PCM IN GERMAN TECHNICAL COOPERATION:
A NEW LABEL – A NEW TASTE?
– A report on recent developments in Germany –

by Dr. Wieland Künzel

PCM (Project Cycle Management) has been introduced by JICA in 1994, followed by the introduction of the PDM (Project Design Matrix) in 1996. It incorporates many elements of ZOPP (Objectives-Oriented Project Planning) and the PPM (Project Planning Matrix), as practiced by GTZ (German Agency for Technical Cooperation) at that time.

Incidentally, while JICA adopted ZOPP and called it PCM, GTZ itself embarked on a major re-assessment of its procedures, and developed a PCM system of its own.

The ingredients of classical ZOPP

Since 1983, ZOPP had been the compulsory and standardised major tool for the appraisal, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of GTZ projects. The method is well developed, and a significant number of practitioners have been trained in its application. This includes most of the personnel at GTZ headquarters, all experts, and many of the counterparts in the more than 120 countries where GTZ is active. Each project went through several phases of ZOPP application during its lifetime, like ‘Pre-ZOPP’, ‘Check-ZOPP’, ‘Partner-ZOPP’, ‘Start-ZOPP’ and ‘Adjustment-ZOPP’.

The final planning step was the preparation of the PDM, a tabular document based on the logical framework that outlines the purpose, overall goal and expected results of the project. It also included a detailed description of the activities of the project, the time frame, the inputs, and indications of how the achievements could be measured. Lastly, it mentioned assumptions regarding the external conditions relevant to the project that have to be fulfilled for the project to succeed. If the above sounds daunting, rest assured: It is. The mastery of ZOPP methodology was seen as an important step in becoming an expert, and was supported by offering a range of training facilities, both for foreign experts and for local...
counterparts. The highest level, being a ‘ZOPP Moderator’, was a professional qualification on its own.

ZOPP has proved to be a practical and relevant tool for project planning. It supports teamwork amongst a wide variety of project participants. Individuals are encouraged to participate, regardless of their status or position. Heavy use is made of visualisation, which guarantees that the topics under discussion are visibly documented for everyone, and guides their systematic and logical analysis. The prescribed structure and internal logic ensures that fundamental questions are asked and that weaknesses are analysed. Under the guidance of an experienced moderator, the ZOPP methodology is a flexible tool that can be used in many situations. The resulting PDM offers a clear basis for the implementation of the project, and provides the reference for monitoring and evaluation. A well executed ZOPP workshop, and the resulting PDM, would successfully guide a GTZ project for years to come.

It is clear, however, that the classic ZOPP methodology also included a number of shortcomings. The most common one is probably that the workshop was mistaken for the method. This means that the prescribed 5-day workshop was rigidly executed, under the assumption that the resulting PDM would substitute for good planning – often this was not the case. The quality of the planning depended on the experience and background of the workshop participants, whose selection sometimes could be arbitrary or even influenced by interest groups. Facilitators and participants alike could influence the results to their liking, provided they understood the dynamics of a ZOPP workshop. Because the PDM was so dominant, and could only be changed through an additional ZOPP, projects were often restricted rather than enabled in fine-tuning their activities. Additional project activities, not foreseen in the original ZOPP, would not be adequately honored during reporting and evaluation. A whole terminology developed, often cynical: Projects could be ‘over-zopped’ or ‘under-zopped’, unwanted ideas could be ‘zopped-away’, and at times it felt like you would ‘zopp till you drop’.

Adding PCM to ZOPP – more ingredients for a richer mix

The ZOPP/PCM Timeline

1975 Logical Framework Approach (LFA) is adopted by GTZ
1980 LFA is developed into ZOPP by adding visualisation, teamwork and a sequence of planning steps
1983 ZOPP is introduced as the compulsory and standardised project planning method of GTZ
1988 Hundreds of headquarter staff, experts, consultants and counterparts have been trained in the method
1992-95 Changes to ZOPP are discussed and tried out within GTZ
1993-96 The ministry undertakes an evaluation of the theory and praxis of ZOPP
1994 **PCM is introduced at JICA, based on ZOPP**
1996 The order making ZOPP compulsory for all GTZ projects is lifted
1996-98 PCM is introduced at GTZ.
From 1992 onwards, a lively discussion developed within GTZ with the aim to improve on the shortcomings of ZOPP. Individual facilitators developed variations to the method, tested them in the field, and reported on the results. Starting in 1993, the responsible ministry initiated an evaluation of the theory and praxis of ZOPP. All these activities combined led to major changes from 1995 onwards. The GTZ-specific flavor of PCM was developed.

