



Learning-based Management at International IDEA

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Learning-based management at International IDEA

Introduction

International IDEA's system for learning-based management (LBM) is informed by the latest thinking and understanding of complex social and democratic change and is inspired by theory of change¹ and outcome mapping² methodologies. It is focused on mapping out or 'filling in' what is often described as the 'missing middle' between what a project does and how these activities contribute to desired societal goals. It does so by paying special attention to *outcomes*, defined as the changes in behaviours, relationships and practices by the institutions and actors that International IDEA interact with. These 'target groups' are referred to as *boundary partners* in the results framework. As democratic change is always driven by people International IDEA has identified 13 categories of boundary partners that the Institute interact with. For each of these a standardized outcome objective has been formulated. The outcome objectives are linked to a set of impact objectives and impact indicators, which relate to four SDG targets: 5.5, 16.3, 16.6 and 16.7.³

Background

In a recent study by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD the way in which donors implement results-based management (RBM) has undermined its potential and lead to negative, unintended effects. According to the study donors tend to: (a) prioritize what can be measured easily; (b) pursue the purpose of accountability at the expense of learning and policy direction; and (c) become overly bureaucratic and rigid, thereby increasing transactions costs and hampering innovation. Some of these challenges derive from a rigid application of the Logical Framework Approach (LFA).⁴ These challenges include:

- A causality and accountability challenge: The assumption that development processes are linear with clear causal relationships between project activities and societal changes. One of the side-effects of overstating the causal relationships between activities and societal change is that accountability claims on projects are misplaced.
- A validity and measurability challenge: LFA favour quantitative indicators. The problem is that it is difficult or impossible to quantify many development processes, in particular processes that are tied to changes of behaviours, relationships and

practices in societies. A consequence of this is that quantitative indicators in logframes often lack validity (i.e. they are not properly measuring what they intend to measure). This problem is often referred to as the ‘missing middle’ or ‘black box’ in LFA.

International IDEA’s system for learning-based management (LBM) is developed as a response to these challenges and is underpinned by the assumption that democratic change processes in societies always require changes of behaviours, relationships and practices by the people who make up these societies. Moreover, as people are interconnected and depend on each other the behavioural changes in one societal group will inevitably affect other groups. This web of reactions and counter-reactions are shaped by culture, context, political interests and personal motivations, which illustrates that change processes in societies are complex and unpredictable rather than straight-forward and linear.

This calls for people-centered development projects where problems are debated, defined and refined in ongoing societal processes. Such an approach to development processes requires a learning-based approach to results assessment and results management, where the focus lies on tracking and analyzing the web of changes in behaviours, relationships and practices that evolve during a project. The purpose of these analytic processes is to use insights and learnings to continuously inform project implementation through rapid cycles of planning, action, reflection and revision.

A learning-based approach of this nature is quite different from some practices in development cooperation where results management is accountability focused, with an emphasis on measuring whether activities are implemented in accordance with plans and whether preset milestones and targets are achieved. In contrast, learning-based management is an ongoing process where plans are regularly adapted based on lessons that have been learned through monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

International IDEA’s results framework

International IDEA’s results framework is the conceptual foundation for the LBM system. The framework identifies three levels of results management:

1. The first level relates to *performance*—that is, the products and services (or *outputs*) that International IDEA deliver.
2. The second level relates to *outcomes*. Outcomes are defined as the changes in behaviours, relationships and practices by the institutions and actors that International IDEA interact with. These ‘target groups’ are referred to as *boundary partners* in the results framework. The boundary partner concept comes from the Outcome Mapping methodology and is crucial in the framework.
3. The third level relates to changes in *democratic practices* to which International IDEA contributes.⁵

To assess and report on performance International IDEA has grouped activities into eight output categories and developed a set of 15 standardized output indicators, which measures the quantity of products and services delivered and how many men and women have been reached by our activities across projects.⁶ Output indicators are important from an accountability perspective, but to assess whether the activities yield results one need to know whether boundary partners are adopting desired behaviors, relationships and practices. To facilitate this process International IDEA has identified 13 categories of boundary partners—including for example electoral management bodies, constitution makers, parliaments,

political parties and public interest groups—that the institute interact with. For each of these a standardized outcome objective has been formulated.⁷ The outcome objectives describe how behaviours, relationships and practices of a boundary partner will change if a project achieves its full potential as a facilitator of change.

