

Temporary help desk on Results Measurement

Synthesis of the e-discussion of SDC's e+i network from August 22 to September 12, 2011
including the interactive Webinar with RM experts on September 8, 2011

Introduction

With this third e-discussion in 2011 the e+i network is closing its discussion cycle of this year. Two discussion rounds were concluded before, one on facilitating change in M4P programmes and one on limiting factors for the M4P approach. In May 2011, the e+i network organised a face-to-face event in Switzerland focusing on the topics results measurement in private sector development and vocational skills development, employment and income in fragile contexts and financial literacy. Syntheses of the discussions and documentation on the event can be found on the e+i shareweb.

The present e-discussion is a direct follow-up of the introductory training on results measurement (RM), which took place during the face-to-face event. Responding to a large number of requests from within the network, the intention is to provide a temporary help desk on questions regarding the work on results measurement frameworks or monitoring systems in general.

During the first two weeks of the discussion the participants discussed their experience on working with a results measurement systems and the DCED Standard and collected open questions and challenges.

An interactive webinar with Jim Tanburn, coordinator of the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED), Nabanita Sen, Results Measurement Specialist of the DCED and Hans Posthumus, consultant and trainer on results measurement took place after the email based discussion to answer these and other questions.

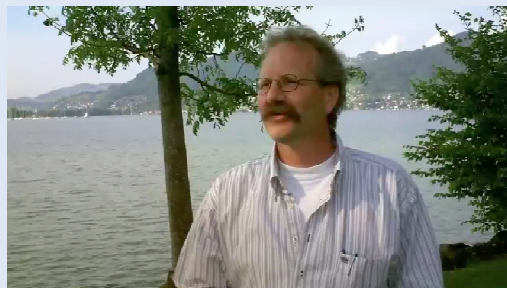
This synthesis will summarise both the discussion on the dgroups platform as well as the webinar by providing a comprehensive list of questions asked and answers provided both during the e-discussion by participants as well as by the experts during and after the webinar.

Inputs from the experts

The webinar started with short inputs by the two experts Jim Tanburn and Hans Posthumus on the topic of results measurement and the DCED Standard.

Hans Posthumus on results measurement systems

- There is a need for a change of attitude in two aspects. Firstly, it should be the people managing a project that want to measure results, not only the donors. Secondly, the dividing wall between field staff and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) staff needs to be broken down: field staff know exactly what needs to be measured, M&E staff know how to measure things.
- The first step of designing a results measurement system is to develop **results chains**. Result chains are not a substitute for the logframe. Results chains demonstrate the logic behind every intervention, so for every intervention there needs to be a results chain. Result chains are much more detailed. To the results chains also belong the indicators that define what exactly to measure as well as a prediction of changes that are likely to happen. After designing the results chains with indicators and predictions as well as developing a measurement plan, a baseline needs to be established.



- The development of result chains forces project people to think what makes the markets work and what they can do to make these markets work better. Hence, before developing the results chains, you need sufficient information of the sector or the market you work in.
- There are two tendencies in designing result chains in the praxis: (1) Make very simplified result chains with three to four boxes and one indicator each. These chains don't tell you enough of the logic of the intervention to be meaningful -> you need sufficient boxes. (2) Make very detailed result chains with 25 to 30 boxes with two or three indicators each, which leads to a complex thing that is not really measurable. A good results chain contains the key changes that are relevant with the key indicators that need to be measured to show the changes. Usually results chains contain somewhere between 15 and 25 boxes with one or two indicators each.
- We use result chains to see what works and what not. If it works they can be used to report credible results. Hence, after starting interventions, data collection starts. Information needs to be analysed and used following the path "from data to information to knowledge". Many projects start measuring a lot of data by using designing large surveys by external parties. However, right from the beginning, you have to measure every step of an intervention from the very first moment in order to see whether the chain of results takes place, whether they work or not, and why! This cannot be done with large surveys but it induces the need of a lot of qualitative information. This needs minimal size surveys, done in-house, selected sampling and in-depth interviews. Only when you see the ball rolling towards the upper levels of the results chains and you want to know whether your intervention is actually changing the market system at a larger scale, then you might go for the formal surveys.
- Many people complain about the costs of measuring results but if you do it in a very practical way, it does not cost that much. You have to see it rather as an investment than as costs. You cannot design and implement an activity without knowing whether it actually works. So it is more of a management cost than a monitoring cost.