PCM as it is practiced at GTZ today is a conceptual design for a functional and target-oriented planning process. It offers appropriate and well-tested tools for the execution of the different functions necessary at the various stages of the project cycle. These tools are offered to the projects, but they retain the right to choose other tools instead. This 'tool box' approach of various methods allows for greater flexibility in the planning, implementation and monitoring of projects. The tools may be used at any time during the life cycle of the project as appropriate, and can be used at different levels, for example the administrative or the village level. Changes to the project design can be incorporated during the implementation phase. This allows target groups to be involved not only in the situation analysis during project formulation, but also in the decision-making process while the project is active. Many of the responsibilities in project design, implementation and monitoring are being shifted from headquarters to field offices and the projects themselves, as part of a de-centralisation process. In its modernised version, ZOPP no longer stands as an equivalent to the infamous '5-day planning workshops'. Instead, it forms the core element of PCM, in connection with the other tools that are available.

### Tools of Project Cycle Management

- **Process Orientation**
  - Plan of Operations
  - Project Progress Report
  - Project Progress Review
  - FDM

- **Flexibility**
  - on-going M & E

- **Participation**
  - PFA
  - Gender Analysis

- **Complementary Tools:**
  - SARAR

### Workshop-Based

- TeamUp
- AIC – Appreciation Influence Control
- Stakeholder Consultation
- BA – Beneficiary Assessment
- SCC – Systematic Client Consultation

### Community-Based

- PIM – Participative Impact Monitoring
- SARAR
- Other
- SA – Social Assessment
- CBA – Cost-Benefit Analysis
Process Orientation forms the part of PCM that ensures that projects are implemented in a structured and transparent form. It contains several tools, of which all except the project progress review are compulsory.

- PDM – as the condensed summary of the project intervention strategy
- Plan of Operations – as the annual work-plan of a project
- Project Progress Report – in yearly intervals
- Project Progress Review – at the completion of a project phase

**Flexibility** is introduced through an ongoing process of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), the results of which are fed back into the refinement of the project design. While "monitoring" is concerned with project-internal processes, "evaluation" consists of external assessments. GTZ does not offer pre-defined monitoring concepts, but the projects are required to develop the necessary activities on their own. A number of key-questions have been defined, however, to assist the monitoring process: Who needs which information, when and in which detail? How shall we define our progress? How often do we check? How much are the target groups aware of what we are doing? etc. If the monitoring process establishes the need to modify the project design, running adjustments to the PDM can be made by the project at the activity level, in coordination with the country office (GTZ HQ is only notified). If the cost framework needs to be changed, or if the project objectives are effected, a "modification offer" needs to be approved by GTZ HQ and the ministry for technical cooperation.

The evaluation concept of GTZ is currently being reformed in cooperation with the responsible government ministry. A separate unit within GTZ is coordinating the evaluation of GTZ projects. It is currently being tested to which extend such a separate unit fulfills the requirements of impartiality, transparency and independence of the evaluation process as required by DAC. A possible future development is the adherence to international quality norms DIN EN ISO 9000.

It is interesting to note that the establishment of "quality circles" within projects has been suggested by GTZ. This concept, where small groups of workers meet in regular intervals to discuss ways to improve productivity, originated in the industrial sector of Japan. It is an example of the exchange of management methods between cultures, with ZOPP finding its way into JICA, and quality circles being promoted by GTZ.

**Participation** is the element that gained far greater recognition under PCM. The primary tools are PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) and Gender Analysis.