To contextualize outcome objectives and clarify the progressive levels of change necessary, the outcome objectives need to be specified in progress markers. Progress markers serve both as ‘indicators’ and ‘targets’, but they do not need to be quantitative. On the contrary, the best way to formulate a progress marker is often as a short description of a desired behavior, relationship or practice. They identify, in concrete terms, practices, behaviours and interrelationships that will emerge during and continue beyond the life and influence of a project. Progress markers cannot be standardized as all projects aim to solve problems that vary depending on context. Hence, the starting point for developing progress markers is to identify the main problems or obstacles for change for the boundary partner. This problem analysis will result in a baseline description of the current behaviours, relationships and practices by the targeted boundary partner.

To clarify what a project aims to contribute to at an over-arching level the overall goal shall be complemented by an *impact objective*. For International IDEA impact objectives are high-level changes within the Institute’s three impact areas: electoral processes, constitution-building processes and political participation and representation. International IDEA has pre-defined impact objectives and impact indicators, as listed in Annex 4. The impact indicators consist of a mix of attributes, subattributes and indicators from International IDEA’s Global State of Democracy indices.⁸ The indices are used for establishing baselines and measure progress for impact objectives, as they are updated annually.

Finally, a project is linked to an SDG target, which serves as the overall goal for a project. The most relevant SDG targets for International IDEA are SDG 5.5 (Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life); SDG 16.3 (Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels); SDG 16.6 (Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels); SDG 16.7 (Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels).

To use SDG targets as overall goals for projects aligns them to the international development agenda and demonstrates why a project is relevant from a development perspective. However, sometimes it may be more relevant to align with national development goals and formulate the overall goal as it is stated by a country in its development plan or by a donor in its strategy for the country in question.

Importantly, solutions to societal problems depend on so many factors that societal development cannot be *attributed* to the interventions by International IDEA. In other words, the ultimate achievement of the overall goal lies beyond our various projects’ capabilities or sphere of direct influence. None the less SDG indicators, country indicators and various qualitative analyses help us see if societies are making progress towards overall goals or not. Such information is important to better understand development mechanisms in a context and for clarifying the role of a project in that context.

Annex 1. International IDEA’s theory of change



Annex 2. Output categories and output indicators

#	Output category	Output indicators
01	Publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of released publications Number of copies distributed Number of downloads from International IDEA's websites
02	Communication products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of released communication products Number of visits to individual web pages
03	Digital tools and platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of visits via International IDEA's websites Number of countries where visitors come from
04	Databases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of visits via International IDEA's websites Number of external media mentions
05	Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of events convened Number of participants disaggregated by gender
06	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of trainings held Number of participants disaggregated by gender
07	Advisory services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of boundary partners that receive advice from International IDEA
08	Capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of projects with restricted funding

Annex 3. Boundary partners and outcome objectives

Boundary partners in the electoral processes programme	Outcome objective
Electoral assistance practitioners	Electoral assistance practitioners provide support, informed by norms, good practices and research in electoral processes. They contextualize norms, practices and research to local conditions.
Policymakers	Policymakers support practices which foster inclusivity and accountability in electoral processes. They recognize and consider risks in electoral processes.
Electoral management bodies	Electoral management bodies recognize and respond to complexities and risks in the electoral processes and effectively implement the Electoral Cycle Approach. They embody principles of impartiality, integrity, transparency, efficiency, professionalism and service-mindedness.
Civil society	Civil society engage and collaborate in national and international discourse on electoral reforms in an informed and effective way. They demand accountability from policymakers and electoral management bodies and identify and advocate for the removal of obstacles to accountability to promote public participation.

