The logical framework

The logical framework, or logframe, is the most common and best known planning tool used in international development. It is also the most hotly debated. Originally designed for use in simple timebound projects, it is now the tool of choice for donors in interventions ranging from small projects to organisational core funding. The logical framework is often used as a basis for monitoring and evaluation.

The logical framework was originally created as a planning tool for military purposes, and was then further developed by NASA to plan space programmes. After being adopted by USAID in the 1970s, the logical framework, or logframe, has since spread to all areas of the development sector. It is the tool of choice for official donors for planning and performance assessment and is closely associated with results based management approaches (Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004; Earle, 2002).

A logical framework can have many different purposes depending on the context, and it is probably this that has made it so popular. It was originally conceived as a planning tool, aimed at supporting the management of planned processes. However depending on the circumstances, a logframe can be:

- a planning tool;
- a tool for programme management;
- the basis for M&E in a project or programme;
- an accountability mechanism;
- a succinct summary of a piece of work;
- a 'window' into the work of an organisation or complex programme;
- a linear theory of change; or
- a mechanism for seeking funding.

With so many potential uses, the logical framework is truly the Swiss Army Knife of the development community.

How it works

The original logical framework was based on a simple grid, and described what a project or programme needed to do to achieve its goal through a hierarchy of objectives. A typical example is shown in the right hand column.

Starting with the narrative summary column, the goal defines the longer-term impact that a project or programme aims to contribute to. The goal may be designed to be achieved after completion of the project or programme, and may depend on the actions of many different agencies, as well as changes in the external environment. The next row down deals with the objectives or purpose of the project or programme – the changes it hopes to directly influence over its lifetime. The outputs row includes the tangible products or services the project or programme aims to produce. The last two rows deal with the activities of the project or programme and the resources required (inputs).

Narrative summary	Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Means of Verification	Assumptions
Goal:			
Objectives:			
Outputs:			
Activities:			
Inputs:			

The second column – objectively verifiable indicators – defines what information will be collected to indicate whether or how far the goal, objectives and outputs have been achieved. The third column – means of verification – indicates the sources that will be used to collect the indicators, such as interviews, observation or secondary sources. The final column identifies the key risks and assumptions that might influence the success or otherwise of the project or programme.

When developing a logical framework it is normal to work down the first column by identifying the goal, objectives, outputs, activities and inputs. Theoretically, the assumptions column should then be filled in from bottom to top, followed by the middle two columns.

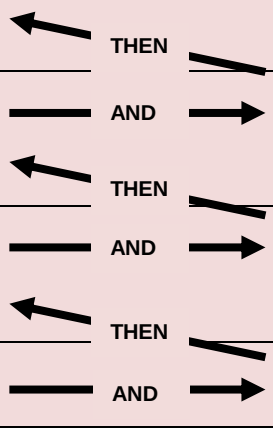
If a logical framework is done properly, the hierarchy of objectives should read logically from the bottom to the top. If the inputs are sufficient the activities can be carried out. If the activities are carried out then the outputs will be produced. If the outputs are produced then the objectives should be realised. And if the objectives are realised they should contribute to the ultimate goal.

However, the tool recognises that in development work things do not always go according to plan, and there are many factors that may influence whether outputs translate into objectives or objectives into the goal. The purpose of the assumptions column is to make these

external factors explicit at the start of a project or programme and encourage staff to take appropriate mitigating action. The logic of the logical framework is therefore as follows:

- ⇒ IF the activities are carried out AND the assumptions are realised THEN the outputs should be delivered.
- ⇒ IF the outputs are delivered AND the assumptions are realised THEN the objectives should be achieved.
- ⇒ IF the objectives are achieved AND the assumptions are realised THEN the project or programme will contribute to the goal.

Narrative summary	Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Means of Verification	Assumptions
Contribution to Goal			
***IF** Objectives achieved* Objectives achieved			Assumptions realised
***IF** Outputs delivered* Outputs delivered			Assumptions realised
***IF** Activities carried out*			Assumptions realised



Different versions

All logframes are based on a similar logic. But there are many different versions, all with their own features and terminologies. This can be very confusing at times. The table below shows some of the terminology at different levels that has been used by a range of different institutions. Note that some logical frameworks also cover different levels of results. For example, the DFID and USAID logframes have space for inputs whilst the EC and World Bank logframes do not.

DFID	EC	World Bank	USAID
Impact	Overall objective	Goal	Goal
Outcome	Purpose	Development objective	Purpose
			(Sub-purposes)
Outputs	Results	Outputs	Outputs
Activities	Activities	Activities	
Inputs			Inputs

Some logframes (such as the USAID example above) allow for an extra level between outputs and purpose (or outcomes). Others include extra columns for different elements such as baselines, milestones, targets and benchmarks. However, the principal of the vertical logic model always remains the same.

Strengths and weaknesses

There have been many fierce debates around the strengths and weaknesses of the logical framework. This is so with any tool, but the difference with the logical framework is that its use is enforced in so many different circumstances, and development practitioners are not free to pick and choose when they use it. This perhaps explains why it is so controversial.

Some of the key strengths of the logical framework are as follows: (see Bakewell and Garbutt, 2005).

