

# Logical Framework Approach and Outcome Mapping

## A constructive attempt of synthesis

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There is an ongoing discussion about the usefulness of different approaches to planning and project/programme management. In particular Outcome Mapping (OM) has been presented by its developers as an alternative to the Logical Framework Approach (LFA). The authors of this paper argue that whilst the LFA is a much used standard that cannot be easily replaced by any other, Outcome Mapping introduces some extremely valuable notions into the methodological debate on aid effectiveness. They have consequently come up with a synthesis model that integrates valuable aspects of both approaches and promotes the use of practically oriented and strategically coherent planning, monitoring and evaluation tools for projects and programmes. They recommend applying the synthesis model in various settings and programmes and ask for comments on its applicability and usefulness.

The original paper can be found at [www.agridea-international.ch](http://www.agridea-international.ch)  
Location: AGRIDEA International/Publications/Concepts and approaches  
<http://www.agridea-international.ch/?id=627>

### I. Introduction

The question of effectiveness of development measures is as old as efforts to achieve development (development in the sense of social, political and economic change to reduce poverty). What do development activities achieve? How must they be structured to achieve the greatest possible effect? How can we determine whether the desired effects have actually been achieved and what are their causes? These and other

questions have occupied development practitioners from the outset.

Different methods have been developed in international cooperation to provide answers to these questions to the actors involved: beneficiaries, practitioners, political authorities, donors. One of them is the well-known and established Logical Framework Approach. A more recent but promising approach is the Outcome Mapping that introduces some new notions such as focusing on capacity building of partners and defining the behaviour changes of partners as key elements for social change.

Since the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 “focusing on results” has become a cornerstone of the new architecture of international cooperation. In many international conferences and high-level meetings the importance of results-based management (RBM) or “Managing for Development Results” (MfDR) has been emphasised. **Goal-orientedness** (starting with the definition of clear goals and objectives), **causality** (logic causal link between activities, outputs, outcomes and impact) and **continuous improvement** (periodical check as basis for timely adjustment)<sup>2</sup> represent typical key principles of such results-based management. There is an upcoming call for this concept to be applied also in the planning and management of national development strategies and policies in partner countries (New Public Management). On the other hand the innovative methodology of Outcome Mapping presented as an alternative to this logic is generating growing interest among practitioners of international cooperation.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Monitoring and Evaluation: Enhancing Development Results, Background Paper, Third International Roundtable on Managing for Development Results, Hanoi, Vietnam, 5-8 February 2007*

<sup>3</sup> *Outcome Mapping was developed and published in 2001 by the Canadian research organisation IDRC (International Development Research Centre).*

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The present paper first very briefly presents the two methodological approaches Logical Framework Approach (LFA) and Outcome Mapping (OM) in terms of their underlying logic and their strengths and weaknesses. The paper then makes an attempt of a synthesis of the two approaches, arguing that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive but could be combined to harness the strengths of both.

## 2. The Logical Framework Approach (LFA)

**Background.** In the 1980s and 1990s the methodology of the LFA was adopted by most development agencies. Since then LFA it has been applied in different ways. The use of the matrix or the so-called log-frame, is still the standard applied in practically all bilateral and multilateral agencies and many NGOs. However, the steps of the planning process as originally defined in the OOPP or LFA methodology, although they have not lost their validity and logical rigor, today are applied far more flexibly and pragmatically.

### Characteristics

**Logic of direct causality and attribution:** There are four levels - activities, outputs, outcomes and impact (goal), linked to each other by direct causal relations (see Figure 1). The stringency of the relations between the four levels decreases from bottom to top as external influences increase at each level of the log-frame. The key element determining the effectiveness of the project design or project strategy is the expected causality between the levels of outputs and outcome (development hypothesis). Between the levels of outcome and impact, however, such direct causality is difficult to determine (“attribution gap”). Indicators are defined for all but the activity level, allowing monitoring achievements independently and objectively. The context is included by coming up with assumptions for all but the goal level.

