Isabel Vogel for the UK Department of International Development

Review of the use of 'Theory of Change' in international development

Review Report

Isabel Vogel, April 2012
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This report was commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and authored by Isabel Vogel, an independent consultant.

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of DFID.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACT	Accountability Tanzania
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
DANIDA	Danish Development Assistance Agency
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
SIDA	Swedish Agency for Development Cooperation

Acknowledgements

This review would not have been possible without the generous inputs of the contributors who gave their time, shared their documents and honestly discussed their experiences, reflections, certainties and uncertainties about working with theory of change, in the true spirit of theory of change thinking.

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1. Executive Summary

'Theory of change' is an outcomes-based approach which applies critical thinking to the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives and programmes intended to support change in their contexts.

It is being increasingly used in international development by a wide range of governmental, bilateral and multi-lateral development agencies, civil society organisations, international non-governmental organisations and research programmes intended to support development outcomes.

The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) commissioned this review of how theory of change is being used in order to learn from this growing area of practice. DFID has been working formally with theory of change in in its programming since 2010. The purpose was to identify areas of consensus, debate and innovation in order to inform a more consistent approach within DFID.

Key messages from the review

'Theory of change' as an approach is not new. It has much in common with other approaches. Many people consider that the current interest in theory of change reflects a need to re-emphasise the deeper analysis that the original Logical Framework Analysis was designed to elicit but that has recently become a more superficial contractual exercise.

1. Theory of change requires both logical thinking and deeper critical reflection

Theory of change draws its methodological credentials from a long-standing area of evaluation which deals with programme theories. It is also informed by an equally long-standing development practice - reflective practice for empowerment and social change.

The presence of both traditions in the current evolution means that a wide range of development organisations, from grass-roots initiatives in developing countries to donor agencies, have found it an accessible and useful approach.

Some people view it as a tool and methodology to map out the logical sequence of an initiative from inputs to outcomes. Other people see it as a deeper reflective process and dialogue amongst colleagues and stakeholders, reflecting on the values, worldviews and philosophies of change that make more explicit people's underlying assumptions of how and why change might happen as an outcome of the initiative.

Theory of change is at its best when it combines both approaches. The mapping of the logical sequence is strengthened by critical thinking about the contextual conditions that influence the programme, the motivations and contributions of stakeholders and other actors, and the different interpretations (assumptions) about how and why that sequence of change might come about.

2. Consensus exists on the basic elements of theory of change

The review found that there is no single definition of what theory of change is and no set methodology. People work with theory of change flexibly, according to their needs.

Rick Davies, a well-known evaluation specialist, defines a theory of change simply as:

'*The description of a sequence of events that is expected to lead to a particular desired outcome.*'[1]

Patricia Rogers, another well-known evaluation expert puts it like this:

> *'Every programme is packed with beliefs, assumptions and hypotheses about how change happens – about the way humans work, or organisations, or political systems, or eco-systems. Theory of change is about articulating these many underlying assumptions about how change will happen in a programme.'*

There is consensus on the basic elements that make up the theory of change approach. As a minimum, theory of change is considered to encompass a discussion of the following elements:

- **Context** for the initiative , including social, political and environmental conditions, the current state of the problem the project is seeking to influence and other actors able to influence change
- **Long-term change** that the initiative seeks to support and for whose ultimate benefit
- **Process/sequence of change** anticipated to lead to the desired long-term outcome
- **Assumptions** about how these changes might happen, as a check on whether the activities and outputs are appropriate for influencing change in the desired direction in this context.
- **Diagram and narrative summary** that captures the outcomes of the discussion.

3. Theory of change is best kept flexible, not prescribed

The strong message from the contributors to this review is that theory of change is best seen as **theory of change thinking,** a flexible approach to think through these fundamental issues. It is both a process and a product.

Rather than a prescribed methodology, theory of change is most effective when applied through pre-existing processes, to support critical thinking throughout the programme cycle.

If donors and funders are keen to encourage the benefits of theory of change thinking in programmes, then mandatory requirements, products or a prescribed process as conditions of funding are best avoided. Contributors to the review felt strongly that, if prescribed, theory of change would quickly become a compliance exercise and lose much of its value.

4. Theory of change inspires and supports innovation and improvement in programmes

The central idea in theory of change thinking is making assumptions explicit. Assumptions act as 'rules of thumb' that influence our choices, as individuals and organisations. Assumptions reflect deeply held values, norms and ideological perspectives. These inform the design and implementation of programmes. Making assumptions explicit, especially seemingly obvious ones, allows them to be checked, debated and enriched to strengthen programmes.

By activating critical reflection, theory of change's real potential is seen as supporting programmes' innovation and adaptation in response to dynamic contexts.

As it encourages on-going questioning of what might influence change in the context and drawing on evidence and learning during implementation, theory of change thinking can inspire improvements in

[1] Rick Davies, April 2012: Blog post on the criteria for assessing the evaluability of a theory of change http://mandenews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/criteria-for-assessing-evaluablity-of.html

programmes, moving beyond technocratic responses towards more realistic and feasible interventions that are responsive to dynamic contexts.

5. Working with theory of change requires performance management approaches to accommodate uncertainty and flexibility

Theory of change is not a magic bullet. It can be used as poorly or as well as any other approach. It is challenging to work with because it requires a commitment to take a reflective, critical and honest approach to answer difficult questions about how our efforts might influence change, given the political realities, uncertainties and complexities that surround all development initiatives. To be applied well, theory of change demands an institutional willingness to be realistic and flexible in programming responses, both at the design stage and, more importantly, in implementation and performance management.

To support a better fit between programme and context, it may be that chosen interventions are not technically the most efficient or effective, but are justified as the most appropriate for influencing change within the social, political and environmental realities of their particular context.

Contributors acknowledged that a realistic, adaptive approach should be recognised as good programme practice, but the realities of funding and performance management systems in the international development sector make this very challenging to achieve at all levels.[2]

Review findings

The findings of the review are summarised below:

- **Theory of change is both a process and a product.** It should be seen as an on-going process of discussion-based analysis and learning that produces powerful insights to support programme design, strategy, implementation, evaluation and impact assessment, communicated through diagrams and narratives which are updated at regular intervals.
- **The quality of a theory of change process rests on 'making assumptions explicit' and making strategic thinking realistic and transparent.** Practical experience highlights that this is not straightforward to do, as these tap into deeper beliefs, values, worldviews, operational 'rules of thumb' and analytical lenses that all individuals in development bring to their work. It takes time and dialogue to be able to challenge assumptions. Power relations, both in the programme's context and within organisations, limit the ability to challenge established ways of working.
- **The time and resource needed to work effectively with theory of change needs to be taken seriously.** Staff in donor agencies, country programmes and civil society organisations are all under time pressures – pragmatic approaches can get theory of change habits seeded, but institutional and funding support for theory of change processes is needed to get the benefits in terms of more robust log-frames, results frameworks and better implementation of programmes.
- **Working with theory of change thinking can be challenging but it can create a strong organising framework to improve programme design, implementation, evaluation and learning if some of the following enabling factors can be achieved**:
    - People are able to discuss and exchange their personal, organisational and analytical assumptions with an open, learning approach.

[2] A point emphasised by a wide range of participants from donor agencies, implementing organisations, civil society organisations and research initiatives at the workshop held at DFID to discuss the draft version of this review report, 2nd May 2012

- Theory of change thinking is used to explain rationales and how things are intended to work, but also to explore new possibilities through critical thinking, discussion and challenging of dominant narratives for the benefit of stakeholders.
- Critical thinking is cross-checked with evidence from research (qualitative and quantitative) and wider learning that brings other analytical perspectives, referenced to stakeholders', partners' and beneficiaries' contextual knowledge.
- A number of theories of change are identified as relevant 'pathways' to impact for any given initiative, rather than a single pathway, with acknowledgement of the non-linearity and emergent nature of these.
- Documented theories of change and visual diagrams are acknowledged as subjective interpretations of the change process and used as evolving 'organising frameworks' to guide implementation and evaluation, not rigid predictions or prescriptions for change.
- Theory of change frameworks and visuals are used to support a more dynamic exchange between donors, funders, grantees, development partners, programmes and communities, to help open up new areas and challenge received wisdoms.
- Donors, funders and grant-makers are able to find ways to support justified adaptation and refocusing of programme strategies during implementation, while there is time to deliver improvements to stakeholders and communities.

Scope of the review

This review was commissioned by DFID Evaluation Division. The reviewer conducted 40 interviews with staff from 25 development organisations, including 9 donor agencies, 7 international NGOS and 9 research and training organisations (see Appendix 3 for a list of people and organisations).

Organisations were identified through an email survey, self-identification and recommendations. There was also a light-touch review of published and grey literature on theory of change, in particular to identify guidance and tools available. The draft report was shared at a DFID workshop with external stakeholders on 2nd May 2012, by email and through a blog posting for wider discussion. Comments and feedback have been incorporated into the final version of the report.

Structure of the report

The review report is structured around nine topics that were identified through scoping interviews with key DFID staff and partners. The review focused on the practical aspects of working with theory of change in programmes.

To assist the reader, for each topic, key points are highlighted at the start of each section, the findings illustrated with examples. Practical suggestions are highlighted. Box Examples are also provided to illustrate people's experience, from donors to implementing agencies and projects. The appendices contain more examples of documented theories of change and also guidelines and tools to support people working with theory of change.

Section 2: Who is using theory of change in international development?
Section 3: What is 'theory of change thinking' in practice?
Section 4: Why are the 'assumptions' so important in theory of change?
Section 5: What makes a good quality theory of change process and product?

2. Who is using theory of change in international development?

'Theory of change is a dynamic, critical thinking process, it makes the initiative clear and transparent - it underpins strategic planning. It is developed in a participatory way over time, following a logical structure that is rigorous and specific, and that can meet a quality test by the stakeholder. The terminology is not important, it is about buying into the critical thinking.' Helene Clark, ActKnowledge

Key points

- Theory of change comes from both evaluation and social change traditions, so it is being used both by smaller civil society organisations and by donors
- Development agencies and organizations are mainly using theory of change for evaluation, but it is increasingly being used for programme design and to guide implementation
- Perceived benefits include an integrated approach to design, implementation and evaluation and better analysis of the programme context than other approaches

A wide range of organisations in international development are using 'theory of change' type approaches. Figure 1 shows the organisations that were identified through this review, building on those identified earlier in the Comic Relief review. No doubt there are many other organisations using similar approaches.

'Theory of change seems to be at a tipping point. Three key drivers appear to have contributed to the mainstreaming of theory of change thinking:

- **Results agenda:** This is driving the need to demonstrate impact, especially in difficult areas like governance. Evaluation has come to the fore as the demand for evidence of results and the attribution of effects to programmes' influence is sought, as a means to understand impact and how that might be achieved elsewhere. Transparency requires the justification for decision-making around programmes to be made more explicit.
- **Complexity:** In tension with the drive for more assurance of results, there is a growing recognition of the complexities, ambiguities and uncertainties of development work, involving complex political and social change in dynamic country contexts. Theory of change thinking is viewed as one approach to help people deal positively with the challenges of complexity.
- **Country-owned development:** The emphasis on country ownership in development cooperation is focusing attention on supporting country programmes, collaborating and innovating with local actors, institutions and local capacities, as well as responding to new configurations of development actors. Theory of change thinking is viewed as encouraging realistic and politically-informed mappings of contexts, actors and capacities for impact.

Over the last five years, theory of change approaches have moved into the mainstream in international development. A recent review on the use of theory of change in international development by Comic Relief has been very helpful in sharing and consolidating experience that up to now has been locked within organisations and opening up the discussion to people working on programmes who are not evaluators (James 2011). This review aims to build on this strong foundation.

'People are seeing theory of change as new, but it is just about good programme design, good adaptive management and understanding where you fit into the grander scheme of things.' Lydia Gaskell,

What is 'theory of change'?

People approach theory of change thinking from different starting points and for different purposes throughout the project cycle.

Some interviewees view it from a technical perspective as a tool and methodology to map out the logical sequence of an initiative, from activities through to the changes it seeks to influence. Other people see it as a deeper reflective process: a mapping and a dialogue-based analysis of values, worldviews and philosophies of change that make more explicit the underlying assumptions of how and why change might happen as an outcome of the initiative.

Theory of change requires a combination of both approaches. The mapping of the logical sequence is strengthened by critical thinking about the contextual conditions that influence the programme, the motivations and contributions of stakeholders and other actors, and the different interpretations (assumptions) about how and why that sequence of change might come about (Stern et al, 2012).

Two definitions of theory of change have recently been put forward that reflect both the process mapping and reflective aspects of a theory of change approach. Both definitions are helpful and so are shared here.

Rick Davies, an influential monitoring and evaluation specialist, defines a theory of change simply as:

'The description of a sequence of events that is expected to lead to a particular desired outcome'[3]

The Comic Relief review puts forward a learning-based defined theory of change as:

'*Theory of change is an on-going process of reflection to explore change and how it happens - and what that means for the part we play in a particular context, sector and/or group of people.*

- *It locates a programme or project within a wider analysis of how change comes about.*
- *It draws on external learning about development.*
- *It articulates our understanding of change - but also challenges us to explore it further.*
- *It acknowledges the complexity of change: the wider systems and actors that influence it*
- *It is often presented in diagrammatic form with an accompanying narrative summary.*'

(James 2011)

This review also concludes that theory of change is best viewed as a flexible approach - 'theory of change thinking' that rather than as rigid tool or methodology (Wigboldus and Brouwers, 2011).

Where does theory of change come from? A brief history

Theory of change, although perhaps new to the mainstream, is not new. The current evolution draws on two streams of development and social programming practice: evaluation and informed social action.

From the evaluation side, 'theory of change' is an aspect of programme theory, a long-standing area of evaluation thought, developed from 1960s onwards. Programme theory approaches urge a more explicit focus on the theoretical underpinnings of programmes, clearer articulation of how programme planners

[3] Rick Davies, April 2012: Blog post on the criteria for assessing the evaluability of a theory of change http://mandenews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/criteria-for-assessing-evaluablity-of.html

view the linkages between inputs and outcomes, and how programmes are intended to work, to improve evaluations and programme performance (Funnell and Rogers 2011). The Logical Framework approach, familiar to those working in international development, comes from the programme theory family.

The spread of the particular strand of programme theory that is known as 'theory of change' has no doubt been influenced by the seminal practical guidelines, '*The Community Builders' Approach to Theory Development'* that were developed by Anderson (2005) as part of the Aspen Institute's 1990s initiative that involved evaluators and community development programmers in applying programme theory concepts to the evaluation of complex community initiatives (Connell and Kubisch, 1998).

These remain the best-known source of guidelines on how to approach the development of programme theory as a basis for design and evaluation of social programmes. In the late 1990s, the U.S based evaluation social enterprise ActKnowledge partnered with the Aspen Institute to establish a practical, theory of change-based evaluation service to social programmes and continues to be one of the leading providers, with a well-defined methodology.

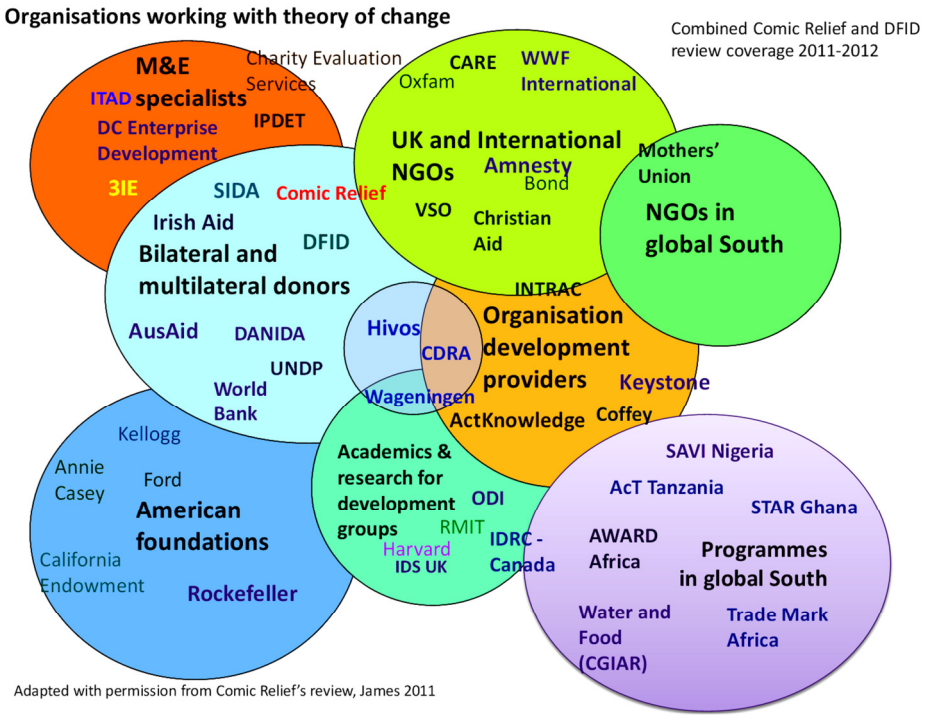
However, as James' review (2011) highlights, in international development, the current interest in theory of change as an approach represents the convergence of another, equally long-standing strand of development thought. Since the 1960s, informed action for social change and participatory approaches have advocated a conscious reflection on the theories of development, as a basis for social learning and action.

The presence of these different traditions that are blended in the current evolution of theory of change approaches may explain why such a wide range of organisations, from donor agencies to small civil society organisations, have taken it up. Despite taking often very different starting points, driven by different motivations and using different vocabulary and processes, organisations working in international development and related fields have found theory of change thinking a useful approach for exploring and clarifying their thinking about change and how they contribute to it in a particular context.

Figure 1 shows the range of organisations that are working with theory of change, identified through the Comic relief review and this one.

Amongst these organisations, the range of applications and approaches in use reflect the different purposes that 'theory of change' thinking can inform, as the broad overview suggests in Figure 2. The Asia Foundation has also recently commissioned a review of theory of change that will add to this body of work.

Figure 1: Selected agencies, foundations, programmes and initiatives working with theory of change in international development, mapped through Comic Relief and current review



Most of the interviewees and organisations that contributed to this review are using theory of change thinking to bring a more integrated approach to programme scoping, design, strategy development, right through implementation, evaluation and impact assessment.

Anticipated benefits of working with theory of change in programmes

Interviewees gave a number of reasons and expected benefits behind their current interest in theory of change as an approach, including:

- Understanding the context and situation as a starting point for planning programmes, bringing critical thinking to bear on the assumptions around a programme, to make the views on how the programme is expected to work transparent.
- To help move beyond 'business as usual', generic programme designs through a greater awareness of the context.
- Developing a common understand of the work and surfacing differences in perspective in a positive way.
- Strengthening the clarity, effectiveness and focus of programmes.
- More flexible alternative to working with log-frames for complex programmes and contexts.
- Using theory of change as a framework from which to assess impact and improve monitoring and evaluation, to test the assumptions, demonstrate impact and learn from it.
- Improving relationships with partners and stakeholders by identifying opportunities for dialogue and collaboration.
- Providing a unifying framework for strategic decision-making, communicating and reporting.

- Wanting to have a clearer conceptualisation of 'impact' and understanding the intermediate changes that have significance for programmes and stakeholders, to enable strategies to be optimised for the context.
- Strengthening adaptive management, responsiveness to changes in the context.
- Looking to find new ways of bringing rigour to the evaluation of complex and emergent change in difficult areas like governance.

These different reasons highlight how theory of change thinking can be applied at different stages through the programme cycle. Whether these benefits are being realised is too early to tell and should be balanced with the concerns expressed by all interviewees about staffing constraints and time pressures. Despite this, most interviewees seem to experience theory of change thinking as an energising and motivating way to think about their programmes.

Theory of change is used as an integrated project cycle planning and monitoring and evaluation framework or applied at different points. These include the pre-planning stages of scoping and strategic analysis, design and planning, and throughout implementation. It can be used to support different project cycle activities, such as implementation decision-making and adaptation; to clarify the drivers, internal and external, around an existing initiative; monitor progress and assess impact.

Table 1 shows the different ways that interviewees are using theory of change thinking, whether in its programme logic form or in its more exploratory version.

