



Resource Toolkit for Common Project Design & Implementation Challenges

Based on a synthesis review of
OTLA project evaluations

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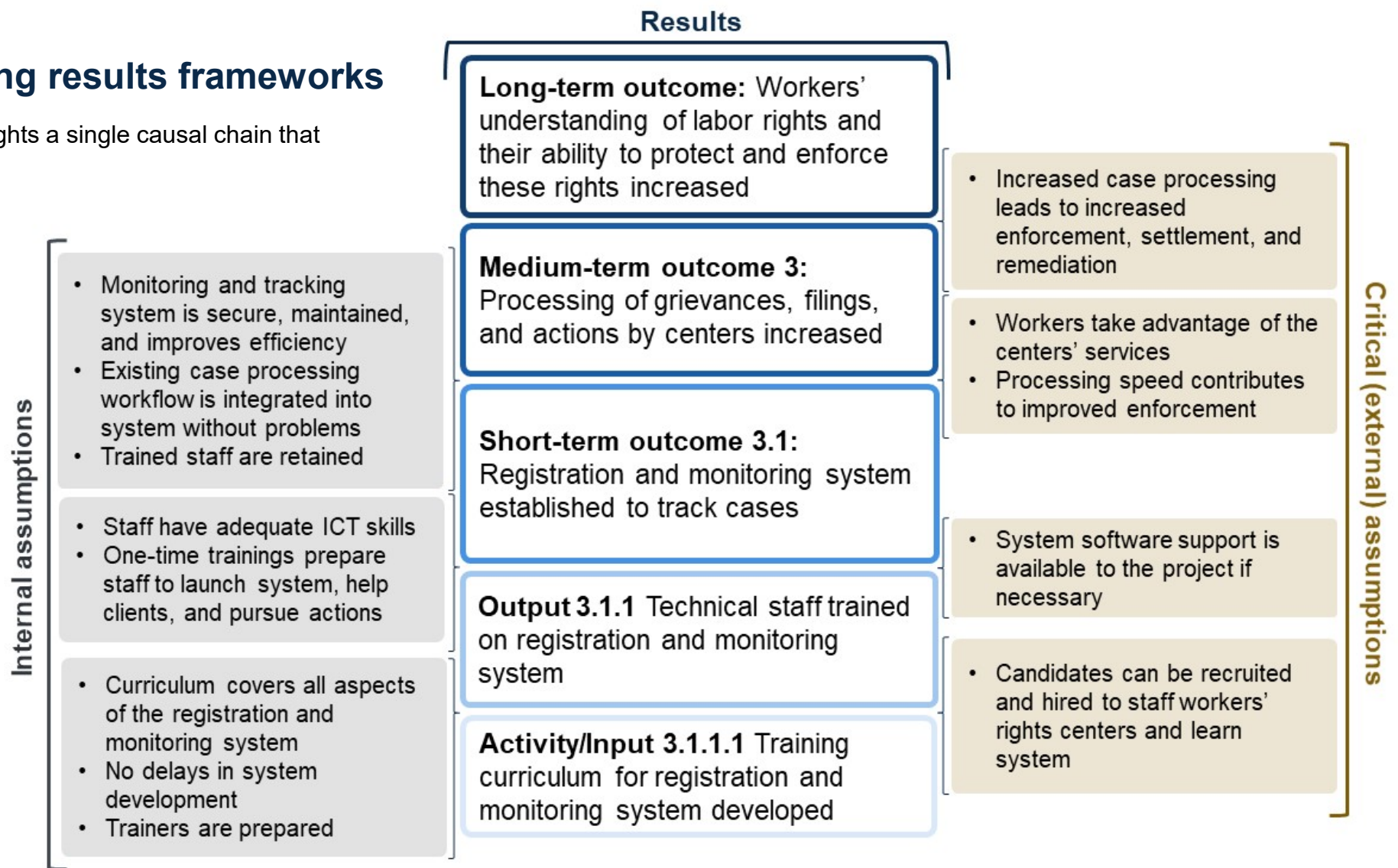
This information is based on a report prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Trade and Labor Affairs by Mathematica, under contract number GS-10F-0050L. The report is a collection of learnings from contracted, independent performance evaluations of USDOL-funded projects. The views expressed are those of the synthesis reviewers and do not represent the official position or policy of USDOL.



