

# AusGuideline

Program strategies

## 2.2 Using the Results Framework Approach

**Associated guidance on 'Program strategies'**

Part 2 *Program Strategies*

AusGuideline 2.1 *Program Strategies Toolkit*

October 2005



**Australian Government**  
**AusAID**

© Commonwealth of Australia 2005

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>What is a results framework</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>What is a results framework used for?</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>What you need before you start</b>	<b>2</b>
4.1	Research and information	2
4.2	An understanding of “cause and effect” logic	3
4.3	An understanding of attribution	3
<b>5</b>	<b>Getting started with an objective tree</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Developing a results framework for performance assessment</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>Definitions</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>Example object tree</b>	<b>9</b>

# 1 Introduction

The AusAID Strategic Plan stresses the importance of improving the quality and rigour of program strategies to ensure that the aid program is more effective in achieving results. Program-level assessments by AusAID have identified gaps in the information necessary to measure results and impact, and highlighted the need for strategies to include performance frameworks that are rigorous and user-friendly.

The primary source of guidance on developing program strategies is AusGuideline 2.1 *Program Strategies Toolkit*. This guidance has been developed as a supplement to the Toolkit to assist program areas to use the results framework approach in the development of program strategy performance frameworks. Its logic can also be used to help program areas in developing and refining program strategies themselves.

This guidance is not intended to be a mandatory, step-by-step process. It is expected that it will be used in different ways by different program areas, and even at different stages of the strategy development process (eg before- or after- the issues paper). No matter how it is used, it is crucial to involve partners (especially partner governments) as well as a range of AusAID areas. Although this takes time, the Results Framework and the Strategy will be more robust with greater ownership.

The Results Framework approach is not complicated and it does not require specialist skills. What sets it apart is its systematic approach to documenting the logic of a strategy and its subsequent management, monitoring and measurement to ensure that intended results have the greatest opportunity of being achieved.

## 2 What is a results framework

A Results Framework is a tool to assist with achieving and measuring specific objectives at the sector, country or regional level – usually laid out in diagrammatic form. It uses the objective tree approach to link high-level objectives through a hierarchy to program-level outcomes (and ultimately individual activities) and then sets out a means by which achievement at all levels of the hierarchy can be measured. The Results Framework approach has a lot in common with the Logframe used on an individual activity basis.

Two features of a Results Framework that are critical to its strength as a performance measurement tool are its

- **big picture perspective** – a Results Framework does not just focus on the specific AusAID contribution in a sector, country or region, but incorporates the contributions of other partners (governments, donors, NGOs etc) necessary to achieve relevant goals and objectives, and
- **Cause and Effect Logic** – a Results Framework outlines the development hypothesis implicit in the strategy and the cause-and-effect linkages between the goal, strategic objectives and specific program outcomes.

### 3 What is a results framework used for?

A Results Framework is both a planning and management/monitoring tool, with additional benefits in terms of communication.

- **Planning** – using the Results Framework approach can help you identify appropriate objectives by ensuring that important questions are asked and answered at an early stage (eg “can objectives be measured? If not, are they appropriate? What will be sufficient to achieve the goal/objectives? What assumptions is the strategy relying on?” etc). It also provides a framework within which to work collaboratively with development partners in building shared ownership of objectives and approaches.
- **Management/Monitoring/Review** – a Results Framework can fill the role of a performance framework for a program strategy. It provides a program-level framework for the Agency to monitor progress towards the achievement of results and, if necessary, to adjust programs accordingly. Annual Reviews and other more comprehensive program-level assessments should be more straightforward and effective as the Results Framework provides a rigorous structure through which a strategy’s performance can be tested.
- **Communication** – in its most succinct form, a results framework can provide a “strategy in a page”, that gives the reader an instant idea of what a program is trying to achieve.

### 4 What you need before you start

#### 4.1 Research and information

A Results Framework should be based on solid information and analysis, well grounded in reality, and not simply be the result of brainstorming. At a minimum, the following documentation should be available before you start: Poverty Analysis (either original work or drawn from other sources); a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) or development plan,

or similar document for non-country strategies; and information on the programs and strategies of other donors and NGOs.

