

## Outcome and Impact Assessment in International Development

### Zewo Guidelines for Projects and Programmes



## Step 6: Use the findings

The findings of the assessment can be used to build up organisational knowledge and to learn lessons for the future, to steer the organisation's activities towards effects, or to legitimise its activities towards donors, intermediaries and the target groups.

### How it is done

**Activities** If the findings of the impact assessment are to be used properly, then the necessary conditions need to be created and appropriate forms of communication found. These should be adapted to those receiving the information.

**Questions** Answering to the following questions can form the sixth step in an impact assessment:

- Who is to use the findings and to what end?
- What can be done to encourage use of the findings?
- Which forms of communication have proved their worth?

**Results**

- Learning sessions completed, findings articulated
- Information prepared for strategic discussions and decision-making
- Achieved effects reported and accounted for

### Examples

- WWF Switzerland: Performance Report
- SDC: Wirkungsbericht im Wassersektor
- SDC: Wirkung im Fokus – Einblick in DEZA-Programme
- Helvetas: Performance Indicators for Helvetas
- Helvetas: Organic Cotton changes producers' lives

### IMPORTANT

The use of findings has to be planned systematically from the beginning. Learning events, for example workshops with stakeholders, must be organised at an early stage. It should also be considered in advance in what form the findings should be disseminated more widely - for example by summarising the findings as lessons learnt.

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## Learning

The findings of the impact assessment are a good basis for the organisation to expand its knowledge and to learn from its actions. As a result, the organisation's processes, projects and programmes, as well as its strategic direction are improved and adjusted to new insights.

### Positive factors

- **Willingness to learn**

It requires readiness from management and a corresponding strategy to institutionalise learning within an organisation. Appropriate strategies must be forged, and the necessary Tools and Resources must be made available.

- **Learning culture**

In an environment where people are keen to learn, information is made available, mistakes are accepted and understood as an opportunity to learn, both individually and as an organisation. There is no looking for the guilty party and calling them to account for mistakes. This only hampers the flow of information and people's readiness to learn from mistakes.

- **Time**

Phases of learning should be a scheduled part of the organisation's project management and overall management system so that they do not get squeezed out under the pressure of the day-to-day running of the organisation. There can be a tendency to take shortcuts under time pressure, especially in the planning and decision-making phases. In such cases, integration of previously made experiences and insights is easily neglected.

- **Continuity**

A constant feedback process should be instituted that also includes the stakeholders. It does, however, take time before the consequences of one's actions become apparent. If staff and consultants have switched to a different task or a new project or another organisation in the intervening period, then there is little incentive for them to learn from the findings. Regular staff turnover and short-term involvement of advisors make the learning process more difficult. To minimise potential knowledge drain, findings and insights need to be documented.

- **Spirit of innovation**

Insights gained from the impact assessment can be used to grasp the unknown and to understand the known better. Organisations should not give in to the temptation and become stuck in a rut by simply sticking to what they know and to the tried and tested.

- **Intelligibility**

If changes are necessary, then the reasons for them must be intelligible and the process must be explained transparently. If an organisation changes its direction or priorities too often and too quickly, it has a negative effect on its readiness to learn.

### Suitable forms of communication

- Discussion forums or workshops with staff and stakeholders,
- Regular discussions about project reviews,
- Formulate the lessons learnt and make them available,
- Draw up good/best practice guidelines and integrate them into training and planning.

## **IMPORTANT**

For knowledge-building and the learning process to be successful, it is important that the findings of the impact assessment immediately feed back to all parties involved. This allows them to recognize how the outputs affected the target group. Staff, partner organisations and stakeholders need to discuss together what went right, where the problems were and what reasons for success and failure were. They can thus seek solutions and improvements together and establish what additional training or technical assistance is needed. The new insights should be written down; if they are embedded and accepted within the organisation, then they can be taken to heart in the future.

