



## ***Discussion paper 2: Programming and evaluation for psychosocial programmes***

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### ***ABSTRACT***

This paper gives guidance for the planning and implementation of psychosocial programmes as part of development assistance projects. It aims to turn the reader's attention to the two chief questions involved in such planning: What are we appropriately seeking to achieve? What is the best way of going about this? For responding to these two questions, the author suggests creating a logical framework ('logframe') for identifying goals and measuring success. Finally, the paper explains the tools for project evaluation, and stresses the need for

issues surrounding implementation and evaluation to be addressed at the stage of project planning.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are to:

- *introduce the concept of 'logical frameworks' (or 'logframes') as a formalized method for identifying aims and objectives and to identify their four features*
- *familiarize the reader with the language of logframes – 'goals', 'outputs', 'purposes', 'indicators', and 'means of verification' – and to enable the reader to use this framework for programme evaluation and planning so that there is a clear mechanism established for monitoring progress, evaluating outcomes, and potentially, impact on targeted goals*
- *link the skills of evaluation to the skills employed in research methodology, in an effort to give a reader with minimal experience of programming evaluation a sound basis for undertaking such an endeavour.*

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*Further reading*

## 1. PSYCHOSOCIAL PROGRAMMING

There are a number of resources supporting the planning and implementation of humanitarian and development assistance projects. In general, such resources are of relevance for the planning of psychosocial programmes, either as specialized interventions or as an integral part of a larger

project or programme. It is thus inappropriate to attempt to duplicate such resources here. However, the common principles behind virtually all such resources are the importance of being able (1) to articulate clear aims and objectives for a programme, and (2) to identify appropriate means of achieving such aims and objectives with respect to a rigorous analysis of the prevailing context. All resources within the module should be seen to be relevant to these two principles: what are we appropriately seeking to achieve? And what is the best way of going about this?

### 1.1. Logical frameworks

Logical frameworks (or 'logframes') are one formalized method for identifying appropriate aims and objectives, and appropriate means of trying to achieve them. The framework that relates objectives and activities is required to demonstrate clear 'logic'. Many project planners thus use them as a tool for developing coherent proposals (with an increasing number of funders requiring them as part of a project proposal for funding). Readers are referred to alternative sources for a detailed presentation on the preparation of logframes, but for our current purpose there are four features that are worthy of note. These features may be considered of importance even when a formal logframe approach is not being adopted.

### 1.2. Hierarchy of objectives

All projects and programmes have explicit – and often implicit – aims and objectives. These may be specified at a range of levels. Some may be rather long-term impacts to which a project hopes to contribute, but for which it is unlikely to be solely responsible (e.g. 'reintegration of displaced children in Kosovo'). Some may be very concrete, short-term objectives, which may have little significance outside the project (e.g. 'establish a recording system'). Some may fall somewhere in between, possibly serving to summarize the very specific impact that a project seeks to make (e.g. 'provide family placement for all unaccompanied children within the district of Pristina'). In the language of the logframe, the first sort of objective is termed a

	Hierarchy of objectives	Indicators of success	Means of verification	Assumptions
Goal				
Purpose				
Outputs				
Activities				

Table 1: The structure of a logical framework

‘goal’, the second an ‘output’, and the third a ‘purpose’ (see Table 1).

It should be clear that goals may be served by many different programmes and activities, and it may be hard specifically to link project activity to their attainment. Nonetheless, they serve as valuable ‘high-level’ anchors for activities, ensuring that projects and programmes address appropriately significant issues for a community. Purposes are very much the *raison d’être* of a project, i.e. what it is seeking to do, the attainment of which would lead to it being judged a success. Along the way of seeking to achieve a project purpose, a number of

‘sub-objectives’ will need to be achieved. These define the outputs of the programme.

**1.3. Indicators of success**

How do you know when you have achieved an objective, whether at goal, purpose, or output level? Information needs to be collated to make such judgements, and it is often stressed how important it is that objectives are SMART: specific, measurable, appropriate, realistic, and time-bound. Verification of success at the level of outputs may be seen to be part of the effective monitoring of a programme, as outputs can be seen as process variables (reflecting the process of project implementation). Verification

of success at the purpose level is essentially a process of evaluation. However, there is an argument that says that what is important is not that the project achieved its purpose, but that there was the anticipated impact on the over-arching goal. True assessment of such impact is often outside the scope of a project evaluation but, over time, there needs to be evidence that there is a link between achieving project purposes and the ultimate goal being sought.