## 4.2 An understanding of “cause and effect” logic

Cause-effect logic is the underlying methodology in objective tree Analysis. It may be familiar from work undertaken developing logframes. A good objective tree illustrates the overall benefit and impact which will be realised via a chain of cause and effect both during and after implementation of the Strategy – eg the realisation of the program outcomes will help achieve the Intermediate Objectives, and the Intermediate Objectives will (ultimately) result in the achievement of the Strategic Objectives, and so on.

It is important to remember that the cause-and-effect relationships are based on a hypothesis, not hard evidence. The strength of the hypothesis will be borne out by the performance data – and a good strategy will provide flexibility to learn lessons and build in modifications as the strategy proceeds.

## 4.3 An understanding of attribution

One of the mistakes people make in developing their strategy is the constant focus on what they are responsible for, rather than what needs to be achieved in order to reduce poverty in a sustainable manner. AusAID cannot usually achieve strategy-level statements but instead contributes to them - indeed the degree of attribution is often low at the level of a grand Strategic Objective.

What is important is that the degree of attribution increases as you progress from Strategic Objective through Intermediate Objective to program outcome. At program outcome point the attribution is very strong. That is, the AusAID program is fundamental in achieving the desired program outcome - without the AusAID program the outcome would not have happened.

# 5 Getting started with an objective tree

An objective tree is simply a pictorial representation of the analytical framework on which a Program Strategy is based. It is a useful way to address the key elements specified in Section 3 of the Toolkit. See Annex B for an example. An objective tree generally includes the following elements

- an overall goal

- one or more strategic objectives, which contribute to the achievement of the goal, whether supported by AusAID or other partners
- if necessary, intermediate objectives, which support the strategic objectives, and
- program outcomes – ie outcomes jointly delivered by AusAID and the partner government through activities and policy engagement.

The key to a useful objective tree is ensuring that the different elements are linked together and, in doing demonstrating the cause and effect logic from goal to program outcome.

**Step 1: Set an appropriate goal.** The goal should reflect AusAID's best assessment of what should be aspired to by all partners (ie recipient government; donors, including AusAID; NGOs etc) and usually extends beyond the life of the strategy. Ideally, it will not be an AusAID-specific goal, but one that is based on a consensus among key partners.

**Step 2: Identify strategic objectives.** These should address key constraints to development in the country/region and contribute to meeting the goal, and should be achievable over the life of the strategy. Identifying these should follow a process of analysing the development needs (eg through a poverty analysis), drawing on big picture assessments (eg national development plans, PRSPs etc) and being conscious of whole-of-government national interest priorities. Again, these should reflect a consensus among key partners. Objectives that AusAID will address directly should be highlighted differently to objectives that AusAID will not support directly, but which are critical to the achievement of the goal. Also, ensure that management objectives are included in the discussion at this stage. Management objectives represent planned intentions designed to improve management of the program/strategy implementation.

**Step 3: If necessary, intermediate objectives can be defined** to address the critical constraints affecting the achievement of the strategic objectives. For most programs, especially where AusAID is able to have a significant impact, intermediate objectives will be necessary.

**Step 4: Identify program objectives** that will help achieve the objectives (both strategic and intermediate) and, ultimately, the goal. These will usually be AusAID-specific - this is the key level at which AusAID spells out what it will be attempting to achieve and is the level at which attribution of results to AusAID should be identifiable over the life of the strategy. A good test of a program outcome is whether it provides a clear basis for programming activities at a later date.

**BOX 1: TIPS ON WRITING OBJECTIVE STATEMENTS**

There is a simple test to identify if you have written a useful objective statement. Ask yourself “how will I know when it has been achieved?” If this is difficult to answer, then you should rethink your objective and its wording.

A few other useful tips

- each objective must have a single focus (ie objectives should not be double-barrelled)
- each objective must be unambiguous (test this with colleagues to ensure different people have the same understanding of what is meant)
- each objective must be results-oriented

## 6 Developing a results framework for performance assessment

The results framework is a natural extension of the objective tree. It provides another opportunity to test the cause-effect logic by focusing on performance indicators and the availability of data/resources to measure progress.

**Step 1:** The first step is to transfer the elements of the objective tree – goal, strategic objectives, intermediate objectives, program outcomes – into a table as below (first two columns). It is only necessary at this stage to include those components of the objective tree that AusAID will directly address.

**Step 2:** Identify critical assumptions – that is, the conditions under which the development hypothesis for achieving the goal/objective/program outcome will generally hold true. Critical assumptions are beyond the control of AusAID - the implications of their non-realisation should be addressed separately in a risk-management matrix. The results framework should not be based on critical assumptions with a low probability of holding true.