- **PRA** is itself a toolbox of participatory approaches, designed to emphasize local knowledge and to enable local people to make their own planning and analysis. The methods most commonly used include semistructured interviews, focus group discussions, ranking, mapping and modeling. Although initially developed for use in rural areas, PRA can be used in a variety of settings. It is important to note, however, that PRA on its own will not lead to sustainable development efforts at the village level – it needs to be supplemented by process-oriented methods of project implementation.

- **Gender Analysis** focuses on the appreciation of gender-based differences in roles, needs and activities in any given context. While originally developed to highlight the special needs of women, it today incorporates the needs of all members of the community. The aspects most commonly analysed include activity profiles, access to and control of resources, assessments of institutional constraints, and the definition of gender-specific needs and incentives. GTZ has included staff members specialised in
gender issues in its quality assurance unit, to establish a direct link between gender issues and its project management concepts and procedures.

The complementary tools mentioned here constitute a sample only. A wide variety of other methods has been developed and it is the responsibility of the individual project to identify and implement the approaches that are most suitable in the respective conditions.

Workshop-Based Tools are characterised by a setting where a trained facilitator guides a group of participants. Often, these methods are a variant or an expansion of the ZOPP process. TeamUp is one of these methods, but places additional emphasis on team building and interaction. It facilitates the creation of high performance teams, which will be able to guide and monitor a project continuously through its phases. TeamUp uses a software package to assist participants in team-oriented analysis, planning and project design. It is especially suited to situations where ample time and facilities are available to implement an in-depth planning process. AIC (Appreciation Influence Control) places strong emphasis on the evaluation of power relationships amongst the stakeholders, and is especially suited to analyse the social, political and cultural factors that influence a project. Activities focus on building appreciation through listening, influence through dialogue, and control through action. The role of a well-trained facilitator is crucial.

Community-Based Tools are based on work with and in a local community, in a participatory setting. Strong emphasis is placed on local knowledge, visual tools, and the use of local materials. The methods are often similar to those used in Participatory Rural Appraisal. PIM (Participative Impact Monitoring) is based on the continuous monitoring and action-oriented management for self-help groups and projects. It reduces the role of planning and evaluation in favour of intensive monitoring, which is broken down into small, more manageable parts. SARAR stands for ‘self-esteem, associative strength, resourcefulness, action planning and responsibility’. It is specifically aimed at the training of local trainers and facilitators, and encourages participants to rely on local experiences, rather than learning from external experts. This method can be especially useful if strong literacy or language barriers exist.

Stakeholder Consultation emphasizes listening and consultation amongst a range of local groupings. Such methods can be especially relevant to clarify opinions amongst the local stakeholders themselves, and to provide feedback on local preferences and priorities to project planners. They can be used in a local or in a workshop setting. BA (Beneficiary Assessment) is based on a systematic evaluation of the perceptions of beneficiaries and other local stakeholders. This is achieved through a systematic sampling process of opinions, and thus emphasizes the inclusion of marginalised or otherwise hard-to-reach communities. It is a form of qualitative survey based on participatory methods, used intensively in World Bank projects. SCC (Systematic Client Consultation) is a related technique, which also relies on the systematic consultation of stakeholder groups. It emphasizes that information that is gathered must be analysed and acted upon as part of the process. Primarily the World Bank has used this method in the African region.

A wide range of other tools have been developed that can be utilised in the PCM process. Their choice will often depend on experiences that are available locally, or on specialised project needs. SA (Social Assessment) can be used to incorporate participation and social analysis in country economic and sector studies. Related to Gender Analysis, but not specifically limited to these issues, it emphasizes the identification of stakeholders, and the consideration of constraints towards their participation in the development process. SA poses a range of questions to assure
that project interventions are appropriate and acceptable to the various parts of the local community, especially the marginalised or other vulnerable groups. This tool can be used by social scientists or consulting teams as part of a wider study. Cost-Benefit Analysis is a set of well-developed tools used by economists to assess the expected rewards of a project in relation to its costs. This analysis can be aimed at the household, village, regional or national level. It can be useful in situations where projects are expected to have significant economic impacts on the stakeholders.