Table 1: Applications of theory of change thinking

Uses of theory of change thinking	
Programmes, implementation organisations, grant-making programmes • Clarifying impact pathways in multiple operational contexts and sites • Linking activities to changes at different levels: community, sub-national, national, international • Results-management, evaluation and impact assessment • Linking multiple projects to a higher-level theory of change • Foundation for monitoring and evaluation planning • Identifying synergies between strategies • Identifying trade-offs and negative or unintended consequences • Programme scoping and design, strategic planning	**Donors and foundations** • Theory-based evaluation of large-scale programmatic areas • Approaches to programme design and commissioning, country, sector and thematic • Clarifying strategies and impact pathways
Civil society organisations and international NGOS • Clarifying links between organisational values, vision, mission, strategy and programmes • Conceptualising impact, mapping thematic theories of change • Country programme impact pathways • Mapping collaborative relationships and influencing strategies • Monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks • Linking multiple projects to a higher-level outcomes framework • Testing links in theories of change in complex programme areas • Supporting empowerment by linking individual change to wider change	**M&E trainers, consultants, organisational development** • Theory-based impact evaluation for large-scale complex programmes • Theory of change foundation for programme design, monitoring and evaluation and learning • Theory of change-based strategic planning • Exploring theory of change-based methodologies for small-scale evaluations

Different types of theory of change are discussed further in the next chapter.

3. What is theory of change in practice?

'We use the analogy of Google Maps – this is the territory, this is how we see our bit of the territory, and this is the route that we think is best to take through it (though, like Google Maps, we recognise there may be a couple of different routes across the territory, but we have explicitly chosen one). Based on our understanding of how the territory along the route works, this is how we shall approach the journey, and these are some of the landmarks we expect to see on the way. This then gives you a basis for analysing your programming options and developing your log-frame.' Julian Barr, ITAD

Key points

- The concepts that are most common across theory of change thinking are: **context, actors and a sequence of logically-linked events leading to long-term change,** although there are many combinations and differently developed applications of these
- Variations exist in the types, scope and level of detail of theories of change seen amongst donors, implementing agencies, civil society organisations and NGOs, and evaluators, reflecting their different purposes and needs
- Theory of change is viewed as a more realistic and flexible thinking tool than current logical framework approaches

What are the core concepts of theory of change as it is currently used?

'What I appreciate about the theory of change approach, the beauty of it, is that it encourages a broader analysis. But when you do it, it is easy to fall back into linearity and results-chain thinking, especially when representing it visually. It is difficult to bring the complexity into the representation, and keeping it understandable and transparent at the same time.' Marjan Van Es, Hivos

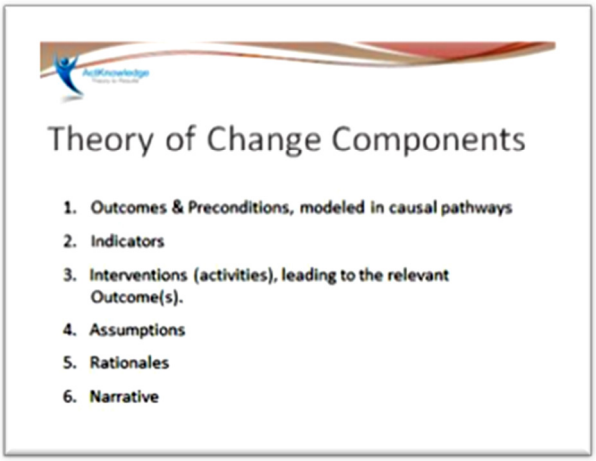
Some interviewees have come to theory of change from theory-based evaluation and logic model perspectives, others have come to it from a 'dimensions of change' perspective. This influences what they see as the important concepts.

As a minimum, theory of change is considered to encompass a discussion of the following elements

- **Context** for the initiative, including social, political and environmental conditions and other actors able to influence change
- **Long-term change** that the initiative seeks to support and for whose ultimate benefit
- **Process/sequence of change** that is anticipated in order to create the conditions for the desired long-term outcome
- **Assumptions** about how these changes might happen, as a check on whether the activities and outputs are appropriate for influencing change in the desired direction in this context.
- **Diagram and narrative summary** that captures the outcomes of the discussion.

The most important criterion to guide how to approach theory of change is to be clear about the purpose for which it will be used. Theories of change should help to generate understanding and clarity, be useful in supporting different aspects of the project cycle and be proportionate to the scale of the initiative (Funnel and Rogers 2011).

Theory of change thinking can be approached effectively in relatively simple ways. An example of this was CARE International's work with peace-building initiatives. The team helped programmes in 19 projects to make more explicit some of their ideas about change.



Focusing on a single activity, programme staff were encouraged to express a statements about change as: *'If we take x action, then y change will result, because…'* These statements were discussed within the programme, and subsequently evidence was sought to support them (Ober 2011).

More formal, structured approaches, such as ActKnowledge's, could include some or all of these elements:

- **Context:** Situational analysis, evolution of the problem and current conditions, factors in the context, political and institutional landscape and opportunities for change.

- **Beneficiaries:** Focus on who is intended to benefit from the changes in the context that the programme or intervention aims to support, and how they will benefit.
- **Desired change**: Statement of a long-term change, supported by a sequence of intermediate changes that are anticipated, modelled in 'pathways'
- **Actors in the context:** Analysis of the actors, organisations and networks that influence change in the setting, power relationships and institutional configurations
- **Assumptions:** Making explicit the interpretations of how change might happen relevant to this context, hypothetical cause-effect links, and explanations of the worldviews, beliefs, rationales, analytical perspectives and evidence that inform this analysis
- **Sphere of influence:** Analysis of the programme's**,** ability to reach and influence change, directly through its interventions or indirectly through collaboration and interaction
- **Strategic choices and intervention options:** Activities needed to influence the changes sought
- **Timeline:** A realistic timeframe for changes to unfold, expected trajectory of changes following interventions
- **Indicators**: Areas to investigate and track with evaluation and impact assessment.

Accessing all these elements in one step can be challenging. People recommended starting simply with the core elements and building from there. Theory of change thinking becomes easier with practice as confidence grows in the approach.

Most interviewees emphasised that the terminology was not important and often got in the way of people approaching this in a more intuitive and accessible way.

The term 'theory of change' itself was viewed as having academic connotations, whereas in fact the approach was considered by a lot of interviewees as straightforward and accessible if approached as a set of principles and in the vocabulary that people use in their own settings. Interviewees felt that theory of change thinking should be accessible to people in villages as much as staff in programmes.

> 'You should be able to talk to people in villages about ToC thinking, be it 'rich picture' or 'timeline'. You can also talk to businesses about it – what is their business case, their value-added? ' Jan Brouwers, Wageningen

Most organisations emphasise a group-based discussion, starting simply from a set of principles, some parameters, a staged approach and key questions to guide discussion at each stage. People reported positive feedback from their staff when they embark on theory of change thinking.

Types of 'theories of change'

Theory of change thinking is used in a number of different ways, ranging from exploring high-level change processes, to explaining the internal logic of an intervention through to hypothesising cause and effect links between important changes.

Depending on the starting point, whether a broad, exploratory approach or a more programme logic approach, different components of theory of change thinking are emphasised. All approaches are referred to as a 'theory of change'. Either approach may involve the elaboration of a sequence of changes ('process mapping', 'outcomes chain' or 'impact pathways') and logic models.

However, most interviewees who contributed to this review would view a logic model without reference to the context as more of a log-frame than a theory of change.

A generally held view was that theory of change maps out the change process, including a number of possible pathways, and the logic model maps out the intervention within that, as in the Google Maps analogy that heads this chapter.

Table 2 presents an approximation of the different concepts, starting points and purposes of theory of change thinking. These encompass learning and evaluation, exploring and explaining change, specifying cause and effect links, and mapping out complex interactions between actors and initiatives (James 2011, p.6).

In practice, these approaches are becoming more blended. In particular, the emphasis on making assumptions explicit, the most common element in theory of change guidelines, often prompts a deeper reflective (and self-reflexive) analysis of how different people understand causes and drivers of change.

Table 2: Range of terms and approaches in 'theory of change thinking'

More evaluation-informed	Complexity-informed	More social change-informed
Programme theory/logic	Pathways mapping	Models of Change
Outcomes chain	– 'What would it take…?' approaches	Dimensions of Change
Intervention theory	Learning /evaluation	How history happens
Causal pathway	Explore/explain	Change hypotheses
Impact pathway	Linear /complex	Open enquiry and dialogue
Logic model		Reflective theory of change practice
Causal model		Rich picture
Single programme logic	Multiple outcome pathways	Future timeline
Macro/sector theory of change	'Tipping points'	Feedback loops
	Emergent, non-linear, recursive	Road-map
Assumptions about change	Systems thinking about change	Beliefs about change

Adapted from James, (2011)

Variations in theories of change

A key learning point to emerge from the review and the subsequent discussions is that some of the variations seen in theories of change in terms of form, scope and focus and level of detail reflect the drivers within different organisations and the purpose for using a theory of change analysis.

In very general terms, differences can be observed between donor-level organisations and foundations, implementing agencies, civil society organisations, and evaluators, although in practice these are often merged. These can be grouped into three broad categories:

- **Country, sector and/or policy archetypal theories of change**

  This type of theory of change includes high-level mapping of drivers, key contextual or issue conditions, examples of archetypal sequences and pathways of change that might be informed by evidence and learning from multiple sites.

  This kind of mapping might describe high level changes, for example, for a policy area, such as reducing violence against women and girls (see Appendix 3 for this specific example), or a sector-

wide programme, such as education, to map generic sector interventions to a specific country context. Sequences of intermediate changes may be aggregated to macro-level changes.

These types of theories of change provide a broad conceptual framework for change which can then be used to focus in on strategic choices for a particular context, identify intervention options to influence change in the specific implementation context as a basis for commissioning, and focus evaluation questions.

This type of high-level theory of change tend to be related to donor agencies, foundations and other funding type organisations, as well as head office-based policy departments within large organisations.

- **Implementing agencies' theories of change**

  Implementing agencies' theories of change tend to develop all theory of change elements in much more detail to support their decision-making and to underpin performance management and evaluation frameworks.

  Close attention is paid to the analysis of the context, institutional analysis of power relationships and networks between actors, stakeholders and beneficiaries, the initiative's role and contribution in that context and the changes that are anticipated.

  Most of the other elements in a theory of change process are developed in depth, including assumptions, worldviews, hypotheses and models of how change might unfold, identification of multiple pathways and cause-effect linkages that the initiative intends to influence.

  A systems perspective is often developed in this type of theory of change, as change in one area has knock-on effects in another, with implications for programme strategies and networking activities.

  Implementing agencies' theories of change often need to make explicit the links between project-level changes that encompass attitude and behaviour change in specific domains, aggregated changes at the programme-level which may encompass practice and policy change, through to macro-level changes at a national, regional or international level, which may involve political and institutional change (see Box Example 4).

  These linkages might then be captured in the performance management and evaluation frameworks that the programme works within.

  Two examples of theories of change in programmes intended to support accountability in Tanzania and Nigeria respectively illustrate these points (see Appendix 3).

- **Causal maps for evaluators**

  Evaluators need different information from a theory of change process. The focus here is to understand issues of effectiveness and wider change for people intended to benefit. Theories of change for evaluation purposes tend to drill down into the detail of theories about cause-effect, the different pathways, actors and mechanisms the programme has influenced or could have influenced, as well as significant contextual conditions that had an influence. Differences between the design-stage theory of change and implementation model are also examined in depth. This is a rapidly developing technical area of evaluation literature (Stern et al 2012; White and Phillips 2012). Appendix 3 presents some examples of causal maps, for theory-based evaluations, including the OECD evaluation of budget support and the Paris Declaration.

  Some contributors noted that it is helpful for evaluators to have access to implementing teams' documented theory of change about their initiative. This provides evaluators with a useful insight into intentions, anticipated effects and learning from experience. However, it is important to keep in mind that this theory of change is subjective and owned by the implementing team. It represents

their perspectives, and perhaps those of their stakeholders. The evaluators' theory of change might test and subsequently critique or validate aspects of it, but represents a different set of interpretations for different purposes.

Further insights into these different types of theory of change were shared. It was suggested that archetypal, policy or donor-level theories of change should not be overly-elaborated, as crucial details on contextual social, political and environmental conditions are likely to be missing.

Problems arise when high-level theories of change are seen as fixed predictions or prescriptions to an inappropriate degree of detail. Participants suggested that it is helpful to use the donor-level theory of change as the basis for commissioning and then to use it to support a dialogue with partners and implementing agencies about what is realistic and feasible in the particular context.

It was noted that representations of theories of change may require different versions for different purposes. A representation to aid communication and dialogue may need to be stripped back to core elements, while the implementing team may need more detail. Even within a single initiative, different teams may require more detail about a particular aspect of the theory of change to support their work.

How is theory of change thinking different from the log-frame?

Many interviewees observed that people find difficult to separate theory of change from the familiar log-frame that is a common planning and management tool for international development funding. This is not surprising, as discussed above, they come from the same family of approaches, programme theory.

However, for people who were involved in the early development and application of the log-frame, it has moved a long way from how it was originally intended to be used. Completing a log-frame is now often a mandatory funding requirement, with standardised templates that allow little flexibility. Because they are used for management and measurement, log-frames become enshrined into results-based contracts which are then administratively difficult to change.

Many interviewees felt that the interest in theory of change comes from a need to return to the more robust analysis that the log-frame was originally designed to elicit.

Originally, log-frames were intended to summarise an in-depth participatory discussion with project stakeholders about the goals the project would contribute to, very much in the terrain of 'theory of change thinking.' The 'assumptions' column was also originally much more in this vein. The intention was that it be used to analyse external dependencies that would influence the programme's effectiveness. The programme team had to decide whether to directly address or mitigate these factors.

More recently, in weak log-frames, the assumptions column has come to be used almost as a 'too hard' column. A crude example might be: 'Policymakers will read the research.' If they do not, the factor is considered to be out of scope of the programme to influence.

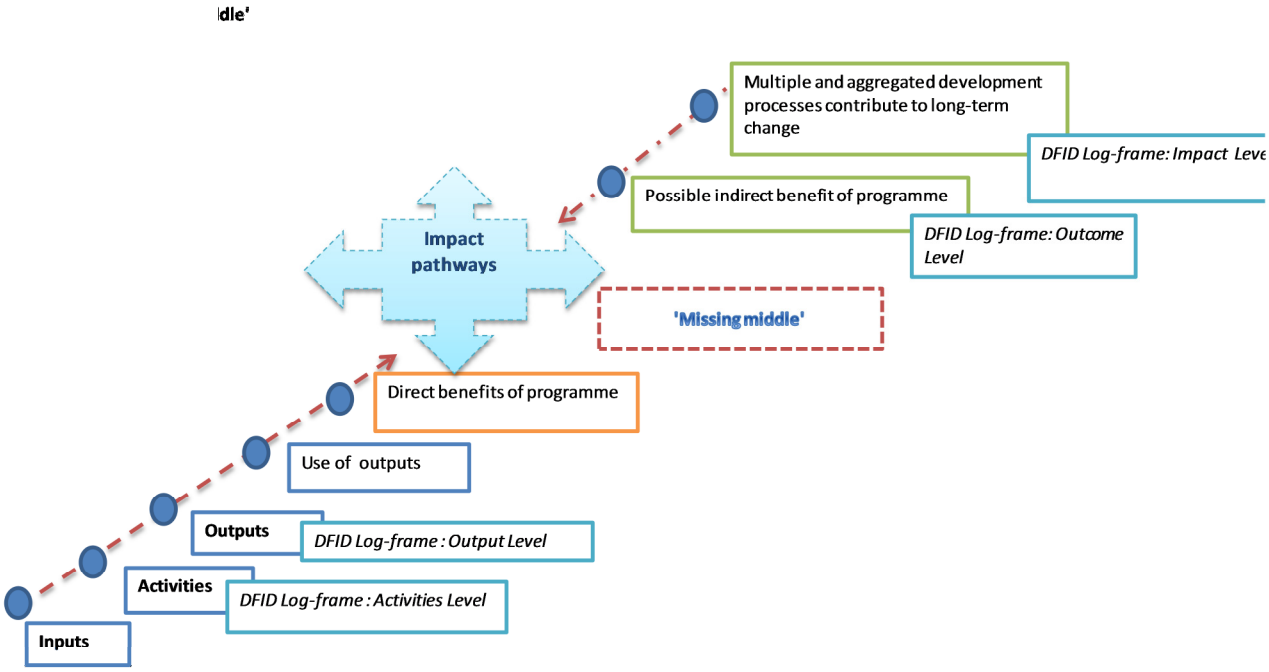
Another issue that people raise is that the log-frame as it is currently used hides what many interviewees called a 'missing middle' – how the immediate results of a programme influence changes at other levels to influence outcomes and impact in the longer-term.

Theory of change thinking can help to bridge the 'missing middle' that the log-frame hides. Analysing and mapping out people's ideas and theories as to the links and iterative processes that underlie the sequence of

events between a programme's outputs and the development impacts it seeks to contribute helps to make this clearer.

Clarifying what is going on 'behind the arrows', acknowledging the weaknesses in the logic and proposing how feasibly to address them given the conditions in the context can then start to inform programme strategy and monitoring and evaluation in a more robust way.

Fig. 3: Log-frames and the 'missing middle'



Adapted by author from GIZ 2009, Douthwaite et al, 2003

Donor agencies are adapting their logical framework planning approaches in recognition of the 'missing middle' issue. For example, the German development cooperation agency GIZ emphasises 'use of outputs' as an intermediate outcome. Swedish development agency SIDA is working with a new approach that encourages programmes to express a medium-term change that 'bridges' from project outputs to higher-level outcomes and emphasising what is at least in reasonable control of the programme's influence.

However, there was recognition that amongst some interviewees that programme design and planning approaches were out of step with theory-based evaluation approaches, which are becoming more sophisticated at dealing with complexity, the non-linear and unpredictable factors that affect programmes.

Is there room for both log-frames and theory of change?

There were mixed views on this question, with some interviewees feeling that to have donors work with both approaches was confusing and overwhelming for development organisations. However, a majority felt that it was useful to have two quite separate approaches: a mandatory one for performance management and monitoring, and a voluntary one to support analysis and critical thinking to strengthen programmes.

There were very strong feelings about making theory of change thinking mandatory and prescribing standardised diagrams and outputs. Most people felt that it would then become a bureaucratic compliance effort.

More detailed and more intricate log-fames - *'log-frames on steroids'*, as one interviewee put it - are not going to help development organisations navigate the challenges of complexity and the persistent development challenges that people want to tackle (Loveridge, 2010; ;Rogers 2008). It is likely to compound the problems that affect current log-frame usage.

Rather, most interviewees advocated a flexible approach that encourages on-going analysis and questioning about the real-world, dialogue with stakeholders, partners and peers to keep checking on assumptions, planning and predicting where possible and active learning through M&E where it is not.

When and how to develop theory of change thinking

Most approaches to theory of change do not attempt to access all of the components of theory of change in one process. Hivos, the civil society funder from the Netherlands is approaching theory of change as a conscious practice. From their experience, it can take a while to become confident with the principles, so it is best to start simply. Care International similarly found that people became better at theory of change thinking with practice.

All interviewees agreed that the benefits are greater if theory of change thinking is integrated from the start of a programme before major strategic decisions have been made. However, it is still possible to apply theory of change thinking to an existing programme, if there is an opportunity to adjust and revise strategies.

All interviewees emphasised that a group discussion-based approach was needed to make the process worthwhile. The people involved in the programme will have different views, depending on their perspective. Iterative consultation and development of theory of change thinking is considered key to the quality and robustness of what is discussed and captured. Section 5 considers quality issues in more detail.

