HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

Mini MBA Project Management and AI: PMP, PRINCE2, Agile and PMD Pro applied to humanitarian work

Course handout · Week 5 : Designing the project: Project DPro, theory of change, logical framework and results-based management

A programme of exactly 3 months (12 weeks, 144 hours) to manage humanitarian projects with the main methodologies and artificial intelligence: project cycle, PMBOK and PMP, PRINCE2, Agile (Scrum, Kanban) and hybrid approaches, Project DPro (PMD Pro), logical framework, theory of change and results-based management, planning and critical path, donor budget and earned value, risks and stakeholders, MEAL, donor reporting, change management, leadership and closure. At every step, AI (Claude, Gemini, Copilot and project management tools) is used methodically, protecting the data of the people we serve. Corrected numerical exercises, three monthly exams with case studies, and a verifiable diploma from the Humanitarian Academy. Independent preparation programme: it does not award the PMP, PRINCE2 or PMD Pro certifications, which are obtained through the official exams.

https://humanitairejobs.org/en/academy/mini-mba-gestion-projet-ia/semaine-5/

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Week 5 : Designing the project: Project DPro, theory of change, logical framework and results-based management

Objectives

- Describe the phases and disciplines of Project DPro (PMD Pro), the PM4NGOs framework for the sector.
- Move from problem analysis to the theory of change and then to the logframe, with sound vertical and horizontal logic.
- Use AI to speed up design (problem tree, first logframe, critique) without inventing data.

Project DPro: the sector's framework

Project DPro (second edition of **PMD Pro**, 2020) is published by **PM4NGOs**, an association created by international NGOs to adapt project management to development and humanitarian work. The guide is available free of charge in several languages, including French and Portuguese, and certification is managed by PM4NGOs with examination bodies.

The Project DPro life cycle follows five phases: **identification and definition**, **set up**, **planning**, **implementation** and **closure**, with **monitoring, evaluation and control** throughout. It stresses disciplines specific to the sector: stakeholder and partner management, integration of the logframe and MEAL, procurement and logistics management, donor requirements, sustainability and transfer.

PM4NGOs also offers **Program DPro** (programmes), **MEAL DPro** and **Finance DPro**. These are excellent free resources to complement this Mini MBA.

From problem analysis to objectives

Design starts from **needs data** (assessments, community consultations, secondary data) and a **stakeholder analysis**. A **problem tree** is then built:

- the **core problem** (trunk): for example "high prevalence of diarrhoeal diseases among children under 5 in camps A and B";
- the **causes** (roots): insufficient and untreated water, damaged latrines, risky hygiene practices, poor access to soap;
- the **effects** (branches): malnutrition, deaths, household health spending.

It is turned into an **objectives tree** (each problem becomes a desired situation), then the **strategy** is chosen: which branches to address, given the mandate, skills, budget and what other actors are doing (the cluster's 3W/4W mapping).

The theory of change

The **theory of change** explains *how and why* the activities will lead to the desired change. It makes the **assumptions** explicit: "if families receive soap and suitable awareness-raising, and if water is available within 500 metres, then handwashing at key times will increase, because the main barriers identified are the cost of soap and distance".

A good theory of change:

- relies on **evidence** (previous evaluations, literature, Sphere standards);
- identifies the **conditions** beyond the project's control;
- is **revised** when monitoring shows that an assumption does not hold.

It is often presented as a diagram and serves as the basis for the logframe and the MEAL plan.

The logical framework

The **logical framework** (*logframe*) summarises the project in a matrix of 4 columns and 4 levels. The levels (vocabulary varies by donor):

- **Overall objective / impact**: long-term change the project contributes to;
- **Specific objective / outcome**: change expected among beneficiaries by the end of the project;
- **Results / outputs**: goods and services delivered;
- **Activities**.

The columns: **intervention logic**, **indicators**, **means of verification**, **assumptions**. The **vertical logic** reads from bottom to top: if the activities are carried out and the assumptions hold, then the outputs are achieved, and so on. The **horizontal logic** checks that each level has measurable indicators and realistic sources.

Frequent mistakes: confusing output and outcome ("2,000 kits distributed" is an output, "80% of households use the kit correctly" is an outcome); indicators without a baseline or target; assumptions that are in fact major risks to be managed.

Results-based management

Results-based management (RBM), adopted by the UN system and many donors, consists of directing all decisions towards results rather than activities: planning from the desired outcomes, tracking results indicators, adjusting, reporting.

In practice: each monitoring meeting starts with "where are our outcomes?" before "what have we done?"; budget reallocations are justified by their contribution to results; reports talk about change, not just quantities delivered.

The **results framework** of some donors (for example UN agencies, or USAID before 2025) plays the same role as the logframe, with a different presentation: always identify the format the donor requires.

Designing faster with AI

A safe four-step method:

1. **Provide the data**: anonymised extracts from the needs assessment, actor mapping, donor priorities. "Work only from these documents."
2. **Ask for a structure**: "Propose a problem tree, then an objectives tree; flag causes the documents do not prove."
3. **Ask for a first logframe**: "Propose a logframe in [donor] format, with at most 2 outcomes and 4 outputs; SMART indicators; leave baselines and targets empty if they are not in the data."
4. **Ask for a critique**: "Act as the donor's evaluator: what weaknesses in the vertical and horizontal logic do you see?"

What AI must not do: invent baselines, targets or prevalence rates; replace community consultation; settle a strategic choice. The team validates everything, and the problem tree is discussed with communities and partners.

Exercise: correcting a logframe

Situation. A draft WASH logframe of the fictitious NGO Rahma contains: outcome "3,000 hygiene kits distributed"; output "30% reduction in diarrhoea"; outcome indicator "number of awareness sessions"; assumption "the project is well managed". Baseline of the indicator "households washing hands at key times": 35%; target requested by the donor: +25 points.

Task. 1) Which mistakes do you spot? 2) What is the target as a percentage? 3) Out of 3,000 households, how many additional households must adopt the practice?

Answer. 1) Outcome and output are reversed: the kits distributed are an output, the reduction in diarrhoea belongs rather to the overall objective or to a health outcome. The number of sessions is an activity indicator, not an outcome indicator: a change indicator is needed (handwashing rate). "The project is well managed" is not an external assumption: it is the team's responsibility. 2) 35% + 25 points = 60%. 3) (60% − 35%) × 3,000 = 750 additional households.

Key takeaways

- Project DPro (PMD Pro) from PM4NGOs is the project management framework designed for the sector, free and multilingual.
- Problem tree, objectives tree and strategy choice come before any planning.
- The theory of change makes assumptions explicit and relies on evidence.
- Logframe: vertical logic (if... then) and horizontal logic (indicators, sources); do not confuse outputs and outcomes.
- AI structures and critiques; it invents neither baselines nor targets, and does not replace consultation.

Quiz

1. Project DPro is published by:
   A. PM4NGOs
   B. PMI
   C. PeopleCert
   D. Scrum.org

2. "2,000 kits distributed" is:
   A. An outcome
   B. An impact
   C. An assumption
   D. An output

3. The vertical logic of a logframe reads:
   A. Top to bottom, column by column
   B. Bottom to top: if activities and assumptions hold, the higher level is achieved
   C. Left to right only
   D. In any direction

4. Baseline 40%, target +15 points, 2,000 households: additional households to reach?
   A. 150
   B. 800
   C. 300
   D. 1,100

5. When baselines are missing from the documents, AI should:
   A. Estimate them as best it can
   B. Leave the cells empty and flag it
   C. Use the global average
   D. Copy those of another country

Quiz answers : 1. A · 2. D · 3. B · 4. C · 5. B