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A conceptual fusion of the logical framework approach and outcome mapping

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'Contextual differences, as well as diverse expectations for learning, decision-making and accountability of the organisations and persons in development interventions make it difficult to exclusively utilise a single standard tool'

Development practitioners strive for planning, monitoring and evaluation approaches and tools adapted to their needs as well as the multiple uses of data and new knowledge. Contextual differences, in addition to diverse expectations for learning, decision-making and accountability of the organisations and persons (donating agencies, programme management, partner organisations, etc.) in development interventions, make it difficult to exclusively utilise a single standard tool. A fusion between a well-known "standard" method (the Logical Framework Approach – LFA) and an innovative actor and outcome-oriented method (Outcome Mapping – OM) can address many of the gaps that are perceived in each approach and make planning, monitoring and evaluation tailored to use and users of new information and knowledge.

The proposed fusion of LFA and OM integrates both a results-oriented focus and process-oriented learning pathways. By no means is this fusion a silver bullet to resolve all challenges, but it can be used as a novel approach serving as a base to build upon; each development intervention must define and design its result pathway and adapt approaches based on need.

The questions around the effectiveness of development interventions (development in the sense of social, political and economic change to reduce poverty) are relevant and legitimate for three reasons. First, they are important to the poor, who have an interest in knowing the extent to which their situation will be improved as a result of measures carried out for their benefit. Second, those who provide services with the aim of reducing poverty, as well as their donors, need to know if the resources they invest and the activities and services they finance have indeed made the greatest possible contribution to poverty reduction. Thirdly, local as well as national and international development organisations have a need to learn from experience; it is of interest to know not only whether a contribution was made but also what are the resulting changes and what is being done differently by whom. Clear indications of changes in behaviour, and hence of sustainable development, are required. Accordingly, methods are needed in international cooperation to provide answers to questions of achievement, effect and contribution to the different actors involved.

New modalities of cooperation

Since the Logical Framework Approach was introduced in the 1970s and 1980s, a series of fundamental changes has taken place in the ways in which development assistance is delivered. Seen from the perspective of donor countries, these changes can be characterised as a process leading from project to programme approach. In concrete terms, these changes can be divided into four partly overlapping areas or trends.

- **From direct poverty alleviation to capacity building and social development**: This trend is an expression of a changed perception of the roles of actors in international development cooperation, from direct engagement in poverty alleviation to supporting partner organisations in the South to build their own capacity for poverty alleviation as a better way to foster development.

OM*ideas* is an Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC) initiative to generate new knowlegde around the use and development of the OM methodology.

The papers in this series are authored by members of the OMLC, a global community of OM users dedicated to mutual learning and sharing of experiences around OM.

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- **From direct implementation to a multi-stakeholder approach:** Partnership and multi-stakeholder approaches are more common as partners increasingly claim and concede responsibility for implementing development projects and programmes, while development organisations from the North tend to limit themselves to a subsidiary supporting role.
- **From direct cooperation with beneficiaries to "vertical integration":** Awareness of the danger of so-called "insular solutions" in a purely micro-level approach (positive impacts on the situation of the target public in the immediate project area but little resonance and multiplier effect beyond) have inspired development organisations in the North to strengthen the capacity of partner organisations through capacity building at meso-level, and also to exert greater influence on shaping the policy framework through policy dialogue at macro-level.
- **From implementing donor-driven projects to supporting partner programmes:** As time goes on, development organisations in the North see their role less in terms of implementing projects of their own than in supporting programmes of governmental and non-governmental partners. This includes financial support as well as technical advice. Contributing to shaping the policy framework is an important component of this so-called programme-based approach.

In our view there is no question that the focus on "changes in behaviour" of partners is fundamental to sustainable development. Changes in behaviour means strengthening the capacity of "local systems" (or their actors), which includes the capacity to continuously adapt and respond to a changing world. Nevertheless, if poverty alleviation is our utmost concern (and the reason why donors spend tax payers' money in development cooperation) these "changes" cannot be an objective or an end in itself. This means that behaviour changes should induce or support changes or improvements in situations at a higher level. Therefore, a one-dimensional focus on changes in the behaviour of partners is not sufficient. What are needed are clear impact hypotheses and indicators, representing other levels or scales of development results in space and time. Our proposal for a fusion model combining LFA and OM aims to bring together the strengths of OM as an approach that focuses on capacity changes and LFA with its focus on situational results.