Recently developed planning approaches such as Outcome Mapping formally involve stakeholders and strategic partners in the elaboration of theories of change. Outcome Mapping is premised on the perspective that development is about people and so collectively exploring the changes that an initiative might directly influence in stakeholder behaviour, relationships and the wider environment is the first step in understanding wider changes that might then unfold. The Outcome Mapping process effectively builds theories of change collaboratively with stakeholders in a dynamic process that continues throughout the project cycle.[4]

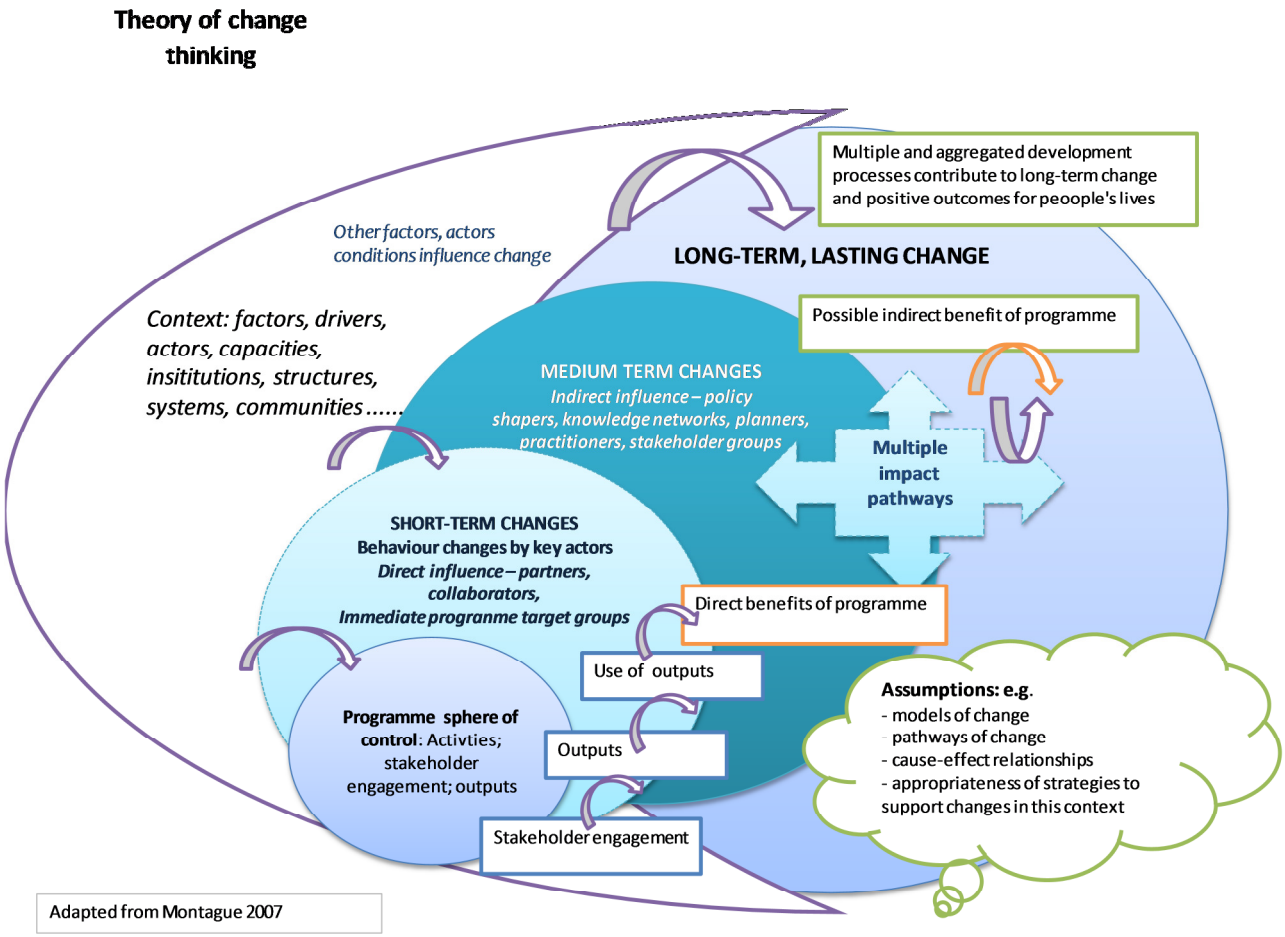
'The theory of change explains how you see the world, and how change happens and how you are going to intervene based on that understanding. The log-frame then becomes a management and measurement tool for making resource decisions. It is good for defining success but not for defining reality.' Julian Barr, ITAD

[4] See the active Outcome mapping Learning Community for more resources and applicat

Theory of change thinking then is viewed as encouraging a broader of view of change beyond the immediate programme that encompasses the realities of the context – social, political, technical and environmental.

Theory of change thinking is summarised in Figure 3. It is a not as neat as the elegant simplicity of the traditional results-chain, but arguably allows more elements from the real world to be explored and included in the analysis of a change process.

Figure 3: Theory of change thinking



What is less clear – assumptions

The central element that is shared across all theory of change approaches are the 'assumptions', with the guidance to 'make assumptions explicit'. Several interviewees mentioned that currently, theories of change that they have seen are 'superficial', that they are mechanistic and have not explored the deeper questions. Getting depth and critical thinking on assumptions is widely agreed to be the crux of a theory of change process. Because the assumptions are such a crucial component of theory of change thinking, many theory of change trainers advise working with a facilitator. Not everyone thought a professional facilitator was required, but it was a role that someone in the discussion group ought to take on to encourage a more in-depth process.

Assumptions and why they are important in theory of change thinking is dealt with in more depth in the next section.

Practical suggestions

1. A simple theory of change process (A. Ortz, interview):

- A group discussion: 'What are the main types of changes that we want to support?'
- 'What are the main 3-5- development conditions that need to be in place for change even to be possible?'
- Identify the 3 most important relationships between these conditions and write them as affirmative statements
- Discuss in the group, use drawing and cards to develop the discussion.

2. Another simple starting point:

- Share a story of change in a group discussion
- Ask: 'What happened? Who was involved? What do you think helped the change happen? What, if anything, did we contribute? How do we know?'
- Discuss and use as an opportunity for reflection.

3. Key questions from Comic Relief's guidance (James 2012)

Some guiding issues and questions you may want to use in the process

1. The context for change – how change happens

Who are we aiming to support and why? (clarifying the target group and prioritising the key issues they face, if appropriate)

Who are the groups, and what are the structures and processes that influence change in the target group's lives? (ranking them in their importance to the target group; and showing whether they influence change positively, negatively or both)

- How do we know? – what is the basis for our understanding/ learning?

2. Our organisational (or programme) contribution to change

What are the long-term changes that need to happen in the target group's lives?

What is our overall vision for change as an organisation/programme?

What are the key four or five long-term changes to which we can contribute?

Who and what needs to change in order to achieve those long-term changes?

What changes need to happen at other levels or dimensions in order to achieve the long-term changes (e.g. at community level or in policy or systems).

What factors relationships or approaches influence change at each level?

Who are the groups we can influence? What changes need to take place in them?

What factors relationships, approaches, pathways influence change at each level?

What are the three to five key factors to which we can contribute that will be vital in bringing about

change? (i.e. our core beliefs about how we influence change)
How do we know? – what is the basis for our understanding/ learning?
Why do we think that change will happen that way? (our rationale/ assumptions)
What are the risks (external and internal) that might prevent change taking place?
How might we need to tailor our approach to groups with specific vulnerabilities?

3. Applying our theory of change

How will we know and measure if we have brought about change?

How will we apply it to our organisation, programme and learning processes?

Example 1: DFID Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): Using theory of change thinking to explore the links between road-building and development

DFID has recently introduced a Business Case approach to its programme design and commissioning. The Business Case involves a 'theory of change' analysis as an integral step, drawing on programme logic thinking.

The DFID team in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) applied theory of change thinking to a new roads programme, as one of their first new Business Cases. In one of the poorest countries in the world, where years of conflict have left the country deeply impoverished, building infrastructure to support basic services, market access and improved security is a key priority.

The team's starting point was the honest recognition that previous roads programmes in DRC had not fully worked. Roads had been built, but it was very unclear if these had led to the development outcomes that were the aim.

Although they had not worked with the approach before, the team felt comfortable with the principles of 'theory of change'. They started their change analysis at a higher level than the programme logic to fully explore the issues around the programme.

The main question the team asked themselves was:

'What else needs to be happening to make the roads programme deliver development outcomes?'

This led to the development of a macro-level theory of change which situated the proposed programme in the broader DRC context.

This critical questioning, supported by looking at available research and evidence at key points, led the team to a broad proposition that in a post-conflict situation, roads provide an initial confidence boost to the population. A number of other conditions will then be needed to ensure that this confidence is built upon, with sequenced support to wider conditions to build a virtuous circle of confidence in stability. Roads must then be maintained at a high standard, to maintain people's confidence that they have lasting physical access and help the virtuous circle continue (see Appendix 3 for the full theory of change diagram and narrative).

The challenges the team experienced as they developed the theory of change ranged from the emotional to the conceptual and practical, as often arises in a theory of change analysis. These included:

- a daunting realisation of how many other conditions need to be in place that cannot be addressed through the programme alone
- a recognition of negative consequences and knock-on effects of the programme, unavoidable if the programme is to be successful but that need to be mitigated (for example, road access will lead to a rise in the timber trade)
- gaps in data and evidence, which in a data poor setting, can create uncertainty about strategic choices.

But in addressing these challenges the team found that they had created a 'backbone' for their thinking that underpinned the whole design of the programme. In addressing the challenges, the team saw clearly that:

- the roads programme needed to work in synergy with DFID's whole country programme and the Stabilisation Strategy for Eastern Congo, managed by the UN, to address the wider conditions
- the data gaps meant that an on-going strand of research and evaluation needed to be included in the programme to provide evidence to support the focusing and adaptation of the programme as conditions developed
- negative effects could be addressed through risk management and while some negative effects were unavoidable, the balance could be monitored through baselines for the whole programme from the start, and on-going cost-benefit analysis.

The key learning point for the team was that applying theory of change thinking right from the start of the Business Case process generated the benefits. It provided a conceptual 'backbone' that linked all the subsequent appraisals in the Business Case. This meant that it was not additional work, but in fact underpinned their strategic thinking and resulted in a stronger programme design.

4. Why are the 'assumptions' so important in theory of change thinking?

'The main purpose of the process and the diagram is not to map reality, but to surface perspectives on reality and worldviews, so that these can be explored, debated and enriched. Theory of change is about generating better assumptions, better hypotheses of change to strengthen our work, learn from what happens and improve it.' Alfredo Ortiz, Researcher and facilitator

Key points:

- Assumptions are important because they are the 'theories' in theory of change thinking
- Assumptions are hard to access because they are deeply held perceptions that have become 'rules of thumb' that are taken for granted
- Focusing, checking and testing assumptions can improve them and inspire new ways of addressing issues

Why are assumptions important?

All interviewees mentioned 'making your assumptions explicit' in a theory of change process. They also mentioned that it is the most challenging aspect of theory of change thinking.

Assumptions can be broadly understood as 'a proposition that is taken for granted, without reference to the facts'[5]. As such, assumptions represent the values, beliefs, norms and ideological perspectives, both personal and professional, that inform the interpretations that teams and stakeholders bring to bear on a programme. These are the often deeply-held 'theories' in theory of change (Van de Knapp 2004; Chen, 1990)6.

'You have to take the assumptions seriously, how do you work well with assumptions? Critical reflection is difficult, as I know from reflective practice experience.' Irene Gujit, Researcher and facilitator

Assumptions act as a set of 'rules of thumb' that influence our choices, as individuals and organisations. The central idea of theory of change thinking is that these 'rules of thumb' need to be checked to see if they are guiding us to act in ways that are optimal for the context, people and changes that we seek.

'Reference to the facts' of the real-world situation at hand is needed if learning and adaptation is to take place. Interviewees who have facilitated theory of change processes emphasised that 'making assumptions' explicit is not a solo exercise – examining assumptions requires interaction with other people, comparing ideas through questioning and dialogue to create a critical thinking approach.

Facilitators interviewed emphasised that the wide range of what constitutes an 'assumption' can become confusing and overwhelming for people in a theory of change process. 'Assumptions' range from ideas about the context, ideas about the drivers of change, ideas about the cause-effect relationships between interventions, outcomes and context, as well as individual and organisational values.

[5] Assumptions in theory of change thinking come from logic and critical thinking. Although relevant to understanding how to work with critical thinking, a review of the theoretical concepts is beyond the scope of this review. The definition used is a general one.

[6] Loveridge 2011, unpublished thesis on using theories of change for capacity development assessment reviews the theoretical literature in depth. Available at: http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/eprints/

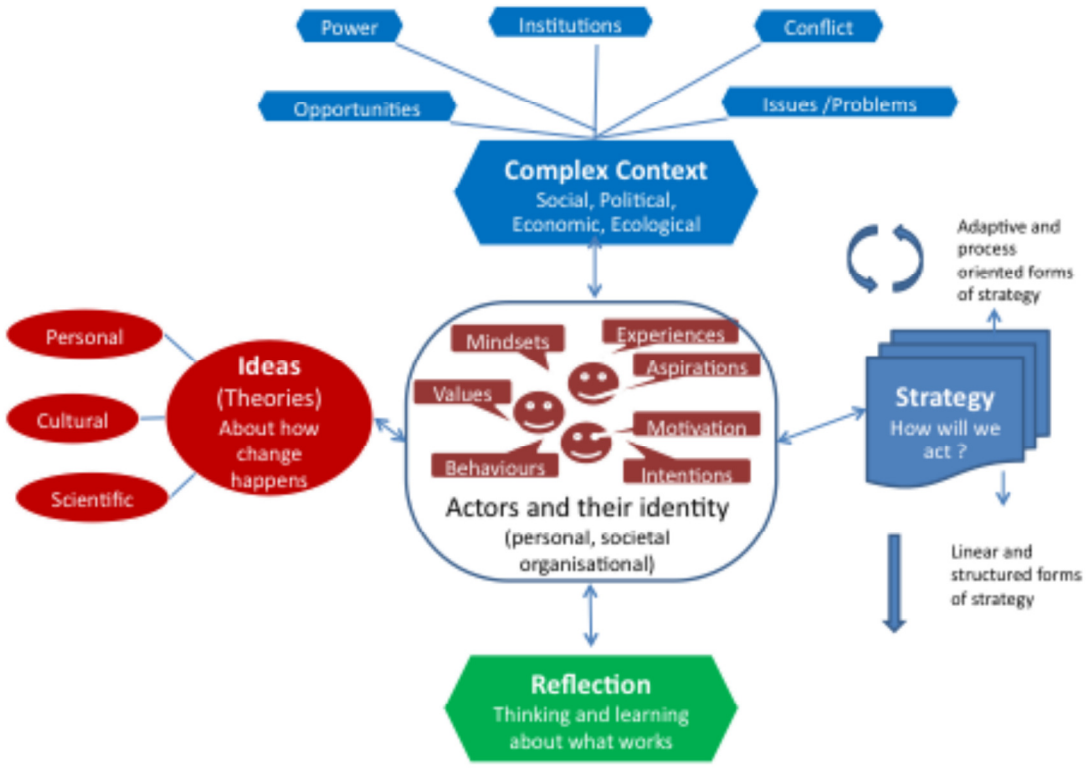
In a workshop, or as one goes on developing a theory of change map, it becomes clear that there are assumptions and multiple theories of change at every level and about every aspect.

To get beyond superficial theories of change, theory of change thinking cannot be approached as purely a technical methodology. It involves activating people's deeply-held beliefs and worldviews, personal as well as organisational motivations for improving the world through their work.

'Hivos started working with theory of change as a potential alternative to log-frames in 2007, in capacity development pilots with partners with the aim to strengthen what we called "result-oriented practice". But we found that while people appreciated the approach in the workshops, it was not getting embedded into practice. The main feedback was that the approach was too time-consuming, that it conflicted with other donors' requirements, and some people perceived it as a log-frame by another name. Our conclusion was that we needed to understand better how and under which circumstances the approach could work. We decided to start a learning process, with external support, and to use the approach more in our own practice. So we are now introducing it internally as a way of thinking, as a practice.' Marjan Van Es, Hivos

Through its own developing theory of change reflective practice, Hivos explains this phenomenon. They view theory of change thinking as involving four dimensions of change, as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Dimensions of theory of change thinking



Woodhill, 2010, reproduced in Hivos, Guijit and Retolaza, 2012[7] , reproduced with permission here

[7] http://www.hivos.nl/content/download/76473/665916/version/1/file/E-Dialogue+1+-+What+is+ToC+Thinking.pdf

For Hivos, theory of change thinking involves the systematic questioning of five elements:

1) The **actors** (individuals or groups) who are trying to bring about change;
2) The **context** or situation that influences the actors and which they are trying to change;
3) The **ideas** or theories that influence the actors when they consider how to act in a certain situation at a situation;
4) The **strategic plan** that describes the reasons and provides a framework for taking particular action; and
5) The **reflection and decision-making processes** that help actors to develop strategy, review success and failure and make improvements to ideas and strategies.

The emphasis on the individual dimension means that people often experience a theory of change process in a deeper and more intuitive way than anticipated. Journey metaphors abound - pathway, mapping, trajectory – giving clues as to the emotional and reflexive aspects of the process, as well as the technical.

In contrast, there can be frustration if people feel they have not been able to get beyond boxes and arrows.

Assumptions are the key to unlocking the critical thinking that people appreciate about theory of change. Thinking about the things that people care deeply about, about their work, how and why their organisation or programme is going to set about improving a situation often brings a clarity of thinking and insight, a sense of energy and motivation, that people call 'aha moments'.

The intuitive and insightful experiences that the contributors to this review have had with theory of change thinking seems to be at the root of the widely shared view that theory of change should remain an authentic, flexible, on-going learning process, rather than becoming a mandatory, prescribed management tool.

Power and politics in theory of change thinking

Achieving a deeper level of critical thinking and reflection is challenging for a number of reasons. It can often flag up weaknesses in the fit between strategy and context, and highlight differences of worldview, philosophy and culture within a team, as well as within an organisation and stakeholders in the wider context.

How assumptions are dealt with once they have been uncovered and explored is key to unlocking the full potential of the theory of change process. Participants highlighted how being open in acknowledging weaknesses and the subjective nature of theories of change can act as a spur to creative thinking and innovations in programme strategies.

Power relations internally within hierarchies in organisations, as well as externally between donors, partners and stakeholders constrain the extent to which differences can be acknowledged. This is especially the case when theory of change thinking takes place in the context of highly pressured negotiations around results-based performance management. There may be a retreat to technocratic or 'ideal' programme strategies that are poorly suited to the context but are in keeping with organisational norms and therefore more acceptable to senior managers.

Multiple theories of change

The evaluation literature on programme theory also emphasises that there may be different theories actively influencing a programme. Organisational norms influence views on how a programme 'should' work. These may be declared in project documents, but are not in fact how a programme is implemented.

Intended beneficiaries and stakeholders may also view the role of the programme differently[8]. Inappropriate theories of change may be imposed on partners, who may then behave in a different way when implementing the programme to that anticipated by managers and funders (R. Eyben, interview).

A disconnect between the 'espoused', unchallenged theory and the reality of implementation is likely to lead to selective decision-making and poorly informed strategy, which constrain the effectiveness of a programme in influencing the changes its commissioners want to see. In other situations, seeking one dominant or unifying theory can lead to tension and conflict in the organisation or programme team. The presence of different 'theories' is often the root of debate about strategic choices and decisions in organisations and programmes (Eyben et al, 2008).

Interviewees emphasised that that the presence of different theories needs to be explored in order to challenge received wisdoms and enrich programme strategies in the process. It can be useful to explicitly choose a number of different 'theories' to explore, as they can suggest different pathways to influence outcomes. Developing two or three pathways and triangulating between them can become a point of learning and reflection to open up new strategic choices and innovations (Ortiz and Macedo, 2010). (See Box Example: Chukua Hatua).

Combining this critical exploration with external learning and evidence, a focus on the context and the motivation to improve things can help to make strategies feel more appropriate, transparent and more robust in their effectiveness.

Most interviewees felt that the level of critical thinking and insight needed for a good theory of change process is difficult to achieve without a facilitator. It may not need to necessarily be a specialist 'theory of change' facilitator, but someone is required to take on the role seriously and sensitively to ensure that dialogue is open, to be alert to power relations in the group that constrain challenge and the voicing of alternative perspectives, so that stakeholders are able to learn from comparing perspectives, and differences in assumptions and worldviews are explored in a positive way.

Subjective limits to theories of change

Interviewees who have worked with theory of change thinking for a while in their setting emphasised that the subjective nature of the expressed theories of change needs to be understood. Documented theories of change reflect the views of the people who have contributed at one point in time.

The theory or theories of change will evolve if they continue to act as a foil for critical thinking, and others contribute to it. Evidence and learning, insights from stakeholders, experience and implementation should continue inform new discussions. It should be considered as a flexible 'rough guide' that offers a unique set of perspectives, not a definitive, static prediction.

This was flagged as important for donors and funders to remember with their theories of change – their view is different from grantees' and beneficiaries' perspective, and there should be openness to discussing and challenging these different viewpoints (see Section 10).

[8] In the evaluation literature, these different theories are referred to as 'espoused theory', 'theories-in-use' and 'preferred theory' (Funnell and Rogers, 2011; Argyris and Schon, 1974).

