

Results-Based Management Tip Sheet 2.3

Questions and Approaches for Theory of Change Clarification and Refinement

This tip sheet is a companion to the Results-Based Management for International Assistance Programming at Global Affairs Canada: A How-to Guide. It expands on the discussion of the theory of change, the logic model and the performance measurement framework in the How-to Guide and provides a reference tool that you can use in your day-to-day work.

This tip sheet provides questions, approaches and language that implementers and Global Affairs Canada staff can use to clarify and refine a theory of change, logic model and performance measurement framework.

Asking the following questions is one of the best ways to bring clarity to an unclear theory of change, logic model or performance measurement framework. In addition to questions, you can also take notes, draw pictures and post sticky notes on a wall to help establish clear, logical steps of an initial theory of change, which can then be developed into a logic model.

The Theory of Change:

- Tell me about this initiative; walk me through the logic. How do you see it working?
- How is the change at this level connected to the level above or below?
- How will your planned activities and outputs lead to the changes you describe?
- What are the assumptions behind the arrows in the logic model that support your theory that X will lead or contribute to Y?
- What other changes will need to take place on the part of other actors for the outcomes to be achieved?
- Does this logic model contain the main building blocks required to get where you want to go (your ultimate outcome)?
- Let's look at this statement. Can you break it down for me? Could we express this as more than one result statement? What kinds of change do they each describe? Could they go at another level of the logic model?
- What are the potential risks or challenges that could prevent the outcomes from being achieved?
- What is needed to overcome these risks and challenges?

Ultimate outcome:

- Why are you doing this project?
- What change do you expect this project to bring about in the lives of men, women and girls and boys in the country where the project is being implemented?
- Who will experience the change (who are the ultimate beneficiaries)?
- How will you measure that change?

Intermediate outcomes:

- Who do you expect to reach, and in what way, by the time the project ends?
- Which groups/organizations/individuals will you work with?
- Who does the project expect to experience a change in behavior, practice or performance for the ultimate outcome to take place?
- What kind of things do you foresee this organization/group doing better by the end of the project, that they were not doing before?
- Who will they be doing this for?
- How will you measure this change? What kind of things can you look at to see if this organization/group is performing better, or improved their practice or behavior?

- What do you mean by effectively, sustainably, appropriately, etc...? Can you define this in a footnote in the logic model or in the theory of change narrative?

Immediate outcomes:

- Who needs to have which capacity for your intermediate outcomes to occur? For example, who needs to know, understand, be aware of X, or be able to do Y?
- Who will experience this change? Is this the same group identified in the associated set of activities and outputs?
- How will your project activities and outputs lead to this change?
- How will you measure this change? What kind of things will demonstrate increased capacity, such as increased knowledge, understanding, awareness, abilities or skills, etc.?

Outputs:

- What service or product in which subject and to whom needs to be provided/produced for your immediate outcomes to occur?
- What is the verb in your output (e.g. provided, facilitated, delivered, developed, etc.)?
- Are there any key words in the immediate outcome that you should pay attention to when planning the outputs? (Equitable, gender sensitive, sustainable, etc.)?
- Who is responsible for actually producing the product or providing the service? Who will actually deliver/render it?
 - Is it the implementer? If yes, good. If these are not direct products and services that your implementer will produce/provide through the project activities, they are not project outputs.
 - Is it an intermediary? In other words, are these products and services that will be produced/provided by your intermediaries as a result of changes to capacity or performance stemming from the project? If so, these are not outputs in the context of this project, but you might be able to reformulate the output statements into an indicator for the intermediate outcome.
 - Where appropriate, how could the output be rewritten to accurately reflect what the implementer is responsible for?

Activities:

- Are these the activities that you or your implementer will be undertaking? If not, are they activities that will be undertaken by your intermediaries? (See points above.)
- Could you explain how these activities will create the products and services described in the outputs?
- Are these activities or sub-activities? Is there any way these could be grouped to simplify?
- Who is this activity aimed at? Which individual, group or organization is targeted?

Other approaches for clarifying or refining the Theory of Change

Sometimes there is a discrepancy between what the design team wants to achieve (the change described in the outcome) and what they will be using (the indicator) to measure the change.

When you find a discrepancy, the following questions can help:

- What change is the indicator actually measuring?
- Which is closest to what you actually want to see in the project—the change the indicator is actually measuring or the change the result describes?
- Is the information provided by the indicator vital for project management and communication?

Depending on the answers to these questions, the indicator or the outcome statement—and perhaps even the theory of change—may need to be rethought.

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These tools will be updated periodically as required. Enquiries or feedback on this tip sheet should be directed to:
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