

RESULTS-BASED MANAGEMENT



Results-Based Management (RBM) is a performance management strategy that has increasingly been adopted by institutional donors over the past decade. It has significant implications for strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation. RBM places the measurement of results at the heart of management. There are passionate debates about how useful or appropriate it is within social development.

Results-Based Management (RBM) has been around for a long time. It has become increasingly popular in the donor community, particularly since the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005, where countries from around the world agreed to change the way in which donor and developing countries collaborated. There is no single, agreed definition of RBM, but a typical definition is as follows:

“RBM is a management strategy by which all actors, contributing directly or indirectly to achieving a set of results, ensure that their processes, products and services contribute to the achievement of desired results (outputs, outcomes and higher-level goals or impact). The actors in turn use information and evidence on actual results to inform decision making on the design, resourcing and delivery of programmes and activities as well as for accountability and reporting.” (UNDG 2011, p2)

There are a number of key elements to RBM. These include the following (see Hailey and Sorgenfrei 2004; Bakewell and Garbutt 2005; Mango 2014).

1. The identification of clear and measurable objectives.
2. The identification of indicators to measure progress towards objectives.
3. The setting of targets associated with objectives and indicators.
4. The establishment of a monitoring system to regularly collect data and compare targets with actual results.
5. The use of evaluations to provide complementary performance information that is not available from monitoring systems.
6. The use of performance information for internal management accountability, learning and decision-making, as well as for reporting to external stakeholders and partners.

Increasingly, RBM has become associated with the use of linear planning tools such as the logical framework (or logframe) and with results chain terminology. A results chain is the sequence of results considered necessary to achieve desired objectives. This begins with inputs, which are used to carry out activities and deliver outputs. It is hoped that these will help bring about a set of outcomes that will eventually contribute to the desired impacts.

RBM debates

RBM is hugely controversial within the social development context, and there are fierce debates about how appropriate it is in different circumstances. Supporters of RBM argue that it reflects an increasing concern with greater accountability between large institutions and host governments – something that is seen as an inherently good thing. They also point to the fact that the purpose of RBM is partly to enhance the role of strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation within management processes. Again, this is something most would agree is a reasonable goal.

Some supporters of RBM acknowledge that the ‘management’ side of RBM has often been overlooked, but see this as a failure of application rather than of RBM principles. For example, the UNDG RBM manual explicitly notes the flexibility needed to change activities and strategies when needed, in collaboration with a range of different stakeholders (UNDG 2011).

Indeed as one INTRAC colleague is fond of saying, “*why wouldn’t you want to manage by results?*” As M&E practitioners surely we should want to see our work taken seriously, and considered when managers make decisions.

On the other hand, some critics argue that RBM is often applied in a very rigid way, with a focus on the achievement of hard, measurable results. This can lead to a number of problems.

- Firstly, there may be a bias towards doing what is measurable. The risk is that targets and performance indicators over-simplify development efforts by assuming that only verifiable and measurable facts are important, and other types of knowledge have less value (Eyben 2013). This then encourages agencies to focus on programmes seeking to bring about simple, measurable change instead of more complex initiatives with goals that are difficult to measure. As former USAID President Andrew Natsios commented recently: “... those development programs that are most precisely and easily measured are the least transformational, and those programs that are most transformational are the least measurable” (Van Ogenvalle et. al. 2012).
- A second potential bias is that RBM may encourage the pursuit of short-term rather than long-term change. In

social development some changes take many years to materialise, and may be due to the contributions of many different organisations. This does not always sit well with the need to manage by results over short timescales.

- Thirdly, RBM may not be so appropriate when working in areas where there are different views of what constitutes success. This is because RBM encourages a focus on measurable, unambiguous indicators and targets, whereas the reality in many social development settings is that there are different interpretations of what constitutes success.
- Fourthly, there is an argument that RBM has become too dominant. Some argue that what used to be creative tension between a *“flexible and enabling role in supporting an empowerment process of social change and the obligation to demonstrate results and fulfil internal rules and regulations ... is no longer creative”* because the obligation to demonstrate results has become increasingly dominant (Eyben 2013, p5).

INTRAC’s own experiences over the past few years confirm that many CSOs are coming under increasing pressure to justify funding through the measurement of results at different levels, and some of this is down to the RBM agenda. International NGOs and CSOs operating complex programmes may find it most difficult to conform to RBM principles, as it can be very difficult to measure results and summarise performance across different locations and sectors. This inevitably affects CSOs further down the funding chain, as demands and expectations are pushed downwards.

But the debate is also framed in the context of an ever-sharpening divide between development practitioners wedded to RBM principles and those more in favour of complexity theory. The latter can be characterised as

preferring M&E approaches such as Most Significant Change, Outcome Mapping and stories of change to logframes, measurable targets and evidence-based approaches. Discussions around RBM therefore need to be seen as part of much wider debates around social development and the contribution of the aid industry as a whole.

Summary

Many debates within the field of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are about how tools or approaches are applied, rather than their intrinsic value, and RBM is no different. Indeed the principles on which RBM is based – greater accountability, more harmonisation, taking M&E seriously – are hard to argue with.

But it is also evident that any system designed to manage by results is harder to apply in situations where change is intangible, long-term or contested. This is the arena in which many CSOs operate, and it is perhaps not surprising that so many (by no means all) are suspicious of the RBM agenda.

Ultimately, assessing results should always play a part in management. Of course this involves assessments of predicted, measurable change. But management is also about making value judgements about changes, identifying unexpected or negative changes, monitoring the external environment, and constantly questioning what else could be done instead of what is being done. RBM focuses most keenly on one aspect of management – the identification and measurement of predicted, measurable change – and INTRAC believes it is important that this is balanced by other methods and approaches that enable more flexible and nuanced monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes.

***“To measure whatever can easily be measured is okay as far as it goes
To disregard that which cannot easily be measured is artificial and misleading
To presume that what cannot easily be measured is not very important is dangerous
To say that what cannot easily be measured does not really exist is fatal.”***

Source: Adapted from Yankelovich (1972)

Further reading and resources

Other papers in this section deal with logical frameworks and how to make logical frameworks more useful in complex situations.



The logical framework



Beyond logframes

Many organisations have manuals on Results-Based Management (RBM) and many are freely available on the internet. One such is the United Nations Development Group manual (see reference below). A critique of the evidence and results agenda by Rosalind Eyben is available from the Big Push Forward website.

- *Results-Based Management Handbook: Harmonizing RBM concepts and approaches for improved development results at country level*, United Nations Development Group, October 2011. This manual is available from: <https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/UNDG-RBM-Handbook-2012.pdf>
- *Uncovering the Politics of 'Evidence' and 'Results': A framing paper for development practitioners*, by Rosalind Eyben, April 2013, is available from <http://bigpushforward.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Uncovering-the-Politics-of-Evidence-and-Results-by-Rosalind-Eyben.pdf>

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- Yankelovich (1972). *"Corporate Priorities: A continuing study of the new demands on business."*

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INTRAC is a not-for-profit organisation that builds the skills and knowledge of civil society organisations to be more effective in addressing poverty and inequality. Since 1992 INTRAC has provided specialist support in monitoring and evaluation, working with people to develop their own M&E approaches and tools, based on their needs. We encourage appropriate and practical M&E, based on understanding what works in different contexts.

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