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# Basic Guidance for Tools Results Chains

October 2005



**Resources for Implementing the WWF Standards**

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This document is intended as a resource to support the implementation of the *WWF Standards of Conservation Project and Programme Management*. A results chain is a tool that can be used to help meet several steps of these standards; each project or programme team will have to determine whether this tool and associated guidance makes sense for them.

This document may change over time; the most recent version can be accessed at:

<https://intranet.panda.org/documents/folder.cfm?uFolderID=60978>

**Written and edited by:** Foundations of Success

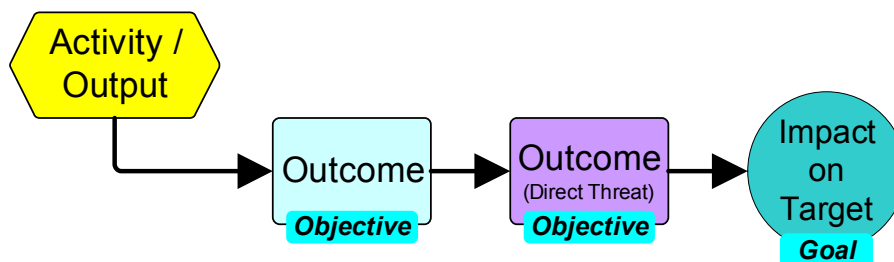
Please address any comments to Sheila O'Connor ([soconnor@wwfint.org](mailto:soconnor@wwfint.org)).

# Results Chains

## What Are Results Chains?

A results chain is a tool that clarifies assumptions about how conservation activities contribute to reducing threats and achieving the conservation of biodiversity or thematic targets. They are diagrams that map out a series of causal statements that link factors in an “if...then” fashion – for example, if a threat is reduced, then a biodiversity target is enhanced or if an opportunity is taken, then a thematic target might be improved. In some organizations, results chains are also termed “logic models.” Results chains focus on the achievement of results to define how you think project activities will contribute to your goal (see Box 1 for a definition of results and other terms). The basis for the chain comes from your conceptual model, but you will build on that model to make it more specific and to make the boxes results-oriented. As shown in Figure 1, results chains are composed of an activity or strategy (a group of activities), desired outcomes, and the ultimate impact that these results will have on the biodiversity target. A goal is a formal statement of a desired impact on a target and an objective is a formal statement of a desired outcome.

**Figure 1. The Basic Components of a Results Chain**



A good results chain should meet the following criteria:

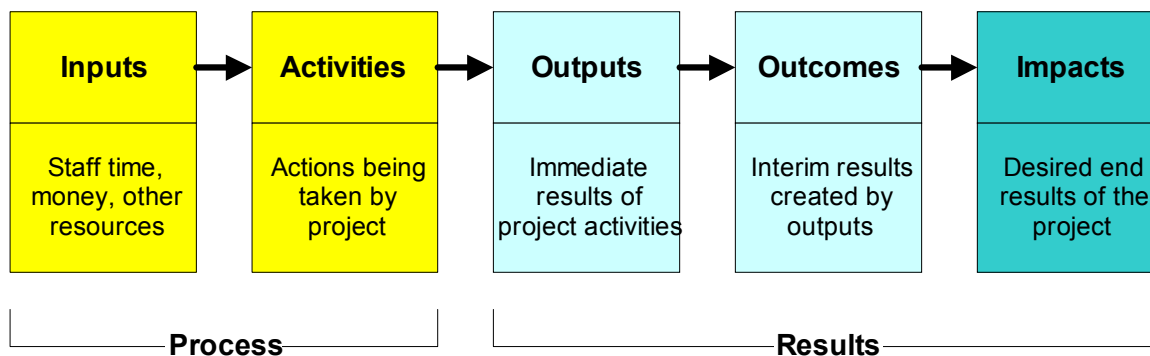
- **Results oriented:** Boxes contain desired results (e.g., reduction of hunting), and not activities (e.g., conduct a study).
- **Causally linked:** There are clear “if...then” connections between successive boxes.
- **Demonstrates change:** Each box describes how you hope the relevant factor will change (e.g., improve, increase, or decrease).
- **Reasonably complete:** There are sufficient boxes to construct logical connections but not so many that the chain becomes overly complex.
- **Simple:** There is only one result per box.

