IMARK

Module
Investing in Information for Development

Evaluating an Information Project

Lesson 3: Defining Content

Learner Notes

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This lesson is part of the IMARK Module on "Investing in Information for Development". The Module contains six units. The unit on "Evaluating an Information Project" comprises four lessons:

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This course is available in self-paced e-learning format on CD-ROM and the Internet (www.imarkgroup.org).

Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- use a Logic Model to identify the "if-then" relationships in your project;
- understand how this Logic Model can be used to decide what you want to measure.

Introduction

Suppose you have successfully concluded an Evaluation Management Committee (EMC) meeting, during which you conducted a SWOT analysis. By the end of it, you should have both an evaluation team in place and a consensus on major issues.

What are the **next steps**? How should the EMC decide **what to measure**?

Now it is time to become more specific, and to think in more detail about what to measure, and how to measure it.

Deciding what to measure

Let's continue with our quarterly newsletter about rice production practices. During the EMC meeting, all members agreed that a major impact would be "more farmer knowledge about fertilizer application".

How can you measure that?

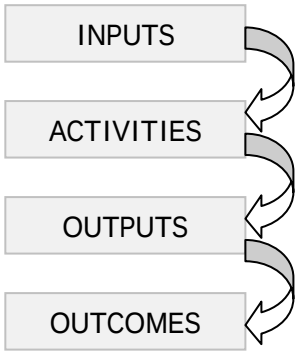
Can you simply ask how many farmers have read the newsletter? Or should you ask how many readers actually **learned something** after reading it? There is a big difference between the two approaches. Here is a method that can help you understand what has happened. It is called a "Logic Model".

What is a Logic Model

A Logic Model is a tool that helps understand the "if-then" relationships in a project.
The basic idea is that we need to understand "what leads to what" if we are going to plan a good evaluation.

More specifically:

- What **inputs** in a project have led to what **activities**?
- What **activities** have led to what **outputs**? And finally,
- What **outputs** have led to what **outcomes** (or impacts)?



If we can be clear about these relationships at the beginning, then we can decide what we want to measure: activities, outputs or impacts?

In a "performance" evaluation, we might want to measure activities or outputs (e.g. the number of copies distributed). But in an "**impact**" evaluation, which is what we are focusing on, we will want to focus on **outcomes** (e.g. a change in behaviour).

A good Logic Model forces us to be precise about the goals of the project. Another value of the Logic Model is that it helps us to analyse our project in detail, which we must do if we're going to have a good evaluation.

These are some of the questions that we can answer using a Logic Model:

- What to we really want to measure?
- Are we clear as what the project was supposed to achieve?
- Are we sure that we are focusing on the right thing?

- Are we likely to be able to collect good data?
- Are we measuring things that the stakeholders really want us to measure?

Building your own Logic Model

To begin creating your Logic Model, you should first prepare **three worksheets**. The first worksheet deals with the relationship between inputs and activities, the second worksheet deals with activities and outputs, and the third with outputs and outcomes. These worksheets are the building blocks of the Logic Model.

The first worksheet

The first worksheet deals with **inputs and activities.**

If you have time, it would be preferable to conduct this analysis together with all EMC members.

Let's consider again, as an example, the newsletter on rice production practices.
What resources have we used to publish it?

- Where have these inputs come from?
- What activity or activities has each input contributed to?

You should think about the resources used, one at the time. The goal is to describe the "if-then" relationships: if we have an input, then it leads to an activity, which then leads to an output.

Suppose that the newsletter has used funds coming from the Ministry of Agriculture, which have contributed to equipment acquisition. You may fill your first worksheet using this information, and do the same thing for each input which you have further identified.

Here is an example:

SOURCE	TYPE OF INPUT	CONTRIBUTION TO WHICH ACTIVITY
Ministry of Agriculture	Funds	Purchase of publishing equipment
State Agricultural University	Scientists	Research
State Agricultural University	Publication professionals	The newsletter production process
The extension department	Extension agents	Newsletter distribution
National Farmers Union	Funds	Support Farmer Field Days

Suppose your EMC at this point wishes to find out whether the project has been organized efficiently (a "performance" evaluation). It will need to have a clear view of how inputs have contributed to activities. For instance, if the funds from the Ministry were for purchasing equipment, the evaluation should show that these funds were actually used for that purpose.

Likewise, if the EMC wants to focus more on "impact", it will examine how inputs and activities have contributed to outcomes. Therefore, it will need to start with this first worksheet, as well as the ones that come next.

The second worksheet

The second worksheet deals with **activities and outputs**. For each activity noted in the previous table, you should ask the following questions:

- What has been the main output?
- Who have been the main beneficiaries of that output?

These questions are the most important so far. If we cannot be specific about project outputs, and if we cannot fit them into clear "if-then" relationships, then we run the **risk of confusing outputs with outcomes.**

ACTIVITY	OUTPUTS	BENEFICIARIES
Purchase of publishing equipment	Number of PC, printers, pressers	The University; The Publications Department; Commercial firms
Research	Articles submitted to the newsletter; Articles accepted	The University; Scientists
The newsletter production process	Number of trained staff; Participating students	The Publications Department; Students; Commercial firms
Newsletter distribution	Numbers of copies printed and distributed	Extension agents, Farmers; Agribusiness
Support Farmer Field Days	Number of farmers present (farmer education)	Farmers

The third worksheet

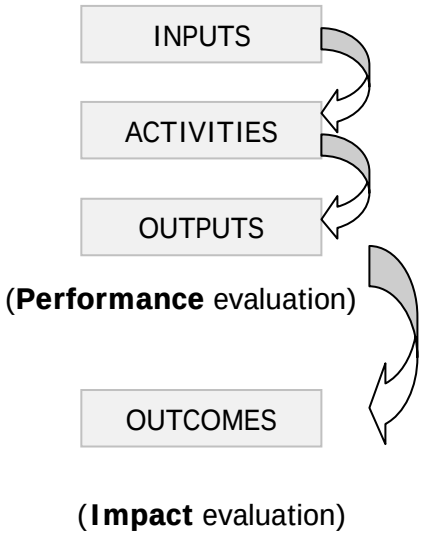
The third worksheet deals with **outputs and intended impacts** (or **outcomes**).

OUTPUTS	INTENDED IMPACTS (or OUTCOMES)
Number of PC, printers, pressers	More cost-efficiency in the production of the newsletter
Articles submitted to the newsletter; Articles accepted	More relevant research; More scientist promotions
Number of trained staff; Participating students	Increased staff and students skills in the production of the newsletter
Numbers of copies printed and distributed.	Increased involvement of: • Farmers • Extension Agents • Agribusiness
Number of farmers present (farmer education)	Increased farmer commitments to put knowledge into practice

The major benefit of using a Logic Model for planning your evaluation is to **separate activities** from **outputs**, and outputs from **impacts** (or outcomes).

By doing so, you will also be able to decide whether the main focus of your evaluation will be on **performance**, or **impact**, or **both**.

No single approach is "correct". There is no "right" way. The Logic Model simply helps you to set priorities for your evaluation, to decide what you want to measure.



Once you have filled up all the worksheets, you have your Logic Model.
You are now ready to use this Logic Model as a basis for formulating your detailed evaluation questions.

Summary

To agree on the detailed content of an evaluation, it is useful to build a **Logic Model**.

A Logic Model is a tool that helps understand the "**if-then" relationships** in a project.
It is important to find out what inputs in a project have led to what activities, what activities have led to what outputs, and what outputs have led to what impacts.

A Logic Model can therefore help **focus** on what you really want to measure.

It is useful to create a worksheet for each of these three areas, and fill it up with detailed information.

The major benefit of using a Logic Model for planning your evaluation is to **separate activities** from **outputs**, and outputs from **impacts** (or outcomes). It can also help evaluate whether the objectives within each of these areas have been met. In addition, it can help you decide whether you want the focus of the evaluation to be on **performance**, on **impact**, or on **both**.