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TECHNICAL NOTE

Developing Results Frameworks

Planning Series

This Note describes the concepts underlying the Results Frameworks for Country Development Cooperation Strategies

Technical Notes are published by the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning and provide key concepts and approaches to USAID staff and partners related to the Program Cycle.

INTRODUCTION

The **Results Framework (RF)**, a diagram of cause and effect logic, is a core element of all USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS's). This Technical Note provides a general introduction and background on Results Frameworks. The Tech Note defines a Results Framework; identifies key considerations in developing a strong RF; and discusses the uses of the RF in strategic planning, project design, monitoring and evaluation and portfolio realignment. The relation between an RF and a LogFrame is discussed. Two Annexes provide **key definitions** related to Results Frameworks and discuss the relation between USAID's Development Hypothesis/Results Framework approach and the concept of **Theory of Change** that is used by a number of other donors. This Note supplements the **USAID Automated Directives System (ADS) Chapter 201 on Planning**.

The CDCS describes the **development results** that are expected over a prescribed period, given the planned level of USAID resources as well as resources from non-USAID actors that are expected to contribute to the results. The CDCS also presents the country-specific **development hypothesis** that describes how we expect to achieve the development results. The development hypothesis explains the logic behind a causal chain of results that contributes to achievement of the CDCS Goal. These results are graphically expressed as a **Results Framework**.

The causal chain linking the results - CDCS Goal, Development Objectives (DOs), Intermediate Results (IRs), and Sub-Intermediate Results (Sub-IRs) - must be based on sound evidence.

A **development hypothesis** is expressed in a narrative statement that describes a theory of change, i.e. the logical explanation of how the development results are expected to be achieved. If the results at one level are achieved, the results at the next level above can also be achieved if the critical assumptions hold.

A development hypothesis is:

1) Based on development theory, practice, sound evidence, literature and experience;
2) Country-specific;
3) Explains why and how the proposed investments from USAID and others collectively lead to achieving the Development Objectives and the CDCS

The CDCS and its development hypothesis must be developed within the context of Agency core operational principles, relevant Policies and Strategies, and USAID Forward. Therefore the RF must reflect focus and selectivity (see terms, below) to invest resources for maximum impact. The results are selected considering their potential for achieving sustainability, meaning availability of local buy-in, alignment with partners, capacity, and financing to carry results forward at the end of the program. Local capacity development and the qualities of USAID partnerships with local entities are also integrated into the development hypothesis and the RF.

BACKGROUND

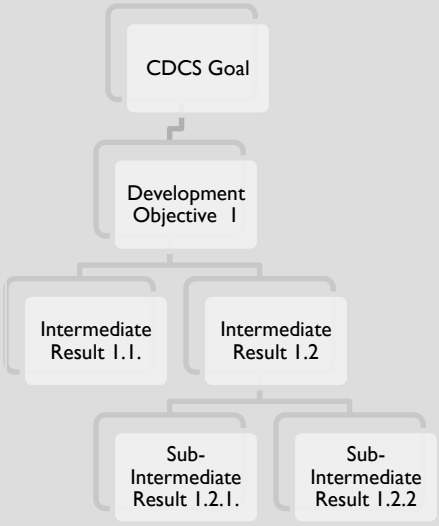
The Results Framework has been a key tool for USAID since the 1990s, used in describing the underlying development logic driving Agency strategies in the field. The tool has been updated and integrated into the Program Cycle, which is at the core of USAID Forward. Today the Results Framework remains a key tool for USAID strategic planning, program management, and program evaluation efforts.

WHAT IS A RESULTS FRAMEWORK

A Results Framework is a diagram of the cause and effect logic for achieving a development objective over a defined time period. The RF uses causal logic, i.e. if lower-level results are achieved, then the next higher-level result can be achieved, as long as the critical assumptions hold. The accompanying development hypothesis narrative statement identifies the specific development problem that the Development Objective addresses, and explains the causal logic between results, generally through a series of if-then statements that describe the theory of change underlying those relationships. It is helpful to consider that the development hypothesis focuses on the lines linking the lower-level results with the higher-level results, and must reference the evidence supporting those causal linkages. In the RF diagram (Figure 1), results at the same level (for example Sub IRs 1.2.1 and 1.2.2) are considered necessary individually and jointly sufficient to achieve the level above them (IR 1.2).