## Why Results Chains Are Important

Often, project teams implement strategies that they believe will contribute to conserving part of the biodiversity in their site, but they do not formally state their assumptions about exactly how the strategy will lead to threat reduction and biodiversity conservation. As shown in Figure 2, it is likely that they have many implicit assumptions – and team members may even have different assumptions – about how their strategies will contribute to achieving conservation. Because they do not make these assumptions explicit, however, they cannot test them and learn over time whether they are valid.

**Box 1. An Overview of Terms Used to Describe Results**

There is a great deal of confusion in the world over the different terms used to describe the results of a project. What one person calls an “outcome” another calls a “result” and yet a third person calls an “impact.” The following figure shows the terms as they are most commonly used by evaluation experts in different fields such as development and public health.



Based on the above figure, the following terms can be defined for use in results chains in biodiversity conservation projects:

- **Impact** – The desired future state of a target. A **goal** is a formal statement of an impact.
- **Outcome** – The desired future state of a threat and/or opportunity factor. An **objective** is a formal statement of an outcome.
- **Output** – The desired product of an activity or task.
- **Result** – A generic term used to describe the desired future state of a target or factor. Includes impacts, outcomes, and outputs.

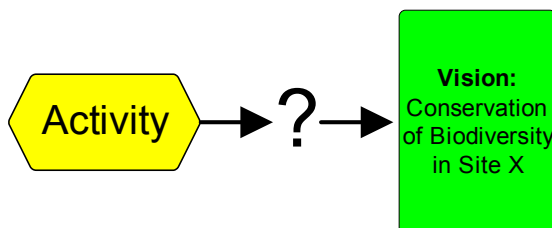
The above terms refer primarily to a sequence of results in a logical sense. There is also a sequence of results in a temporal sense:

- **Final result** – The ultimate desired result over time.
- **Intermediate result** – A milestone along the way to that final result.

Note that the *WWF Standards* do not “officially” define these terms (with the exception of goal and objective) – they are merely presented as suggestions.

**Figure 2. Implicit Assumptions**

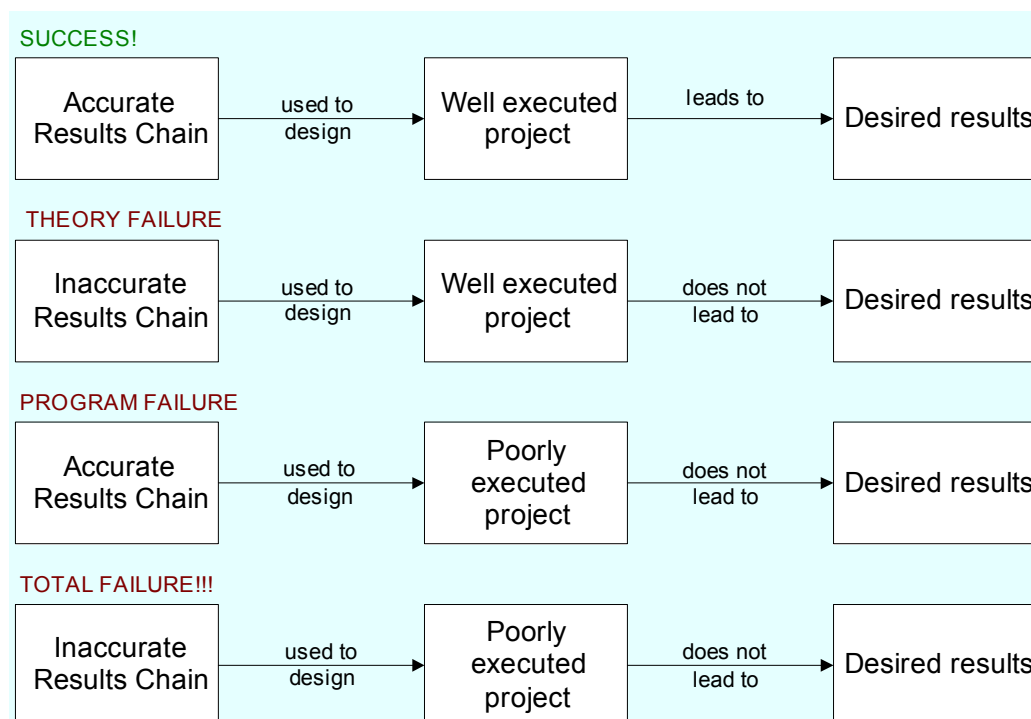
As shown by the question mark, team often do not make explicit how their activities link to their vision.



