
THEORY OF CHANGE

How to Guide

Compiled

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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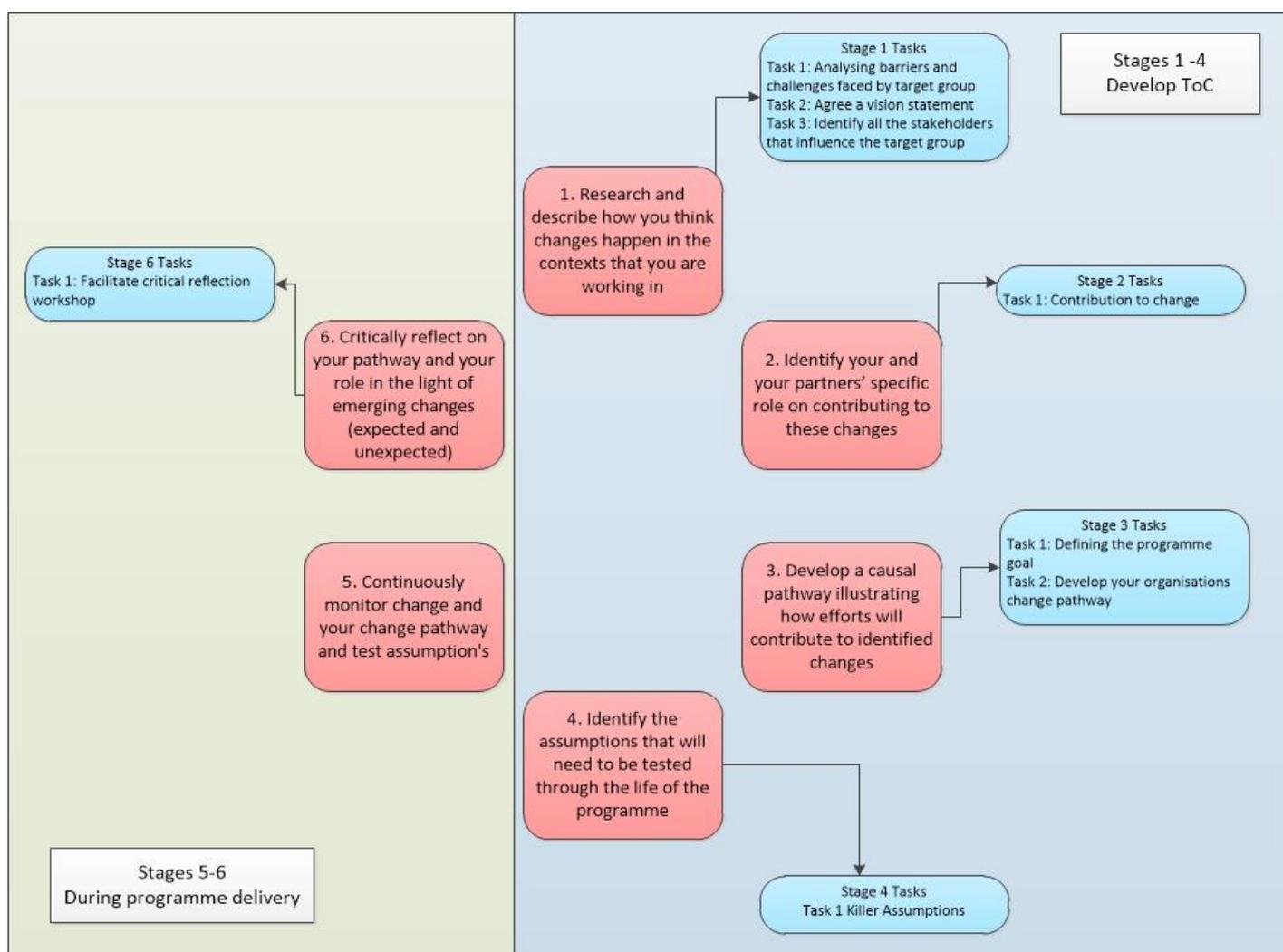
Rough guide to theory of change for planning and impact assessment

Theory of Change is:

A process that should come before you start planning, and which brings together key stakeholders so that they can:

- Agree how **change will really happen** for final target groups in the current context
- Identify their **most effective roles** in contributing to changes
- Develop a **model of change**(not a plan)that they think will contribute to desired changes
- **Test and adapt the model** when context changes or they learn more about the successes and failures of their efforts

Six stage theory of change process



A summary of what needs to be addressed in developing a Theory of Change

1. Analysis of problems and underlying causes you seek to address
2. How you believe change happens (drivers and barriers to change)
3. Your vision of success and what needs to be in place if it is to become a reality
4. Analysis of your own role and potential contributions to this change process
5. Your planned pathway which illustrates how your efforts will lead to your programme goal and long term changes (diagram)
6. Learning questions and/or assumptions you will need to test through the life time of the programme
7. Why you think this package is your best offer
8. How you will reflect on your Theory of Change (test your assumptions and adapt to changing contexts and your own learning)

Note: In a scenario with limited time, stakeholders should be consulted on these eight points.

