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Nordiska ministerrådet

Nordic Council of Ministers

- *A practical guide to Results Based Management (RBM) in the NCMs grant process*

Nordiska ministerrådet

Preface

This guide introduces the core concepts of results-based management (RBM) and how the NCM adapts RBM in its grant process. It includes guidance on best practices for planning and designing projects or programmes that contribute to the NCM's Sectoral Goals, along with step-by-step instructions for building and formulating a results framework as part of the NCM Project/Programme description.

In adopting RBM, the Nordic Council of Ministers emphasises a strategic and structured approach to ensuring that funded initiatives align with broader objectives and deliver meaningful results. By focusing on outcomes and their contribution to long-term impacts, the approach emphasises accountability, transparency, and organisational learning, enabling informed decision-making and improved policy implementation.

This handbook is designed to be a practical tool. It aims to assist administrative bodies, project managers, and other stakeholders in systematically applying RBM principles across all stages of the project and programme lifecycle. From identifying sectoral priorities and setting realistic outcomes to selecting measurable indicators and tracking progress, this guide offers instructions tailored to the unique context of funding activities within the NCM policy framework.

Through the consistent use of RBM, the NCM seeks to create a shared framework for monitoring and evaluating contributions to our Vision 2030. We hope this guide serves as a good resource and an aid in applying the approach when writing up project/programme descriptions.

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1. Introduction

The Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) has adopted a **Results-Focused Approach** for *planning, assessing, monitoring, and evaluating* Projects and Programmes that receive funding from the NCMs budget.

1.1. Results Based Management

Results-Based Management (RBM) is a ***management strategy*** that goes beyond resource allocation as practiced in traditional activity planning. Instead, it focuses on achieving the results that are the most likely to drive change towards clearly defined and pre-determined objectives.

The approach is widely employed by international- and governmental organisations as a tool to ensure that decision making is aligned with overall objectives. When combined with continuous monitoring and follow-up of whether funding decisions lead to desired results, the approach can be used to ***enhance accountability***, ***transparency***, ***effectiveness***, ***and learning***.

1.2. The IT tool

To support the effective implementation of the results focused approach, the NCM has introduced the use of a ***digital platform*** to facilitate case-handling and data collection in the process. The system provides structured digital forms and processes that enable systematic collection of information and data in each step, where all relevant stakeholders will be provided the ability to register or access information about a project or program throughout its lifecycle.

1.3. The Objective

The objective is to provide the NCM with the tools it needs to establish a more strategically focused and transparent process for its funding activities.

Good results-based management systems are a source of knowledge capital. Systematically managing for results enables the NCM to develop a knowledge base of the types measures and policies that are successful. Over time, assessments, and evaluations of achieved results will provide insights and information about what works, what does not, and why. In this context, the RBM model will **promote organizational learning**.

The approach and the IT tool are intended to **promote greater transparency and accountability** in the grant process. By enhancing the amount- and quality of information about the results of funding decisions, both external and internal stakeholders will have a clearer sense of the NCMs priorities and the impact it contributes to creating.

2. Managing for Results

2.1. Results Based Management in the NCM context

In adopting RBM as a management strategy, all of NCMs funding decisions will be based on an assessment of whether the expected results of a project or programme demonstrate the potential to drive progress toward the NCM's overall objective, ***Vision 2030.***

To monitor and track progress, the NCM will gather information on both expected and realised results across all NCM funding decisions. The data and information that will be generated through this process will serve as the foundation for the organisation's reporting, follow-up, and evaluation of the collective results of its activities.

2.2. NCM Sectoral Goals, Strategy and Results

For the NCM as a whole, **results** are defined as the direct benefits and long-term changes that occur as a consequence of activities on all levels of the NCM, from policymaking to the individual measure.

The NCMs 2025-2030 strategic objectives are established in each sectors ***Co-operation Programme*** in the form of ***Sectoral Goals.*** These represent the long-term societal changes that are needed to realise Vision 2030. Each sectoral goal is associated with so-called ***sectoral sub-goals*** that determine the path to affect this change.

The NCM has further focused the strategies for achieving these goals and associated sub-goals in 3-year ***Workplans***.

Where these strategies involve initiating and funding projects or programmes, the expected results of the measures shall align with these strategies and goals. Consequently, the collective results of the NCMs funding activities are generated by the individual project or program (see Annex I).

2.3. Key Terms and Concepts in the NCMs Adaptation of RBM

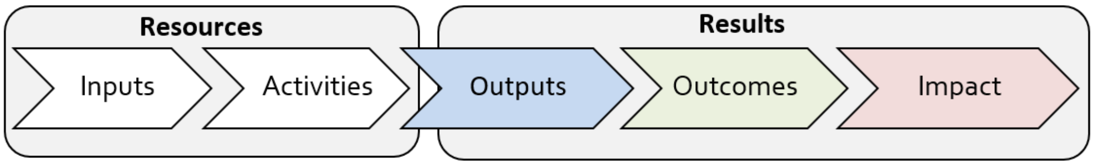
Subsequent sections of this document provide more detailed guidance, illustrated with examples, on how to define and formulate the expected results of a project or programme. Before that however, it is necessary to introduce the key concepts of RBM and how they are applied in the NCM.

2.4. the Results Chain

To ensure that funding decisions consistently lead to relevant and measurable results, the NCM applies RBM as the standard for *planning*, *assessing*, *monitoring*, and *evaluating* projects and programmes that receive NCM funding.

The starting point is to establish a structured narrative for how each project and programme proposes to contribute the long-term change articulated by the NCMs Sectoral Goals. The point of reference will be the so-called ***Results Chain***.

The results chain (pictured below) is central to RBM. It provides a simple conceptual framework for illustrating the link between a measure's planned use of resources and its expected results over time. On its own, without additional information or context, it represents a simple linear cause-and-effect relationship between its components.



In line with the standard application of RBM, the NCM defines the ***resource components*** of the results chain as the financial, human, and material ***inputs*** that are needed to perform the ***activities*** that will produce certain outputs.

The ***results components*** of a results chain are categorised by the NCM as a measure's expected ***Outputs***, ***Outcomes*** and ***Impact***.

2.4.1. Impact

Impact is defined as the long-term changes to which a project or programme aspires to contribute.

> **!** In the NCMs application of RBM, a measure's expected **impact**, and by extension its objective is, **by definition**, one of the NCM's Sectoral Goals.

While it is unrealistic to hold a single project or programme accountable for achieving this scale of impact, it establishes the specific sector goal that sets the direction for its planning, design and implementation.

➔ In short – Impact is what a measure *"aspires to contribute to"* in the long term.

Impact:

- Is defined as macro level change and concerns the political, economic, environmental, and social conditions in the Nordic region.
- Is considered attainable only in the long term and with the involvement of a large number of stakeholders.
- Is influenced by factors outside of the direct control of a project or a programme

> **Example of a projects expected impact (Project overall goal):**
>
> Impact: Greater Competitiveness through Sustainable Management and Use of Resources
>
> *(As defined by NCM Policy Objective MR-FJLS 2)*

2.4.2. Outcomes

A measure's outcomes are defined as the short to medium-term direct effects on the *target groups* of the measure, that are generated by its outputs.

For the NCM, outcomes represent the specific goals that can realistically be achieved or influenced by individual measures, and are central to how a project or a programme intends to contribute to a Sectoral Goal (impact).

In the NCMs application of RBM, the path through which a measure intends to affect a Sectoral Goal (*impact*) is defined by one (or more) of its associated *sub-goals*.

A measure's outcomes should always be aligned with a sectoral sub-goal, but. Outcomes should nevertheless be defined independently to reflect the specific focus and scope of a measure and should not be identical to a sub-goal.

!

- A measure must define **at least one Outcome**.
- Outcomes must be defined in relation to a **sectoral sub-goal**.
- A measure is required to define **at least one outcome** in relation to a sub-goal associated with the primary sector goal that the measure has adopted.
- A measure can include more than one outcome. **Additional outcomes** may be formulated in relation to the same sub-goal, or in relation to any other sub-goal belonging to **any sectoral goal in any of the NCMs co-operation programs**.

A measure can thus establish a path towards affecting change that leads through goals that belong to different sectors. This is highly relevant for so-called intersectoral measures.

➔ In short – Expected outcome is *"the difference"* a measure intends to make.

Outcomes:

- Are direct and observable changes, such as shifts in knowledge, attitudes, skills, or practices, at the level of the measures target groups or end-beneficiaries,
- Are attainable in the short to medium term, often within the timeframe of the measure or shortly after its completion.
- Are influenced by a project/programme but are not necessarily under its direct control as they depend on the actions and cooperation of target groups-, systems, or institutions and other external stakeholders.
- Provide the NCM with the main parameter for evaluating the success of a project or a programme
- Provide the NCM with a valuable resource of data and information on its contribution to change.

Example of a projects Outcome (project specific goal):

Outcome: Enhanced adoption of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture

Note: The project outcome in the example contributes to the Goal (impact) through the sub-goal; MR-FJLS 2.1 – "Public-private partnerships for innovation and competitiveness, fostering greater competitiveness through sustainable resource management"

2.4.3. Outputs

Outputs are defined as the tangible products and/or services that result directly from a measure's activities and are essential for achieving outcomes.