For example, a team may choose to develop fisheries regulations for a marine protected area (MPA) in coordination with the local fisheries cooperative. They may believe that by working with the leaders of the fishing cooperative they will be educating the fishermen in the area about the value of MPAs in contributing to fisheries productivity and that this participatory planning will change local fishermen’s attitudes about the MPA and lead to strong local respect of the fisheries regulations. It is quite likely, however, that they have not made each of their assumptions explicit and that they are not testing them. If they do not make their assumptions explicit or test them, then they have no way of knowing whether their actions are contributing to the achievement of desired results. There are many points at which their logic could break down – for example, the majority of fishermen in the area may not be members of the cooperative or influenced by the coop leaders, an increase in the fishermen’s knowledge about marine ecology and attitudes about the MPA may not change their fishing practices, or there may be other factors (such as their need for income or weak enforcement) that the project needs to address to make this participatory planning process successful.

To be successful, a project must be based on both sound project theory – in other words, an accurate results chain – and good implementation. When a project does not produce desired results, people usually assume that the project team did not carry out the planned activities well enough. As shown in Figure 3, however, projects may fail due to theory failure, even when the project team does an excellent job implementing the project activities.

**Figure 3. Ingredients Needed for Project Success**



## When to Use Results Chains

Results chains are an important tool to use in Step 2.1 of the Design Phase of the WWF Standards to help in the development of your action plan including in particular, objectives and strategic activities. You will also use the results chains for designing your monitoring plan (Step 2.2) and for the analysis and adapt phase (Step 4), when you will analyse the extent to which you have achieved your goals and objectives and why you have seen progress or lack thereof. If you have implemented your project as planned but have not achieved your desired results, you should examine what assumptions in the results chain may not be valid and make necessary changes to strengthen your project theory. The results chains will also be important inputs for the feedback and evaluations step (Step 5.3), because they define your project theory, which provides evaluators with a framework for measuring the progress of your project.

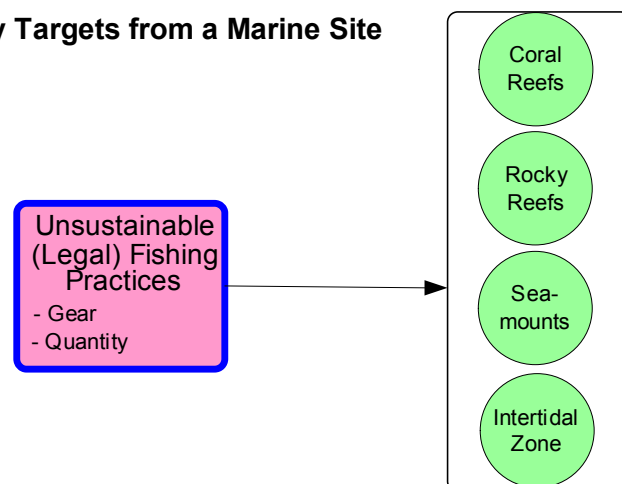
## How to Develop and Use Results Chains

The following outline the basic steps in completing a results chain. In workshop settings, this is best done using index cards and a sticky board. The final product can then be captured using MS Visio, Powerpoint, or another flow-charting software program.

