PROGRAMMATIC RESULTS FRAMEWORKS

The logical framework, also known as a logframe, is the most common results framework used in international development. Initially designed for use within simple projects, it has limitations when applied across large or complex programmes of work involving multiple agencies. A variety of approaches can help overcome these limitations.

The logical framework is the most common results framework used in international development. Otherwise known as a logframe, it was originally a tool designed for use in discrete, timebound projects. Its use has since spread to complex, multi-level programmes involving multiple agencies. In some cases, logframes are now being used to summarise the entire portfolio of large non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

However, the logical framework, in its initial form, was not designed to cope with a high level of complexity. Three main problems may occur when logframes are used to summarise large, complex programmes (IFAD, 2002).

▪ First, work may be oversimplified so much that the logframe becomes useless for programme management purposes.

▪ Second, particularly if a logframe allows only one main outcome or purpose statement, the hierarchy of changes needed to achieve the ultimate goal may become squeezed into a single change statement, which gives no real sense of the scale or variety of changes sought or considered necessary.

▪ Third, outputs and outcomes can become confused. This is because a logframe is only ever written from the point of view of a single agency. However, in a complex programme many different agencies may be involved at different levels. This is illustrated in figure 1.

In response to these challenges, programmes have adopted a variety of approaches. Some of these are described in this paper. The approaches have been divided into five categories, as summarised in the box below, and outlined in the remainder of this paper.

Approaches designed to address the limitations of the logical framework in complex programmes

➔ Expanding the logical framework
➔ Using multiple logical frameworks
➔ Changing the logic of the logical framework
➔ Including different measures
➔ Introducing space for learning and improvement

Figure 1: Different perspectives on outcomes and outputs

	NGO	Partner	Community
Goal	Communities secure better services	Communities secure better services	Communities secure better services
Outcomes	Partner carries out effective mobilisation work with communities	Communities engage with local government	Local government takes actions to address needs of communities
Output or activity	Training conducted with partner	Partner carries out effective mobilisation work with communities	Communities engage with local government

Whilst the goal remains the same throughout, the NGO's outcome is the same as the output of the partner. Equally the partner's outcome is worded in exactly the same way as the output (or activity) of the community organisation. In these kinds of scenario, categorising changes as activities, outputs or outcomes can be misleading, especially if a logframe is meant to be a shared document between different agencies.

It is important to note that whilst there may be different options for developing more suitable results frameworks for complex programmes, many organisations have also devised innovative solutions to enable their work to be captured through a standard logical framework. Developing a programmatic results framework is an option rather than a necessity.

Expanding the logical framework

Logical frameworks can be expanded horizontally or vertically. Horizontally, additional columns can be added to show not just a narrative summary, indicators, means of verification and assumption, but also baselines, milestones, targets and achieved results. Information can also be included on who collects data, when and how; and how it might be analysed and used. Indeed, many standard logical frameworks now contain at least some of these options.
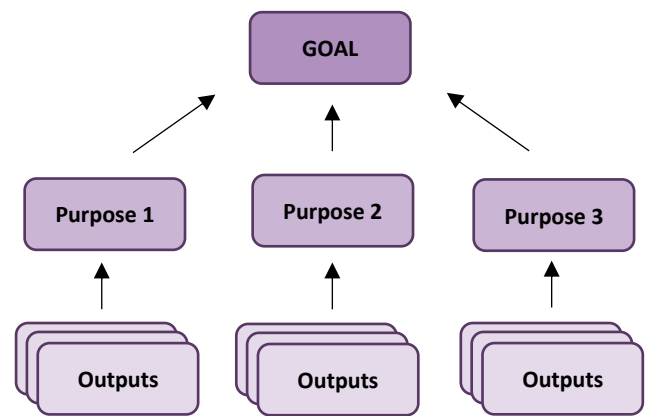
Figure 2: Identifying multiple purposes

Another option, often used when a programme contains multiple components, is to allow multiple purpose statements to be placed alongside each other. In figure 2, for example, each component of a programme – such as a project or the work of an implementing partner – could be represented by an individual strand of a logical framework, complete with purpose and output statements. The different strands could then combine to support the wider goal. Some agencies allow multiple purpose statements to be defined within a logical framework, whilst others apply more rigid rules.