FIGURE 1: RESULTS FRAMEWORK

An RF is a diagram of cause-effect relationships among a number of inter-related results. Each level identifies results necessary and sufficient to achieve the results in the level above, for the selected causal path.



A USAID RF for a CDCS has (at least) four levels of results:

- Goal – The highest level of impact to which USAID, the partner country, civil society, and other development partners contribute, within the CDCS timeframe. The Mission contributes to the CDCS Goal by achieving the DOs.
- Development Objective (DO) – The most ambitious result that an operating unit can materially affect and is willing to be held accountable for, along with USAID partners. Together, the DOs advance the Goal.
- Intermediate Result (IR) – Measurable lower-level changes that individually contribute to jointly achieve the DO, if the critical assumptions hold.
- Sub-Intermediate Results (Sub-IR) - Changes that contribute to the IR, if the critical assumptions hold.

Although the RF is useful to explain why we think a set of results will occur, there may be alternative paths that can lead to the same higher level result. The proposed RF represents the path that has been selected as

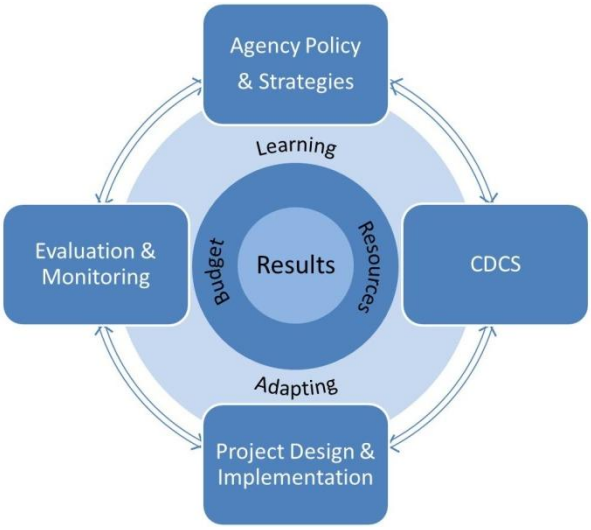
the best choice among the alternatives, based on a variety of factors including cost-effectiveness, highest impact, manageable interest, likelihood of sustainability and as well as evidence and analysis. Results are considered to be within USAID's *manageable interest* (see list of key definitions, page 9) when USAID and its partners can control, organize, or influence their achievement through good project design, implementation, monitoring, and oversight, and are accountable for achieving with a sufficient probability of success to justify use of the resources. Any result within USAID's manageable interest should be included in the development hypothesis and RF, even if no USAID program funds are used directly to obtain them (such as policy reform that comes from the impact of influence). For a DO to be achievable, we need to be able to achieve all those results which are individually necessary for a DO, and when taken together are sufficient.

USES OF A RESULTS FRAMEWORK

A Results Framework serves multiple functions in the Program Cycle:

1. **CDCS Development.** The preparation of an RF is a critical step in formulating the Mission strategy. The RF:
   - Helps managers to identify and focus on key objectives within a complex development environment;
   - Provides an opportunity to build consensus and ownership around shared objectives among USAID staff government representatives, partners, and stakeholders;
   - Helps identify alternative views, areas of concerns, knowledge gaps, and risks which may get masked and ignored once implementation begins;
   - Serves as a negotiating tool with the partner government.

FIGURE 2: PROGRAM CYCLE



2. **Project Design and Implementation.** The RF also serves multiple functions in project design and implementation. It:
   - Establishes the basis for project design by identifying the results that must be achieved in a project or projects:
   - Serves as an effective communication tool because it succinctly captures the key elements of a program's intent and content;
   - It facilitates dialogue between a USAID field mission preparing a CDCS and USAID/Washington on the expected results and resources needed to achieve those results;
   - Is both a planning and a management tool - it provides a program-level framework to gauge progress toward the achievement of results and adjust relevant programs and projects.

