**Design methods and tools: considerations on the revised Logframe presented in the EC PRAG**

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1. **Introduction**

The EC published in July 2015 an updated Procedures and Practical Guide (PRAG) (European Commission, 15 July 2015).This Guide introduced a number of innovations in the Logical Framework Matrix (Logframe) without any consultation with the concerned actors, using, e-g., the capacity4dev or other on-line tools; and without any reference to methods as Project Cycle Management (PCM) that include Logical Framework Approach (LFA), or Results Based Management (RBM) or Managing for Development Results (MfDR).

In addition to that, this decision was taken without a clear justification or rationale presented in the PRAG and, more in general, without the planned previous publication of an updated Project and Programmes Cycle Management (PPCM), replacing the present in-use PCM manual (European Commission, March 2004), and announced by the EC many times

The PRAG introduce a revised Logframe , but, shifting the focus from only one Project Purpose to multiple outcomes/specific objectives is not changing only a tool as the Logframe, but a method as the LFA, “coming back “ to the an over-ambitious design approach. This approach, with many possible specific objectives, and related many problems to be addressed, was abandoned by the EC in the first PCM manual (EC, 1993), and by other Donors and Agencies, based on evidence of risks of failure related to over-ambitious projects sand programmes..

The aim of the present article is to contribute to the clarification on the innovations introduced by the new PRAG, and more in general, to the improvement of methods and tools for PPCM.

1. **Considerations on the revised Logframe**

The following considerations refer to the various issues of the Logframe as: Specific objective(s)/Outcome(s), outputs, results, activities, baseline, current value, target, means and costs, assumptions.

***Specific objective(s)/Outcome(s)***

In the PRAG’s Intervention Logic (IL) column the level between Outputs and Overall objectives is “Specific objective(s)/Outcome(s)”. This refer to possible multiple purposes, as clearly indicated by the parenthesis following outcome and specific objective in the title and from the example provided in the text: “Outcome = Oc (Oc 1; Oc 2; etc.)” (European Commission, 15 July 2015, Annex E3d, page 1) .

Specific objective(s)/Outcome(s) are defined in the IL column as follows: “The direct **effects** of the project which will be obtained at medium term and which tend to focus on the changes in behaviour resulting from project” (bold is in the text). Another definition is provided in the legenda of the Logframe : “ “Outcome” means the likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an Action’s outputs” (European Commission, 15 July 2015, Annex E3d, page 1). This definition is not consistent with the definition provided in the IL because refer not only to medium term but also to short term period.

In PCM manual (European Commission, march 2004) and in ROM handbook (EC, April 2012) the PRAG’s Specific objective(s)/Outcome(s) are called “Project Purpose”, using singular. In the same PRAG, in different sections of the document, reference is made to only one Outcome/Purpose:

* in § 3.3 concerning Full Application Evaluation Grid: “The outcome of the action” (European Commission, 15 July 2015, Annex E5b, page 4) .
* in the Glossary no definition is provided of outputs or Specific Objective/Outcome , but target groups are defined: “ The groups/entities that will be directly positively affected by the project at the project Purpose level” (PRAG, 15 July 2015, Annex A1a Glossary, page 10)

Concerning the issue of unique Purpose or multiple Purposes, recent and in-use development aid manuals, based on RBM (FAO, 2012), MfDR (IFAD, 2008 UNDP, 2009) or LFA (DFID, 2011) agree on the identification in the Results Chain (RC) of only one Purpose, called Outcome. In addition to these manuals, Theory of change (ToC) (DFID, April 2012) refer in its RC/sequence of change to only one Outcome. ToC also identify the need to add an intermediate level between the Outputs and the Outcome, the “Missing middle”. The mentioned manuals are based on a worldwide evidence: successful actions use a modest design models with only one Purpose and failures are very often related to over-ambition.

In conclusion, Purpose/Outcome, the more relevant level of the IL/RC because refer to the benefits for the target groups, is presented in the PRAG in a unclear way. That circumstance is source of confusion among development actors for a correct target group identification and targeting.

***Outputs***

Outputs are defined in the IL the PRAG Logframe: The direct/tangible **outputs** (infrastructure, goods and services) delivered by the project” (bold is in the text). A different definition is provided in the legenda of the Logframe: “Output” means the products, capital goods and services which result from an Action’s activities” (European Commission, 15 July 2015, Annex E3d, page 2) .

In ROM handbook (European Commission, 2012) outputs are clearly indicated as intermediate levels between activities e results. In this handbook, efficiency analysis is related to achievement of outputs and effectiveness analysis is related to achievement of results.

During the implementation of the EC Research and Technological Development Framework Programmes the design approach used over the years was the Work Packages approach (WPs).WPs sequence identified the level of outputs (called “deliverables”) as intermediate level between activities (called tasks) and results.