In the NCMs application of RBM, outputs are considered to be under the direct control of a measure, and establish what results the administrative body will be held accountable for delivering.

- ➔ In short - Outputs are *"what a measure will produce".*

Outputs:

- Are the specific products and services delivered by the measure; such as reports, workshops, conferences, networks.
- Are attainable in the short term within the duration of the project.
- Are fully under the control and responsibility of a project or programme.
- Provide the NCM with the main parameter for accountability
- Provide the NCM with a valuable resource of data and information on the deliveries of its funding activities.

Example of project outputs :

Output 1 - Guidelines on the practical application of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture.
Output 2 - Five workshops conducted on sustainable farming practices
Output 3 - Online resource tool for compliance tracking launched

Note: These outputs are necessary steps towards the outcome "Enhancing the adoption of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture", from the previous example.

With the exception of a measures overall goal (Impact), expected results should be grounded in what is possible and achievable in the short and medium-term. This means that a project or a programme's expected outcomes and outputs should be relevant, realistic and within reach of what the measure can influence.

How to describe and formulate expected results (outcomes and outputs) is discussed in further detail and illustrated with examples in section 4 of this guide.

2.5. Measuring and Tracking Results

To ensure that the projects and programmes that receive funding deliver tangible achievements based on the expectations in the project/programme descriptions, methods for measuring and tracking progress have been introduced.

In the NCM's application of RBM, measuring and tracking results on the project and programme level, is done using outcome-indicators and output-indicators.

Impact will <u>not</u> be measured or assigned indicators on the project or programme level

2.5.1. Indicators

In requiring the use of output- and outcome indicators, the NCM establishes a practical way to both monitor progress and evaluate the success of an individual measure. They are used by the NCM to both assess efficiency and progress in each measure, and to collect data and information about the organisation's collective results across all funding decisions.

In the NCM's application of RBM, all indicators need to be assigned a baseline and a target value to clearly define each measure's point of departure, and what will be considered its scope of success.

Example - Output Indicators:

Output 1: Guidelines on the practical application of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture developed and published.
Output Indicator 1: Number of guidelines developed and published
Baseline Value: [0]
Target: [1]

Output 2: Workshops on integrating Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture in small-scale farming conducted
Output Indicator 2: Number of workshops conducted.
Baseline Value: [0]
Target: [5]

Output 3: Online resource tool for the use of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture and compliance tracking launched.
Output Indicator 3: Online resource tool operational by project end
Baseline Value: [0]
Target: [1]

2.5.2. Outcome and Output Indicators

Indicators measure different things on different results levels:

Outcome Indicators: assess or reflect the direct- or early effects that are generated by a measures outputs, among the target group(s), systems or institutions that the measure aims to affect.

! Due to the long-term and indirect nature of impacts, **outcomes** are considered to be the **most important result level** in RBM, as they are often observable and represent steppingstones on the path to long-term impact.

Measuring and reporting on outcomes should therefore aim to capture the effects or changes that a measure contributes to.

If, for example, an awareness-raising campaign has been carried out, it is the effects of the campaign that count towards an outcome. While measuring how many people were reached by a campaign (output) may indicate an effect, it is more interesting and informative to measure how many have increased their knowledge (outcome) because of the campaign. Taking it even further, we could try and capture changes in attitude or behaviour triggered by the campaign.

Output Indicators: Measure the quantity or quality of the direct and immediate deliverables of a project or programme.

They indicate a measure's progress in implementation and are used for accountability. Output indicators show what has been directly supported with a measure's budget and normally begin to show a value other than zero early in implementation.

A more detailed discussion, illustrated with examples, on how to develop and formulate good and appropriate indicators for different types of results will be discussed in Section 4 of this guide.

Example - Outcome Indicator:

Project Outcome: Enhanced adoption of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture.

Outcome Indicator: Share of farmers who report adopting Nordic sustainability standards into their farming practices after attending workshops
Baseline value: [0 %] Target value: [30%]

2.5.3. Baselines, Targets and Sources of verification

For indicators to be meaningful and useful in measuring progress, they must be accompanied by baselines, targets, and sources of verification.

An indicators ***Baseline*** is its initial value at the start of a project or program. It represents the starting point against which future progress will be measured, and provides the point of reference needed to assess a measures efficiency over its lifetime

The ***Target*** is the specific value of a result that a measure aims to achieve within a defined timeframe, establishing clear expectations. Ambitious targets are encouraged but should always be realistic.

An indicators **Source of Verification** identifies where and how data for the indicator will be collected. It ensures that the information used to measure progress is reliable and can be validated. Common sources include surveys, official statistics, project reports, attendance records, or third-party assessments.

2.6. The strengths and limitations of the RBM approach

The strengths of the RBM approach lie in that it encourages reflective and evidence-based planning and is adaptable across projects and programmes that are different in size and scope.

From the NCMs perspective RBM provides a coherent framework for assessing whether individual measures are likely to drive change towards the NCM's broader strategic goals, as well as providing a useful tool to collect data and information, monitor progress, communicate results, and evaluate impact over time.

But as with all models, the results chain simplifies the complex reality in which the NCMs projects and programs operate. In practice, the path to impact is rarely singular or linear, and is even more unlikely to be directly measurable.

Attributing long-term impacts to specific projects or programs is challenging. Given the scale and scope of the changes expressed by the NCMs Sectoral Goals, it is in most cases unrealistic to establish a direct and observable causal link between an individual project or programme, and overall objectives like Vision 2030.

Policy shifts, technological advancements and societal trends can all significantly affect results and their sustainability in the long term, especially at the outcome and impact levels. Additionally, the time lag between project implementation and the appearance of outcomes or impacts, can extend well past the lifecycle of a project or a programme.

However, by applying a coherent RBM approach to assessments and funding decisions, and by systematically categorising, analysing and evaluating end-results, the NCM can support a narrative about how the collective results of the NCM's funding activities have contributed to its overall objectives.

3. The NCM a Results Framework

Having been introduced to the key concepts of RBM we are ready to apply the approach to the description of out project or programme and register our measure's expected results in the **NCM Project/Program Description**.

3.1. Establish a Theory of Change

As a first step it is helpful to start with establishing a simple ***Theory of Change*** (ToC) for our project or programme. This is not a formal requirement, although completing the exercise will contribute to a better understanding of the measures logic and may benefit the rest of the narrative description of the project/programme.

Each project or program funded by the NCM is based on a hypothesis about how it will contribute to the NCMs strategic objectives. This hypothesis forms the story of:

a) How NCM ***Funding*** will be converted into ***Activities***
b) How these activities will deliver specific *products or services (**Outputs**)*
c) What direct observable benefits and changes those products or services are expected to generate (***Outcomes***); and
d) How these outcomes are likely to contribute to the longer-term societal changes as defined by the NCMs Sectoral Goals (***Impact***).

In building our ToC we use the components of the results chain but complement the model with context and **assumptions** about the conditions that influence our measure's success. The assumptions that we base our theory on reflect our underlying beliefs about "*why?*" and "*how?*" we expect change to happen in the specific context of the project or program.

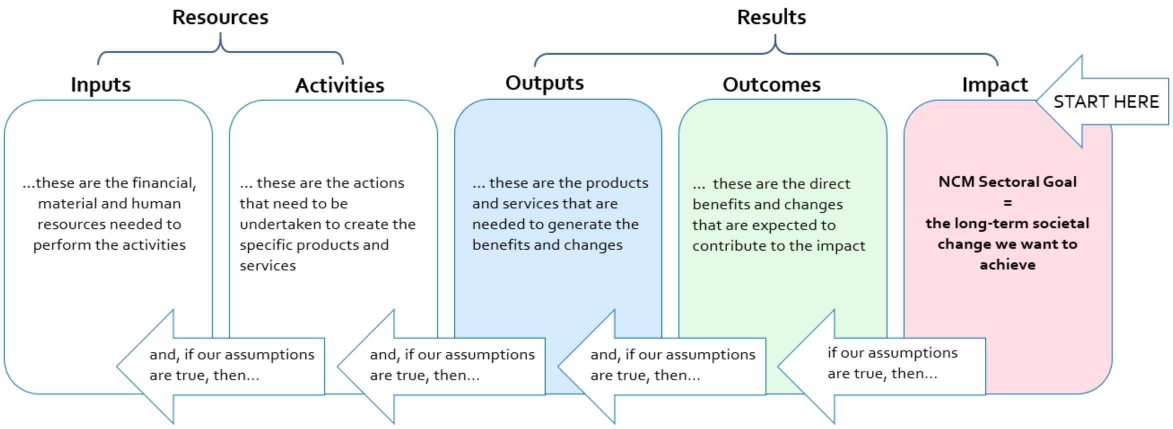
It is important to base a theory of change on realistic assumptions that are supported by some form of evidence (e.g., scientific literature, policy papers, stakeholder consultations or evaluations, etc.). The more solid the support that exists for the suggested approach, the better.

3.2. Plot a Structured Representation of the ToC

Contrary to traditional activity planning the recommended approach to formulating a ToC is working backwards from the impact to which a project or program is meant to contribute, as defined by one of the Sectoral Goals set out in the sector co-operation programmes.

