Assessment of Logical Frameworks

1. Introduction

An increasing number of development organisations use the Logical Framework as the backbone or spinal cord of newly formulated project proposals. MDF experiences indicate that the use of the Logical Framework indeed results in project proposals of a better quality in terms of transparency, completeness and consistency.

At the same time the use of the Logical Framework makes it easier to appraise project proposals. But it should be realised that, especially for projects in the productive sectors, an assessment of the intervention logic alone is not sufficient. A complete appraisal report has to pay due attention also to social desirability, cost-benefit analysis, institutional embedding and factors affecting the organisational and financial sustainability of the project proposals.

2. Assessment criteria

There are two sets of criteria that need to be applied. The first set relates to technicalities concerning the form of the Logical Framework. The second set of criteria relates more to the contents of the proposal: is it relevant, effective and efficient, are the assumptions realistic and the risks acceptable (feasibility)?

2.1 Technical criteria

The questions that need to be raised for the technical assessment of a project proposal or its Logical Framework are directly related to the way in which the proposal or Logical Framework is formulated:

- Is the gap between overall objective and project purpose not too wide?
- Does the project have one purpose?
- Is the purpose not a reformulation of the project results?
- Is the purpose clearly stated in terms of utilisation?
- Are the results clearly formulated as attained conditions?
- Are all results indeed necessary to achieve the purpose?
- Are all the mentioned activities indeed necessary to achieve the results?
- Are there assumptions at result level which might be considered as killer assumptions?
- Do the assumptions at activity level not include pre-conditions?
- Are all the results together indeed sufficient to achieve the project purpose?
- Are the activities mentioned under each result indeed sufficient to achieve that result?
- Are the indicators at purpose level independent from the outputs?
- Are the overall objective indicators objectively verifiable in terms of QQTTP?

- Do the purpose indicators have the five required dimensions (QQTTP)?
- Does the means of verification column indicate clearly where the information for each indicator will be found?

2.2 Content-wise criteria

The most important content-wise criteria are relevancy, effectiveness and efficiency. In addition, it should be assessed how realistic the intervention logic is and whether assumptions and risks are acceptable and realistic (feasibility/viability). Basically the following questions need to be answered:

- Is the "if - then" relationship between purpose and overall objective logical and does it not skip important steps?
- Do the overall objectives clearly indicate why the project is important for the society at large?
- Does the purpose clearly contribute to one or more priority programmes from the government? And does the purpose indicator measure what is important?
- Are the assumptions (and risks) at result level realistic and acceptable?
- Are the results and the assumptions at result level producing the necessary conditions to achieve the purpose?
- Are the assumptions (and risks) at activity level realistic and acceptable?
- Are the activities and the assumptions at activity level producing the necessary conditions to achieve the results?
- Are the inputs described at the activity level adequately translated into a resources allocation plan and subsequently into a transparent budget?

When it is concluded that the project purpose contributes in a meaningful way to an overall objective which reflects one or more political priorities, one can say that the project is relevant.

When it is concluded that it is highly likely that (a) by implementing the mentioned activities the projects results will be achieved and that (b) achieving all project results will lead to the realisation of the project purpose one can conclude that the project is effective.

When it is concluded that the relation between activities and resources is fair and realistic it can be said that the project is efficient.

When it is concluded that the assumptions and risks at activity and result level are sound, realistic and acceptable one can conclude that the project is feasible.

Hence when a project is thought to be relevant, effective, efficient and feasible there remains one important issue to be addressed: sustainability. Sustainability depends on a number of factors. The importance of the various factors might differ from project to project, but in principle the following questions need to be answered.

- Is there adequate policy support by competent authorities?
- Is the technology appropriate for the local conditions?
- Will the ecological environment be preserved after the project?
- Is the permanent part of the project properly embedded in local organisation structures?
- Are the feelings of ownership of the project by the host organisation or beneficiaries adequate and are they willing and able to take over operation and maintenance costs?
- Are there financial and economic benefits induced by the project that compensate for running cots, depreciation costs and future investments?

3.   Conclusion

Assessment of Logical Frameworks is a vital and perhaps even the most important step in the appraisal procedure. Based on a sound assessment, a preliminary decision to accept the project can be taken or a request for more information can be made.

However, this does not imply that the assessment of the Logical Framework alone is sufficient for an overall assessment. For on overall assessment the Logframe assessment needs to be completed by answering the following questions:

- Are the selected organisations for implementation indeed capable to carry out the project or programme? Answering this question calls for an environmental scan and a review of the elements of the IOM model: inputs, outputs, mission, structures, systems, staff motivation, strategy and the quality of the leadership. To detect the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, it may be useful to carry out a SWOT analysis.

- Are the selected organisations able to sustain the expected outputs or do they need to be strengthened to guarantee long-term sustainability?

- Does the concerned project produce unintended side effects that need to be compensated by additional activities?

- Does the project proposal pay due attention to the gender issue and environmental protection? If not, is it possible to formulate a package of activities to make up for these shortcomings?

- Is the proposal socially desirable in its societal context and will it get sufficient support from politicians (political feasibility)?

Only when also these questions can be answered positively, the proposal qualifies for approval. When a few questions cannot be answered positively, it may be necessary to add a number of additional activities, e.g. to strengthen implementing organisations, to improve guarantee sustainability, to mitigate unintended (environmental and/or social) side effects or to promote more equal gender relations.