information (some of it critical) and further links.

Monitoring and Evaluation NEWS

Links: Methodological overviews

Below you will find collections and overviews of impact assessment methodologies, methods and instruments used in development.

The German Evaluation Society has published an extensive overview of existing methodologies and methods of impact assessment. The methods are compared according to various criteria.

DeGEval, Wirkungsanalyse — Eine Landkarte für die entwicklungspolitische Praxis (2009)

ACT Development has also produced a collection of impact assessment methods. The methods are characterised and analysed in a standardised way.

ACT Development, A guide to assessing our contribution to change

This Wageningen UR Centre for Development Innovation portal contains a great deal of (unfortunately fairly unstructured) information and links on the subject of “Participatory Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation”.

PPM&E Resource Portal

A list of links on monitoring and evaluation methods, including a number of practical toolkits on the website of the Institutional Learning and Change Initiative

Tools and methods for Monitoring and Evaluation

Links: monitoring and evaluation handbooks

Below you will find handbooks on the practical implementation of results-based monitoring and evaluation systems and/or impact assessment methods.

There is a detailed handbook on project monitoring and evaluation by the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Annex D is of general interest, as it gives an overview of various monitoring and evaluation tools (from sampling to focus groups and Spider’s Web). Available in English, Arabic, Spanish and French.

International Fund for Agricultural Development, Managing for Impact in Rural Development: A guide for project Monitoring and Evaluation (2002)

This handbook also focuses on rural development and exclusively on participatory impact assessment. It provides explanations of various practical, participatory data collection methods. Available in English, Spanish and French.

Feinstein International Center, Participatory Impact Assessment — A Guide for Practitioners (2008)

Karl Herweg und Kurt Steiner, Impact Monitoring and Assessment, Instruments for use in rural development project with a focus on sustainable land management. (2002)

Another handbook on participatory monitoring and evaluation in the area of agricultural/rural development; Volume 2 describes several practical tools. Available in English and Spanish.

Volume 1: Procedure

Volume 2: Toolbox

Brief guidelines for carrying out data collection at the beginning of a project (or at other times) by the German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit.

GTZ, Baselineerhebung (2010)

The World Bank handbook focuses more on (country) programme impact assessment.

Jody Zall Kusek and Ray C. Rist, Ten Steps to a Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System, The World Bank, Washington D.C. (2004)

The UNDP handbook also focuses on country programme impact assessment.

United Nations Development Programme, Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results (2009)

The wide-ranging EuropeAid project management handbook.

European Commission, Project Cycle Management Guidelines (2004)

Links: toolkits

Below you will find links to concrete, ready-to-use instruments for measuring impact in specific situations.

Contains four complementary methods. Originally designed for credit and savings projects, but can also be used in other areas according to the authors.

The NGO-IDEAs «Impact Toolbox»

Helvetas, Tracer Studies for VET Programmes — a Practical Tool Kit

Links: experiences

Sourcebook on Emerging Good Practice in Managing for Development Results

BMZ, Wirkungsevaluierungen — zum Stand der internationalen Diskussion und dessen Relevanz für die Evaluierung der deutschen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit

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Logical Framework Approach

The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) was developed for USAID in the 1960s. Since then it has been adopted and adapted by many other international development organisations. Among them was the German agency GTZ, which derived its Goal-Oriented Project Planning (ZOPP) from it. LFA is widely used today, although the methodology is often used in a more flexible and more pragmatic manner than in the 1970s and 1980s. Also, many approaches known as “Results-Based Management” (RBM) and “Managing for Development Results” are based on the Logical Framework Approach or are at least closely related to it.

The Logical Framework Approach is a systematic and analytical planning process used for the results-based planning of a project (or programme) and for the associated monitoring and evaluation system. The basic idea of the Logical Framework Approach is to condense the planned project mechanism down into a relatively simple, linear Logic Model, using a documented situation and problem analysis as the point of departure. This forms the basis for planning the monitoring and evaluation system, whereby the project’s outputs and effects are recorded by means of quantitative or qualitative indicators. Lastly, the project mechanism and the monitoring and evaluation system are summarised in a standardised table (logframe). The Logical Framework Approach is therefore not per se a method of measuring impact. Instead, it helps with planning projects and evaluating them in a goal- and results-based manner.

