New Zealand Partnerships for International Development

Writing Quality Concept Notes

What we will cover today

- Concept writing

- MFAT assessment criteria

- What do we mean by results

- Addressing cross-cutting issues

- Discussion / Questions

Missing from Round 1 proposals

Demonstrating:

- WHAT the Activity will deliver
- evidence of engagement with in-country partners or their buy-in/commitment to the proposed Activity
- analysis or evidence of the development need
- why this intervention would best address the need
- awareness of existing activities in the same sector/geographic area; or signalling the potential for coordination or coherence and avoiding duplication
- lessons from previous phases or experiences
- logical links between the proposed tasks/inputs, the outputs, and outcomes (anticipated results)
- likely sustainability beyond the period of support from the Partnerships Fund.

Round 2: Provide a Concept

- We have learnt from Round 1 and have simplified the Concept Note template.

- This is a concept. We don't expect the level of detail that would be provided in the design document.

- Give us a sound business case - in simple terms:
  - Why should we fund this Activity?
  - What are you going to do?
  - What results will be delivered?

- There are five sections in the revised template:

Concept Note template

Activity Summary

- This summary is key to your Concept

- In 150 words, WHAT are you going to do?

- WHAT results is the Activity going to deliver - e.g. numbers of people who will benefit from each of the activity areas

Concept Note template

Activity Summary – example:
- What is this Activity going to deliver?

"The Activity will facilitate improved agricultural production in 11 remote communities in Luzon and Mindanao. It will provide farmers with basic tools and seeds, technical training in sustainable agriculture and integrated organic farm systems. It will establish nurseries and support reforestation. These actions will increase food security and incomes for approximately 1,600 people. It will also provide a clean and sustainable source of water for 3,600 people in 9 communities by protecting naturally occurring springs and piping their water to communal water points. It will assist communities to collectively plan, implement, and manage projects. This will develop their organisational and project management capacities." (HOPENZ)

Concept Note template

Activity Summary – example:

"This proposed activity will supply safe water directly to 23 villages (around 4,300 people) using ram pumps and will also install appropriate sanitation systems. Training will be provided on installation and maintenance, supported by safe water and hygiene practices to ensure overall health of community members is improved. Entrepreneurship training will be provided so that small business can be developed to install, maintain and repair water systems, creating employment opportunities. " (UNICEF)

Concept Note template

1. Why: Activity rationale

   - What is the development need or opportunity?

   - Use evidence/data to support the business case

   - How was this need identified?

   - How does it relate to national development plans of the partner country?

Concept Note template

1. Why: Activity rationale – examples:

"The XX Survey report for Vanuatu in 2007 stated that 74.4% of the population of Tafea Province have access to improved water sources (second lowest for provinces in Vanuatu) with 22% still using surface water for drinking. It also states that use of unsafe surface water from unimproved sources is highest in Tafea and Sanmo provinces. … Nearly 19.5% of the population of the poorest households are using unsafe surface water for drinking." (UNICEF)

"The Government of Vanuatu's Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management National Action Plan has listed 'extending the coverage of water supplies in rural areas' in its priority list …" (UNICEF)

Concept Note template

1. Why: Activity rationale – examples:

"In earlier projects, a learning farm was used as the main method of training … However, experience has shown that in XX communities, there is a greater sense of ownership and individual initiative when interventions are implemented directly on each farmer's farm, as they will be in the currently proposed initiative." (HOPENZ)

Concept Note template

2. What: Activity purpose and description

- What are the expected results?

- What is the purpose of this Activity?

- What are the risks?

- Will the Activity make a profit; what will happen to any profit?