3. **Learning and Adapting.** The RF supports learning and adapting through the review of the development hypothesis based on lessons learned and changing circumstances; by tracking the potential implications of game changers on the viability of the RF; and through portfolio review and other processes that consider how to adapt strategy, projects and activities as necessary.

4. **Evaluation and Monitoring.** The RF provides the foundation for monitoring and evaluation efforts that facilitate "mid-course" adjustments that may be needed in a Mission's strategy. Each specific result, i.e. the Goal, each DO, and each IR (and Sub-IR), has performance indicator(s) identified.

5. **Budget and Resources.** The Mission should consider the likely magnitude and allocation of expected budget and resources over the CDCS period as the RF is developed. The CDCS does provide a budget by DO, however the RF is not a budgeting tool and resources are not allocated to IRs.

DEVELOPING A RESULTS FRAMEWORK

Key considerations in an RF include the following:

- Relevant results achieved by other donors, government, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector are to be included in the RF or described in the development hypothesis if USAID believes it can influence those results (or if USAID's results are significantly influenced by others). They should also be identified in the development hypothesis in terms of both their importance to achievement of higher-level results and why we think that they will be achieved.

"GAME CHANGERS" AND RISKS

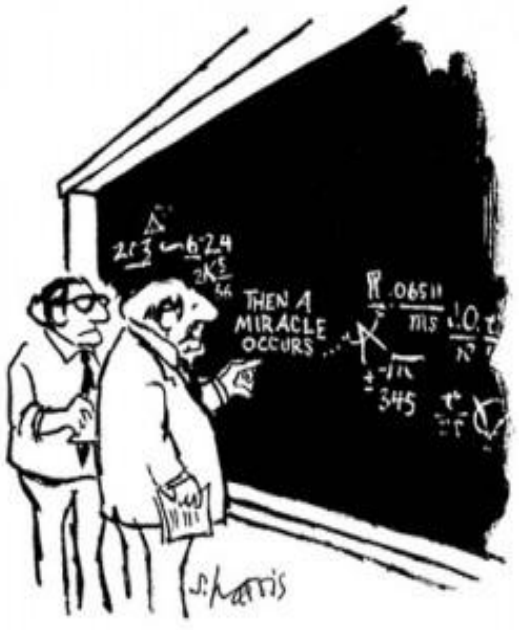
The Results Framework and/or the development hypothesis narrative must explain relevant critical assumptions and "game changing" scenarios, and assess risks associated with successful results achievement. Critical risk factors and assumptions beyond USAID's control should also be monitored. Critical assumptions may include partner country commitments that are not part of USAID programs; the socio-economic and political environment, health, population and migration trends, conflict, investments and results from other donors; and any other factors outside of USAID's control.

- The Goal and results statements define what will be achieved at the end of the strategy period. A statement of a result at any level should be the completed result of actions or processes, not the actions or processes themselves, for example a statement of a desired result, such as "Health Systems Strengthened" versus a statement of an action or process, "Increase the institutional capacity to deliver and sustain health services. A result should be stated clearly and precisely in a way that can be objectively measured. Each DO, IR, and/or Sub-IR should identify one clear result in the cause and effect chain, precluding the need for additional explanation, e.g. "through", "by", or "for".

- The Goal, each DO and each IR must have at least one **performance indicator** specified. These serve as the basis for monitoring progress toward results achievement. The indicators should measure the intended results of the CDCS and how these results will be achieved. They may be included on the RF graphic, if there is sufficient space, and they must be included in the Performance Management Plan (PMP).

- There are several clearly defined steps in the development of an RF. These include problem analysis; stakeholder consultation; analytical work; development of a Goal-level development hypothesis; identification of IRs and Sub-IRs; specification of roles of other actors; clarification of assumptions and risk; and an iterative process of revision as necessary.

- In selecting the causal pathways and identifying the Sub-IRs, IRs and DOs, keep in mind that some results are likely to be inter-connected due to the inherently complicated nature of development work. The RF should reflect these connections to the extent possible. Be aware that during implementation of a CDCS some of these inter-relationships may produce unintended consequences.