IMPORTANT

The term Logical Framework Approach (LFA) should not be confused with the term Logical Framework Matrix (the so-called “logframe”). The Logical Framework Approach is the whole planning process, whereas the logframe is its product and one of its tools.

Planning process

Descriptions of the precise approach vary slightly depending on the source. According to the European Commission’s PCM Guidelines, the Logical Framework Approach includes the following steps:

- **Stakeholder analysis**
The stakeholder analysis aims to clarify who the stakeholders (partners, target groups, beneficiaries, opponents, etc.) are that participate in the project and/or are positively or negatively affected by it.
- **Problem analysis**
The problem analysis identifies the negative aspects of the existing situation. These are organised into causal links and presented in the form of a “problem tree”. Preferably, the problem tree should be drawn up in a participatory exercise with stakeholders.

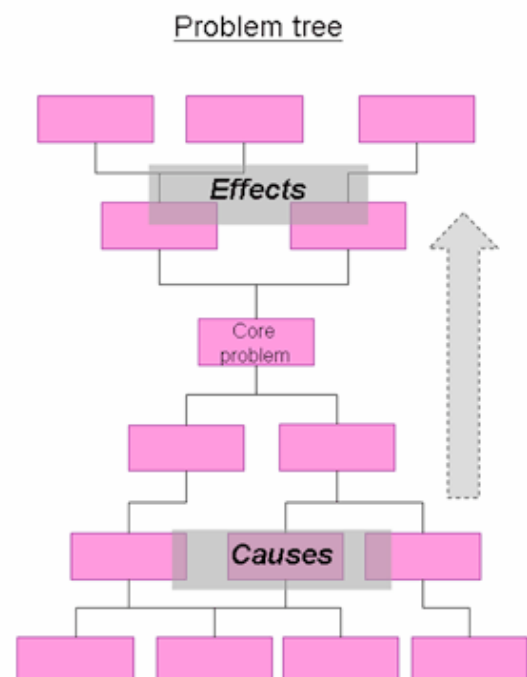


Diagram: SECO, 2007

- **Objective analysis**

During the objective analysis, solutions are drawn up for the problems that have been identified. The negative aspects shown in the problem tree are converted into desirable, positive future situations and presented as an objective tree according to a logic of means and end. In the simplest scenario, the objective tree is structured identically to the problem tree.

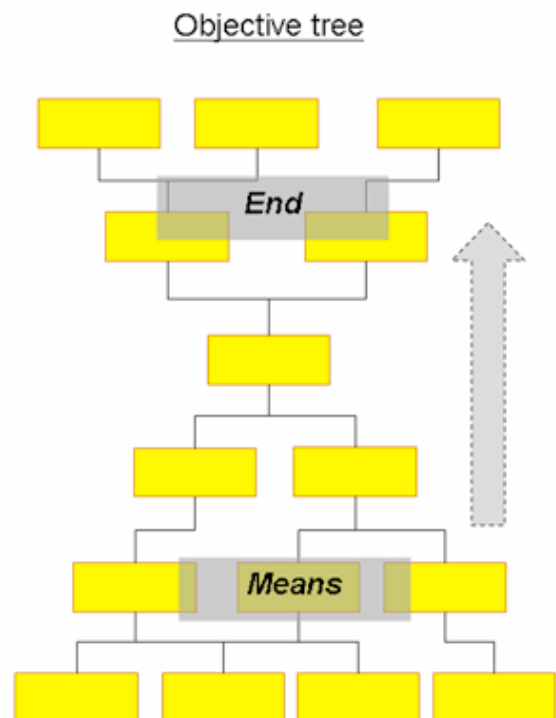


Diagram: SECO, 2007

- **Strategy analysis**

The strategy analysis serves to clarify which (of usually several) ways to the objective in the objective tree is the most appropriate and feasible. Some of the criteria that need to be considered in doing this are: existing possibilities, probability of success, local ownership, cost, resources, relevance, effectiveness, negative effects, etc.

