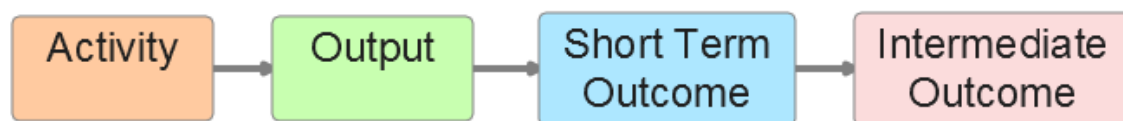# HOW TO MAKE RESULTS CHAINS[1]
Version edited 6/11/12
All hyperlinks to other TMEA documents have been disabled

Results chains are the core of the TMEA monitoring framework. They are visual tools that show what we are doing, and why we are doing it. They are compulsory for all new projects, and it is expected that existing projects should retrospectively complete one. This guide explains the importance of results chains, and demonstrates how to make one. It complements the main TMEA monitoring guidelines, which you can download here. Throughout this document, press control and click on blue links to download other TMEA or external guidelines.

Results chains begin with the **activities** of the project; this is anything that TMEA does, whether recruiting consultants, organizing meetings. Next, it shows how these lead to **outputs**. Outputs are the results of these activities, such as policies, plans, workshops, conferences, etc. Finally, it shows how these lead to **outcomes**. The outcome is the positive or negative change that occurs as a result of the outputs; for example, a reduction in time to trade across borders in East Africa. Outcomes can be further divided into **short term outcomes** and **intermediate outcomes.** Short term outcomes are readily observable throughout the lifetime of the project, while intermediate outcomes are observable only after some time, perhaps never during the project lifespan. At its simplest, the results chain looks like this:
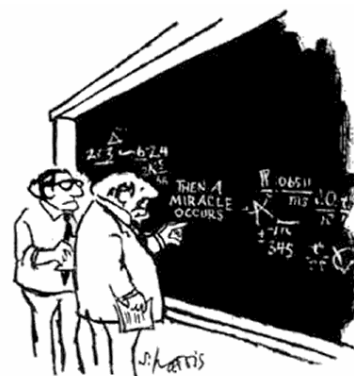

In real life results chains will have multiple activities, outputs and outcomes, with sometimes complex links between them.

1) Why use results chains?

A results chain is the illustration of the project level theory of change, and can bring two main benefits.

Firstly, **they ensure clarity and logic in your project**. The activities show exactly what you are doing, and when you are doing it. The outputs demonstrate what you expect to happen as a direct result of your actions. Finally, the outcomes make it clear what positive change you hope will happen. By identifying the links between them, you also show the assumptions that underlie the project. Importantly, this allows the logic and assumptions to be

"I THINK YOU SHOULD BE MORE EXPLICIT HERE IN STEP TWO."

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[1] This guide includes material from The DCED Guide to Results Chains ⸱ it.

questioned. Are you sure that your activities will lead to the outputs and outcomes? What could prevent this? Results chains can also show the context of the programme, external factors in the social/physical environment that might influence outcomes. This helps to understand the complexity of the programme.

This is useful for communication both internally and externally. Internally, it helps directors, staff and partners have a common strategy, and are working towards the same goal. It is not uncommon to find that members of a team have different understandings of what will change as a result of the activities and outputs, assumptions and risks; the results chain enables these to be clarified and discussed. The results chain is also a useful communications tool to external stakeholders; it serves as a simple diagrammatic representation of your project.

It also serves as the basis for **monitoring and evaluating your project**. It is impossible to monitor if it is not clear what the project is doing, and why. As the great American baseball player Yogi Berra said, "If you don't know where you're going, how are you gonna' know when you get there?" The results chain acts as a roadmap for your project, showing where it is going and so enabling you to measure whether you are getting there.

Monitoring and evaluation plans start with the results chain, examining each link to see if it can be monitored, and how. This serves as the basis for evaluation, which will return to the results chain to see if the logic really held, and the desired results were achieved. See the monitoring plan how-to guide for more details. (Click here to download it).

2) Getting started: How to draw results chains

This section describes nine key steps to make a results chain.

You may wish to run through the below steps twice, especially if you have not worked on the explicit logic of your programme before. The first time will be a brainstorming session, putting ideas down on paper and ensuring a shared understanding. The second session focuses on the details, ensuring that the final results chain is clear and consistent.

Tip for Projects:
Results chains include activities, outputs, and outcomes. This is a useful way to think about in which order you expect changes to occur. However, allow flexibility in how these are defined. Basing your results chain on project realities is more important than semantics.