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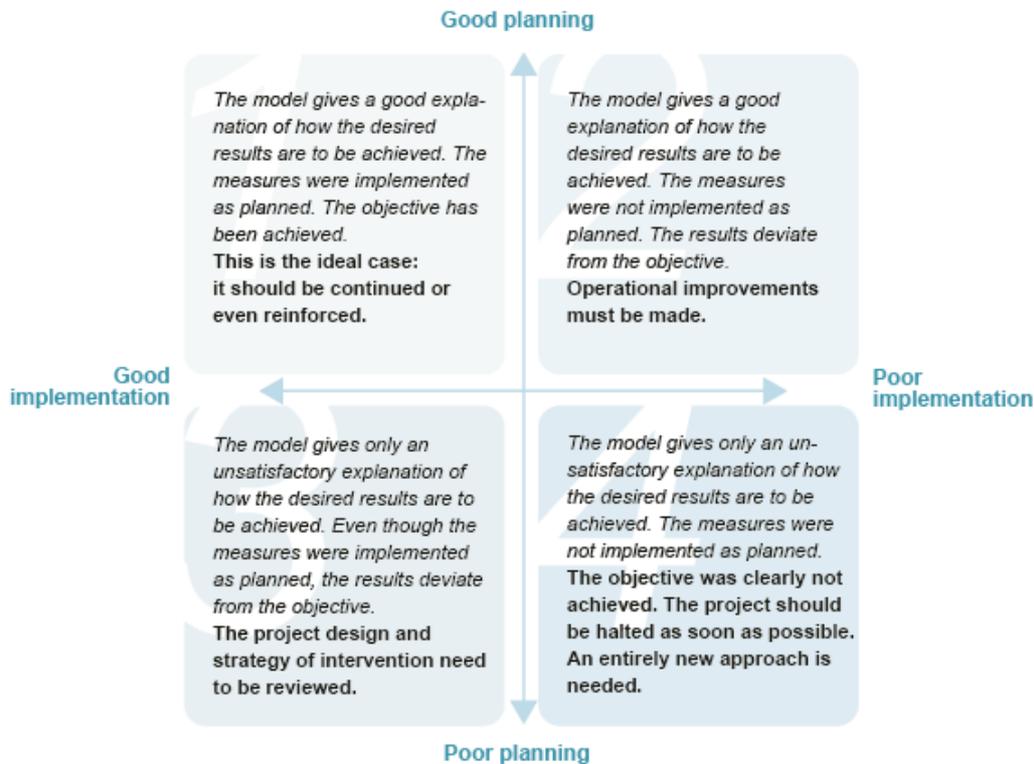
### Steering

In order to have the greatest chance of achieving the planned effects, organisations must react to changing circumstances and new information and steer their projects and programmes accordingly.

The findings from an impact assessment need to be presented in such a way that it is clear how well a project or programme has been planned and implemented, i.e.:

- How good were the results model and its underlying assumptions, hypotheses and assessment of the risks or side effects? How good was the strategy of intervention that was derived from it?
- Were the outputs timely, with the planned level of quality and at the budgeted cost?

This information provides the organisation with a basis which can help to set priorities for checking the strategies, allocating resources and developing improvement measures.



### Positive factors

- **Window of opportunity**  
It is more likely that impact assessment findings will be used when they are available at a when external conditions are favourable to change. This can for example be the case when there are changes in the management team, during a periodic review of organisational strategy or if public events coincide strongly.

## Suitable forms of communication

- Presentations to the board or to management
- Project portfolio
- Internal reporting

### **IMPORTANT**

It takes more than systematic implementation of impact assessment at all levels of an organisation to promote results-oriented thinking and action within it. Creating a climate of transparency and trust is just as important. Critical reflection involves participants and stakeholders. This critical reflection is oriented towards discovering where there is potential for improvement, rather than looking for someone to blame.

### **N.B.**

An organisation should not subordinate its decision-making entirely to impact assessment or else it runs the risk of only doing things that can be measured and attributed as clearly as possible to an effect. The insights offered by impact assessment are only one basis on which decisions can be made.

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## Legitimising

The findings from the impact assessment form an important basis for demonstrating what an organisation has been able to achieve for its target group with the means at its disposal.

### Upward Accountability

Aid agencies are accountable to public funding bodies as well as private and institutional donors. They must demonstrate that they have used the funds put at their disposal in a purposeful, efficient and effective manner. Impact assessments conducted with this in mind are often based on a Logical Framework Approach.

### Positive factors

- **Independence**  
The greater the independence of the body carrying out the assessment, the better suited the evaluation's findings are for legitimisation purposes.
- **Scientific soundness**  
The public - and often the strategic decision-makers too - accept findings more readily if they have been produced by acknowledged and recognised institutions.
- **Communication**  
The better the form of communication is tailored to the user group and the more targeted the selection of findings, the higher is the legitimising effect likely to be.

### Forms of communication

- Performance report with impact assessment findings
- Report on the impact assessment of a project, for one subject area or a region

### Downward accountability

It is increasingly recognised that aid agencies also have a responsibility and are accountable to intermediaries and their target groups. Target groups should therefore not only be included in the planning and implementation stages of development projects, but also have a right to demand good performance from aid agencies. This alters the relationship from the aid agency giving and the target group taking to a truly equal partnership. This is part of empowering the target groups.

### Downloads

Both approaches are justified; the challenge is to combine them. The examples provided below show how this can be accomplished.

Accountability Learning and Planning System (ALPS) von Action Aid  
Standards für Humanitarina Accoutability Partnership (HAP)