Figure 1: The logic Model of LFA- direct cause-effect relation between different levels

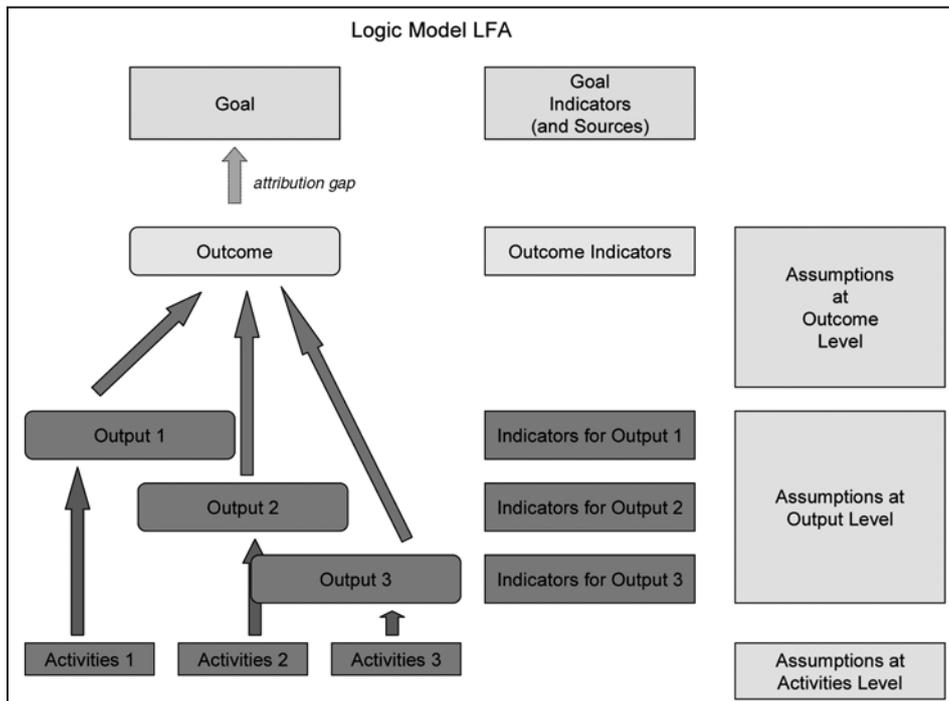


Figure 2: The 16-field matrix, the so-called log-frame, is used to present the core elements of a project in a simplified overview.

The 16-Squares Matrix of the Logical Framework					
		Hierarchy of Objectives Summary of Project Strategy	Indicators	Sources of Verification	Assumptions (External Factors, Risks)
Operational Domain of Project	Effects of Project long-term visions	<b>Goal / Overall Objective / Impact</b> Improvement in the living conditions of people and/or in the situation of natural resources	Indicate whether improvements have been achieved		
	direct effects	<b>Project Objective / Outcome (Purpose)</b> Changes in the behaviour and in the capacities of key-persons, people and/or organisations (target groups) <i>(Utilisation of project outputs, adoption of improved practices and changes of attitude)</i>	Indicate whether intended changes in behaviour and capacities have been achieved		Framework conditions necessary to achieve the goal or overall objective
		<b>Outputs</b> Products and services provided by the project <i>(training on new knowledge, skills and attitude; improved or new technologies, new tools, new equipment, new methods, resources, infrastructure, etc.)</i>	Indicate whether project outputs have been provided in sufficient quantity and quality		Framework conditions necessary to achieve project objective or outcome or purpose
		<b>Activities</b> of the project to provide the outputs	<b>Means, Costs (Inputs)</b> financial, material and human resources		Framework conditions necessary to provide the outputs