### 1. Select a Target and Threat to Focus On

The first step in developing a results chain is to select the biodiversity target and direct threat that you want to focus on. It is generally best to begin with one of the threats that ranked high during the threat prioritization exercise (see [Basic Guidance on Threat Ranking](#)). The threat and biodiversity target will be the last two components at the right end of your results chain. Figure 4 provides an example from a marine site. In this example, the direct threat affects several targets.

**Figure 4. Priority Threat and Biodiversity Targets from a Marine Site**

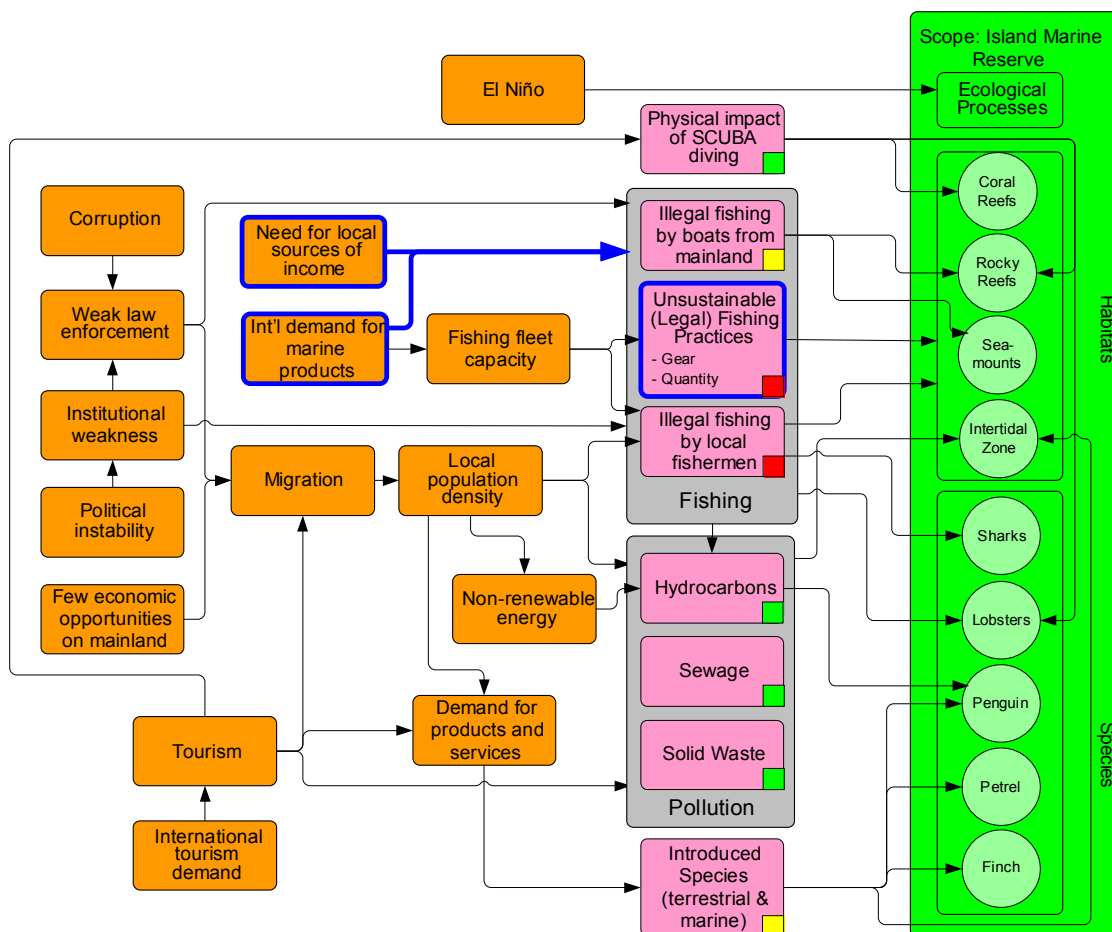


### 2. Select a Strategy That Will Address the Threat

The next step is to select a strategy or line of action that you will take to reduce the direct threat. This is a very important step and should be taken carefully, because you want to focus your work on the strategies that you believe will have the greatest impact. Using the conceptual model, identify all the main factors (indirect threats or opportunities) that contribute to that direct threat. For example, your main factors might include market factors, social organization, people's level of knowledge of

appropriate practices, politics, law enforcement. Of these main factors, identify the ones you believe you must change to reduce the threat and others that have a large impact on the threat. Of these, choose the ones that are feasible to change – these are the key factors. As shown in Figure 5, the marine project team chose to focus on local fishermen’s need for income and international demand for marine products as their critical factors.