Before you start, consider who to involve. Results chains are best developed with multiple stakeholders as different people have different understandings or perspectives on how change occurs. Typically, it is important to involve TMEA staff, partners, and potentially key stakeholders from the institutions that we are trying to assist. But think carefully about who to involve – more is not always better.

1) **Understand the intervention and the context**. You need to understand:
- What is the problem that this intervention is trying to address?
- Who does this problem affect, and why?
- What is working already, and how can we build on/support it?
- Who are the different actors present in the sector?
- Why are they not solving the problem? What gap exists?
- What are their incentives?
- Why would the solution work?
- How feasible are the programme activities?

2) **Write down the main project activities** and dates they will occur, with each in a different box. Use arrows to show the relationship between them. Typically, this means asking:

- Does one activity lead to another? Or will they be undertaken at the same time?
- Do they all target the same service providers? Or do they target different service providers?
- Do they all aim to produce one specific change in service providers' capacities? Or are they aimed at different changes?

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Facilitation Techniques

One way to encourage participation in results chain design is to brainstorm activities, outputs and outcomes, and write each on a separate piece of paper. Stick them on the wall with blu-tack, and ask group members to move them into the correct order.
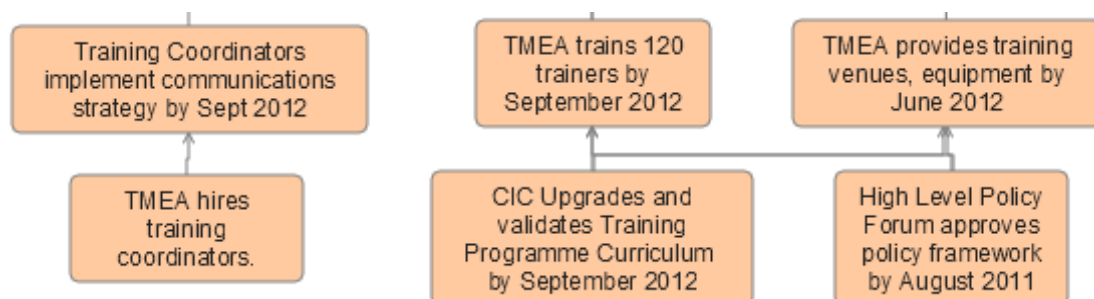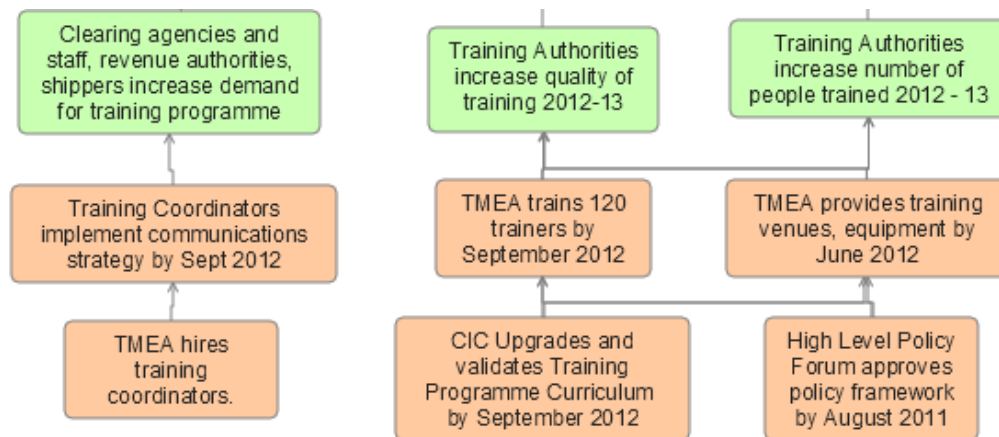
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These questions clarify the logical sequencing for activities: what happens when; whether to group two or more activities under one output; and how to show the link between different activities.

The results chain does *not* need to show every activity and sub-activity. The art is in making sure that you list what is needed (key activities) for change to take place. For example, a key activity may be 'Recruit Consultant to conduct feasibility study'. You do not need to include sub-activities such as drafting terms of reference, advertising, etc. This would make the results chain too complicated and large.

