

THE LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The logical framework, sometimes known as a logframe, is the most common planning tool used in social development. It defines the logic of a project or programme from its activities through to the desired changes, and is used as a basis for monitoring and evaluation. A logical framework can serve many different purposes. There are several versions, but each conforms to the same overall logic.

The logical framework was originally created as a planning tool for military purposes, and was then further developed by NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration) to plan space programmes. After being adopted by USAID in the 1970s, the logical framework has since spread to all areas of the development sector. It is the tool of choice for most official donors.

A logical framework can serve many different purposes (see box below) depending on the context. It is probably this that has made it so popular within the social development community.



The logical framework is also known as a logframe. There is no difference between the two terms, and they are used interchangeably even within the same documents.

How it works

The original logical framework was based on a simple grid. It described what a project or programme needed to do to achieve its goal by outlining a hierarchy of objectives. An example is shown in figure 1 below.

The narrative summary: Starting with the narrative summary column, the goal defines the longer-term change that a project or programme hopes 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 socio-economic or political environment. The next row down deals with the purpose of the project or programme – the change it hopes to directly influence within its lifetime. The outputs row covers the tangible products or services the project or programme aims to deliver. The last two rows cover the activities of the project or programme, and the resources required to implement it (the inputs).

Uses of the logical framework

- ➔ A planning tool
- ➔ A tool for project or programme management
- ➔ The basis for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) within a project or programme
- ➔ An accountability mechanism
- ➔ A succinct summary of a development intervention
- ➔ A 'window' into the work of an organisation or complex programme
- ➔ A linear theory of change
- ➔ A mechanism for seeking funding or support

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

Figure 1: The original logical framework

Narrative Summary	Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Means of Verification	Assumptions
GOAL <i>The longer-term change a project or programme hopes to contribute to</i>	<i>The measures that will show whether or how far the goal has been achieved</i>	<i>Sources of information, or methods used to collect the indicators</i>	(This box is not used)
PURPOSE <i>The change hoped for by the end of the project or programme</i>	<i>The measures that will show whether or how far the purpose has been achieved</i>	<i>Sources of information, or methods used to collect the indicators</i>	<i>Assumptions necessary if the purpose is to contribute to the wider goal</i>
OUTPUTS <i>The products or services the project or programme intends to deliver</i>	<i>The measures that will show whether the outputs have been delivered</i>	<i>Sources of information, or methods used to collect the indicators</i>	<i>Assumptions necessary for outputs to generate the desired purpose</i>
ACTIVITIES <i>The activities that will be implemented through the project or programme</i>			<i>Assumptions necessary for activities to be turned into outputs</i>
INPUTS <i>The financial, human, and material resources required to implement the project or programme</i>			<i>Initial assumptions about the project</i>

Objectively verifiable indicators: The indicators define the information that needs to be collected to show whether, or how far, the goal, purpose and outputs have been achieved. Indicators are not normally developed for activities or inputs.

Means of verification: The third column includes the sources that will be used to collect the indicators. These can include different tools and methodologies – such as interviews, observation or surveys – or information acquired from other places, e.g. World Bank or government reports.

Assumptions: The final column identifies the key risks and assumptions that might influence the success or otherwise of the project or programme. In social development, things do not always go according to plan, and many factors may influence whether successfully achieved outputs translate into the desired purpose, or the purpose into a goal. Within a logical framework, the assumptions column is designed to make these factors explicit at the start of a project or programme, and encourage staff to take appropriate mitigating action.



When developing a logical framework it is recommended to first work down the left-hand column by identifying the goal, purpose, outputs, activities and inputs. The assumptions column should then be filled in from bottom to top, followed by the middle two columns.

If a logical framework is designed properly, the hierarchy of the first column 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

purpose should be achieved. And if the purpose is achieved it should contribute to the goal. However, the final (assumptions) column allows a project or programme to be more realistic about its expectations. It outlines the conditions necessary in order for change at one level of a logical framework to contribute to change at the next level.

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 purpose should be achieved.
- **IF** the purpose is achieved **AND** the assumptions are realised **THEN** the goal should be achieved.

For example, in figure 2 (which uses slightly different terminology to the example in figure 1) the logic for activities to outputs reads:

- ➔ **IF** the project runs 5 summer reading camps, each with capacity for 100 students
- ➔ **AND** parents of children with low reading proficiency are willing to send them to the camp
- ➔ **THEN** 500 students with low reading proficiency will complete a reading summer camp.

Different Versions

All logical frameworks are based on a similar logic. But there are many versions, each with their own features and terminologies. This can be very confusing for people who are not accustomed to working with logical frameworks. Figure 3 on the following page shows some of the terminologies that have been used by a range of different organisations in the past. Note that some logical frameworks also cover different levels of results. For example, the UK Department for International

Figure 2: The logic of the logical framework

	PROJECT SUMMARY	INDICATORS	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS / ASSUMPTIONS
Goal	10% increase in the number of Grades 5-6 primary students continuing on to high school within 3 years.	Percentage of Grades 5-6 primary students continuing on to high school.	Comparison of primary and high school enrolment records.	N/A
Outcome	Improve reading proficiency among children in Grades 5-6 by 20% within 3 years.	Reading proficiency among children in Grades 5-6	Six monthly reading proficiency tests using the national assessment tool.	Improved reading proficiency provides self confidence required to stay in school.
Outputs	500 Grade 5-6 students with low reading proficiency complete a reading summer camp	Number of students completing a reading summer camp.	Summer camp attendance records.	Children apply what they learnt in the summer camp at school.
Activities	Run five summer reading camps, each with capacity for 100 Grades 5-6 students.	Number of summer camps	Summer camp records.	Parents of children with low reading proficiency are willing to send them to the camp.