Leaning on our assumptions in each step, we begin by identifying what outcomes are most likely to contribute to this impact over time. Next, we define which outputs we believe are needed to bring about these outcomes. Finally, we propose which activities and inputs are the most appropriate and efficient for the creation of these outputs.

Following these steps, our simple Theory of Change can be plotted into a table:



In the structured representation of a theory of change (as in the table above), each component is linked to the next through a cause-and-effect relationship that is supported by our underlying assumption; that if certain actions are taken, they produce specific results. A completed ToC table provides a clear outline for what a project or a program is expected to achieve, how it intends to do it, and explains why the approach will work.

Example – Theory of Change

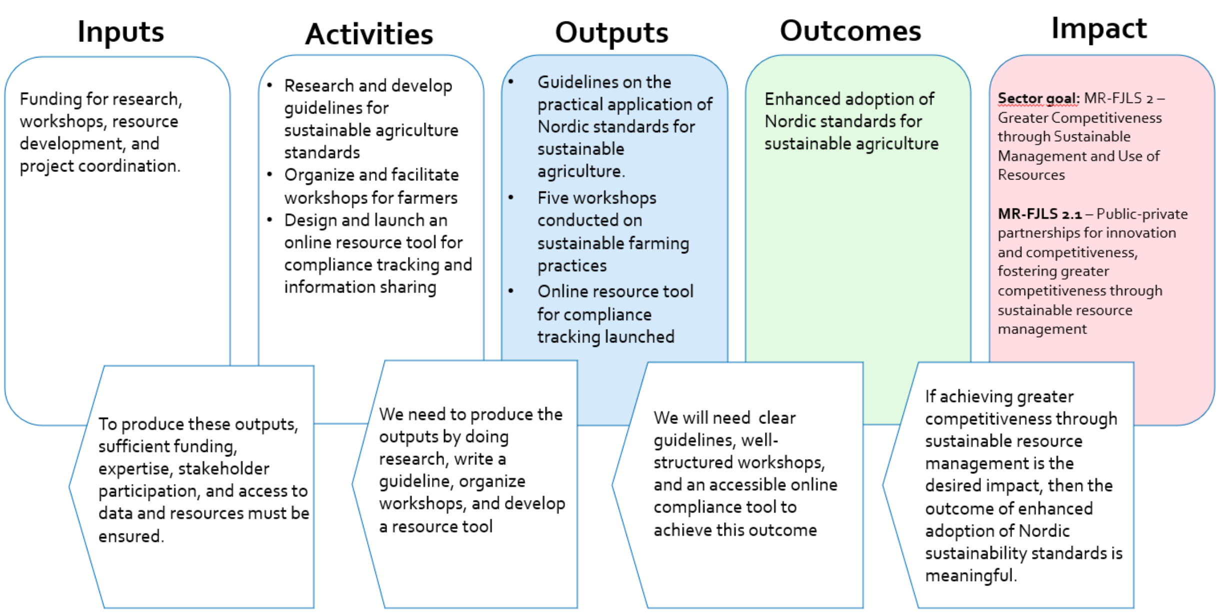
Project Title: Pilot for Promoting Nordic Standards in Sustainable Agriculture

NCM Sectoral Goal / Impact: MR-FJLS 2 Greater Competitiveness through Sustainable Management and Use of Resources

Project Specific Objective: Facilitate the adoption of Nordic sustainability standards in small-scale farming by providing practical tools, training, and resources.

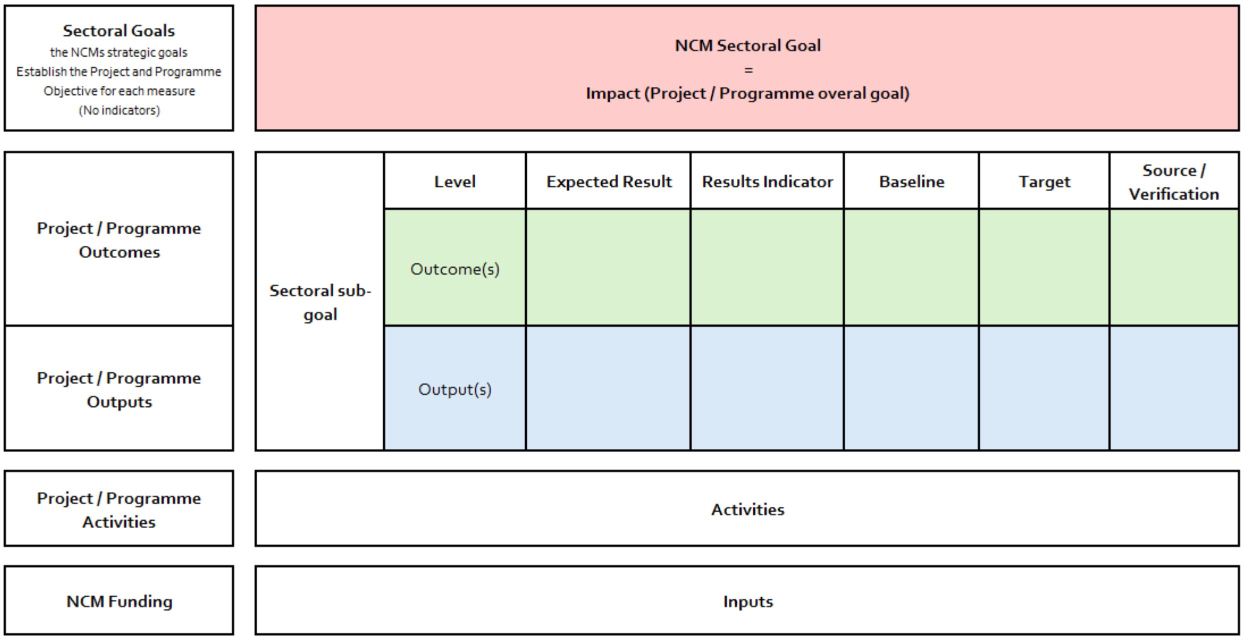
Theory of Change narrative:

The project aims to contribute to the Sectoral Goal (MR-FJLS 2) by promoting the adoption of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture. Through developing practical guidelines, conducting workshops, and launching an online resource tool, the project equips farmers with the knowledge and tools needed to adopt these standards. These outputs are expected to drive the outcome of enhanced adoption, which, in turn, contributes to advancing sustainability across the Nordic region.



3.3. The NCM Results Framework

By rotating the ToC and adding indicator elements to the outcome and output components, we get a results matrix, or what we have chosen to call ***the NCM Results Framework,*** for an individual measure (as pictured below).



The ***results framework*** is a practical tool that translates the components of the results chain and the ToC into a standardised format that is tailored to the NCMs strategic context. The results framework will be used by the NCM throughout the lifecycle of a project or a programme, from planning and implementation to monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

The results framework's structure expresses the assumed causality between a measure's resources, expected results and the NCMs overall objectives.

In summary, the NCM Results Framework:

- Clearly defines which primary **Sectoral Goal (Impact)** the measure aspires to contribute to.
- Identifies the **sub-goals** that define the path through which a measure intends to affect the primary Sectoral Objective.
- Identifies the **Outcomes** that indicate how the measure intends to affect the change along this path.
- Identifies the **Outputs** necessary to realise the outcomes
- Establishes the **Indicators** that will be used to collect data and measure progress towards both Outputs and Outcomes
- Establishes **baseline** and **target** values for each indicator.
- Establishes accountability by **identifying how to verify results**.

4. Sector Goals, Results and Indicators – Guidance for completing a Project/Programme description in the RBM system

Part 2 of the NCM Project/Programme description - "**Sectoral Goals, Expected Results and Indicators**", establishes the results framework that will serve as the basis for the NCMs assessment, evaluation and follow-up of a project or a programmes expected results.

This section provides instruction on how to complete a results framework for a project/programme. Specifically, it will provide a step-by-step guide on how to correctly:

a) Select a **NCM Sector** and **Co-operation Programme**.
b) Select a **Sectoral Goal**
c) Select **Sectoral Sub-Goal(s)**

And provide a set of general instructions and best practice guidelines on how to:

d) Develop and formulate project/programme **Outcomes**
e) Develop and formulate project/programme **Outputs**
f) Establish outcome- and output **Indicators**
g) Set **Baseline** and **Target** values for indicators

4.1. Determining Primary Sector, Sectoral Goal and Sub-Goal(s)

The Sector, Sectoral Goal, and sub-goals are **pre-determined by the NCMS**, before a Administrative Body (AB) is tasked with completing a project/programme description in the system. The NCMS will be in dialog with the Administrative Body of the project or programme and will communicate what sector and Goals should be selected when completing the Project/Programme description.

4.1.1. Sector and Sectoral Goal

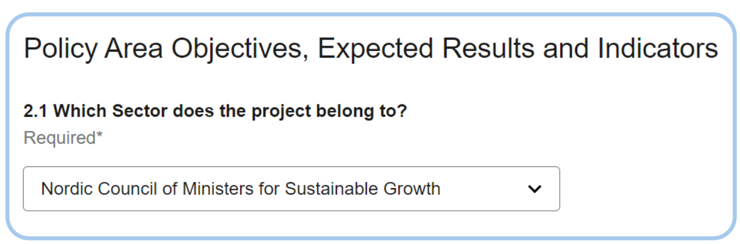
The selection of a project or programme's Sector and Sector Goal is made in the two first steps of section 2 of the project/programme description.