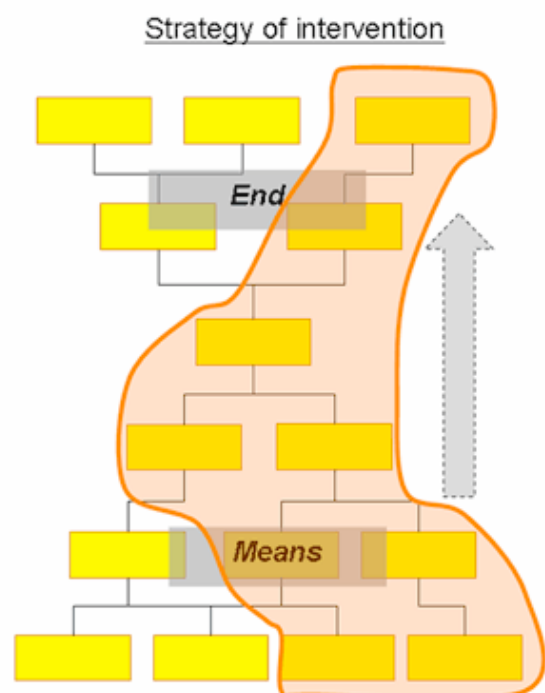


Diagram: SECO, 2007

- **Developing the Logical Framework Matrix**

The results of the Logical Framework Analysis (stakeholders, problems, objectives, strategies) are presented in the Logical Framework Matrix (logframe). This provides a summary of the project design. The simplest form of logframe is a matrix with four columns and rows.

Logframe

	Project description	Indicator	Source	Assumptions
Impact	Long-term effects and project's contribution to overarching goals	How (with which units of measurement) is the impact measured, including the planned quantity, quality and time?w	How is the information collected, when and by whom?	
Outcome	Direct utility and effects of the project for target groups	How (with which units of measurement) is the outcome measured, including planned quantity, quality and time?	As above	If the outcome is achieved, which assumptions must be fulfilled for the project to contribute to the impact?
Output	Concrete products or services provided by the project	How (with which units of measurement) is the output measured, including planned quantity, quality and time?	As above	If the outputs are achieved, which assumptions must be fulfilled for the project to contribute to the outcome?
Activities	Activities that must be undertaken for the project to have the desired outcome			If the activities are carried out which assumptions must be fulfilled for the output to come about?

Source: adapted from European Commission (2004)

The first column of the logframe summarises what the project is supposed to do and shows the causal relation within the hierarchy of objectives. It is based on a linear Logic Model that runs from bottom to top. The fourth column contains the so-called assumptions. These are external factors that can potentially or definitely influence the success of the project, but lie outside the project managers' sphere of influence. Together, the first and the fourth columns form the "vertical logic" of the logframe:

- If the activities are carried out and the assumptions (at this level) are correct, then the outputs are produced.
- If the outputs are produced and the assumptions are correct, then the outcomes are achieved.
- If the outcomes are achieved and the assumptions are correct, then the project will be able to contribute to the overarching goal (impact).

The second column is filled in with the indicators by which the achievement of objectives at the respective level can be measured. At the same time, how and where these indicators are to be collected (known as sources or means of verification) is entered into the third column. The relation between objectives, indicators and sources is called the "horizontal logic" of the logframe.

Suitability

The Logical Framework Approach is without any doubt a powerful tool for results-based project planning. The process is also oriented towards measuring the effects, although no means of measuring are explicitly mentioned. If the Logical Framework Approach is well implemented, it can:

- Promote dialogue between all parties;
- Contribute to identifying problems and correct solutions to them;

- Contribute to clarifying and expressing in concrete terms the project's objectives and effects;
- Enable and plan evaluation and impact assessment.

Critics of the Logical Framework Approach note that the underlying logic model is too simple for the complex realities encountered in the field. They add that the Logical Framework Approach encourages tunnel vision and allows little flexibility. In practice, logframes (i.e. the matrix) are often filled out without going through the whole planning process. If that is the case, then it is indeed very simplistic. The Logical Framework Approach is occasionally criticised for being based on an exclusively Western mode of thinking and therefore not very suited to certain cultures.