"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

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RESULTS ALIGNMENT AT THE CDCS STAGE

During CDCS development, the Mission should begin to identify how the results expected to be achieved by its current portfolio of activities will align with the new RF. See ADS 201.3.4.3 for further guidance. The RF in the CDCS will be the basis for project design, but first the Mission must consider whether or not results from their existing portfolio align with the results expected in five years, as outlined in the CDCS.

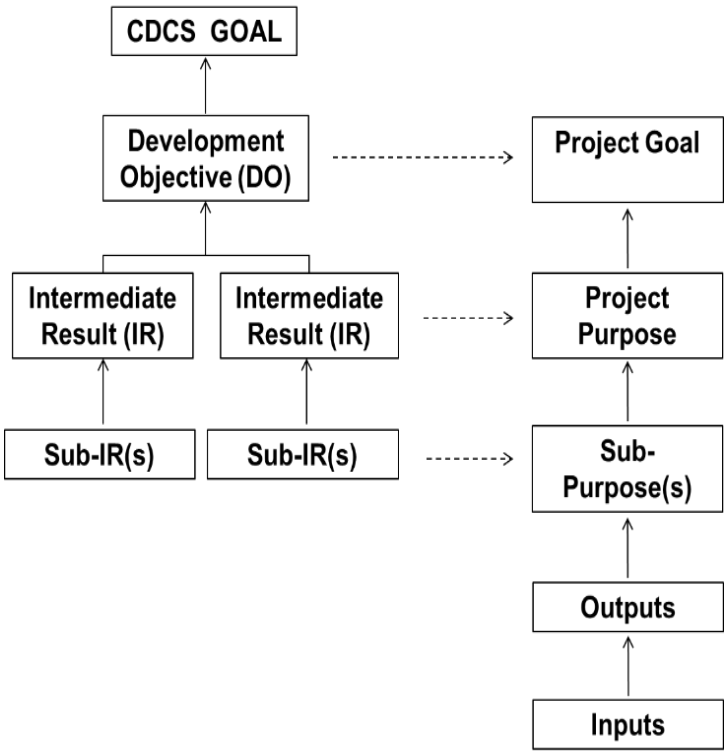
LINKAGES BETWEEN RESULTS FRAMEWORK AND LOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

The Results Framework is a strategic planning tool that helps Missions identify the development hypothesis and think through what results lead to other results. The LogFrame underlying a project allows the Mission to define exactly what resources and set of actions are needed to achieve and measure the results. Usually, but not always, the Goal level in a LogFrame corresponds to a DO in the CDCS RF, while the project Purpose in the LogFrame is an IR in the RF. Sub-Purposes in a project LogFrame are usually derived from Sub-IRs in the RF. (see the example on next page).

A DO will often require multiple projects and activities for its achievement. A single project is one of the necessary interventions for achieving a DO, but will generally not be sufficient by itself to achieve a DO. In addition, achievement of a DO generally depends on other policies and operations of partner governments, other donors, civil society organizations, and the private sector. As projects are designed, the RF of the CDCS will need to be reviewed, validated and if necessary updated, based on evidence.