Concept Note template

2. What: Activity purpose/description – examples

"Two districts, XX and XX, have been identified to be the project locations. The selection criteria are (i) the high rate of poverty (11.48%-18.78%); (ii) suitable land for animal husbandry; (iii) highly prone to natural disasters and climate change issues without a proper mechanism in place to address them; (iv) complement rather than duplicate efforts made by other MFAT projects in XX." (ADRA)

"The project cooperation and collaboration with project partners, XX and other stakeholders in XX, will help to complement rather than duplicate other existing or planned activities (different partners, project site, income generation models) to maximise beneficiaries and increase impacts scale." (ADRA)

Concept Note template

2. What: Activity purpose/description – examples

"Staff had discussions with the Tafea Water Authority in September 2012. It was agreed that, given the successful installation in four existing communities, the use of ram pump driven gravity pipe system was the most appropriate method to supply other communities." (UNICEF)

"X has a total population of 8,702 (female 4,394, male 4,308) in 2,341 households. Specific beneficiaries will be mothers, caregivers and children aged 0-5 years (approx. 1,279 children)."

"Biocontrol, which uses natural enemies to control pests, offers the only economically viable and sustainable method for controlling widespread weeds….." (Landcare Research)

Concept Note template

3. Who: Activity implementation

- Roles and responsibilities of each partner; what skills/experiences; what value does each partner add?

- Additionality?

- What happen when Partnerships Fund support ends?

Concept Note template

3. Who: Activity implementation - examples

"The project seeks to ensure sustainability of the results of its activities by (i) focusing on local capacity through training of trainers ...; (ii) encouraging local ownership by community-led implementation and management of project activities; (iii) maximising local financial and in-kind contributions ...' (iv) linking into existing systems for national/provincial plans for disaster management." (ADRA)

"The sustainability of such (water) systems is fundamentally linked to operation and maintenance regimes. ... one measurable aspect of the village water committees will be to develop and prepare operational plans, which will include regular maintenance schedules for each system." (UNICEF)

Concept Note template

4. How much: Budget

- How much will it cost to deliver the outputs

- Funding sources

- Explanatory notes (incl. how the Activity seeks to achieve value for money)

Tips

- We are no longer asking you to describe alignment to the aid programme priorities – but we will still appraise for this

- Be sharper in your language - avoid generalities and jargon

- Don't spend too much time on the HOW

- We don't expect you to have all the answers at concept stage

- Be succinct but signal areas that you will describe further in the design

MFAT appraisal process

MFAT uses the DAC evaluation criteria to assess concept notes (and design docs)

1. Relevance

2. Effectiveness

3. Efficiency

4. Impact

5. Sustainability

DAC = Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Relevance

"The extent to which the proposed Activity aligns and remains consistent with beneficiary priorities, country priorities, and partner and MFAT policies"

Has the development need been identified? (refer sections 1.1 and 2.3)

- If the application is to scale up or for a new stage, is there evidence of success and a strong reason for continuing?

- Has data about the problem/need been presented?

- Is it clear that your in-country partner has been involved in analysing the need and developing an appropriate response?

- Is it clear what other donors/agencies are doing in the space? Does it make sense for us to also get involved?

- Does the focus align with the partner government's development priorities?

Effectiveness

"The extent to which the Activity's intended results are expected to be achieved"

Are the intended outputs and outcomes (results) clear and appropriate? (refer section 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3)

- Is the proposed approach likely to the most effective to address the need; have alternatives been considered?

- Are there logical links between inputs/activities, the outputs and the outcomes?

- Is the scale about right to achieve the intended results?

- Have assumptions been identified, i.e. factors or risks that could affect progress/success?

Effectiveness

Are the intended outputs and outcomes (results) clear and appropriate? (refer section 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3)

- For commercial activities, you will need to provide additional – but brief– detail that describes where the Activity fits into the value chain, the target market, possibly barriers to success, and factors that will lead to success.

- Have you described how you will treat any downstream profit?

Efficiency

"How efficiently resources e.g. funds, expertise, time etc are expected to be converted to results"

A high level assessment of the likely quality and cost of outputs (refer sections 2.1, 2.3, and 4)

- We don't expect a detailed budget – but ….