EuropeAid LFA and WPs approach present different positive aspects. It was proposed, mutually learning from these positive aspects, to adopt deliverables as an useful intermediate level in the IL of LFA and to adopt LFA for improving the WP approach, shifting in this way from WPs to Logical Work Packages (LWPs) (Rossi M. Sycamore C. 2006). LWPs were applied by the Associazione per la Promozione della Ricerca Europea (APRE) in project proposal design presented to the EC.

EC new Research and Innovation programme Horison 2020 confirmed the WPs approach, but in the WPs sequence the level of results was unfortunately eliminated (European Commission, May 2015).

***Results***

In the revised PRAG Logframe results disappear from the IL column. This lack of intermediate level between outputs/deliverables is consistent with the Horison 2020 new WPs approach but is not consistent with the ROM handbook (European commission, April 2012) and with the following sections of the PRAG:

* The § 4.3, in the Full Application Evaluation Grid , reference is made to “expected results” not to outputs.
* The legenda of the Logframe, where the definition of indicators refer to results not to outputs:“Indicator” is the quantitative and/or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure the achievement of the Results of an Action” (European Commission, 15 July 2015, Annex E3d, page 2) .

***Activities***

Activities were included in the IL in the more recent PCM manual as “Optional within the matrix itself” (European Commission, March 2004, page 73), but they were included in the IL without remarks in the previous manual (European Commission, 2001).

In the PRAG activities are included in IL without any remark. This inclusion is inconsistent with RBM that don’t include activities in the Results Chain of the Results Matrix.

***Baseline, current value, target***

Positive innovations are:

* The inclusion of baseline, current value and target as new column in the Logframe.
* The inclusion of gender specificity..

Despite the positive aspects, Baseline e current value are not presented in a clear way:

* In the Logframe Baseline e Current value are presented in two different columns.
* In the legenda of Logframe , Baseline e Current value are presented as the same issue :“Baseline” means the starting point or current value of the indicators” (European Commission, 15 July 2015, Annex E3d, page 2) .

***Means and costs***

Means and costs were included in the Logframe in PCM manual in 2001, but no more in the PCM manual in 2004.

PRAG introduce again Means and costs in the Logframe. No other aid development manual include these issues in the Logframe or in the Results Matrix.

***Assumptions***

ToC emphasizes the high relevance of analysis of assumptions expressed by different stakeholders, making assumptions explicit: “ Getting depth and critical thinking on assumptions is widely agreed to be the crux of the theory of change”(DFID, April 2012, page 22).

In an opposite perspective, RBM eliminated the Assumptions column from the RM, focusing in a rigid way only in a linear cause-effect relationship as presented in the RC. The RM, also called Results Framework, is an example of over-simplification of any complex reality: “A result framework , a simplified version of the traditional logical framework, depicts causes and effect relationships in development projects” (World Bank-FAO Investment Center, 2010, page 35)

It is therefore a positive concern that PRAG include Assumptions as a column of the Logframe.

1. **Conclusions and proposals**

The innovations introduced in the revised Logframe as a PRAG Annex, concerning the multiple specific objectives to be identified and other specific aspects, are not clearly presented and justified, and they are not consistent with the in-use PCM manual and EC ROM Handbook..

Uncertainty and confusion are in this way generated and the quality of formulation, management, monitoring and evaluation will be affected . In addition to that, the innovations introduced in the revised Logframe are not consistent with manuals produced by other donors.

A revision of the of the EC operational guidance is ongoing, as stressed in a 2014 EC Call for tender concerning methodological support regarding the programming, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development actions: “A set of three document*s (*Common features of Budget Support and Project Modality*,* Budget Support Guidelines (BSG) and Project Modality Guidelines (PMG) are planned to constitute the core methodological guidelines and would replace the previous sets of guidelines on Project Cycle Management (2004), Support to Sector Programmes (2007) and the previous Budget Support Guidelines (2010, already redesigned and published in 2012) bringing them together into one coherent set of manuals” (European Commission, 2014, page 3).

The background section of Terms of reference of this Call for tender conclude that the methodological revision and the knowledge sharing process: “It will also facilitate the harmonisation of practices by developing and sharing EC guidance with other donors.(page 4).

In line with the mentioned EC ongoing comprehensive methodological revision and the harmonization need, it is proposed to the EC:

1. To learn from criticism (as the remarks contained in the present article) and to “embrace the error”.
2. To recognize that the Purpose/Outcome, the more relevant level of the IL/RC because refer to the benefits for the target groups, is presented in the PRAG in a unclear way. That circumstance is source of confusion among development actors for a correct target group identification and targeting.
3. To publish as soon as possible an *errata corrige* note in PRAG confirming the in-use PCM 2004 and ROM Logframe.
4. To publish in a near future in PRAG a revised Logframe when the EC will publish new Programme and Projects Cycle Management Guidelines.

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1. The author is grateful to Roberto Carpano for taking time to provide suggestions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)