Stage 1: Articulating how we think change happens: At whatever level we are working, we need to have a vision of the change(s) we want to see in a particular area/context. Every context has its own political, social, economic, cultural identity so, in order to understand how could change happen in these contexts we need to analyse the pre-conditions for its success. We need to understand social, political, technological and cultural contexts; and to be clear about who/what could drive change forward; or prevent it from happening. Solid analysis of this “big picture thinking” will inform the next three steps of the ToC process.

Thinking about how change could happen in relation to a particular issue

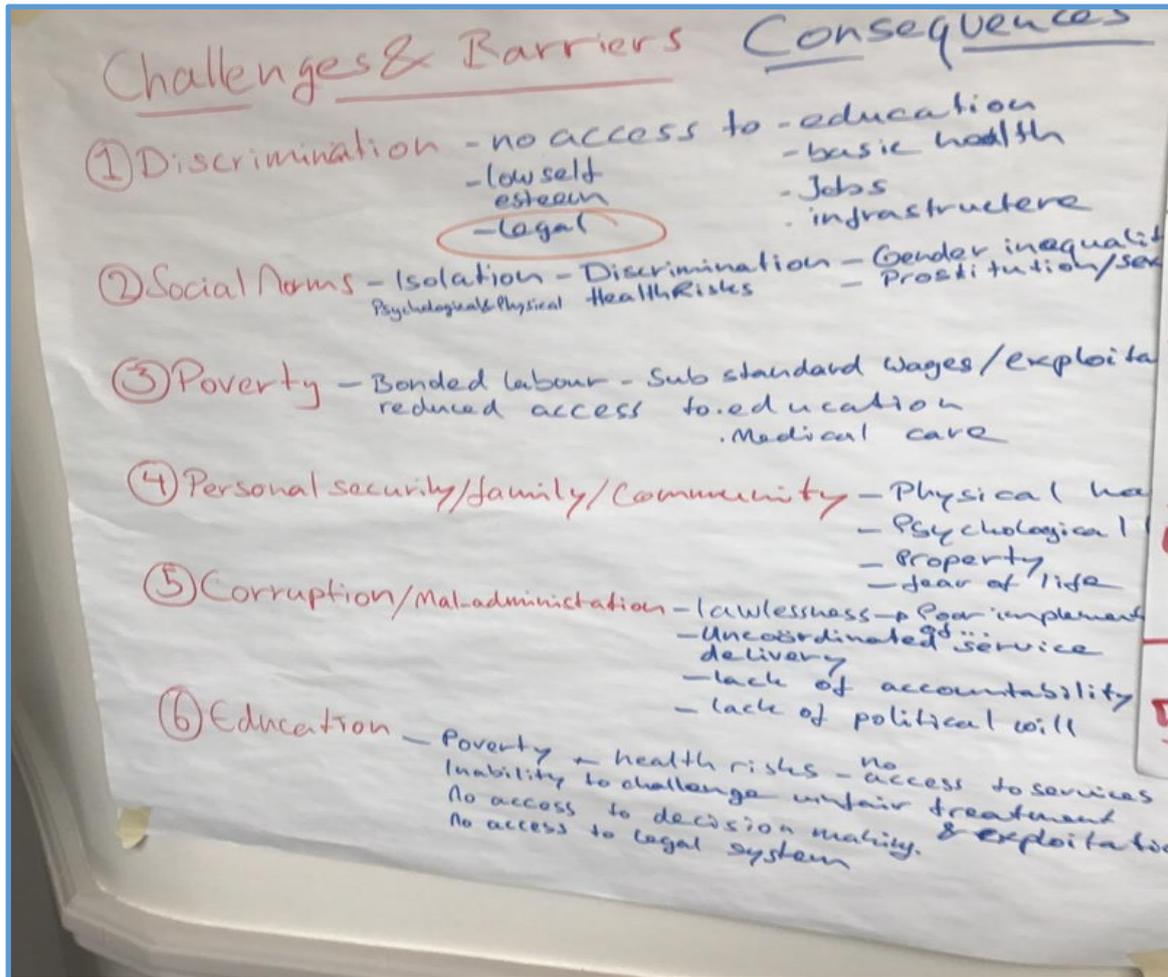
- What factors in the external context help or hinder change?
- Who has the power to influence change either positively or negatively
- What/who needs to change? At what level

Task 1: Analysing barriers and challenges faced by target group

As a group list the barriers, challenges and potential consequences of the barriers and challenges faced by the target group.