- … do the budget (and accompanying notes) and associated outputs demonstrate value for money?

- Does the implementing partner have the capacity and experience to hit the ground running? Have they got a track record in managing money?

- Will the governance and management structures support efficient and effective delivery?

Value for Money

... of New Zealand Aid Programme Activities is defined as:

"Achieving the best possible development outcomes over the life of an Activity relative to the total cost of managing and resourcing that activity;

and

"Ensuring that resources are used effectively, economically, and without waste."

Value for money is not always about the cheapest model.

Value for money at Concept stage

MFAT considers:

1. The outputs that will be delivered

2. Whether the total price for the Activity seems fair and reasonable (including matched funds) for:
   - expected outputs and outcomes
   - likely quality of what is delivered
   - sustainability over the medium/long term
   - level of profit generated and how this is used
   - realistic for the size and complexity of the project

3. Whether there are alternative modalities/designs that could achieve the same outcome but at a lesser cost.

Value for money - examples

"The project will make efficiencies by linking and integrating with other development initiatives in the country and gain the greatest 'bang for bucks' by ... sharing information on baseline studies and situation monitoring."

"The project will expand its impact by use of qualified interns and experienced volunteers."

"All measure are taken into consideration to ensure value for money by comparing the costs and benefits of various options." (ADRA)

Appraising budgets at Concept stage

- Accuracy (does it add up/down/across)

- Completeness (outputs defined reflect what would need to be done to achieve the outcomes)

- Reasonableness (does the total output costs reflect the scale/size you expect to deliver the proposed outputs, does it appear reasonable in the context and the level of complexity of the project, how does it compare against similar activities)

- Cost effectiveness (are they delivering a reasonable level of quality and outcomes for cost, are there alternative ways they could work, i.e. effort, quantity or quality that would achieve outputs more effectively)

- Do the levels of in-country support costs and/or New Zealand-based support costs match Guidelines advice?

Impact

"The long-term effect(s) resulting from the Activity, including positive and negative, intended and unintended, direct and indirect"

Is there a clear, longer term vision behind the proposal?

- Are there opportunities for scaling-up, and maximising the footprint/influence.

Note: MFAT doesn't really appraise for impact at the concept stage

Sustainability

"The likelihood of continued long-term benefits after major assistance (e.g. donor funding) has been completed"

What is the likelihood of continued benefits? (refer section 3.1 and 3.4)

- Is there sufficient in-country ownership and leadership to continue the Activity (or benefits) when funding has ended?

- What is the political and financial viability of partners?

- What are the medium to long term cost implications of changes, including ongoing resourcing and asset maintenance?

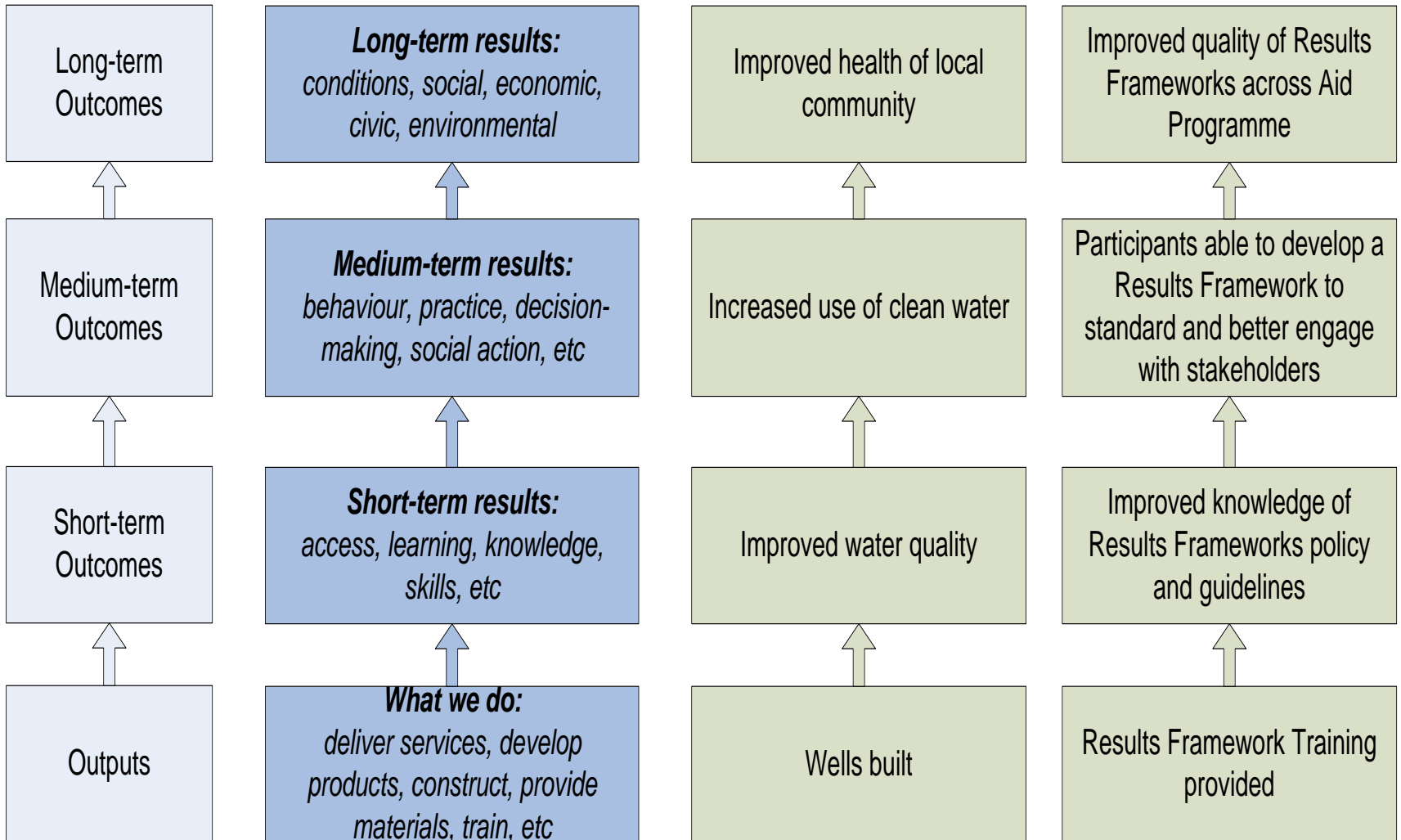- Any risks to medium to long-term positive outcomes?