Jim Tanburn on the logframe, intervention logics, evaluations, and the DCED Standard

- The logframe was originally developed in 1969; since then, programmes have become much more complex. Therefore, the logframe now remains as an excellent tool for summarising the rationale of a programme – but most of the detail that a manager needs has to be stripped out, in order to fit it onto one or two pages.
- Managers need the full results chain on which the logframe is based, or which is summarised in the logframe. The full results chain shows which outcomes have to happen first, which have to happen in parallel etc. In a logframe, all of these are typically shown as a list of bullet points.
- If practitioners don't articulate the logic themselves, someone else is going to try to do it for them. Typically, evaluations struggle to see whether the programmes really achieved what they say they do because of the lack of an explicit logic or the data to verify it. The difference of an evaluation of a 'traditional' programme and a programme that is using results chains is that in the latter, the necessary data are available and the programme can encourage the evaluators to ask the right people the right questions at the right time.
- The idea of the audit of the results measurement system is to give managers, project staff and donors some degree of comfort that the system is credible. The DCED Standard aims for the middle ground between what programmes are able to do and what a sceptical observer would accept and be willing to agree with.
- In a changing market, a PSD programme also needs to adapt. Within the DCED Standard there is the possibility to change the results chain to reflect those changes.
- These and other issues will be discussed more with practitioners at the DCED Seminar on the subject, in Bangkok next January; members of the network are welcome to participate. More information is available on the DCED website: www.enterprise-development.org/page/seminar



Question and answer session

After the inputs of Hans Posthumus and Jim Tanburn, there was a question and answer session where questions collected from the e-discussion as well as questions from the audience were answered. In the following, the questions and answers are presented.

Question 1: How are the project planning and the development of an M&E system connected? How do you assess the need for having an inception phase to set up an appropriate M&E system?

- It is very important to think about the M&E system right from the beginning at the project planning stage. In order to set up a M&E system that can be used as a tool for project steering and management, it needs to be thought out during the programme set-up, as its also has implications for organisational set-up, staff time and resource allocation.
- Often when the M&E system is designed after the programme planning, managers struggle to allocate enough resources to results measurement. Hence during project set-up it is important to think of how staff are organised, whether there is need to have a separate M&E team and if so how they work together with the implementation team.
- If a programme is already on-going and wants to work towards the different elements of the Standard for Results Measurement, it is sometimes useful to try the system on one or few component(s) or market(s) (particularly if the programme has a big portfolio of projects), in order to test it. For instance, to decide on the structure of results chains, to see how the indicators of change from the results chains can be measured, how results can be effectively used to influence decision-making. Based on the practical experience, the programme can decide on how to further apply it across the entire programme (training staff, developing guidelines, etc.)

Question 2: To start with the results chain or the logframe?

- The logical thing is to start with the results chains and then condense them into a logframe. A logframe is a summarising tool, while a results chain is a planning tool. Results chains are used to articulate the logic of intervention(s) and the different level of changes that it will trigger. These are the changes that need to be condensed into the logframe for a project to give the summary of its impact at various levels. The problem is that many people inherit a logframe and then have to unpack the logic behind it was. Summarising a results chain in a logframe is fairly easy, the other way around is quite hard.
- It is important to have a thorough analysis of market(s) that a programme is working in, to prepare good result chains and programmes might not have that knowledge when they are just starting up and have to propose the logframe. The logframe in this case should be quite generic and give enough flexibility to match/adjust with the results chains that are evolving, based on market research at the start of the programme.

Question 3: What are measurement tools for results measurement? Are there special tools for M4P projects?

- There are no particularly special tools for results measurement in M4P projects; ordinary tools to measure changes can be used. Specialty of M4P projects lie in the fact that interventions are designed to cause systemic change and have indirect impact which is more difficult to measure than direct change caused by interventions. But the tools themselves are just the ordinary surveys, interviews, observations, etc. It's not the tool that is different but it's the way you apply it.
- There are a couple of special challenges in M4P projects. What you hope for in these projects is spontaneous replication, copying, crowding in of businesses. No classical measurement system of development agencies focuses on how to capture these spontaneous replication, spill overs, or copying. They all focus on the direct target group. The Standard recommends that programmes articulate these indirect changes that they think their activities will trigger in their results chains. Once these systemic changes are identified, the programme can then decide on indicators that will measure these changes and their sustainability in the long run. Finally the programme can measure these indicators using standard qualitative and quantitative research tools (in-depth questionnaires, survey, focus group discussions, case studies, etc.).

Question 4: How to transform results chains into a good logframe? How to handle large numbers of results chain outputs/outcomes and indicators when making the step to the logframe? What are appropriate methods to reduce goal levels and indicators?

- It's fairly easy if you have good results chains to take the relevant boxes from the results chains and put them

in a logframe. The much bigger challenge is that often people get a logframe that was agreed on previously with the donor and have to work out the results chains behind it. Then you often get a mismatch with the logframe they have been given. The logframe is often a part of a legal agreement with the donor so it is important to negotiate with the donor to either revise the logframe based on the new results chains or alternatively stress the elements of the logframe that are still in line with the results chains and give less priority to the others. If not enough information is available by the time of logframe development it needs to be flexible and generic enough to later match it with the more detailed results chains

- In the logframe there are only a few levels and at these levels you need to define indicators that are to be aggregated. The DCED Standard suggests that programmes look at three Universal Impact Indicators to measure change at the higher level in results chains: income, outreach, and jobs created which can be added up across an entire programme portfolio (while adjusting for possible double-counting). This aggregated impact can be used to report on the logframe. At lower levels of changes (outputs, outcomes) you often have very sector specific indicators in the results chains but in the logframe these have to be translated in indicators that can be added up (for instance number of service providers who make a behaviour change to give information to beneficiaries, number of policies that associations take up, etc.).

Question 5: How many indicators for each box in the results chain?

- The trick is to get the right level of detail in the results chain: not too much, not too little. Focus on the key changes, not all the possible changes. For each key change you need at least one indicator to tell you whether it has been achieved or not.
- Qualitative indicators are extremely important as well. They give you indication about sustainability: why are the changes happening and are they likely to sustain. So it's not so much about the number of indicators but it's about having the right mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators that you need to measure, especially to measure sustainability and systemic change.

Question 5: How often should the results chains be revised?

- It is useful to reflect on results chains whenever there is new information from monitoring and impact assessment or even from regular project visits. This would allow project teams to reflect on their market findings and see whether change is happening as anticipated and if not whether new or follow up activities need to be designed. The Standard suggests that programmes reflect on the results chains at least once a year but in reality programmes find it useful to do more often.

Question 6: Often baselines are designed based on the initial logframe. Due to the dynamics of market systems, interventions and logics will change. How to deal with this issue?

- If the logframe is a good one with the right baseline indicators, then the baseline would be good. The problem is often not the baseline, but the logframe indicators. Whenever you design an intervention and are clear of the logic of the intervention and the different changes it might cause, only at that time you can establish a baseline. Meaning that when you work with a lot of interventions in a lot of markets then you need to develop different baselines for different interventions. These would be different from a 'conventional' baseline covering the whole beneficiary population. It's rather a very specific base line that enables you to measure the changes between the start and at the end of the intervention. So it is important to do the baseline when you know very well what changes are likely to happen and which indicators you need to measure.
- Alternatively, if no baseline was done or the baseline is not to be used any more (because the design of the programme has evolved), one of the things that can be done is to establish a baseline retrospectively by asking respondents what the situation was before. The Implementation Guidelines for the Standard of results measurement suggests a few alternatives on how a baseline can be established retrospectively (<http://www.enterprise-development.org/download.aspx?id=1494>).

Question 7: What should be done first, the baseline or finding appropriate interventions?

- Development of appropriate interventions and the corresponding baseline has to be an iterative process. From many donor headquarters there is the demand for indicators and baselines because if you don't have a baseline it's difficult to measure changes later on. But it is necessary to first know what should be measured before starting with the baseline. Often interventions change during implementation when realising that there are better ways to achieve one's target. This is something particular to the M4P approach, which advocates having that flexibility to take opportunities that come along. But this can leave you without a good baseline. There is no easy answer and the way forward is to be very pragmatic. If the project interventions change then try to put down a baseline as fast as possible. DCED has implementation guidelines for the Standard that give

some tips in these cases.

- In M4P projects there is not one single intervention and many M4P projects are very flexible in adjusting interventions to a changing context and changing knowledge. At the start of a project, not all interventions are designed. This means that the first baseline has to be pretty generic and when starting a specific intervention then something like a 'sub-baseline' might be established. If you want to have good results chains then you have to do a very comprehensive market analysis and this also provides you with a lot of baseline information.

Question 8: What is the difference of having a project based on results chains or a logframe for steering and decision-making? What examples are emerging from managers and implementing teams on how they are applying their results chains to inform on going decision-making?

- A results measurement system based only on logframes is not very effective for steering and decision-making. If you use a logframe for monitoring, you pick up changes without really knowing what caused those changes, so it's very difficult to attribute it back to your activities. It's a bit like a black box where you tick off your activities and wait for a year without any monitoring. Thus afterwards when you only measure changes at the impact level, you have an attribution problem. Secondly the information comes out often too late because instead of measuring changes at different stages after your intervention, you only measure according to your logframe indicators (which might not be relevant); and thus cannot be used to manage interventions any more. In M4P projects it's the market trigger and market uptake that you have to measure in real-time, so that you can adapt the intervention.
- The results chains lay out the logic of intervention and then it is much easier to see whether specific project activities are leading to different levels of change or not. Project managers can use the results chains to check whether changes are taking place as initially anticipated and then take necessary follow-up activities if and when required. It is important to encourage an open and honest culture in programmes, to ensure that team members report back on both positive and negative findings, which are then analysed and reflected back on the results changes for managing projects.

Question 9: Is there still a need for external evaluation of an audited project? How would this evaluation be different from a 'conventional' one?

- If a project has got a decent monitoring system then the evaluation is much simpler. Sometimes donors want to evaluate things additional to the impact, for example through interviews with stakeholders, etc. However typical 'conventional' evaluation struggles to find enough useful information as often there are not enough data and evaluators are not familiar enough with the project. On the other hand an audited project or one with a decent monitoring system has most of the information that an evaluator would be keen to see and questions, discussions, conclusions can be based on solid information.

Question 10: Why to do an audit? How to audit a complex project with many different interventions?

- If a project feels that they are monitoring well, how would they get credit for that? The only way to do that is to have someone from outside take a look at the whole system and see how it works. One of the advantages of the Standard is the requirement of a paper trail documenting what the project actually does and why it does that. So an auditor can come in and have a look at the documents, and then certify whether it has a good system of results measurement in place..
- It is not necessary to look at all interventions. If there is a portfolio of interventions a sample can be selected and reviewed, representing the whole portfolio.

Question 11: When is the time for doing an audit? How much time does it take to set up a running M&E System according to the DCED Standard?

- The right time for an audit is really when the project feels that they are ready for it. The DCED Standard has two auditing systems, one applicable to programmes which have been working towards the Standard for results measurement for less than one year and one for programmes applying it for more than one year. The former would be an audit to check whether the programme has a system in place and the latter for a system in use.
- It is not too complicated to get a system going. You might need help from outside. There is the possibility to have a mock audit that can show where there is still room for improvement. Not every project must try to be audited as soon as possible. More important is that the project staff works with it and uses the information that the system produces.

Question 12: Universal indicators such as the three defined by the DCED Standard are designed to enable aggregation across programmes. On 'scale', there is no standardised way of how to categorise 'beneficiaries'. How will we be able to aggregate if different programmes use different methods of counting?

- First of all it is important to realise that 'scale or outreach' is for those beneficiaries that have actually benefited, i.e. have increased their income. For example beneficiaries that have changed their behaviour, but have not increased their income as a result of that change, are not counted. Secondly, outreach is categorised in direct and indirect. Beneficiaries reported as direct are those beneficiaries that have directly benefited due to e.g. support that the project provided to the service provider to e.g. improve its service provision. Indirect benefited beneficiaries represent target beneficiaries that copy their neighbours' behaviour or other service providers that copy the supported service provider (crowding in).
- Attribution is critical for both direct and indirect beneficiaries, and it requires extra attention by practitioners to be on the lookout for potential indirect changes. Also in the compliance criteria for attribution, the Standard requires programmes to acknowledge the contributions of other publicly funded programmes when measured changes are reported. This could potentially help at a higher-level aggregation across programmes by already identifying where there can be potential overlaps.

Question 12: What are the experiences of measuring the three universal indicators at Household level (rigorous surveys vs. case studies...)?

- The Standard helps you to measure additional income due to the project interventions; the reported figures are thus the additional income only. If target beneficiaries replace one crop by the crop addressed by the project, only the difference is taken into consideration (so the gross income of crop 1 that is no longer grown is deducted from the gross income of crop 2 that replaced it). However, additional income losses or gains that are not linked to the targeted crop (e.g. remittances reduced or increased) are not measured and reported. This is because total income changes at households are of course important, but complex to attribute – since so many other things are going on at household level. The Standard therefore stops at enterprise-level indicators. Case studies at household level may nonetheless complement the more attributable findings at enterprise level.

Question 13: How to measure results inside of households, which are not direct contacted during the project? For example gender issues in households?

- If one wants to measure gender changes within households, these changes should be reflected in the result chains with measurable indicators. E.g. if one wishes to see that additional income increases the household spending, this can be measured, as well as reducing workloads or control and decision powers; attribution may however be a challenge (as above). Gender tools are available that assist you to measure the indicators you have defined in the relevant result chain boxes.

Question 14: Now in addition to the Results Chain methodology, the Theory of Change (ToC) method is becoming more popular. How do you see the connection between those two approaches?

- The Theory of Change method seems more or less similar to results chains but more on a programme level rather than intervention specific. The Theory of Change community define it as a graphical representation of the types of interventions (of a single programme or a comprehensive community initiative) that are required to bring about a particular change. Thus essentially the ToC is a single picture of multiple interventions required to contribute to the ultimate achievement of a goal. The results chain can zoom into individual set of activities that together form a single intervention. So in a way one TOC can be linked to a number of results chains which add up to the TOC at a programme level.
- Another possible interpretation is that the Theory of Change method provides a framework for preparing results chains; our experience has been that such frameworks can be helpful for some people, but can confuse others. This is why ultimately we suggest that programme managers start with a blank sheet of paper, and simply write down the logic of what they are doing. Trying to fit their own logic into someone else's framework (or categories, or definitions) might be helpful, but sometimes it might not. Usually people already have a clear idea of why they are doing what they are doing, but not a clear articulation of that logic on paper – so the question is how we can best support people to get something down on paper.

Closing remarks

The following closing remarks were delivered by Peter Tschumi, focal point of the e+i network:

- The DCED Standard is a useful tool that will improve our M&E systems and eventually our interventions and it will help to better communicate results to a broader audience such as the top management, the parliament, other constituencies and the broad public. The DCED Standard is also a useful tool to improve the ability to attribute results to the project interventions.
- Results chains are a very practical instrument that constitutes the centrepiece of results measurement. While logframes are mandatory in the SDC system and form an integral part of SDC credit proposals, results chains are not mandatory but complementary, they are far more detailed and practical. There are however no antagonistic characteristics between logframes and results chains but they work very well together.
- If a measurement system is developed in a smart way as an integral project management tool, the additional cost to measure beyond the outputs are not extremely high. The system however helps the managers to get more accurate information in order to take better decisions, and at the end of the day there is even a gain in efficiency and effectiveness of projects and its interventions.
- The three universal indicators of the DCED Standard are mandatory as far as possible for e+i projects. Whereas “scale” and “income” is usually more common and easier to measure, “changes in employment” pose a bigger challenge. Moreover, it is quite obvious that almost all projects have an additional set of indicators they deem important, such as gender, governance aspects or other pro-poor growth indicators. These additional indicators are again not antagonistic to the universal indicators on the DCED Standard.
- SDC has had a strong involvement in the development of the DCED Standard not the least by providing many practical cases in the field. The development will continue and the intention is for example to simplify the procedures – if possible- for small projects.
- The DCED Standard is more and more used in SDC projects but still more efforts also from the projects are needed to further improve the Standard. SDC is committed to continue this work with the DCED, currently new working groups of the e+i network have started to elaborate practical knowledge how to apply the principles of the Standard – in an appropriate manner- to vocational skills development.

Thanks to contributors and Webinar participants

The facilitation team thanks all contributors of this e-discussion for their valuable questions and comments (in order of appearance) – and to all participants of the Webinar

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Website of e+i network PSD Discussion Group: <http://dgroups.org/sdc/privatesectordevelopment>

Website of the DCED: <http://www.enterprise-development.org/>

Website of Hans Posthumus: <http://www.hposthumus.nl/>

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