### Strengths and Weaknesses of the LFA

- **Simplicity in a situation of complexity.** The LFA logic model is based on simple, linear causality excluding explicitly elements of systemic approaches such as feedback loops. A prerequisite for its successful use is the clear awareness of actors that they are managing complex projects that intervene in complex social systems on the basis of simplified logic models.
- **Simple summary of key elements in a consistent and coherent way.** Enables rapid understanding of the broad outline of a project – what it is trying to do and how – and facilitates comparisons between different proposals. But the logical framework is a simplification and ‘dangerous when not seen as such’ (Gasper 2000: 17).
- **Forces people to think things through.** “... it does force people to think through their theory of change – a process which many people find difficult”<sup>4</sup>
- **Increasing difficulty to attribute outputs to development results due to new modalities of cooperation.** There have been changes in the ways in which development assistance is delivered – less direct implementation by donors, more responsibilities with partners, more partners, more programmes at micro, meso and macro level. These make it increasingly difficult to attribute development results such as poverty alleviation to the outputs provided by individual programmes and projects or individual actors.
- **The principle of causality – too rigid?** This principle helps and even forces analysis of the relations between project outputs and desired effects at all stages of the project/programme cycle and allows showing the development hypotheses underlying the project design. But the mechanistic idea of cause and effect does not hold true because there are many factors involved which lie beyond the scope of the planned initiative.<sup>5</sup> Adhering to the principle of causality can lead to a “planning

<sup>4</sup> Bakewell and Garbutt, *The Use and Abuse of the Logical Framework Approach*, SIDA 2005, p. 20. The paper by Bakewell and Garbutt is based on a survey of 19 development organisations analyzing the use of the LFA.

<sup>5</sup> Bakewell and Garbutt, 2005, p. 19

mentality” that ignores the circumstances and needs of the people concerned.

- **External risks tend to be neglected and poorly analyzed** whilst “the management of risk and coping with the unexpected is critical for the success (or failure) of most development initiatives...”<sup>6</sup>.
- **Temptation of inflexible “blueprint planning”.** The considerable effort associated with elaborating a project using the logframe approach, as well as the fact that financing and implementation agreements are made on the basis of this project design, lead to a situation in which all key stakeholders (implementer and donor) have an interest in not altering the logframe matrix.
- **The best we have got:** “Development organisations are torn between increasing levels of stakeholder participation and accountability and ever greater requirements to demonstrate that they have performed according to expectations and to provide evidence of impact. The LFA, while deeply flawed, seems to provide some middle ground, as it is both a component of results based management and also allows scope for intensive stakeholder participation, at least at the planning stage.”<sup>7</sup>

As can be seen from the above list it is frequently difficult to determine whether some shortcomings observed in the use of LFA are based on weaknesses inherent in the method or whether they result from flawed or inadequate application of the logframe methodology that is concerned with processes.

### 3. Outcome Mapping (OM)<sup>8</sup>

**Background.** The above-mentioned criticisms of existing project cycle management tools and – more specifically – their weaknesses in the monitoring and evaluation of development effects, have motivated IDRC (International Development Research Centre, Canada) to develop a different approach.

<sup>6</sup> Bakewell and Garbutt, 2005, p. 16

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p. 18

<sup>8</sup> Based on and partly quoted from the publication by IDRC (2001); p. 1 – 10.

### Characteristics

Outcome Mapping (OM) **focuses on one particular category of results:** changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities or actions of people, groups, and organisations with whom a programme works directly. These changes are called “outcomes”. Through the OM method, development programmes claim contributions to the achievement of outcomes rather than claiming the achievement (attribution) of development impacts. OM helps to analyse complex changes, especially those relating to behaviour and knowledge. The underlying principles are that (1) changes are complex and do not move in a linear way, (2) development is done by and for people, and finally (3) although a programme can influence the achievement of outcomes, it cannot control them because ultimate responsibility rests with the people affected. **Three important principles** in OM thus are:

- **Non-causality:** Outcomes can be logically linked to a programme’s activities but they are not necessarily directly caused by them.
- **Contribution instead of attribution:** When applying OM, a programme is not claiming the achievement of development impacts; rather, the focus is on its contributions to outcomes. The logic behind this is that long-term development goals are rarely accomplished by the work of a single actor (especially an external donor agency) and that the complexity of the development process makes it extremely difficult to actually assess impact (especially for an external donor agency seeking attribution).
- **Control of change / development:** Outcome Mapping assumes that the boundary partners control change and that, as external agents, development programmes only facilitate the process by providing access to new resources, ideas, or opportunities for a certain period of time.