Best practices for developing results frameworks

This example results framework (RF) highlights a single causal chain that shows best practices, such as:

- Changes in lower level contribute to changes in higher-level results through strong causal linkages. These **causal linkages must be explicit and justified using concrete evidence when possible.**
- Each linkage depends on **assumptions, which should be made explicit and assessed** for the level of threat they pose to the framework if the assumption is false.
- Results at the same level (such as outputs) must be **“individually necessary and jointly sufficient** to achieve the level above them” (USAID 2018).



This simplified causal chain is only one of many that would form a results framework. Other activities would feed into output 3.1.1, other outputs would feed into short-term outcome 3.1, and so forth. The long-term outcome and contributing results are derived from the RF of the Workers' Rights Centers project in Colombia. Sources: [Interim Performance Evaluation of WRC](#), IMPAQ, 2019; [Technical Note: Developing Results Frameworks](#), USAID, 2018; and personal correspondence with ILAB, 2020.

Guidance on indicators-USAID best practices

Indicators help implementers and donors track progress toward desired inputs, outputs, and short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. Indicator targets should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART), and the indicators themselves should be set according to best practices, such as those established by USAID (2018) and presented below.



Direct: the indicator *“clearly measures the intended result.”*

Objective: the indicator *“is unambiguous about 1) what is being measured and 2) what data are being collected.”*

Useful for management: the indicator *“provides a meaningful measure of change over time for management decision-making.”*

Attributable: the indicator *“can be plausibly associated with [the] interventions.”*

Practical: the indicator *“data can be collected on a timely basis and at a reasonable cost.”*



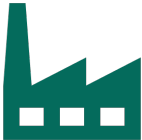
Adequate: the indicator or set of indicators is *“sufficient to measure the stated result.”*

Disaggregated, as necessary: indicator data are broken down by age, gender, location, or other critical aspects to aid in decision-making.

Source: USAID Performance Monitoring Indicators, <https://www.usaid.gov/project-starter/program-cycle/cdcs/performance-monitoring-indicators>

Exemplary indicators

These example indicators (derived from PMPs reviewed for the synthesis) meet the USAID criteria and may provide a useful basis for OTLA to draft a list of required indicators. Medium- and long-term sustainability indicators are provided in the next graphic.

Worker	Indicator
	Input/Activity: Number of fire and building safety trainings conducted in newly-organized workplaces in the last 6 months
	Output: Number of union leaders trained on reporting hazards to factory managers (disaggregated by gender)
	Short-term outcome: Percent participants with improved knowledge of fire/building safety and basic hazard reporting, as shown by an improvement of at least 10 percentage points between pre- and post-tests
	Medium-term outcome: Percent of worker reports resulting in remediation of hazard
Government	Indicator
	Input/Activity: Number of labor complaint management protocols developed
	Output: Number of MAST conciliators trained on labor complaint management protocols (disaggregated by gender)
	Short-term outcome: Percent of MAST conciliators who report greater confidence in their labor complaint management skills, as shown by an improvement of at least 20 percentage points between pre- and post-surveys
	Medium-term outcome: Percent of labor complaints received that were followed up by quarter
Employer	Indicator
	Input/Activity: Number of advisory visits to participating factories
	Output: Number of compliance assessment reports completed
	Short-term outcome: Program revenue from compliance assessment subscriptions in the reporting period
	Medium-term outcome: Average non-compliance rate of participating factories on publicly reported labor issues



Indicators to capture potential sustainability

Outcomes meant to be sustained after funding ends should also have indicators measuring likelihood of sustainability. Such measures help keep projects accountable to their goals for sustained impact.

The green box to the right shows outcome domains that should be measured to assess potential sustainability.

The box below shows example medium-term and long-term indicators to capture potential sustainability.



