Response by the author – Sue Nancholas

I was glad to receive Mr Hernan Rosenberg’s comments on the LogFrame paper. The points he makes about the value of preparing problem trees and conducting thorough stakeholder analysis are valid. It is unfortunate that the article appeared to diminish their importance, or ‘shortchange the method’ so that the matrix construction seemed a premature entity.

The article was, perforce, a brief one in which the main aim was to correct some common misunderstandings about preparation of LFA matrices. I tried to emphasize that the creation of a LogFrame should be ‘preceded by a small group of secondary stakeholders who should base their discussions on a thorough needs assessment (or problem tree)’ and I also emphasized the need for wider stakeholder analysis. I hope I stressed that many enterprises fail because this process is neglected.

It is vital that the stakeholder analysis is not seen as a ‘one-off’ exercise as part of the formative appraisal for a programme, but a process that continues at intervals throughout the life of a programme as part of process evaluation. This contributes to evaluation of the short-term sustainability of a programme and must also provide a significant contribution to evaluating long-term sustainability.

In summary, Mr Rosenberg’s concern is that the LogFrame should not be seen as a total planning process. He emphasizes caution in the earliest stages of identifying, exploring and assessing these problems – a process I fully endorse. The brevity of the article precluded lengthier treatment of these issues so Mr Rosenberg’s comments usefully expand on these.

He proceeds to address the difficulty for planners in identifying an appropriate level of intervention for the LogFrame. This really does constitute a critical issue that appears to confuse many people. In the section on preparation of a LogFrame, I made the point that where large organizations have several operational ‘themes’, or multiple purposes, then separate LogFrames are needed for each. There should be a set of higher level LogFrames that integrate with each other, then a series of LogFrames that ‘cascade’ downwards from each to related projects or to discrete project level. LogFrame planning is always an iterative process. Each of the lower level LogFrames should be consonant with the higher LogFrame, thus contributing to the overall goal at the highest level. The programme outputs at higher levels should be rephrased as goals for lower levels of operation and so on, until basic level projects are reached. By no means should the chief planners attempt to integrate all their programme issues into one comprehensive LogFrame. That is clearly unworkable and confusing for everyone concerned. In one training exercise for a large international organization with multiple areas of operation, the trainees initially attempted to adapt the LogFrame to incorporate everything on a single ‘country level’ LogFrame. This resulted in a completely unworkable programme with 15–20 outputs and indescribably complex sets of activities.

My article intended to facilitate some clarity over this matter. By specifying one goal, one purpose in each matrix, it should be clear that multiples of these are not feasible. The whole reason for Logical Framework planning is to clarify action at every level, and to enable planners to integrate their objectives. There have been many political and economic reasons for the proliferation of ad hoc, decentralized planning in many developing countries. Large agencies have often felt obliged to follow their own situation assessments and agendas, without seeking the more centralized and co-ordinated planning that might result in more effective interventions. A planning Utopia would exist whereby sectors for policy in health, education, finance etc. could integrate objectives.

A major problem is that the planning should not be ‘top-down’ but should come from the project level upwards in order to respond to real problems. This poses a real problem. At what point/level do bottom-up needs and top-down services provision meet in terms of planning?

Mr Rosenberg points out that an immunization programme’s ‘goal’ may be to immunize 100 000 children and this goal differs from a minister’s ‘goal’ to ‘improve the health of the population’. I do not believe that it does differ. The immunization programme can be seen as a lower level programme within the Ministry of Health. Ultimately the goal should be that of the Health Minister. The Ministry LogFrame may set out all the Ministry’s aims and intentions at their level. These should reflect at policy level, frameworks set at lower levels of operation. There should be no conflict. If there is, when lower level projects are well-founded, then it is the upper levels that need to make adjustments. In summary, one of the main problems in designing and implementing the LogFrame is the ‘meshing’ and integration (logical linkages) between objectives from the lowest level of interventions to the highest levels of policy making, and the policy should be informed by needs.

Our aim should be to enable all planners, at every level, to be conversant in LogFrame planning that ensures a series of LogFrames are made for each national goal, and that these all attempt to integrate objectives at every level. It is hard enough to get separate multinational agencies to plan in this ‘integrated levels’ way, let alone co-ordinate and integrate with governments.

The Logical Framework Approach is not easy. It is, if properly undertaken, detailed and consultative, and requires considerable information to be available at the outset. This is essential for planning. Without good baseline data, measurable (and realistic) indicators cannot be set. Without the latter, any subsequent evaluation of achievements is impossible.

Writing from his evaluation experience in Africa, David Akroyd suggests that adoption of the Health Management Information System is a valuable tool to resolve this problem for future planning. Despite the difficulties created by inadequate information for his LogFrame evaluations, he also found that the adoption of the LogFrame approach improved the quality of planning, especially for terms of reference, service contracts, mission reports and project documents. It
has improved the analytical capacity of staff, and projects were better appraised as a result.

References


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