

Outcome and Impact Assessment in International Development

Zewo Guidelines for Projects and Programmes



Step 5: Evaluate the effects

The effects for the target group are now assessed as foreseen in the planning. This can be carried out by external experts (external evaluation) or by project managers (self-evaluation). Mixed forms are also conceivable. Participatory approaches involve the target group in this phase.

Whatever the form of evaluation, the aim is to gather together the collected data, to analyse it and to disseminate it in a clearly intelligible form. The conventional means of doing this is a written report. Depending on the rationale for the outcome and impact assessment, a presentation or a group discussion may be appropriate. As part of their reporting, project managers inform their organisation about the project and the results of the impact assessment.

How it is done

Activities Project managers or external experts make comparisons and find out the project's effect on the target group using the available data. This task should be carried out according to standard evaluation practice. The findings are generally recorded in writing.

Questions Coming up with answers to the following question forms the fifth step in an impact assessment:

- Is all the necessary data available in a suitable format?
- What was the effect or change on the target group?
- What would have changed for the target group without the project?
- What are the reasons for any deviation from the project objectives?
- Which assumptions and hypotheses have proved true, and which were false?
- What foreseen and unforeseen side effects were there?
- Is there a plausible case to be made that the project has contributed to the overarching goals?
- Which effects can be clearly attributed to the project?
- Which recommendations are needed?

Results • A report or a presentation has been made about the effects of the project or programme.

N.B.

It is generally at this stage that external experts come into play. However, there should already have been clarification during Step 3, i.e. during the planning of the impact assessment, which questions need answering and who will carry out the impact assessment. This important point is often neglected in practice, making it difficult or even impossible to assess the effects.

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Analysis

If the collected data is to be converted into usable information, then it must be consolidated and interpreted.

Consolidation

If an overall picture needs to be produced from many different individual surveys or data from various sources and methods needs to be assessed, then the raw data first of all needs to be prepared accordingly. It is obvious how quantitative data is consolidated. The data is entered into tables or presented in the form of graphs. Quantitative data is analysed statistically. Consolidating qualitative data is a slightly more complex matter and depends on the type of analysis. Qualitative data can be analysed with various methods of content analysis. The results must be graded and assessed.

Interpretation

Analysing and interpreting the data forms the core of outcome and impact assessment. It is a matter of assessing the effects of the project on the basis of the comparisons that have been made and revealing potential weaknesses. Discussing the findings helps to explain or fill in contradictions or gaps in the data. Analysing data is an especially important element of participatory methods. It helps stakeholders to internalise and accept the conclusions, and their motivation to commit themselves to change increases.

IMPORTANT

The following are generally accepted standards that need to be adhered to:

- External teams should be allowed to work freely. The organisation should not put any pressure on the assessment.
- Differing perspectives within a team are disclosed and documented.
- Sources of information are published and are reliable.
- Data is meaningful and systematically checked.



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Quantitative data

Statistical methods of descriptive analysis are especially suitable for analysing quantitative data. They include counting frequencies, analysis of percentage distributions and comparison of averages. Descriptive analyses aims to present available data clearly in tables and diagrams, describing it and ordering it.

The available data is subjected to validation through a descriptive analysis and the first interpretations of content can be undertaken.

IMPORTANT

Save and store copies of the raw data. This enables one to go back to the original data if material is changed during analysis.

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Qualitative data

Qualitative data is generally analysed according to the principles of content analysis. For the data to be analysed, it needs to be put into a standard format that allows for comparisons. This often means various kinds of minutes.

These are the different kinds of minutes:

- **Transcript**
All statements are taken down in full, word for word. This type of minutes serves as the basis for comprehensive, interpretative analysis.
- **Annotated minutes**
This contains information other than the transcript, e.g. pauses, emphasis, particularities of speech or additional comments.
- **Summarised minutes**
This is a systematic summary of content that is of the most relevance to the central questions. It involves harmonising all the material and aggregating it to the same level of detail. This kind of minutes is used primarily when there is an abundance of data and when interest is mainly on the thematic content of the material.

N.B.

Interviews and minutes should not be interpreted in a free (non-systematic) fashion, since it will limit other people's comprehension of the interpretation.

The analysis of minutes involves four stages:

1. Checks are made that the data being analysed is all to the same level of detail. If this is not the case, then not all of the pieces of data can be analysed using the same template.
2. The information must be sorted according to standard criteria – generally questions – so that the various pieces of data can be compared with each other. Various forms of tabular presentation are appropriate here. Alternatively, passages in the minutes can be highlighted in different colours or using a variety of signs.
3. For the actual analysis of the prepared data, the content can be attached to the main questions. It is also possible to quantify statements or answers that occur several times. Information from the analysis can be recorded in a separate document or an extra column in a table.
4. Checks are made that the summarised or aggregated results still match up to the question to which an answer must be found. If this is not the case, then Steps 2 and 3 must be reviewed.