**Step 3:** Identify performance indicators – there are no hard and fast rules. The key issue is to ensure that indicators are capable of identifying whether an objective or outcome has been achieved (eg “percentage of households with access to clean water” is better than “improved water supply”).

Those indicators for the higher order objectives will generally not measure progress attributable to AusAID, but rather will establish the context and hence provide the basis for demonstrating relative development need. However, as one moves towards those related to the program outcomes, there will be increasing attribution and hence a more robust basis for assessing our performance.

**Step 4:** Establish means of verification – that is, baseline data and ongoing data flows that will allow you to measure changes in the indicators. If there is no baseline data and no reliable data flows, the emphasis of the objective and/or the objective itself should be reconsidered.

**Step 5:** Step back and have a look at the Results Framework in totality. After a period of intense work on the Results Framework, it can be helpful to give yourselves some time away from it and then return for a fresh look at the logic, linkages and appropriateness of the framework.

**BOX 2: TIPS ON DEVELOPING INDICATORS**

Make sure they satisfy the “SMART Characteristics”:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Timely

**Table 1: Example Results Framework**

Vietnam Program Strategy 2003-2007

Results Frame -  
Strategic Objective Two

<i>Level</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Performance Indicators</i>	<i>Means of Verification</i>	<i>Critical Assumptions</i>
<b>Goal</b>	To advance Australia's national interest by assisting Vietnam to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development			
<b>Strategic Objective Two</b>	<b>Improved livelihoods for the rural poor in the Mekong Delta and Central Coast regions</b>	1. Rate of poor households living below the poverty line based on international standards 2. Poverty gap	CPRGS  CPRGS/WB	
Strategic Objective 2.3	Develop Human Capital	1. Increase in the Vietnam National Human Development Report (UNDP/GoV) Index	Annual GoV/UNDP Vietnam Human Development Report	
Intermediate Objective 2.3.1	Improve health by increasing access to clean water and sanitation	1. % change in morbidity due to sanitation related illnesses 2. % of households with access to clean water	MOH statistics  CPRGS/MARD	

Program Outcome 2.3.1	Policies, institutional arrangements and technologies that meet the health, water and sanitation needs of the poor demonstrated and widely adopted	Extent of adoption of effective policies, institutional arrangements and technologies	Surveys of GoV and donor WSS programs	
-----------------------	--	---	---------------------------------------	--

## 7 Support

Office of Review and Evaluation (ORE)

Evaluation Section (EVAL) within ORE is the focal point for assisting program areas develop performance frameworks. EVAL will continue to monitor performance frameworks developed by the agency, improve the methodology and approach when warranted, and liaise with other donors on results based management approaches and the measurement of program strategies. EVAL also holds some more detailed guidance on developing a Results Framework, which may be useful for program areas already deeply involved in the process.

Facilitator

AusAID has contracted Michael Pilbrow to act as a facilitator upon request. He is available under Period Offer 11788. The Period Offer has been established to meet this particular need. A sample Exchange of Letters (EOL) is available as a template in Word by selecting File\New\Country Strategies\PilbrowEOL.dot.

Electronic support

There are a number of templates available. A template Results frame is available in Excel, while a template objective tree is available in Powerpoint. Each is available by selecting File\New\Country Strategies. The Intranet includes a directory managed by the Office of Director General (ODG) on Program Strategies. It also contains guidelines, approved strategies, issues papers, reviews and seminar content. If you are looking for some ideas for your own strategy or just to help interpret the guidance, it's a good place to look.

