

## Assumptions & Risks

### Key features

Assumptions describe the conditions which must exist for the cause and effect relationship between the different levels of results to behave as expected. As such, they are the "glue" that binds together the hierarchy of results in the matrix and the "if-then" cause and effect relationships between them. They are like the "fine print" in the overall design.

*Definitions:*

Assumption

A necessary condition for the achievement of results at different levels

Risk

A potential event or occurrence beyond the control of the programme that could adversely affect achievement of the desired results

Risks on the other hand are negative external events or occurrences which might be expected to seriously alter the achievement of desired results. As such, risks are important in that they provide an opportunity to anticipate and specify reasons why a programme or project may *not* work out as intended.

Assumptions about the transformation of activities into outputs are usually highly probable, that is, they can be expected to come true in most cases. Remember, outputs are like promises, so the UN and partners should have a high level of control over their achievement (**see Figure 1 below**). On the other hand, assumptions at the higher level (e.g. relating to the transformation of outputs into agency outcomes) can be expected to be less probable. Promised new skills and abilities, or new services and products can be developed, but the UN and partners have little control over whether these operational changes lead to changes in institutional performance and behaviour. This requires commitment or "buy-in" from partners (an assumption) which may be difficult to guarantee.

Assumptions about the causality between agency outcomes and UNDAF outcomes, and between UNDAF outcomes and National goals/ MDGs are highly un-predictable. This is because these assumptions are often related to political and economic factors completely external to the programme of cooperation. Long-term human development requires institutional or behavioural changes. These necessarily rely on the actions of stakeholders and beneficiaries.

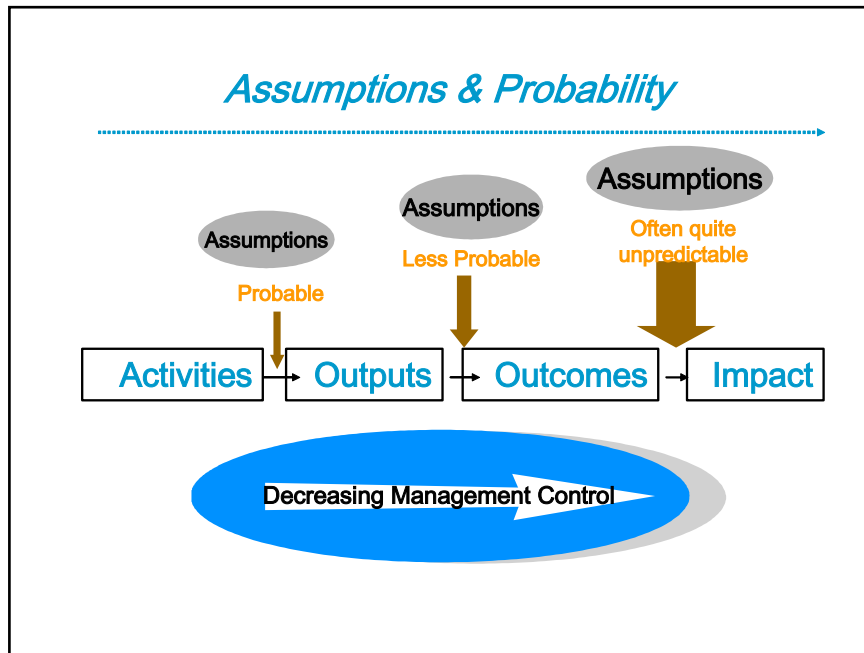
Because UN agencies can influence these actions, but not control them, assumptions are most important at:

- the interface between National goals/MDGs and UNDAF outcomes;
- the interface between UNDAF outcomes and agency outcomes; and
- the interface between agency outcomes and contributing outputs.

Examples of assumptions include:

- Planned budget allocations are actually made by an external agency;
- Political will to implement the proposed taxation reform;
- Sustained support and leadership of the government as regards poverty reduction efforts
- Political, economic, and social stability in the country.

