

Introduction and problem definition

Welcome to another video at Enactus Academy.

In this video, we will learn the basics of impact measurement.

First, we will take a closer look at the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Then, we will explain the term "impact" using the Impact Staircase to show you how to set up an impact logic for your project.

At Enactus, we want to make the world better through our projects. Enactus projects achieve a positive impact on one or more of the 17 SDGs. We want to make a difference! But how big is this difference, really? What is the bottom line our projects are trying to achieve? How do we determine that we are actually having a net positive impact? How can we make measurable the positive impact we are actually having on the SDGs with our projects?

Solution

It is a challenge to clearly identify the impacts of a project on different areas in the first place, then express them in measurable units and assign them to the appropriate SDG. Let's start first with the 2030 Agenda and the 17 UN SDGs:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all United Nations (UN) member states at the 2015 UN Summit on Sustainable Development. At the core of the agenda are the 17 SDGs with 169 targets.

SDG 2, "End hunger," for example, includes ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture. The SDGs address all countries to take collective action to end poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Sustainable development is defined by the United Nations as, "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The 17 SDGs thus include goals that integrate social, environmental, and economic interests. All parts of society: states, civil society, business, and academia, as well as each and every individual, are called upon to contribute to the achievement of the goals. The SDGs form the global framework for sustainable development and provide orientation for a uniform recording of progress: because behind each SDG is a structure of subgoals and measurement indicators. For example, SDG 1 "End poverty in all its forms and everywhere" has seven other sub-goals. These sub-goals each have up to four indicators. Sub-goal 1.1 aims to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. Extreme poverty affects people who live on less than \$1.25 a day. Indicator 1.1.1 is the proportion of the population living below the international poverty line. The measurement also includes gender, age, employment status, and location. If one person has more than USD 1.25 per day available to them in the long term as a result of your project, you are directly contributing to the achievement of SDG 1. However, your projects must not cause other people to lose their jobs or adversely affect the goals of another SDG.

You will not find sub-goals and indicators for each project that accurately describe the impact on an SDG. Nevertheless, they are a very good orientation for you if you want to define the impact of your project and make it measurable.

But what exactly is impact?

We talk about impact when everything we invest in a project - time, resources, etc. - leads to changes in the target group, in their living environment or in society.

Impact can reach different levels, which can be illustrated with a so-called Impact Staircase. The Impact Staircase comprises 7 levels, which in turn can be categorized into output, outcome, and impact:

Outputs are on levels 1-3 and include offers, measures, or products that you produce with your project. The effects we are talking about can only result from these outputs from level 4 onwards:

The so-called "outcomes" can be found at levels 4-6, which always refer to the effects on the project's target groups. Level 4, the first outcome level, is reached when the target group acquires new skills through the services offered by the project. Level 5, the second outcome level, is achieved when the target group changes its behavior. Level 6, the third outcome level, is reached when the target group's living situation changes, for example through social advancement.

Impacts are at the highest level 7 and describe the intended changes at the societal level (social, economic, or ecological). Impacts always refer to a part of society, such as the population in a district or region.

In summary:

A project provides certain services and measures. These are outputs.

As a result of these outputs, effects can occur in the target groups. These are outcomes.

The outcomes, in turn, can influence the broader society. Only then do we speak of impact.

Now, that impact and its differing levels have been defined, let's look at how you can set up an impact logic for your projects. The impact logic systematically identifies which resources flow into the project (input), which achievements the project produces (output), and what effect they want to have on the target group (outcome) and at the level of society as a whole (impact). The impact logic makes it possible to visualize connections between measures and changes. It helps you to develop your own understanding of what you are doing in the project and what you want to achieve with it. In addition, you can identify gaps in your project logic, further align your project with the needs of your target group, and plausibly present your goals and the resources you will need to achieve them to investors, partners, or funders. Finally, you can derive from the impact logic for which elements you will develop concrete indicators and collect data to make your impact measurable.

A simple representation of the impact logic is based on the structure of the Impact Staircase. Each step builds on the other: On the left are the inputs (i.e., all the means to realistically implement a project), and on the right is the impact.

To set up your impact logic, you work from right to left: You first describe what you want to contribute at the societal-level with your project (here, you can use the SDGs as a guide), and then work your way up, stage-by-stage, through the impacts at the level of the target

group and the services you offer in the project, to the resources you need to commit to your project.

General Summary

At Enactus, we want to contribute to making the world a better place. In doing so, we are guided by the 17 SDGs with the need to understand and make clear what impact we are actually achieving with our projects, while expressing it in measurable units. In doing so, we can orient ourselves on the impact ladder and need a transparent impact logic for our projects, which can then be used to set up indicators and measure results and impact.