Introduction
It is first important to clarify the key concepts as they have been used. Development maybe defined as a process of change that generates perceived benefits for people or as a state of perceived well-being attained (Dale, 2004). Development Management is then the process of handling, directing, accomplishing or controlling organised endeavours that contribute to development.1

Project is defined as a ‘planned intervention for achieving one or more objectives, encompassing a set of interrelated activities undertaken during a delimited period of time, using specified human, financial and physical resources... Development projects should be well specified before one starts implementation, leaving as little uncertainty as possible about the quantity and quality of outputs and costs’ (Dale, 2004). In practice, the same aspects of a project can be simultaneously its strength and limitation.2

Strengths and Limitations of Projects

The planning process
The most obvious strength of using the ‘project’ as a tool is that the use of human, financial and physical resources is planned to get the best results possible within a specific time-period. The required inputs, outputs and method of converting inputs to outputs is clearly laid out. Techniques for managing projects can be derived from a vast body of management knowledge and then fine-tuned to specific requirements.

The limitation arises when projects are viewed as cut-and-dried entities, rigidly implemented according to a pre-arranged sequence of events. In practical terms, this limits original thought, adaptation and innovation. Flexibility in development management is important though planners/ implementers may not be open to change once a project has been finalized because of the re-work and re-analysis that becomes necessary. There may also be a tendency to spend too much time on planning and not enough on implementation.

Achieving results on time
Projects clearly set out results expected and the time-frame they are expected in so there is no meandering aimlessly, wasting time and money without getting results. Also, this may prevent people from misusing resources when they know that certain results are expected from them by a certain date. However projects may produce short-term results as all goals/ targets are time-bound. The long-term sustainability of a development goal may remain unaddressed. Experience shows that stating results and dates before a project starts creates expectations that do not consider the externalities affecting the project.

Attaining development goals
A benefit of the project mode is that it (ideally) allows planners/ implementers to keep track of project results with respect to the development goal. Projects can be planned to contribute towards multiple development objectives or, conversely, multiple projects can be planned/ coordinated to contribute to a single goal without duplication of work or contradictory results.

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1 From the definition of management as given by the Miriam-Webster Dictionary
2 Though a conscious effort has been made to use the broader definition of project as given by Dale, there may be instances where the concept of ‘project’ is specifically used as in the system of Project Cycle Management known as the Logical Framework (specifically the Dfid logframe – check Appendix 1). This is because that is the concept of ‘project’ that the author has most frequently used and is most familiar with.
However, attaining project results may be confused with achieving the broader development goal. A lot of effort may go into making projects successful (by meeting deadlines, staying within budgets, achieving results etc.) without actually achieving the long-term development goal. Sometimes, the project makes an immediate contribution to the development goal without contributing to the long-term sustainability of the development process.

Verifying Results
The results of a project are supposed to be objectively evaluable so that its progress and impact can be assessed. Faulty evaluation criteria may deem a project successful even when it isn’t. Additionally results should be verifiable for both short term and long term effects and care has to be taken not to ignore/ downplay unintended results. An obvious problem arises when results are not easily measurable so development objectives that cannot be easily evaluated are ignored when it comes to formulating projects for them.

Ease of Use
Projects set out finite targets with finite deadlines. This makes them easier to comprehend than the more ambiguous broader development objectives. Another obvious strength is that they can be easily set out using existing formats. However this ease of use becomes a limitation when projects are quickly formulated without being backed up by sufficient research and analysis. Inadequate efforts may be made to find possible alternatives and projects which are not the best solution may go through because of laziness or vested interests.

Planning for externalities
By realistically considering external factors that affect a project, it can be better planned to work with them or around them. However a superficial understanding of these factors leads to faulty assumptions that limits effectiveness of projects (if not bringing them to a complete halt). Experience shows that inadequate/ faulty assumptions result in unforeseen effects that create additional problems for the development process.

Also, an over-emphasis on planning or statistical data etc. may fail to consider factors like unpredictable ‘human’ behaviour. Development projects (unlike scientific or engineering projects) are people oriented, and people are rarely organized into homogenous groups with common interests. Every individual thinks differently and has different interests in a project. What may seem logical to one participant may not be so clear to another. Therefore an over-dependence on planning and a neglect of participatory discussions with people may result in project results contradictory to the broader development goal.

Human involvement
Projects take a scientific approach and are meant to be executed and verified in an objective fashion. The effects of a project are not supposed to be dependent on the changing biases and prejudices of the beneficiaries/ planners/ implementers etc. This objectivity and reliance on data can be both good and bad. A project can only remain unaffected by biases and prejudices when it has already taken into account the fact that they exist and have to be planned for.

Also, though a project is (theoretically) less open to manipulation by vested interests if it is formulated by an independent planner - expected project results may then reflect the ideas of the planner instead of the interests of the project beneficiaries. The project (formulated on external values) is then imposed on communities rather than involving them. This limitation can be overcome as the flexibility of projects mean that they can combine the planning and participatory processes.

Conclusion
It is important to remember that a project is a tool or step towards achieving a development goal(s). It is not the goal in itself. If a development goal has not been properly set or has been over-simplified, then projects can achieve their expected results without, in any way, contributing to development.

By itself, the project can be an efficient way of managing resources and achieving results. However to ensure desirable results, project planners and implementers need to be systematic, objective and flexible in their thinking. Most importantly, they should never forget that the success of a development project depends on the involvement of its beneficiaries.
Appendix 1: Logical Framework Matrix as used by Dfid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Summary</th>
<th>Measurable Indicators</th>
<th>Means of verification</th>
<th>Important assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GOAL: Overall goal which this project will help to achieve</td>
<td>The evidence (quantitative/ qualitative) which will be used to measure/judge the achievement of goal</td>
<td>Sources of information/data which will be used to assess the indicator(s)</td>
<td>(Goal to supergoal) Main external factors necessary to sustain objectives in the long run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURPOSE: Immediate impact on the project area or target group i.e., the change or benefit to be achieved by the project</td>
<td>The evidence (quantitative/ qualitative) which will be used to measure/judge the achievement of the purpose</td>
<td>Sources of information/data which will be used to assess the indicator(s)</td>
<td>(Purpose to goal) Main external factors necessary if project purpose is to contribute to reaching project goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUTPUTS: The specific, deliverable results expected from the project to attain the purpose</td>
<td>The evidence (quantitative/ qualitative) which will be used to measure/judge the achievement of the outputs</td>
<td>Sources of information/data which will be used to assess the indicator(s)</td>
<td>(Outputs to purpose) Main external factors necessary for outputs to achieve project purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTIVITIES: These are the tasks to be done to produce the outputs</td>
<td>INPUTS: This is a summary of the project budget and other key inputs</td>
<td>Sources of information/data which will be used to assess the indicator(s)</td>
<td>(Activity to output) Main external factors necessary for activities to achieve project outputs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bibliography


Potts, D., 2002, Project Planning and Analysis for Development, Lynne Reinner Publishers, Boulder

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