Outcome Mapping is divided into **three stages**. The first stage, Intentional Design, helps a programme establish consensus on the macro level changes it will help to bring about and plan the strategies it will use. It helps answer four questions why (vision)? Who (partners)? What (changes sought)? How (contribution of programme to change process)? The second

Figure 3: The OM Framework

<p><b>The vision</b> reflects the broad human, social &amp; environmental betterment in which the programme is engaged and to which it is contributing.</p>	
<p><b>The mission statement</b> describes in a broad way the contribution of the donor programme to the vision. It describes how the programme intends to operationalise its role in support of the vision and support the achievement of outcomes by its partners, and how it will remain effective, efficient, relevant and sustainable.</p>	
<p><b>Outcome Challenge:</b> Boundary Partner A The outcome challenges describe the changed behaviours (relationships, activities, and/or actions) of a partner; and how they would be behaving if they were contributing ideally to the vision. Set of <b>progress markers:</b> Progress Markers are a gradual set of statements (milestones) describing a progression of changed behaviour in a partner. They describe changes in actions, activities &amp; relationships leading up to the ideal outcome challenge statement.</p>	<p><b>Outcome Challenge:</b> Boundary Partner B  Set of <b>progress markers</b></p>
<p><b>Support strategies</b> from the programme / project: The strategies outline the approaches of the project team in working with the partners. They indicate the relative influence the programme is likely to have on a project partner. An overview of the strategies helps to pinpoint strategic gaps in the approach or determine whether the programme is overextended; it also suggests the type of evaluation method appropriate to track and assess the performance of the project.</p>	<p><b>Support strategies</b> for Partner B</p>
<p><b>Organisational practices</b> describe the efforts of the project team in order to remain innovative, efficient and relevant for the programme purpose.</p>	

stage, Outcome and Performance Monitoring, provides a framework for the ongoing monitoring of the programme's actions and boundary partners' progress toward the achievement of outcomes. It is based largely on systematized self-assessment and a set of data collection tools. The third stage, Evaluation Planning, helps the programme identify evaluation priorities and develop an evaluation plan. The compulsory interactive and iterative planning process with OM takes into account existing local organisations, institutions and structures. It should be based on a pre-planning phase that is used to get to know the 'big picture'.