IMPORTANT

Every operation must be documented. Intermediate products such as summaries or tables should be kept. This increases the transparency of the aggregation process and allows for corrections. It also means that additional questions can be analysed at a later stage.

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Attribution gap

Even if an effect has been observed and measured, one should not deduce from this that the result came about through the project alone. And even if the direct effect (outcome) can be clearly attributed to an intervention, this does not prove that this contributes to an overarching goal (impact). This state of affairs is known as the attribution gap.

However, it is not always thoroughly necessary to prove that a particular input has had a specific development impact. Depending on what the impact assessment is to be used for, it is often sufficient to make a case for the fact that the project has contributed to the observed change. A good results model plays an important part in this.

Attribution vs. Contribution Analysis

A distinction should be made between whether an effect needs to be proved and attributed to a development measure for purposes of legitimation (attribution), or whether a case needs to be made for a project or programme having contributed to improving a situation (contribution), e.g. for purposes of organisational learning or steering within the organisation.

Rigorous impact assessment methods are needed in order to attribute an outcome to an intervention. There must be a comparison with a control group to record what would have happened without the project. The analysis requires scientific, statistical methods. This makes it possible to exclude external factors and to clearly attribute the findings to a specific intervention. However, such comparisons are expensive.

Contribution analysis can be made using simpler approaches. It is already a good approach if a baseline study is carried out to enable before & after comparisons to be made.

It is only possible to say whether an intervention has had an impact at a higher level if the links and effects at this level have been proved through rigorous impact assessment methods. That is barely possible in practice. It is therefore all the more important to make a plausible case for further impact hypotheses.

Examples of how to formulate effects

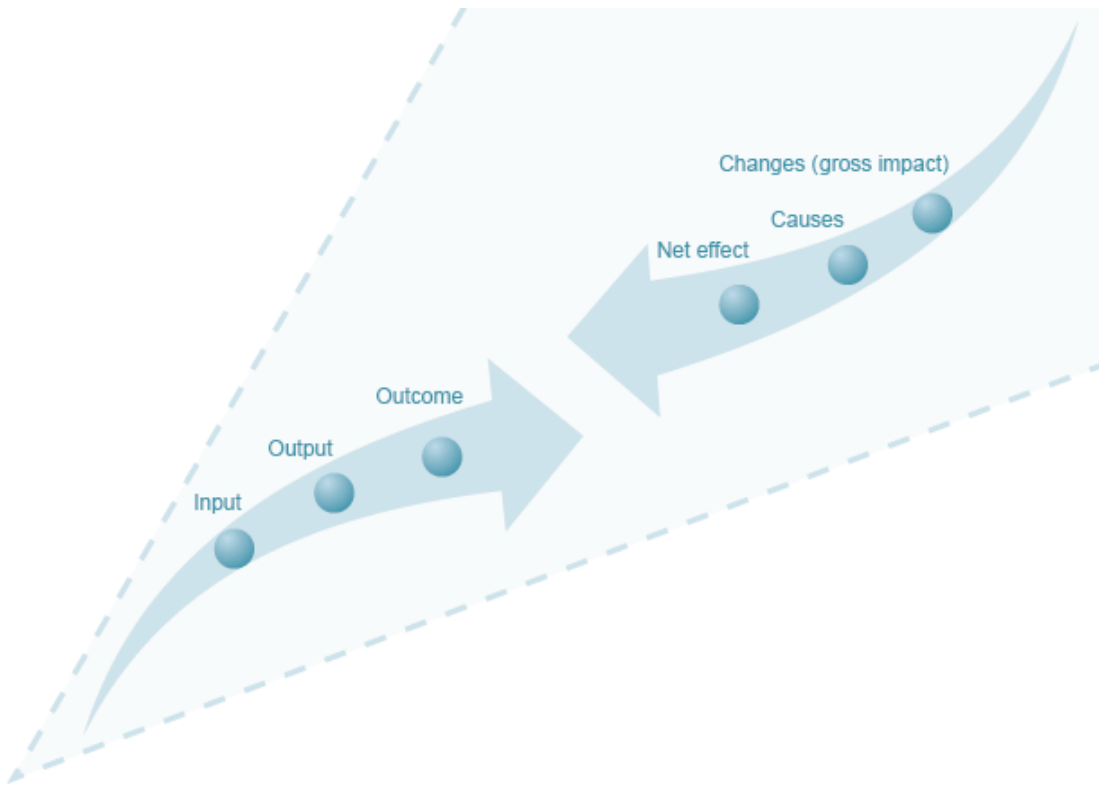
The report should disclose which assertions can be made on the basis of the completed impact assessment.