Step 2.1 - Selecting the Primary Sector:

The selection in step 2.1 will depend on which NCM Sector initiates and provides funding for the measure, and which NCM strategies and goals the funding is meant to support.

Step 2.1: *In the drop-down menu, the Administrative Body selects the Sector that the measure belongs to.*

Note: In our example, the NCM Sector for Sustainable Growth has been selected.



Step 2.2 - Selecting the Sector goal:

As outlined in section 2.4.1, the impact that a project or a programme is expected to contribute to is **pre-defined** as one of the NCMs Sector Goals.

The expected impact of a project or programme is always derived from, and clearly aligned with, the NCM's sectoral goals. It is important to remember however, that an individual project is not held accountable for achieving this impact. Rather, the project is seen as contributing to this impact.

Step 2.2: The Administrative Body *selects the the Sector Goal) that will define the project/programme overall goal and the impact that it aspires to contribute to.*

Note: In our example we have selected MR-Tilv. E.1 – High supply security for sustainable energy at reasonable prices.

2.2 Nordic Council of Ministers for Sustainable Growth : Which sector goal does the project support?

Required*

If you change sector or goal all subgoals will be deselected.

Goal		Description
◉	MR-Tilv. E 1	High supply security for sustainable energy at reasonable prices
○	MR-Tilv. E 2	Strengthened Nordic value chains for sustainable energy technologies
○	MR-Tilv. E 3	By 2030, the Nordics will have the world's most competitive, innovative, and consumer-oriented electricity market, which contributes to achieving the ambitious Nordic climate goals

It is only possible to select <u>one</u> Sector Goal for each project or programme in step 2.2 of the project description. Additional Sector Goals that the Project/Programme may contribute to are implicit and established with the selection of sub-goals related to other Sector Goals (see section 4.1.3. Inter-Sectoral Goals and Inter-Sectoral Sub-Goals)

4.1.2. Sectoral Sub-Goal(s).

As outlined in section 2.4.2, a sub-goal determines a path through which a project or programme intends to affect a Sector Goal (Impact).

The administrative body of a project or programme selects the relevant sub-goal(s) belonging to the Sector Goal selected in the previous step. The selection of the sub-goal(s) is also pre-determined by the NCMS.

Step 2.3: *The administrative body selects the sub-gials(s) to identify the path through which the project/programme inteds to affect the Sector Goal.*

Note: In our example we have selected MR-Tilv. E.1.1 – Improved framework conditions for sustainable energy, as the path through which we intend to affect the Sector Goal.

2.3 Which sector subgoals does the project support?

Required*

Subgoal		Description
☑	MR-Tilv. E 1.1	Improved framework conditions for sustainable energy
☐	MR-Tilv. E 1.2	Behavior and incentives for energy efficiency
☐	MR-Tilv. E 1.3	Public acceptance/support
☐	MR-Tilv. E 1.4	Support each other also in times of crisis and contribute to energy security

4.1.3. Inter-Sectoral Goals and Inter-Sectoral Sub-Goals

The next step (2.4) will provide the administrative body with an option to select additional sub-goals that are relevant to the project/programme.

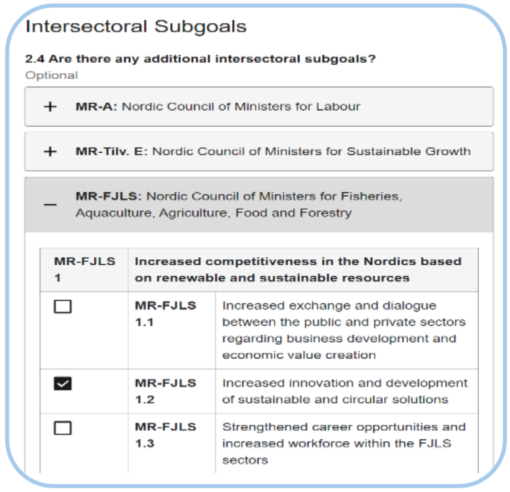
Additional sub-goals can be selected from any sectors co-operation programme. The project/programme can thus contribute to a Sector Goal through various sub-goals across different Sectors s and goals.

The ability to establish connections between a project/programme and sub-goals that belong to different Sector Goals is highly relevant for so-called inter-sectoral measures.

Step 2.4: *The administrative body selects any additional sub-goal(s) that identify additional paths through which the project/programme inteds to affect the Sector Goal.*

Each sub-goal is selected under the Sector and Sector Goal it is associated with. One or multiple sub-goals can be selected under each Goal.

Note: In our example we have selected one sub-goal, MR-FJLS 1.2 – Increased innovation and development of sustainable and circular solutions, as an additional path through which we intend to affect the Sector Goal.



It is advisable to **consider the capacity of the project/programme** to deliver multiple outcomes before determining that the measure will contribute to several Goals.

For **each sub-goal** that is selected in step 2.3 and 2.4, the project/programme will be **expected to deliver an outcome**.

Each outcome is in turn expected to be supported by **at least one output** that will be delivered by the project/programme.

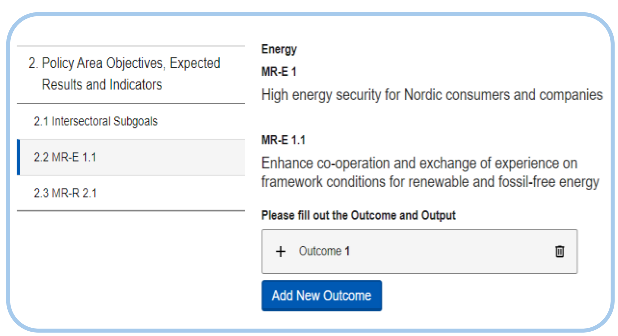
4.2. Describing Outcomes, Outputs and Indicators

For each sectoral sub-goal that is selected, the administrative body is required to describe the results that are expected to be delivered by the project or programme to affect the sub-goal.

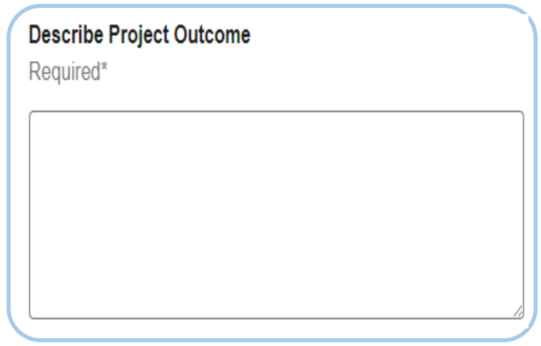
The NCMs guidelines state that the administrative body of a measure is required to:

- Describe at least one expected outcome for each sectoral sub-goal
- Describe at least one expected output for each outcome.
- Describe indicators that will be used to measure each outcome and output
- Provide baseline and target values for each indicator
- Identify how indicator values can be verified by the NCM

Expected Results: *In order to describe expected results (outcomes and outputs) the administrative body selects each relevant sub-goal and selects the "+" next to the button labelled outcome. This will alow for registering the expected Outcome and Outcome indicators, as well as associated Outputs and Output indicators. It is possible to add multiple outcomes under each sub-goal.*



4.2.1. Describe Project/Programme Outcome(s)



Outcomes should capture what are expected to be the immediate or short-term effects of a project or a programmes implementation. Outcomes should be realistic, measurable, and directly linked to outputs.

It is important to emphasise that while an administrative body cannot guarantee an outcome, it should be based on a clear strategy and have a solid foundation for contributing to the NCMs sectoral sub-goals.

How to describe outcomes

Well formulated outcomes facilitate the NCMs assessments and decision making, and are a valuable resource for follow-up, evaluation, and reporting. Good outcomes clearly describe the direct changes that a measure intends to achieve as the tangible benefits or changes that occur as a result of its activities and outputs.

In the NCMs adaptation of RBM, an outcome should be specific to a measure's context, reasonably likely to be achieved, and adhere to the following principles:

An outcome for a measure funded by the NCM should:

- Include a **verb** expressed in the past tense, such as "improved", "increased" or "strengthened", to illustrate direction of change.
- **Describe a change** in practices, capacities, skills, or behaviour, that can be applied to measures target groups, institutions, or systems.
- Focus on **a single distinct goal**
- Be an **end-state** not a process.

Examples of Outcomes:

- *Enhanced adoption* of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture
- *Awareness* of circular-economy strategies is *increased*
- *Strengthened cross-border collaboration* between Nordic civil-society organisations
- *Knowledge* of climate change impacts on biodiversity is *Improved*

The scale or size of an expected outcome is determined by the groups-, systems- or institutions that make up the targets and end-beneficiaries of a measures outputs. This can be illustrated by using one of the outcome examples above:

- *Enhanced adoption* of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture

  Smaller scale: **Farmers** attending seminars, conferences and/or trainings organised by a project have adopted the standards in their practices;
  Medium scale: **Agricultural trade organisations** in multiple Nordic countries have adopted the standards in their recommendations to members
  Larger scale: **National agricultural policies** incorporate the standards.