Links

A shorter introduction to the Logical Framework Approach can be found here:

SECO – The Logical Framework User Manual (2007)

More comprehensive manuals on the Logical Framework Approach can be found, for example, here:

Chapter 5: The Logical Framework Approach in European Commission – PCM Guidelines (2004)

AusAID – AusGuideline 3.3: The Logical Framework Approach (2005)

SIDA – The Logical Framework Approach (2004)

And much more information can be found on Rick Davies' website:

Monitoring and Evaluation NEWS Website.

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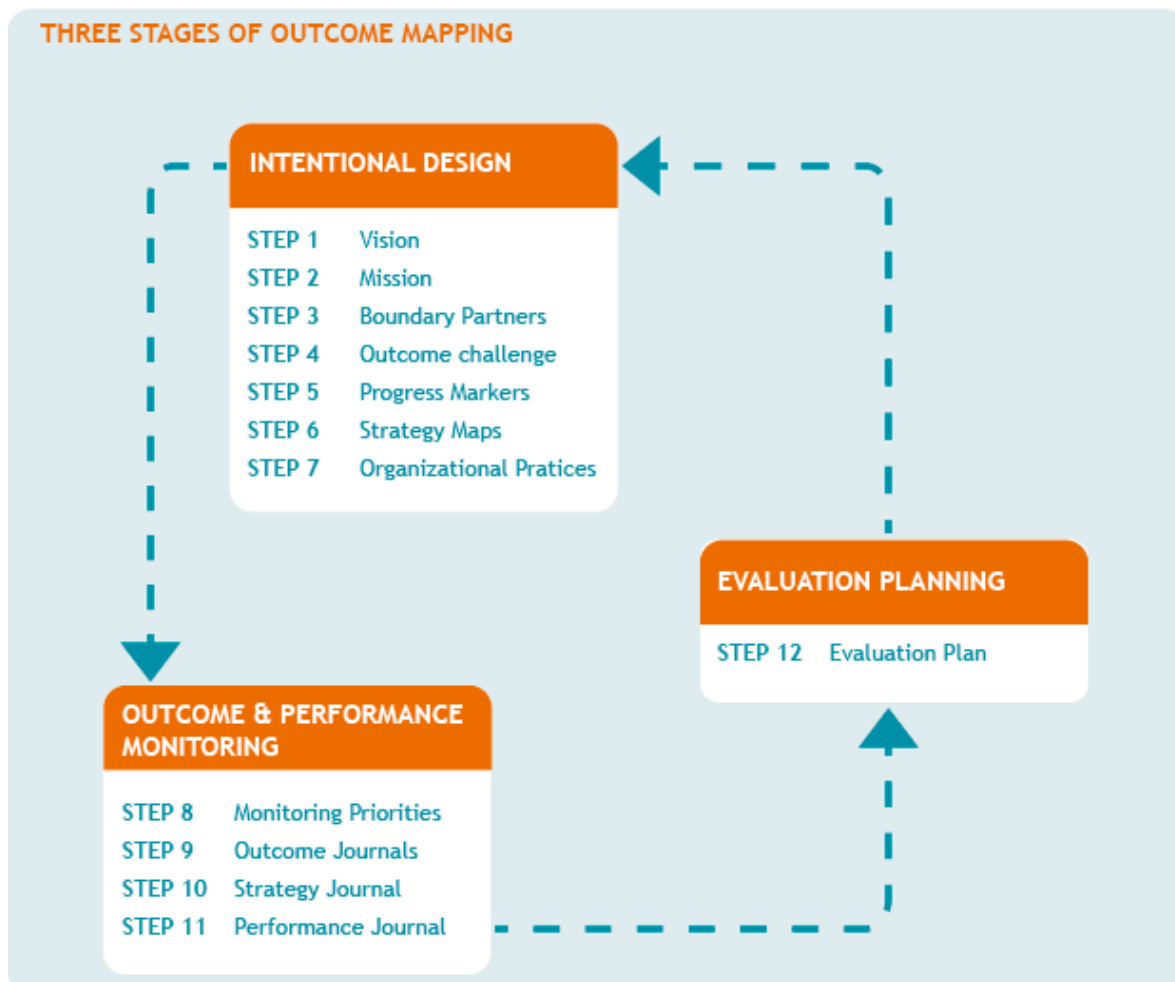
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Outcome Mapping