Source: <https://tools4dev.org/resources/how-to-write-a-logical-framework-logframe/>

Development (DFID – now FCDO) and USAID logical frameworks have space for inputs, whilst the European Commission (EC) and Agence Française de Développement (AFD) logical frameworks do not.

Some logical frameworks (such as the USAID example in figure 3) allow for an extra level between outputs and purpose (or outcomes), or allow for multiple outcomes. Others include extra columns for different elements such as baselines, milestones, targets and benchmarks. In recent times there has also been an increasing tendency to include spaces or boxes to capture actual results against indicators on a regular basis. However, the principle of the vertical logic always remains the same.

Strengths and weaknesses

There have been many fierce debates around the strengths and weaknesses of the logical framework, particularly in the first part of the twentieth century. This is perhaps because the logical framework is often imposed on organisations by donors as a condition of funding, and

Figure 3: Different versions of the logical framework

DFID	EC	AFD	USAID
Impact	Overall objective	Overall objective	Goal
Outcome	Purpose	Specific objectives	Purpose
		Intermediate objectives	(Sub-purposes)
Outputs	Results	Expected results	Outputs
Activities	Activities	Activities	
Inputs			Inputs

organisations are therefore not free to decide whether or how to use it. Some of the key strengths and weaknesses of the logical framework are described in the table below (see Bakewell and Garbutt, 2005).

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES AND LIMITATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ The logical framework forces people to think about how a project or programme’s activities and outputs will contribute to desired changes, both in the short- and long-term. In recent years, projects and programmes have sometimes been encouraged to do this through developing theories of change, but these were not widely used when the logical framework was first introduced. ❑ By identifying and reviewing risks and assumptions that lie beyond the control of project or programme management, and which might affect progress, the logical framework helps managers pursue mitigating actions. ❑ The logical framework puts the focus on M&E right from the start by ensuring there are clear benchmarks (indicators) for success and failure. It also helps ensure there are plans for how and when M&E information will be collected throughout the project or programme lifetime. ❑ A logical framework can provide a simple summary of the key elements of a development intervention 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 achieve and how. This is part of what makes the logical framework so valuable for donor agencies. ❑ The logical framework is a relatively simple and well-understood tool. Although some have argued that practitioners based in the Global South do not like the logical framework, that has not necessarily been the experience of INTRAC. Many development practitioners have used logical frameworks from the start of their careers, and have found ways to build on the strengths and offset some of the weaknesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Some argue that logical frameworks inhibit participatory planning, as they are often developed by small teams in head offices rather than in the field. Even if many stakeholders are involved in the 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. ❑ The logical framework is based on a linear logic that emphasises predictable cause and effect. It can sometimes be seen as quite mechanistic. In reality, change can be a very complex and messy process. ❑ Some feel that the logical framework can be too rigid, and can 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 continues on a pre-defined path instead of evolving and adapting in the light of experience and events. ❑ When using a logical framework, indicators are articulated at the start of the project or programme, rather than becoming known along the way. Even where plans evolve continuously, projects and programmes may still be judged based on indicators developed at the design stage of a project or programme. ❑ Logical framework approaches may encourage reviews and evaluations to focus on expected change (i.e. performance against pre-defined indicators) to the exclusion of unexpected changes, whether positive or negative. ❑ A logical framework often represents a simplification of reality. This may not be a problem in a straightforward, time-bound, service delivery project. But when logical frameworks are applied to the work of complex programmes or entire organisations they may result in an unhelpful over-simplification.

Summary

The logical framework has divided opinion more than any other tool or process used in social 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 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]."

However, over recent years the debate seems to have died down somewhat, either because development practitioners

have become accustomed to using the logical framework, or because debates have shifted elsewhere (e.g. towards theory of change approaches or systems thinking).

The authors of this paper have worked with many people in the Global North and the Global 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.

For now, logical frameworks are a reality of the development world, and are likely to remain for the foreseeable future. Consequently, they are likely to continue to wield 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 section of the M&E Universe deal with outcome mapping and results frameworks for use in complex programmes and organisations. These can be accessed by clicking the links below.



Outcome mapping



Programmatic results frameworks

A generic explanation of the logical framework is contained in a paper written by S. Wiggins and D. Shields in 1995 called "Clarifying the 'Logical Framework' as a Tool for Planning and Managing Development Projects". This is available from various places on the internet. Many donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have manuals explaining how to use their own versions of the logical framework, and many of these are also available through online searches.

The INTRAC paper "The Use and Abuse of the Logical Framework Approach" (see reference below) was the result of primary research conducted on behalf of SIDA in 2005. Although written two decades ago, much of the information and analysis remains relevant, and the paper is still widely used within social development.

References

- Bakewell, O. and A. Garbutt (2005). *The Use and Abuse of the Logical Framework Approach*. SIDA, 2005.

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