Partnerships Fund: Appraisals

Summary DAC Evaluation Criteria

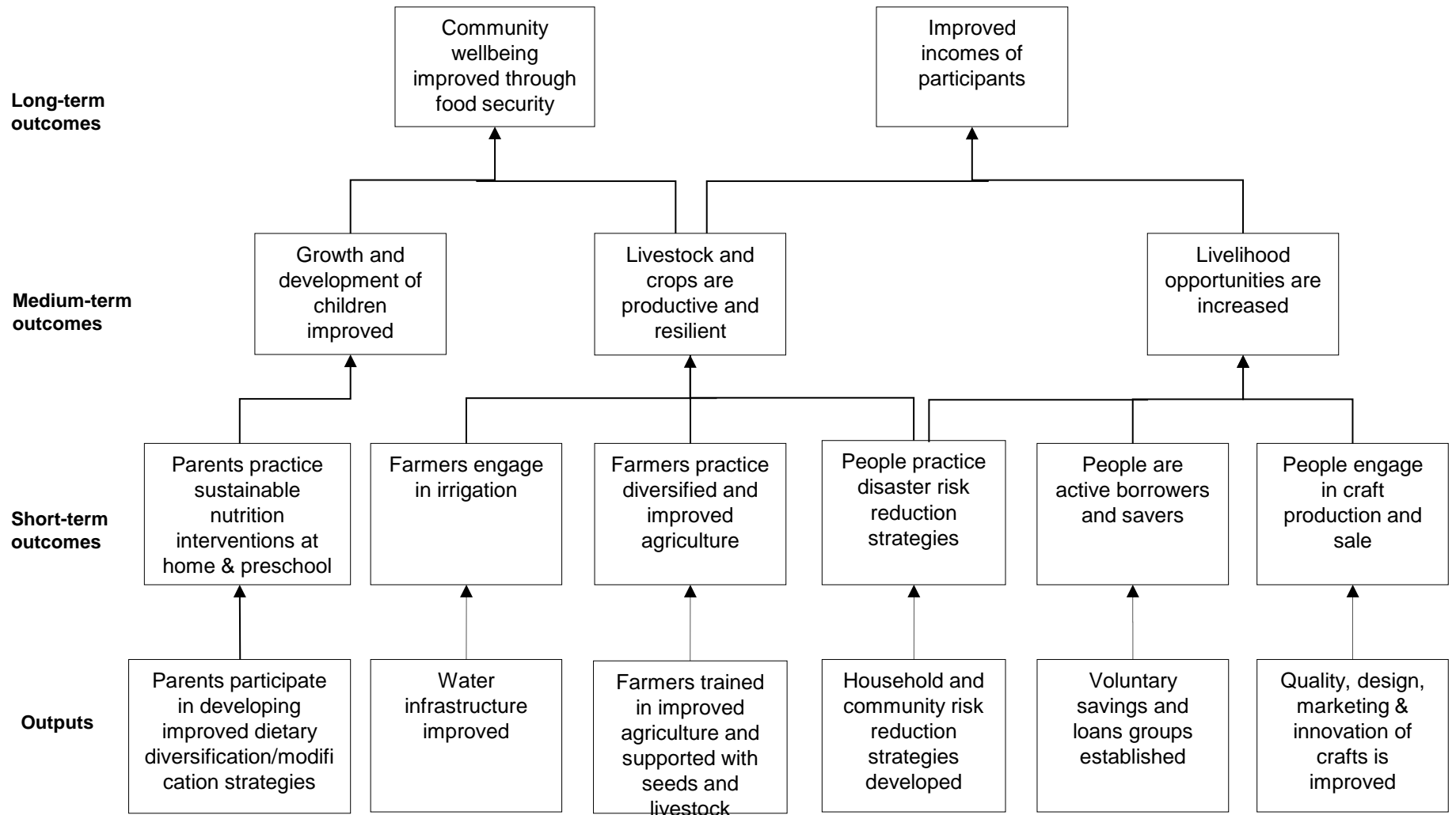| Criteria	Meaning (Activity Quality Policy)	Key Questions
Relevance	Extent to which the Activity aligns and remains consistent with beneficiary priorities, country priorities , and partner and MFAT policies.	*Is the proposal focusing on the right issues and approaches?*
Effectiveness	Extent to which the Activity's intended results (outputs/outcomes) were achieved (includes unintended outcomes) (*NB what we achieved, not what we did*)	*Is the proposal likely to work?*
Efficiency	How efficiently resources (eg funds, expertise, time etc) were converted to results	*Is the proposal likely to bring good value for money?*
Impact	Long-term changes resulting from the Activity – positive and negative , intended and unintended effects. Impact relates to the goal of the Activity in the Results Framework.	*What long-term changes are envisaged to result?*
Sustainability	Likelihood of continued benefits after major assistance (e.g. donor funding) has been completed.	*Are benefits likely to last over the long term once external funding has dried up?*

Focus on results

- Measuring results - essential for effective aid and development

- MFAT uses a results-based approach to design and manage activities:

  - Results at the forefront of our work

  - **Simple** and manageable: supports design, monitoring and reporting

  - Supports Activity management, learning and improvement, decision-making, and accountability

Results Diagram (Results Chain)