PCM is not limited to the techniques mentioned above. Additional tools may be employed, based on the needs and capabilities present at the project location.

**Digesting the method – some reports on using PCM in the field**

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<td>Nowadays, the term &quot;ZOPP&quot; has a wider meaning: It no longer stands for a predetermined sequence of binding and predescribed steps and methods. Instead, ZOPP should now be understood as GTZ’s overall planning framework. ZOPP should illustrate the quality of planning GTZ strives for, but it does not dictate specific tools or methods for individual planning steps.</td>
<td>In contrast to &quot;instant package&quot; workshops, ZOPP should in future be understood as a method which consists of a sequence of analytical and planning steps (e.g. stakeholder analysis, problem analysis, objective analysis, results, activities, assumptions, required resources, etc.). Meaningful planning requires to work through this sequence, with a flexible and complementary use of all suitable instruments and techniques, PRA, SWAT or Future Search Conferences to name but a few. The conventional comprehensive workshop remains one, but only one, option.</td>
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Franziska Donner, Head of GTZ’s Strategic Corporate Development Unit, in: ZOPP Objectives-oriented Project Planning, GTZ, 1997  

It will take time before the impacts of PCM on project design and implementation become fully apparent. Some issues, however, are already being discussed amongst those who work with it in practice.

Decision-making processes are shortened, and project interventions become more responsive, as more capacity is given to projects and field offices. Projects are becoming much more flexible in their approach to planning and implementation, as PCM allows the
use of those methods most suited to a specific situation. Because the monitoring process is constantly fed back into the improvement of project designs, local stakeholders are more involved - not only in the situation analysis, but also in decision-making and the contents of technical cooperation projects. Marginalised groups are in a better position to have their concerns heard. In general, the 'realities' of a project, which often become apparent only after a project has started, have a greater chance to be taken into practical consideration.

There are, however, some concerns as well: The wide choice of methods leads to a lack of clarity in project design. Big conceptual differences exist between headquarter staff and experts already trained in the new approach, and the hundreds of field practitioners, including counterparts and local facilitators, who adhere to the traditional ZOPP methods. As local knowledge and local methods become more prominent, headquarters may 'loose control' of projects, making it harder to support them. Local interests may influence project design by choosing those tools that best serve their interests. And lastly, if a project is encouraged to constantly re-align itself with current development needs, will it ever come to a natural end?

Different agencies, different flavours

It can be confusing to compare the use of project management tools amongst different agencies. Many of the methods mentioned here are related to each other, but unfortunately can have different meanings within different organisations. As outlined above, the GTZ sees ZOPP as an integral - but not the only - part of PCM. The European Union (EU) has adopted the classical ZOPP methodology as its major project planning tool, but calls it PCM as well. So ZOPP equals PCM, while the PDM is called the Logframe. For the World Bank, ZOPP is merely one tool amongst many, especially suited to the re-organisation of troubled projects.

Do we need cookbooks?

In its "classical" form, ZOPP used to be a clearly structured, repeatable process. The original ZOPP handbook of GTZ described the required steps in concise detail, together with the philosophy, aims and approaches of ZOPP. The instructions were clear enough to organise a ZOPP for any project, at any time. This rigid approach had its drawbacks, as outlined already. Therefore, the "new" approach to PCM and ZOPP relies on flexibility. Every project is different, and so the tools used for PCM will differ every time. The philosophy of ZOPP, the planning steps it entails, and the PDM will still be part of every project. However, the ZOPP workshop itself might be omitted altogether, and if it takes place, its structure might be changed beyond recognition. GTZ headquarters declines to provide "cookbook-style" prescriptions for PCM, ZOPP and Project Monitoring. The projects have to design their own procedures, under the assumption that the necessary knowledge to do so is available. The "old ZOPP" has been discarded and the PCM/ZOPP approach has taken its place.

