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Outcome and Impact Assessment in International Development
Zewo Guidelines for Projects and Programmes

Step 1: Define the project objectives

The effect (outcome and impact) of a project can only be assessed and verified if it is clear what the effect of the planned project should be. Carrying out a situation analysis and defining the outcome and impact objectives form the basis of outcome and impact assessment.

How it is done

Activities	Taking account of the environment and the context, the nature of the problematic situation confronting the target group, what has caused it and what the target group's needs are must be clarified. It is necessary to define the change the project is supposed to bring about. The target group must be included from the very beginning and overarching goals must be kept constantly in mind.
Questions	Finding answers to the following questions can provide the first step in an impact assessment: • What is the problem and what are its causes? • What are the target group's needs and what do other stakeholders want? • What do we want to change for the target group? • What longer-term effects do we want to trigger? • How does this contribute to the overarching goals both within and outside our organisation? • Which external factors and forces might work against these objectives?
Results	• The project objectives are defined. • The project goals are clarified.
Resources	• Logical Framework Approach: analysis of stakeholders, problems and objectives • Outcome Mapping: Intentional Design • Theory of Change: Identify Goals and Assumptions

IMPORTANT

A project's effects must be clearly distinguished from its outputs. Outputs are the services provided by the project and its products. Effects are the results on the target groups. We differentiate between direct, short-term project effects for the target group (outcomes) and indirect, longer-term effects (impact) for the community. The project's objective at the outcome level is called the project objective. The project's objective at the impact level is termed the project goal. In the ZEWO Guidelines on outcome and impact assessment, we are primarily interested in effects at the outcome level.

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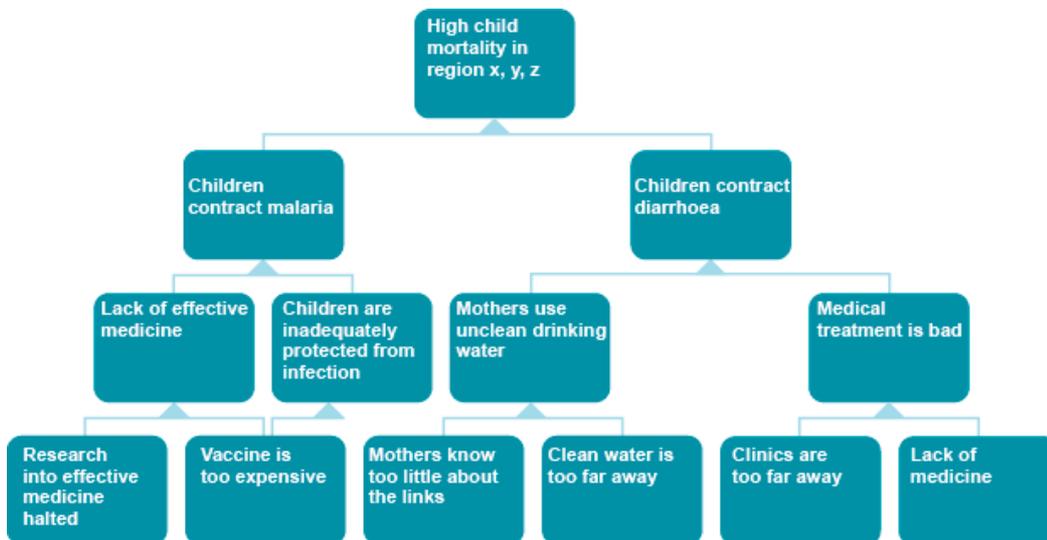**Outcome and Impact Assessment in International Development**
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Problem analysis

The problem tree is a commonly used tool for identifying problems and their causes. This technique forms part of the Logical Framework Approach. In an ideal scenario, the problem tree is elaborated in a multi-stage participatory group discussion. The first step is an open brainstorming round in which problems of importance to the participants are named and noted down on cards. Taking a selected main problem as the starting point, the cards are arranged into a hierarchy of causes and effects. The product of this discussion, the problem tree, should show an accurate, but simplified model of reality.

Example of a problem tree

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What is a project objective?

The project objective describes the project's outcomes: intended and direct, short- and medium-term effects on the target group. The project objective must lie within the scope of the project, and one must be able to directly attribute the effects to the project. The project objective is often formulated in terms of the project's utility for the target group: *"Better… higher…"* It also makes sense to formulate the project objective as a situation to be achieved in the future.

The project objective ought also to describe an outcome, meaning the effect or change that the project is supposed to cause for the target group. In practice it is often not quite so simple to distinguish outcomes from outputs, i.e. the project's products and deliverables. Well-formulated, genuine outcome (and impact) objectives are therefore of great importance if the outcome and impact assessment is to have any significance.

A well-formulated project objective

- Provides a concrete description of the project's effect at the outcome level;
- Was developed in a participatory process;
- Is accepted by the target group and other stakeholders;
- Is clear and concise.

N.B.