## A Definitions

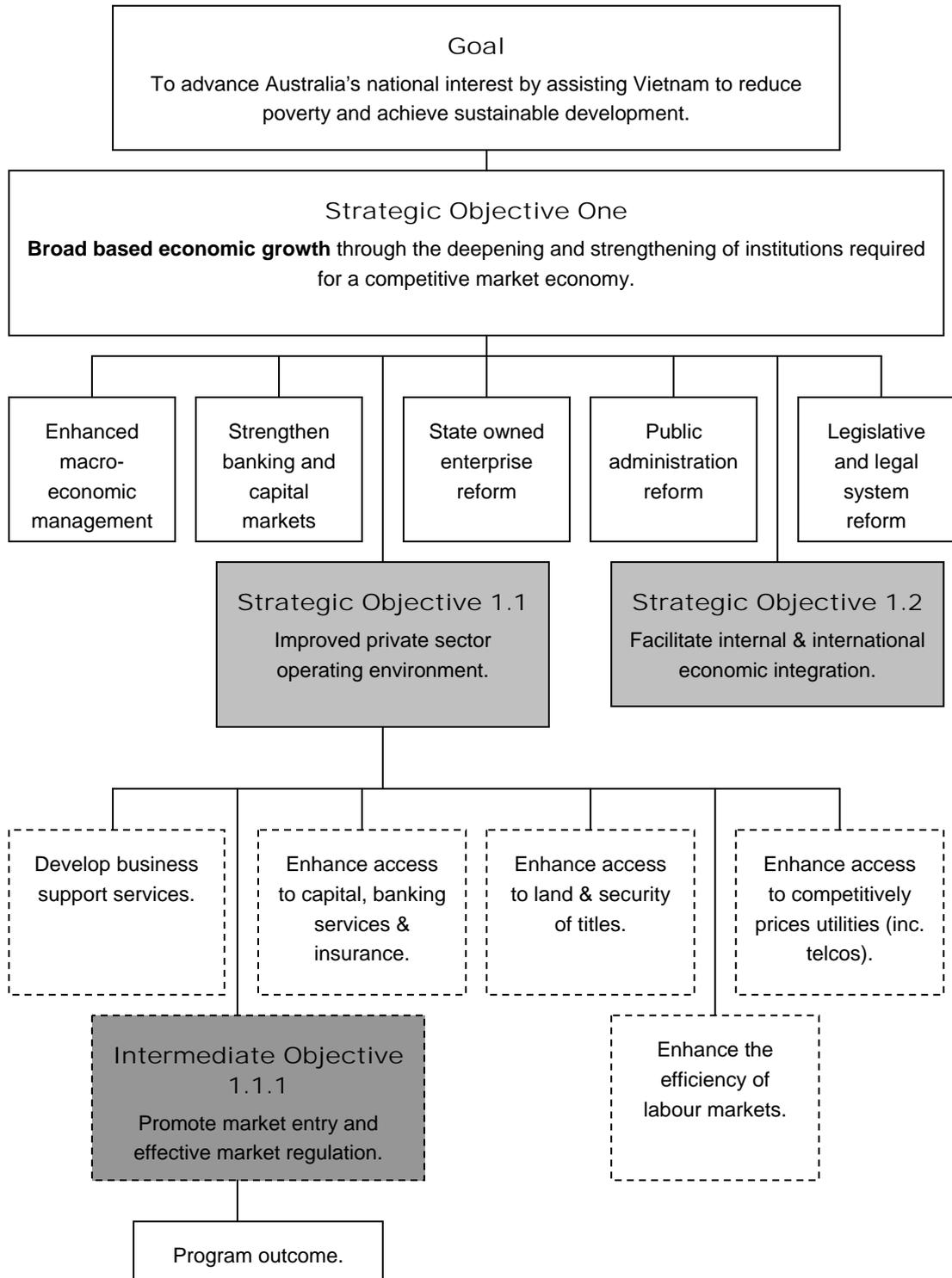
**Performance Framework** – a generic term for a structure that facilitates the assessment of a program’s progress towards meeting its objectives. A Performance Framework should also provide the basis for assessing efficiency of management of implementation and gather evidence of results achieved.

**Results Framework Approach** – a specific methodology for developing a Performance Framework, loosely based on the ‘Logframe’ approach used at the activity level.

**Objective Tree** – a subset of the Results Framework approach, an objective tree is a pictorial representation of the hierarchy from goal through ‘strategic objectives’ and ‘intermediate objectives’ to ‘program outcomes’.

For other definitions, see the DAC GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS IN EVALUATION AND RESULTS BASED MANAGEMENT, which can be found on the internet at [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/29/21/2754804.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/29/21/2754804.pdf)

B Example object tree



(Key over page)

## **Key**

### **Strategic objective**

Necessary condition, no AusAID strategy involvement

Strategic impact lead role (not used in this example)

### **Strategic impact, partnership role**

Selective impact, secondary role and delivered through other activities (not used in this example)

Selective impact, cross-cutting issue (not used in this example)