

## PERFORMANCE MONITORING & EVALUATION

# TIPS

## BUILDING A RESULTS FRAMEWORK

### ABOUT TIPS

These TIPS provide practical advice and suggestions to USAID managers on issues related to performance monitoring and evaluation. This publication is a supplemental reference to the Automated Directive System (ADS) Chapter 203.

#### WHAT IS A RESULTS FRAMEWORK?

The Results Framework (RF) is a graphic representation of a strategy to achieve a specific objective that is grounded in cause-and-effect logic. The RF includes the Assistance Objective (AO) and Intermediate Results (IRs), whether funded by USAID or partners, necessary to achieve the objective (see Figure 1 for an example). The RF also includes the critical assumptions that must hold true for the strategy to remain valid.

The Results Framework represents

a development hypothesis or a theory about how intended change will occur. The RF shows how the achievement of lower level objectives (IRs) leads to the achievement of the next higher order of objectives, ultimately resulting in the AO.

In short, a person looking at a Results Framework should be able to understand the basic theory for how key program objectives will be achieved. The Results Framework is an important tool because it helps managers identify and focus on key objectives within a complex development environment.

#### A RESULTS FRAMEWORK INCLUDES:

- ✓ An Assistance Objective (AO)
- ✓ Intermediate Results (IR)
- ✓ Hypothesized cause and effect linkages
- ✓ Critical Assumptions

#### WHY IS THE RESULTS FRAMEWORK IMPORTANT?

The development of a Results Framework represents an important first step in forming the actual strategy. It facilitates analytic thinking and helps

### What's the Difference Between a Results Framework and the Foreign Assistance Framework (FAF)?

In one word, accountability. The results framework identifies an objective that a Mission or Office will be held accountable for achieving in a specific country or program environment. The Foreign Assistance Framework outlines broad goals and objectives (e.g. Peace and Security) or, in other words, programming categories. Achievement of Mission or Office AOs should contribute to those broader FAF objectives.

program managers gain clarity around key objectives. Ultimately, it sets the foundation not only for the strategy, but also for numerous other management and planning functions downstream, including project design, monitoring, evaluation, and program management. To summarize, the Results Framework:

- Provides an opportunity to build consensus and ownership around shared objectives not only among AO team members but also, more broadly, with host-country representatives, partners, and stakeholders.
- Facilitates agreement with other actors (such as USAID/Washington, other USG entities, the host country, and other donors) on the expected results and resources necessary to achieve those results. The AO is the focal point of the agreement between USAID/Washington and the Mission. It is also the basis for Assistance Agreements (formerly called Strategic

Objective Assistance Agreements).

- Functions as an effective communication tool because it succinctly captures the key elements of a program's intent and content.
- Establishes the foundation to design monitoring and evaluation systems. Information from performance monitoring and evaluation systems should also inform the development of new RFs.
- Identifies the objectives that drive project design.

In order to be an effective tool, a Results Framework should be current. RFs should be revised when 1) results are not achieved or completed sooner than expected, 2) critical assumptions are no longer valid, 3) the underlying development theory must be modified, or 4) critical problems with policy, operations, or resources were not adequately recognized.

## KEY CONCEPTS

### THE RESULTS FRAMEWORK IS PART OF A BROADER STRATEGY

While the Results Framework is one of the core elements of a strategy, it alone does not constitute a complete strategy. Typically it is complimented by narrative that further describes the thinking behind the RF, the relationships between the objectives, and the identification of synergies. As a team develops the RF, broader strategic issues

should be considered, including the following:

- What has led the team to propose the Results Framework?
- What is strategic about what is being proposed (that is, does it reflect a comparative advantage or a specific niche)?
- What are the main strategic issues?
- What is different in the new strategy when compared to the old?
- What synergies emerge? How are cross-cutting issues addressed? How can these issues be tackled in project level planning and implementation?

## THE UNDERPINNING OF THE RESULTS FRAMEWORK

A good Results Framework is not only based on logic. It draws on analysis, standard theories in a technical sector, and the expertise of on-the-ground managers.