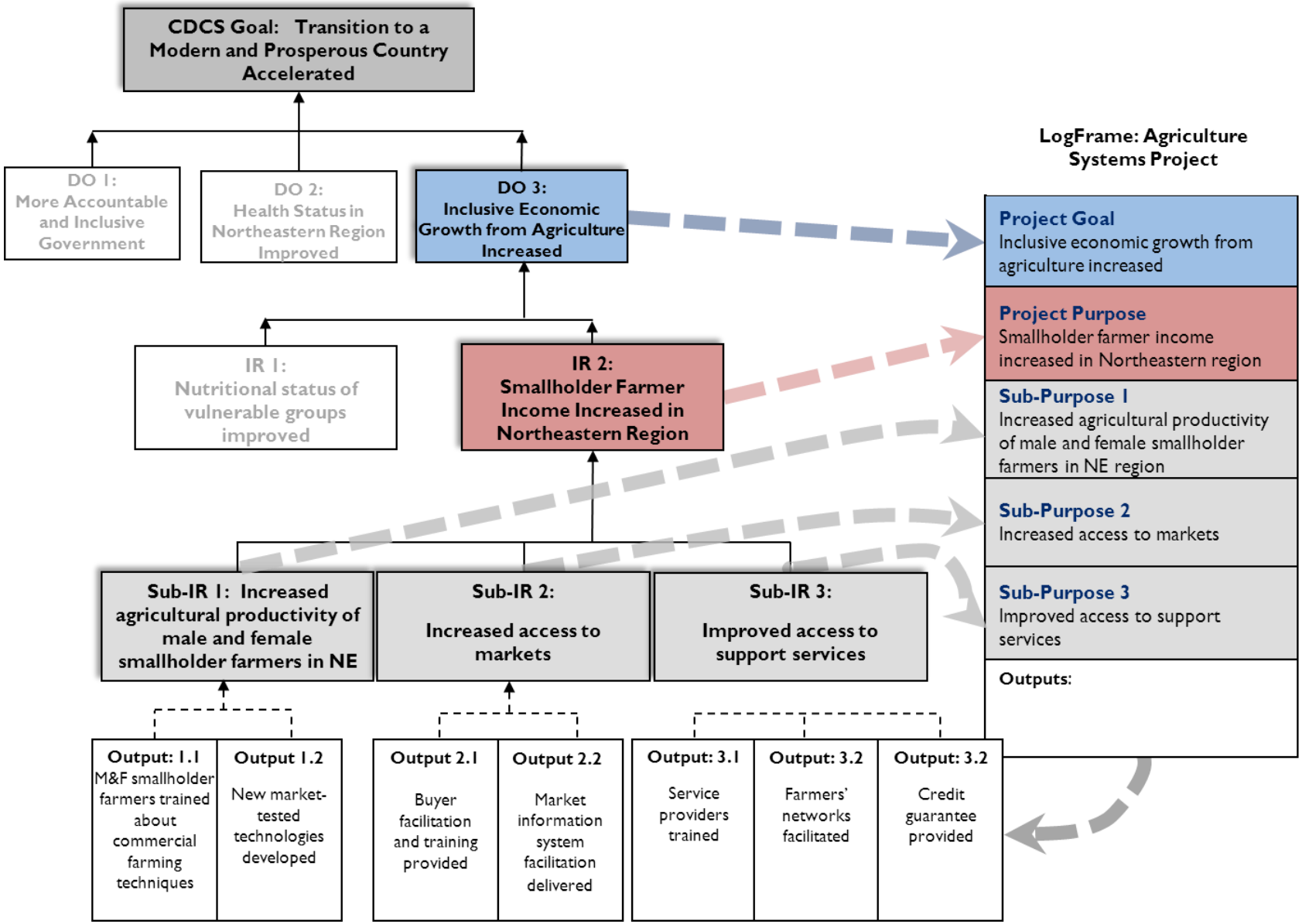
Strong problem analysis at the RF stage will be carried through to more in-depth problem analysis for the LogFrame, providing a logical cause and effect basis for the project hypothesis. A well-articulated RF is important for development of a good project LogFrame. If the RF is weak or poorly constructed, it may need to be revised by the project design teams in developing project LogFrames.

FIGURE 3: FROM RESULTS FRAMEWORK TO LOGICAL FRAMEWORK



The example on the following page demonstrates the linkage between the RF and the first column of a LogFrame for a project that has as its Goal the same result as DO 2 in the Results Framework. Note how the project Purpose in this example tracks with a specific IR and the project Sub-Purposes track with the Sub-IRs.

FIGURE 4: EXAMPLE OF LINKAGES BETWEEN AN RF AND LOGFRAME



RESULTS FRAMEWORKS IN LEARNING, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION

Performance monitoring is the ongoing and routine collection of performance indicator data to reveal whether desired results are being achieved and whether CDCS and project implementation is on track. A Mission analyzes progress through the strategy period by comparing actual results achieved against the targets initially set in the Mission's PMP. RFs should continually be reassessed to analyze whether: Mission targets require adjustment to meet higher level results; assumptions remain valid; and/or DOs, IRs and/or Sub-IRs need to be revised in light of new evidence about factors that affect results achievement.

