THEORY OF CHANGE AND LOGICAL FRAMEWORK: A COMPARATIVE MEASURE FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION PRACTICES

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Abstract. *This article is a brief study of the advantages and disadvantages of Theory of Change (ToC) and the Logical Framework (Log Frame) based on literature; a comparative approach. The later has a long historical stand in the development practices while the former was formed as supposed to answer the shortcomings of the Log Frame. By comparing both strengths and weaknesses, the finding argues that ToC is strongly considered to have a more certain degree of advantages rather than the M&E in view of development agencies especially NGOs in the practice of monitoring and evaluation of development practices. M&E, in particular, gave birth to ToC in pursue of answering the Log Frame's current shortcoming. ToC has gained positive stand in the realm of international development by addressing at least three main features: participation, flexibility and the dynamic of development deliverance and accountability.*

Keywords: *The Logical Framework; Theory of Change; Monitoring and Evaluation; development practice.*

Abstrak. *Artikel ini adalah studi singkat tentang kelebihan dan kekurangan dari Theory of Change (ToC) dan Logical Framework (Log Frame) berdasarkan literatur; pendekatan komparatif. Yang kedua memiliki pendirian historis yang panjang dalam praktik pembangunan, sementara yang pertama dibentuk untuk menjawab kekurangan Log Frame. Dengan membandingkan kekuatan dan kelemahan, temuan ini berpendapat bahwa ToC secara kuat dianggap memiliki tingkat keuntungan yang lebih pasti daripada M&E dalam pandangan lembaga pembangunan terutama LSM dalam praktik pemantauan dan evaluasi praktik pembangunan. Monitoring & Evaluation secara khusus melahirkan ToC dalam rangka menjawab kekurangan Log Frame saat ini. ToC telah mendapatkan posisi positif di bidang pembangunan internasional dengan mengatasi setidaknya tiga fitur utama: partisipasi, fleksibilitas dan dinamika pembebasan dan akuntabilitas pembangunan.*

Kata Kunci: *The Logical Framework; Theory of Change; Monitoring dan Evaluasi; Praktik Pembangunan.*

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Introduction

The Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) practices have been partly shaped by the Policy framework of Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005); emphasizing five principles to increase aid effectiveness in terms ownership, harmonization, alignment, results and mutual accountability. Monitoring is defined as a tracking process in a routine and a continuous manner on a project that emphasizes on the outputs and the purpose of decision making and management, while evaluation stresses on outcome assessment periodically, project efficiency and impact that have the purpose of drawing lessons (Bakewell & Garbutt, 2005). Both M&E encompasses internal and external aspects; NGOs determination and Donor accountability (James, 2011).

One way of theoretically grappling with the issue of accountability is through an understanding of its associated practices as technologies of power. There has been an argument that the logic of M&E often neglects the notion of power analysis: overlooking the way of measurement practice and who governs, how particular roles for NGOs, values and impacts on organizational cultures. As Bakewell & Garbutt (2005) states that Neo-Foucauldian theorist argued that the practice of monitoring has been viewed as 'a governmentality'; referring to the accomplishment of directed government development and thus it is considered as a merely a political technology that relate to power relation.

Strathern (2000), through anthropological perspective, has described accountability has come to carry a whole range of practices, procedures and values. In consequences, more elaborate auditing, monitoring and evaluation, of which part of the paradigm of knowledge-quality control, good practice and economic efficiency; have been referred to neoliberal forms of government. M&E, in this context, has two purposes: 1. to measure effectiveness and efficiency and 2. Public and political cooperation, supporting information for targeted audiences, promoting development skills, management adaptation and organization learning. A worth mention of note in terms of range contribution of those purposes is that the potential of the vast gap between the learning process of the NGOs and donor led. In addition, though having the least funding, NGOs tend to treat evaluation as part of the agreement and refers as a step needed to be done excluding the importance of self-learning (Bakewell & Garbutt, 2005).

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Method

In M&E of international development projects, the dynamic has resulted into two mainstreams theories or approaches namely Theory of Change (ToC) and The Log Frame, both come from the same root; programmed theory family (Vogel, 2012). This essay is an attempt to explore the advantages and disadvantages of ToC and the Log Frame based on literature; a comparative approach. The later has a long historical stand in the development practices while the former was formed as supposed to answer the shortcomings of the Log Frame. By comparing both strengths and weaknesses, the writer argues that ToC is strongly considered to have a more certain degree of advantages rather than the M&E in view of development agencies especially NGOs in the practice of M&E. It is crucial to differentiate between The Logical Frame; the matrix; summarizing features of the work programme that links them to one and another, and The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) which is the whole process by which the elements inserted into the formulated matrix (Dale, 2003).