The analytical perspective that informs people's 'rules of thumb' is important to clarify at key points in theory of change thinking. Political economy, rights-based approaches, power analysis, development economics, innovation theory, to name a few, all give rise to different worldviews and strategies.

Often, these are further informed by historical ideas about how macro change happens that seem self-evident but often come from western scientific and social science traditions (Eyben et al 2008). These include a wide range of contrasting 'macro-theories of change' about, for example, the way individuals change (e.g. behavioural economics or empowerment models), internal or external drivers of social change (e.g. collective social action or happiness-seeking behaviours), how political systems operate (e.g. political economy or public management), or how ecosystems and people interact (e.g. ecosystems services), among many others.

Making these explicit and deliberate choices to frame programme strategies and checking to see if they are appropriate for the context is an important outcome of theory of change thinking.

A useful check is to look at other cultural traditions for models of how change happens. The recent African Evaluation Association Conference in Ghana[9] saw a discussion about the importance in African cultures of traditional leaders as change agents, and the role of societal norms, African history, cosmology and the quality of life aspirations of people that should be taken into account in evaluations.

When using evidence to support a theory of change process, care should be taken to understand the dominant analytical perspective and to look at evidence from other analytical traditions, qualitative as well as quantitative approaches.

If it is not to be seen as an academic exercise, this kind of exploration should be appropriate to the organisation, and should have a clear practical purpose, for example, as preparation for a strategy process or other review point where insights can be directly applied (R. Eyben, interview). A final caveat is not to become overly attached to a particular analytical lens – it can all too quickly become a hard-wired assumption (D. Green, interview).

Practical suggestions

1. Think of assumptions simply as 'things that we believe to be true'. Express them as affirmative statements e.g. 'There needs to be closer links between conservation and development' or statements such as 'If we undertake x action, then y change will result because…' Document them and then discuss how true they really are from different stakeholders' perspectives – if someone from a community was here, what would they think about the statement? (A. Ortiz, interview)

2. Use a process-mapping approach to build out the change process. Keep asking 'And then what happens?' The facilitator listens out for statements that sound like assumptions, colour coding for different sorts of assumptions: values, worldviews, analytical perspectives, cause-effect hypotheses. These are documented and then discussed and sorted (i. Guijt, interview).

3. After the change process mapping, brainstorm 5-8 'things that we believe to be true' about the context, change process and programme, capture one idea per card or sticky paper. Discuss and sort the cards into categories, for example:

[9] http://www.3ieimpact.org/news.html?id=101

- causality, i.e. hypotheses about the theory of how change happens, e.g. nutrition counselling for mothers changes their behaviour because person-to-person interaction is more influential than a pamphlet
- programme implementation conditions, e.g. e.g.. health workers can correctly identify priority children
- context and external factors that influence the programme, e.g. security conditions in programme areas are stable

Link each assumption clearly to an aspect of the change process. Discuss the implications for the changes that are likely to be influenced, the pathways for influencing change and what needs to be considered in the programme strategy (Z. Stephenson, interview).

4. Approach the assumptions by unpicking the 'arrow' - the relationship between one change and another. Thinking about the interventions that would be needed to achieve the subsequent change, whose behaviour would change and how as a result, other influences, interventions or conditions that might be needed can be a useful way in (ActKnowledge follows a similar approach).

Follow this with a reflection on different possible interpretations of why this change would happen in that way, taking care to triangulate between different stakeholder perspectives, analytical lenses and evidence.

5. Look at the programme from the perspective of the people intended to benefit and ask:

- How would they know about your programme?
- How would they understand it?
- Why should they participate?
- What are the costs and benefits from their point of view?
- Will they really benefit? What are the risks to them if they do/do not participate? (H.Wjite, interview)

4. Listen carefully to the discussions when it comes to synthesising or agreeing a visual, often at the end of the workshop. This is usually the point when really deep beliefs can come to the fore, so the facilitator or an observer should be alert and sensitively draw attention to the debate as an opportunity to continue the discussion (R. Dawes, interview)

Example 2: Accountability Tanzania (AcT): Applying 'Models of Change' thinking to understand emergent strategies

http://www.accountability.or.tz/

The Accountability in Tanzania Programme (AcT) is funded by DFID to support Tanzanians seeking greater accountability from their government by supporting civil society to engage in activities to strengthen accountability.

The programme has clear long-term outcomes, but works in a complex environment with multiple possibilities for achieving them. After supporting a number of projects, it became clear that a deeper exploration of the underlying ideas about change and the programme's role could help understanding of how the programme's strategy was working in practice.

One of AcT's programmes, run by Oxfam, is Chukua Hatua (Take Action). It is developing a suite of village level accountability experiments including 'farmer animators', student councils and an 'active musicians' scheme. Chukua Hatua explicitly applies an evolutionary Model of Change to improve impact, but a field visit by Programme Coordinator Jane Lonsdale and Oxfam head of research Duncan Green identified a range of other theories of change that were being used by the programme, or that could open up further avenues for exploration. The three MoCs that were underpinning the current programme were:

- **Evolution:** 'Take Action's approach is an example of evolutionary acceleration, a process of variation-selection-amplification. Lots of different activities are started up, promising ones are selected by the team or by natural selection, as projects multiply or die of their own accord. The final phase will be amplification: creating an enabling environment, but otherwise staying out of the way
- **The Four Powers**: One model of change holds that disempowered, marginalised people must first feel a sense of 'power within' – the light-bulb moment when people realize they have rights, and that those they elect should serve them, rather than vice versa. Then they move to 'power with' – coming together around common issues - before achieving 'power to' – asserting their rights, campaigning, mobilizing. Finally comes 'power over' officials or companies. Chukua Hatua supports the 'power within' and 'power with', especially among women. What happens next is up to them.
- **Transitions to Accountability:** Jonathan Fox's work in Mexico proposes that local breakthroughs in accountability arise through the interaction of 'networked' civil society and successful reformism by, for example, particular ministries, or local officials. These often involve cycles of conflict and resolution.

Three other MoCs identified suggested new avenues to explore:

- **Drivers of Change** and importance of alliances: DFID's own 'drivers of change' work highlights that successful change often comes about through alliances of dissimilar actors - social movements, churches, sympathetic officials and private sector champions. If people can come together around a simple, winnable aim, this has a galvanizing effect that helps to overcome fear. This suggested that the team could try moving more quickly to exploring and building alliances from the outset and engage emerging leaders' natural inclination for this.
- **Local political economy analysis**: This lens suggested that the team could look more closely to the local building blocks of more permanent, stable organizations – churches and mosques, savings groups, village militia, faith healers, cultural groups. Exploring and understanding this local granularity could help both to identify potential allies, and to understand the political economy of change at the local level.
- **Positive Deviance**: the evolutionary process is not a steady progression from variation, selection and amplification. Things happen at the same time. Even as successful experiments are supported, keep an eye out for new innovations. One way is via positive deviance – studying 'outliers' or looking for what was 'not in the plan'.

Key lessons included:

- MoCs can help to understand the world: different perspectives can suggest different strategic options.
- Any change event has multiple drivers, so a number of working 'change hypotheses' are needed to keep learning about what is happening as the programme unfolds, not a single 'theory of change'.

In Jane Lonsdale's words:

'I can't differentiate programming from power analysis – they go hand in hand. We're doing something different now, not just rolling out a load of community scorecards, or public expenditure tracking. We're pushing ourselves to really think through how change happens in Tanzania and try out different things. Partners and stakeholders have a shared language of power analysis and everyone is picking up trends and patterns – it's a lot better than conventional indicators.'

Adapted from Duncan Green's blog
http://www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/?p=9861

5. What makes a good quality theory of change process and product - or 'good enough'?

'It is good quality if someone can look at the diagram and understand the logic, you can see the sense of it, you can see the causal links and the analysis that supports the thinking. It has to go beyond the programme logic, beyond the technical programme logic, it has to acknowledge the policy dialogue and the strategic and political choices that have been made.' AusAid

Key points

- Quality comes from quality of the thinking process, how the important concepts are captured and how it is used
- Different quality criteria were highlighted for programme design theory of change than were for theory for evaluation
- **Usefulness, ownership and clarity** were three main quality criteria

Quality of the product or the process?

In interviews, the discussion oscillated between 'good quality' and 'good enough'. The reason for this is that most people view the quality as dependant on the purpose for which theory of change is being developed. There is also a difference if one is discussing quality about a theory of change product or a process.

For most interviewees, the product is viewed as an important but interim step. The product - the documenting of the theory of change map and narrative - is important to mark the current 'state of the art' of those particular discussions amongst that particular group of people, but it is the discussions which are important.

There was broad agreement that the key role of the theory of change visuals and documents were to provide an 'organising framework' to guide on-going discussion, decision-making, monitoring and evaluation, and provide focal points for triangulation and learning.

Most people emphasised that a good theory of change should be worked with flexibly - revised and adapted in the light of implementation experience, evaluation feedback and evidence, implementation experience and re-focusing of strategies. It should not be regarded as a deliverable – 'we've done our theory of change' – but lived with in the day-to-day processes of the initiative.

Features of quality in theory of change thinking

As the product is born from the process, the product becomes a way of communicating the most important aspects of the theory of change thinking as it currently stands. To that end, quality comes from a combination of the quality of the thinking in the theory of change process, how the important concepts are captured and how the framework is used (Hivos uses a similar concept). The criteria that were suggested for quality are outlined below.

There were differences in the perception of quality, depending on whether interviewees were starting from evaluation or programme design and strategy. This is an emerging debate – with methodological debates on

the theory-based evaluation side about the testability and evaluability of theories of change, and newer thinking on the programme design side as to what makes a good quality approach[10].

The three principle criteria that were emphasised were **usefulness, clarity** and **ownership**. Use is the starting point – a theory of change needs to be useful and used actively, rather than being an all-encompassing 'paper' model. Many have pointed to the risks of tinkering with ever-more intricate models while the world changes outside (Funnell and Rogers 2011; Wigboldus and Brouwers, 2011).

Three main process quality criteria were emphasised strongly:

- **A group discussion and consultation process, as participatory as possible, with the involvement of stakeholders as feasible and appropriate**

  The greater the number of people that have been able to contribute to the critical thinking process, then the clearer and more robust the representation of the thinking about change will be. Ownership and recognition of their perspectives in the theories of change by both staff and management in different sites was deemed crucial.

  'Doing a theory of change' alone is pointless, unless it is to develop something generic or archetypal for others to respond to. Some people had worked with groups of up to 35 in a workshop, but others had worked through iterative rounds of consultation and revision with smaller groups of people in different sites through face-to-face, email and other communication channels.

- **Clear grounding in the context, informed by local knowledge and stakeholder perspectives, with recognition of the political economy**

  Taking the context as the starting point was flagged as key to moving people out of habits of 'business as usual' or pre-conceived activities. Involving people with local knowledge is important to ground the discussion in realism and specifics. A political economy lens was flagged as important for being able to have an open, honest discussion about what is possible in the context.

- **Sufficient time to prepare and conduct an in-depth analysis, consult stakeholders as appropriate and achieve a genuinely reflective process**

  Theory of change thinking has to be supported. All the organisations and programmes that contributed are very pressed for time, especially in country programmes. The implications are that working with theory of change thinking needs to be taken seriously, supported and resourced. Unless people are able to take time to step away from the day-to-day work, then a good process will not be achieved and it may be better to work with the tools that are already in current use.

Other criteria of quality that were highlighted include:

- **Clear conceptualisation of impact and the pathways to it:** the outcomes are realistic, specific and meaningful at different levels, the programme's 'sphere of influence' is understood, there are timeframes set and the 'road map' is plausible within the resource framework.

[10] For an insight into the latest thinking from both starting points, see Rick Davies, http://mandenews.blogspot.co.uk/ and Hivos' new portal on Theory of Change: http://www.hivos.net/Hivos-Knowledge-Programme/Themes/Theory-of-Change/Resources/8.-How-can-I-recognise-good-quality-ToC; also White, H. and Phillips, D. (forthcoming, 2012)

- **Assumptions and hypotheses that lie behind the 'arrows' have been explored and captured:** how one change will influence or relate to another, the behaviours that can be expected of certain actors have been identified in as transparent and well-founded a way as possible, and that there has been some challenge of people's 'comfort zones' in thinking this through
- **Evidence and wider learning has been used to open up thinking and triangulate the analysis**
- **Uncertainties, risks and knock-on effects are captured:** unintended effects, negative as well as positive.
- **The representation or process map stands up to scrutiny:** key concepts and meaning can be grasped by others, links and arrows are labelled with key assumptions, and it gives a basis from which to have a dialogue with colleagues, stakeholders, grantees and donors
- **Progress and change process markers are identified**: in order to track change and focus impact assessment, with some clarity about where the difference is intended to be made so that this can be learned about.
- **An analysis of power (highlighted especially by civil society and governance initiatives)**
- **On-going review and revision of the theory is integrated into programme implementation.**

Practical suggestions

- **Time and resource issues:** Many organisations have tried to make it as simple and manageable as possible for colleagues, grantees and stakeholders, using familiar terminology, working through existing planning processes and at the level of asking key questions. Group discussions can be initiated and continued through all communication channels, not only in a workshop setting, if it is done in a transparent manner. Working with the processes that are already set in an organisation, for example, team meetings, can help.
- **Work with archetypes and generic theories of change:** Having something to respond to can be helpful to make the best use of time when people have been brought together. Preparation prior to the workshop and involvement of senior management at key points helps with buy-in.(See Funnell and Rogers 2011 for examples of some archetypal outcome pathways)
- **It is not always necessary to start from first principles**. Analysing the 'non-negotiables' gives some boundaries to make the group discussion manageable. However, if the programme is already up and running, then it can take some time to move beyond well-established debates to arrive at new thinking about the theory of change. As assumptions may be hard-wired into ways of working, facilitation may be needed to assist this.
- **Triangulate with wider learning, stakeholder perspectives and evidence:** Sector-informed perspectives can also be useful, but people need to be able to look cross-sectorally for possibilities. Discussions can be triangulated by collating the views of stakeholders, or convening a parallel theory of change process with stakeholders and beneficiaries as useful check-in on assumptions.
- **Select the most important aspects of theory of change for your setting, programme and organisation.** Agreeing on the aspects which are most important for the purposes of the organisation. For example, for DFID, assessing the evidence for causal links is a major aspect of their theory of change approach, for Keystone Accountability, it is identifying the key actors in the ecosystem for collaboration, coalition-formation and influencing.

Example 3: Irish Aid: Using theory of change thinking to clarify programme strategic thinking by not asking for diagrams

When designing a civil society programme in 2011, the biggest challenge Irish Aid saw in the sector was not the 'numbers in the boxes' in the results frameworks, but a lack of clarity about what organisations were trying to achieve and how strategic thinking had informed their programme strategies.

Irish Aid's own analytical lens is that a robust analysis of the operating context, particularly the underlying causes of poverty and vulnerability, needs to inform strategic choices and implementation. Because the context is constantly changing, this analysis should be on-going to constantly sharpen and refocus programme interventions throughout the programme cycle.

For the civil society programme, ensuring that this kind of adaptive thinking is feeding through to realistic pathways for achieving results, on balance, is more important than rigid results frameworks that have not been informed by rigorous analytical strategic thinking.

Following a consultation, a two-phase tendering process was designed to help a clearer expression of the strategic foundations for partners' programmes.

In Phase 1, partners were asked to lay out their analysis and strategic thinking at the country programme level (not the whole organisation). Phase 2 was about building on this thinking to develop detailed results frameworks.

In Phase 1, the prescription of a results-chain or any form of diagram was deliberately avoided. Instead, organisations were supported to provide evidence of their strategic thinking.

The expectation was that organisations could provide supporting documents that they already had, such as the strategic plan, and that funding was available from previous grants to support the strategic planning process.

The strategic elements that were asked for in Phase 1 were:

- Documentation of a clear purpose – what the organisation is trying to achieve.
- Evidence of programme-relevant learning based on a reflection on the past, what had been achieved and not achieved
- Involvement of local partners and stakeholders in strategic planning discussions
- A 'change pathway' showing links between changes at:
    - immediate levels for targeted groups (micro-level changes)
    - partnerships and other relationships to widen the reach of benefits (meso-level)
    - contributions to stronger institutional arrangements at regional and/or national level to help sustain improvements (macro-level changes)
- A rationale and disaggregated strategy for each actor
- Clear strategic logic for the strategies and interventions, with an indication of the analytical approach that had been taken to think through the strategy - for example, a political economy lens that looked at actors and contexts.
- All linked clearly to the overall change that the organisation is trying to achieve.

This material was then appraised. Only in Phase 2 were more detailed results frameworks and formal management outputs asked for from organisations.

Organisations expressed their strategic thinking in many different ways, some with diagrams, others with tables and columns. Others documented their decision-making. The key value was in clarifying and communicating this to the staff at Irish Aid.

The key lessons for Irish Aid were:

- Theory of change thinking is effective if done by a team of people at the level at which it makes the most sense, the country programme or sector implementation level.
- People who have local knowledge are essential to include in the thinking, but sector perspectives have to be put aside to have an honest discussion about what is possible.
- Political economy analysis is helpful when articulating the pathways for change.

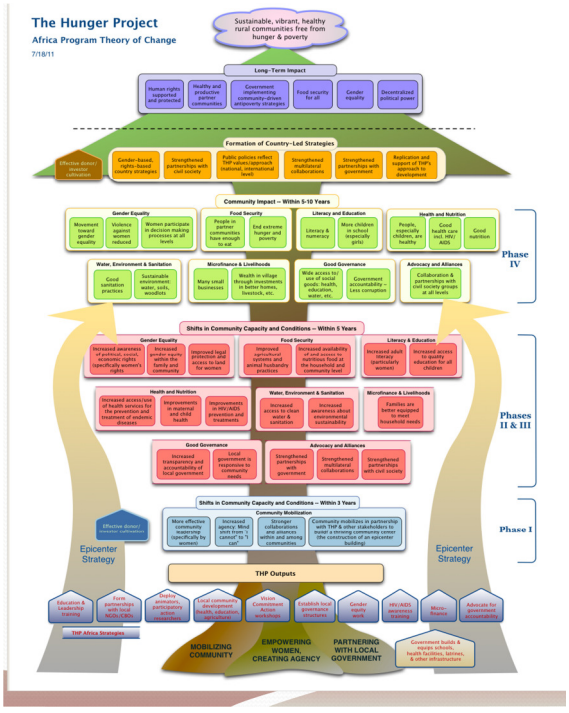
6. How should theory of change thinking be represented?

'The visual is what most people remember about the theory of change. But it is interesting that it is often at the end of a process, when you are trying to synthesise some wording or diagram, a key assumption that has been hidden will cause a heated debate.' Robert Dawes, The Mothers' Union

'Now that we have more accessible computer visualisation, we can use it to draw visual models which have major advantages over text and table to support creative and logical thinking processes.' Paul Duignan, Outcomes-pathways facilitator

Key points

- Visual representations are useful to communicate the conceptual analysis, but should be regarded as only one aspect of the 'theory of change', a narrative and on-going review processes are also needed
- Important assumptions are often revealed when the diagram is created through a group process
- The visual representation should stand up to scrutiny so that concepts and meaning can be grasped by others and stimulate discussion



Source: ActKnowledge(larger version in Appendix 3)

The emphasis so far has been that theory of change is a process and a way of thinking. Yet what most people remember is the diagram or the visual representation of a theory of change – the impact pathways, the assumptions and levels of change, colour-coding.

Diagrams are often visually rich, creative representations that as well as expressing the logical and relational hierarchies, are also reminders of the group process of deeper reflection, insight and inspiration that people have experienced.

Interviewees had mixed views about the visual representation aspect of theory of change thinking. On one hand, some felt that diagrams were only meaningful to those who had been involved in the discussion. Others felt that a strong visual risks too much attention being paid to the 'product' rather than the discussion and thought process.

On the other hand, a lot of people felt that a visual representation gave an accessible overview of the whole conceptual model. It provided an organising framework that could be 'put on the back of the door' and used daily and in team meetings. Some people use them frequently as guides for discussion and review.

Visual representations also have the advantage of bridging cultures and language groups, expressing the most important concepts. The Comic Relief review emphasised that diagrams should combine 'simplicity with validity - an acknowledgement of complexity, but recognition that things are more complex than can be described.' (James 2011,pp28-29) .

