Beyond Logframe: Using Systems Concepts in Evaluation

Description

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â??Editorâ??s Note: The 2010 Issues and Prospects of Evaluations for International Development employs systems concepts as clues to re-assess the conventional ways of conducting evaluations and to explore how development evaluation can potentially be made more useful.

In Japan, development evaluation predominantly relies on the Logical Framework (logframe) when conducting evaluations. Evaluations based on a logframe often face difficulties. One such difficulty arises from the futile attempt to develop an evaluation framework based on a logframe, which, in many cases, was prepared as part of the early-stage planning of the project and which then does not necessarily reflect a projectâ??s real situation at the time of evaluation. Although a logframe can be utilised initially as a tentative project plan, logframes are rarely revised even when the situation has changed. By the end of the project, the original logframe may not be an accurate embodiment of what the project is about and therefore logframes do not particularly help in terminal or ex-post evaluations.

Still, having been institutionalized by clients, logframe-based evaluations are common practice and in extreme cases, evaluators face the danger of evaluating the logframe instead of the actual project. Although widely used for its simplicity, logframes can end up becoming a cumbersome tool, or even a hindrance to evaluation.

Various attempts have been made to overcome the limitations of the logframe and some aid organizations such as USAID, UNDP, CIDA and the World Bank have shifted from the logframe to Results-Based Management (RBM). Now GTZ is in the process of shifting to a new project management approach designed on RBM and systems ideas.

In the first article, â??Beyond logframe: Critique, Variations and Alternatives,â?• Richard Hummelbrunner, an evaluator/consultant from Austria, sums up the critique of logframe and the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), and explores some variations employed to overcome specific shortcomings of LFA. He then outlines a systemic alternative to logframe and introduces the new GTZ management model for sustainable development called â??Capacity WORKS.â?• Richard has dealt with LFA and possible alternatives to LFA at various points along his career, and he is currently involved in GTZâ??s rollout of Capacity WORKS as it becomes the standard management model for all BMZ 5 projects and programmes.

What does he mean by â??systemic alternativeâ?•? In the second article, â??Systems Thinking and Capacity Development in the International Arena,â?• Bob Williams, a consultant and an expert in systems concepts, explains what â??thinking systemicallyâ?• is about and how it might help evaluation. He boils down systems ideas into three core concepts (inter-relationships, perspectives, and boundaries), and relates these concepts to various systems methods.

In December 2009, FASID offered a training course and a seminar on this topic in Tokyo. Through the exchange of numerous e-mails with the instructors prior to the seminar, it occurred to me that the concepts might be more easily understood presented as a conversation. That is what we tried to do in the third article, â??Using Systems Concepts in Evaluation â?? A Dialogue with Patricia Rogers and Bob Williams â??.â?• These two instructors of the FASID training course and workshop explain in simple conversational style where and how we can start applying systems concepts in development evaluation.

This issue also carries a report of two collaborative evaluations of Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects. The first case presents an innovative joint evaluation conducted collaboratively with Vietnamese stakeholders. The evaluation took place in 2009 â?? 2010 as the last year of a three-year evaluation capacity development project coordinated by the Japan International Cooperation Agency. The second case covers a joint evaluation study of another Japanese ODA project in Lao PDR with a local Lao administration for which neither logframe nor OECD DAC five criteria was used. Instead, an evaluation framework was developed from scratch, based entirely on the beneficiariesâ?? interests and perspectives. In both cases, a partner countryâ??s participation in the evaluation necessitated considerable changes in perspectives of evaluation practice. I hope they provide examples of how boundaries and perspectives, as discussed theoretically in the first three articles, relate to development evaluation in practice.â?•

Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

1. complexity
2. Logical Framework
3. systems

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