Time scale	Outcome domain
 Medium term	Sustained motivation
	Sustained resources
	Sustained capacity
	Sustained linkages
 Long term	Sustained service delivery
	Sustained access
	Sustained demand








Target group	Medium-term sustainability potential indicator	Long-term sustainability potential indicator
Worker	Number of factories where workers form complaint-processing committees (<i>sustained capacity and linkages</i>)	Percent of workers in targeted factories that indicate interest in future trainings from union leadership (disaggregated by gender) (<i>sustained demand</i>)
Government	Percent change in projected MOL allocation to inspectorate for next FY (<i>sustained resources</i>)	Number of inspections pre-approved for next FY (<i>sustained service delivery</i>)
Employer	Number of employers who seek ongoing technical assistance to remediate outstanding compliance problems (<i>sustained motivation</i>)	Percent of assessment costs covered by international buyers' subscriptions (<i>sustained access and demand</i>)

Note: medium- and long-term domains for each example indicator are shown in parentheses.

Framework for measuring potential sustainability is from [Rogers and Coates 2012](#).

Performance monitoring plan (PMP) quality

Some performance monitoring plans (PMPs) reviewed for this synthesis showed weaknesses that limited their usefulness, including problems with targets, reported data, number of indicators and their definitions, and measuring outcomes. The following table illustrates these commonly observed problems and the best practices implementers can use to avoid them.

<i>Evaluation characteristic</i>	 Commonly observed PMP problems	 Best practices for PMPs
 <i>Targets</i>	<p>Missing targets: no targets set for key indicators</p> <p>Unstable targets: targets are frequently revised</p> <p>Unjustified targets: targets are not explicitly justified using theory and data, nor are revisions</p>	<p>Present targets: all targets set</p> <p>Stable targets: target revisions limited</p> <p>Justified targets: targets are explicitly justified using theory and data, as are revisions</p>
 <i>Reported data</i>	<p>Missing data: no data collected/reported for key indicators</p> <p>Contradictory data: quarterly or semi-annual progress metrics do not add up to life-of-project cumulations</p>	<p>Present data: data are reported for all indicators</p> <p>Reliable data: reported data is consistent and accurate</p>
 <i>Number of indicators</i>	<p>Too few indicators: fewer than 10 indicators across outputs and short, medium, and long-term outcomes</p> <p>Excessive indicators: more than 50 indicators muddle the importance of each indicator in capturing result</p>	<p>Adequate indicators: number of indicators is adequate to capture project effects but does not dilute value of data (1-3 indicators per result)</p>
 <i>Indicator definitions</i>	<p>Ambiguous definitions: indicators try to capture two or more distinct concepts or values in one line</p> <p>Non-specific definitions: such as data tracking system in “use”</p>	<p>Easily measured definitions: indicators capture unique data</p> <p>Specific definitions: increments and units of measure are clear</p>
 <i>Focus on ultimate outcome measures</i>	<p>Missing outcomes: no indicators to measure ultimate outcomes</p> <p>Unmeasurable outcomes: progress cannot be assessed toward excessively broad or ambiguous goals</p>	<p>Present outcomes: ultimate outcomes have adequate indicators</p> <p>Clear outcomes: goals are not over-broad and are unambiguous</p>

Projects faced challenges that can be grouped into four areas



Political and government-related challenges, including limited government capacity, low political will, political resistance, uncertainty, unrest, turmoil, or rapidly changing conditions.



Internal project deficiencies, including insufficient capacity of implementers, insufficient monitoring capacity, hiring and turnover problems, limited project reach, poor synergy with allied projects or parent organizations, inadequate intervention dosage (funding, intensity, duration), contractual challenges, and poor representativeness of or outreach to workers.



Union, worker, and employer-related challenges, including low union or labor federation capacity, employer reluctance or low motivation to engage, threats against workers or backlash for project participation, low stakeholder understanding of or support for the project, low levels of women's participation.



Other challenges, including natural disasters, price competition incentivizing corner-cutting on labor compliance, and difficulties in engaging with migrant labor.