As far as the vertical logic is concerned, some logical frameworks allow an extra level of outcomes or objectives to be defined between the output and purpose levels. These may be called intermediate outcomes/objectives, but they are known by other names as well. They can help a logical framework become more representative of a complex programme by clarifying linkages between different levels of change.

Some organisations have gone further and have allowed for multiple levels to be defined between the outputs and goal of a logframe. This may be done by first developing an objectives or problem tree, or by producing an impact pathway via a theory of change. The objectives tree or impact pathway is developed so that the linkages between different outputs and outcomes (the tree on the left in figure 3) can clearly be seen. The individual outputs and outcomes can then be translated into the rows of a logical framework, and the horizontal logic of indicators, means of verification and assumptions completed.

If required by a donor, the different outcomes and outputs can then be categorised and sorted under the required levels of the logical framework, whilst still allowing organisations to capture the complexity of the programme.

Using multiple logical frameworks

A second approach is to use multiple logical frameworks within a programme or across an organisation. This is more appropriate for a complex programme than for an organisation because of the large number of different logframes that would otherwise be needed to represent the work of an entire organisation.
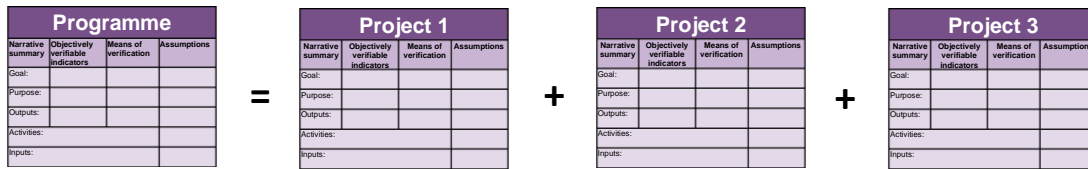
Multiple logframes can be used within a programme in two main ways. The first is to develop a number of logframes, each with its own purpose statement, and often reflecting the work of an individual agency or a single project. These logframes then *add up to* a programmatic logframe. The logic is that if each individual project achieves its purpose then the programme as a whole is likely to achieve its purpose. This is represented in figure 4 on the following page.

Figure 3: Linking a hierarchy of objectives to a logical framework
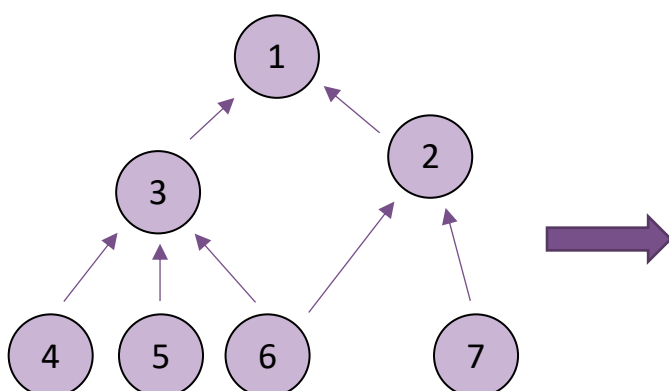
Output / Outcome	Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Means of Verification	Assumptions
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			

Figure 4: Multiple project purposes adding up to the programme purpose

A less rigid system is applied by many large NGOs when running programmes alongside multiple partners. In these situations, a programmatic logframe is often developed to represent the work of the programme. Each partner or project within the programme then develops its own logframe (see figure 5) representing its own contribution. Some of the information on progress against the programmatic logframe may be generated at programme level, whilst some may be generated at project level and then captured within the programme logframe.

Here, the links between the different logframes may be less well defined and more flexible. The intention is to enable programme and project managers to assess progress at different levels of the programme. This is done by examining progress within each project, as well as by looking at progress across the programme as a whole.

Changing the logic of the logframe

A common complaint is that the logical framework is not very good at managing for long-term, cumulative change. This is because the average logframe covers a period of less than five years – often representing a funding period – whereas in social development changes can take much longer to emerge, and can be the result of many different initiatives.

One solution for multi-phase programmes is to weaken the linkages between the output and purpose levels of a logical framework. Whilst activities and outputs could be set within a programme period as usual, changes at purpose level could represent changes identified over that period

that may have arisen wholly or partly through activities carried out in previous funding phases. Equally, change could be the cumulative result of many different initiatives.

Refining the logic of the logical framework in this way allows programmes to capture and report long-term change in areas such as capacity strengthening, network development, piloting and policy influencing, where change tends to emerge over long time periods.

Some programmes also use outcome grids that keep the horizontal logic of a logframe (indicators, means of verification, assumptions, etc.) but which do not attempt to link outcomes to specific activities or outputs. The outcome grids represent the changes an organisation or programme is working towards, but the changes are not explicitly linked to a pre-defined set of activities or outputs. Once change has been detected, programmes are then able to work backwards from the change to establish the different factors that may have contributed to it.

> Outcome grids can be used alongside monthly, quarterly or annual activity plans and budgets. This helps draw a clear distinction between the activities for which a programme is responsible, and which are designed to be carried out within a specified period, and the changes which cannot easily be predicted to occur within specified timescales, and for which a programme may not be completely responsible.

Figure 5: Multiple project logframes contributing to a programme logframe
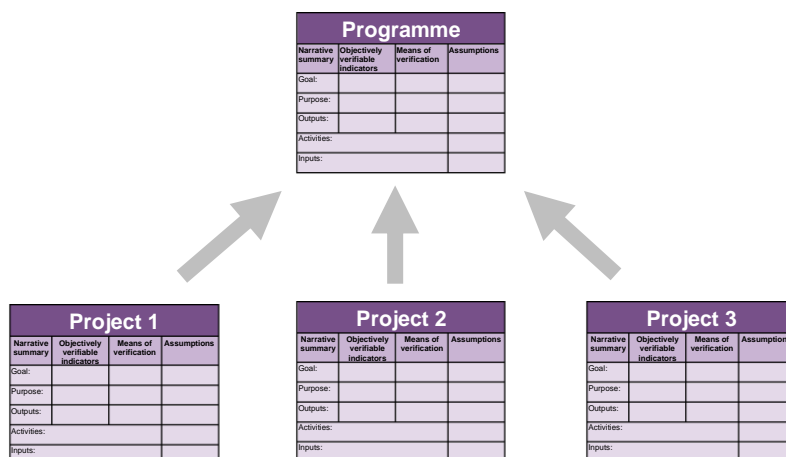
Including different measures

Standard results frameworks tend to focus on one aspect of a programme (results) and one way of measuring them (indicators). However, there are alternatives, some of which are described below.

Different areas of focus: A logical framework usually focuses on what a project or programme does (activities and/or outputs) and the changes it contributes to (outcomes and/or impact). Sometimes it may be useful to focus on two different areas within a results framework.

- Some programmes contain several component projects or partners, with multiple interactions between them. Programmatic results frameworks may focus not just on external results, but also on internal changes within the programme. For example, indicators could be defined to assess enhanced cooperation or learning between different partners, or the enhanced capacity of partners to engage in joint advocacy.

- Programmes may also seek to formally monitor what is happening in the external political or socio-economic environment on an ongoing basis. This is particularly important for programmes such as governance programmes, which need to respond to external changes that cannot be controlled but need to be understood. It is also important for programmes that are heavily reliant on external factors in order to function properly.

Different measures: A standard results framework uses indicators to measure results. Sometimes it is more appropriate to develop questions than indicators, especially if a programme does not know exactly what change might look like, and it is therefore not easy to develop pre-defined indicators. Questions can be framed as evaluation questions, which tend to focus on what has been done and what has changed as a result. Or they can be framed as learning questions, which may focus on how or why changes have happened, but may also deal with wider issues relating to the external environment. Learning questions are covered in the following section.