Outcome Mapping was developed at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Ottawa, Canada, and published in manual form in 2001. It is a system for recording project/programme progress, or more precisely a structured process for planning for it. The core concept in Outcome Mapping is that development is based on changes in people's behaviour. In contrast to conventional impact assessment methods, its focus is therefore not on (logically linked) project outputs and their effects on the target groups. Outcome Mapping concentrates instead on behavioural changes (called "outcomes") in direct partners with whom the project is working (so-called "boundary partners"). Outcome Mapping is a qualitative and participatory approach and focuses on the project's contribution to development. It was developed particularly as a tool for learning and for self-evaluation.

Planning process

The Outcome Mapping planning process consists of three stages and twelve steps, which would ideally be gone through in the planning phase of general project management.



Stage 1: Intentional Design

The aim here is to clarify and define (on a participatory basis) the overarching goals to which the project should contribute and the strategies used to achieve them. The first step involves writing down a project “vision” (why?) and “mission” (how?). A central task is to identify the primary “boundary partners” on whom the project will focus. These typically include the direct recipients of the project outputs (e.g. a local partner organisation) as well as other stakeholders. For every “boundary partner”, the general, desired behavioural changes are described and several concrete behavioural changes (so-called “progress markers”) are defined. Lastly, the activities designed to influence these changes in behaviour over the life of the project are defined.

Stage 2: Outcome & Performance Monitoring

The second stage involves the development of an ongoing monitoring system. The basic principle here is not just to monitor the achieved results (behavioural changes). Data is also collected on the activities and how the project works as an organisational unit. The first step is to set the monitoring priorities and, based on this, three data collection tools are planned. The “boundary partners” progress is charted in relation to the “progress markers” by means of the “outcome journal”. The activities carried out in favour of the partners and their results are recorded in the “strategy journal”. Lastly, internal processes are closely monitored with the help of the “performance journal”.

Stage 3: Evaluation Planning

The last stage aims to clarify which aspects of the project (specific outcomes, activities or processes) need to be evaluated and plans the necessary resources for this to be done.

Suitability

Outcome Mapping is suitable for:

- Analysing the effects of development projects whose success can not be recorded using quantitative indicators alone;
- Analysing the effects of participatory projects that aim to improve the behaviour (e.g. interaction, action/reaction and participation) of specific actors in complex systems;
- Working out with which actors a project works with and which changes should be achieved with which strategies;
- Making a case for a project’s contribution to a development;
- Learning.

Conversely, it follows that Outcome Mapping is less suitable for demonstrating accountability or for ascertaining a project’s direct development contribution.

Outcome Mapping is also a planning and monitoring tool, and it therefore would not appear to make any sense to use Outcome Mapping for evaluations that only are initiated once a project has ended.

Links

The complete Outcome Mapping Manual is available online:

Sarah Earl, Fred Carden and Terry Smutylo – Outcome Mapping (2001)

There is further information about Outcome Mapping on the following websites:

IDRC Outcome Mapping Website

Outcome Mapping Learning Community

For an article on (possibly) combining the Logical Framework Approach and Outcome Mapping:

D. Roduner, W. Schläppi und W. Egli — Logical Framework Approach and Outcome Mapping — A Constructive Attempt of Synthesis (2008)

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Theory of Change

Theory of Change is an approach that was put forward and promoted by the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, New York, and ActKnowledge, New York. It should be noted that the term “Theory of Change” can be used in another context to mean any kind of results model. Theory of Change is used here to define two things in fact: firstly, a systematic project planning cycle (Theory of Change Process of Method) and, secondly, a specific form of results model (the actual Theory of Change), which is the outcome of this process. The basic idea of this process, taking the project objective and the project goal as its starting points, is to determine which preconditions the project must create in order for the outcome objectives to be achieved. Next, indicators for measuring the preconditions and objectives are set and plans are made for which activities must be undertaken in order to create these preconditions. This is all then presented as a flow chart, or more precisely a result chain. This presentation is the project’s Theory of Change. Like the Logical Framework Approach, the Theory of Change is therefore not *per se* an impact assessment method, but rather helps projects and their evaluation as part of results-based planning.