Main challenge areas and solutions used by implementers

Challenges, by group	Times occurred	Most and least successful solutions	Success score 0-3
Political and government challenges	27	Provide core inspection services in place of low-capacity MOL	2
		Narrow project activities to focus on most successful technical aspects	2
		Be flexible with activities, focus on communication, and build partner human resources	2
		Seek MOUs and hire task team when confronted with uncooperative agencies	0
		Be flexible with policy and reform proposals when regulatory action is impeded	0
Project deficiencies	24	Bring in consultants when project team has low capacity	2
		Redesign core project activities in a mobile format if geographic reach is inadequate	2
		Lean on central project administration resources (for example, BW, ILO)	2
		Increase worker outreach and engagement if there is unrepresentative participation	2
		Simplify indicators and improve measurement strategy if M&E system is too complex	1
Union, worker, and employer challenges	19	Invite union intervention to protect workers' rights when violated	3
		Co-conduct a strategic planning exercise with union leadership when vision is lacking	2
		Engage reluctant employers through awareness-raising, reframing efforts	2
		Hold women-only activity sessions if gender representation is a problem in training	1
		Support union leaders in working with participants' families to gain buy-in	1
		Be flexible with stakeholders and emphasize strong communication to overcome mistrust	1

Note: “times occurred” refers to the number of times the challenge occurred (not the number of projects in which it occurred), and “success score 0-3” indicates the score we assigned to the solution (in the instances where it was applied) with 0 indicating no mitigation of the challenge and 3 indicating complete mitigation.

Contextual risks, challenges, and strategies used to overcome them

This infographic conveys 1) which common risks were foreseen, 2) how the most common challenges manifested, 3) which challenges were most often mitigated, and 4) how they were best mitigated.

Anticipated and unanticipated risks

Projects anticipated risks more often than they were caught by surprise.



Commonly **anticipated** risks included political turmoil and lack of government capacity.



Commonly **unanticipated** risks included lack of union capacity and lack of political will.

A project anticipating a risk did not imply the risk would be successfully mitigated.

Most common contextual challenges

Donors and implementers should design projects to be able to overcome the challenges that arise most frequently.



Limited government capacity: High rates of staff and agency leadership turnover, corruption, and under-resourced departments that are unable to fully execute their mandates or engage in project activities.



Low political will or political resistance: Government unresponsiveness in project countries, low support for labor rights enforcement, resistance to taking ownership of relevant project activities, poor intragovernmental collaboration, or not committing staffing to activities or trainings.



Political uncertainty, political turmoil or social unrest: Rapidly changing political or social conditions, riots, strikes, shifting legal landscapes, and low trust among stakeholders.



Insufficient implementer capacity: Weak monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and poorly prepared staff and subcontractors.



Low union or labor federation capacity: Undertrained union leadership, weak organizational systems, and workers lacking collective bargaining knowledge, tools and opportunities.

Mitigated and unmitigated challenges

Projects that did not address risks faced them later as challenges and generally had lower effectiveness.

The more risks a project faced but did not mitigate—such as contractual impediments or the potential backlash against workers for participating in the project—**the less likely the project was to achieve its planned outputs and outcomes.**



Lack of political will in government partners was a common risk and often unmitigated. **Lack of employer will** and **lack of worker, union, or community will** were much less common and more easily mitigated.

Political turmoil or sensitivity (of the project issues) and the **lack of government capacity** were also common risks and were more unlikely to be mitigated.

Contractual challenges, weak trust among project stakeholders, and **low understanding of project priorities,** went unmitigated about half of the time.

Inadequate union capacity was difficult for relevant projects to mitigate, and **natural disasters** and **low project uptake among individual beneficiaries,** while rare, were unmitigated.

Projects with high levels of unmitigated risks also tended to have deficiencies and design weaknesses such as inadequate funding or project reach, susceptibility to external-factor delays, and poor project management and accountability systems.

Strategies to address contextual challenges

To support the resilience of projects once they are running, USDOL could prepare a **toolbox of resources** for implementers to draw from as they seek to mitigate common challenges. The toolbox could include a set of how-to briefs focusing on solutions that were successful in the past, such as:



Supporting low-capacity governments by providing ancillary services that both fill gaps and offer job shadowing



Using stakeholder analysis tools to shift focus away from unresponsive partners and toward committed partners



Narrowing partner agreements to a technical scope if political sensitivity is present



Pursuing civil society, NGO, and private sector partnerships if government stakeholders are unsupportive



Providing human resources (such as legal expertise) to partners end during political turmoil or changing conditions



Increasing communication with partners to address mistrust among stakeholders



Maintaining flexibility with activities to overcome political uncertainty and mistrust among stakeholders



Addressing inadequate implementer capacity by bringing in external consultants



Preparing to guide low-capacity partners in planning and priority-setting processes