Barriers and challenges	Consequences

Example Task 1 (Empowerment of Dalit girls in India)



Task 2: Agree a vision statement

- If all issues and problems and their underlying causes were successfully addressed in relation to the barriers and challenges, what would this look like?
- Be quite specific –write a sentence of no more than 25 words which outlines what changes you expect to see for whom

Example of vision statement:

All Dalit girls have equal access to and benefit from quality educational provision and are able to make positive choices in their lives as a result.

- Referring to the vision, the barriers and challenges and consequences, who/ what could be the main drivers for change?

Task 3: Identify all the stakeholders that influence the target group

Identify all the stakeholders that influence the target group

What would the stakeholders be doing differently in order to achieve the vision of success?

What would need to be put in place?

Develop a short statement (no more than 25 words) for each stakeholder that includes all of the elements identified.

Community	Government	<p>Example: Teachers are well trained, motivated and have the educational resources they need. They are respected role models in their communities They actively promote equality and inclusion in what they teach and how they behave.</p>
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Stage 2: Defining our role in contributing to change in our context: Informed by analysis of the context, we can begin to think about how and where we can most usefully contribute to desired changes. In this step, we analyse our strengths, capacity, resources and ability to influence or achieve change, so that we can identify our most effective roles in the desired change process. We need clarity about where we (and our partners) can make **direct** contributions to changes; where we can support changes **indirectly** through working with/alongside others, networking, advocacy etc.); and **where we have no influence in the change process**. This last point is very important: we need to recognize that, some changes need to happen even if we can't do anything about them. **If they don't happen, we need to be aware of how they may affect our own efforts.**

Task 1: Contribution to change

- Study the vision of change that we have created and read through each of the statements about the ways in which each stakeholder group would be behaving if the vision was to be realised
- Think about your role, your size, capacity, resources, who you work with and how
- Discuss how and where your organisation could actually make useful contributions to this big picture of change: as a result of your work, **who could be doing what differently**

Contribution to change		
Stakeholder group	Changes	Direct(changes you would expect to see as a direct result of your efforts)/indirect (changes you would expect to see in this group as a result of your efforts)
Parents	They would be more aware of the importance of educating girls	Direct
National government	Respond to pressure to improve legislation	Indirect

Example Task 1: Contribution to change

Community Based Organisation: Changes we can influence :-

Stakeholder Group	Changes we hope to influence	⑤ or ⑥
Community	- Advocate for the acceptance of Dalit girls as equal + treat them with mutual respect. - Providing a safe environment for Dalit girls - Including Dalit girls in festivals + social functions - Influence the community to accept inter-caste marriage - Building awareness campaigns about SRHR - Raising awareness about Dalit girls rights and claiming + practicing their rights.	D H H H D D
Community leaders.	- Empowering Dalit girls to claim their rights to access education. - Identifying + encouraging role models + their success stories.	D D
Local Government.	- Passing by-laws to criminalize discrimination - Making the environment safe for Dalit girls + standing for their rights.	H D
National leaders.	- Have representation from Dalit people as community leaders. - Create influential senior level champions to represent + advocate for the rights of Dalit girls.	D D
Civil Society Organisation	- See Post it also join forces with specific groups focusing on certain issues.	D
UN Agencies.	- Seek funding + project implementation of developmental projects supporting Dalit girls.	D
Schools	- Providing Dalit girls with good educational programs. - Advocate for the benefits of education.	D D
Law Enforcement	- Law enforcement have good relationship with community - Law enforcement have capacity to respond to discrimination, gender inequality + abuse. - Easy access to police.	D D D

Stage 3: Develop a causal pathway illustrating how your efforts will contribute to identified changes:

With clarity about the “Big Picture” and the roles we can most effectively play in the process, we can then develop a diagram and an accompanying narrative which illustrates sequences of change and causal links that we believe will result in the achievement of our agreed goals.

This relates directly to your understanding of how change happens (first component).

It describes in detail your unique ways of understanding and addressing these issues, including:

- Who you work with
- How you work with them to achieve or influence what changes
- The assumptions that you have made in designing the pathway

Task 1: Defining the programme goal

- Imagine a closing down party for this programme in 4years’ time because of what your organisation has been able to achieve
- In groups, write a statement on large post its. Use no more than 20 words. Start the statement with: “Because of our work...”
- Make sure you describe what changes you would expect to see for whom

Example goal statement

By 2020, 60% of Dalit girls in 5 communities will be attending school on a regular basis, and participating in all educational and social activities with confidence.

Task 2: Develop your organisations change pathway

Work backwards from the goal. Ask your selves:

- How this group of stakeholders should be behaving if the goal was to be achieved?