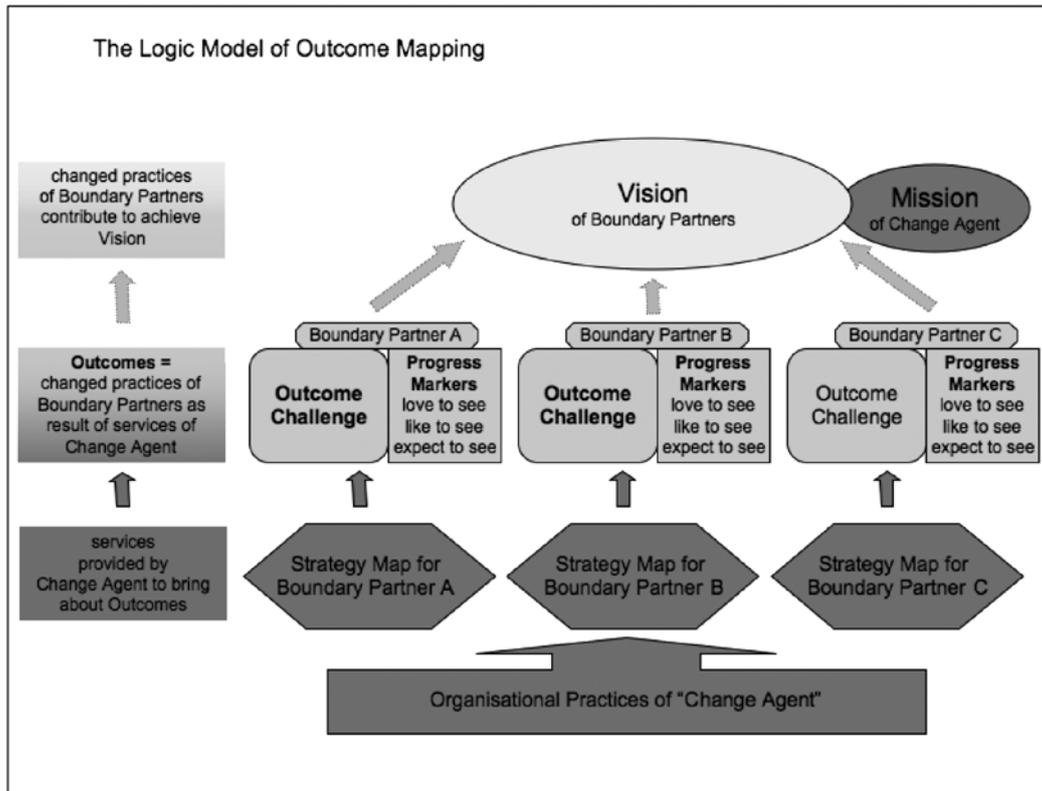
### The OM Framework

The OM Framework is reflected in Figure 3. It is based on a **vision**, a **mission statement** (formulated for the project resp. donor programme) and **outcome challenges** (statements formulated by boundary partners describing their roles, responsibilities and aims, responsibility for these changes lies with the partners). Progress markers indicate changes beyond the programme's own practices, i.e. interaction with beneficiaries. They are not used for assessing failure or

success, but for learning and reflection. **Support strategies** define the approaches of the project/programme as to how to work with partners. They are the basis for elaborating working plans and assessing the performance of the project. Activities are planned and can be monitored along the work plans. **Organisational practices** help to build 'organisational development' matters into the project team. Projects allocate resources (time and money) for remaining relevant and innovative.

**System borders must be drawn**, however without neglecting that the 'defined system' is interacting with a wider world. The system border is reflected in the **vision**, where a description of the changed behaviour of key stakeholders (change agents, decision-makers, policy-makers, etc.) and the expected change for the ultimate beneficiaries are related (impact hypotheses).

Figure 4: The Logic Model of Outcome Mapping



**Strengths and Weaknesses of OM**

- **Added value through three main distinctive features:**
  - Clear definition of system borders, roles and responsibilities; a process that supports the partners in assuming responsibility and clarifies the end of project status at the very beginning (i.e. includes the exit strategy during the planning phase).
  - Milestones that indicate a possible process, not final indicators; these indicate a path of change that makes it possible to assess development in short time periods and therefore to assess / change / adapt strategies within a short time.
  - Concentration on learning and accountability; learning from experiences and coping with change are the key elements of OM. Accountability issues (in all directions) and learning purposes are held in a balance.
- **Limited systematic analysis of OM.** As a recent method there are no systematic studies of its effectiveness and efficiency to date. Existing reports

and articles are based on observations, and the accompanying examples or empirical evidence is often criticised as not well founded.

- **New meaning for existing terms can create misunderstandings.** OM makes use of terms that are already used with other connotations in other areas (for example, “vision” and “mission” in organisational development).
- **Harmonisation – vs diversification.** “Harmonisation” was a cornerstone of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and some critics insist on harmonisation of PCM methods. For many project managers the logframe represents such a harmonised framework.
- **Difficulties for international/interregional comparisons:** Outcome Mapping explicitly requires that project structures and activities constantly adapt to changing context. The course of projects will be less predictable. Under these conditions it can be argued that standardised planning tools such as milestones and outcome challenges may not make much sense. Therefore the comparison of

project reports becomes less easy and the regional/international comparison will be difficult due to the fact that project indicators are highly dependent on the context.

- **One-dimensional focus on changes in the behaviour of partners is not sufficient.** The focus on “changes in behaviour” of partners is fundamental to sustainable development. Nevertheless, if poverty alleviation is our utmost concern these “changes” cannot be an objective or an end in itself. Therefore clear impact hypotheses and indicators at the level of development results (i.e. MDGs) are still needed.

#### 4. The Synthesis Model

Next to several significant differences between LFA and OM these two approaches also have numerous things in common. So, rather than directly comparing the strengths and weakness of them, we believe it is more productive to engage in discussion of a synthesis model, that will make it possible to adopt the most convincing and effective elements of each approach. The following attempt at a synthesis of LFA and OM aims at bringing together the strengths of OM as an approach focusing on capacity building and LFA with its focus on development results. The synthesis is guided by and based on the following considerations:

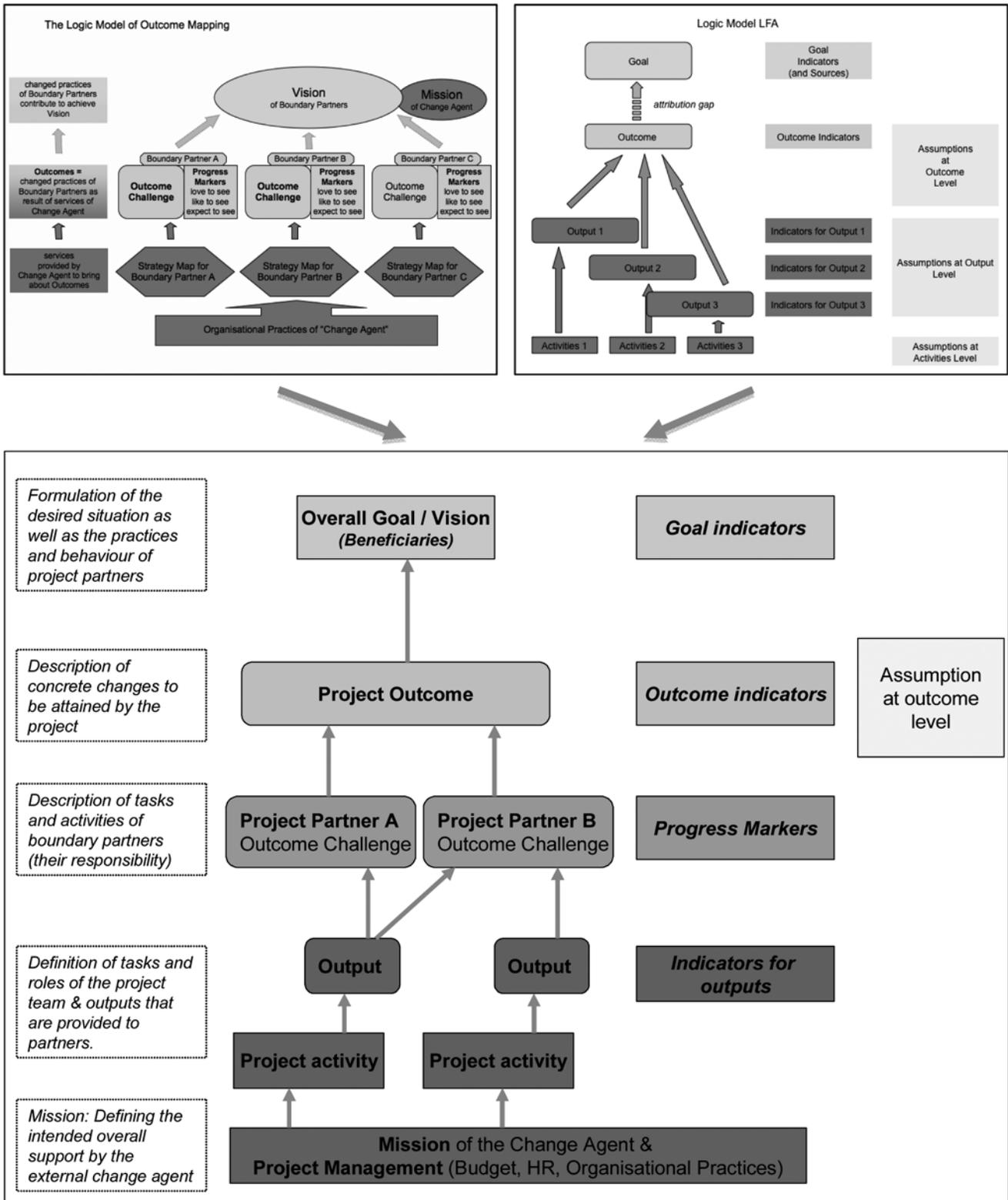
- **Focus on results and capacity building:** The focus on results is necessary in every project or programme. The recipients or beneficiaries and the donors, have a legitimate right (and duty) to get as clear a picture as possible about the effectiveness of development projects or programmes. In our understanding impact is not an end state, but an intermediate result of a limited (in time and scope) external intervention. Ideally, durable improvements in the capacity of key actors will, in a continuous process, result into improvements at the impact level. This implies that capacity building as the groundwork of sustainable development is of paramount importance, too.
- **Capacity building:** Here lies a fundamental difference between the two models. The OM approach was conceived for a very particular type of project, namely projects in which capacity building for

partners is the main strategy. The LFA as a model, on the other hand, is independent of project content in that it exclusively represents relations between (any particular) outputs and their effects. Our synthesis model is only applicable for projects in which capacity building plays a major role. However, in current development cooperation capacity building is in fact always an important – if not the most important – externally financed intervention strategy.