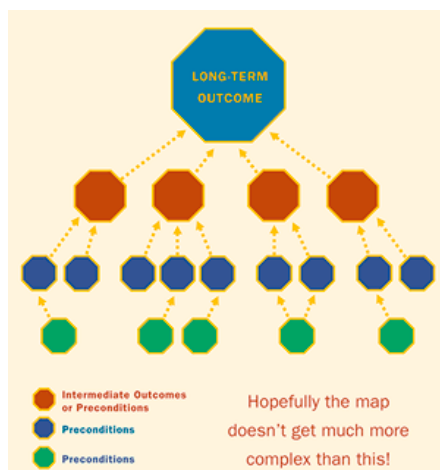
Comparison between Theory of Change and Logical Framework Approach

The Theory of Change Method and the Logical Framework Approach share a systematic approach to creating a results model as well as the fact that they both measure success by means of indicators. The Theory of Change Method is distinguished primarily by the fact that the underlying results model is more open; it allows for many intermediate steps and there is no strict linear relation, so the activities can be included at different levels of the model.

Planning process

The process consists of the following five steps:

1. Identify goals and assumptions
2. Backwards mapping and connecting outcomes
3. Developing indicators
4. Identifying interventions
5. Writing a narrative



The first step involves drawing up the project objective and the project goals in a participatory process. Particular attention is paid to defining, at the same time, which external assumptions must be fulfilled so that these objectives can be achieved at all. As a second step, through backwards induction, it must be established which interim results (preconditions) must be achieved first, both in time and logically, for the project objectives to be able to follow on. It should be noted that these preconditions should also be effects (changes, conditions, achieved results) and not activities. In this stage too, a close watch should be kept on the underlying assumptions. The result of this process is a results chain (a series of consecutive effects), or more precisely a tree of effects.



As a third step, indicators must be found for all the preconditions and outcomes so that the progress of the project can be constantly checked during the implementation phase and so that eventually a good data basis for an impact assessment is available. The fourth step consists of determining the position in this effects tree at which the project should develop its activities. It is assumed that there will be steps that will take place autonomously and others where the project will need to intervene. The end result of the process is therefore a diagram of an effects tree with the indicators, assumptions and interventions entered in the correct places.

In a fifth and final step, a written explanation is added to the diagram.

Suitability

The role of Theory of Change's as a project planning process is primarily to facilitate a dialogue between different stakeholders, to contribute to identifying correct solutions and to clarifying and expressing the project's objectives and effects in concrete terms, and to enable results-based monitoring and evaluation. Theory of Change is particularly suitable for:

- Planning complex projects and programmes;
- Recording (on an ongoing basis) the effects of a programme with a close monitoring and evaluation system.

Theory of Change has the ambition to implement a detailed results model and monitoring system and may be costly as a result.

Links

The Theory of Change Method was published in the following User Guide:

Andrea A. Anderson, *The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of Change* (2005)

This document illustrates the method using a real-life example:

ActKnowledge and the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, *Guided Example: Project Superwomen* (2003)

ActKnowledge operates a Theory of Change website. It also contains an online tool for drawing ToCs:

[Theory of Change Community](#)

This Powerpoint presentation explains the differences between the Theory of Change and the Logic Model:

Andrea A. Anderson and Hélène Clark, *Theories of Change and Logic Models: Telling Them Apart* (2004)



Outcome and Impact Assessment in International Development Zewo Guidelines for Projects and Programmes

Most Significant Change

The Most Significant Change technique was developed in the 1990s by Rick Davies and published in a User Guide (with Jess Dart). It is a qualitative and participatory method for recording the effects of a project or programme. Most Significant Change can be used as an ongoing monitoring tool during a project. However, the technique is especially useful for project evaluation, since it provides “data” about its outcomes and impacts. Most Significant Change is essentially based on collecting stories about significant changes - particularly from a project’s target groups – and then, via a systematic, multi-step process, selecting the Most Significant Changes. Most Significant Change is particularly suitable for complex and multi-layered projects with varied effects. It also records unexpected effects. The Most Significant Change technique, when successfully implemented, leads to whole teams focusing on the effects of their projects. Most Significant Change is thus particularly good for learning.