Write this on post it as a results statement (“Community leaders (CL) act as role models in the community and challenge negative behaviours”)

- **What will it take to enable them to do this (Who needs to be doing what/ or should be place?)**

Write this on a post it as a results statement (“CL adopt more positive attitudes to Dalit issues”)

- **And again: Who needs to be doing what/ or should be in place to make this change happen?**

Write this on a post it as a results statement (“CL understand the consequences of their behaviour”)

- **So what do we need to do with whom?**

Describe what you do with whom (“we raise awareness about Dalit issues with Community Leaders”)

To develop your pathway, its best to work backwards from the goal to identify sequence of changes

Key questions to ask each time: What will it take for this change to really happen (who would have to do what? Or how would they have to behave?)

To read your pathway, you start from the left hand side. It should read like this:

We train Dalit girls on basic human rights, advocacy skills, gender quality and community mobilisation

So that

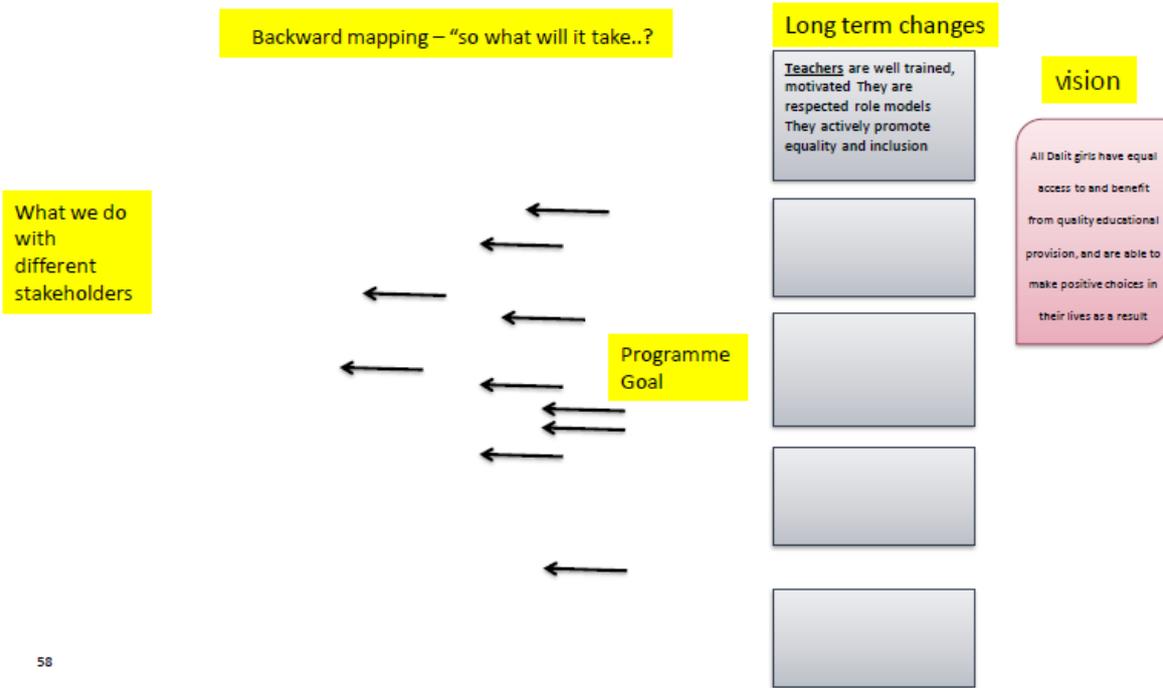
Dalit girls have greater awareness of their rights and can identify when they are being violated

So that

The Dalit girls can use the skills and form the structures/groups needed to claim their rights

etc

First elements of the change pathway



58

Backward mapping – “so what will it take..?”



Step four: Identify assumptions that need to be tested during the life of the program. Assumptions are beliefs about conditions that prevail and which are critical to achieve the goals. Very often they are implicitly built into our plans and thinking. For example, we implicitly think that as a result of training, target groups will have improved knowledge skills and/or attitudes. We all know that this is not necessarily the case. The training may be inappropriate. The wrong people may be there for the wrong reasons. In these cases, the assumption that these key people will have and apply greater knowledge, attitudes and/or skills proves false and compromises the whole plan. Identifying key assumptions on which the success of the plan rests is critical as these can then be used to test the feasibility of our strategy or 'pathways'.

Assumption = something that is accepted as true or likely to happen but there is no proof (yet)

- Assumptions must be made explicit –write as a belief statement
- Be specific
- Link it to specific aspects of the pathway

Task 1 Killer Assumptions

- Identify 3 "killer" assumptions that you would need to test in relation to your planned pathway
- For each of the links that you have made, ask yourselves the following sort of questions:
- Why did you think that xxx would lead to xx? What makes you think that?)
- What might hinder this from happening (e.g. costs, opposing views, lack of trust/capacity/technology, people losing assets...?)
- Are there any missing links?
- Who else might need to be involved?
- Looking at the pathway again, are there better ways of getting to your goal?
- Are there things you are not sure/confident about?