Can this be a blueprint for other agencies as well? I have my doubts. It needs to be remembered that ZOPP was introduced by GTZ more than 15 years ago. The concepts and techniques of GTZ are well known to headquarter staff, experts and many counterparts alike. Under these conditions, it might indeed be possible to call for greater flexibility, without endangering quality or the acceptance of the method itself.

For agencies that are still in the process of introducing ZOPP at the field level, however, too much flexibility might be counter-productive. As long as a significant proportion of experts
and counterparts are still in the process of learning to use the method, it will be necessary to provide clear and concise guidelines for implementation. Only when the principles of ZOPP are generally accepted, and when the majority of staff and counterparts alike are conversant with the methods, can flexibility be introduced. It is not the case that the "old" approach to ZOPP was wrong while the "new" approach is right: Rather, the learning curve from a clearly defined system to a more flexible approach needs to be traveled by any organisation that introduces this method.

For GTZ, this learning curve took 15 years – are there ways to speed up this process? The first step will be training. The introduction of a comprehensive training programme will quickly disseminate the method amongst the projects. Such a programme needs to address a wider audience than headquarter staff and new experts alone. The re-training of existing staff, and their counterparts, is necessary. A second step, which is equally important, is policy. The knowledge about PCM and ZOPP, and their actual application, needs to become part of the criteria to evaluate the performance of projects and personnel alike. Project evaluations need to include questions about the use of those methods, and their effectiveness. For the promotion and hiring of staff, knowledge about PCM and ZOPP needs to become part of the assessment procedure, like technical skills and language proficiency.

Lastly, every agency will have to work actively on the development of these methods to fit its needs. PCM as used by JICA might have its roots in ZOPP as used by GTZ. However, this does not mean that the method is static. Over time JICA will expand and improve the method, and develop a PCM ‘flavour’ of its own. It will be interesting to see which form it takes.

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The ingredients of classical ZOPP

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The major and most structured application, the ‘Start-ZOPP’ usually consisted of a one-week workshop, which brought together the local stakeholders, a number of GTZ representatives, and a specially trained facilitator. This group went through a sequence of planning steps, called ‘stakeholder analysis’, ‘problem analysis’, ‘objectives analysis’, ‘alternatives analysis’ and the ‘assumptions analysis’.

The final planning step was the preparation of the PDM, a tabular document based on the logical framework that outlines the purpose, overall goal and expected results of the project. It also included a detailed description of the activities of the project, the time frame, the inputs, and indications of how the achievements could be measured. Lastly, it mentioned assumptions regarding the external conditions relevant to the project.

¹ From the German term “Zielorientierte Projektplanung”
² From the German term “Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit”

I wish to thank the following persons for their valuable comments and suggestions:

Dr. Michael Göbel, GTZ Headquarters, Quality Assurance Unit
Mr. Konrad Sandhofer, GTZ Project on Buffer Zone Management, Bolivia
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<td>Nowadays, the term “ZOPP” has a wider meaning: It no longer stands for a predetermined sequence of binding and prescribed steps and methods. Instead, ZOPP should now be understood as GTZ’s overall planning framework. ZOPP should illustrate the quality of planning GTZ strives for, but it does not dictate specific tools or methods for individual planning steps.</td>
<td>In contrast to “instant package” workshops, ZOPP should in future be understood as a method which consists of a sequence of analytical and planning steps (e.g. stakeholder analysis, problem analysis, objective analysis, results, activities, assumptions, required resources, etc.). Meaningful planning requires to work through this sequence, with a flexible and complementary use of all suitable instruments and techniques, PRA, SWAT or Future Search Conferences to name but a few. The conventional comprehensive workshop remains one, but only one, option.</td>
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It will take time before the impacts of PCM on project design and implementation become fully apparent. Some issues, however, are already being discussed amongst those who work with it in practice.

Decision-making processes are shortened, and project interventions become more responsive, as more capacity is given to projects and field offices. Projects are becoming much more flexible in their approach to planning and implementation, as PCM allows the use of those methods most suited to a specific situation. Because the monitoring process is constantly fed back into the improvement of project designs, local stakeholders are more involved - not only in the situation analysis, but also in decision -making and the contents of technical cooperation projects. Marginalised groups are in a better position to have their concerns heard. In general, the ‘realities’ of a project, which often become apparent only after a project has started, have a greater chance to be taken into practical consideration.