- Do not simply summarise the outputs, but describe the effects that should be triggered at a higher level.
- Distinguish clearly between objectives and indicators. There are various ways to distinguish between objectives and indicators. However, individual variants should not be mixed up.

Examples

- **Child health programme**
  Improvements are made in the health of children in the poorest parts of the country.
- **Health course project**
  Young mothers in regions x, y and z should use clean drinking water more often or boil dirty water.
- **Well-building project**
  The population of regions x, y and z should have better access to clean drinking water.
- **Medical care project**
  Children suffering from diarrhoea in regions x, y and z should be able to be treated successfully.
- **Education programme**
  The communities have better access to formal and informal education.
- **Empowerment project**
  Socially and economically disadvantaged people influence decision-making in the region.
- **Project to support farmers' organisations**

The farmers' organisations improve their institutional and organisational capacities.

The farmers' organisations improve the management of their business activities.

In practice, there are objectives for local partner organisations as well. It can be useful for a development agency that has no direct contact to the target groups to concentrate on this level. However, this is not the subject of the impact assessment as discussed in these guidelines.

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Objective and indicator

In practice, the terms 'objective' and 'indicator' are often defined and used in different ways. At bottom, we can distinguish between three variants, and these are presented in an example in the table below. All three variants are expedient, yet they should not be mixed up.

We shall use Variant 1 in these guidelines.

Variant 1 (e.g. EU)

	Objective	Indicator
Impact level	Less children in x die from diarrhoea	Child mortality in x <5% (by 2015)
Outcome level	Improved access to drinking water	Walk to next well <15 min for 90% of households in x (by 2015)
Output level	Build wells	100 wells operational

Variant 2 (e.g. World Bank)

	Objective	Indicator	Target
Impact level	Less children in x die from diarrhoea	Child mortality in x	<5% (by 2015)
Outcome level	Improved access to drinking water	% of households in x with <15 min walk to next well (by 2015)	90% (by 2015)
Output level	Build wells	Number of wells operational	
			100

Variant 3

	Objective	Indicator
Impact level	By 2015 child mortality < 15%	Child mortality
Outcome level	90% of households in x have good access to drinking water (by 2015)	% of households in x with walk to next well < 15 min
Output level	Build 100 wells	Number of operational wells

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What is a project goal?

A project goal describes the projects impact: the long-term effects that should (also) be triggered. The words *"The project will contribute to…"* are often used here. This reveals that the intended results at this higher level are in the main not concrete, nor can they be exclusively attributed to this project. The project goal provides the link between the project and its direct effects (project objective), and the overarching goals both within and outside the organisation.

A well-formulated project goal

- Provides a concrete description of the project's effects at the impact level;
- Provides the link between the project (the project objective) to the overarching goals.

Examples

- **Child health programme**
  It contributes to reducing child mortality in the country.
- **Health training project**
  It contributes to improving child health in the poorest parts of the country.
- **Education programme**
  A better level of education in the communities contributes to lowering poverty.
- **Empowerment project**
  It contributes to improving living standards of socially and economically disadvantaged people.
- **Project to support farmers' organisations**
  It contributes to improving the economic situation of the rural population.

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Involvement of target groups

Participation runs through the entire project cycle, from the definition of a strategy and the identification of objectives, via the planning and implementation of activities, right up to the evaluation of the results and the use of the lessons learnt. This is the only way in which the Southern NGO can carry on working successfully after the departure of the Northern NGO. The voice of the South can express itself directly and not via an expert appraisal. Participation begins with the very first conversations.

Participatory definition of project objectives and planning

A whole range of approaches, methods and behaviour patterns about participatory situation and problem analysis, definition of objectives and project planning have been compiled under the title of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Yet it is more a style than an actual method. Some of the issues that form of the basic principles of PRA are:

- Empowerment: Knowledge is generated locally and remains available.
- Respect: Local intellectual and analytic abilities are respected.
- Localisation: Local materials and representations are extensively used.
- Inclusiveness: Special attention is paid to the participation of marginalised groups.
- Visual sharing: Information is presented visually.
- Iterative learning and action: Instruments are put into action step-by-step and on a coordinated basis.
- Triangulation: Research is validated through as many different perspectives as possible.
- Optimal ignorance: Unnecessary precision is avoided.

PRA depends to a great extent on the moderators, who must lead and be the catalyst for the process without dominating it.

Photo: Ecosolidar

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

PRA's style and toolbox are also used for monitoring and evaluation – and therefore for impact assessment. The inclusion of the target groups in the planning and implementation of an impact assessment is decisive for it to be accepted. This is especially true for the development of indicators and data collection, as well as the evaluation of a project's effects. This is the only way to ensure that local partners can also use the impact assessment's results to good effect.

Links

Participatory Rural Appraisal on Wikipedia

NGO Programme Karnataka-Tamil Nadu, Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: Field Experiences (2005)

Feinstein International Center, Participatory Impact Assessment – A Guide for Practitioners (2008)

eldis, Resource Guide «Participation»