- **Synthesis = LFA+ or OM+:** We deliberately wish to leave open the possibility of shaping the synthesis model according to each specific case, its context, and the inclinations and preferences of the responsible practitioners and stakeholders, either by enhancing the Logical Framework Approach or by enhancing Outcome Mapping. This should also make it possible to reduce the importance of the issue of “branding” (using the approaches as a brand), which we consider as being highly counterproductive. The goal of the synthesis model is to combine the advantages and strengths of both approaches so that it is applicable in different institutional contexts in the most multifaceted way. A specific goal is to make it possible to use the synthesis model in institutional setups where a focus on results is required. This means that the synthesis model must be so conceived that it can be designed in a way that meets the demand for focusing on results and that also meets the inherent demands of OM.

**The synthesis model – a proposal:** Our proposed synthesis model (see figure below) is based primarily on theoretical considerations (supported by the authors’ practical experiences with LFA and OM). We are interested in seeing this synthesis model used and tested in practice in order to discover whether our deliberations prove to be of value in practice.

Figure 5: Synthesis Model at a Glance



## The Design of the Synthesis Model

Important requirements and demands from both approaches, related to core elements of the synthesis model, will be presented in the following summary. The focus is on the orientation towards an overall goal (which in turn should allow establishing links with country strategies, PRSP, or MDGs) and the explicit consideration of changes in behaviour of project partners. The synthesis model should make it possible to determine and display the distribution of roles and responsibilities directly in the logic model. When we speak of a synthesis model, we mean the logic model that underlies a project. As far as it is reasonable and possible, this logic model can be presented in synoptic form (e.g. as a table or matrix). As is also the case with the LFA that consists explicitly of a matrix, we are concerned only with a summary of the core elements of the project. The complete project document containing detailed descriptions of all elements of a project (initial situation, development hypotheses, interventions strategies, beneficiaries, project organisation, project management, monitoring and evaluation, etc.) is still very much needed for understanding the entire project.

In the following paragraphs we define the key elements of the project design following our proposal of a synthesis model.

**Overall Goal / Vision:** There is a need for clear and concrete formulation of the desired situation as well as the practices and behaviour that are supposed to be realised by project partners. Description of the overall goal should be limited to the core elements, which in turn should provide a clear expression of what project partners perceive for the future.

**Project Outcomes:** Project outcomes describe the concrete changes that are to be attained by the project. These changes may refer to a system, to the behaviour of organisations or people, or be manifested as changed conditions for beneficiaries. Project outcomes reflect the concrete and verifiable objective of the project that has been agreed between all stakeholders. Indicators help to measure the achievement of project outcomes; impact hypotheses link outcomes with the overall goal / vision. Following the logic of Outcome Mapping the interest and responsibility for verifying whether

the project outcomes are achieved rests primarily with the boundary partners, since project outcomes are defined (in our synthesis model) as results of the behaviour changes of the partners. Achievement of project outcomes thus becomes the purpose of the behaviour changes of the boundary partners.

**Outcome Challenges of project (boundary) partners in achieving project outcomes:** An external change agent alone can achieve neither project outcomes nor the overall goal. Project success depends on the need to improve and effect changes and on the willingness to cooperate of local organisations, groups and people. Outcome challenges describe the tasks and activities that boundary partners within their system

- a. must carry out in order to contribute to achieve project outcomes and the overall goal
- b. have been unable to carry out so far
- c. can or must continue to carry out beyond project support.

Outcome challenges are formulated for each partner. In addition, qualitative and quantitative indicators in the form of gradual progress markers are defined for each partner to enable monitoring of changes in practice or behaviour. Progress markers may also be defined for several partners at once. These progress markers need to be monitored at specific stages or times so that monitoring results can be included in work planning.