Collaboration, Learning and Adapting (CLA) is a framework to foster program learning to yield more positive change. To this end Missions are encouraged to develop and implement a learning approach that effectively integrates all components of the Program Cycle. The learning approach provides a link between the RF formulated in the CDCS and the projects implemented over the life of the CDCS. It provides an iterative framework for reviewing the external changes and lessons learned from CDCS implementation so that projects and, where relevant, the RF can be adapted. Using the RF, USAID staff and partners can jointly create, share, refine, and apply practical CLA approaches to ground the strategy in evidence and adapt to new learning and changing contexts so that the CDCS remains relevant and operational. The RF provides the framework for the identification of knowledge gaps, monitoring critical assumptions, and evaluating and learning from programs. Information about good practices and advice about learning in the Program Cycle can be found in the **Program Cycle Learning Guide**.

The RF and the development hypothesis also serve as the basis for developing evaluation questions. Evaluations are required for certain categories of projects as specified in ADS 203. Further, if monitoring shows that the expected causal links among results are not supported, a performance evaluation may be needed to identify the gaps in causal logic, which may result in revisions to the RF.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF USING RESULTS FRAMEWORKS

The RF is the backbone of USAID's strategic planning process and establishes Mission and partner accountability. It sets the parameters for the project design process. It provides a sound framework for monitoring and evaluation. The RF is a particularly helpful tool to help ensure that Missions work strategically in complex socio-political-economic environments. However, there are some potential pitfalls which Missions must manage throughout the Program Cycle.

- **Missions must devote adequate analytical thought to and stakeholder engagement for RF development.** Considerable time and effort is required to carry out appropriate analysis for a good RF. Experience shows that Mission staff members are often pressured to develop an RF without sufficient discussion and engagement of all USAID staff, stakeholders and (potential) partners. Consequently, DOs may be defined without proper consideration given to what is really within the Mission's manageable interest. Likewise USAID's operational principles of selectivity and focus may be too sensitive to adequately consider in a short timeframe. Superficial or inaccurate problem analysis may miss key results in the causal pathway. As a result, the causal relationships between Sub-IRs, IRs and DOs may be defined with insufficient evidence. Recent USAID experience has shown that poorly constructed RFs require Mission project design teams to reconstruct the problem analysis, and even redefine the IRs, in order to define a clear project purpose and a sound Logical Framework.
- **Be prepared to adjust the RF as necessary throughout the strategy period.** Results Frameworks and Logical Frameworks are meant to be dynamic tools that can be adjusted as additional evidence becomes available. For example, a Mission might become aware that the initial RF did not include all lower-

level results necessary for the desired higher-level results. Missions may need to modify the RF frequently during the Program Cycle, particularly at the Sub-IR level, if evidence and changing circumstances require it.

- **Don't aim too high.** Experience shows that Missions often define Objectives beyond their manageable interest, in terms of scale or time frame. To be useful for project design, the RF needs to realistically define what is achievable in five years.

- **Think beyond the five years of the RF**. On the other hand, it is equally important to think of the overall trajectory of the strategy beyond the five years of the CDCS; in essence, what the NEXT RF might look like. Thinking beyond the five year time line of the CDCS makes it possible to identify key foundational results which may need to be put in place now, to allow for future results.

- **Allow the RF to reflect real complexity and inter-connectedness of results.** The RF tries to capture key elements of a complex development environment through the use of "if, then" causality that shows the selected pathway to achieve results. Nevertheless, as a tool it necessarily over-simplifies the development problems. It should not be viewed merely as a map of linear relationships between lower and higher-level results. This overlooks the interconnectedness among results under different DOs. During implementation of a CDCS some USAID activities may affect other parts of the RF with intended as well as unintended consequences. Missions need to watch out for these situations and modify the RF accordingly.

- **Give due consideration to the partner country environment**. The RF has to be developed within, and be responsive to, the partner country context and needs. The organizational realities that USAID faces in terms of budgets and initiatives can tend to push the Mission to develop an RF that responds to USAID's internal organizational imperatives without sufficiently focusing on the partner country needs and roles.