For the NCM, the value of an outcomes does not depend on the scale or size of the outcome. What is most important is that an outcome clearly illustrates an actionable aspect of a measures individual contribution to the broader, long-term impacts envisioned within the NCM's policy-framework.

The size and scale of an expected outcome can both be clarified by either integrating the targets (groups, systems, institutions) directly into the description of the outcome, or by representing them in the outcome-indicator that will be used to measure the outcome:

An outcome that integrates scale in its description:

- **Outcome**: *Awareness* of circular-economy strategies *among stakeholders in the Nordic construction sector has been increased*

An outcome-indicator that specifies the scale of an outcome:

- **Outcome:** *Strengthened cross-border collaboration* between Nordic civil-society organisations
- **Outcome-indicator**: The share/number of participating organisations that report an increase in joint/collaborative initiatives with civil-society organisations in other Nordic countries.

This approach connects an outcome to a measures intended targets, while describing a realistic and achievable effect for these targets.

Our outcomes represent stepping-stones toward the NCMs overall goals, while taking the available resources and reach of individual measures into consideration. This is crucial for collecting meaningful information about what our projects and programmes set out to achieve.

How NOT to describe outcomes

When describing outcomes, we should avoid pitfalls that can lead to misleading information about a measure's expected results. This can make assessment, follow-up and evaluation difficult. The following examples illustrate common errors to avoid when describing outcomes for a project or a programme.

Take som time to reflect on the following examples in order to avoid formulating outcomes that:

Include the method for achieving the outcome:

If the method for achieving an effect (e.g., workshops, seminars) is included in the outcome description, it risks describing a process rather than an outcome.

> **Example:** "Five workshops conducted to Increase understanding of sustainability issues" includes the activity and output for generating the outcome, while "Increased understanding of sustainability issues" is an outcome that focuses only on the effect of the outputs.

Have an unclear focus on the desired change

An outcome should ideally reflect specific and measurable changes for target groups, systems, or institution. Such as changes in knowledge, practice, attitudes, or behaviours. Clarity on what is expected to change is essential.

> **Example:** "More engagement in democracy" is unclear, whereas "Increased active citizen participation in local decision-making processes" provides a clearer focus.

Have an unrealistic level of ambition

Outcomes must be tailored to the scope of the measure. Smaller projects cannot realistically aim for large-scale effects. The formulation should be realistic and focus on direct effects within the measures reach.

> **Example:** "Reduction in Nordic energy consumption" is unrealistic for a smaller scale project, whereas "Increased adoption of energy-saving practices in public administration" is more achievable depending on target groups.

Focus on describing a process

An outcome should focus on the expected effect, not on how the effect is achieved or the specific deliverables produced. Outputs are tangible deliverables, while outcomes describe the changes they lead to.

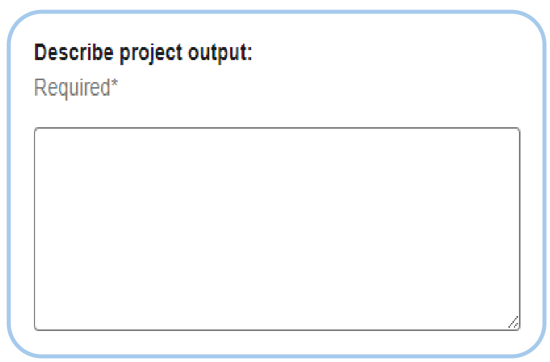
> **Example:** "Successful awareness raising campaign on workplace risks has been conducted" is a process that focuses on activities and outputs and does not capture the effect of the campaign, whereas "Increased awareness of workplace risks among employees" is an outcome.

> **Avoid circular logic**
>
> The output-to-outcome logic is the heart of any measure. State it clearly. Circular logic introduces ambiguity to a measure's design. Avoid restating the outputs as the outcome using slightly different wording.
>
> **Example:** "Trainings provided" (as output) and "Increase in provided trainings" (as outcome), is a repetition. It says we are going to "achieve what we are going to achieve". Following this logic, the purpose of providing trainings is to provide more trainings. Whereas the underlying reason for providing trainings is to enhance the skills of those attending the trainings – which would be the actual outcome.

For more examples of outcomes and tips on formulating good outcomes, please see annex III to this guide.

4.2.2 Describe project/programme outputs

As discussed earlier in this guide (section 2.4.3) a measures outputs represent the tangible deliverables generated by a measure, such as products, services, or completed tasks.


Describe project output:
Required*

They should be delivered using the allocated NCM funding and within the planned project/programme period. Outputs are seen as falling under the control of the measure and its administrative body. Data and information that is collected on outputs improves the proficiency of the NCMs monitoring and follow-up of individual projects and programmes, and will be a valuable resource when communicating the results across all projects and programmes funded by the NCM.

Each output is linked to a specific outcome and should contribute to the achievement of the outcome. It is more than likely that several outputs are needed to achieve the intended outcome, and a clear and logical connection should exist between each output and the outcome they are designed to support.

How to describe outputs

Descriptions of outputs should be concrete and clearly illustrate what the project or programme is expected to deliver.

Well formulated outputs should represent a direct and measurable result, not an effect. The description should be simple yet sufficiently specific to provide a clear understanding of what will be delivered.

An output for a measure funded by the NCM should:

- Use a **noun qualified by a verb** – A description of an action (verb) and the result of that action (noun).
- Be **specific and measurable** – Outputs should be trackable and verifiable.
- Have a clear and logical **connection to the outcome** to which it contributes

As a rule of thumb, the following questions can help to ensure well formulated output descriptions:

- Is the output clearly defined and free of "jargon" ?
- Does the output directly contribute to the specified outcome?
- Can the output easily be measured and without much effort?
- Is the output achievable with the available budget and timeframe of the measure?

Examples of Outputs in relation to an Outcome:

Outcome: Enhanced adoption of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture

Outputs:

1) Guidelines on the practical application of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture developed and published
2) Workshops on integrating Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture in small scale farming conducted.
3) Online resource tool for the use of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture, and compliance tracking, launched.

***Note**: All three outputs in the example contribute to the same outcome*

How NOT to describe outputs

As with outcomes, there are a number of common pitfalls to avoid when describing outputs. When describing an output, take steps to avoid formulating output descriptions that:

Are too vague or lack specificity
Outputs should be clear and detailed enough to give information about what is being delivered. Vague descriptions make follow-up and verification difficult.

Example: "Educational materials" is vague, while "A best practice guide on energy efficiency" provides clarity.

<u>Focuses on an activity instead of an output</u>
Outputs should highlight what is produced, not the steps taken to produce it. Including activities risks shifting focus from the actual result.

> **Example:** "Organise a seminar" is an activity, while "Seminar on labour markets in a green transition held" is an output.

<u>Include unrealistic or unachievable deliverables</u>
Outputs must align with the intervention's scope and resources. Overly ambitious outputs may lead to incomplete or unsuccessful delivery.

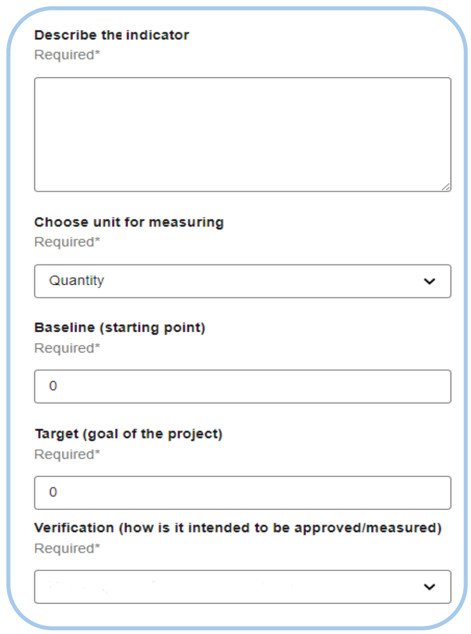
> **Example:** "Regional policy framework developed and adopted" might be unrealistic, while "Policy brief on regional policy produced and published" could be more attainable.

<u>Describe an outcome instead of an output</u>
Outputs are tangible and measurable results, while outcomes describe the changes these results lead to. Including expected effects in an output description can blur the distinction.

> **Example:** "Increased awareness of sustainability" is an effect, while "Guide on sustainable practices published" is an output.

For more examples and tips on formulating good outputs, please see <u>annex III</u> to this guide.

4.2.3 Describe indicators for each outcome and output



Indicators are quantitative or qualitative variables that specify how an outcome or an output is to be measured.

An administrative body is required to provide **one indicator for each outcome and each output**. Each indicator must specify in which units it will be measured (quantity or percentage), a baseline value, a target value, and select a source of verification that describes how the indicator values are going to be obtained.

In the NCMs application of RBM, indicators are treated as the quantitative, qualitative or binary variables used to measure deliverables (relevant to a measures outputs) or to reflect expected changes (relevant to a measures outcomes).

- Quantitative indicators are variables that measure outputs or outcomes in either numbers or percentages.
- Qualitative indicators are usually used to reflect outcomes and represent judgements, opinions, perceptions and attitudes towards a situation or subject. Most qualitative indicators can be expressed in quantitative (numerical) terms, such as the proportion of a projects target group that express or report a change in relation to a subject.
- Binary indicators are category of quantitative indicators that simply describe the presence or absence of something with a 'yes' or 'no' (or 1 and 0 in our case).