Within the logframe, therefore, for each objective – at whatever level – there is a requirement to specify the ‘indicators’ that can be used to judge the extent to which an objective has been achieved. Indicators might include ‘90 per cent of documented children reunited with their families’, or ‘vocational training provided to 50 per cent of displaced teenage children’. For each of these indicators, there needs to be a mechanism for finding out the relevant information. In the language of the logframe, this is termed a ‘means of verification’. Specifying SMART indicators and means of verification at all objective levels ensures that before the project begins there is a clear mechanism established for monitoring progress, evaluating outcomes and, potentially, impact on targeted goals.

#### **1.4. Activities**

The means of achieving targeted objectives are the concrete activities of a project or programme. These need to be logically listed under the specific output(s) that they will seek to achieve. This discipline ensures that all outputs that are required for the fulfilment of a project purpose have specific activities identified to support their achievement. If an activity cannot be related to a specific output, either it is irrelevant and dispensable, or the ‘logic’ of the project is deficient.

#### **1.5. Management of assumptions**

Finally, ‘logframe thinking’ forces us to examine the assumptions that we are making regarding the activities achieving the outputs, the outputs achieving the purpose, and the purpose contributing to the goal. A list of activities (e.g. ‘training of enumerators’, ‘procurement of forms and instant cameras’, ‘establishment of enumeration

sites’, etc.) may logically move us towards the achievement of an output (e.g. ‘coherent documentation procedure for unaccompanied minors established’), but are there any assumptions that need to be made about events outside the direct remit of the project that we need to be aware of (e.g. ‘adequate security for inter-site travel maintained’, ‘community remains willing to share information regarding family connections’)? We need to consider these assumptions for two reasons. First, if any of the assumptions that we have to make are implausible, we will have to change the logic and approach of the project, so that we are not reliant upon this implausible circumstance in order to achieve our objective. Second, there may be actions we can take to ensure that certain assumptions prove to be more reliable. If, for example, the support of local civic and religious leaders is vital for the success of a project, it will underline the importance of activities which seek to ensure that such support is fostered.

#### **1.6. Programme implementation**

The attraction of such principles of ‘logical’ project planning is that they establish a clear framework for project implementation and management. The objectives of the project – and the tasks to be undertaken in order to achieve them – have, in principle, been identified, and project implementation involves setting – and keeping – this project logic in motion. In practice, of course, things often turn out rather differently, but the logical framework approach still provides a framework with respect to which changed circumstances can be reflected in explicit amendments to project objectives, activities, or assumptions.

## **2. PROJECT AND PROGRAMME EVALUATION**

It is clear from the above that evaluation is NOT an activity which should be deferred from consideration until towards the end of a project or programme. The seeds of good evaluation practice are sown in the setting of clear objectives, the defining of appropriate indicators, and the identification of appropriate means of their

<p><b>Aims and objectives</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the explicit <i>aims</i> and <i>objectives</i> of the project?</li> <li>2. What are the targeted <i>outcome variables</i> (at goal, purpose, and output levels)?</li> <li>3. What is the <i>targeted population</i> (i.e. who are the intended beneficiaries)?</li> </ol> <p><b>Measurement</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What are the most appropriate measures for <i>operationalizing</i> targeted outcome variables (i.e. what are the means of verification for the indicators selected)?</li> <li>5. What evidence exists - or could be gathered - to support the <i>reliability</i> of these measures?</li> <li>6. What evidence exists - or could be gathered - to support the <i>validity</i> of these measures?</li> <li>7. To what extent are chosen measures likely to be <i>sensitive</i> to the degree of change targeted by the project?</li> <li>8. What can be done to minimize (social, cultural or other) <i>bias</i> in the chosen measures?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. To what extent are the outcome variables considered <i>grounded</i> in the experience of potential beneficiaries and/or having clear <i>respondent validity</i>?</li> </ol> <p><b>Interpretation</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. What means can be adopted for selection of participants in the evaluation to maximize the <i>trustworthiness</i> of findings with respect to the full targeted population?</li> <li>11. What comparisons are available to allow outcomes to be meaningfully related to programme activity (e.g. pre- to post-scores, outcomes for non-programme participants. etc.)?</li> <li>12. What bases are there for <i>triangulating</i> findings with other sources of data?</li> <li>13. Does the analysis provide a <i>comprehensive</i> account of the experience of participants in the programme?</li> <li>14. To what extent are participants <i>representative</i> of other groups/situations of potential interest?</li> <li>15. Otherwise, is theoretical analysis potentially <i>transferable</i> to other settings?</li> </ol>
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Table 2: A checklist for programme evaluation (after Ager, 1999)

verification. Nonetheless, evaluation does involve knowledge, skills, and competencies quite distinct from project planning and implementation, and it is thus not uncommon for assistance in evaluation to be sought from persons who have not been involved in such earlier stages. The notes in this paper seek to guide both people who have not been involved in the earlier stages of a project and those seeking to plan evaluation strategy as an integral part of a project plan.