Another alternative – one widely used by programmes dealing with advocacy or capacity strengthening – is to use progress markers instead of indicators. Derived from outcome mapping, progress markers are a set of desired, visible, behavioural changes to which a project or programme hopes to contribute. They range from changes a programme expects to see as an early response to programming, through to changes it would love to see if it were extremely successful. Progress markers are designed to show progress as a group, rather than as individual indicators.

Combinations of measures: Programmatic results frameworks may also use combinations of different measures, or may apply different measures at different times in the life-cycle of a programme. Some examples can be found in the box below (see FCDO 2023), although a detailed description is beyond the scope of this paper.

Embedded logframes: A complex programme may also seek to embed a logical framework within a wider results framework. Developing a wider results framework in this way allows a programme to develop its own results framework that is appropriate, flexible and responsive to

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Combinations of measures

Bedrock indicators: Bedrock indicators are a core set of indicators that remain fixed throughout a programme, typically at purpose and goal level. However, at lower levels of the results chain (outputs and activities) programmes are free to change indicators on a regular basis. Bedrock indicators can be used when a programme is operating in a relatively stable environment, where there are clearly measurable indicators of change. Organisations have greater flexibility to define, adapt and remove indicators at output level in response to learning acquired throughout the programme.

Menu of indicators: A menu of indicators involves setting out several measures of progress across different aspects of a programme. Menus of indicators can be used in programmes where progress might happen in several directions. For example, a menu of indicators could be useful for programmes aimed at institutional change processes, where a measurable end result could take many years to achieve, but where there are several parallel tracks that could represent progress, rather than a single critical path.

Basket / framing indicators or domains of change: Basket indicators or domains of change are typically used to capture and communicate multiple changes associated with a broad area of change. Examples include changes in the capacity of organisations to address climate change, or changes in the way government engages with civil society. They can be placed in a results framework in situations where programmes are attempting to bring about change in an area, but do not know exactly what that change might look like at the start of the programme, and cannot therefore set reliable indicators.

Sprints and reflections: Sprints are a method of planning work in increments, or small batches, which allow programme teams to test ideas, and generate learning and feedback. The information generated can then be used to reflect on what has (or has not) worked and why. Programme teams can then make decisions on what work to undertake or prioritise next. A programmatic results framework can support this by allowing activities, outputs and associated indicators to be constantly inserted, amended or removed, or by enabling different learning questions to be embedded at different stages of a programme.

Lines of enquiry: Broad questions can be inserted into a results framework, and then turned into more specific indicators at a later date. For example, a programme may start by trying to address a specific question, such as *"what are the best ways to support small-scale farmers in rural areas?"*. Once some initial work has been done to develop strategies and workplans, the programme can then develop more specific outcome and output indicators.

the needs of that organisation or programme, whilst still complying with donor requirements by providing a logical framework as an accountability mechanism. An example is shown in the case study opposite.

Introducing space for learning

Learning is an essential ingredient of any programme. Some learning is emergent – it happens in the natural course of events without prior planning or design. However, many programmes also need to pursue intentional learning. This means setting out to generate learning around a particular topic, issue or question, and then using that learning to take action. Although most results frameworks focus primarily on the results of a project or programme, it is possible to place a greater emphasis on learning, especially learning that leads to improvements in programming. This is sometimes called **actionable learning**.

Actionable learning is particularly important in pilot or innovation projects, or programmes that are more concerned with learning what works and how than with the impact on a relatively small number of people. Actionable learning is also important in highly adaptive programmes that rely on formal learning throughout a programme to guide and adjust programming.

Actionable learning may be captured by placing a series of learning questions at the heart of a results framework. The questions represent areas of interest to an organisation and/or its donors that could be explored over the course of a project or programme. They can be updated regularly during the course of a programme. A suggested table is included in figure 6 below. It includes space to:
- define the learning question to be explored;
- outline the methodology used to answer the question; and
- explain how findings will be used.

Developing a results framework in this way allows organisations to be held partly accountable for their formal learning, and how they have used that learning to take action, rather than simply for achieving short-term results. A table such as the one in figure 6 is largely used to capture

Case study: CSSP in Ethiopia

INTRAC supported the Civil Society Support Programme (CSSP) in Ethiopia, which had to report to multiple Development Partners as well as the Ethiopian government. CSSP had a programmatic logframe which was used for basic accountability purposes. This logframe was embedded within a wider results framework that included:
- a super-goal, which was there as a guiding objective, but for which there were no indicators or targets;
- some outcomes that were too politically sensitive to be placed in the public domain;
- some broad areas of enquiry, without indicators or targets;
- some intermediate outcomes, not included in the logframe;
- some outcomes for which CSSP did not want to have associated targets;
- a few broad activities that were not included in the logframe;
- the key principles of the programme;
- some indicators relating to CSSP's internal organisational development; and
- some indicators related to the wider socio-economic environment over which CSSP had no control.

This wider results framework enabled CSSP to manage the programme appropriately and flexibly, and to change objectives and indicators as desired without worrying too much about the achievement of targets. The embedded logframe allowed the Development Partners to hold CSSP to account, and provided a succinct summary of the programme.

major, formal, planned learning, generated through mechanisms such as pilot projects or action-oriented research. Informal or emergent earning could also be included in the table, although this means it would need to be updated on an ongoing basis.

Summary

Donors often require projects and programmes to complete a logical framework as a condition of funding. In large or complex programmes a logical framework may be

Figure 6: An actionable learning table

Learning or research question	Methodology	Proposed actions
What is the best way to address current challenges in the food supply system?	Rapid scoping study undertaken by local research institute over a 3-week period.	New project designed and implemented to act as an emergency response to address key challenges in the food supply system.
How is our deeper understanding of gender dynamics and radicalisation feeding into new strategies and approaches?	Internal reflections and 'Learn and Share' meetings with programme partners.	Conference to be held in December, during which new proposals will be developed.
What is the potential for using new forms of technology to boost milk production amongst rural farmers? How might this affect backwards and forwards linkages?	Pilot study, focusing on 30 small-scale, rural dairy farmers in the region.	If successful, the pilot study will be expanded to include more farmers in the region, and government officials will be brought in to help shape the wider research.

too inflexible or too simplistic to support effective programme management. In these situations, programmes may design a programmatic results framework that better represents the complexity of the programme. This may be done as a replacement for a logical framework, or as a supplement.

Several different approaches can be used to support the development of a more relevant programmatic results framework. These include expanding the scope of a logical framework, using multiple logical frameworks, changing the logic of a logical framework, including different measures within a results framework, and providing space to capture actionable learning.

"Donors may insist that an organisation develops a logframe. I have yet to meet a donor that refused to allow an organisation to develop its own results framework as well."

Further reading and resources

A paper called *"The Use and Abuse of the Logical Framework"* by Oliver Bakewell and Anne Garbutt, published by SIDA in 2005, contains some more information on how different people have adapted the logical framework approach. This is available from many places on the internet.

A search frame is a dedicated results framework that embeds experimental iteration into a structured approach to make policy or reform decisions in the face of complex challenges. It is sometimes proposed as an alternative to a logical framework. Information on searchframes can be found at https://bsc.hks.harvard.edu/2016/06/06/searchframes-for-adaptive-work-more-logical-than-logframes/.

Outcome mapping can generate a results framework that can be used as an alternative to the logical framework in some circumstances. The M&E Universe paper on Theory of Change also contains information relating to programmatic results frameworks. Information on these papers can be accessed by clicking on the links below.

▶ **Theory of change**   ▶ **Outcome mapping**

References

- FCDO (2023). *PrOF Guide: Top tips – how to design and manage adaptive programmes.* Centre for Delivery, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). November, 2023.
- IFAD (2002). *A Guide for Project M&E*, by Irene Guijt and Jim Woodhill, produced by the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

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