There are, however, some concerns as well: The wide choice of methods leads to a lack of clarity in project design. Big conceptual differences exist between headquarter staff and experts already trained in the new approach, and the hundreds of field practitioners, including counterparts and local facilitators, who adhere to the traditional ZOPP methods. As local knowledge and local methods become more prominent, headquarters may ‘loose control’ of projects, making it harder to support them. Local interests may influence project design by choosing those tools that best serve their interests. And lastly, if a project is encouraged to constantly re-align itself with current development needs, will it ever come to a natural end?

Different agencies, different flavours

It can be confusing to compare the use of project management tools amongst different agencies. Many of the methods mentioned here are related to each other, but unfortunately can have different meanings within different organisations. As outlined above, the GTZ sees ZOPP as an integral - but not the only - part of PCM. The European Union (EU) has adopted the classical ZOPP methodology as its major project planning tool, but calls it PCM as well. So ZOPP equals PCM, while the PDM is called the Logframe. For the World Bank, ZOPP is merely one tool amongst many, especially suited to the re-organisation of troubled projects.
Do we need cookbooks?

In its “classical” form, ZOPP used to be a clearly structured, repeatable process. The original ZOPP handbook of GTZ described the required steps in concise detail, together with the philosophy, aims and approaches of ZOPP. The instructions were clear enough to organise a ZOPP for any project, at any time. This rigid approach had its drawbacks, as outlined already. Therefore, the “new” approach to PCM and ZOPP relies on flexibility. Every project is different, and so the tools used for PCM will differ every time. The philosophy of ZOPP, the planning steps it entails, and the PDM will still be part of every project. However, the ZOPP workshop itself might be omitted altogether, and if it takes place, its structure might be changed beyond recognition. GTZ headquarters declines to provide “cookbook-style” prescriptions for PCM, ZOPP and Project Monitoring. The projects have to design their own procedures, under the assumption that the necessary knowledge to do so is available. The “old ZOPP” has been discarded and the PCM/ZOPP approach has taken its place.

Can this be a blueprint for other agencies as well? I have my doubts. It needs to be remembered that ZOPP was introduced by GTZ more than 15 years ago. The concepts and techniques of GTZ are well known to headquarter staff, experts and many counterparts alike. Under these conditions, it might indeed be possible to call for greater flexibility, without endangering quality or the acceptance of the method itself.

For agencies that are still in the process of introducing ZOPP at the field level, however, too much flexibility might be counter-productive. As long as a significant proportion of experts and counterparts are still in the process of learning to use the method, it will be necessary to provide clear and concise guidelines for implementation. Only when the principles of ZOPP are generally accepted, and when the majority of staff and counterparts alike are conversant with the methods, can flexibility be introduced. It is not the case that the “old” approach to ZOPP was wrong while the “new” approach is right: Rather, the learning curve from a clearly defined system to a more flexible approach needs to be traveled by any organisation that introduces this method.

For GTZ, this learning curve took 15 years – are there ways to speed up this process? The first step will be training. The introduction of a comprehensive training programme will quickly disseminate the method amongst the projects. Such a programme needs to address a wider audience than headquarter staff and new experts alone. The re-training of existing staff, and their counterparts, is necessary. A second step, which is equally important, is policy. The knowledge about PCM and ZOPP, and their actual application, needs to become part of the criteria to evaluate the performance of projects and personnel alike. Project evaluations need to include questions about the use of those methods, and their effectiveness. For the promotion and hiring of staff, knowledge about PCM and ZOPP needs to become part of the assessment procedure, like technical skills and language proficiency.

Lastly, every agency will have to work actively on the development of these methods to fit its needs. PCM as used by JICA might have its roots in ZOPP as used by GTZ. However, this does not mean that the method is static. Over time JICA will expand and improve the method, and develop a PCM ‘flavour’ of its own. It will be interesting to see which form it takes.

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