Step five: Continuously monitor change and change pathways, and test assumptions. As stated earlier, we develop our pathways based on our best understanding of how change happens **at one point in time**. But we know that the contexts in which we are working are constantly changing – a key government minister is replaced; there is a local/national election; there is a change of leadership in the partner organisation; drought mitigation takes priority over everything etc. We need ways to reflect on and adapt our "theory of change" in the light of changing circumstances; through understanding how other actors and factors are helping or hindering the progress of our pathway. As stated above, we also need to test our own assumptions to see to what extent they are holding true (and if they are proving false, to think about how to address this).

Step 6: Critically reflect on your pathways and your role in light of what you have learnt. This step provides an essential opportunity to reflect on the following questions: So in the light of the changing context, what we understand about how change happened and what role we played in the process. Are we working with the right people in the right way? To what extent are planned changes actually taking place? Are they making a difference? What exactly did our efforts contribute (could be positive, negative unintended)? So what have we learned and how should we adapt our plans in the light of this?

Task 1: Facilitate critical reflection workshop

To provide an opportunity for staff and partners to think together about the real progress that they are making against planned changes over the last 12 months and adapt change pathways and plans in the light of this:

- agree how key elements of the context have changed; and how these may have affected the programme
- understand and agree what has really changed for the different target groups and what it means for them
- explore how and where the programme has been able to contribute to these identified changes
- test the assumptions that were made at the beginning of the programme
- Consider and agree how they should adapt elements of the programme to ensure that they become more effective in supporting positive changes for their target groups.

DFID's list of questions to assess quality of ToC (2013)

1. Clear analysis of the context and wider change process sought

- Is there a clear 'story' about the actors, factors and stakeholders at play in a specific context and on a specific issue?
- Is it a strategic response to a contextual analysis and assessment of external and internal learning?
- Is there a discussion on how power relations exist and how these might shift for the most vulnerable or excluded groups?
- Is it clear on how systemic changes are expected to emerge as a result of the actions of the intervention and other actors and factors in the system (ToC)?

2. Clearly articulated vision of change and process of change sought

- Is the vision conceptually clear and specific?
- Is the change process conceptually clear, logical but with non-linearity expressed?
- Are the hypothetical causal pathways mapped, with no missing links, specific to the programme in its context, and not a generic response?

3. Assumptions are made explicit, categorised and linked to specific aspects

- Have the assumptions been made explicit, in relation to different aspects of the theory of change:
 - about how change is understood to happen - paradigms and worldviews informing this
 - the enabling and constraining factors –
 - the contextual conditions
 - other actors, stakeholders and beneficiaries
 - strategy and implementation options
- Does the narrative describe key 'pathways' (i.e. the hypothetical sequences of change, sometimes called results or outcomes chains)?
- Does the programme make explicit its 'drivers of change' (i.e. how its interventions interact with the context to influence change)?
- Are the strategic options described in relation to the drivers of change?

4. Assessment of external learning and evidence for key change drivers and cause-effect links

- Is there a narrative assessment of learning / evidence for key assumptions and change pathways? Is the strength of the evidence assessed?
- Are the aspects that are poorly understood flagged?
- Does the assessment make sense given the sources referred to?

5. Documentation, communication and wide ownership

- Is the ToC used regularly in discussion and communication both internally as well as externally?
- Can it be easily summarised verbally by a wide range of stakeholders?
- Is the ToC documentation available, describing different stages of ToC development and use (ToC visual summary, ToC paper, etc.)?
- Are there different products tailored for different stakeholders and uses?
- Are changes in the ToC over time captured and documented?

6. Active use of ToC in planning, M&E and management processes

- Is the ToC explicitly used in strategic planning and in the design and practice of M&E?
- Do monitoring and/or evaluation questions pick up on where cause-effect links are poorly understood?
- Are regular reviews and adaptation of the ToC integrated into management process and reviews planned in, at least once a year?

Impact Assessment

Definition of impact assessment

The systematic analysis of a programme or organisation's contributions to planned changes for target groups and end beneficiaries in its context of operation. The assessment actively seeks to understand and report on unexpected/unintended impacts as well as those that were planned.

Impact Assessment – So What?

Impact assessment is designed to ask (and answer) the "SO WHAT" questions: we have completed our project/programme successfully:

- So what has actually changed?
- For whom?
- How significant have these changes been for different target groups?
- How did these changes come about? What are the factors contributing to them?
- What, if anything, did our programme contribute to these changes?
- So what should we do differently next time?

Purpose:

The overall goal for those of us who work in development should be to improve the quality of life for those men, women, girls and boys in the communities where we work.