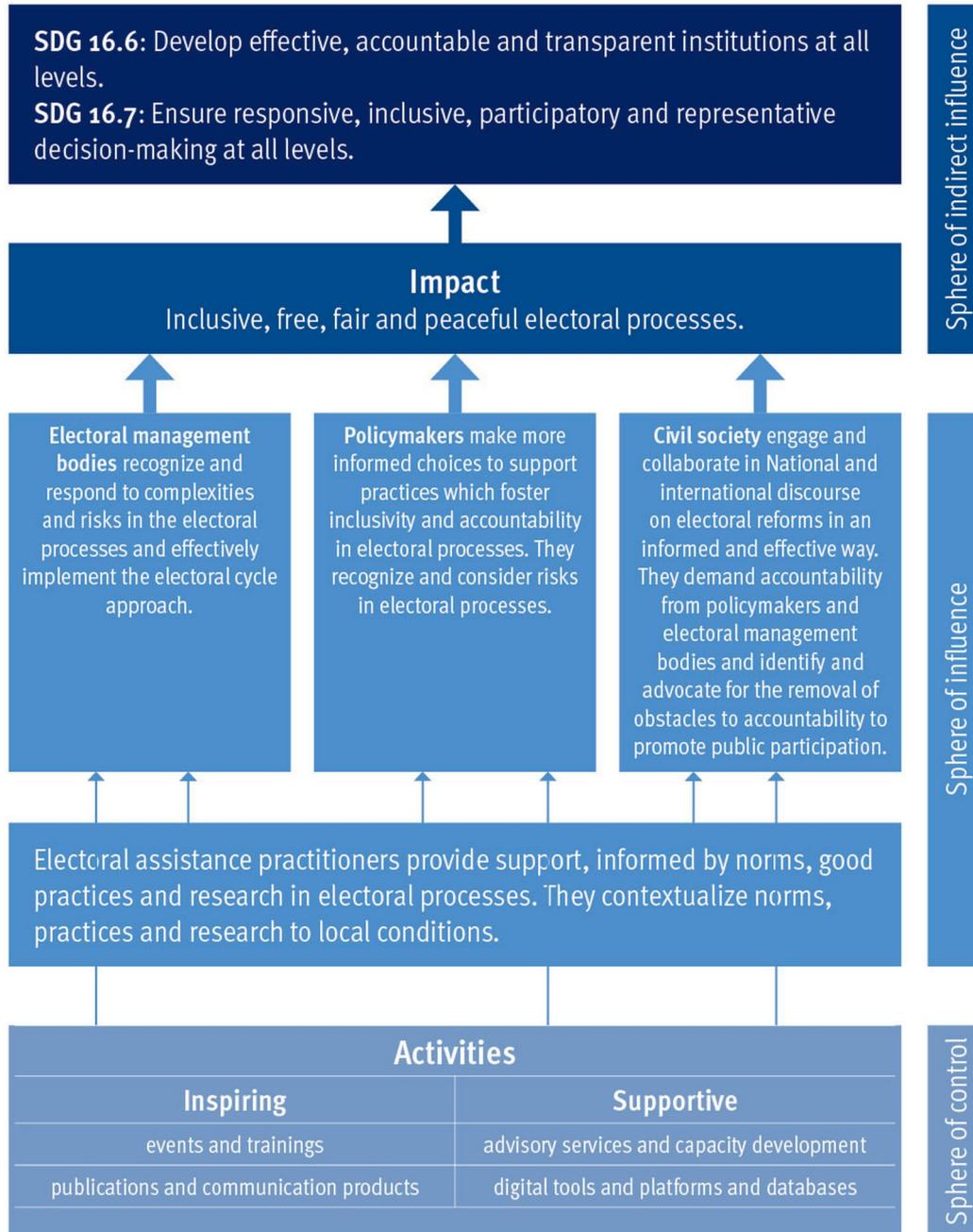
Boundary partners in the constitution-building processes programme	Outcome objective
Advisors to constitution makers	Advisors to constitution makers utilize International IDEA's knowledge and networks to give high-quality advice to constitution makers, civil society, and constitution implementers. They expand coordination and collaboration in a coherent and communicative community of practice to advance good practices in constitution-building processes.
Constitution makers	Constitution makers apply increased knowledge and skills to make more informed choices regarding constitutional design and process.
Civil society	Civil society hold constitution makers accountable, inform the public on constitution-building processes, and promote public participation in the process.
Constitutional implementers	Constitutional implementers interpret and operationalize constitutional provisions following ratification in a manner that respects fundamental democratic principles and human rights. They promote respect for rule of law and constitutionalism under agreed constitutional frameworks.

Boundary partners in the political participation and representation programme	Outcome objective
Political parties and movements	Political parties and movements exercise their functions (mobilizing citizens, aggregating their interests into political programmes, recruiting political leaders to contest elections, and organizing governments and parliaments) so that they contribute to a party system that is inclusive, responsive and accountable to all citizens.
Public interest groups	Public interest groups engage with representative institutions in a democratic and effective way to improve public policy and practice, and to hold political decision makers to account.
Oversight agencies	Oversight agencies monitor, prevent and mitigate threats to democracy, and threats posed by both illegal and illicit money in politics.
National and subnational parliaments	National and subnational parliaments exercise their legislative, oversight and representation functions and institutional systems to become transparent, inclusive, responsive and accountable to all citizens.
National and subnational governments	National and subnational governments exercise practices and decision-making processes to become more transparent, inclusive, responsive and accountable to all citizens.