For donors and funders, the diagram seems to help to lay out the clarity and logic, but the thinking is not always clearer in a diagram. Interviewees emphasised that funders need to be careful not to over-focus on the diagram as the 'theory of change'. The visual is best thought of as a tool that enables strategic conversations with grantees and partners, to compare perspectives.

Key parameters for effective visual representation of theories of change

The key points that interviewees agreed on were:

- visual representations are useful to communicate the conceptual analysis but the product is not the 'theory of change'
- important assumptions are often revealed when it comes to synthesising the visual, so it is a key tool in the group process
- elements should not be standardised, it is for each programme to decide on the most appropriate representation to avoid 'tick-box' compliance
- the visual representation should stand up to scrutiny - concepts and meaning can be grasped by others, for example by giving explanations of what is 'behind the arrows', using annotations and a key to the symbols used
- that visual elements should be meaningful and not merely decorative, and are stripped back to the essential process elements
- that there is an organising hierarchy of changes at different levels, but that there are also elements to express key aspects which are non-linear, for example, cyclical processes or feedback loops, and more than one pathway
- the most important assumptions are documented
- specialist software is not needed, standard office software is now well-equipped with visual tools sufficient for the purpose.

All the interviewees emphasised that although it is useful, if a visual representation is made a mandatory requirement by donors, then the potential quality of good strategic theory of change thinking will be reduced to a product and a literal 'filling-in of boxes'.

Practical suggestions

- Multiple pathways can be represented on more than one page. Layers can be used to show top-level outcomes, with the two or three key pathways that feed into it from intermediate levels mapped out on separate pages (See Box Example TMEA)
- Use different representations for different communication and dialogue purposes
- Use key outcomes as the basis for building out more detailed areas for investigation, monitoring and evaluation
- Include a longer narrative with the visual
- Have a 'stripped down' version that can be put on a wall and referred to often
- Treat it as a working document, so take care to not over-elaborate the visual representation, keep it simple but valid, as it should be revised regularly.

Example 4: Trade Mark East Africa: Mapping the 'missing middle' in a complex multi-country, multi-implementing agency programme

TradeMark East Africa is a regional integration and trade facilitation programme. It works across six countries implementing over 100 projects with numerous partners. Many projects are implemented at sub-national locations such as border posts and ports.

TMEA's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system is based on a theory of change approach. TMEA's logical framework sets the top-level outcomes and project areas were defined in the original design. The challenge has been to understand the 'missing middle' between the projects and top-level outcomes, the impact pathways in different countries, and the sub-theories of change across the project.

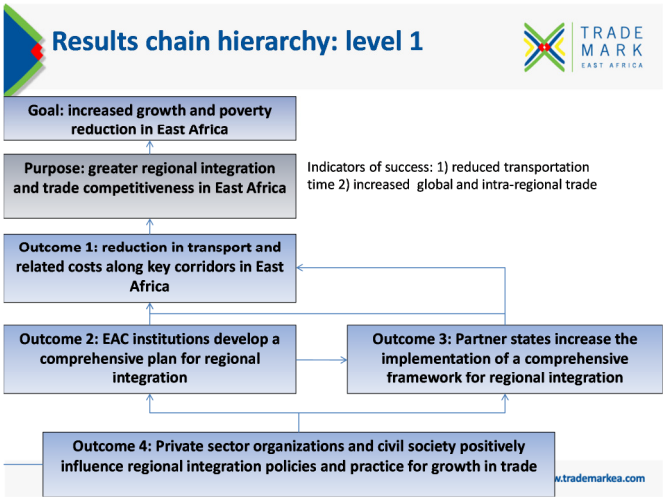
In late 2010, the Knowledge and Results Director began a process of unpacking the theory of change and building a results chain hierarchy beneath each of the log-frame outcomes. This is an ongoing initiative. Senior managers and project partners have been engaged through an iterative consultation process using workshops, smaller meetings and email. Working with the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) Standard, project teams were supported to identify an intermediate outcome and then to map the 'missing middle' between their proposed project outputs and the intermediate outcome. Linked to a logframe outcome and signed off by teams, these provide a basis for the development of the M&E plan.

Running over a number of months, the process was strengthened by feedback from initial implementation experience as projects got underway. As understanding deepens, the results chain hierarchy is fine tuned.

Key learning points

- Time and effort are key to the theory of change, investment from staff and partners is necessary. There are different levels of comfort with talking about how change is expected to happen and testing theories.
- For example, 'raising awareness of integration' is a key milestone, but the analysis revealed that more strategies were needed to increase the chance that 'awareness' leads to action
- In a large programme, the theories of change take time to emerge. Assumptions were difficult to access and develop at first given the range of activities and multiple countries
- The vocabulary of results-chains was more accessible than 'theory of change' which was seen as academic and off-putting.

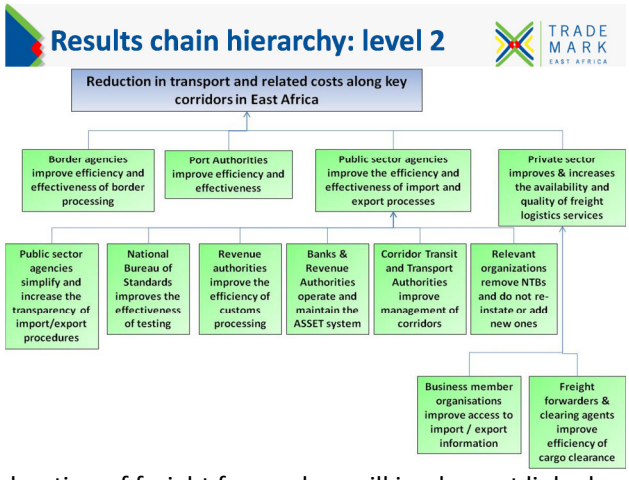
The diagrams show the hierarchies at different levels in the TMEA.



The logframe structure of goal, purpose and four outcomes sets the relationship between the different pieces. The analysis revealed some logical gaps between outcomes and indicators, which will be addressed in due course.

Taking Outcome 1 (reduction in transport and related costs along the key corridors in East Africa), the next figure shows the project level outcomes that contribute to achieving the overarching outcome, at Level 2 in the hierarchy.

Below each of these outcomes in green (TMEA calls these 'intermediate outcomes') there are one or more projects. Each project is drilled down from a green outcome to a further level 3, with indicators of success linked to assumptions. The assumption here is that the regional



federation of freight forwarders will implement linked initiatives to support a code of conduct and accreditation of training. Ethics is an important issue that training alone is not assumed to adequately address. Similarly, the accreditation process is considered a factor that will motivate freight forwarders and clearing agents to attend and pass the training, so mutually reinforcing initiatives are needed. ===.

7. How can evidence be used to support a theory of change process?

'I think, particularly through the 'exploring change' approach to ToC that there is a more explicit expectation to understand 'what is known', through both internal and external learning in terms of constructing a theory of change than there might be in other approaches. The tendency just to draw on internal learning is strong, so we must take care to look wider to check our thinking.' Joanna Monahan, Comic Relief

Key points:

- The role of evidence is to check and challenge assumptions, broaden the range of strategic options that may be relevant to the context, and strengthen the quality of the hypotheses to provide a confident basis for action
- Triangulating between multiple sources of evidence – academic and community, qualitative as well as quantitative - is important to ensure a breadth of perspectives to inform the analysis
- Some mapping of the evidence for causal pathways, for example value chains, general budget support, have been mapped through evaluations and can provide a useful starting point, as can formal initiatives such as synthetic reviews.

Using evidence to support the development of theory of change is a key concern for DFID. Most other interviewees shared the concern but all were aware of the practical difficulties of accessing evidence. In many cases, the evidence is not synthesised in a way that is helpful to the questions being asked by programme planners.

Assessing the quality and strength of the evidence for particular issues is also a key stage in the DFID Business Case process. Looking at questions of how to assess the quality of evidence is beyond the scope of this review, but some insights from others' experience are useful to discuss[11].

The role of evidence in theory of change thinking

Evidence can be considered as any robust information that helps to turn strategic priorities into concrete, manageable and achievable plans (Shaxson 2005). In theory of change thinking the role of evidence is to check and challenge assumptions, broaden the range of strategic options that may be relevant to the context, and strengthen the quality of the hypotheses for change to inform both the design and implementation of a programme or intervention.

The Comic Relief review advocated a reference to wider learning on context and issues as a key principle in theory of change thinking (James 2011). Many interviewees emphasised looking at what is already known about relevant country and sector issues in preparation for a theory of change process. The importance of taking a range of analytical lenses to understand what is happening in the context by looking at different sources of information has already been discussed.

It was also emphasised that the vocabulary and learning practices used should be appropriate to the setting. A compilation of lessons from different perspectives and about what has worked can support a discussion of the success factors (C. James, interview).

[11] A useful guide to critically assessing evidence through key questions is Shaxson, L. (2205), "Is your Evidence Robust Enough?" *Evidence & Policy*, vol 1, no 1, pp.101-11

Funnell and Rogers (2011) recommend triangulating people's 'mental models' and experience-based knowledge with research and evaluation evidence in theory of change development. Evidence can support analysis at many levels in theory of change thinking, for example:

- Country context and the issues
- Drivers of particular problems and their consequences for different groups in the population
- Trajectories and timeframes of change in different contexts for different issues and interventions – for example, crime indicators can get worse in the intermediate stage due to improved reporting before long-term improvements might start to be seen in justice interventions[12]
- Cause-effect links which have already been mapped in evaluations or value-chain analyses
- The range of intervention options, the performance of intervention options in different contexts, possible sequencing and bundling of intervention options
- Pilots to judge the potential of innovations.

Interviewees emphasised the importance of triangulating between quantitative and qualitative evidence, looking for insights into possible causes and 'mechanisms' from impact evaluations and programme evaluations, looking at different kinds of information from different disciplinary and institutional perspectives on the issue, especially local civil society, stakeholders' and communities' perspectives.

However, there needs to be an awareness of the limits of what can be 'known' or 'proved'. The objective is to provide confidence for action, but evidence cannot provide cast-iron guarantees of success (Shaxson 2005). Making the thinking transparent and open is helpful in encouraging a realistic appraisal of the mix of certainties, potentials, risks and uncertainties that characterise most programmes. Where there are gaps in evidence, these can provide useful opportunities for monitoring and evaluation questions to generate information and analysis.

'Pathways Mapping'

An approach to building operationally-oriented evidence bases using theory of change principles that was reviewed is the Harvard Pathways Mapping Initiative. This ambitious initiative attempted to tackle complex social challenges by mapping 'what works' type evidence. Multi-disciplinary expert teams and local communities were asked 'What would it take to achieve x? ', where x was a multi-dimensional complex social problem, such as improved nutrition, schooling and life chances for children from families living on low incomes (Schorr and Marchand 2007).

The concept was to map the multiple outcome 'pathways' that contributed to the overall outcome and linking in the evidence of what was already known about how to achieve the intermediate outcomes. The objective was to make this evidence base available as a whole rather than piecemeal.

The importance of the context and local communities' own knowledge and agency to act to address their problems was the main principle, and so, rather than attempting to identify wholesale 'blueprints' for interventions, the Pathways Initiative focused on identifying 'causal ingredients' that could be combined with local communities' own knowledge to inspire new strategies, without waiting for a perfect 'body of evidence' to appear (Schorr and Marchand 2009).

[12] For more on impact trajectories, see Woolcock, M. (2009) Towards a Plurality of Methods in Project Evaluation: A Contextualised Approach to Understanding Impact Trajectories and Efficacy, BWPI Working Paper 73, University of Manchester http://www.bwpi.manchester.ac.uk/resources/Working-Papers/bwpi-wp-7309.pdf

The initiative has now been discontinued in the US but continues in an initiative to map the pathways, evidence and engage communities to support anti-retroviral treatment strategies for HIV-AIDS in Africa.[13]

Practical suggestions

Looking for 'ingredients' from where 'pathways' and evidence have already been mapped was flagged by some interviewees. Some examples included:

- STAR Ghana programme is using mapped value chains for oil and gas to frame their analysis of how civil society could interact with these (J. Barr, interview)
- DFID's team working on violence against women is in the process of developing a high-level 'pathways map' of evidence about factors, development conditions, barriers and possible intervention options to address violence against women as an analytical framework to support country programmes' analysis of their context (Z. Moohsa and K. Bishop, interview)
- Causal maps have been developed for multi-country evaluations of areas such as general budget support (IDD 2007)

Other formal initiatives such as 3IE are building up an evidence base of impact evaluations and systematic reviews on a wide range of issues that are synthesised and structured specifically to assist policy and operational decision-making (http://www.3ieimpact.org/). These are still emerging tools in international development and effective ways to apply them are becoming clearer as people strive to work in a more evidence-informed way (see for example, a recent report from the Secure Livelihoods Consortium)[14] .

[13] http://mappingpathways.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/harvard-school-of-public-health-to.html

[14] Hagen-Zanker, J. et al (2012), Making Systematic Reviews Work for International Development, SLRC Briefing Paper, ODI http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/7546.pdf

8. How is theory of change thinking being used for monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment?

'In AWARD, we have built the M&E system on the foundation of our theory of change. We have identified many causal pathways, and are tracking the ones that seem critical at the moment. But because we are dealing with complex issues and multiple contexts, we have built in space to test our theory of change as we go, using real-time data from participants and stakeholders, to support on-going management decisions'. Zenda Ofir, Evaluation Advisor, AWARD (see Box Example for more details)

Key points

- Examples suggest that theory of change thinking brings greater clarity and robustness to the concepts of impact and supports useful frameworks for tracking changes and analysing linkages
- Theories of change provide a good basis for evidencing impact and inferring causal relationships to demonstrate results.
- As theory-based evaluation meets theory of change thinking for programmes, appropriate standards for testing theories of change will need to be further debated .

Some interviewees mentioned that working with theory of change in programmes can feel intimidating against the backdrop of the results agenda, impact evaluations, debates around causality, attribution and contribution, and accountability to funders and stakeholders.

Working in practical ways to manage these tensions is an on-going challenge, but many people highlighted that using theory of change thinking to bring 'evaluative thinking' into a programme at an early stage is one of the key benefits of working with the approach. It helps to identify progress markers, and where focused evaluation questions can provide insights as a programme is implemented.

A focus on the context and process of change that a programme seeks helps to clarify the focus of monitoring and evaluation and the questions that are important to ask, and for what purpose. Some of the important motivations for doing this include:

- Learning in order to improve strategies and interventions
- Accountability to donors
- Accountability to local communities
- Demonstrate results and impact.

Conceptualising the change process: impact pathways and cause-effect links

Some of the programmes that contributed to this review are using theory of change thinking to 'test' particular links in their theory of change at key points during the implementation life-time of the programme. Particularly for programmes with complicated or complex aspects, such as governance,

accountability or empowerment programmes, 'real-time' M&E data can help to adapt programme implementation to the conditions at hand and demonstrate early results that are indicators of longer-term change. The AWARD box example explains how they are tackling it.

This review found that people use many different terms, often metaphorical, for how they conceptualise the change process and the 'links' in the theory of change. One of the most common terms that interviewees in this review used to describe the sequence of change they want to achieve is the metaphor of a 'pathway' to impact, or an 'outcome pathway'.

Understanding what is meant by the' pathway' is important for identifying what to track and what aspects of the 'pathway' is there interest in understanding more about, as a framework for M&E. The pathway idea refers to the sequence or hierarchy of changes and events that map out how things will change. People see their own pathway in different terms, based on the values, perspective and ways of working that form the main driver in their organisation or programme.

For example, one of the research-based programmes (the Water and Food Challenge Fund) that contributed to this report works with an innovation science analytical lens. They see their 'impact pathway' as arising from changes in practice amongst groups of actors. To support changes in practice, changes in knowledge, attitude and skills need to take place first, followed by social interactions and learning processes that support the adoption and adaptation of new knowledge. These eventually lead to new practices. The likely behaviour changes that might indicate that knowledge, skills and attitudes have changed in the target groups are what might be tracked in this framing.

Some of the civil society programmes that work with political economy lenses take as their starting point changes in interactions, power, relationships and influence as their 'pathway' to change, so a lot of governance and accountability programmes track relationships and coalition formation. Looking at empowerment models of change adds a dimension of individual change, so individual behaviour changes that suggest attitude and relational changes become important to track (see SAVI, AcT, STAR, AWARD examples).

However, the emphasis on relationships and collaboration in civil society programmes also means that there is often an ethical discomfort with the evaluation notion of attribution, when people feel that they contribute to shared outcomes alongside the efforts of others.

Depending on the 'pathway', different processes are seen to trigger changes. The evaluation literature talks about 'causal mechanisms' that refer to combinations of context and social processes that an intervention seeks to 'activate'. (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). The extensive use of metaphors – 'mechanism' is a metaphor here - gives clues that the 'theories' of what constitutes a 'cause-effect linkage' are as much informed by worldviews, values and beliefs about social processes as they are 'technical' considerations. In this respect, they should be critically examined in the same way as other kinds of assumptions in theory of change thinking.

What is helpful to understand about evaluation concepts of causality and evidence when working with theory of change for programmes?

The extent to which a theory of change process in a programme can engage with monitoring and evaluation issues will depend on the programme or organisations' particular circumstances. Bearing in mind the caution against making models overly intricate, some thought can be given to what interviewees view as a realistic

aim in terms of conceptualising and evidencing their theory of change, given the 'prove-it' pressures of the results-based agenda that are a reality for programmes.

Debates about attribution or contribution present the former as more rigorous than the latter. Funnell and Rogers (2011) discuss the idea of 'causal inference' in evaluation, which is a less 'all-or-nothing' way of looking at the issue. 'Causal inference' involves using evidence and information to build a credible case that there is a relationship between changes that have taken place and the activities that the programme undertook.

The analogy often used is that of a detective building a case, so that given the weight of the evidence, a reasonable and independent person (or 'a sceptical outsider' in DCED's standard) would be convinced that 'the evidenced version of events occurred' (White and Phillips, 2012).

There is a wide range of M&E methodologies that are valid for building this evidenced case, qualitative as well as quantitative. What links them all is the importance of having a theory of change that lays out the expected story in advance of the changes happening. This then provides the basis for collecting evidence, checking other possible explanations as counterfactuals and presenting a case from which cause can be reasonably inferred and linked back to the programme (White and Phillips, 2012).

The steps to consider include:

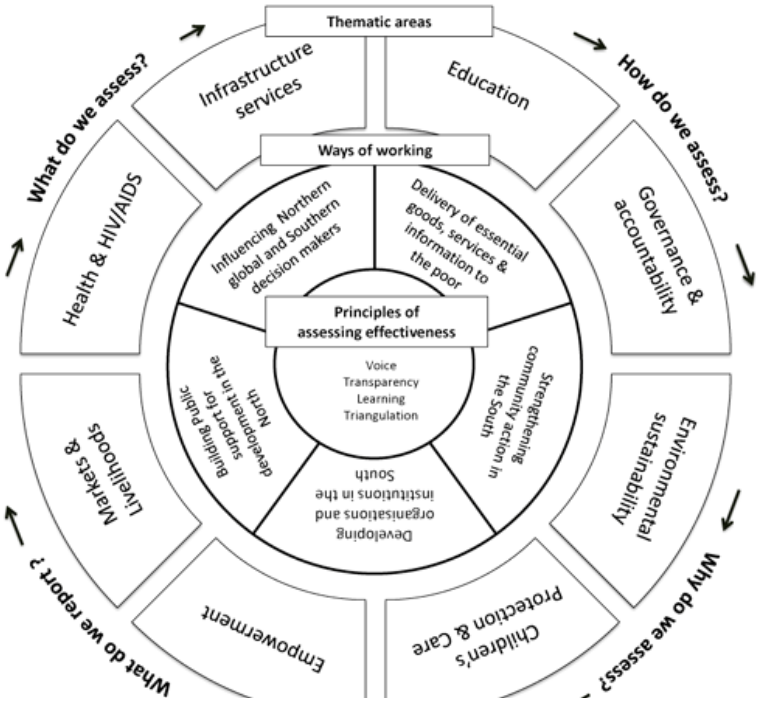
- Expressing a theoretical idea of what changes are anticipated in advance, what the team consider to be the effects and changes that are likely to be seen as a result of an activity or strategy
- Expressing the different explanations of how and why the actions will influence that effect
- Documenting the analytical or worldview perspective on the theoretical links between effect and cause, with reference to other sources, being alert to alternative explanations of how changes could be influenced
- Summing up the theory about the link, for example in Care International UK's format: *'If we take x action, then y change will result because…'*
- Collecting evidence and information through a range of appropriate methods at key points throughout the programme cycle, in order to understand to what extent whether observed changes can be linked back to the theory
- Testing the explanation and evidence by checking if the changes seen could also be explained by other influences.

Different methodologies that draw on a wide range of qualitative and quantitative techniques exist to do this in a way that is useful, proportionate and credible, that picks up unexpected as well as expected effects, for both learning and accountability[15].

Practical suggestions

The challenge of tracking results and assessing impact has been taken up by many M&E specialists. There are many initiatives and innovations now aiming to support organisations and programmes to assess impact, using a theory of change-based approach.

[15] Monitoring and Evaluation News http://mande.co.uk/ has many guides to methods. Also, The Outcome Mapping Community is a useful resource http://www.outcomemapping.ca/ . A comprehensive summary of methods and issues for small-scale evaluations and monitoring, with further resources is available in White and Phillips (2012),forthcoming, 3IE.



Source: BOND Effectiveness Team,

ActKnowledge tackles this by building out the specifics of outcomes at each stage in the outcomes pathway. Outcomes are defined in specific terms and indicators developed that detail the changes that would indicate that the outcome had been successfully achieved. Each indicator needs to express: the nature of the change, for whom, 'how many', 'how good' (the threshold above which an outcome can be said to have been achieved) and by when. Rationales are used to explain the causal links, and assumptions are also expressed in relation to the 'arrows' and outcomes.

The BOND initiative that supports civil society organizations has developed a framework for applying outcomes-orientated thinking to strengthen effectiveness.

Another example is the Donor Committee on Enterprise Development (DCED). DCED has developed a standard for results measurement which is based on context-aware programme logic approach. Once M&E systems are developed, there is an independent audit which certifies both the system and the results.

Keystone Accountability works through a five stage Impact Planning and Learning approach, starting from a theory of change, with participatory indicator development and monitoring and evaluation systems. http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/analysis/ipal

Mapping theory of change to log-frames

Mapping theory of change thinking to log-frames is still a challenge, but it is one that a lot of programmes are tackling, given the realities of existing performance management frameworks.[16]

The DCED Standard 'At a Glance'

1. Articulating the Results Chain
2. Defining indicators of change

Source: Donor Committee on Enterprise Development
http://www.enterprise-development.org/page/measuring-and-reporting-results

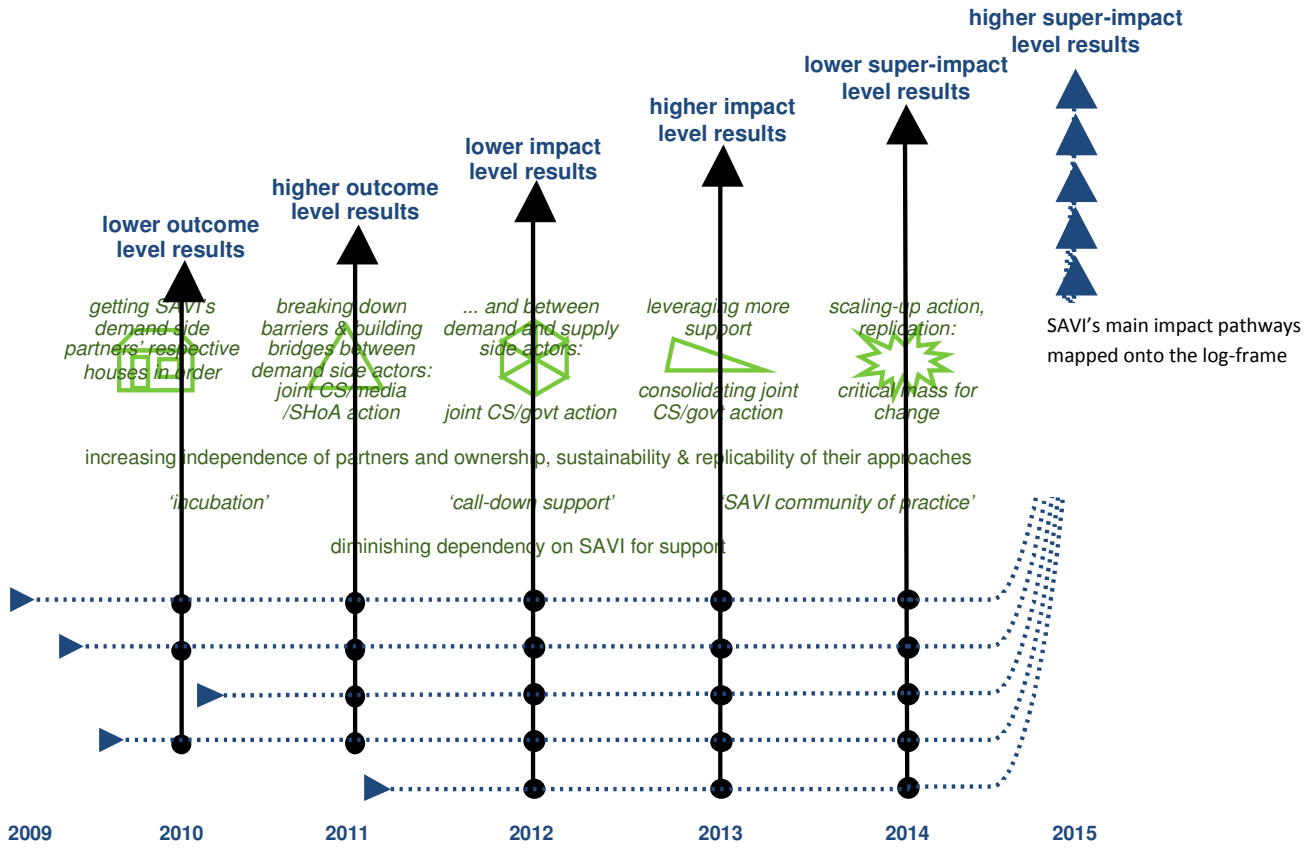
6. Tracking programme costs
7. Reporting results
8. Managing the system for results measurement

The Box Example for Trade Mark East Africa illustrates how each log-frame output has been expanded to show the changes at the project and intermediate level that feed into it, and some of the key cause-effect assumptions have been documented. This analysis has highlighted some logic issues at the level of the main log-frame, common challenges which have been discussed before.

[16] Funnell and Rogers (2011) have a useful chapter on developing an M&E plan using the theory of change and choosing which aspects of programme theory to measure – Chapter 14, pp.417-476

In another example, Accountability Tanzania is linking outcome mapping to the logical framework by conceptualising a set of 'bridging' network changes occurring below each log-frame results area. The programme has developed a full theory of change which is being used to identify key indicators to map into the log-frame (Dyer 2012).

In a further example, the figure below shows how the State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI) in Nigeria is linking the key contributions from each broad area of its theory of change to higher-level outcomes in its log-frame.



Source: SAVI Nigeria,

Example 5: AWARD: Tracing empowerment and capacity-building using theory of change thinking for real-time monitoring and evaluation

Zenda Ofir

http://awardfellowships.org/home.html

Attributing benefits to capacity building poses a challenge to the development community. There are insufficiently strong examples of tracking and measuring change and impact at individual, institutional and society levels. In particular, how can we be more confident that interventions that aim to 'empower' is achieving impact or value for money?

AWARD is a professional development program that strengthens the research and leadership skills of African women in agricultural science - the AWARD Fellows. It has three inter-connected strategies - mentoring, science and leadership development – to give 240 women scientists in 11 countries the power to contribute better to poverty alleviation and food security in sub-Saharan Africa.

At its first meeting in 2008, the AWARD Steering Committee opted for a utilization-focused and realistic, yet rigorous approach to determining and measuring change. A system was developed based on core principles, *i.a.* making it in the first place useful for its African stakeholders; treating M&E as management priority; multi-directional accountability; testing and rigorously applying innovative, appropriate methods; and focusing on results while recognizing the complexity of working towards enduring impact by empowering individuals. The M&E approach had several key components:

- The management team had to have some internal M&E capacity, but was also supported by an evaluation advisor from South Africa who worked as '**internal evaluator'** in a facilitative way with the AWARD team and Steering Committee.
- An initial focus on outcome mapping was modified to a detailed **theory of change** developed by the management team with input from the fellows.
- Every fellow also has an **individual roadmap** developed with her mentor. The structure of these roadmaps is aligned with the theory of change.
- Crucially important is AWARD's use of **'process monitoring of impacts'**, a theory-based, systems approach (Williams and Hummelbrunner, 2011, Systems Concepts in Action, Chapter 5). It shifts the emphasis from monitoring indicators to understanding and steering the *impact-creating* processes.
- A significant amount of data and information are collected and analyzed at various intervals to **test the theory of change**, tracking implementation performance as well as expected and unexpected short-term and intermediate outcomes. Long-term impacts are tracked through special studies.
- The monitoring data are quantitative and qualitative, factual and perceptual, with a strong focus on **triangulation**. Process tracing, surveys, systematic impact story analysis and comparative case study analysis are some of the methods used.
- Comparison of the agreed upon theory of change with theoretical frameworks led to the adoption of an **empowerment model** (Alkire and Ibrahim, 2007) as integral part of the ToC and M&E system. It highlights the effectiveness of AWARD's integrated approach to leadership development and enables a deeper understanding of the type and extent of empowerment for leadership in science.
- AWARD also focuses on deepening understanding **of** the nature of **transformative change**. It is seen as an important issue if positive changes are to endure after the fellows leave AWARD.

AWARD's theory of change serves as the foundation for regular monitoring, reflection and self-assessment among the team and fellows. It provides structure to their learning, accountability reporting and knowledge generation. The process monitoring of impacts approach - systematically working with the internal factors (mechanisms) and external factors (contexts) - also helps identify where processes towards impact can be improved.

The theory of change acknowledges that change is not linear, yet focuses on progression over time. This helps to clarify what preconditions should be in place for the next 'level' of outcomes to occur. Social change interventions in open, complex systems inevitably interact with others and with contextual influences. Leadership development processes are usually long-term, emergent and have multiple inter-relationships.

AWARD's theory of change opened up many possible pathways. The challenge has been to identify the most important ones to track for a 'light' M&E system, while remaining open to emergent change. Much effort has also gone into establishing effective data management systems and standard processes, and to developing reflection capacities within the team. These efforts should come to fruition during 2012.

9. How can theory of change thinking help with complex aspects of programmes?

'Our basic approach is to plan for the future, as if linear cause-and-effect logic works, and then regularly revisit and challenge this 'theory of change' using information from monitoring and other sources. If the change from original plans can be justified in terms of what is being learned, and is underpinned by good process, then funds can be redirected at project and program levels. This is adaptive management in practice.' Boru Douthwaite, Water and Food Challenge Fund, CGIAR

Key points

- Most programmes have complicated or complex aspects, theory of change can help to identify and deal with them positively
- Some donors are starting to work with a more adaptive management approach
- Theory of change thinking can help guide data collection to inform interpretations of complex situations during implementation, but there is much more to be learned about working with complexity in practice.

Most international development programmes have aspects which are complicated or complex. How theory of change thinking can help is an area which is still a 'new frontier' for programming, management and evaluation, hence the interest in including this topic in the review (Funnell and Rogers, 2011).

There are some excellent analyses of the challenges posed by complex problems for policy, programming and evaluation, which are beyond the scope of this report to review in-depth (Jones, 2011; Patton 20011; Rogers 2008). Some key messages are useful to summarise, as theory of change thinking lends itself to working with complexity in positive ways.

Rogers (2008) emphasises that programmes do not fit neatly into separate categories, but are likely to combine simple, complicated and complex aspects in one programme. Useful short-hand for understanding the differences includes:

- **Simple** aspects include standardised activities, implemented by a single organisation, the context has little influence on implementation and results
- **Complicated** aspects in a programme include multiple components, implemented by multiple agencies, implementation and multiple sites or multiple possible pathways
- **Complex** aspects in a programme include non-standard evolving activities, sensitivity to context, uncertainty about trajectories, iterative cycles and feedback loops, disproportionate relationships where a small change at a critical point can create 'tipping points' and 'ripple' effects, and outcomes are more likely to be understood after the event.

Jones (2011) highlights how complex problems pose challenges for traditional implementation approaches:

- Capacities to tackle complex problems are shared amongst various actors and stakeholders, no single organisation or network can influence change alone
- Complex problems are difficult to predict, dynamics of change are non-linear and so cannot be fully understood or interpreted

- Complex issues often involve conflicting goals, with different actors approaching from different starting points, characterised by trade-offs and knock-on effects
- Technocratic approaches are not an appropriate response - addressing the problem requires a negotiation between stakeholders on the interpretation of the situation and how to approach it that recognises political realities and allows room for the co-existence of different views.

There are different strategic and implementation responses that people can take when faced with complex programmes and problems. Patton (2011) discusses that how people and organisations intuitively plan, implement and realize strategy in the real world is already well-suited to adapting to changes in the context and innovating to take advantage of new opportunities (p 49). The process moves from:

- 'intended strategy', where things are planned
- an interim stage where not everything that is intended is realised - parts that are no longer relevant or needed may be dropped - 'unrealized' - what is left is 'deliberate strategy'
- this stage is also when changes in the context may create new opportunities, requiring the improvisation of a new bit of strategy that was not anticipated at the outset – 'emergent strategy'
- what is finally realized is a combination of deliberate and emergent strategy, things that unfold as planned combined with innovated responses to the unexpected and unanticipated 'turns in the road'.

'Looking at what you have dropped from your intended strategy and why is really important for learning. So go back to your theory of change at every report point, recognise the complexity of the context and ask, what has changed, what is different, how does our theory need to change?' Joanna Monahan. Comic Relief

Taken together, the relevance of these insights for development programmes seems clear. Adaptation and innovation in programmes are positive responses to complexity. However, interviewees working in complex programmes highlight that existing project performance management tools are restricted in flexibility to accommodate a more adaptive approach.

How theory of change thinking can help

The analyses of complicated and complex aspects of programmes fit well with looking at theory of change thinking as a 'learning lens' that invites dialogue and triangulation from a number of viewpoints and sources of evidence.

As Funnell and Rogers (2011) emphasise, rather than side-step challenging aspects, it is more helpful to analyse them, understand your sphere of influence and range of available strategies to address them, and also identify others to work with, as a basis for informed action. Many contributors to this review emphasised that good programme practice should aim to proactively address challenging aspects through adaptation and learning. Some examples of how people have approached this challenge are explored below.

Many of Oxfam's initiatives are informed by complexity science. This type of approach emphasises that in a complex environment, stable patterns are not possible. Reversing the traditional project cycle sequence, in this approach the first step is to act in a small-scale, experimental way that initiates responses and feedback.

Feedback is learned from and informs subsequent decision-making about the next step in an iterative way. This approach is known as 'act-sense-analyze-respond' (Snowden and Boone, 2007).

The DFID DRC programme to build a road in a fragile context (see Box Example 1) acknowledged gaps and uncertainties, past short-falls and dependencies on regional strategies managed by other actors. Their response was to include in the programme design a rapid-response research and evaluation component to support on-going analysis and decision-making in response to changing conditions throughout the programme.

Interviewees who have applied complexity science to their programmes highlight how, in a complex environment, programmes become much more like experiments. Some will succeed, others will fail, but all generate positive learning about the interactions between context and initiative. Theory of change thinking helps to articulate propositions or hypotheses of how change might occur to underpin experimental initiatives.

Identifying realistic intermediate changes that are stepping stones along a hypothetical trajectory can help to identify a number of intervention pathways to explore in an experimental way, including how different strategies might interact and feedback at the same intermediate level (I.Guijt, interview). Some suggestions of how to support this included reviewing the theory of change as part of annual reviews, building in 'circuit-breaker' reviews of the programme and its theory of change where critical decisions to end, amend or expand initiatives are taken (D. Green, interview).

Rather than a stable model with confident predictions, when dealing with complex aspects of programmes, theory of change thinking should be treated as a working 'organising framework' that can be discussed, clarified and tested to make sense of what is emerging from the context (Funnel and Rogers 2011; Loveridge 2011).

Donors and funders: working with adaptive management approaches

Many of the people interviewed for this review emphasised the need to keep theory of change flexible and not prescriptive if it is to support more strategic adaptations to changes in the context. As had been said before, the idea is not to create intricate logic models that 'lock-in' what has to be achieved to an inappropriate level of detail.

This can be challenging in donor agencies and other organisations where a public management culture is dominant. Current performance management approaches assume that the environment is stable and controllable. As discussed in the preceding section, this is rarely the case in complex initiatives.

Some donors and funders are working more with an emergent strategy approach. For example, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada is now including an evaluation question about adaptation to assess how well the programme team adapted its theory and implementation strategy to changes in the context, for example the emergence of a new actor.

Irish Aid (see Box Example 3) is emphasising strong strategic thinking and proactive responses to changes in the context. At the Rockefeller Foundation, systems-thinking has been a core approach for some time, so theory of change thinking and adaptive management approaches have meshed with this way of working. The

Water and Food Challenge Fund at the CGIAR will re-direct funds at the project level if this is justified by learning.

The implications for resourcing a more responsive, integrated M&E system and staff capacities to support adaptive management were flagged, as well as the time required to learn as well as to implement.

Most interviewees recognised that stable management frameworks are needed for resourcing and decision-making. Many of them highlighted that it is possible to develop performance-management and accountability orientated frameworks for multiple component and emergent aspects of programmes based on a theory of change foundation. Although this is still a learning process, some examples were discussed in the section on M&E and more are given in Appendix 3.

Practical suggestions

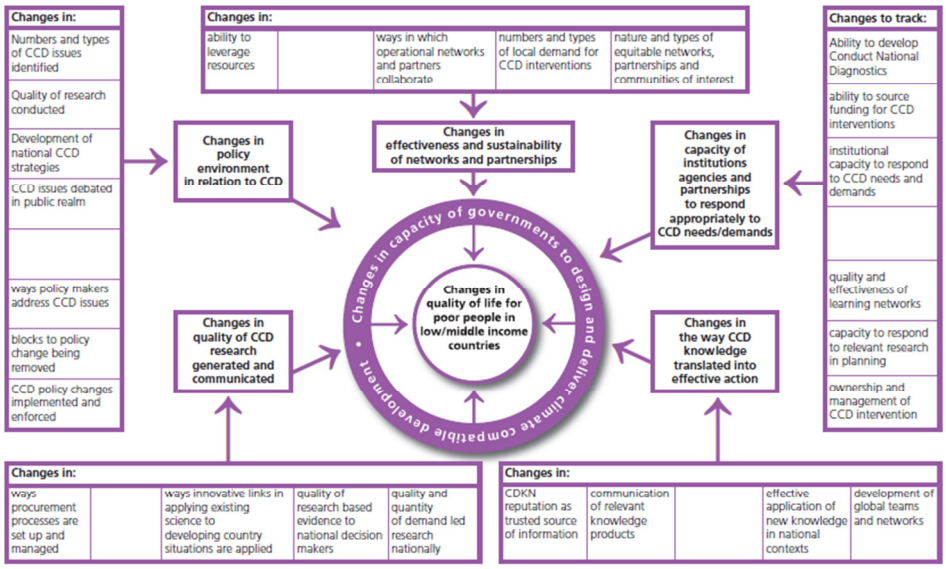
There are no hard and fast rules in this area, but some suggestions to try include:

- If the programme team are used to working with a simplified programme logic, it was suggested that theory of change thinking about the context, the bigger picture and how the programme fits in can be helpful to open up the thinking, using the criteria given above to identify which aspects of the programme are complex or complicated.
- If the programme team are used to looking at the bigger picture but struggle to find focus, then it was suggested to use theory of change thinking to:
    - identify the programme's 'spheres of direct and indirect influence'
    - map out a timeframe and the parameters of vision, mission, existing strategic frameworks, ways of working, resources, budget
    - create a timeline, starting with the recent past to where the activity is now, and project into a future timeline, using 'What happens next? Who is involved?' as process mapping approach
    - identify points where the programme would need to intervene in the future timeline – if the future is unclear, what would make sense to initiate or catalyse within a short timeframe the results of which would help clarify further strategic options? What behaviour changes would be seen?
- If the top-level outcomes are defined, interventions are defined, but multiple sites, multiple implementation organisations and multiple contextual conditions mean that the impact pathways are not clear:
    - Use 'dimensions of change' approach to identify key conceptual dimensions of change that would support the top-level outcome
    - Define intermediate changes that support the dimensions
    - Identify areas of enquiry and evaluation questions to track the emergence of pathways and causal links that could generate hypotheses and 'causal ingredients' that could be useful to inform strategy in other sites. See the CDKN example below.