- The most important reason therefore, for assessing the impact of our efforts is to learn about what works, what difference are we making and to continually try to improve our effectiveness.
- Additionally, we need to be able to report on impact for our donors (although donors mostly only focus on outcomes or, at best, expected impacts in relation to log frames).
- We are accountable to all of our stakeholders, especially the communities with whom we work; we should be working together with them to identify changes that they want to see in their lives; and to monitor and assess how well our projects and programmes are contributing to these identified changes
- Lastly, but not least, evidence of impact is a very powerful tool for advocacy (for example, evidence of numbers of children whose lives have improved as a result of a change of law or policy); and for inspiration.

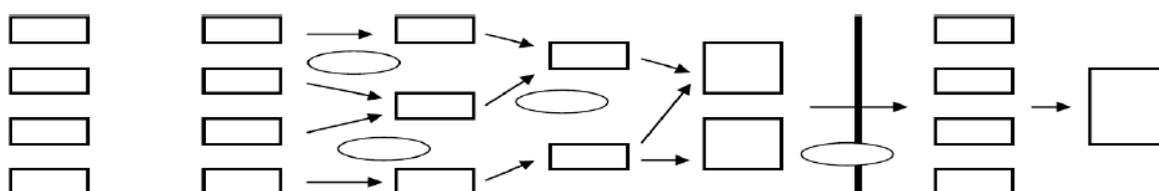
Monitoring	Evaluation	Impact Monitoring and Assessment
Measures on-going activities	Measures performance against objectives	Assesses changes (positive or negative, intended or not) for target group and end beneficiaries
Main work during implementation	Main work in middle or at end of project/programme cycle	Can be included at all stages and/or can be used specifically after the end of programme/project
Focus on interventions	Focus on interventions	Focus target groups and end beneficiaries
Focus on outputs	Focus on outcomes/impact	Focus on impact and change
“What is being done?”	“What has happened? Did we achieve what we set out to achieve?”	What has changed/is changing? For whom? How significant is it for them? What, if anything, did our programme contribute?

Main steps in designing an Impact Assessment

1. Define purpose, approach and scope of the assessment
2. Develop/confirm theory of change and/or dimensions of change
3. Prioritise dimensions of change that you will want to assess
4. Develop areas of enquiry/key questions in order to assess these
5. Select tools and methods for gathering and analysing relevant information
6. Design tools and train evaluators or those gathering information
7. Decide on reporting strategies and prepare
8. Make concrete plans and timelines (who, when, how....)

How to think about impact assessment in relation to TOC and impact pathways: do we measure, assess or illustrate evidence of change?

Impact pathways form a key element of Theories of Change (ToC). An impact pathway normally consists of a set of change statements, linked by arrows to show how change at one level affects change at other levels. Impact pathways should also contain assumptions. In the diagram below, the rectangles represent change statements and the ovals are assumptions.



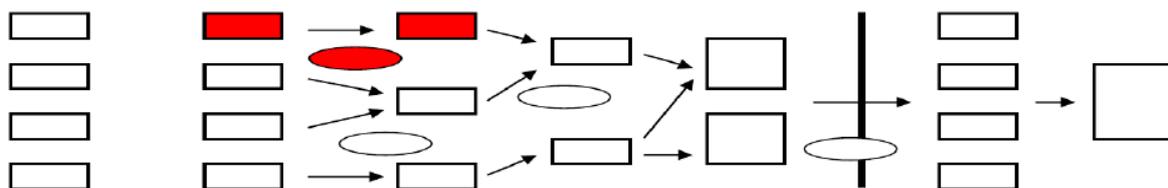
In order to test the Theory of Change it is important to collect and analyse information at different levels. This can be done through a variety of different methods (described elsewhere). But it is first important to distinguish three different levels – measurement, assessment and illustration.

Sometimes it is possible to objectively **measure** change. In this case change can often be established beyond any reasonable doubt. For example, if a box on an impact pathway represents the development of a new network with members from each of the different regions in Tanzania then it should be possible to establish whether this has happened, simply by counting the number of organisations affiliated to the network.

In many cases, especially in the field of governance, it is not possible to accurately measure change, but it may be possible to come to a critical **assessment** of change. This normally means collecting enough evidence to be able to balance the arguments for and against change happening, and draw conclusions about whether, or how far, change has happened.

Sometimes it is only possible to **illustrate** changes, especially when dealing with national level issues. For example, the Foundation might develop a change statement that represents increased local government willingness to engage with communities. But there may be thousands of local government officials and their willingness to engage with communities may take many different forms. It would be hugely expensive to undertake a study to assess overall whether things are changing in Tanzania. Instead, the Foundation might choose to develop a few cases to illustrate the kind of changes that are occurring. Illustration does not attempt to show overall whether the situation is getting better or worse, but only seeks to represent some cases where things are changing, for better or worse.