- **Consider the time required to design and implement projects supporting a CDCS.** While the RF lays out causal relationships, it is not a tool that captures the element of time. USAID projects require time to design and implement. Further, even though they lead to the desired results at the Sub-IR or IR level, there may be time lags between achieving the lower-level results and realizing the higher (DO) level results.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources provide more information on Results Frameworks. Where information differs, ADS 201 takes precedence over other resources. Note that non-USAID documents may have terminology and graphics that differ from USAID terminology and use of graphics.

- USAID Program Cycle On-Line Core Course: **http://www.usaidallnet.gov/ppl/program_cycle/player.html**
- USAID Program Cycle On-Line Dilbertia Example: **http://www.usaidallnet.gov/ppl/dilbertia/story.html**
- USAID Program Cycle Learning Guide: **http://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/DRAFT%20Learning%20Guide%207-17-12.pdf**
- Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank, "Designing a Results Framework for Achieving Results: A How To Guide", 2012; **http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTEVACAPDEV/Resources/designing_results_framework.pdf**
- AUSAID, AUSGUIDLINE 2.2 Program Strategies: Using the Results Framework Approach, 2005; **http://www.ausaid.gov.au/ausguide/Documents/ausguideline2.2.pdf**
- Actknowledge, a consultancy that specializes in the Theory of Change, has developed an on-line, cloud-based tool that can be used to develop Results Frameworks. This tool, available without charge, is found at **http://www.theoryofchange.org/toco-software**.

SOME KEY DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

- **Critical Assumptions**: Those results and processes beyond the control or influence of USAID.
- **Development Result**: The most ambitious result that an operating unit can materially affect and is willing to be held accountable for, along with USAID partners.
- **Development Hypothesis:** The theory of change underlying the selected causal pathway intended to achieve a given strategic Goal.
- **Development Hypothesis Narrative:** A narrative statement that describes the development hypothesis. The narrative identifies, through a series of if-then statements, the lower level results that are needed to achieve each higher level desired result, providing evidence supporting the hypothesized causal linkages.
- **Intermediate Result (IR):** An important result that is necessary and sufficient to achieving a Development Objective if the critical assumptions hold.
- **Focus and Selectivity:** USAID must be selective about where it invests its resources to maximize the Agency's long-term impact. USAID must focus its invested resources to ensure they are large enough to have a meaningful, measurable, and lasting impact. The CDCS must consider each of the following means of targeting and prioritizing USAID interventions, highlighting any trade-offs:
  - Geographically
  - Sector and Sub-sectorally
  - Institutionally
- **Logical Framework:** A rigorous methodology used for project design that focuses on the causal linkages between project Inputs, Outputs, and desired outcome (or Purpose). When completed, LogFrame components will be detailed enough to provide specific and clear information for preparing the project authorization document (PAD).
- **Manageable Interest**: Results are considered to be within USAID's manageable interest when USAID and its partners can control, organize, or influence their achievement through good project design, implementation, monitoring, and oversight, and are accountable for achieving with a sufficient probability of success to justify use of the resources.
- **Necessary and Sufficient:** In a causal model underlying a Results Framework or LogFrame the planning team selects as its development hypothesis the causal pathway most likely to achieve the result. For the selected pathway, each result must be both individually necessary and, when taken together with other results at that level, sufficient to achieve the next higher level result. "Necessary" means a condition must be satisfied for the result to be achieved. A sufficient condition is a condition that, if satisfied, guarantees the result.
- **Project:** A "project" is defined as a set of executed interventions, over an established timeline and budget intended to achieve a discrete development result through resolving an associated problem.
- **Results Framework:** A diagram of the cause and effect logic for achieving a Development Objective over a defined time period. The RF includes the CDCS Goal, DOs, IRs, Sub-IRs, and performance indicators.
- **Theory of Change**: A theory of change is a description of the logical causal relationships between multiple levels of conditions or interim results needed to achieve a long-term objective. It may be visualized as a roadmap of change, and outlines pathways or steps to get from an initial set of conditions to a desired end result. A theory of change is analogous to a USAID development hypothesis or project hypothesis.