Result and Discussion

The Logical Framework (Approach)

The logical Framework has its origin to US military planning approach which was later adaptably used by NASA, a US Space Agency, prior to being subject of use for development projects by USAID followed by CIDA over forty years ago (Cracknell, 1989). In the 1980s, it was chosen by European development organizations and since the 90s, many donors agency has shaped the LFA as the standard approach for grant application (Hailey & Sorgenfrei, 2004, Bakewell & Garbutt, 2005). One argues that its origin and the theory basis could be traced back to ancient Greek Aristotle, by describing the 'four causes' or four fundamental questions consisting of the material; physical process and activities, the formal; producing output, the efficient; what the produced thing will be, and the final; contribution to wider needs and purposes (Bell, 2000).

In the practice of The Log Frame, there have been many challenges in delivering development projects generally and M&E in particular. Generally, Gasper, (1997) described it as 'good servant bad master' theme as having produced widespread logical confusion with issues in both vertical and horizontal logic. In addition, The Log Frame M&E has been viewed as a 'necessary evil'; burdensome; fixed; rigid; sometimes considered merely as targets;

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indicators and impact measurement; numerical gain to obtain the fund; a tick-box exercise; and a mechanism for uniformity NGOs as a weak self-portrayal institutions, with little power in hierarchical reporting structures. These views are due to the increased of donors' emphasis on M&E which related to financial and budgeting accountabilities, project management skills and organizational learning (Bakewell & Garbutt, 2005).

Log frame, as a monitoring tool, has a strong tendency in favor of product output in terms of reports requirement which is sometimes too narrow in focus; putting the expected effects at the centrum (Gasper, 2000). Data, like a product, is produced based on physical and financial particulars which focus on simply tangible and measurable indicators and quantitative analysis, while data process emphasizes on the qualitative dimensions of context-specific and interpretative in nature of NGOs. The fact is that although the presence of enormous critiques on the LFA but it is still commonly utilized by NGOs and donors, thus, LFA has strongly stood its position since it serves as function a system of logical summary on crucial aspects rather than details inclusion. High-level decision-makers strengthen LFA as a favorite tool (Dale, 2003) that has become a common basis. The perfect example is based on Gasper's (1997) analysis on the research performed by Cracknell and Rednall that the Log Frame emphasized on the needs of the high ranking managers, workability and its usefulness in practice. However, a transformative commodification has been performed due to a competitive market of NGOs enterprises and organizations. Certainly, this may have affected on how to develop and implement projects by NGOs if commercialization has been seemingly stimulated by funding agencies.

Issues in The Log Frame (The Logical Framework Approach)

Based on Bakewell and Garbutt (2005) research, LFA has been likely considered beneficial because of several reasons, but within the positive aspects, there are issues as well. First, for several NGOs, LFA is particularly useful when there is a large number of partner agreements as it offers a supportive mean to value grant applications and work management. Although if the grant consists of a small portion in the project, LFA has already been used by NGOs for any projects and programmes. Therefore, it likely appears that the attitude towards LFA has been to the extent how beneficial in terms of dealing with work rather than the organizational nature. At a certain time,

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NGOs require their partner, for the sake of 'making life easier' but meanwhile bearing a grudge the LFA imposition by their donors. Secondly, in theory, The Log Frame is utilized as a mean of planning, monitoring and evaluating progress but mostly, it is used in the planning stage with a wide variation in terms of integrating participation aspect. However, the participatory aspect seems to face challenges when it is put into practice, especially when building a sense of ownership in the NGOs internal planning process since the Log Frame is viewed as an imposition gesture. The other argument is that success of any framework tools are strongly based on how to use it rather than the content but there is a need of recognition of a legitimate thinking process instead of an easy way out to gain money. Thirdly, The Log Frame has been seen as an internal requirement of funding for both NGOs and their partners because the formers face great difficulties in conversing The Log Frame to their local partners with different level of acceptance in various regions, for example, there is one NGO spending two years for putting a logical framework for a water project with their partner. Thus, a participatory approach adopted in the LFA does involve a great number of time resources and investment.