Once the pathway has been developed, it is important to decide at each step along the pathway what evidence could be generated to measure, assess or illustrate change. Sometimes the evidence will focus on a single box (change or assumption). Sometimes the evidence may take in a group of boxes and assumptions as in the diagram below. Often the evidence needs to look not just at a change or changes, but also the linkages between them.



Decisions on where to focus attention in any one period will be based on:

- a bottom line of the minimum MEL necessary to comply with internal or external accountability;
- an assessment of what will be most useful to guide learning and decision-making; and
- an analysis of the resources required to carry out the MEL work, and how else the money could be spent.

At country programme level, these decisions are often best made on an annual basis, and should be informed by a formal review of the previous year.

Task 1: A theory of change approach to impact assessment

a) Design considerations

- What is the **main purpose** of this impact monitoring/assessment process: Organisational learning? To meet donor demands? Accountability to stakeholders? For advocacy?
- What resources will be (or have been) allocated to this task?
- Who will be primarily responsible for its implementation and sharing the results?

b) Develop/retrofit the programmes Theory of Change

- Using the information you have and your understanding of the programme develop a change pathway which illustrates the **sequence of changes from programme activities to desired outcomes, and the links between these changes at different levels**. Ensure that you indicate areas of change where you (and /or your partners) **directly contribute**, and where you (and/or your partners) contribute **indirectly** to change
- Identify at least 3 key assumptions that underpin this pathway (and connect them to the sequence or elements to which they refer)

c) Design “lines of enquiry” for some of the change statements in your pathway that you will need to monitor and/or assess as part of this exercise.

- Select two change statements in the pathway where your programme has direct influence; and two where it has indirect influence
- For each of the selected change areas, develop two/three areas of enquiry that will enable you to set baselines and track progress

d) Select methods for gathering data that can be usefully analysed

- Bearing in mind both time and resource considerations AND the need for robust analysis, propose appropriate methods that will effectively interrogate the areas of enquiry that you have identified
- Briefly justify why you have chosen these methods over other possible option

Task 2: How to Retrofit Theories of Change for Impact Assessment

Retrofitting theories of change post-design is a frequent practice—though certainly not a best practice. Nevertheless, the challenge remains: how can one accurately discern the original theory or theories behind the logic of an intervention when it is not made explicit in the intervention design? This challenge is compounded particularly when the theory has implicitly shifted throughout the intervention.

Making theories of change explicit post-design is complicated, but can be achieved and the process is not dissimilar to that of creating theories of change in the design phase:

- a) **Desk review.** The first step is to review existing written documentation such as project proposal documents, conflict analysis, baseline study and communiqués between partners. Based on the explicit information here, you should identify what you still need to know in order to develop a theory of change. Consider paying particular attention to whether the proposed activities will indeed ‘add up’ to the desired changes – and also look for gaps in both activities and the logic linking the various levels of the design or strategy hierarchy.
- b) **Collect additional information.** Additional information beyond what is contained in the project documents may be required. In which case, key informant interviews are an excellent method for gathering this preliminary data. If there is disagreement amongst the key informants, however, then a focus group might be in order to bring key stakeholders to agreement on how change will occur.
- c) **Propose a theory or theories of change.** Once all the relevant information has been identified, gathered, and analysed, you should be ready to propose a theory or theories of change retroactively. Consider seeking feedback from key stakeholders to ensure that you indeed understand the change process correct.