### Supporting Analysis

Before developing a Results Framework, the team should determine what analysis exists and what analysis must yet be completed to construct a development hypothesis with a reasonable level of confidence. Evaluations constitute an important source of analysis, identify important lessons from past programs, and may explore the validity of causal linkages that can be used to influence future programming. Analysis of past

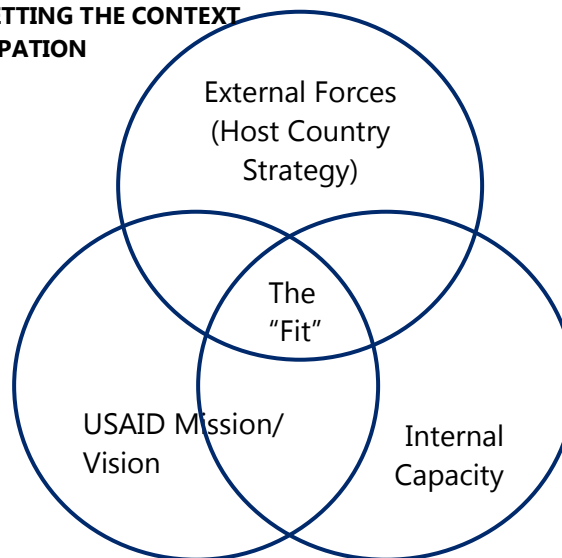
performance monitoring data is also an important source of information.

## Standard Sector Theories

Sectors, particularly those that USAID has worked in for some time, often identify a set of common elements that constitute theories for how to accomplish certain objectives. These common elements form a basic “template” of sorts to consider in developing an RF. For example, democracy and governance experts often refer to addressing supply and demand. Supply represents the ability of government to play its role effectively or provide effective services. Demand represents the ability of civil society to demand or advocate for change. Education generally requires improved quality in teaching and curriculum, community engagement, and adequate facilities. Health often requires improved quality of services, as well as access to -- and greater awareness of -- those services.

An understanding of these common strategic elements is useful because they lay out a standard set of components that a team must consider in developing a good RF. Although, not all of these elements will apply to all countries in the same way, they form a starting point to inform the team’s thinking. As the team makes decisions about what (or what not) to address, this becomes a part of the logic

**FIGURE 2. SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR PARTICIPATION**



that is presented in the narrative. Technical experts can assist teams in understanding standard sector theories. In addition, a number of USAID publications outline broader sector strategies or provide guidance on how to develop strategies in particular technical areas<sup>1</sup>.

## On-the-Ground Knowledge and Experience

Program managers are an important source of knowledge on the unique program or in-country factors that should be considered in the development of the Results Framework. They are best able to examine different types of information, including

<sup>1</sup> Examples include: Hansen, Gary. 1996. *Constituencies for Reform: Strategic Approaches for Donor-Supported Civic Advocacy Groups* or USAID. 2008. *Securing the Future: A Strategy for Economic Growth*.

analyses and standard sector theories, and tailor a strategy for a specific country or program environment.

## PARTICIPATION AND OWNERSHIP

Development of a Results Framework presents an important opportunity for USAID to engage its own teams, the host country, civil society, other donors, and other partners in defining program objectives. Experience has shown that a Results Framework built out of a participatory process results in a more effective strategy.

Recent donor commitments to the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action reinforce these points. USAID has agreed to increase ownership, align systems with country-led strategies, use partner systems, harmonize aid efforts, manage for development results, and establish mutual accountability.

Common questions include, “how do we manage participation?” or “how do we avoid raising expectations that we cannot meet?” One approach for setting the context for effective participation is to simply set expectations with participants before engaging in strategic discussions. In essence, USAID is looking for the “strategic fit” (see Figure 2). That is, USAID seeks the intersection between what the host country wants, what USAID is capable of delivering, and the vision for the program.

## WHOLE-OF- GOVERNMENT APPROACHES

Efforts are underway to institute planning processes that take into account the U.S. Government’s overall approach in a particular country. A whole-of-government approach may identify larger goals or objectives to which many USG entities contribute. Essentially, those objectives would be at a higher level or above the level of accountability of any one USG agency alone. USAID Assistance Objectives should clearly contribute to those larger goals, but also reflect what the USAID Mission can be held accountable for within a specified timeframe and within budget parameters.