Indicators should context-specific

For the time being, output- and outcome Indicators are treated as context-specific and tailored to measure or reflect the expected results each project or program. There is thus currently no requirement to align indicators with a pre-determined set of standardized measurements.

Outcome-indicators and NCM expectations - a pragmatic approach

It is important to establish a shared understanding of the level of detail and depth that the NCM is aiming for when requiring descriptions of outcome-indicators.

By registering expected outcomes, we introduce the possibility to go beyond simply counting activities and outputs. Outcomes focus on the changes that our measures intend to create, and assessing outcomes across all funded measures will provide a more meaningful perspective on the value of the NCMs work.

However, collecting information on the progress towards outcomes through indicators must follow a pragmatic and balanced approach to avoid that processes for data-collection lead to an unnecessary burden for everyone involved.

We recognise that the long-term societal impacts, as defined by the goals and sub-goals in the sectoral co-operation programmes, extend beyond the reach and scale of any individual project or programme.

Requiring indicators to extract this kind of data and information would be cumbersome, inefficient, and counterproductive to the NCMs needs. In fact, we are trying to introduce efficiency and want to avoid transforming the attempt at reflecting change into a major exercise with a burdensome workload.

Outcome-indicators are <u>not intended</u> to reflect:

- The observable effects of a project or programme on the societal- or macro level
- The full spectrum of a measures potential results-, effects, and/or impact

Rather, an outcome in the NCM results framework should capture an actionable aspect of a projects or programme's contribution to change.

Outcome-indicators <u>should</u> therefore aim to measure/reflect the direct and observable effect that is created by the measure, for a specific target groups or end users (individuals, systems, or organisations).

While we in most cases will be unable to make a direct and observable link between outcome-indicators on this scale and macro-level societal changes, they <u>do</u> capture the individual contributions that build the foundation for the impact that the NCM wants to achieve. Our outcome-indicators can as such be considered as proxy measures for impact.

Using outcomes to create an impact narrative

Outcome-indicators are not designed to deliver scientific "proof" or comprehensive explanations about change. They do not claim to present an absolute truth or guarantee certainty in the data they convey. However, when thoughtfully developed an outcome-indicator that offers meaningful insights into what changes our measures create, it can be a good tool.

Ultimately, having approximate knowledge about critical matters is far more valuable than precise data on less significant concerns.

When outcomes from multiple projects and programmes are collected and evaluated, they provide a more coherent and comprehensive view of the overall contributions to the NCMs strategic goals. Aggregating outcomes in this way, for example under standardized categories such as "Awareness raising", "Policy influence" or "Knowledge creation" etc., can provide a structured impact narrative for the NCM.

How to select indicators

The challenge in selecting indicators for results is to find variables that can be used to assess progress towards outputs and outcomes in a meaningful way, while also be practical in terms of managing data-collection and reporting.

As a rule of thumb, indicators should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and trackable. These so-called "SMART" - criteria can help in establishing indicators that are relevant for measuring results. Indicators should be:

Specific: Clearly define what is measured and directly reflect the desired result.

What exactly are we measuring? Does the indicator focus on a specific aspect of the outcome/output?

Measurable: Track changes reliably with data agreed up-front.

Can it be verified? Is there a clear method for measuring progress?

Attainable: Achievable within the project's scope, resources, and timeframe.

Is this indicator realistic given the projects resources? Can the size of the outcome reasonably result from the outputs and activities?

Relevant: Aligned with the desired result and meaningful to target groups.

Does this indicator capture the essence of the desired result? Is it significant to the needs and expectations of the target audience?

Trackable: Data is accessible, uncomplicated, and cost-effective to collect

Are reliable data sources available? Can the required data be collected without excessive cost or effort?

We should nevertheless be pragmatic when applying "SMART". No single indicator will perfectly meet all the criteria. The choice of indicator should always balance the need for meaning, depth and practicality.

How to describe outcome-indicators

In previous sections we have established that outcome-indicators should be able to reflect progress toward the outcome that a project or programme intends to generate for its target groups, such that:

Outcome-indicators should measure/reflect:

The direct and observable effect that is created by the measure for specific target groups or end users (individuals, systems, or organisations).

Outcomes-indicators should also be context-specific, meaning that they should be tailored to reflect the expected outcome that a project or program can realistically achieve.

Consider the following **examples of outcome-indicators** that have been selected in relation to the outcome examples from before:

Example: Outcome-indicator that reflects the outcome by measuring changes in behaviour:

Outcome: *Enhanced adoption* of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture

Indicator: *Share of farmers who report* adopting Nordic sustainability standards into their farming practices after attending workshops

(*Data collected through simple post-workshop surveys after an appropriate amount of time)*

Example: Outcome-indicator that reflects an outcome by measuring changes in awareness:

Outcome*: Awareness* of circular-economy strategies is *increased*

Indicator: *Share of participants in industry stakeholder meetings that report increased awareness of circular-economy strategies.*

(*Data collected through simple post-meeting surveys after an appropriate amount of time)*

Example: Outcome-indicator that reflects the outcome by measuring number of new partnerships:

Outcome*: Strengthened cross-border collaboration* between Nordic civil-society organisations

Indicator: *Number of cross-border partnerships or joint initiatives entered into* by participating civil-society organisations within one year of receiving grant from programme

(*Data collected through reports from civil-society organisations that participated in the programme)*

Outcomes and time lag

When selecting outcome-indicators it is also important to consider the "time-lag" aspect of outcomes. This means that the outcome that an indicator reflects may not always fully materialise within a pre-determined project or programme period.

The issue of time lag can be addressed with indicators that capture early and observable signs of change, while it is also important to acknowledge that most outcomes may require longer-term follow-up. Consider the following examples of outcome indicators that are adjusted for the time-lag aspect:

Example: Outcome-indicator adjusted to reflect an outcome by measuring early signs of change

Outcome: Increased adoption of sustainable farming practices.

Indicator: Percentage of farmers who report initiating trials of sustainable farming practices within six months of training.

(The indicator his captures an early, observable sign of change (trial adoption) that suggests progress toward the long-term outcome of full practice adoption.)

Example: Outcome-indicator adjusted to reflect an outcome by measuring long term potential for change

Outcome: Improved energy efficiency in public buildings.

Indicator: Percentage of project-funded buildings with approved energy efficiency plans within the program period.

(While energy efficiency implementation may take years, this indicator reflects progress toward achieving the outcome by measuring a foundational step (plan approval)).

For more examples and tips on formulating good outcome indicators, please see annex III to this guide.

Note: *For the time being, the NCMs results framework requires that one indicator is selected and described per outcome and output, but it is not possible to add several indicators to specific outputs or outcomes.*

However, it is recognised that it may be relevant to allow for a set of indicators for an outcome or output that measure different aspects of a concept (especially at the outcome level), or to disaggregate indicators to capture relevant information about variation within target groups, e.g. gender, age or status etc. The NCMS is currently looking into solutions to allow for this.

How to describe output-indicators

Output indicators measure the quantity and/or quality of the tangible deliverables which will be generated directly by a project or a programme (and its projects). Output indicators tell us what we got for the effort and resources, what we bought/procured, what services we directly provided, such as training, reports, conferences, or scholarships. Output indicators, in other words, help us measure the progress of implementation.

It is generally more straight forward to formulate indicators for outputs compared to outcomes, as they most often measure the quantity of a measures immediate and deliverable results, making them easier to define, observe, measure, and verify.

A good output-indicator should apply the same SMART criteria as an outcome-indicator. In addition an output indicator should:

- Be specific and Avoid vague language. An indicator should clearly state what the indicator measures and ensure it corresponds to a single, tangible deliverable.

  Example: *Instead of "Educational materials created," specify "Number of best-practice guides on sustainable energy published."*

- Quantify outputs where possible by using numbers, percentages, or binary measures (yes/no) to make indicators easy to track and verify.

  Example: *"Number of stakeholder meetings held."*

- Ensure relevance to the outcomes and goals of the project or programme. Indicators should reflect deliverables that contribute directly to the project's desired outcomes.

  Example: *For a policy advocacy project, an output indicator might be "Number of policy briefs submitted to decision-makers."*

- Be realistic and rchievable within the project's timeframe, scope, and budget.

  Example: *"10 training workshops conducted" is more realistic for a small project than "50 workshops."*

- Focus on the tangible deliverables themselves, not their effects or changes in the target audience.

  Example: *Output Indicator - "Number of workshops held." (Correct), Outcome Indicator - "Percentage of participants who report increased knowledge." (Incorrect for outputs)*

By adhering to these principles, output indicators can provide clear insights into project progress and ensure that that the results that a measure are expected to deliver can be monitored and reported. Consider the following **examples of outcome-indicators** that have been selected in relation to the three output-examples from before:

Example: **Output:** Guidelines on the practical application of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture developed and published

Indicator: Number of guidelines developed and published.

(Unit of measurement: Quantity, Baseline: 0, Target: 1)

Example: **Output:** Workshops on integrating Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture in small scale farming conducted.

Indicator: Number of workshops conducted on integrating Nordic standards.