- It forces people to think through how a project or programme intends to bring about change, and explain how activities might produce outputs and contribute to objectives and goals. Many people working at INTRAC remember how game-changing the logical framework was when first introduced, and how it helped transform thinking in many projects that had not previously fully considered the links between activities and desired changes.
- By acknowledging, identifying and reviewing risks and assumptions that lie beyond the control of project or programme management, but that might affect progress, the logical framework helps those managers develop mitigating actions. However, whilst sometimes recognised as the most important part of a logical framework, some also argue that the articulation of assumptions is often taken the least seriously.
- The logical framework immediately puts the focus on monitoring and evaluation by ensuring there are clear benchmarks for success and failure. It also helps ensure there are plans for how and when information will be collected throughout the lifetime of a project or programme.
- It provides a simple summary of the key elements of a development initiative in a consistent and coherent way. This means people can quickly understand the broad outline of a project or programme – what it is trying to do and how. This is part of what makes it so valuable for donor agencies.
- It is relatively simple and well understood. Although some have argued that people in developing countries do not like the logical framework, that has not necessarily been the experience of the authors. Many people like the logical framework as a tool and find it straightforward to use and apply.

However, there are some weaknesses of the logical framework. Some of these apply to the tool itself and others only apply to how it is used in certain situations (ibid).

- Some argue that it inhibits participatory planning, as it is often developed and devised in head offices rather than in the field. It is certainly true there is nothing in the logical framework itself that encourages participatory planning, although many agencies advise that it should be developed alongside other planning processes such as consultation, situational analysis and stakeholder analysis. Another issue is that even if many stakeholders are involved in its initial development, it may be impractical to keep going back to those stakeholders if a logical framework needs to be changed over the course of a project or programme.

- Some feel that the logical framework is too rigid and has a tendency to lock projects and programmes into one path to change, whereas in reality there may be many different paths. The danger is that a project or programme then continues on a pre-defined path instead of evolving in the light of experience and events. One of the reasons for this is that a logframe is often treated as a contractual document, and staff feel they have to carry out the activities defined in the logical framework as initially planned, especially if those activities were discussed extensively at the start.

- Another aspect of rigidity is that indicators are usually articulated at the start of the project or programme, rather than coming to light along the way. Some argue that in some types of development interventions divergence from a project or programme plan is the norm rather than the exception. Yet projects and programmes may still be judged based on indicators developed at the design stage of a project or programme.

- The logical framework is based on a very linear logic that emphasises cause and effect. This can be seen as quite mechanistic, whereas in reality change can be a very complex process.

- Logical framework thinking may encourage reviews and evaluations to focus on expected consequences (e.g. performance against pre-defined indicators) to the exclusion of unexpected changes, whether positive or negative.

- Finally, the logical framework is a simplification of reality. This is not a problem in itself (many tools are to some degree simplifications of reality) but can become a problem if it is not recognised. This can be dangerous enough in a simple time-bound service delivery project. But when logical frameworks are applied to the work of complex programmes or international organisations the problems become even more profound. This is the subject of the separate paper in this series '*Beyond Logframes'*.

Summary

The logical framework divides opinion as no other tool or process used in international development. Bakewell and Garbutt's research into the use of the logical framework (2005, p12) found that:

> *"The world ... divides between those who see the [logical framework] as a universal approach whose application is hindered by people's lack of understanding; and those who see it as a more particular approach, which is embedded in a worldview largely associated with Western positivist thinking, and alien to the rest of the world. Both universalists and particularists may find the [logical framework] useful, but both groups have to face the fact that the some people 'just don't get it'. The former tend to see the problem lying with the people, while the latter locate the problem in the [logical framework]"*

That finding is probably as true now as it was then. There may also be some truth in the opinion sometimes expressed that *'logical people are more likely to like the logical framework'.* But it is hard to come to any real consensus as opinions differ so widely.

The authors of this paper have worked with many people in the North and the South who are good at developing logical frameworks and people who are not so good; people who like logframes and people who loathe them; people who use them because they want to and people who use them because they have no choice; people who take them seriously when developing them and people who treat them as a box-ticking exercise designed to keep donors happy; and people who develop logframes over a period of time with extensive engagement from different stakeholders and those who fill them in an hour before the deadline for a funding proposal.

At the end of the day logical frameworks are for now a reality of the development world, and would appear to be here to stay for the immediate future. While that is the case they are likely to remain a significant influence over how monitoring and evaluation is planned and executed within development projects and programmes.

Further reading and resources

Further papers in this series deal with Results Based Management and how logframes can be extended to be used in complex programmes and organisations. There are also papers on another methodology used in planning – Outcome Mapping. A generic explanation of the logical framework is contained in a paper written by Wiggins, S. and Shields, D. (1995). "Clarifying the 'Logical Framework' as a Tool for Planning and Managing Development Projects" in *Project Appraisal* 10(1), pp 2-12. This is available from various places on the internet.

Many organisations have manuals on how to use their own versions of the logical framework. DFID's principle document is called *Guidance on Using the Revised Logical Framework*, (edited in January 2011) and is available from the website address: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/253889/using-revised-logical-framework-external.pdf

The INTRAC paper *The Use and Abuse of the Logical Framework Approach* (see reference below) is available from the INTRAC website, and was the result of primary research conducted on behalf of SIDA in 2005.

References

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INTRAC is a specialist capacity building institution for organisations involved in international relief and development. Since 1992, INTRAC has contributed significantly to the body of knowledge on monitoring and evaluation. Our approach to M&E is practical and founded on core principles. We encourage appropriate M&E, based on understanding what works in different contexts, and we work with people to develop their own M&E approaches and tools, based on their needs.

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