For example, one TMEA project is supporting a training session for freight forwarders. After discussing with partners, they came up with the following activities:
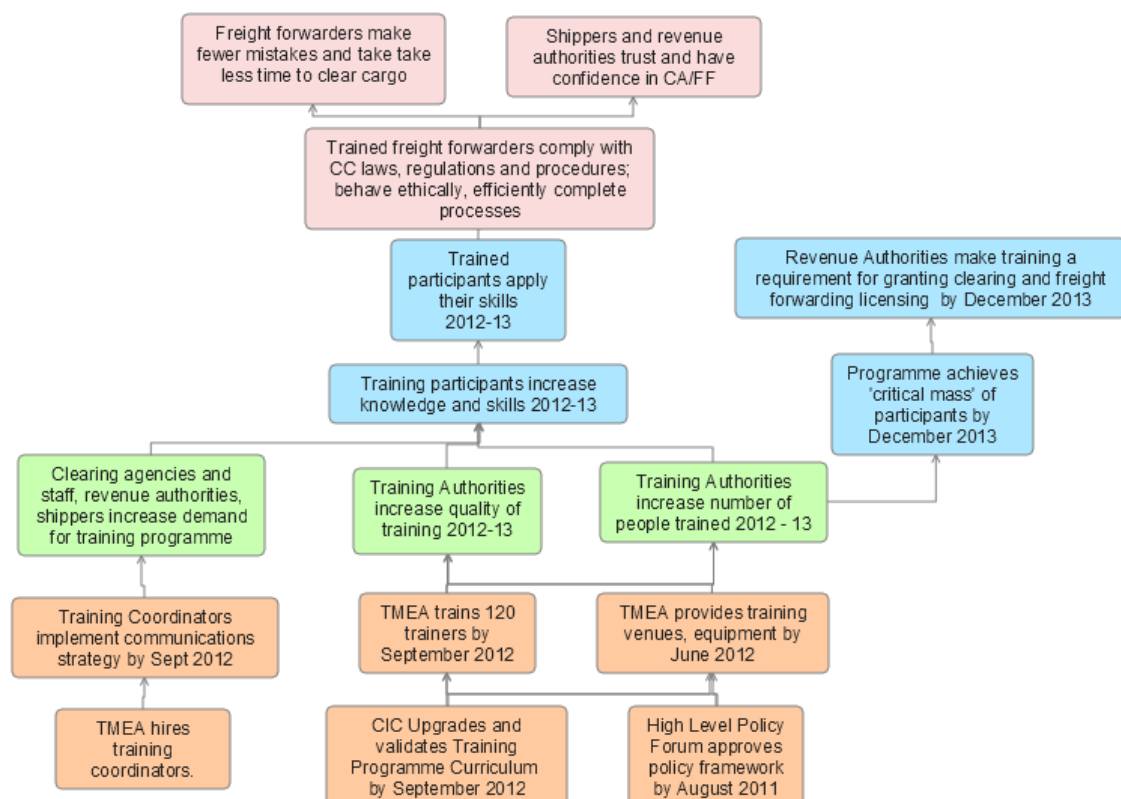

3) **Add the outputs of your project**.

Describe the main changes expected to result from project activities. These changes may be to institutions, traders, the private sector, etc. Add a different box for each major type of change. At this point, be sure to be **explicit** about the change you expect to see. The outputs are a crucial stage in your results chain; they describe how your activities will lead to your outcomes. As with activities, try to group these logically, and show the connections between them. Does one output lead to another? Can you group several outputs together? For example, the Freight Forwarders Training team developed the following, with activities in green and outputs in blue:
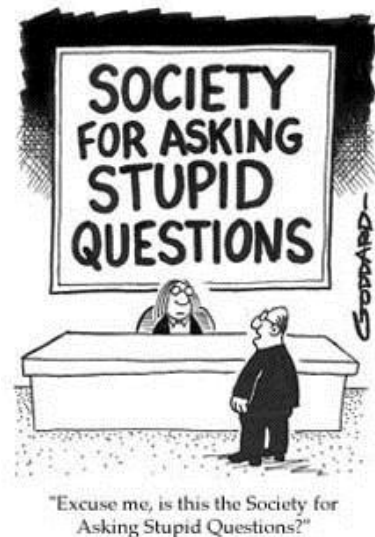
4) **Describe the short term outcomes.** These are the short term (within the life of the project) changes that will result from the outputs. These may be changes in individuals' knowledge, awareness, attitudes, skills, aspirations and motivations. As with activities and outputs, you may find a hierarchy of outcomes, with connections between them.

5) **Describe the intermediate outcomes.** These are the reasons why you are doing your project – the change you wish to see. They may not be attainable or measureable until after the project has finished. They will frequently relate to the TMEA outcomes. This completes the results chain, as shown in the example from Freight Forwarder training below:

6) **Check the logic and consistency of the results chain.** Go back through each link, and ask the following questions:
- Clarity: Are the statements clear and unambiguous?