**Figure 5. Conceptual Model for the Island Marine Reserve Project with Factors Highlighted that Are Relevant to the Promotion of Alternative Fishing Techniques**

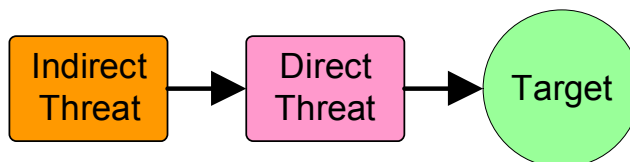


**3. Construct an Initial Results Chain Based on Your Conceptual Model**

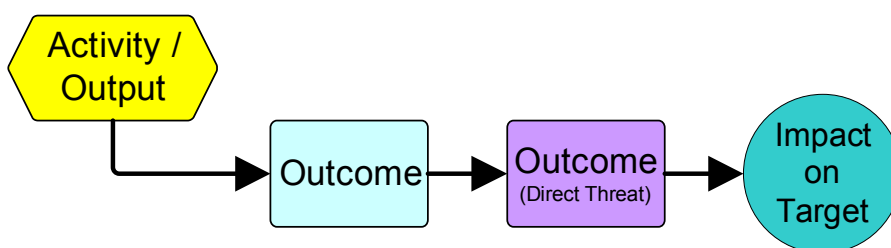
Take these key factors out of the model and place them in your draft results chain, as shown below. Choose a strategy or a series of actions that could influence these key factors. You now have the basic building blocks of a results chain. To develop a very simple (and probably incomplete) chain, you will just need to convert the factors from the results chain into results, as shown in generic fashion in Figure 6. Factors are either neutral (e.g., government fisheries policies) or may be negative (e.g., weak institutional capacity), whereas results are stated as desired changes in these factors (e.g., strengthened capacity to enforce fisheries regulations). Note that in these examples, the colour of the factors shifts from green, pink, and orange in a conceptual model to turquoise, purple, and blue in a results chain to indicate a shift from the “current state of the world” to the “desired future condition of the world.” A very simple results chain based on our marine example is shown in Figure 7.

**Figure 6. A Generic Depiction of Converting a Conceptual Model to a Results Chain**  
 Note that the colours of the factors shift from orange, pink, and green to various shades of blue to indicate a shift from the “current state of the world” to the “desired future condition of the world.”