- **Clearly attributable effects**
The project or programme has effects in a x% fall in child mortality in Region A from ... to ...
- **Plausible effects**
The project or programme has contributed to a x% fall in child mortality in Region A from ... to ...

Alternative approaches

It is expensive to close the attribution gap using rigorous impact assessment methods and, notwithstanding enormous effort, it is often impossible. Furthermore, the simplification to a link between cause and effect on which this method is based comes in for a great deal of criticism.

Participatory methods offer an alternative or complementary approach to this and can provide qualitative information about the effect of a development project. These centre primarily on asking the target groups what has changed for them as well as to which influences and to which actual project they attribute this result.



This approach takes the opposite perspective to a strict input/output model. First of all, it records the total change (gross impact), which encompasses external factors and side effects. Next, the causes of these changes are investigated using participatory methods. The aim is to ascertain the net effect that a specific project has had on the target group. Some of the models for this context-specific approach include MAPP (Method for Impact Assessment of Programmes and Projects) and Most Significance Change. These methods focus primarily on the changes in the target groups and/or their experiences. Alternative approaches are often rather controversial in practice, but they can be used in combination with the Logic Model. In particular, they allow one to complete quantitatively proven changes (What has changed?) with qualitative information (Why did it change?).

N.B.

Due to the pressure to legitimise development projects, impact assessments are often carried out too early and in too much detail. Often, expectations of impact assessments are too high – and cannot be fulfilled.

If funders have unrealistic ideas about proving results, or if different funders have different conceptions, then the organisation should seek to agree on an appropriate impact assessment system with them. Aid agencies that have implemented an impact assessment system are better placed than organisations that have not yet developed any ideas of their own on the subject.

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Aggregation

If the success of development efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals is to be measured, then the impact assessment models employed need to enable the findings to be aggregated and assessed at various levels. Also, if one is to answer the question as to the effects of a project on target groups in different geographical areas, or the effect of different projects on the same target group, the data and information need to be summarised.

Aggregations could possibly be made on a thematic or geographical basis if quantitative methods or scoring-based methods have been used. It is a necessary condition that the same indicators be used. If the indicators have been developed locally with the target group as part of a strong participatory process, then generally binding key indicators must be used in all the studies as a minimum to allow the findings to be aggregated.

There are often challenges in practice when it comes to aggregation. To date, there are only a few approaches, and no fully tried-and-tested methods to analyse the effect of country programmes, sector-wide programmes or programme-oriented community funding.

Meta-evaluation

Another means of summarising data is to produce a meta-evaluation (an evaluation and summary of evaluations) of existing evaluations on a particular subject or a specific region.

Links

The two overviews of impact assessment methods listed below assess various methods in terms of how suitable they are for aggregation (cf. [Resources](#)).

DeGEval, Wirkungsanalyse – Eine Landkarte für die entwicklungspolitische Praxis (2008)

ACT Development – A Guide to Assessing our Contribution to Change

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Reporting

The findings of an impact assessment should be published in an appropriate form for them to be used further and disseminated. If the outcome and impact assessment is carried out by the project managers themselves, then the resulting insights can be integrated into the organisation's general reporting system. If the impact assessment is conducted by external experts, then they will generally produce a written report. Even in this latter case, the main findings ought to feed into the general reporting system. Whatever the case, project managers should report on the effect of their project, even if they did not conduct the impact assessment themselves.

It is just as important when producing a report to consider the needs of potential users as to include only essential information. The hallmark of a good report is that it answers the emerging questions in a clear, factual and intelligible manner. The evaluation process should be described with full transparency and the meaningfulness of the results needs to be discussed. Opinions and assessments must be highlighted and must not be presented as facts. Conclusions must be substantiated and recommendations must be oriented towards results. The stakeholders should also have an opportunity to comment on the findings, judgments, conclusions and recommendations.

The findings of an impact assessment should always be reported, regardless of whether the findings are expected or unexpected, negative or positive. What is particularly important, though, is an ability to communicate negative results. The reasons for the result, along with the corrective measures that have been planned or implemented, need to be described. Good recommendations are ones that are formulated in a way that encourages their implementation.

N.B.

It would be wrong to restrict communication of the findings to publishing a report. Other forms of communication might well be appropriate, depending on to whom the information is addressed and what it is to be used for.

Template

Template for how to structure an impact assessment report

I Summary

II Basic principles

1. Rationale, purpose and objectives
2. Scope of the impact assessment
3. Questions for impact assessment
 - 3.1 Question a
 - 3.2 Question b
4. Context of the impact assessment
5. Team

III Approach

1. Discussion of methodology, sources of information and data quality
2. Inclusion of relevant stakeholders

IV Findings

1. Question a
 - 1.1 Observations
 - 1.2 Appraisal and conclusions
2. Question b
 - 1.1 Observations
 - 1.2 Appraisal and conclusions

V Overall conclusions and recommendations