- Logic: Are the links between each statement logical and reasonable?
- Necessary and sufficient: Are actions at one level sufficient to support results on the next level? Will the achievement of a level help support the attainment of the level above it?
- Gap analysis: Are there missing levels/outcomes? Should other positive actions and/or statements be added? Is the detail adequate?
- Simplicity: Is the overall structure a simple, robust, clear version of reality? If it is too complicated, it might be less useful for providing direction to subsequent steps.

7) Check the format of the results chain.

- **Use TMEA's colour coding.** Orange designates activities, green outputs, blue short term outcomes, and pink intermediate outcomes. Grey represents inputs from other partners. This makes it easier to understand and compare different results chains.
- **Use TMEA's format for results chain text.** Clearly written outcome statements consist of four parts. This includes who, what changes, in what, and by when. See the below table for examples:

Who (e.g. the individual, organisation, the target group)	What change	In what (e.g. financial management processes, border processing, decision-making)	By when
MEACA Policy and Planning Division	Improves	The quality and timeliness of monitoring and reporting of regional integration	By end of 2015
Customs officers at the border	Increases	The timeliness and accuracy of processing goods and people at Malaba	By end of 2014
Targeted 'influential individuals'	Increase	The public promotion of the benefits of regional integration to the public and key agencies	By June 2012

Outputs and activities should follow a similar pattern, although instead of specifying the change, you just need to specify the verb. Activities should start with 'TMEA…' (or one of our close partners)

Who	Does what	In what	By when
TMEA	Conducts	Feasibility study into improvements in logistics chains	By end of 2015
The East African Community	Develops	A training programme for administrative staff	By end of 2014
Freight Forwarders	Attend	Training classes	By June 2012

8) **Other things to consider:**
- **Sustainability:** How will you ensure sustainability? Do you need any other activities for this, or should you add outputs or outcomes to reflect this goal?
- **Systematic Change:** Consider how your project will lead to wider market changes. For example, if you are running a training programme, do you expect knowledge to be passed from the trainees to other members in the organisation? If you are launching a new innovation, do you expect this to be adopted by others in the sector? How does this contribute to your goal, and what activities can you do to facilitate it?
- **Other Actors:** Which other partners are contributing to your project? For example, your intervention may be based on a feasibility study produced by another agency. If so, consider including their contribution in your results chain.
- **Assumptions:** What assumptions are you making in your project? Can you add them to the results chain, or find ways round them?

> ### There are many ways to skin a cat (English proverb)
>
> This guide suggests beginning with the activities, and then working up towards the outcome. Some find it more useful to begin by listing the change that the intervention is trying to trigger, and then working down through the outputs to the activities. This may be particularly useful in the design phase, when the activities are still being decided. Ultimately, there is no right way to design a results chain – experiment with both and see which suits your project.

9) Regularly review your results chain

TMEA is a fast-moving organisation, where projects change and grow very quickly. Objectives and outcomes may change, strategies adapt, and the context can shift around you. In these situations, the results chain and monitoring plan you developed may eventually become out of date, not reflecting your actual project.

Consequently, it is vital to revisit your results chain annually, or more frequently if there has been a significant change in the project or context. With the same group of people who originally developed it, look again at the actions, outputs and outcomes. Consider the following questions:

- Are you still trying to achieve the same things you were before?
- Have you changed your strategy to achieve this?
- Have you observed the change you were hoping for at this stage?
- If not, does the logic of your programme need adjustment?
- Did all of your assumptions hold true?

10) Send your results chain to the Knowledge and Results Team

All finalized results chains should be sent to the Knowledge and Results Team (contacts below) for their records. This strengthens oversight over the process, and ensures that we can tell a coherent story about TMEA's activities, and how the different results chains work together. Include the date of completion on the results chain, and send a new version whenever it is revised.

3) Using DoView

DoView is a visual mapping software which allows you to easily draw and update results chains. It is simple to learn, will save you time when developing results chains, and has a number of more sophisticated features to help you demonstrate the complexity of your projects. TMEA requires the use of DoView for results chains. Download a free trial (one month) here, and speak to the Knowledge and Results team in order to receive the full version. Help and support on DoView itself is available here.

Other TMEA resources include:

- TMEA MEL Guidelines
- How to Design a Results Chain
- How to Plan a Baseline
- How to Write Indicators
- How to Develop a Monitoring Plan

There are a number of useful guidelines available on results chains and theories of change. Note that they may use slightly different terminology and recommend different ways of working, but are still applicable to TMEA. They include:

- The DCED guide to results chains.
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide
- Logic Model Workbook, from the Innovation Network.
- A Practical Guide to Theory Development, from the Aspen Network