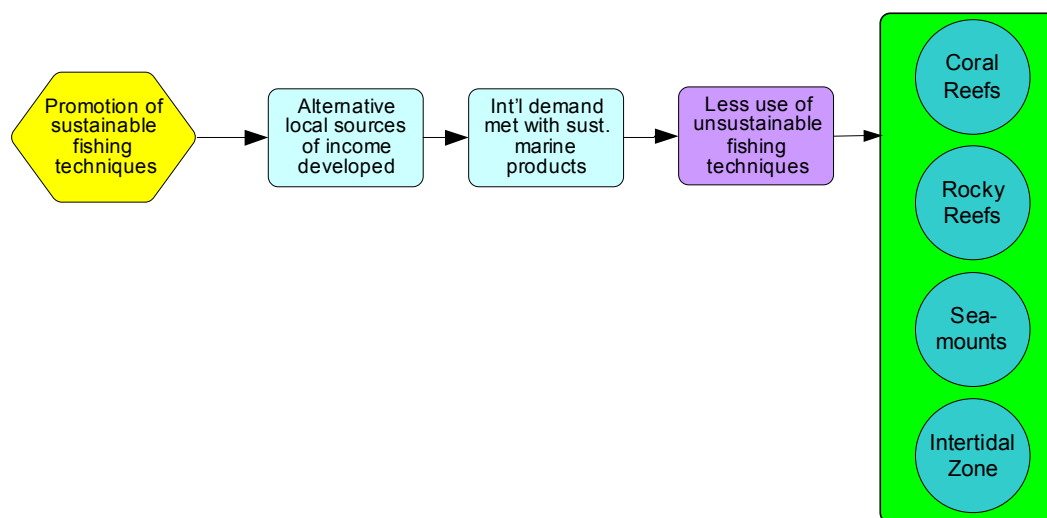
*A chain from a conceptual model showing the “current state of the world”*



*The same factors converted to a results chain showing the “desired future condition”*



**Figure 7. An Initial Results Chain Including the Factors from the Conceptual Model Converted into Results**



**4. Complete the Links in the Results Chain**

The next – and most difficult – step is to flesh out the results chain, adding all of the intermediate results necessary to create clear, logical “if...then” linkages along the chain. There are several different ways to do this. One way is to work from the left to the right, asking what the immediate results or outcomes of the strategy should be, what intermediate outcomes they will produce, and what

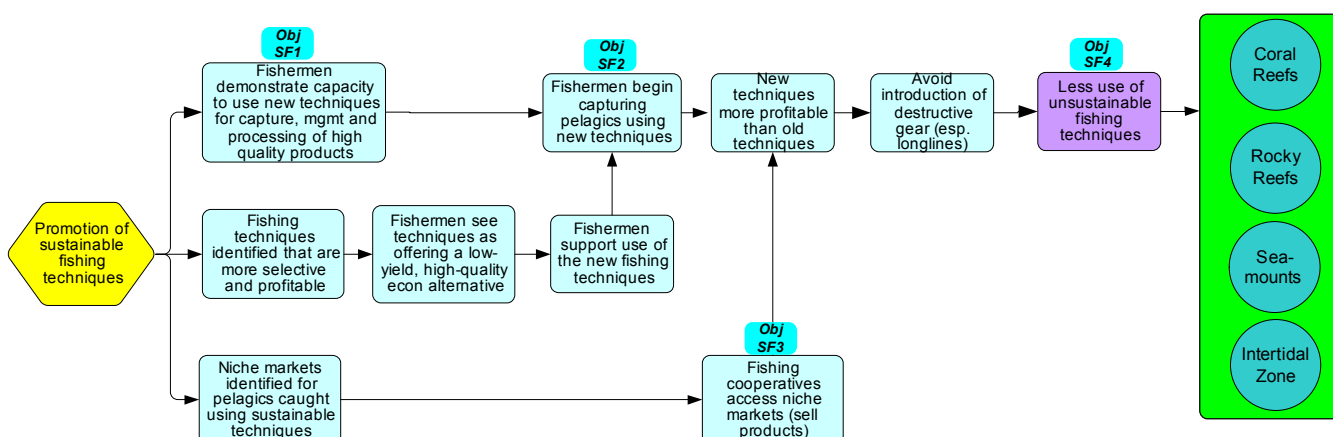


additional outcomes are necessary to reduce your threat. Another way is to work from right to left, asking what needs to happen to reduce the threat, what outcomes are needed to make that happen, etc. Yet another way is to brainstorm intermediate results and then organize them along the chain, assuring that there are clear “if...then” linkages between each pair of results.