**Activities and outputs:** The project team (external change agent as defined by Outcome Mapping) gives a clear and concrete description of the tasks, roles and responsibilities that can be assumed by the project. This includes definitions of the outputs that the project (or programme or external change agent) can provide to partners. For each partner the supporting activities that are needed so that each partner can achieve expected changes in practice or behaviour, are defined and negotiated separately. These partner-specific forms of support can be expanded by transversal themes or contributions.

Including an element of the LFA we propose to define indicators at the level of project outputs that can be used to verify the services provided by the project team.

Figure 6: Example of Project Summary Matrix

		Hierarchy of objectives Summary of Project Strategy	Indicators	Sources of Verification	Assumptions (External factors, risks)
Effects of Project	Effects by the Boundary Partners (indirect effects)	<b>Goal/Vision</b> Formulation of the desired situation as well as the practices and behaviour of project partners	Indicate whether improvements have been achieved		
		<b>Project Outcome(s)</b> <i>Description of concrete changes to be attained by the project</i>	Indicate whether the intended changes have been achieved		External risk assessment and framework conditions necessary to achieve the goal
	Direct effects	<b>Boundary Partner(s)</b> <i>Description of tasks, activities and changed practices (behaviours) of boundary partner (changes in behaviour and capacities)</i>	Progress markers indicate the degree of achievement of the intended changes in behaviour and capacities		
Operational domain		<b>Outputs</b> <i>Products and services provided by the external change agent</i>	Indicate whether project outputs have been provided adequate and efficient quality and quantity		
	<b>Mission:</b> <i>Definition of intended overall support by the external change agent</i> <b>Project Management:</b> <i>Budget, HR, Organisational practices</i>				

A definition of project strategies (activities and outputs) that is as precise as possible facilitates annual operational planning. Strategies should be examined yearly in terms of their effectiveness and efficiency. Outputs must have a plausible relation to outcome challenges and progress markers. When expected effects are not achieved among project partners, it is advisable to modify project strategies.

**Assumptions:** Assumptions in the synthesis model must only be taken into account at the level of project outcomes. Additional assumptions or external factors in regard to project partners and project activities can be identified, provided that they do not relate to behavioural issues of project partners (as these are integrated in the outcome challenges).

**Mission:** This element of OM is extremely useful for defining the intended overall support provided by the external change agent (the programme in OM terminology) to the partners. This mission statement helps

to clarify the role of the change agent (external, limited in time and scope).

**Organisational practices of the change agent:** This element of OM defines, in standardised form, the internal strategies of the donor agency or NGO for remaining innovative, creative, efficient and relevant. These issues of organisational development should definitely be integrated.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations by the Authors

Outcome Mapping has brought fresh ideas to ongoing discussions about the usefulness of different approaches to planning and project/programme management. Its authors present Outcome Mapping as an alternative to the Logical Framework Approach. However, debates about whether one approach is better than the other have not proved to be productive.

We have tried to show that results-orientation as defined by the current mainstream debate in development cooperation (results-based management or managing for development results) is a standard used by most multilateral and bilateral agencies that cannot easily be replaced by any other approach to project or programme management. However, Outcome Mapping introduces some extremely valuable notions into the methodological debate on aid effectiveness such as focusing on capacity building of partners and defining the behaviour changes of partners as key elements for social change.

With our synthesis model we acknowledge the factual weight of the LFA as an international standard but at the same time try to show a way of combining the two approaches and thus introducing the strengths of Outcome Mapping in mainstream project and programme management.

The synthesis model integrates valuable aspects of both approaches and promotes the use of practically oriented and strategically coherent planning, monitoring and evaluation tools for projects and programmes. The relation between strategic planning (at the programme or country level) and operational implementation is straightforward, and the roles and responsibilities of all actors are transparent and can consequently be assessed and evaluated.

We therefore recommend applying the proposed synthesis model in various programmes, projects and initiatives around the world. This theoretical model needs to be tested, and comments on its applicability and usefulness are crucial in order to further improve the model and promote it in other programmes and agencies. Furthermore, we encourage donor and implementing agencies to set up (and finance) a program for applying and improving the proposed synthesis model.

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