In terms of M&E, the shortcoming of LFA highly focuses on LFA itself which is the expected achievement rather than the working (Gasper, 2000). This is true since M&E LFA based has a strong nature of upward accountability that is whether the achievement of the proposed outputs and impacts have been reached or not. Another issue is that LFA requires to perform programme logic such as identification of outset indicators that, in practice, has the tendency to refer to already fixed matrix although it is highly possible for revision in theory at least to the output level. In addition, as a project document, the LFA seems to serve as an important element when donors require to view it and the higher interest of the donors is a specified paper on what partners should perform rather than what they should deliver. Furthermore, Donors who consider LFA as a participatory approach are very likely to face a lack of understanding in terms of the planning process and comprehending the thinking processes beneath the plan since the involvement is extremely scarce. Thus, the LFA resultant is used to evaluate and request external evaluators to make the indicators as the benchmark of work assessment (Bakewell and Garbutt, 2005).

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The Theory of Change; Background

Theory of change, in terms of evaluation, is an aspect of the programme theory that has a long-established ground, a developed form 1960's. ToC is taken from two lines of practices, social programme practice and development from which informed social action and evaluation (Vogel, 2012, Stein, & Valters, 2012, Valters, 2014). Since then, both approaches have supported a critical understanding of the development theories for action and social learning (James, 2011). Programme theory wishes to emphasize on a more explicit focus on a clearer articulation of how planners perceive the link between inputs and outcomes, how the intended programmes work, evaluations improvement and programme performance (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). In addition, ToC has a purpose of finding ways in exploring and representing the change that has more complexity and systemic understanding of development, rather than a linear process portrait. Thus, development funding organisation providers and consultants use the theory of change in assisting NGOs attention on change, rather than just a mere activity; and to assist them to direct their energies more clearly (James, 2011).

The utilization of ToC has been evidenced in the 1980s and 1990s whereas Australia's state and federal governments had mainstreamed program theory in the 1980s and 1990s and continued with a significant development since Weiss's published article in 1997. Weiss pointed out (as cited in Rogers, 2007) that theory-based evaluation (ToC) was mostly practiced in health areas. Her work has been commonly cited within a wide range of programs such as energy conservation evaluations, comprehensive community-based initiatives, housing program, gaming and simulation and anticorruption activities. In addition, U.S based evaluation social enterprise Acknowledge has performed partnership with the Aspen Institute in an attempt to form a ToC practicality based evaluation for social programmes in 1990s (Vogel, 2012) as well as best known source of guidelines, namely The Community Builders; Approach to Theory of Development, developed by Anderson (2005), and as part of the Aspens' initiative to involve evaluators and community development, programmers. Thus, the application of programme theory concepts to evaluation practitioners (Connell & Kubisch, 1998) has partly shaped ToC's development.

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The Strengths, Partnership and Shortcomings of Theory of Change

The first strength of the ToC is the use of both logical and critical thinking process in terms of planning, designing, implementing and evaluating programmes for context alteration (Vogel, 2012), as well as thoughtful reflection through constant participatory throughout project cycle management (PCM) which succeed to a specific and rigorous logical structure to meet stakeholders' quality test. One argument is that ToC requires logical sequence mapping and process of critical thinking on the contextual circumstances influencing the programme, actors as well as stakeholders' motivation and contribution based on values analysis, world view and philosophical change (Stern, 2012) in addition to various assumptions on how and why that change sequences might come as initiative outcomes (Vogel, 2012). Secondly, there are several differences in the element of the ToC, however, a consensus has been reached and undeniably accepted by respective stakeholders; government, funding agencies, development practitioners and academicians which reflects the third strength; flexibility of the theory. Its flexibility even goes further to work cooperatively with the LFA to manage programme and context complexities as well as open to a widely innovation and improvement within. For example, Valter (2014) pointed out perceptions several staffs of The Asia Foundation who argued that The Log Frame is meant for donor agencies, not for implementing agencies; The Log Frame contains rigidity and strict means to show things in a very short period of time. Therefore, there is a great necessity to place ToC as best kept flexible rather than prescribed (Vogel, 2012).

While as a framework, ToC has the means to assess impact, improve M&E, examine assumptions, and explore impacts as well as the learning process. Furthermore, ToC emphasizes on the context and process of change clarifying M&E focus of the important questions need to address and for what aim. This framework by means to gain four aspects, namely, a learning process for strategies and interventions improvement, accountability to local communities, accountability to donor institutions, and results as well as impact achievements (Funnell and Rogers 2011).

There have been certain numbers of differences in terms of the components, NGOs use starting 3-5 elements into their ToC practices. For example, Hivos practices ToC thinking into five elements of systematic questions such as the stakeholder (both individuals and groups); influencing actors and trying to

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change in terms of context or situation; the theories and ideas influencing the stakeholder; the strategic plan which describing reasons and providing a framework for any particular action needed; and the reflection-decision-making processes for strategy development, success review, failure and improvement for strategies and ideas (Vogel, 2012).

Theory of Change; A Critique

As any theories exist, therein shortcomings and ToC is not excluded. First, when a knowledge regime installed with a strong establishment and abusively practiced, the theory tend to shape another standardized tick in the box exercise as it has happened with the Log Frame. Secondly, the notion of power relation, between funding agencies with implementers, has been considered too rigid in the development industry, thus, the power relation may discourage any critical reflections constraining ToC practice (Valters, 2014). Thirdly, excessive lack of consultation and participation will affect ToC's elements in terms of critical reflection and review for learning or change.

In terms of quality perception, another posed critique has been addressed to ToC especially on methodological aspect of the theory-based evaluation on the aspect of testability and evaluability, thus, the debate results into the three main quality features as to assure the good quality approaches such as usefulness, clarity and ownership. The three strongly emphasize on process of consultation and group discussion that is strongly urged as the participatory manner by first integrating stakeholders as key point; as many people contribute to the critical thinking the more vibrant and hearty representation will transformation be. Thus, their in-take participation and perspectives; integrating with local knowledge, are likely to ensure strong generic ownership and recognition. Secondly, a supporting reflective process of ToC gives important to time sufficiency in preparing, conducting and consulting stakeholders. Therefore, using ToC would serve as an opening point and be used actively in avoiding the all-encompassing paper model and while applying ToC, it is highly necessary to acquire a serious and a supportive attitude such as assessing quality features as well as a resourceful time (Vogel, 2012).

Vogel (2012) refines different opinions regarding the Log Frame and Theory of Change. Both are equally considered as a funding mandate

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requirement that tends to another business as usual practice, but LFA contains a standardized template which strongly limits space for flexibility in messy social analyses (Valters, 2014). In addition, it is abusively used as management and measurement tool, in consequences, it has shaped into a result-based contract which is administratively demanding to alter. In the beginning, LFA was intended as a summary of an in-depth participatory discussion with stakeholders on the project goals; embedding the very nature of ToC with the presence of enormous assumptions as of the main core. The interviewees shared their high interest in applying the ToC due to the need for robust analysis which the Log Frame was originally designed for. Thus, the analysis process serves as a finding tool for external dependencies that may influence a program's effectiveness rather than another accomplished paperwork.

Another important address of the ToC is to accomplish so-called a missing middle that refers to the level from which influencing outcomes and longer-term impact. ToC functions as a bridging step derived from analyzing and mapping people's perceptions and theories and to make a clearer link and iterative process underlining events sequences between outputs and development impacts of which the LFA has not offered. This clarification of beneath the arrows is performed by acknowledging weaknesses in logic and to propose feasible means to address within context condition of which later used for programme strategy and M&E in a forceful way. Interestingly, in dealing with this issue, the current Log Frame practices use the outputs as the intermediate outcome, for example, German Development Cooperation Agency (GIZ) had encouraged for one example. Another example is from the Swedish Development Agency (SIDA) who inspire to put a medium-term change that functions as the bridge of project outputs to outcomes level (Vogel, 2012).

Conclusion

The origin of the two; the Log Frame and ToC derived from the root; program theory family and this may explain the similarity of the two at a certain level. In addition, both inherently embed advantages and disadvantages theoretically and practically. The Log Frame, from its beginning, was purposely designed to integrate participatory aspect and critical thinking process in building the assumptions. However, the fact is that development practice in general, M&E, in particular, gave birth to ToC in pursue of answering the Log Frame's current

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shortcoming. Indeed, ToC has gained positive stand in the realm of international development by addressing at least three main features: participation by means of focusing on the need of the people, rather than outcomes; flexibility in terms of changing not only the nature of power relationships between the donors and NGOs but also the dynamic of development deliverance; and accountability may also be reached in maximum degree both for donors and communities. Ultimately, the use of both approaches are still relevant in current development practice and M&E in particular, what crucial is to properly choose in what context one approach specifically be applied to deliver development project.

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