If you are developing a new strategy for a threat that you have not addressed in the past – for example, the threat of tourism infrastructure development – then we recommend building the chain from right to left, so that you are clear about what you need to accomplish to minimize the impact of this threat on your targets. For example, if you are beginning to address tourism infrastructure development as a threat to a coastal-marine system, then you’ll need to determine if tourism infrastructure is degrading coastal ecosystems because it is not sited in appropriate areas (which could be addressed through better planning) or if the problem is that builders use coral, mangrove and other raw materials extracted from coastal and marine ecosystems to build the hotels (which would require the identification and promotion of alternative building materials). If, however, you understand the threat well and have a few years of experience applying a specific strategy, then it may be easier to build the chain from left to right.

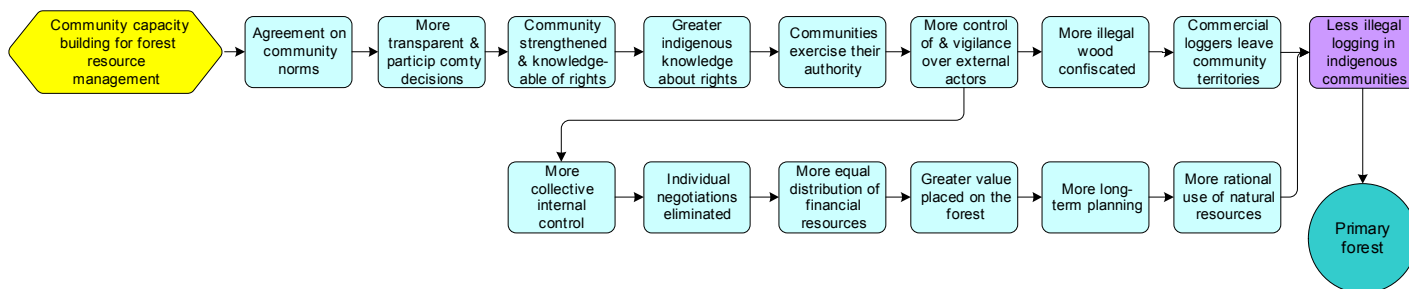
As shown in Figure 8, the marine project team felt that there were three different aspects of the promotion of sustainable fishing techniques: training fishermen in new techniques for the capture, management and processing of fish so that they could produce high quality fisheries products; getting fishermen to support the use of these techniques and see them as equally or more profitable than their current techniques; and finding a market for high value, high quality pelagic fisheries products. They developed separate chains for each of these three parts of their strategy, but these chains come together and all contribute to fishermen using the new techniques and finding them to be more profitable than current techniques. The chain also shows where the team has developed formal objective statements outlining the desired outcomes in more detail.

**Figure 8. Complete Results Chain for the Promotion of Sustainable Fishing Techniques**



Results chains can be longer, if the strategy is complex or the project team prefers a greater level of detail. For example, the results chain shown in Figure 9 was adapted from a plan developed by a South American team working to conserve primary forest.