Implementierung

The User Guide describes the implementation of Most Significant Change in 10 steps:

1. How to start and raise interest
2. Defining the domains of change
3. Defining the reporting period
4. Collecting Significant Change stories
5. Selecting the most significant of the stories
6. Feeding back the results of the selection process
7. Verification of the stories
8. Quantification
9. Secondary analysis and meta-monitoring
10. Revising the system

The first step consists of involving various stakeholders and motivating them to collaborate (as the process is highly participatory). The next step is for the participants to define in which areas or on which subjects the Significant Change stories should be collected. Then they define at what intervals the stories should be collected.

The stories are collected from the people who are the most closely involved, i.e. usually beneficiaries or project staff in the field. The stories are essentially collected with the following simple question: “In your opinion, what was the most significant change for the project beneficiaries in the last three months?”

The collected stories are then filtered through the hierarchical structure of the project, programme or organisation. In concrete terms, this means that the stories are analysed and discussed at each level and eventually each level passes on one “Most Significant Story” for each subject area. Simultaneously, the selection criteria are fed back to interested stakeholders. The top level of the organisation produces a document containing the selected stories.

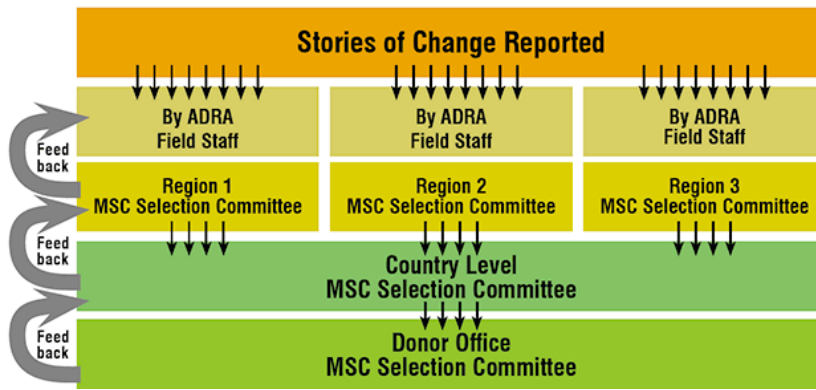


Illustration: example of selection process (ADRA Laos). Source: MSC User Guide

The next step involves verification of the selected stories during a field trip in order to establish, first of all, that they are true and, secondly, to obtain more information about the significant event. An extra step might consist of quantifying the qualitative information in the stories, e.g. with figures of how many people have experienced the same change.

The last two steps are to monitor the monitoring (e.g. Who took part and what influence did they have on the results? Which kinds of change were counted how often?) and to check the process itself (e.g. What lessons were learnt from using the technique?).

Suitability

Most Significant Change is suitable:

- When complex projects/programmes bring about multiple and varied effects;
- When unexpected changes need to be recorded as well;
- For recording the effects of large-scale programmes with a large number of organisational levels;
- For recording the effects of participatory projects/programmes focusing on social changes;
- When there is no pre-existing knowledge of monitoring and evaluation, as it is easy to communicate;
- When a detailed picture of changes is desired;
- For making a case for a project's contribution to development;
- For learning.

Most Significant Change demands a relatively large amount of time and its effects unfold only when several rounds of selection and feedback have been carried out. It therefore makes less sense to use Most Significant Change:

- If an expected change needs confirming;
- If a completed project needs to be evaluated retrospectively;
- If an average experience of the beneficiaries needs to be ascertained;
- If there is a need for a quick and cheap evaluation for purposes of accountability.

Links

The User Guide is available online.

Rick Davis and Jess Dart – The Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique (2005).

The Australian consultancy firm Clear Horizon (Jess Dart) has produced a:

“Quick Start Guide” for the practical implementation of Most Significant Change

Most Significant Change at Rick Davies’ “Monitoring and Evaluation NEWS” homepage:

Monitoring and Evaluation NEWS

Outcome and Impact Assessment in International Development Zewo Guidelines for Projects and Programmes

Method for Impact Assessment of Programmes and Projects (MAPP)

MAPP was developed in 1999 by Dr Susanne Neubart at the German Development Institute. It is a participatory approach to recording the effects of a project or programme. MAPP is based on group discussions that record and analyse retrospectively, using a series of logical tools, changes and effects surrounding a project or programme. The group analyses the effect of the project, at first in general and then in detail, by means of various self-defined indicators. Next, the relevant project measures and activities (and additional actors) are listed and prioritised. Lastly, the group looks at the contribution made by the individual development measures to the observed developments. The authors claim that the method makes it possible to bridge the attribution gap. MAPP is well suited for assessing multi-dimensional development schemes. It also records unexpected effects. The assessments are primarily of a qualitative nature and are based on the subjective judgments of the participants in the group discussion.