The fusion: value-added and trade-off

"*A fusion inevitably leads to con-fusion and more work*". If this were the only valid argument, this paper shoud find its way to the recycle bin. However, practitioners are often faced with different requirements, needs and uses of planning tools and M&E data. There are situations when it makes sense to use a fusion, and situations where practitioners would rather opt for one or the other instrument. At the same time, practitioners see a series of reasons for fusion, while counter-arguments need to be considered for effective use.

When does it does *not* make sense to use the fusion?

- When one method (OM or LFA) provides everything you need.
- When no information is required on behaviour change (= only use LFA), or on situational change (= only use OM).
- When your current program design already integrates key elements of both approaches.

When does it make sense to use the fusion?

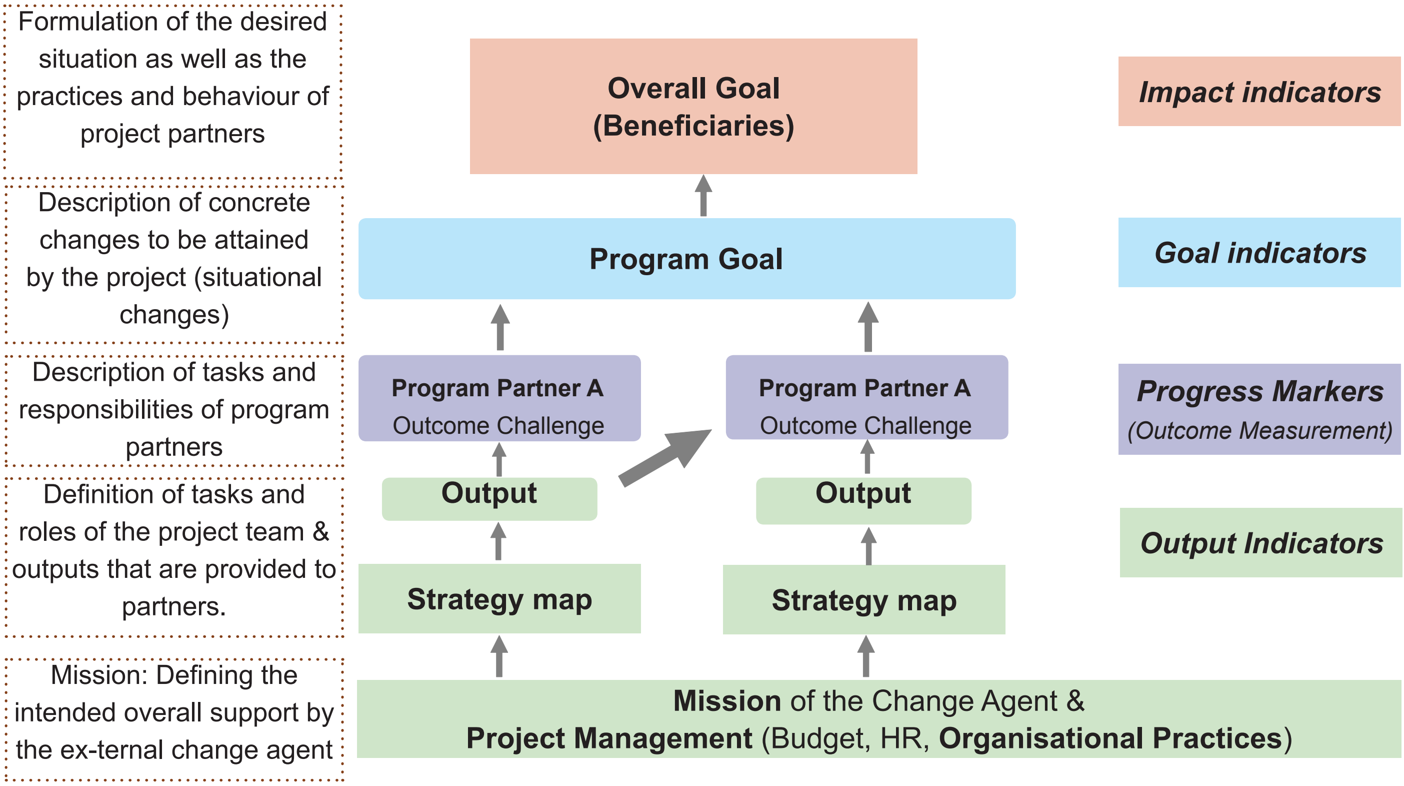
- When you need to harmonise the levels you are working with (i.e. from ministries to communities).
- When you need information for various partners, for different needs and accountabilities.
- When you want to improve the program in an LFA environment (OM by stealth approach)

Ongoing discussions reflect different opinions, both from a theoretical perspective and from practice. Some believe that OM and LFA should never share a space, based on their fundamentally different paradigms and approaches to planning, monitoring and evaluation of development interventions. Others, from practical experience, have carved out a shared space for the use of OM in their LFA-driven projects, using OM to track the process of change and contribute innovative dimensions to social and organisational learning.

Why does the use of an OM-LFA fusion make sense?

- A combination of focuses serves different users and uses: clear result areas and ultimate results (LFA concept, mostly for accountability) and process on "how to get there" (OM concept, mostly for learning and program steering).
- Existing program frameworks (planned with OM or LFA) can be improved with simple adaptations.
- Concepts from both approaches can be used, where they add most value. Long term processes (i.e. advocacy work) can be tracked with OM; while service delivery from a program team can be planned and tracked with LFA methods.
- Progress markers for tracking social and behavioural change can be used for program steering and learning amongst program partners, while quantitative indicators are most relevant for reporting.

Figure 1: The Fusion Model at a Glance



OM - LFA Fusion

Before we look at the fusion model, we want to elaborate on its four cornerstones:

- **Focus on different scales of results (be-havioural changes, capacity building, impact):** The focus on results is necessary in every intervention as recipients or beneficiaries of development efforts, as well as donors, have a legitimate right to get as clear a picture as possible about the effectiveness of development projects or programmes. Contributing to longer-term impact is a continuous process as the result of durable improvements in the capacity of key actors. This implies recognising the paramount importance of capacity building as a strategy that aims at strengthening the performance and adaptiveness of local actors and systems, and therefore lays the groundwork for sustainable development. Our idea of a fusion between LFA and OM is based on a conviction that results-orientedness and capacity building must not be mutually exclusive options but complementary approaches.
- **Looking for the common denominator:** In our view there are several significant differences between LFA and OM; however, rather than directly comparing the strengths and weakness of both approaches, we believe it is more productive to engage in discussion of a fusion model, which will make it possible to adopt the most convincing and effective elements of each approach.
- **Capacity building:** A fundamental difference between the two models lies in the possible ways in which they can be applied. The OM approach was conceived for a particular type of project, namely projects in which the changes in behaviours and capacities of partners is the focus. The LFA as a model represents relations between (any particular) outputs and their effects. Our fusion model is most applicable for projects in which capacity building plays a major role.
- **Fusion = LFA+ or OM+:** The fusion model should be left open to be shaped as context dictates, as well as the inclinations and preferences of the responsible practitioners and stakeholders, either by enhancing the Logical Framework Approach or by enhancing Outcome Mapping. This should also make it possible to reduce the tendency to “brand” the approaches, which we consider to be counterproductive. The goal of the fusion is to combine the advantages and strengths of both approaches so that it is applicable in different institutional contexts in the most multifaceted way.

Design of the Fusion Model

Important requirements and demands from both approaches, related to core elements of the fusion model, will be presented in the following summary. The focus consists of orientation towards an overall goal (which in turn should allow establishing links with country strategies, PRSP, or MDGs) and explicit consideration of changes in behaviour of project partners. The fusion model should make it possible to determine and display the distribution of roles and responsibilities of development actors directly in the logic model.

When we speak of a fusion model, we mean the logic model that underlies a project. So far as it is reasonable and possible, this logic model can be presented in synoptic form (e.g. as a table or matrix), outlining the summary of core elements of the project or programme. A complete project document containing detailed descriptions of all elements of a project (initial situation, development hypotheses, interventions strategies, beneficiaries, project organisation, project management, monitoring and evaluation, etc.) would be needed for understanding the entire project.

Overall Goal: There is a need for clear and concrete formulation of the desired situation as well as the practices and behaviour that are supposed to be realised by project partners. Description of the overall goal should be limited to the core elements, which should provide a clear expression of what project partners perceive for the future. For those familiar with OM, the overall goal would lie in the realm of the Vision Statement.

Programme Goal: Programme goals describe the concrete changes that the project is to achieve. These changes may refer to a system, to the behaviour of organisations or people, or be manifested as changed conditions for beneficiaries (i.e. situational data). Programme goals reflect the concrete and verifiable goal of the project that has been agreed between all stakeholders. Indicators help to measure the achievement of project outcomes; impact hypotheses link the programme goal with the overall goal. Following the logic of Outcome Mapping the interest and responsibility for verifying whether the project goals are achieved rests primarily with the programme partners, since programme goals are defined (in our fusion model) as results of the behaviour changes of the partners. Achievement of project goals thus becomes the purpose of the behaviour changes of the boundary partners.

Outcome Challenges of programme partners in achieving programme outcomes: An external change agent alone can achieve neither programme goal nor the overall goal. Programme success depends on the need to improve and effect changes and on the willingness to cooperate of local organisations, groups and people. The identification of key programme partners (or in OM terms, Boundary Partners, as well as strategic partners) and their outcome challenges describe the tasks, responsibilities and activities that they must carry out in order to contribute to programme goals (and thus the overall goal) within their system, including what they must do beyond programme support.

Outcome challenges are formulated for each partner. In addition, qualitative and quantitative indicators in the form of gradual progress markers are defined for each partner to enable monitoring of changes in practice or behaviour. Progress markers may also be defined for several partners at once. These progress markers need to be monitored at specific stages or times so that monitoring results can be included in work planning.

Strategy maps and outputs: The programme team (external change agent as defined by Outcome Mapping) gives a clear and concrete description of the strategies, roles and responsibilities that can be assumed by the project. This includes definitions of the outputs that the programme can provide to partners.

Including an element of the LFA, we propose to define indicators at the level of project outputs that can be used to verify the services provided by the project team.

A precise definition of project strategies (activities and outputs) facilitates annual operational planning. Strategies should be examined yearly in terms of their effectiveness and efficiency. Outputs must have a plausible relation to outcome challenges and progress markers. When expected effects are not achieved among project partners, it is advisable to modify project strategies.

Mission: This element of OM is extremely useful for defining the intended overall support provided by the external change agent (the programme in OM terminology) to the partners. This mission statement helps to clarify the role of the change agent (external, limited in time and scope).

Organisational practices of the change agent: This element of OM defines the internal strategies of the donor agency or NGO for remaining innovative, creative, efficient and relevant.

This model is meant as a visualization of a programme development model – defining the different result areas (goal, outcome, progress markers, mission and strategy maps) must be based on highly participative and iterative processes. It is essential that all development actors define their own roles and responsibilities (including their pathway of change) for clear ownership from the beginning of the process. The planning process should be reviewed periodically as market dynamics, changes within partner organisations and/ or changed contextual factors might lead to changes within the programme outline.

References, footnotes and acknowledgements

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i. Differences and a summary of evolving discussions around LFA and OM can be found in: "Outcome Mapping and the Logical Framework Approach: Can they share a space?"; IDRC, 2008.

Background information on the Result-Based Management and "Managing for Development Results" (MfDR) can be found in: "Logical Framework Approach and Outcome Mapping, A constructive attempt for synthesis"; Daniel Roduner, Walter Schläppi, Walter Egli, 2008.

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