> *'The success of the theory-based approach requires that the programme's assumed pathways of progression from inputs to outcomes (typically non-linear) are carefully thought through upfront, but can be appropriately modified in light of implementation experience. In turn, this requires a working environment that encourages course corrections in response to external or internal factors and one that does not view changing the originally presumed theory as a sign of weakness.' Soniya Carvalho, Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank.*

Maureen O'Flynn

CDKN Dimensions of Change



- Funnell and Rogers (2011) offer suggestions for representing complex or complicated aspects of programmes, Chapter 9.

10. How can theory of change thinking be embedded as a support to learning through the project cycle?

'There is a lot to be gained from working more along these lines. A lot of these core points- exploration, learning and adaption are part of an evaluative culture. But there are real issues of continuity and resources in being able to keep a closer tab on what happened, how we think things are working, especially in the most complex areas, where it is most needed and important, for example, support to a peace process.' Eva Jakobsen-Broegaard, DANIDA

Key messages

- Theory of change thinking can be used as an opportunity to encourage innovation through more dynamic exchanges between donors, programmes and civil society to improve hypotheses of change and create a wider range of strategic options
- To benefit from on-going learning, donors and grant-makers need to see themselves as actors 'in the picture', not outside it
- Theory of change thinking can be encouraged with principles and key questions throughout the programme cycle, not through mandatory prescriptions

The main benefits that are expected from programmes working with theory of change thinking right from the start are that an impact-oriented learning process is created in an on-going way to strengthen and improve programmes as they are being implemented.

'Part of the on-going checking is to compare your theories of change, it should not be the case where the donor is looking for a perfect match to their theory of change, but to have a dialogue, a more dynamic exchange to see where our theories match and where do they stretch us, challenge us to open up new areas?.' Joanna Monahan, Comic Relief

All the interviewees agreed that this was the prize, to embed theory of change thinking rather it being a one-off, proposal stage process. Most organisations and programmes are at an early stage of working with theory of change thinking, most interviewees said they were learning by doing. All agreed that theory of change thinking needs to be held lightly, approached from a learning and not a compliance approach - creating a mandatory and prescribed process and product was a sure-fire way to make it a short-lived tool.

The main challenges highlighted were:

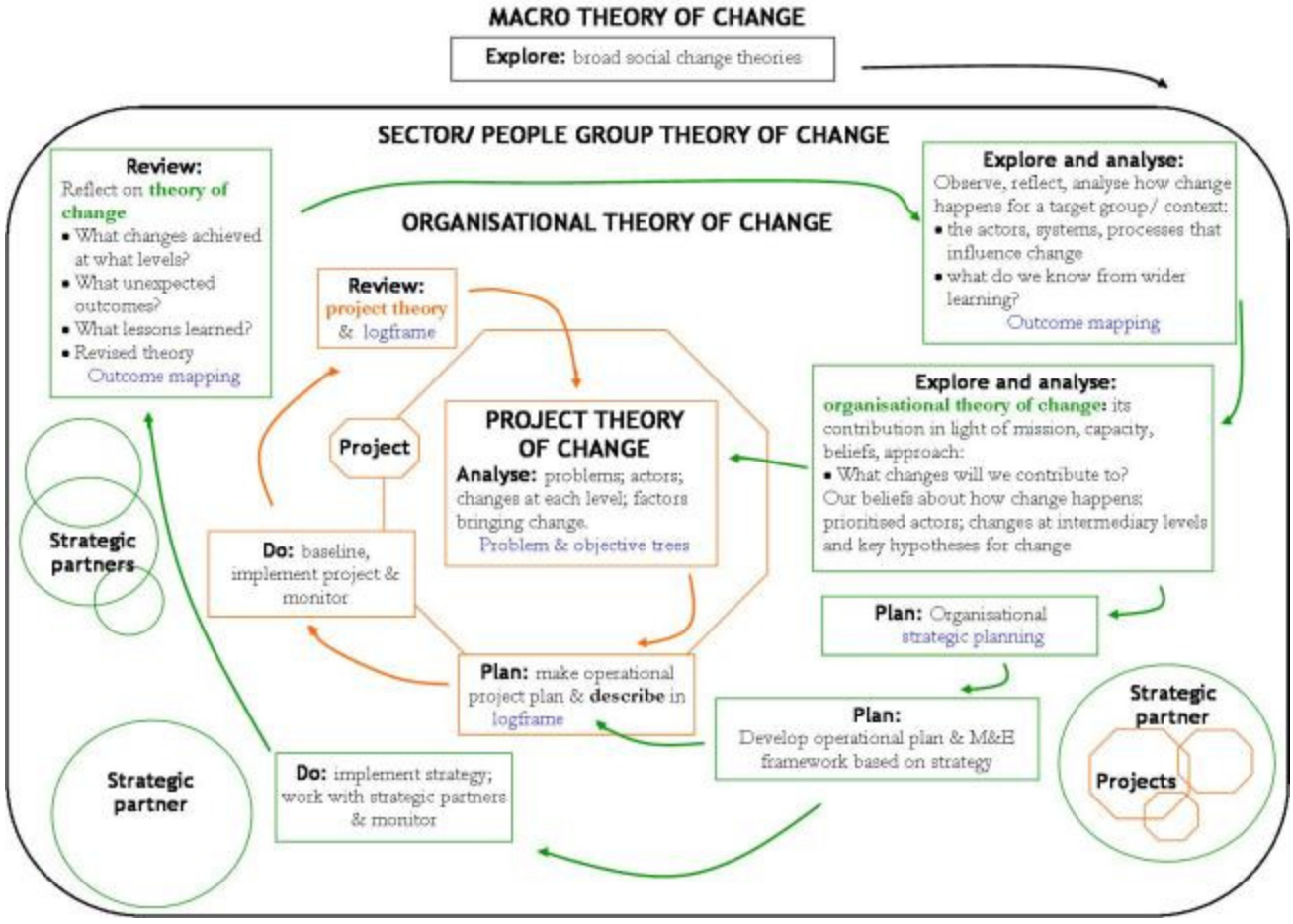
- how to integrate theory of change thinking without adding another layer of process for over-burdened staff
- how to create space for engaging with feedback and data
- how to resource and staff a larger monitoring and evaluation, impact and learning stream within programmes
- how to build an evaluative culture and make real adjustments to programme strategies in response to learning
- how to create contracting, management, reporting and administrative systems, at donor, organization and programme level that support a more flexible approach.

These challenges apply at all the levels of development programming: country strategies, national and sector programmes, regional programmes, internationally networked initiatives and organisations. Some of the suggestions for how to bring theory of change thinking into these are outlined below.

The key message was to not to try to introduce a detailed process from the top down, but to work with the opportunities as they arise. Theory of change thinking is a habit not a product and a lot of benefit can be gained from simply starting to think more broadly about change and the context.

Theory of change thinking should evolve, it does not need to be developed in one go. Assumptions take time to become clearer and so an iterative, staged process that is integrated into other learning and planning processes can help to develop an outcomes-oriented outlook and build confidence to apply theory of change principles and thinking at different levels and settings. James (2011) developed a diagram to illustrate this iterative process, as part of Comic Relief's review of theory of change.

Comic Relief's Learning and Evaluation Continuum



Source: Comic Relief - Theory of Change Review, C. James (20110)

Demonstrating the power of a good visual, Comic Relief's Learning and Evaluation Continuum illustrates how theory of change thinking can add value throughout the organizational strategic planning, project cycle planning and management (with log-frames), programme implementation and M&E at different levels.

Donors and other funding organisations need to see themselves as 'in the picture' at the country level

A number of interviewees from a range of agencies and programmes noted that theory of change thinking immediately highlights how different actors' strategies interact, often unintentionally.

For example, in the DFID DRC example, the team identified that the effectiveness of their programme was dependent on the effectiveness of other initiatives in the country and region. Their programme was 'nested' within the UN stabilisation strategy, and effectively nested within the DFID DRC country strategy. The implication was that elaborating the higher-level theory of change and the choices of impact pathways that underlay the country strategy would help programmes to focus on working through the pathways at their level in their sector.

The usefulness of developing a theory of change perspective at a key aggregation point, such as country strategy level, national sector level or geographical region, was also identified by other donors and foundations (e.g. SIDA, Irish Aid, AusAid, Rockefeller, Hivos), international NGOs with country programmes (e.g. Christian Aid, Amnesty, WWF) and grant-making programmes working at the sub-national level (e.g. SAVI, AcT, Water and Food CF and STAR).

While recognising the political, protocol and resource constraints of making a country-level theory of change more explicit, interviewees made the link that it was important to encourage a sense that donors and funders too are highly influential actors in country contexts. They are very much 'in the picture' and their actions are informed by their particular theories of change. Making the strategic thinking and decision-making rationales at the country programme level more accessible was felt by some to have the potential to improve focus but also to open up new opportunities and capacities for collaboration.

Integrating theory of change thinking in 'light-touch' ways

All agencies and organisations are very conscious of the human resource constraints and burdens of process and management administration that are being faced by their staff and partners, especially the smallest organisations. Time and space to step out of project boxes and do more in-depth analysis was highlighted across the board as the critical factor to getting the benefits of theory of change thinking.

Given the realities, people are working hard to find 'light-touch' ways that of embedding theory of change thinking and learning, working around key strategic or critical reflection points in the project cycle when it is possible to make changes. Some examples include:

- **Design and commissioning stage:** Identifying where existing processes can be tweaked to encourage theory of change thinking:
    - for example, some DFID staff who were interviewed approached the DFID Business Case process right from the start as a theory of change process, using the first stage to scope the context, actors and stakeholders, and to make a situational analysis, followed by an analysis of the impact pathways; then, at the second stage looking at the strategic options and an elaboration of the hierarchy and logical links of the intervention itself, feeding this analysis through to give the rationale to the subsequent financial, managerial and risk appraisals.
    - Integrating a conflict analysis or context sensitivity study into the situational analysis stage of theory of change thinking (e.g. DANIDA)

- Review and reporting points:
    - Introducing more evaluative key questions for project annual reviews (e.g. IDRC):

      'What is being learned about this project and its context? What does the data say? What is new in the context, are there new actors, new windows of opportunity? What new factors need to be considered for this programme? How should the theory of change and strategy be adjusted?'

    - When annual reviews identify challenges and changes in the sector, feed these through to the next period's project plan (WWF)
    - Annual, quarterly or monthly self-evaluation and reflection with programme participants to analyse M&E data (AWARD; many others working with outcome mapping and similar stakeholder-based approaches)

- Organisational, thematic or programme policy:
    - Sharing theory of change analysis at monthly office meetings and asking for discussion and critical thinking from colleagues and management (DFID country office).
    - Bringing different functional departments together to discuss a shared thematic theory of change perspective, using key questions (Amnesty)
    - Providing support to 'early-adopters' and teams starting on a design stage on a case-by-case basis to 'seed' practice and enthusiasm for the approach in the organisation (Hivos; Amnesty; Rockefeller)

- Cross-country and project thematic peer learning:
    - Creating peer-to-peer support across projects and countries on theory of change thinking and M&E through site visits and staff exchanges to share challenges and broaden perspectives in peace-building initiatives(CARE International UK)

- Smaller organisations and initiatives
    - Sharing stories and examples of change at meetings and check-ins and guide discussions through key questions:
    - 'What happened? What has changed for whom? How significant is it for them? What might the programme have contributed? What are the implications?'
    - When planning an activity, ask key questions: 'What would it look like to the people we want to participate? Why would it be important to them? How might it help their lives/work? What do we hope they would be able to think/do differently afterwards in their settings? What else might be needed to support them in the changes they want to see? What does this mean for how we plan the activity?'

Staffing and resourcing for impact planning and learning

Other organisations and programmes have opted for appointing an embedded evaluator or unit to sustain impact and learning, and to develop monitoring, evaluation and learning systems.

The CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF) has worked with theory of change thinking across its projects for over six years. Since 2009 theory of change thinking has been central to its program planning, implementation, communications and M&E. The CPWF implements agricultural research-for-development programmes to tackle development challenges in six river basins.

One of the key lessons they have learned over time is that working with theory of change is all about the timing. Proposal development workshops, in which individual project teams constructed and shared their theories of change, were a success. However, when the same theories of change were turned into logic models to fill contractual requirements, projects started to see the logic models as committing them to outcomes that were overly ambitious. Their nervousness was reinforced when they were asked to develop outcome targets based on the logic models. Also the logic models became over complicated and near useless for subsequent team reflection.

In response to this 'push-back', the CPWF central team realized that the initial project theories of change were rather speculative and imprecise. Projects needed time to get started and revise their theories of change in light of what started to emerge, before asking them to do much more with them. The CPWF relaxed the requirement to produce outcome targets within six months of project start-up. The central team worked with project leaders to strip their logic models back to show the core of what their projects were trying to do. This 'stripping' proved a good reflective exercise, coming as it did a year or so into project implementation. Project teams found that agreeing outcome targets and indicators, once they were clear on their core theory of change, was very helpful in clarifying assumptions.

Based on this experience the CPWF has produced a Gantt chart to show the ideal sequencing of M&E activities. The sequencing corresponds to Patton's (2011) different strategic and implementation responses. Project start-up is the time in which intended strategy is refined and cut back to leave the 'deliberate strategy'. Hence this Gantt is likely to apply to any project facing a complex problem.

Monitoring and evaluation during the Project Life-Cycle
(monitoring.cpwf.info)

	Year 0		Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Year 4		Year 5	Year 6
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2-4		
Generic phases in project life cycle	Proposal development		Inception		Implementation										Closure			
Processes																		
Stakeholder meetings and workshops to develop and refine ToC	PDW			Incept. WS		Reflect. WS				Reflect. WS				Final WS				
Identify and refine milestones		Identify		Refine		Refine				Refine								
Monitor progress progress against milestones																		
Establish and refine outcome targets				Identify		Refine				Refine								
Identify and monitor against outcome indicators				Identify	Monitor													
Benchmark starting conditions																		
Collect and analyze Significant Change stories																		
Progress reporting																		
Evaluation and feedback on progress report																		
Document processes	Agree protocol																	
Impact evaluation					Ex ante													*Ex post*

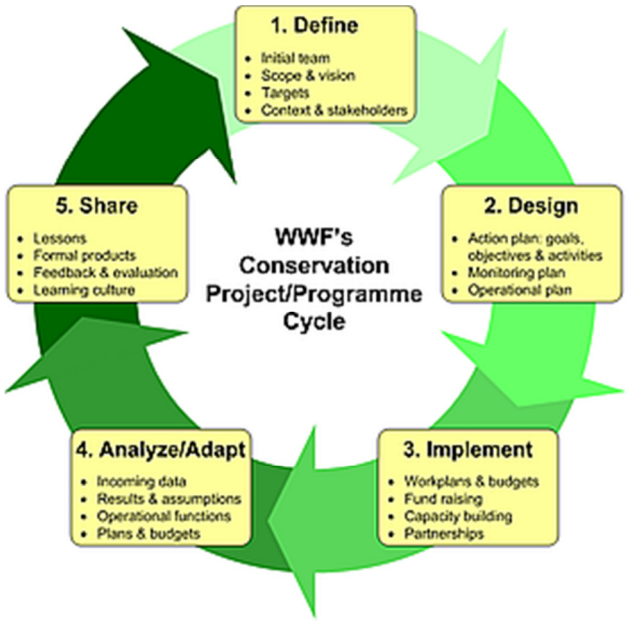
Key and notes:
a) PDW = proposal development workshop; Incept. WS = inception workshop; Reflect. WS = reflection workshop
b) Assumes six-monthly reporting, but reporting period can be changed
c) Gap analysis, stakeholder consultation, needs assessment and ex-ante impact assessment may all happen before proposal development

Structured programme cycle standards and support

Some organisations have integrated theory of change thinking into a well-defined programme cycle. For example, the World Wildlife Fund has been working with a set of theory of change-based standards since 2005. The standards are agreed across WWF International and increasingly used by other members in the federation.

The programme standards are supported by many different thinking tools that encourage the development of a contextual situational analysis, a stakeholder analysis and a 'conceptual model' of impact, including the barriers and pathway, from the initial 'Define phase'. Guidance on developing intervention logic models from this analysis is also provided. [17]

Although few organisations are in a position to be able to consider a standards approach, the WWF programme standards and supporting tools are open source and are available for use. Tailored to a conservation audience, there is still sufficient overlap with development issues to make them very useful tools for those working with theory of change thinking.



Developed through a consultative partnership, The Conservation Measures Forum, the standards are supported by open-source online software, Miradi[18]. This uses an interview and key question approach to help programme planners define their concepts of impact, develop impact maps and identify indicators to track through M&E. Other similar online software is detailed in the 'Guides and Tools' section of this report.

How has having a common standard helped?

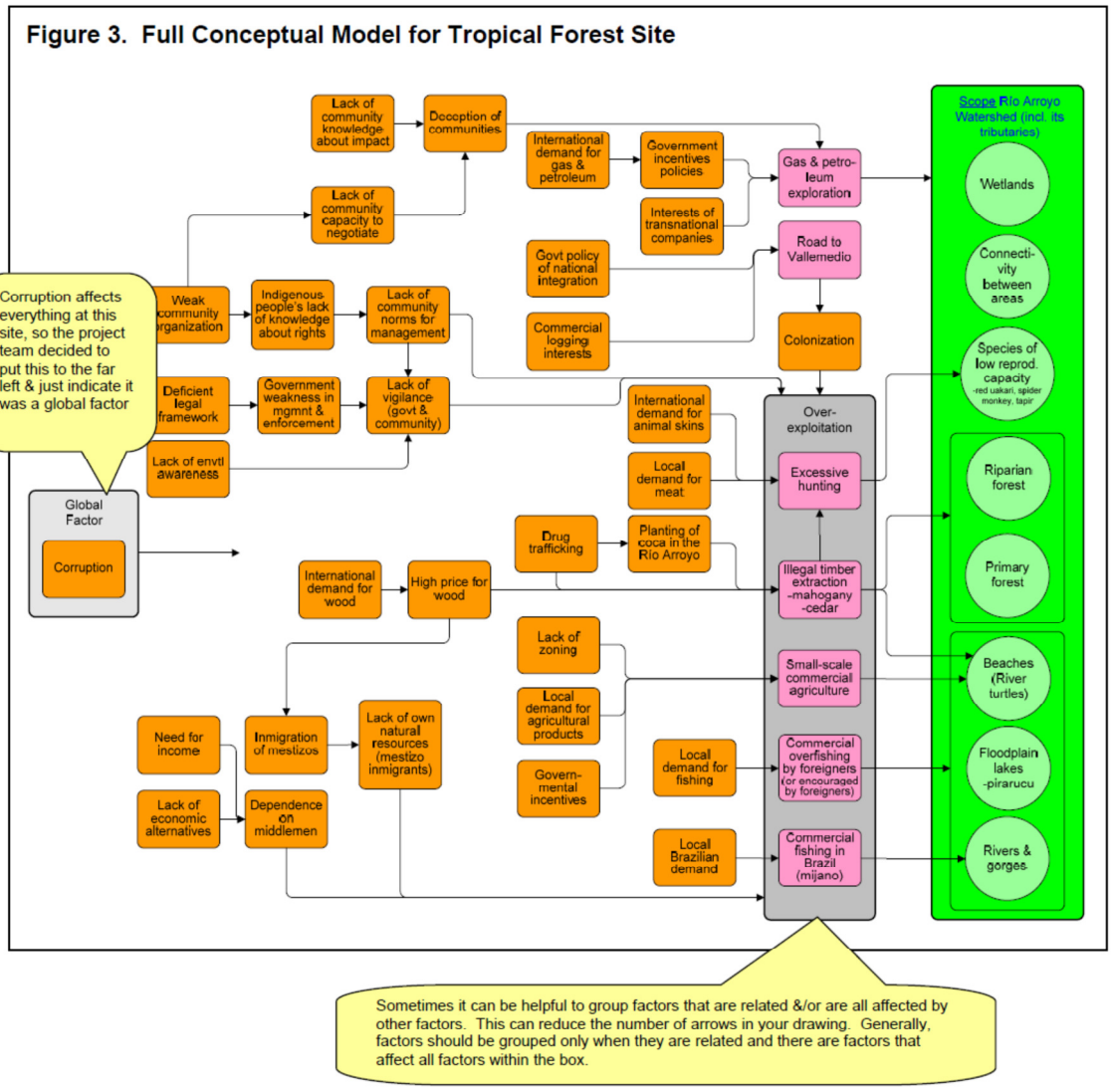
- It gives a common language and visual tools so that donor offices and teams on the ground in different countries can have productive dialogue about issues and strategic choices
- Adaptive management is built-in to the ways of working and systems of WWF
- Theory of change thinking is built-in, although making space for reflection is always challenging given time pressures.