Figure 1:



The identification of assumptions is an important means of enriching programme design especially as they often **help identify additional results or outputs which should be included.**

While programme design can be altered to help ensure that assumptions hold true, risks are serious threats which are, by definition, outside of the control of the concerned programme(s). Although beyond programme control, it is useful for teams to document risks as it alerts them to events or occurrences which might be deemed 'show stoppers', i.e. events which would seriously affect the attainment of desired results. Risks can also serve as **triggers for reconsideration of overall programme continuity and strategic direction** should they hold true. Additionally, the documentation of risks is important for evaluative purposes (e.g. to help evaluators clarify if programme 'failures' were due to poor performance or to the identified risks which ultimately undermined success (and for which a team should therefore not be considered accountable). To be clearly distinguishable, risks should not be written as the negative of an assumption (e.g. Assumption = 'Inflation remains at manageable level'; Risk = 'Hyperinflation').

## Checklist

CHECKLIST FOR VALIDATING ASSUMPTIONS AND RISKS	YES	NO
✓ The assumed condition is outside the control of the programme or project		
✓ The assumed condition is necessary for programme success. specific and verifiable – it can be checked with partners or donors, or in policy and planning documents		
✓ The assumed condition is <b>NOT</b> a result that could be included in the results matrix for UN cooperation		
✓ The assumed condition is not “fatal”, in that it will jeopardize the feasibility or sustainability of the result (eg. An assumption that the market for a planned product or service already exists)		
✓ The probability of the assumption holding true is made clear, either in the assumption itself or separately		
✓ The assumption is specific and verifiable – its status can be checked by calling partners or donors		
✓ The assumption is stated as if it is actually the case		
✓ The risk is clearly beyond the control of the programme		
✓ The risk is NOT simply the negative restating of an assumption		
✓ The consequences of the risk are sufficiently grave as to pose a serious threat to overall programme success		

## Examples of Assumptions & Risks<sup>1</sup>

### Example 1: Poverty reduction

Result	Assumptions & Risks
<u>UNDAF outcome:</u> By 2011, there is greater economic growth in targeted poor rural and urban areas	Risk – Ex-combatants reinstate hostilities in areas of programme implementation
<u>Agency outcome:</u> New businesses and jobs are created <u>in targeted</u> , poor rural and urban areas	Assumption - Planned Government/WB regulatory reforms governing the establishment of SMEs are implemented
<u>Agency outcome:</u> Local public administrations operate in a more effective and transparent manner, and receive larger fiscal transfers from central government	Assumption - Government commitments/ targets to increase fiscal transfers to Local Public Administrations are maintained
<u>Agency outcome:</u> Communities and CSOs participate in local development planning, implementation and monitoring	

<sup>1</sup> Examples have been adapted from CCAs, UNDAFs, CPAPs, and other guidance materials as follows: 1 - Moldova; 2 - Kyrgyzstan; 3 - Afghanistan; 4 - Yemen; 5- Namibia.

**Example 2: Good governance**

<b>Result</b>	<b>Assumptions &amp; Risks</b>
<p><u>UNDAF outcome:</u> Good governance reforms and practices institutionalized at all levels</p>	<p>Risk – Result of congressional elections leads to withdrawal of political support for the reform agenda</p>
<p><u>Agency outcome:</u> Governance bodies have greater capacity at central and local levels to carry out governance reforms</p>	<p>Assumption - Political commitment to implement fiscal decentralization maintained</p>
<p><u>Outputs:</u></p> <p>A legislative framework and code for local self governance is drafted</p> <p>Transparent decision making processes for select state bodies are developed with public consultation</p> <p>Municipal Civil Servants, and “Ayil” Councilors ,from targeted areas, are able to formulate and implement dev plans that are gender sensitive and use human rights principles</p>	<p>Assumption - National policy of “Openness with respect” is maintained, allowing for free public consultations conducted by third parties</p>
<p><u>Agency outcome:</u> Institutional capacity of Parliament strengthened to better perform legislative, representational and oversight roles</p>	<p>Assumption – Current division of powers between executive and legislative branches is maintained</p>
<p><u>Outputs:</u> Legislators and parliamentary staff have improved skills to draft and propose legislation</p> <p>A strategy and action plan developed to improve Parliamentary relations with constituencies, Local Kenesh, and the media</p> <p>Improved Parliamentary oversight mechanisms are drafted</p>	<p>Assumption - Planned parliamentary management committee is established by the congress and maintains non-partisan approach</p>

**Example 3: Good governance**

Result	Assumptions & Risks
<p><u>UNDAF outcome:</u> By 2008, Government at all levels and civil society, including communities and individuals, are better enabled to realise improved governance based on the rule of law and human rights, with particular emphasis on women and marginalized groups</p>	<p>Risk - delay in the electoral calendars, And difficulty to delineate constituencies and agree on power of newly elected councils;</p> <p>Assumption - Overall economic, political and social environment remains stable and secure</p>
<p><u>Agency outcome:</u> By 2008, transparent, effective and efficient legislative and policy frameworks and processes are established and implemented</p>	
<p><u>Agency outcome:</u> By 2008, an effective, more accountable and more representative public administration is established at the national and sub-national levels,</p>	
<p><u>Agency outcome:</u> By 2008, communities and individuals, especially women and marginalized groups, participate effectively in the development and political processes</p>	

### Example 4: Gender

Result	Assumptions & Risks
<p><u>UNDAF Outcome:</u> Improved institutional and human capacity to promote gender equity and empower women in social, political, economic and legal spheres.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. National commitment</li> <li>2. Allocation of sufficient funds for capacity building</li> <li>3. Gender-disaggregated data available</li> </ol> <p>Social and cultural attitudes</p>
<p><u>Agency outcome:</u> Improved institutional framework ensuring that women and girls have the benefit of their equal rights.</p>	
<p><u>Outputs:</u> National laws modified in line with CEDAW provisions</p> <p>Improved access of women to both formal and traditional justice systems</p> <p>Increased active representation and participation of women in decision making political and social sectors</p> <p>Increased national and community level action to eliminate violence against women</p>	<p>Once ratified, amended laws and articles are publicized</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Government commitment</li> <li>2. Available resources</li> </ol> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Political parties support female candidates</li> <li>2. Independent candidates have adequate financial support</li> <li>3. Advocacy channels</li> <li>4. Complex registration procedures</li> </ol>
<p><u>Agency outcome:</u> Increased reflection of gender concerns in allocation of public financial resources.</p>	<p>Governmental support</p>
<p><u>Outputs:</u> Development of line ministries' capacity to apply, assess, and monitor gender-differentiated budgets</p> <p>Increased capacity among women's organisations to monitor and follow up gender budgeting in development activities</p>	<p>Identification of gender-differentiated budget lines</p>
<p><u>Agency outcome:</u> Improved social perceptions and attitudes towards statuses and roles of women and men.</p>	<p>Female role models exist</p>
<p><u>Outputs:</u> Media, young people and CSO networks mobilised to change perception of gender roles</p> <p>Religious, political and traditional leaders and advocates engaged in promoting an improved status of women</p>	

### Example 5: Basic Services

Result	Assumptions & Risks
<p><u>UNDAF outcome:</u> By 2010, the capacity of Government and civil society institutions is strengthened to deliver and monitor essential/critical health, education and special protection services</p>	<p>1. Performance Expenditure Management Programme is fully implemented.</p>
<p><u>Agency outcome:</u> Institutional and community capacity for effective delivery and uptake of critical services, in health and education maintained and strengthened.</p>	<p>2. Level of staff attrition is mitigated by availability and use of ART.</p>
<p><u>Outputs:</u> Strengthened PHC with focus on children and mothers.</p> <p>Improved access to and retention in quality basic education, especially for vulnerable children</p>	<p>3. Other development partners continue and increase contributions to these outcomes and adequate funding from GRN is made available.</p>
<p><u>Agency outcome:</u> The national statistical system is strengthened to ensure effective development and application of tools for evidence-based decision-making, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation</p>	<p>4. The EMIS system is refined to collect school-based data on orphan attendance in schools.</p>
<p><u>Outputs:</u> National capacities for implementation of National Statistical Plan III and the Poverty Monitoring Strategy strengthened.</p>	<p>5. Regional breakdowns of funding unlikely</p>
<p><u>Agency outcome:</u> Increased awareness and capacity for protecting the rights of children, women and other vulnerable groups.</p>	<p>6. DHS is refined to measure numbers of pregnant women sleeping under bednets and maternal mortality data is improved.</p>
<p><u>Outputs:</u> The rights of women and children and other vulnerable groups are protected through enactment and application of required and existing legislation.</p> <p>Women, children and those in other vulnerable groups are aware of their rights and how to access the services available.</p> <p>Improved capacity of service providers to offer protection from violence and abuse and care to women, children and vulnerable groups.</p>	<p>7. New Central Bureau of Statistics organizational structure is operationalised as defined in NSS.</p> <p>8. Adoption and use of database tools by relevant ministries.</p>