(Unit of measurement: Quantity, Baseline: 0, Target: 5)

Example: **Output:** Online resource tool for the use of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture, and compliance tracking, launched.

Indicator: Online resource tool operational by project end [yes/no].

(Unit of measurement: Quantity/Binary, Baseline: 0, Target: 1)

For more examples and tips on formulating good output-indicators, please see annex III to this guide.

4.2.4 Baseline- and target values for indicators

Indicators require a baseline, target and timeframe in order to be useful in when assessing and evaluating project and programme results. This is what makes it possible to demonstrate change over time.

A **baseline** value for an indicator represents the situation before the start of a project or a programme – the reference point for measuring and reflecting progress and change. A **target** value for an indicator represents the expected situation at the end of a project or a programme. The **timeframe** that a project- or programme has to influence progress towards the target, is determined by its implementation period.

How to set baseline values for indicators:

<u>Baseline values for output-indicators</u>
In the NCMs results framework no baseline values are required for output-indicators. This means that they should automatically be set to "0". This is because we generally want to measure the deliverables generated and produced during the period of implementation.

<u>Baseline values for outcome-indicators</u>
Baseline values of other than "0" can be considered for outcome-indicators, as appropriate, but are <u>not</u> a requirement.

As outlined above, outcomes and outcome-indicators in the NCM results framework will in most cases reflect unique project- and programme specific variables that are not linked to standardized sets of indicators.

Unless there is a clear added value in doing so, administrative bodies are discouraged from spending unreasonable time and resources on establishing baselines for outcome-indicators.

However, there may be cases where secondary data on outcome-indicators is readily available, such as when an outcome-indicator measures the quantity in a variable that builds towards an outcome over time, and for which the programme or project regularly receives funding from the NCM for the same purpose.

How to set target values for indicators:

Targets are specific values assigned to indicators that are to be achieved within a defined timeframe, typically spanning from start of a project/programme to its final year. They acts as benchmarks for assessing whether implementation is progressing as intended. Defining realistic targets for indicators is often a central challenge.

There are some key differences in how targets are set for outcome indicators versus output indicators, primarily due to their nature and the aspects of a project or programme they measure.

	Outcome Indicators	Output Indicators
Nature	*Measure effects or changes resulting from project outputs.*	*Measure direct deliverables produced by the project.*
Dependency	*Influenced by external factors and target group behaviour.*	*Fully controlled by the project team.*
Baseline	*May start at non-zero, reflecting existing conditions.*	*Typically starts at zero, as outputs are created during implementation.*
Target Complexity	*Requires consideration of time lag and external dependencies.*	*Straightforward and directly linked to planned activities.*
Target Type	*Often incremental improvements (e.g., percentage increase).*	*Absolute or binary targets (e.g., number of outputs delivered).*

Setting target values for outcome-indicators

The key to establishing appropriate targets for outcome-indicators is to find a balance between ambition and being realistic in terms of what can be achieved. Setting appropriate targets for outcome-indicators should be based on knowledge of what is likely to influence the effects or changes resulting from the project's outputs.

Consider time lag: Outcomes often take longer to materialize and may not fully emerge within the project's timeframe. Targets can account for this by focusing on early, observable signs of change such as the intention to adopt a new practice rather than full implementation.

Account for external factors: Outcomes depend on the actions and decisions of target groups or stakeholders and are influenced by external factors beyond the project's control. Targets need to be realistic, reflecting what is achievable given these dependencies.

Use baselines thoughtfully and only when necessary: Baselines for outcome indicators may not always start at zero, especially if the target groups already show some progress or prior exposure to related interventions. If baselines are established, targets should build on these baselines.

Focus on incremental progress: Targets for outcome-indicators often represent incremental improvements rather than absolute achievements, aligning with the scale and scope of the intervention.

<u>Setting target values for output-indicators</u>

As with outcome-indicators, being realistic and taking into account risks is key to setting appropriate targets for output-indicators. Take into account the following factors

Direct control: Outputs are fully under the control of the project team, making targets more straightforward to set. Targets are tied closely to the planned activities and resource availability.

Aligned with deliverables: Targets are often quantitative and should directly correspond to the project's work plan and activities (e.g., the number of reports to be published or events to be conducted).

The baseline should (almost) always be "0": Output indicators usually begin at zero, as they measure what the project produces during its implementation period.
Focus on completion: Targets are often binary or absolute (e.g., "Yes/No" or specific numbers), reflecting whether the deliverable was produced or the activity completed.

To sum up:

- Outcome targets: Should reflect realistic progress toward broader goals, considering the scale and timeframe of the intervention.
- Output targets: Should be specific, measurable, and aligned with the resources and scope of the project's implementation plan

Examples of baselines and targets for outcome- and output indicators:

Outcome:	Enhanced adoption of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture	
Outcome-indicator:	Share of farmers who report adopting Nordic sustainability standards into their farming practices after attending workshops.	
Baseline:	**[0%]**	*(The project targets farmers who are not yet implementing the standards. Prior adoption specific to the project is assumed to be non-existent.)*
Target:	**[30%]**	*(A realistic and achievable proportion of participants adopting the standards within the project's timeframe, based on the expected reach and intensity of the workshops and resources available.)*
Output 1.1:	Guidelines on the practical application of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture developed and published	
Output Indicator 1.1:	Number of guidelines developed and published.	
Baseline:	**[0]**	*(The guidelines are created as part of the project and do not exist prior to its start)*
Target:	**[1]**	*(The project aims to produce and publish one comprehensive guideline document)*
Output 1.2:	Workshops on integrating Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture in small-scale farming conducted	
Output Indicator 1.2:	Number of workshops conducted on integrating Nordic standards.	
Baseline:	**[0]**	(Workshops are a planned deliverable of the project, and no workshops specific to this scope have occurred before implementation)
Target:	**[5]**	(Five workshops are a reasonable number to ensure sufficient farmer engagement and practical training within the project's resources and timeframe)
Output 1.3:	Online resource tool for the use of Nordic standards for sustainable agriculture, and compliance tracking, launched	
Output Indicator 1.3:	Online resource tool operational by project end.	
Baseline:	**[No/0]**	*(The tool is a project deliverable and does not exist prior to the project start)*
Target:	**[Yes/1]**	*(The goal is to have the tool fully operational and accessible by the end of the project)*

How to determine the source of verification for indicators

The feasibility, complexity and cost effectiveness of data collection should be carefully considered when selecting indicators. Therefore, when indicators are being formulated, it is important to be aware of what it will require to collect the data and report it. We should be able to answer questions such as:

- How will the information be collected?
- Who will collect/provide the information?
- When or how regularly it will be provided?
- What resources are needed to collect it?

Data sources for indicators can be primary or secondary:

> **Primary data** is collected directly by the administrative body and may include administrative-, budget-, or personnel data; surveys; interviews; and direct observations.
>
> **Secondary data** has already been collected outside the project or programme and is readily available from other sources. Examples of secondary data include government reports, or existing statistic al data on local-, regional-, or national level.

While secondary data can be cost-efficient, it should be carefully considered whether it is a realistic prospect to select indicators for which secondary data exists.

4.2.5 Outputs, outcomes, and indicators for Projects vs Programmes

In the NCMs application of RBM, results for projects and programmes are established on the same level, but the scale and what they represent may differ.

NCM funded **programmes** are often bigger measures that are broader in purpose and in scope. Programmes function as intermediaries for channelling funds to multiple sub-projects and activities that are managed by third parties, often through open selection procedures. Consequently, programme-level results should be treated as the expected results of programme activities and its sub-projects, combined.

Projects most often have a more singular focused goal and deliver specific outputs and outcomes, whereas programmes have broader responsibilities, aiming to achieve long-term and systemic changes through multiple projects and subprojects.

Key Considerations for Formulating Outputs and Outcomes for Programmes

The expected results (outputs and outcomes) of a programme should be formulated using the same principles as those for individual projects. However, a programme is required to describe its results as a function of its activities and sub-projects. This means that it should consider the totality of expected results from programme funds when formulating outcomes, outputs and indicators.

An administrative body of a programme is responsible for setting up procedures, reporting forms and control systems to ensure that it receives the information it needs from sub-projects to report on programme results to the NCM.

Sub-projects which receive grants from programmes funded by the NCM, are <u>not required</u> to establish expected results and indicators for their projects, or report directly to the NCM within the results framework.

Level	Source of Financing	Reporting	Outputs	Outcomes
Projects *(Registered in the NCMs RBM system)*	NCM	To NCM	Specific, tangible deliverables.	Short-term effects resulting from the project's outputs.
Programmes *(Registered in the NCMs RBM system)*	NCM	To NCM	A) An aggregate of outputs delivered by the programme's subprojects. B) The number of sub-projects within a specific theme or focus area	Short-term and potentially broader effects or system-level changes expected to result from the programme's outputs.
Sub-projects *(Not registered in the NCMs RBM system)*	Programme	To Programme	Expected outputs and outcomes on the sub-project level contribute to the programme's results.	

The table above illustrates the funding and reporting framework for programmes funded by the NCM. The structure ensures that both projects and programmes meet similar reporting requirements to the NCM, while their results contain a difference in composition and scales.

Programme results are a synthesis of their activities and sub-projects, contextualized within a broader strategic framework outlined in a Programme-document.