**Figure 9. Results Chain for Capacity Building Strategy for a Tropical Forest**

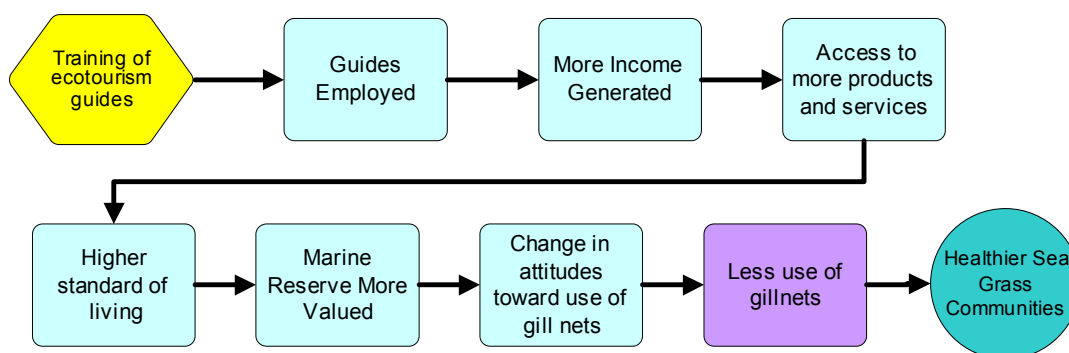


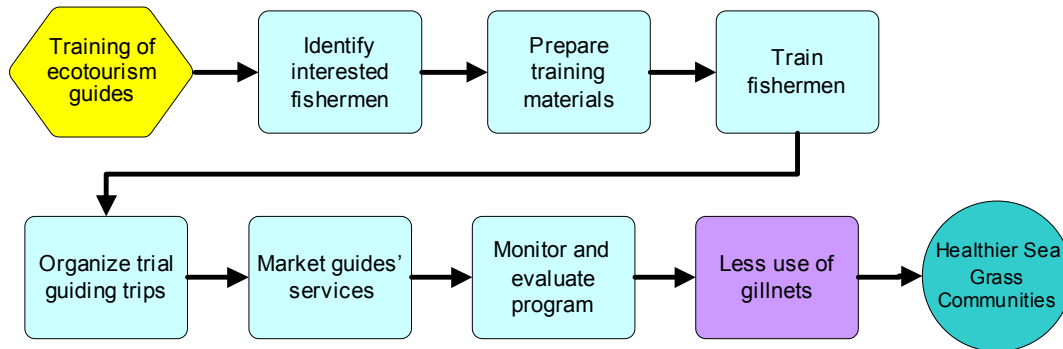
### Examples

The following are some examples of good and not-so-good results chains, based on fictitious scenarios. They are designed to help you learn how to develop good results chains and critique chains developed by others, by using the criteria described earlier.

In this scenario, your project is working in a marine area where one of the critical threats to sea grass communities is the use of destructive fishing gear, especially gill nets. Because the site is becoming an attractive destination for sportfishing, your team decides to train a group of fishermen who currently use gill nets to be flyfishing guides. Figure 10 shows a well-developed results chain for this strategy, whereas Figure 11 shows a poorly-developed results chain.

**Figure 10. Example of a Well-Developed Results Chain for this Scenario**



**Figure 11. Example of a Poorly-Developed Results Chain for this Scenario**

**Exercise:** Review the criteria for results chains to make sure the chain in Figure 11 complies.

Does this chain meet all of the criteria of a good results chain?

- **Results oriented:** Do all of the boxes contain results and not activities? No. Most of the blue boxes are activities. This chain is essentially an implementation chain – a series of activities that you might carry out to implement this strategy. It is not a results chain.
- **Causally linked:** Are there clear “if...then” connections between each pair of successive boxes? No, there aren’t any “if...then” linkages between pairs of blue boxes.
- **Demonstrates change:** Does each box describe how you hope the relevant factor will change (e.g., improve, increase, or decrease)? No.
- **Reasonably complete:** Are there sufficient boxes to construct logical connections but not so many that the chain becomes overly complex? No.
- **Simple:** Is there only one result per box? Again, the boxes don’t contain results.

## References

Some good, more detailed sources of information about results chains (which some organizations call logic models) include:

Margoluis, Richard, and Nick Salafsky. 1998. *Measures of Success: Designing, Managing, and Monitoring Conservation and Development Projects*. Chapter 6. Island Press, Washington, D.C.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Updated January 2004. *Logic Model Development Guide: Using Logic Models to Bring Together Planning, Evaluation & Action*. Battle Creek, Michigan.  
<http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf>