

RESULT BASED MANAGEMENT: DESIGNING RESULTS FRAMEWORK

Introduction

- It is difficult to know if programs have succeeded or failed if the expected results are not clearly articulated.
- An explicit definition of results— precisely what is to be achieved through the project or program and by when.
- Results-based management is a key tool for development effectiveness.

- A results framework serves as a key tool in the development landscape, enabling practitioners to discuss and establish strategic development objectives and then link interventions to intermediate outcomes and results that directly relate to those objectives.
- A results framework is an explicit articulation (graphic display, matrix, or summary) of the different levels, or chains, of results expected from a particular intervention—project, program, or development strategy.
- The results specified typically comprise the longer-term objectives (often referred to as “outcomes” or “impact”) and the intermediate outcomes and outputs that precede, and lead to, those desired longer-term objectives.

- There are many debates, and considerable controversy, on the distinctions among outputs, outcomes, and impact.
- A generally useful approach is to consider **outputs** as the particular goods or services provided by an intervention (for example, nutrition supplements).
- An **outcome** is usefully thought of as benefits of that particular good or service to the target population (such as improved nutrition intake).
- **Impact** refers to evidence on whether outcomes are actually changing beneficiary behavior or longer-term conditions of interest (for example, improved eating habits, a healthier population).

Requirements to Design a Results Framework

- An understanding of the problem or assessment of needs that the development intervention is intended to address.
- An initial theory of change for the project or program, even as it is being designed.
- A working knowledge of evidence required for measuring and assessing desired outcomes and impacts.
- Available data sources and proven data collection approaches relevant for the project or program context.

These components provide a solid foundation on which to base a results framework.

Step-by-Step Guide for developing an Effective Results Framework

Step 1. Establish Strategic Objective(s) for the Problem(s) to Be Addressed:

- A strategic objective is a calculated response to a known problem.
- The wording and intent of the objective should be clear and specific enough that practitioners will be able to identify when it has been achieved.

Tips for Effectively Stating Strategic Objectives

- ***Emphasize the results of actions, not the actions themselves:***
For example, instead of “reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS,” use “reduced transmission of HIV/AIDS.” Instead of “promote credit opportunities for farmers,” use “increased credit available for farmers.”
- ***Maintain a single focus:***
Multiple objectives with multiple components are challenging to manage and measure.
- ***Test wording to avoid ambiguity:***
Test the wording with various stakeholders to ensure that the objective is consistently understood and not interpreted differently by different constituents.
- ***Specify the time frame:***
The amount of time available helps determine what is realistic and feasible for a strategic objective to be achieved.

- **Step 2. Identify and Work with Stakeholders**
- In practice, various key parties (for example, government authorities or development partners) are already involved with the planning and/or implementation at this stage.
- However, the team designing a results framework should revisit whether all the main stakeholders have been engaged to facilitate consensus and ownership of the initiative.
- Wherever possible, the views and understanding of expected beneficiaries or target population should be considered in constructing the results framework.

- **Step 3. Define Results (Outputs and Outcomes)**
- Outputs and outcomes represent those causal links in the results chain that bridge the gap between the current status and the desired high-level results. Starting with the end strategic objective(s), practitioners can backtrack to outline a program logic with immediate and intermediate outcomes.

- **Step 4. Identify Critical Assumptions and Risks**

- Development interventions inevitably rely on some assumptions about factors that are beyond the control of the planners and implementers.
- Results frameworks should not be based on critical assumptions that are
- perceived to have a low probability of holding true over the implementation period. If the risks are high, the intervention needs to be reconsidered.
- For each output and outcome considered critical in the results chain, the framework developers should explicitly note assumptions related to external factors (for example, political environment, economy, climate change, and so forth) that could carry risks.
- In cases where the assumption is seen to represent a more substantial risk, practitioners commonly adjust the development strategy, develop a contingency plan, and/or establish a risk management plan to monitor and address conditions as needed.

- **Step 5. Review Available Data Sources and Specify Indicators**
- Where possible, measurement strategies should be based on existing data sources or tested data collection methodologies.
- Relevant information for analysis and aggregation could already be available through administrative databases or through sample or census-based surveys.
- Before specific indicators are defined for desired outcomes, practitioners should identify data sources that could be used to measure desired changes.

- **Step 6. Assign Indicators and Data Sources for Each Level of Result**
- Strategic objective(s) and intermediate outcomes reflect constructs that need further definition to be measured. These outcomes need to be translated into a set of measurable indicators to establish whether progress is being achieved.
- Indicators are tied to results by focusing on one or more characteristics of the outcome. A measure then expresses an indicator's value quantitatively or qualitatively using SMART criteria

- **Characteristics of Effective—SMART—Indicators**
- ***Specific. Indicators should reflect simple information that is*** communicable and easily understood.
- ***Measurable. Are changes objectively verifiable?***
 - Students' learning achievement
 - Value of land (number of hectares, multiplied by price per hectare)
 - Percentage of customers who are satisfied with the availability of potable water or electricity
- ***Achievable. Indicators and their measurement units must be achievable*** and sensitive to change during the life of the project.
- ***Relevant. Indicators should reflect information that is important and*** likely to be used for management or immediate analytical purposes.
- ***Time bound. Progress can be tracked at a desired frequency for a set*** period of time.

- **Step 7. Establish the Performance Monitoring Plan**
- The next step in designing a results framework is to plan how it will be operationalized to monitor progress and assess the effects of interventions. The plan for monitoring performance typically lists the following elements in a complementary tool, the monitoring plan:

- *Baseline and target values for selected measures to provide the means for verification to measure changes in the indicators*
- *Data sources or methods for data collection.*
- *The agent(s) responsible for collecting or providing the data (for example, independent evaluation team, project staff, and so forth).*
- *Designated intervals at which the data will be collected or provided.*
- *Assumptions and risks associated with the indicators or information being collected (such as the assumption that data will be available from a second party).*

- **Step 8. Establish a Communication and Dissemination Plan**
- The final step is to plan how the results framework will be used to communicate the progress and results of the intervention and how the results will be disseminated.
- Some common approaches are to include results in a “dashboard,” highlighting only the key high-level objectives and outcomes/outputs achieved, using the framework for planning and review meetings (with the current status of the indicators highlighted), and using the change in the indicators from baseline to highlight the results.
- Thus, choosing the correct outcome indicator (for example, change in rates of HIV) and connecting it to key intervention outputs (number of education campaigns about how HIV is transmitted) can provide a powerful communication and dissemination tool to inform and gather support from key stakeholders.

Challenges

- Results frameworks offer clear benefits to practitioners and others working to achieve development results, but the approach is potentially challenging:
- *An up-front investment of time and resources is needed at the start of an intervention.*
- *The effects of interventions can be difficult to measure fully.*
- *Results frameworks can become overly complicated. Attempts to apply*
- *Involving program staff in the evaluation process could bias results measurement.*