Long-term Outcomes	***Long-term results:*** *conditions, social, economic, civic, environmental*	Improved health of local community	Improved quality of Results Frameworks across Aid Programme
↑	↑	↑	↑
Medium-term Outcomes	***Medium-term results:*** *behaviour, practice, decision-making, social action, etc*	Increased use of clean water	Participants able to develop a Results Framework to standard and better engage with stakeholders
↑	↑	↑	↑
Short-term Outcomes	***Short-term results:*** *access, learning, knowledge, skills, etc*	Improved water quality	Improved knowledge of Results Frameworks policy and guidelines
↑	↑	↑	↑
Outputs	***What we do:*** *deliver services, develop products, construct, provide materials, train, etc*	Wells built	Results Framework Training provided

Goal of the Activity: Resilience is strengthened for two communities in Emali, Kenya. (source: ChildFund)

Long-term outcomes

| Community wellbeing improved through food security | Improved incomes of participants |

Medium-term outcomes

| Growth and development of children improved | Livestock and crops are productive and resilient | Livelihood opportunities are increased |

Short-term outcomes

| Parents practice sustainable nutrition interventions at home & preschool | Farmers engage in irrigation | Farmers practice diversified and improved agriculture | People practice disaster risk reduction strategies | People are active borrowers and savers | People engage in craft production and sale |

Outputs

| Parents participate in developing improved dietary diversification/modification strategies | Water infrastructure improved | Farmers trained in improved agriculture and supported with seeds and livestock | Household and community risk reduction strategies developed | Voluntary savings and loans groups established | Quality, design, marketing & innovation of crafts is improved |

Results terminology

Goal

- the overall, aspirational impact that the development Activity is expected to contribute towards

- usually expressed as an intention, e.g. To …. or For ….

- unlikely that achievement of the goal could be directly or solely attributed to the Activity.

Results terminology

Outcomes

- the short, medium or long-term changes or effects that are intended as a result of the Activity (and that contribute to the goal)

- clearly identify the change that is desired

- include one outcome per statement and do not overlap with other statements

- are phrased in the past tense

- are relevant, specific, tangible, achievable and measurable.

Assumptions - explain factors or risks, largely outside your control, that may affect progress of the Activity

Results terminology

Outputs

- the products, goods and services that will be delivered to achieve the outcomes

- result directly from the inputs and activities/tasks of a development Activity

- meaningfully contribute to short and medium term outcomes

- output statements clearly identify what is being produced and/or delivered

- one output per statement; stated in the past tense

- are relevant, specific, tangible, achievable and measurable.

Results terminology

Activities and Inputs

- the tasks required, which will lead to the outputs of an Activity

- may include processes, techniques, tools, events, technology

- may include services, e.g. relationship building, capacity development activities

- uses inputs, such as resources, e.g. personnel and assets, to produce outputs

Gender equality and women's empowerment, human rights, environment

- **Cabinet mandated** and **MFAT policy**

  "To ensure equitable sustainable development … we (must) consider the gender, environmental and human rights implications of what we do."

- **Practice**: critical for good development and each are important in their own right

- **Mandatory**: all MFAT Activities, programmes and policies to consider opportunities/risks.

In Concept Notes

- Ideally, any relevant cross-cutting issue will be considered and identified at concept stage, with assurances they will be addressed in design

- Use sex-disaggregated data, where available, to demonstrate the development need

- Reference partners' gender or human rights policy and how the proposed Activity supports/aligns to it

- Reflect cross-cutting opportunities in the results framework (where key to the activity)

- Tell us that you have thought about each of the cross-cutting issues, even if they are not instrumental to the proposed Activity.

Human rights principles in development

- **Non-discrimination** - who will benefit from the project and who, if anyone, will not benefit or will lose resources or freedoms?

- **Participation** – will those affected by the activity be informed about the Activity and will they (or their representatives) be consulted on design and implementation?