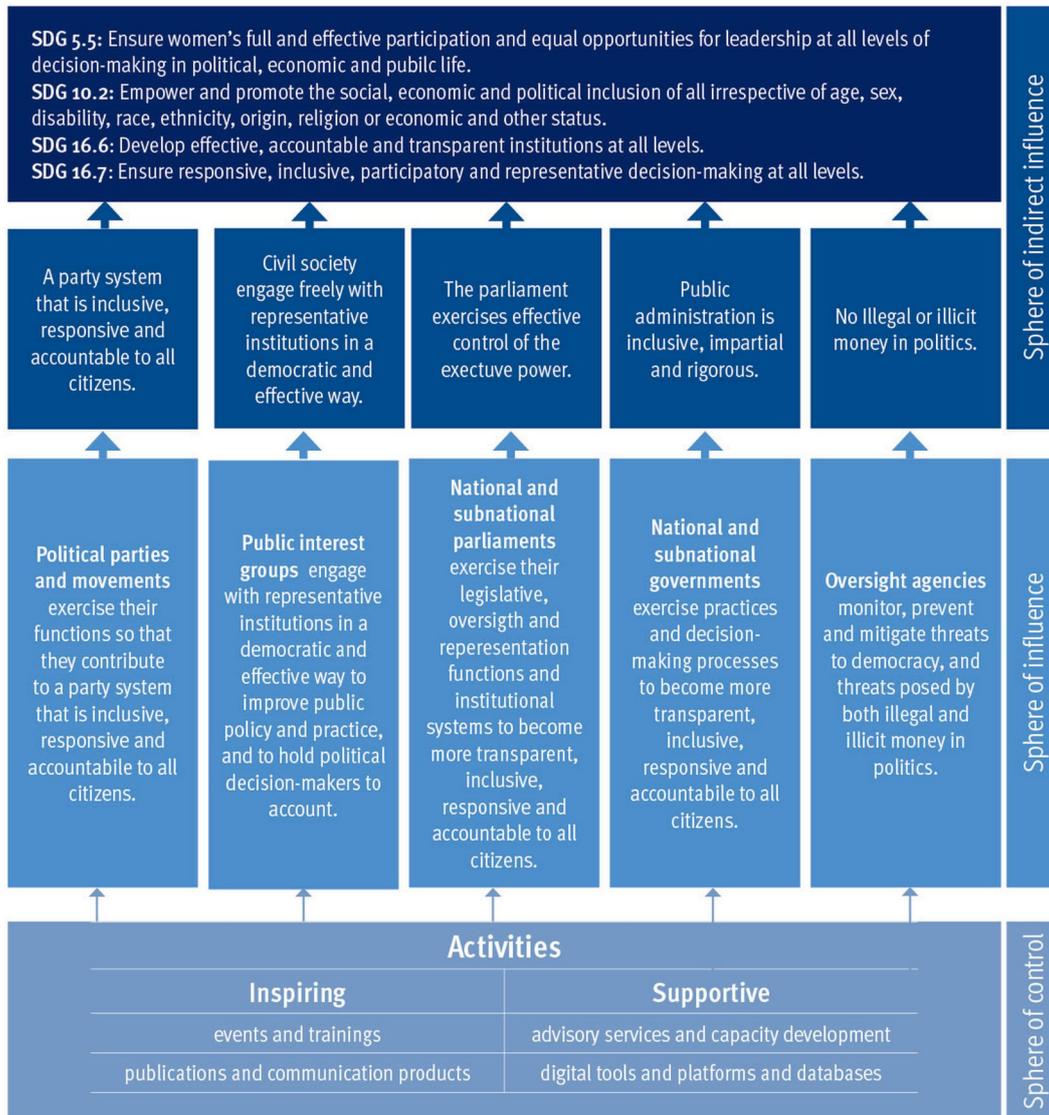
Annex 4. Impact objectives and impact indicators

Impact objective	Impact indicators
Electoral processes	
Credible and well-run electoral processes.	1.1 Clean Elections
	1.2 Inclusive Suffrage
	3.1.30 Election and other electoral violence
Constitution-building processes	
An inclusive constitution building process informed by international knowledge and experiences on constitutional design and process.	There are no suitable impact indicators for constitution building <i>processes</i> . Progress needs to be tracked with qualitative methods.
The constitution is implemented under agreed constitutional frameworks and contributes to reduced tensions and conflicts.	2.2.23 Internal conflict
	2.3.6 Religious tensions
	2.3.7 Ethnic tensions
	4.2 Predictable enforcement
Political participation and representation	
Public administration is inclusive, impartial and rigorous.	3.8.7 Rigorous and impartial public administration
	4.2 Predictable enforcement
Civil society engage freely with representative institutions in a democratic and effective way.	2.2.10 Freedom of Association and Assembly
	3.6.6 Engaged society
	3.10.3 CSO repression
	5.1 Civil Society Participation
The parliament exercises effective control of the executive power and represents the interests of all citizens.	3.1 Effective Parliament
	1. Representative government
Political parties and movements contribute to a party system that is inclusive, responsive and accountable to all citizens.	There are no suitable impact indicators for this impact objective. Progress needs to be tracked with qualitative methods.
Oversight agencies monitor, prevent and mitigate threats posed by both illegal and illicit money in politics.	3.1.3 Disclosure of campaign donations
	3.1.4 Public campaign financing