Some health warnings that were also raised were the risks of a 'compliance' mentality arising once common standards are embedded and the importance of maintaining the institutional space to acknowledge uncertainties and unknowns. Even where a common approach has been institutionalised, all the process principles that support a good theory of change process still apply – the importance of dialogue with stakeholders, acknowledging multiple viewpoints and recognition of power relations, political, social and environmental realities.

[17] WWF Programme Standards and Supporting Tools and Templates http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/how_we_work/programme_standards/
[18] MIRADI Software: https://miradi.org/

As an illustration of the thought process, an example of a WWF conceptual map is given below. The next step is to identify the project's pathway through the map, the factors and barriers that it can influence in that context. Following the analysis of the pathway, success factors, assumptions and strategies are then expressed as a results-oriented logic model.

A WWF Conceptual map of impact



Source: http://www.panda.org/standards/1_4_conceptual_models

11. Conclusions

As the findings of this review suggest, theory of change is not new. Nor is it a magic bullet. It can be applied as poorly or as well as any other approach. However, given that international development has so many existing tools, as well as formal standards, performance management and results-based frameworks, the people who contributed to this review felt strongly that there was no need to create another prescriptive and restrictive management tool based on theory of change.

The main message that people gave was the theory of change, if handled lightly as a flexible way to think through fundamental questions about their programmes, could create better informed hypotheses of change, inspire innovations and improvements in programme strategies, and strengthen the potential of programmes to support the development outcomes they seek.

A greater understanding is emerging about how to enable theory of change thinking in programmes. Appendix 1 presents links to resources and guides to support this thinking. Extracts from DFID's own draft internal guidance is shared in Appendix 1 as a practical example.

Appendix 3 presents examples of a range of theories of change developed for different purposes. The resources highlighted in the appendices illustrate different ways of tackling the same challenge – how to develop practical resources that support people to find their own version of theory of change thinking, help them gain confidence in the approach and see real improvements in their programmes, but without stifling the inspiring reflection that so many people appreciate about working with theory of change.

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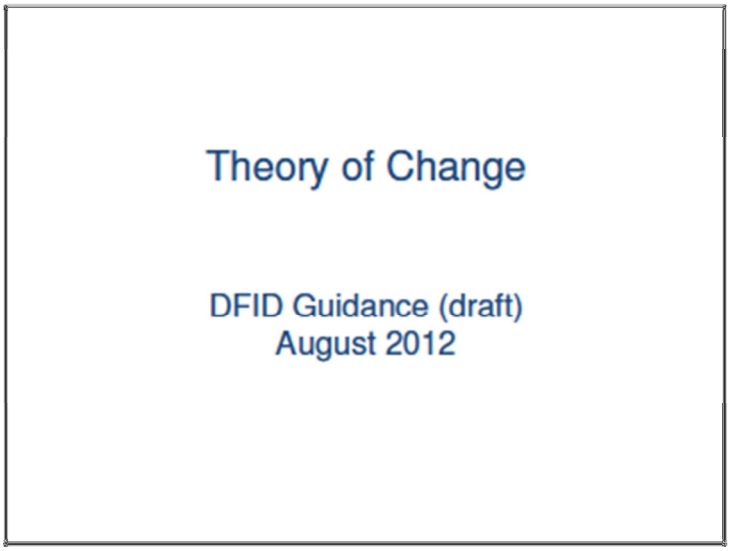
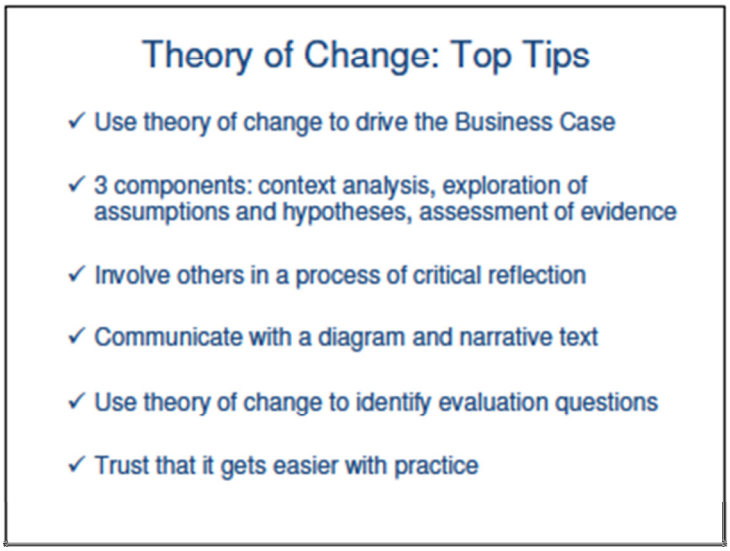
Appendix 1: Guidelines and manuals

1. Draft DFID Guidance on theory of change





The heart of theory of change

"Every programme is packed with beliefs, assumptions and hypotheses about how change happens – about the way humans work, or organisations, or political systems, or eco-systems.

Theory of change is about articulating these many underlying assumptions about how change will happen in a programme."

Patricia Rogers

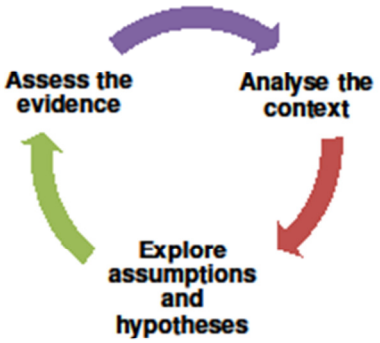
What is theory of change?

At its heart are hypotheses about how change will happen
- Explicit detail is needed about all intermediate steps
- A diagram is usually helpful to map these
- And text is essential to explore hypotheses and evidence

It's a process not just a product
- Reflecting with others about how change will happen
- Using theory of change to generate ideas and drive development of the Business Case

2

The three components of Theory of Change in DFID



Stage 1
Analyse the context

- What is the problem you want to address?
- What are the key factors that influence this issue?
- What and who needs to change?
- And how might that be supported?

This is the starting point for generating ideas and options, mapping possible causal pathways for an intervention

3

Stage 2
Explore assumptions and hypotheses

1) Map the anticipated change process
- Show relationships between all the steps from inputs to impacts
- Don't lump things together leaving the causality unclear
- And be specific about your intervention in its particular context

2) Explore assumptions
- *'The things taken for granted, accepted as true or as certain to happen'*
- Make the assumptions explicit, and think 'what if they don't hold true?'

3) Identify hypotheses
- What are the key hypotheses that you want to test?

Explore three types of assumptions

1. Assumptions about CAUSALITY – ie about what leads to what to bring about change
   - eg. peer counselling will reduce risky sexual behaviour
2. Assumptions about PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION
   - eg. outreach workers will go to the most remote villages
3. Assumptions about EXTERNAL FACTORS that influence the programme
   - eg. security conditions in programme areas will be stable

Assumptions are masters of disguise!
Involve colleagues as a range of perspectives will help uncover them

4

Articulate key hypotheses

Definition: A hypothesis is a supposition or proposed explanation made on the basis of limited evidence as a starting point for further investigation (Oxford Dictionary)

Decide which assumptions need to be developed as hypotheses to be tested

What do you want to test - about causality, implementation or context?

Prioritise the key hypotheses to focus on:
- ones that are crucial for the programme's success
- ones with a weak evidence base

Stage 3
Assess the Evidence

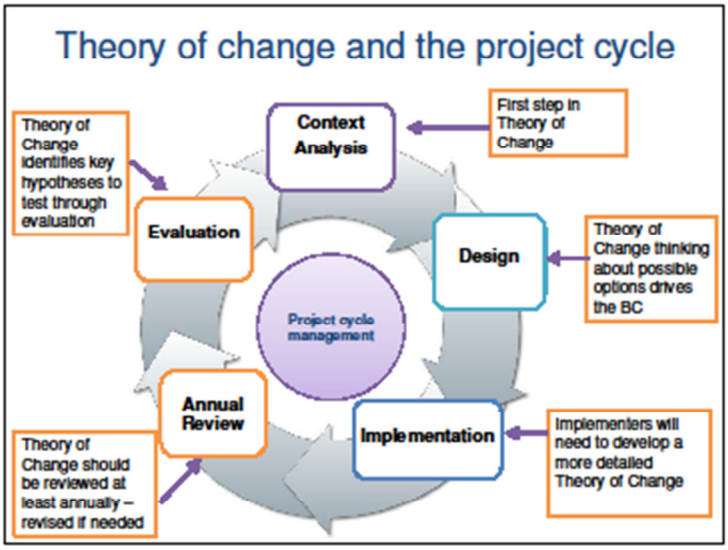
- Evidence relating to the key assumptions & hypotheses in your intervention
  - evidence about the effectiveness of your specific intervention, not just generic evidence that 'this sector/issue matters'
- Indicate the strength of the evidence
  - weak, medium or strong
  - in your context; in other contexts
  - how it varies for different parts of the theory of change
- Be explicit when there is no or limited evidence
  - the intervention may still be credible and worth trying
  - a plausible causal link with a limited evidence base is an obvious focus for an evaluation question

5

Checklist for assessing a Theory of Change

1. Analysis of Context
Does the theory of change make sense as a response to analysis of the context?
2. Exploration of Assumptions and Hypotheses about Change
Are causal pathways well mapped in a diagram?
Are assumptions made explicit (in the diagram and narrative)?
Does the narrative identify the key hypotheses?
3. Assessment of the Evidence
Is there an assessment of the evidence for each key assumption and hypothesis?
4. Other
Are the theory of change and logframe consistent? Do evaluation questions reflect assumptions & hypotheses with weak evidence?

Theory of change and the project cycle



Factors that support a theory of change process

- Interaction with others – a range of perspectives
- Open mind - willingness to be challenged and change
- Safe context to be open
- Time to think creatively
- Self-awareness - of your own views and preferences
- Someone playing a facilitation role (eg a colleague from another team)

Questions that can help draw out your theory of change

- Can you give an example of where this programme is working really well? What is making it work well?
- What are the long-term changes that need to happen in the target group's lives?
- What are the barriers to those changes? Who and what (groups, structures, systems, relationships, processes) needs to change?
- How does the programme try to influence these things?
- How will we know if we have brought about change?

For more detail see Funnell & Rogers (2011) and Comic Relief ToC guidance

7

Theory of change and Evaluation

Theory of Change helps identify evaluation questions
- Key hypotheses to test: Does X lead to Y?
- Did key assumptions hold?

Theory of Change supports deeper understanding
- If the programme works ToC helps us understand why
- If it fails ToC helps us know if it failed because of a poor theory or poor implementation

Theory of Change supports impact claims
- We can track many variables to confirm the presence of key steps along the causal pathway and so credibly link outcomes to the programme's activities

Logframes and Theory of Change

In some ways ToC is inherently distinct from logframes
- ToC does not have a standardised format
- ToC has no limit on the number of steps in a change process
- ToC cites evidence (or lack of it) relating to causal links
- ToC more useful for evaluation, logframes for monitoring

In some ways ToC just differs from logframes if they're done badly. Both have the potential to:
- Present the causality underlying the programme
- Promote exploration of assumptions
- Prompt critical reflection and re-thinking if appropriate

They need to be coherent with each other – it's the same intervention!

8

A few other practical points

- The level of detail will vary depending on:
  - complexity and scale of the intervention
  - whether you are at initial design stage (more simple) or at implementation stage (more complex)
- DFID has developed some generic models, or maps of possible causal pathways for specific policy areas
  - draw on these to help develop your ToC
  - don't just cut and paste them into a BC!
- Drawing is now much easier in powerpoint and excel

Recap: the benefits of theory of change

- Stronger programme designs
  - critical **reflection** about how changes can be supported
  - exploration of new intervention **options**
  - informed by **evidence** about similar hypotheses
- Communication
  - about how we think an intervention will work
- Theory based evaluation
  - testing hypotheses identified
  - exploring why an intervention worked (or didn't)
  - adding to the global evidence base

9

Theory of Change: Top Tips

- ✓ Use theory of change to drive the Business Case
- ✓ 3 components: context analysis, exploration of assumptions and hypotheses, assessment of evidence
- ✓ Involve others in a process of critical reflection
- ✓ Communicate with a diagram and narrative text
- ✓ Use theory of change to identify evaluation questions
- ✓ Trust that it gets easier with practice

2. Original 'Theory of Change' guidelines for facilitators:

The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of Change: A Practical Guide to Theory Development, by Andrea A. Anderson. Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, 2005

http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/rcc/rcccommbuildersapproach.pdf

All available for use online or download.

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3. ActKnowledge and related community site Theory of Change Online:

http://www.actknowledge.org/

Theory of Change Online Community: http://www.theoryofchange.org/

Theory of Change online software tool: http://www.theoryofchange.org/toco-software/

All available for use online or download.

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4. Better Evaluation website

An international collaboration to improve evaluation. BetterEvaluation is designed to support practitioners to share their knowledge and experience in choosing and using evaluation methods.

This section discusses theory of change and logic models:

http://betterevaluation.org/evaluation-components/define

All available for use online or download.

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5. CARE International's theory of change guidance and resources

Conceptual and practical information and guidance about how to approach theory of change.

http://p-shift.care2share.wikispaces.net/Theory+of+Change+Guidance#Resources

All available for use online or download.

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6. Cheyanne Church and Mark M. Rogers: Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict Transformation Programs (2006), Search for Common Ground

This is a comprehensive manual on monitoring and evaluation of conflict transformation programmes. It is based on a 'theory of change' approach, with monitoring and evaluation embedded in the project cycle - and therefore includes a substantial component on wider programme design. The manual is geared towards measuring objectives and outcomes, rather than the higher level goals and impact.

Read Full Text Here: http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilr/ilt_manualpage.html

Also on http://www.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/stabilisation-and-conflict-resources/thematic/doc_details/111-designing-for-results-integrating-monitoring-and-evaluation-in-conflict-transformation-programmes.html

All available for use online or download.

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7. Donor Committee on Enterprise Development Standard

The DCED Standard provides a practical framework, whereby programmes can monitor their progress towards their objectives, according to good practice. This enables programmes to better manage their interventions. The Standard builds on the results chain, or logic, of the individual programme.

http://www.enterprise-development.org/page/measuring-and-reporting-results

All available for use online or download.

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8. Paul Duignan, Outcomes Planning and Dooview Software

Website of Outcomes Central which has free practical guidance and trial copies of the Doo-View software to support theory of change and outcomes pathways development.

http://www.outcomescentral.org/

DooView software:

http://www.doview.com/

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9. Sue Funnell and Patricia Rogers' comprehensive source book on working with programme theory

Thorough overview of conceptual, methodological and practical issues, including quality and rigour, and archetypal theories of change:

Funnell, S. and Rogers, P. (2011)*Purposeful Programme Theory. Effective use of theories of change and logic models*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

(Available to buy through major online book retailers.)

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10. HIVOS Resource Portal on Theory of Change

The aim of the Resource Portal on Theory of Change is to make resources available to Hivos staff and other actors interested. On the portal, there is information on the background, objectives, principles and methodology of this ToC initiative. The Resources part consists of different type of resources on a selected number of topics, framed as Questions. E-dialogues include discussion papers and the results of e-discussions to share views and experiences on topics and questions around ToC and its application in

practice.

http://www.hivos.net/Hivos-Knowledge-Programme/Themes/Theory-of-Change/Background-initiative/About-the-Theory-of-Change-resource-portal

All available for use online or download.

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11. HIVOS/UNDP: Method and Facilitation Guide: "Theory of Change. A thinking-action approach to navigate in the complexity of social change processes, Iñigo Retolaza, 2011

This guide is jointly published by Hivos and UNDP, and is aimed at actors linked to processes of social development and change: bilateral donors, community leaders, political and social leaders, NGO's representatives, community-base organizations, social movements, public decision makers, and other actors related to social change processes.

The first part of the Guide describes some theoretical elements to consider when designing a Theory of Change applied to social change processes. The second part describes the basic methodological steps to develop in every design of a Theory of Change. For reinforcing this practical part, a workshop route is included, illustrating the dynamics in a workshop of this kind.

http://www.democraticdialoguenetwork.org/documents/view.pl?s=13;ss=;t=;f_id=1811

Available for use online or download.

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12. Logic model guidance from Kellog Foundation

Kellog Foundation http://www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2006/02/WK-Kellogg-Foundation-Logic-Model-Development-Guide.aspx

All available for use online or download.

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13. Systemic theory of change guidance from Keystone Foundation, as part of Keystone's Impact, Planning and Learning approach

http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/resources/guides

All available for use online or download.

14. Magenta Book: UK Treasury Department

The Magenta Book is HM Treasury guidance on evaluation for Central Government, but will also be useful for all policy makers, including in local government, charities and the voluntary sectors. It sets out the key issues to consider when designing and managing evaluations, including developing a logic model with clear cause-effect links and evaluation questions.

It describes why thinking about evaluation before and during the policy design phase can help to improve the quality of evaluation results without needing to hinder the policy process.

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/data_magentabook_index.htm

Available for use online or download.

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15. MANDE News: Theories of Change resources

Modular Theories of change: Covers some ideas about nesting theories of change

http://mandenews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/modular-theories-of-change-means-of.html

Criteria for assessing the evaluability of a theory of change:

http://mandenews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/criteria-for-assessing-evaluablity-of.html

All available for use online or download.

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16. Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis (PIPA) Wiki!

Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis (PIPA) is a project planning and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approach. The approach that draws from program theory evaluation, social network analysis and research to understand and foster innovation.

It contains practical guidance and tools on running theory of change workshops for research-based projects and developing M&E frameworks from the outputs.

All available for use online or download.

http://boru.pbworks.com/w/page/13774903/FrontPage

The PIPA Wiki is a resource of the Water and Food Challenge Fund, CGIAR, which also has resources on developing a theory of change-based M&E system:

http://monitoring.cpwf.info/background/theory-of-change

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17. Research to Action: Resources on Theory of Change for Research Programmes

Offers a list of guidance and resources for those researchers and organisations looking to develop a 'theory of change' for their work.

All available for use online or download.

http://www.researchtoaction.org/theory-of-change-useful-resources/

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18. University of Wisconsin, Evaluation Extension Service

Comprehensive set of evaluation resources, including an online course on developing context-based logic models and M&E systems, all freely available online or to download.

http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html

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19. World Wildlife Fund, Programme Standards and Tools

Comprehensive overview of theory of change-based programme design, evaluation and learning. Scroll down the page for specific tools and approaches, including developing a conceptual model of impact, results chains, stakeholder analysis, context analysis, and much more. Also, the online tool MIRADI is accessible from here.

All available for use online or download.

http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/how_we_work/programme_standards/

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20. Care International UK: Guidance for designing, monitoring and evaluating peacebuilding projects: using theories of change

To advance the use of theory-based inquiry within the field of peacebuilding, CARE International and International Alert undertook a two and a half year research project to develop light touch methods to monitor and evaluate peacebuilding projects, and pilot these in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nepal and Uganda. This document, Guidance for designing, monitoring and evaluating peacebuilding project: using theories of change emerges from the efforts of peacebuilders who field tested the processes to define and assess the changes to which they hoped to contribute.

http://www.careinternational.org.uk/research-centre/conflict-and-peacebuilding/227-guidance-for-designing-monitoring-and-evaluating-peacebuilding-projects-using-theories-of-change

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Appendix 3: Examples of theories of change

Please see the separate PDF file for further annotated examples.

Examples of theory-based evaluations and causal maps.

1. DAC General Budget Support evaluation: Note on Approach and methods, 2007

http://www.oecd.org/secure/pdfDocument/0,2834,en_21571361_34047972_38339123_1_1_1_1,00.pdf

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2. Paris Declaration Evaluation and Country Studies

http://www.oecd.org/document/60/0,3746,en_21571361_34047972_38242748_1_1_1_1,00.html

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3. LIRNEASIA Evaluation of an ICT Research Network

Report available on IDRC website

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4. White, H. and Carvalho, S (2004), "Theory-based Evaluation, The Case of Social Funds"**,** *American Journal of Evaluation* June 2004 vol. 25 no. 2 141-160

http://aje.sagepub.com/content/25/2/141.abstract