Method

The method consists of using the following 6 tools in a logical sequence.

- **Lifeline**

The overall development of the project area is analysed from local people's perspective over the period of the project under evaluation on a five-point scale and presented as a graph.

- **Trend analysis**

Development over this period is recorded in detail using several criteria, giving an overall trend for each criterion. This step also involves the participants in the group discussion defining the criteria (indicators).

- **Crosschecking**

Statistics, monitoring data, observations, etc. can all be called upon to check the trend analysis results.

- **List of measures**

A list is made of the measures used in the project under study and also of other actors (other projects, government, etc.) and put in order of their relevance to beneficiaries in the area. In addition, the beneficiaries' own contribution in terms of work and money is also analysed.

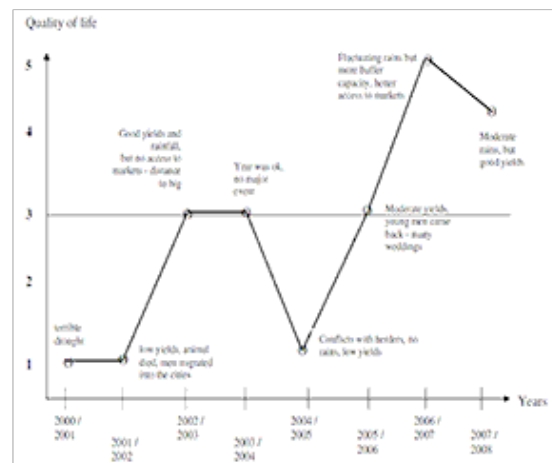


Diagram: Neubart (2010)

• **Influence matrix**

The group now discusses and analyses the effect of individual measures (4.) on the individual development criteria (2.) and these are entered into a matrix. This matrix makes it possible to analyse, firstly, which measures had a strong influence and, secondly, which indicators changed for the better or the worse.

Figure 4: Influence matrix

Development indicators	Interventional activities													Partner
	Marketing	Anti-corruption	Natural resource	Integrated	Gender	Program	Land	Health	Organ	Time	Advis-	School		
Improvement or impoverishment of Livingstandard														
Agricultural yields	-4	+	1	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ 26
Family resources	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ 37 -1
Health of children	0	0	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ 16
Access to or exclusion from resources														
to: Financial	0	0	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ 4
to: Working time	0	0	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ 4
to: Markets	1	0	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ 5
to: Enter markets	-1	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ 23
Expansion or diminishing of knowledge														
School enrolment	0	0	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ 5
Adopt land use systems	-1	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ 24
Participation on or exclusion from rights and power														
Participate in decisions with farmers	0	+	-2	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-4
Attended meetings	+	+	-2	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	23 -2
Active	-14	-10	-11	-12	+33	-13	-12	-11	-10	-10	-10	-10	-10	See complete next page

• **Development and impact profile**

Diagram: Neubert (2010)

The most important information gained using the previous tools are summarised to give an overview. This shows whether, overall, development is evolving in a robust or a vulnerable (irregular) fashion, which the main factors favouring development are, and what role the development measures of different organisations plays in this.

Suitability

MAPP is very suitable:

- For projects/programmes with clearly defined target groups and effects that can be perceived by these target groups;
- For evaluating multi-dimensional target plans (e.g. poverty alleviation, democratisation, etc.).

A certain culture of dialogue in the partner country is a precondition for this method to be successfully employed. Only then can genuine consensus as well as controversial perceptions be recognised in the group discussions.

Links

MAPP on the German Development Institute's website

An introduction including examples of all the tools as used in a real-life project:

Susanne Neubert – Description and Examples of MAPP (2010)