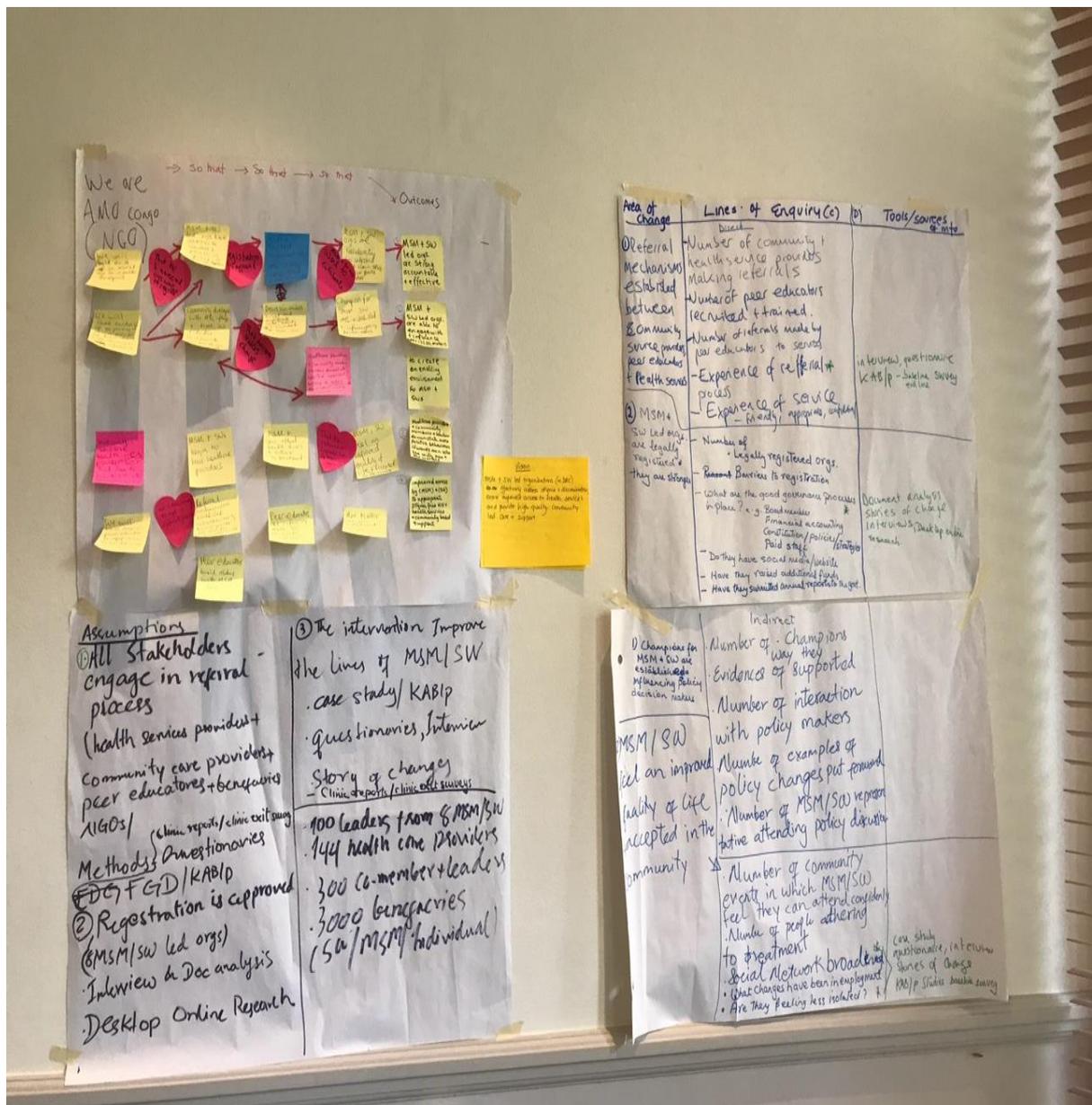
How to develop line of enquiry to explore areas of change

Example of using changes in awareness and mobilisation of key stakeholders in relation to child labour

Changes in frequency and content of CL issues discussed in public arenas and on political agendas	The extent to which leaders and other respected people are seen to be championing CL	Interview/group discussions with stakeholders and documentary review. Possibly network analysis.
	The ways in which the media – TV, radio, electronic (blogs), newspapers etc. – covers CL issues	Media monitoring over an extended period
	Numbers and types of civil society campaigns on CL issues	Interviews/group discussions with stakeholders and documentary review
	How and when CL appears in other public forums	
	The extent to which CL issues are included in school curricula	Public record Interviews with educators
	The extent to which universities take an interest in CL	
Area of change	Possible lines of enquiry	Sources of information
Changes in awareness and attitudes of key stakeholders	Shift in awareness, knowledge, attitudes and commitment in respect of CL among the general public and key multiplier groups in particular e.g. influencers and decision-makers.	KAP-type surveys preferably linked to baseline information relating to changes. If no pre-survey, sample of depth interviews/group discussions to probe further the extent of change and the stimuli for the changes.

Area of change	Possible lines of enquiry	Sources of information
Changes in the extent and type of Community involvement around CL issues	Shifts in levels of Community mobilisation around CL - e.g. CL committees set up and operational	Interviews/group discussions with stakeholders
	Levels and types of actions taken by communities taking effective action e.g. self-sensitizing, monitoring, reporting, self-enforcing/regulating where appropriate, referring vulnerable children and households to agencies	Levels and types of actions taken by communities taking effective action e.g. self-sensitizing, monitoring, reporting, self-enforcing/regulating where appropriate, referring vulnerable children and households to agencies

Example of retrofitting a ToC and developing an impact assessment



To assess impact effectively, you should be able to answer these questions for each area of change you are interrogating:

1. Have there been any changes?
2. How many people were affected (which target groups)?
3. How were they affected (and were they affected differently)?
4. Were these changes intended?
5. How do they compare to baselines (have you got evidence)?
6. Which elements did your programme contribute to?
7. How confident are you in reporting these findings?