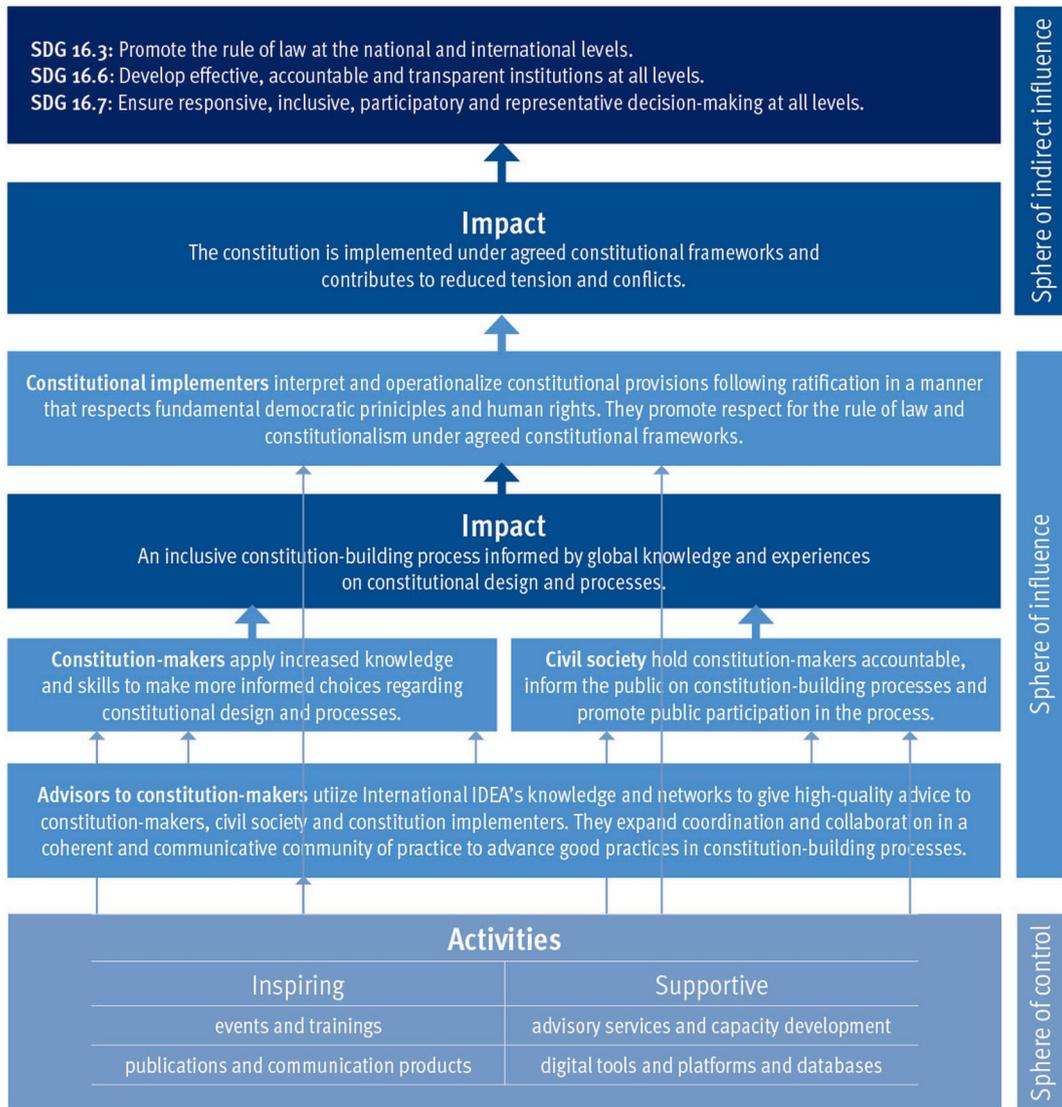
Annex 5. Theory of change for electoral processes



Annex 6. Theory of change for political participation and representation



Annex 7. Theory of change for constitution-building processes



The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with the mandate to promote and advance democracy worldwide.



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