- **Accountability** - should the Activity include particular human rights outputs and outcomes? Does the activity provide for collection of information to identify and monitor impacts on vulnerable groups?

Human rights at concept stage - examples

"Provisions that protect and promote children and young people's full and successful participation in education will have been included in education legislation and policy of three countries."

"Human rights issues, as briefly discussed in previous sections, have also been taken into account and the project aims to support neglected and marginalised communities." (HOPENZ)

"The project ... applies cross-cutting approaches to ensure the improvement of the socio-economic status of women, child protection, and disability inclusion." (ADRA)

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Think about:

- Are there any obstacles to women's **effective participation**?

- What are the different **needs, opportunities, rights** and **benefits** for men and women in this activity?

- What are the **economic opportunities** for women – and barriers – in both the formal and informal economy?

- Does your **in-country partner** have the commitment and capacity to address gender?

- What is the **division of labour** for men and women; can women access **productive resources**?

- Are there opportunities to build **women's empowerment**; leadership, governance, management, political representation?

- Is **violence against women** an issue; can it be addressed in this Activity?

Gender/women's empowerment at concept stage - examples

"Strategic gender needs addressing inequalities in the communities will be employed including women's inclusion and a more active role in the water committees." (UNICEF)

"The project focuses on women's practical and strategic needs. While a clean supply of water and improved agricultural production will benefit all village members, improving water supply has a more direct and immediate impact on women, given their role in providing, maintaining, and protecting a supply of water for domestic use. Field staff will address the strategic needs of women by facilitating opportunities for women to participate in every stage of the project's implementation." (HOPENZ)

Gender/women's empowerment at concept stage - examples

"Women will intentionally be involved in leadership and decision-making, with at least two women given lead roles in each management committee. Because gender roles in the XX are not completely rigid, the shifting of roles is not heavily resisted, and villagers typically accept the reality and benefits of women's inclusion." (HOPENZ)

"A gender analysis will be conducted before the Activity design phase .. recognising that at least 60% of beneficiaries will be women." (ChildFund)

Aid Programme environment principles

1. Aim to **Do no harm** as a minimum and identify opportunities to **Do some good** for the environment. Design activities that maximise environmental (and climate change) benefits.

2. Identify and effectively **manage risks** and potential adverse impacts to the environment posed by Activities we fund.

3. **Maximise environmental co-benefits** by integrating environment (and climate change) across Activities throughout the project cycle, including at concept stage.

4. Design Activities to be **consistent with environmental commitments** made by New Zealand and our partner countries.

Environmentally sustainable approach

When appraising concepts, we consider:

- Will the activity protect and/or enhance the environment?

- Will the activity improve the capacity of people to manage their environment?

- How will environmental impacts (including climate change) be assessed?

- Are there environmental risks posed by this Activity; how will those risks be managed?

Environment at concept stage - examples

"Protecting the forest means protection of the cultural and customary rights of these clans. The communities have identified great potential within the forest to improve their livelihoods through sustainable management and conservation of their forest habitat. The forest is continuously threatened by commercial interests for logging and agricultural development. The Activity has the potential to further promote environmental protection and reverse further degradation and loss of natural habitats."

"The project directly compliments other New Zealand Government Aid Programme priorities which include 1) producing biogas and/or organic fertiliser from animal waste thereby helping to reduce environmental pollution and greenhouse gas (methane) and contribute to alternative energy infrastructure development." (ADRA)

Tools

- Partnerships Fund Guidelines
- Partnerships and Fund team (nzpfid@mfat.govt.nz)
- MFAT's International Development Policy Statement (March 2011)
- MFAT's Sector Strategies 2012-2015
- Joint Commitments for Development (Pacific)

  http://www.aid.govt.nz/where-we-work/pacific

- Country / regional strategies
- http://www.aid.govt.nz/about-aid-programme/how-we-work/programme-framework
- Results framework guidance (more for design)
- Cross-cutting analysis guidance