Project vs Programme Outputs

- Projects: Outputs are often more specific, focusing on measurable deliverables from project activities, such as the number of reports, training sessions, or events conducted.
- Programmes: Outputs represent an aggregation across multiple projects and may include broader statistics, such as the total number of sub-projects or activities funded by the programme.

Project and Programme Outcomes

- Projects: Outcomes focus on short- to medium-term effects, such as increased knowledge or changes in behaviour or policy at a local or regional level.
- Programmes: Outcomes can be more comprehensive and systemic, reflecting broader goals, such as improved collaboration across the Nordic region or long-term policy changes.

Example of a results framework for a programme

Title: Programme for Strengthened Cross-Border Collaboration Between Nordic Civil-Society Organisations

Programme overall goal: Enhance cross-border collaboration between civil-society organisations in the Nordic region to promote joint initiatives and regional cohesion.

Outcome 1: Increased number of collaborative initiatives among Nordic civil-society organisations.

Outcome Indicator 1.1:	Percentage of funded organisations that report at least one cross-border initiative within one year of programme completion. **Baseline:** [0%] **Target:** [75%]
Output 1:	Number of funded projects aimed at fostering collaboration among civil-society organisations in the Nordic countries.
Output-Indicator 1.1:	Number of collaboration projects funded under the programme. **Baseline:** [0] **Target:** [15]
Outcome 2:	Improved organisational capacity for cross-border project management and implementation.
Outcome-indicator 2:	Share of participants reporting improved project management skills after attending workshops. **Baseline:** [0%] **Target:** [80%]
Output 2.1:	Development of best-practice guides for establishing and sustaining cross-border civil-society partnerships.
Output-Indicator 2.1:	Number of guides published and disseminated. **Baseline:** [0] **Target:** [3]
Outcome 3:	Enhanced regional network development and long-term partnership sustainability.
Outcome Indicator 3:	Number of partnerships sustained for two years or longer post-programme. **Baseline:** [0] **Target:** [10]
Output 3.1:	Number of capacity-building workshops conducted to equip organisations with tools for effective cross-border collaboration.
Output-indicator 3.1:	Number of workshops conducted. **Baseline:** [0] **Target:** [10]

Annex I – Goal and Results Hierarchy in the Implementation of Vision 2030

Goal / Results hierarchy in the implementation of Vision 2030, and the NCM:s Sectoral Goals 2025-2030

	Nordic Council of Ministers	**Programme**	**Project**
NCM Overall vision *Vision 2030 is the overarching objective common to all involved in the implementation*	**Vision 2030** a Green, Competitive, and Socially Inclusive Nordic Region by 2030		
NCM Strategic Goal *Sectoral Goals* *Represent the long-term change that all projects and programmes contribute to*	Sectoral Goals (14 Sectoral Co-operation programmes)	Programme overall goal = Programme Impact	Project overall goal
Project / Programme Outcomes	All outcomes from all measures funded by the NCM Indicators	Programme Outcome(s) = Project specific goal Indicators	Project Outcome(s) = Project specific goal Indicators
Project / Programe Outputs	All Outputs from all measures funded by the NCM Indicators	Programme outputs Indicators	Project Outputs Indicators
Sub-Project Results		Sub-Project 1 results Sub-Project 2 results	

Annex II – The NCM Results Framewok

Overall Vision *Common to all involved in the implementation of Vision 2030* (No Indicators)	**Vision 2030** a Green, Competitive, and Socially Inclusive Nordic Region by 2030
Sectoral Goals the NCMs strategic goals Establish the Project and Programme Objective for each measure (No indicators)	**NCM Sectoral Goal** = **Impact (Project / Programme overal goal)**

		Level	**Expected Result**	**Results Indicator**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Source / Verification**
Project / Programme Outcomes	**Sectoral sub-goal**	Outcome(s)					
Project / Programme Outputs		Output(s)					

Project / Programme Activities	**Activities**
NCM Funding	**Inputs**

Annex III – Further examples of hoe to describe outcomes, outputs and indicators

Do's and Don'ts when describing Outcomes:

Weak Formulation	Why is it Weak?	Better Formulation
Contribute to improving collaboration between Nordic educational institutions through joint seminars.	Not formulated as an endstate but as a process. Uses vague terms ("contribute to improving"). Includes the means (joint seminars) to achieve the desired effect.	Improved collaboration between Nordic educational institutions in curriculum development.
Increase awareness and adoption of sustainable strategies among businesses and citizens.	Contains multiple objectives (awareness and adoption), making measurement and assessment complicated. Too broad and unspecific. Combines different target groups (businesses and citizens).	Increased adoption of sustainable strategies among small and mediumsized enterprises in the Nordic region.
Facilitate knowledge exchange between climate researchers and policymakers.	Formulated as a process ("facilitate knowledge exchange"). Does not specify the expected change. Includes the means rather than the end result.	Improved integration of climate research findings into Nordic environmental policy development.
Support the development of innovative solutions for renewable energy.	Uses vague verbs ("support"). Focuses on activities rather than the desired change. Does not specify the effect.	Increased implementation of innovative solutions for renewable energy in the Nordic region.
Strengthen the capacity and resources of local communities to adapt to climate change.	Combines multiple objectives (capacity and resources). May be too broad without specifying the expected change. Difficult to measure effectively.	Improved capacity at the local level to implement climate adaptation strategies.

Do’s and Don’ts when describing Outcome-indicators:

Outcome Formulation	Weak Outcome Indicator	Why is it Weak/Bad?	Better Outcome Indicator
Increased cultural integration in the Nordic region	Increased cultural integration between Nordic countries	Formulated as an expected output, not an indicator. Lacks clear measurement unit and method for measuring change.	Share of participants reporting improved understanding of culture from another Nordic country after participating in cultural activities.
Improved sustainability within Nordic tourism	Reduced carbon emissions from the tourism sector in region X	May be too ambitious for small interventions. Difficult to measure carbon emissions directly from the intervention.	Share of participating companies that have implemented specific sustainability measures after completed workshops.
Increased labour mobility within the Nordic region	More people working in another Nordic country	Unclear and broad formulation. Difficult to quantify without clear parameters.	Share of participants reporting increased understanding of job opportunities in other Nordic countries after attending informational meetings.
Strengthened Nordic language comprehension among youth	Youth better understand neighbouring Nordic languages	Difficult to measure. No clear definition of what constitutes "better understanding."	Share of youth passing a basic language test in neighbouring Nordic languages after language exchanges or workshops.
Increased use of renewable energy in Nordic municipalities	Percentage of municipalities increasing their use of renewable energy	Too broad and unclear. Difficult to measure precisely without specific actions.	Number of municipalities reporting an increase in renewable energy use after completed pilot tests.

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Do's and Don'ts when describing Outputs:

Weak Formulation	Why is it Weak?	Better Formulation
Report	Not specific enough. Does not provide a clear picture of what is being delivered.	Report on Nordic climate strategies published.
Increased awareness of sustainability	Not within the direct control of the intervention. This is an outcome, not an output.	Information campaign on sustainability conducted.
Workshop and development of policy recommendations	Contains two distinct outputs. Difficult to measure progress for each.	Split into two outputs: Workshop on green energy conducted. Policy recommendations for green energy developed.
Implementation of new legislation	Outside the control of the intervention. Implementation of laws is a direct effect or impact, not an output.	Supporting materials and analyses for new legislation developed.

Do’s and Don’ts when describing Output-indicators:

Output Description	Weak Output Indicator	Why is it Weak/Bad?	Better Output Indicator
Nordic conference on sustainable tourism held	Conference participants found the content engaging and relevant	Subjective and difficult to measure reliably. Focuses on perceptions rather than a measurable output.	Number of participants attending the conference.
Report on green energy published	Report accessed by at least 100 people online	Blurs lines between an output (publication) and an indirect effect (engagement). Focuses on usage rather than the product delivered.	Report finalized and published.
Educational materials for Nordic schools developed and made available	Educational materials evaluated as effective by teachers	Relies on subjective evaluation ("effective"). Difficult to measure consistently across all users.	Number of educational materials developed and distributed to schools.
Language workshops for youth conducted	Number of languages taught during the workshops	Measures a characteristic of the activity (number of languages) rather than the actual delivery of the output. Does not capture the quantity of workshops conducted.	Number of language workshops conducted.
Nordic web portal for cultural exchange developed and launched	Number of users visiting the web portal in the first month	Measures portal usage rather than the output (development and launch). Focuses on engagement rather than delivery.	Web portal developed and launched.

(Do´s and) Don´ts when setting baselines and targets

Indicator	Baseline	Target	What's wrong?
Percentage of Nordic municipalities adopting circular economy strategies	5%	100%	Target is unrealistic given the baseline and timeframe.
Number of workshops conducted on renewable energy	0	15%	Target uses a percentage, while the indicator and baseline are absolute numbers.
Share of women in leadership roles within Nordic businesses	25%	Improved	Target is vague and not measurable ("improved").
Reduction in carbon emissions from Nordic public transport	500 tons/year	Significant reduction	Target is not specific or quantifiable ("significant reduction").
Number of industry stakeholders engaging in cross-border collaborations	10	50% increase	Baseline is absolute, but target uses a percentage, creating inconsistency.