ANNEX I
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DEVELOPMENT HYPOTHESIS/RESULTS FRAMEWORK AND THE THEORY OF CHANGE[1]

There are a range of tools and processes which can help to define and develop both the development hypothesis and the RF. These include fishbone analysis and problem analysis, appreciative inquiry and positive deviance, and outcome mapping, to name a few. One which deserves some further discussion in this Technical Note is the "theory of change" methodology.

According to USAID a **Development Hypothesis** "describes the *theory of change*, logic, and causal relationships between the building blocks needed to achieve a long-term result". However, "theory of change" has various interpretations. The term "theory of change" was initially used in community development initiatives in the U.S. in the mid-1990's (1). During the past decade a number of international development organizations have also begun to use the concept, especially in programs that deal with conflict mitigation/resolution. (Several reviews of the use of the theory of change in international development have recently been undertaken. 2, 3, 4) It's important, therefore, for USAID staff to understand what "theory of change" is and how it relates to USAID's Development Hypothesis/Results Framework approach.

There are multiple definitions of "Theory of Change. " However, they have common elements. They are most appropriate for use in complex environments. They focus on making assumptions explicit. They focus on hypotheses about what may be expected to work, based on evidence. They outline the pathways or intermediate steps to get from an initial set of conditions to a desired outcome or result. A diagram or visual aid that maps out the relations between the initial conditions and the desired result is usually employed to summarize the narrative.

HIVOS, a Dutch NGO that has utilized the TOC approach for several years describes it as: "A Theory of Change reflects our ideas and assumptions about how and why change might evolve in the future… [It is] a process-oriented approach for analyzing the complex systems… and for planning action that we think will influence parts of that system in a positive way. It helps us to navigate in unpredictable and complex processes and to 'track' changes in the system that our interventions may have contributed to. A theory of change can be visualized as a roadmap of change….It describes the destination of change, the processes to engage in during the journey, our co-travelers, and the belief system which underlies the importance of travelling in a particular way.

While constructing this 'map', an organization explores the (assumed) relationships between goals, intended results and strategies. It helps to identify the steps they think they need to take in order to achieve longer term goals. Breaking down these goals in smaller steps (intermediate results) makes it easier to monitor progress and assess the contribution of the organization's work to longer term change." (5)

Another frequently cited document defines "A theory of change [as] the articulation of the underlying beliefs and assumptions that guide a service delivery strategy and are believed to be critical for producing change and improvement. Theories of change represent beliefs about what is needed by the target population and what strategies will enable them to meet those needs. They establish a context for considering the connection

[1] The Theory of Change is one of several analytical tools for CDCS development and project design that can be used by USAID Missions. Other approaches which may be used in conjunction with or in lieu of the Theory of Change include: appreciative inquiry, positive deviance, problem analysis, and fishbone analysis. USAID plans to develop a How-To Note that provides examples of these tools.

between a system's mission, strategies and actual outcomes, while creating links between who is being served, the strategies or activities that are being implemented, and the desired outcomes." (6)

HIVOS provides a useful description of how to do a TOC analysis that has 6 key elements:

- Formulate a 'vision of success' at the goal or impact level.
- Develop pathways of outcome by defining the changes –or preconditions- that must be realized to achieve the goal and map out the sequence of steps (intermediate results) on the way to the goal. Changes are stated as results.
- Articulate assumptions – "if we do this, then that will happen"; "this can only succeed if…" Assumptions are related to beliefs about change, about people, about power, and our expectations regarding the response of other actors.
- Assess the context and role of other actors who can influence outcomes positively or negatively. What change processes are already taking place?
- Clarify the role and strategies of [our] organization in the change process.
- Test the logic and relevance of the theory.

Although USAID does not generally use the TOC construct, the TOC approach and USAID's Development Hypothesis/Results Framework are analogous. However, because different organizations employ somewhat different definitions of TOC, it's important to understand what other organizations mean by TOC when they are operating in the same sphere as USAID.

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