The whole-of-government approach may be reflected at a lower level in the Results Framework as well. The RF provides flexibility to include the objectives of other

## GUIDELINES FOR CONSTRUCTING AOs AND IRs

AOs and IRs should be:

- ✓ *Results Statements.* AOs and IRs should express an outcome. In other words, the results of actions, not the actions or processes themselves. For example, the statement “increased economic growth in targets sectors” is a result, while the statement “increased promotion of market-oriented policies” is more process oriented.
- ✓ *Clear and Measurable.* AOs and IRs should be stated clearly and precisely, and in a way that can be objectively measured. For example, the statement “increased ability of entrepreneurs to respond to an improved policy, legal, and regulatory environment” is both ambiguous and subjective. How one defines or measures “ability to respond” to a changing policy environment is unclear and open to different interpretations. A more precise and measurable results statement in this case is “increased level of investment.” It is true that USAID often seeks results that are not easily quantified. In these cases, it is critical to define what exactly is meant by key terms. For example, what is meant by “improved business environment”? As this is discussed, appropriate measures begin to emerge.
- ✓ *Unidimensional.* AOs or IRs ideally consist of one clear overarching objective. The Results Framework is intended to represent a discrete hypothesis with cause-and-effect linkages. When too many dimensions are included, that function is lost because lower level results do not really “add up” to higher level results. Unidimensional objectives permit a more straightforward assessment of performance. For example, the statement “healthier, better educated, higher-income families” is an unacceptable multidimensional result because it includes diverse components that may not be well-defined and may be difficult to manage and measure. There are limited exceptions. It may be appropriate for a result to contain more than one dimension when the result is 1) achievable by a common set of mutually-reinforcing Intermediate Results or 2) implemented in an integrated manner (ADS 201.3.8).

actors (whether other USG entities, donors, the host country, or other partners) where the achievement of those objectives are essential for USAID to achieve its AO. For example, if a program achieves a specific objective that contributes to USAID’s AO, it should be reflected as an IR. This can facilitate greater coordination of efforts.

## THE LINKAGE TO PROJECTS

The RF should form the foundation for project planning.

Project teams may continue to flesh out the Results Framework in further detail or may use the Logical Framework<sup>2</sup>. Either way, all projects and activities should be designed to accomplish the AO and some combination of one or more IRs.

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<sup>2</sup> The Logical Framework (or logframe for short) is a project design tool that complements the Results Framework. It is also based on cause-and-effect linkages. For further information reference ADS 201.3.11.8.

## THE PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING A RESULTS FRAMEWORK

### SETTING UP THE PROCESS

Missions may use a variety of approaches to develop their respective results frameworks. In setting up the process, consider the following three questions.

**When should the results frameworks be developed?** It is often helpful to think about a point in time at which the team will have enough analysis and information to confidently construct a results framework.

**Who is going to participate (and at what points in the process)?** It is important to develop a schedule and plan out the process for engaging partners and stakeholders. There are a number of options (or a combination) that might be considered:

- Invite key partners or stakeholders to results framework development sessions. If this is done, it may be useful to incorporate some training on the results framework methodology in advance. Figure 3 outlines the basic building blocks and defines terms used in strategic planning across different organizations.
- The AO team may develop a preliminary results framework

and hold sessions with key counterparts to present the draft strategy and obtain feedback.

- Conduct a strategy workshop for AO teams to present out RFs and discuss strategic issues.

Although these options require some time and effort, the results framework will be more complete and representative.

#### **What process and approach will be used to develop the results frameworks?**

We strongly recommend that the AO team hold group sessions to construct the results framework. It is often helpful to have one person (preferably with experience in strategic planning and facilitation) to lead these sessions. This person should focus on drawing out the ideas of the group and translating them into the results framework.

### STEP 1. IDENTIFY THE ASSISTANCE OBJECTIVE

The *Assistance Objective* (AO) is the center point for any results framework and is defined as:

The most ambitious result (intended measurable change) that a USAID Mission/Office, along with its partners, can materially affect, and for which it is willing to be held accountable (ADS 201.3.8).

Defining an AO at an appropriate level of impact is one of the most critical and difficult tasks a team faces. The AO forms the

“It is critical to stress the importance of not rushing to finalize a results framework. It is necessary to take time for the process to mature and to be truly participative.”

—USAID staff member in Africa

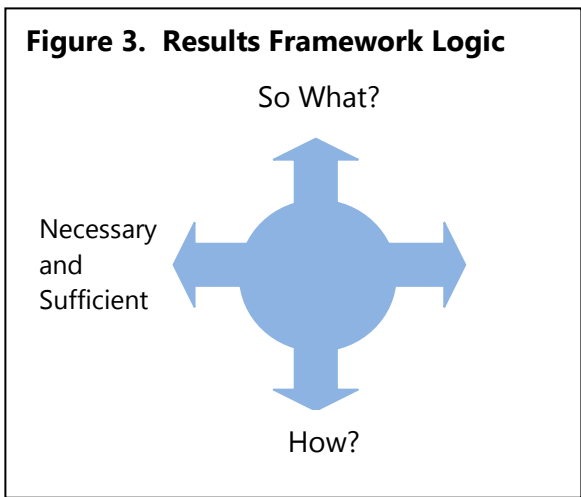
standard by which the Mission or Office is willing to be judged in terms of its performance. The concept of “managing for results” (a USAID value also reflected in the Paris Declaration) is premised on this idea.

The task can be challenging, because an AO should reflect a balance of two conflicting considerations—ambition and accountability. On the one hand, every team wants to deliver significant impact for a given investment. On the other hand, there are a number of factors outside the control of the team. In fact, as one moves up the Results Framework toward the AO, USAID is more dependent on other development partners to achieve the result.

Identifying an appropriate level of ambition for an AO depends on a number of factors and will be different for each country context. For example, in one country it may be appropriate for the AO to be “increased use of family planning methods” while in another, “decreased total fertility” (a higher level objective) would be more suitable. Where to set the objective is influenced by the following factors:



- Programming history. There are different expectations for more mature programs, where higher level impacts and greater sustainability are expected.
- The magnitude of the development problem.
- The timeframe for the strategy.



- The range of resources available or expected.

The AO should represent the team’s best assessment of what can realistically be achieved. In other words, the AO team should be able to make a plausible case that the appropriate analysis has been done and the likelihood of success is great enough to warrant investing resources in the AO.

**STEP 2. IDENTIFY INTERMEDIATE RESULTS**

After agreeing on the AO, the team must identify the set of “lower level” Intermediate Results necessary to achieve the AO. An *Intermediate Result* is defined as:

An important result that is seen as an essential step to achieving a final result or outcome. IRs are

measurable results that may capture a number of discrete and more specific results (ADS 201.3.8.4).

As the team moves down from the AO to IRs, it is useful to ask “how” can the AO be achieved? By answering this question, the team begins to formulate the IRs (see Figure 3). The team should assess relevant country and sector conditions and draw on development experience in other countries to better understand the changes that must occur if the AO is to be attained.

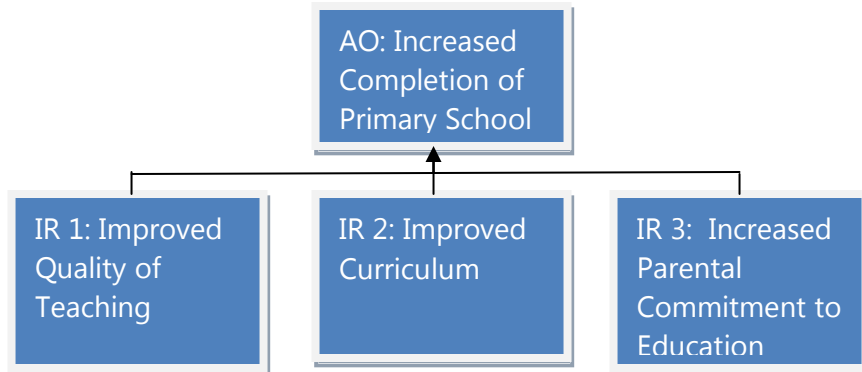
The Results Framework methodology is sufficiently flexible to allow the AO team to include Intermediate Results that are supported by other actors when they are relevant and critical to achieving the AO. For example, if another donor is

building schools that are essential for USAID to accomplish an education AO (e.g. increased primary school completion), then that should be reflected as an IR because it is a necessary ingredient for success.

Initially, the AO team might identify a large number of possible results relevant to the AO. However, it is important to eventually settle on the critical set of Intermediate Results. There is no set number for how many IRs (or levels of IRs) are appropriate. The number of Intermediate Results will vary with the scope and complexity of the AO. Eventually, the team should arrive at a final set of IRs that members believe are reasonable. It is customary for USAID Missions to submit a Results Framework with one or two levels of IRs to USAID/Washington for review. The key point is that there should be enough information to adequately convey the development hypothesis.

### So What is Causal Logic Anyway?

Causal logic is based on the concept of cause-and-effect. That is, the accomplishment of lower-level objectives “cause” the next higher-level objective (or the effect) to occur. In the following example, the hypothesis is that if IR 1, 2, and 3 occur, it will lead to the AO.



### STEP 3. CLARIFY THE RESULTS FRAMEWORK LOGIC

Through the process of identifying Intermediate Results, the team begins to construct the cause-and-effect logic that is central to the Results Framework. Once the team has identified the Intermediate Results that support an objective, it must review and confirm this logic.

The accomplishment of lower level results, taken as a group, should result in the achievement of the next higher objective. As the team moves up the Results Framework, they should ask, “so what?” If we accomplish these lower level objectives, is something of significance achieved at the next higher level?

The higher-order result establishes the “lens” through which lower-level results are viewed. For example, if one IR is “Increased Opportunities for Out-of-School Youth to Acquire Life Skills,” then, by definition, all lower level IRs would focus on

the target population established (out-of-school youth).

As the team looks across the Results Framework, it should ask whether the Intermediate Results are **necessary and sufficient** to achieve the AO.

Results Framework logic is not always linear. There may be relationships across results or even with other AOs. This can sometimes be demonstrated on the graphic (e.g., through the use of arrows or dotted boxes with some explanation) or simply in the narrative. In some cases, teams find a number of causal connections in an RF. However, teams have to find a balance between the two extremes- on the one hand, where logic is too simple and linear and, on the other, a situation where all objectives are related to all others.

### STEP 4. IDENTIFY CRITICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The next step is to identify the set of critical assumptions that are relevant to the achievement of

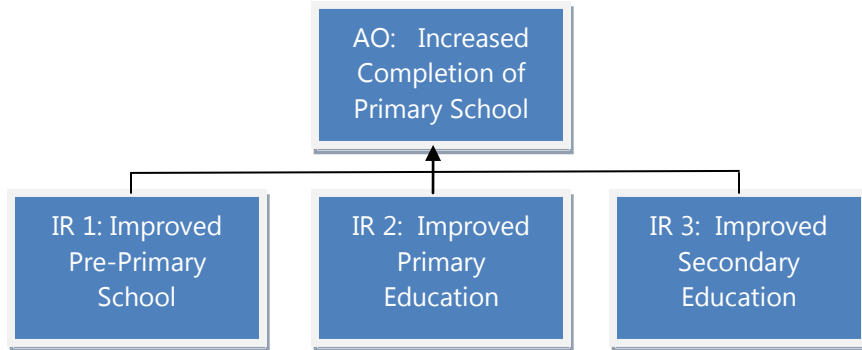
the AO. A *critical assumption* is defined as:

“...a general condition under which the development hypothesis will hold true. Critical assumptions are outside the control or influence of USAID and its partners (in other words, they are not results), but they reflect conditions that are likely to affect the achievement of results in the Results Framework. Critical assumptions may also be expressed as risks or vulnerabilities...” (ADS 201.3.8.3)

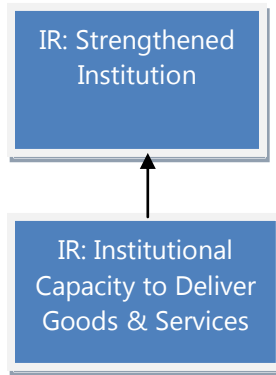
Identifying critical assumptions, assessing associated risks, and determining how they should be addressed is a part of the strategic planning process. Assessing risk is a matter of balancing the likelihood that the critical assumption will hold true with the ability of the team to address the issue. For example, consider the critical assumption “adequate rainfall.” If this assumption has held true for the

## What is NOT Causal Logic?

Categorical Logic. Lower level results are simply sub-categories rather than cause and effect, as demonstrated in the example below.



Definitional Logic. Lower-level results are a restatement (or further definition) of a higher-level objective. The use of definitional logic results in a problem later when identifying performance indicators because it is difficult to differentiate indicators at each level.



target region only two of the past six years, the risk associated with this assumption is so great that it poses a risk to the strategy.

In cases like this, the AO team should attempt to identify ways to actively address the problem. For example, the team might include efforts to improve water storage or irrigation methods, or increase use of drought-resistant seeds or farming techniques. This would then become an IR (a specific objective to be accomplished by the program) rather than a critical assumption. Another option for the team is to develop contingency plans for

the years when a drought may occur.

### STEP 5. COMPLETE THE RESULTS FRAMEWORK

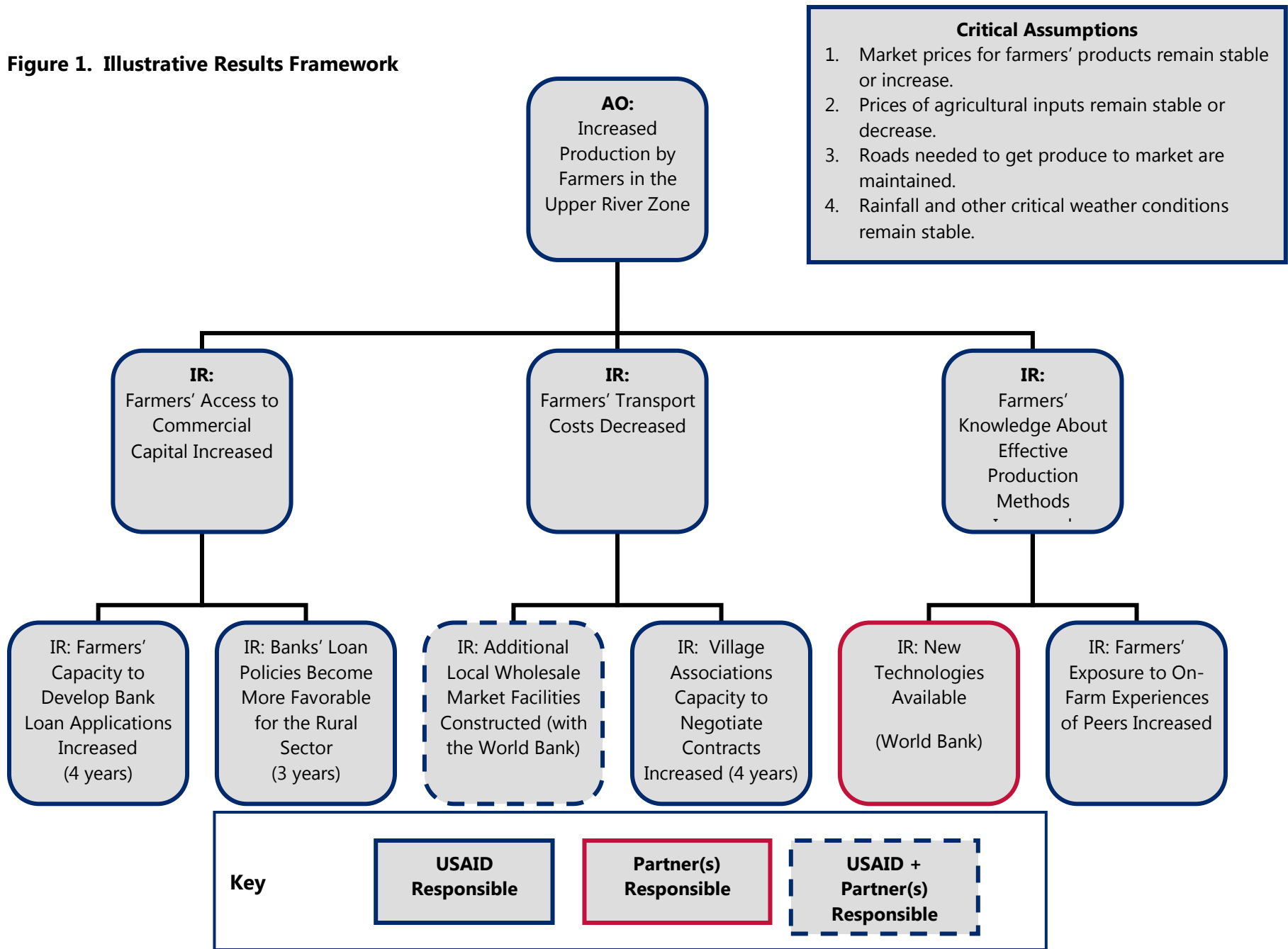
As a final step, the AO team should step back from the Results Framework and review it as a whole. The RF should be straightforward and understandable. Check that the results contained in the RF are measurable and feasible with anticipated USAID and partner resource levels. This is also a good point at which to identify synergies between objectives and across AOs.

### STEP 6. IDENTIFY PRELIMINARY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

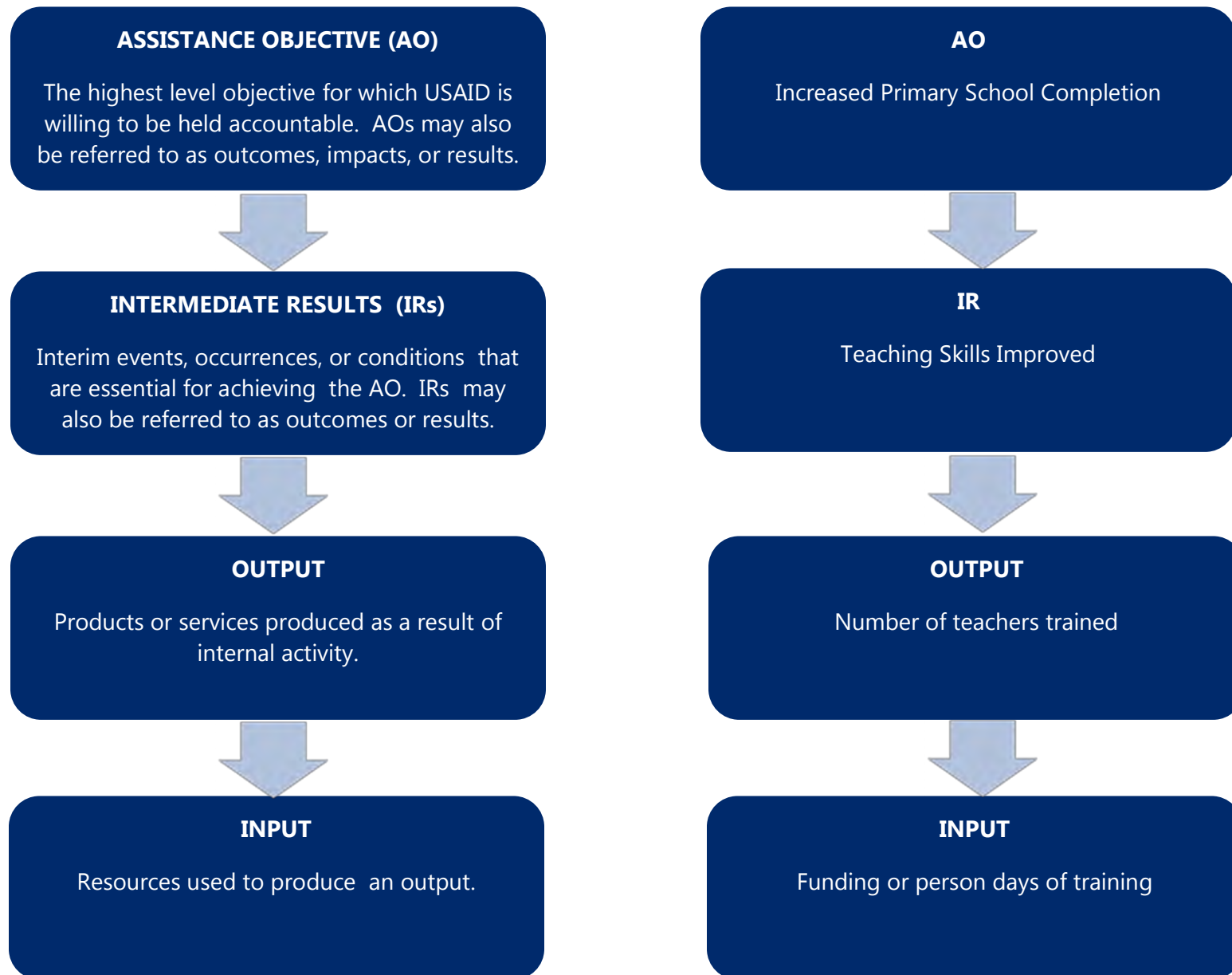
Agency policies (ADS 201.3.8.6) require that the AO team present proposed indicators for the AO with baseline data and targets. The AO, along with indicators and targets, represents the specific results that will be achieved vis-a-vis the investment. To the extent possible, indicators for IRs with baseline and targets should be included as well.



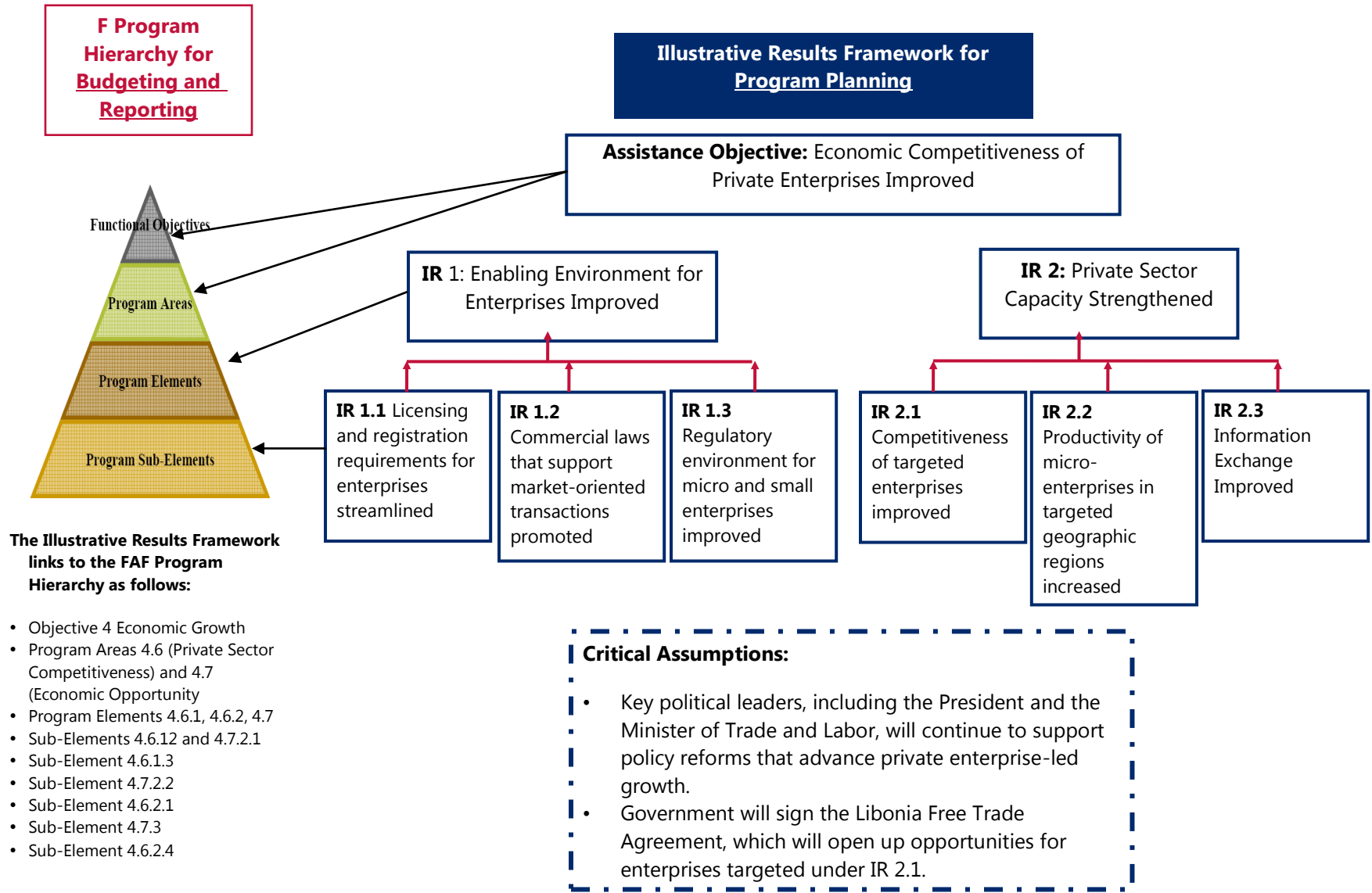
**Figure 1. Illustrative Results Framework**



**Figure 3. The Fundamental Building Blocks for Planning**



**Figure 4. Sample Results Framework and Crosswalk of FAF Program Hierarchy and a Results Framework**



Note: The arrows demonstrate the linkage of AO1, IR 1, and IR 1.1 to the FAF. As an example, IR1 links to the program element 4.6.1 "Business Enabling Environment". IR 1.1 links to 4.7.2.1 "Reduce Barriers to Registering Micro and Small Business".

**For more information:**

TIPS publications are available online at [insert website].

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