The principle assertion made here is that the skills of evaluation are very similar to those deployed in good research. There are some core

principles of research methodology which - if adhered to - are far more likely to produce an appropriately rigorous appraisal of project outcomes and impact. Whether the approach is principally quantitative (seeking to quantify progress with respect to predefined variables) or qualitative (seeking a more 'open-ended' analysis in terms defined by project participants), it can be argued that these core principles still apply. The remainder of this paper is structured around these core principles, in terms of key questions (Table 2) that an evaluator must seek to answer in producing an effective evaluation.

### **2.1. Aims and objectives**

The above discussion on programming has emphasized the importance of identifying explicit aims and objectives for a project. These need to be specified in terms of the variables (or, in project language, indicators) that it is anticipated will be influenced by the project. It is also necessary to identify specifically who the project is intended to benefit, as this will define the appropriate frame for the evaluation.

### **2.2. Measurement**

Having chosen to define 'success' in terms of particular variables or indicators, there is a need to decide how – practically – these will be measured. In psychometric terms, this process is called the 'operationalization' of variables; in 'project' language it may be referred to as the 'means of verification' for selected indicators. A number of established psychometric principles govern the selection of specific measures: the measures' reliability, validity, sensitivity, and lack of bias. In much project evaluation work another key principle is that project beneficiaries can identify with and support the measures chosen. Such measures may be derived from discussion with beneficiaries (ensuring 'grounded' variables), or at least 'checked out' with beneficiaries at some stage (respondent validity).

### **2.3. Interpretation**

Once objectives have been defined and measures chosen to reflect them, information can obviously be gathered. But how is it to be interpreted? Again, facing issues in advance of implementing an evaluation will be of considerable assistance here. For instance, careful selection of participants/respondents in the evaluation will support the trustworthiness of findings. This might involve a statistical approach requiring random selection of a specified sample. With other designs there may be other methods used to ensure that what is found can be trusted to be a 'genuine' finding, rather than the experience of an unrepresentative sub-group.

Gaining information from multiple sources and comparing them – triangulation – can be a powerful means of supporting confident interpretation. Also,

to interpret information appropriately, an evaluator needs to have confidence that measures are providing a suitably comprehensive account of relevant beneficiary experience. In quantitative studies this may mean ensuring that questionnaires etc. address a suitably broad range of issues. In qualitative work it may mean ensuring that selection of material from transcripts, or reportage of discussions in focus groups, does not 'leave out' too much of the story told.

Clearly, evaluation will usually be focused on the experience of intended beneficiaries of a specific project – but there will often be interest in the question of whether there may be lessons that could be applied elsewhere. Here statistical principles of sampling may assist in suggesting how results may be generalized to other settings. In much qualitative work, however, how transferable theoretical analysis may be can be of greater interest. The question being asked here is 'May this way of thinking about things be useful in other situations?'

## **3. CONCLUSION**

It should be clear from all the above that the vast majority of issues surrounding both project implementation and evaluation are best addressed early, preferably at the stage of project planning. However, this ideal is frequently not met, and project managers and evaluators frequently have to work knowing that if some previous decisions had been made differently, their current task would be a lot easier. Nevertheless, the structured principles outlined in this paper at least provide a 'reference point' with respect to which decisions can be made towards achieving the 'best possible' project structure or evaluation attainable in a given, maybe constrained and difficult, situation. The fact that it is generally impossible to keep operating theatres completely free of bacteria does not detract from the importance of seeking the most sterile environment attainable in a given circumstance for the benefit of patients. By analogy, we should not apologize if our project evaluations lack the robust, empirical rigour of an experimental study, if we are genuinely seeking the most rigorous methodology available to us within the constraints of an applied

setting, frequently the context of a complex human emergency. With commitment, imagination, and foresight many of the principles outlined here can be addressed even in the most complex of circumstances.

**FURTHER READING**

Ager, A. (1999). Psychosocial programmes: Principles and practice for research and evaluation. In F. Ahearn (Ed.), *Psychosocial wellness*. Oxford: Berghahn.

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