MINI THEORY OF CHANGE

What: A conceptual framework that outlines the causal chain of how a project or initiative is expected to bring about the intended impact, while anticipating the required resources, key activities, and assumptions.

Why: A theory of change explains how and why a project is expected to work. Creating a theory of change can be a daunting task. This tool – the mini theory of change – offers a 'light' version to align your team on the key ambitions, key activities, resources, and assumptions required to achieve the desired outcomes. The tool is a great addition to a logframe, as it helps you and your team to align and define expected pathways that may need adjusting early in the process. It furthermore helps to clearly articulate and connect your planned activities to your bigger goal, while allowing you to spot potential risks and vulnerabilities in your plan by highlighting underlying assumptions.

When: The theory of change tool is great to use in the design and planning phase, when you have a well-defined solution in place, and you are planning how to best test and implement the solution. The tool is also useful for monitoring assumptions and risks when testing and implementing the solution.

Step 1

PREPARE THE EXERCISE

Download and print the Mini Theory of Change template from the side bar. If more than five participants, split into two groups and prepare one printout for each group, plus one extra to consolidate all inputs.

Do your homework for the solution you will address, to be ready to guide participants with relevant background or contextual information, insights from past evaluations, information about the communities for the intervention, and strategic plans and ambitions etc. If relevant, consider if the participants would benefit from having any additional materials readily available to support them during the exercise.

Step 2

FILL OUT THE THEORY OF CHANGE TEMPLATE

Introduce the participants to the timeframe and the purpose of the exercise by going through the following:

- What are we going to do today?
- Why are they invited?
- What are their roles (if participants do not know each other well)?
- What is the timeframe?

Split the participants into two groups if needed.

As this is a <u>mini</u> theory of change, it should be a rapid exercise. However, when distributing time for the template items, ensure to have a good amount of time to discuss the assumptions item. Discussing which critical conditions that must be in place to ensure project success is important to disclose any misalignment among team members and to scrutinise presupposed assumptions as a team. Being diligent in defining assumptions is therefore important to align teams on key risks to the solution implementation that must be monitored to ensure achievement of desired outcomes.

Starting from the top left, work your way through the template items and note down your responses. Use your responses in each box to guide what you note down in the next one. Try to be as specific and action oriented as possible when noting the responses. This will help you come up with more effective actions.

1. **Problem statement**: What is the main problem that you want to solve, and what is your long-term vision on the change you want to accomplish?

2. **Target group(s)**: Who are the people affected by the problem you have identified, and what are your entry points in reaching this/these group(s)?

3. **Resources**: What will we need? Do you have the required expertise in-house? Do you need to create new partnerships?

4. **Organisational preconditions**: What do we need to be in place internally for successful implementation and sustaining of solutions? (E.g., certain skills and capacities, financial resources, leadership commitment and active support, or adjust existing processes, etc.)

5. **Activities**: What are the key high-level activities we must do for the solution to achieve the desired effects?

6. **Results**: What are the direct outputs of your activities/implementing your solution?

7. **Effects**: What are the short-term, medium-term, and long-term measurable effects of implementing your solution and achieving your goals?

8. **Assumptions**: What are the key assumptions that must be validated for the short, medium, and long-term effects to happen? For example, in relation to stakeholder support, implementation context, end-user needs and capacities, implementer capacities etc. This step is critical to reflect on, as it helps you spot potential risks and highlight key points in your monitoring plan.

Allow 30–60 minutes for this step.

Facilitator tips
Some participants may have been part of developing previous theories of change. Therefore, it can be good to remind participants that this is a mini theory of change and that it is okay not to capture all the small details for this version.

Remind participants to assess the solution and project through a protection, gender, and inclusion lens as well as considering conflict-sensitivity issues.

Theories of change can be tricky – especially the assumption part. Share your theory with colleagues who have experience working with theories of change and ask them to play 'the devil's advocate'.

Step 3

CONSOLIDATE INPUTS AND NEXT STEP

Present the theory of change to the participant group and discuss if any changes are needed or whether there are key attention points to pay particular attention to. If the participants were split into two groups, bring everyone back to present, discuss, and consolidate their mini theories of change.

Agree on the key next steps based on the discussion and the critical points identified. Agree who will do what and when and incorporate the steps into your project planning documents.

If you are working with a new solution, next steps could be to prototype and test the solution to assess how to design and implement the most relevant and impactful solution. You can use the Which prototype? tool to assess which kind of prototype test will be most helpful to you.

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this step.

Facilitator tips
As the solution and project matures, keep on updating this mini theory of change throughout testing, implementation, and monitoring. The team can also choose to develop a more detailed theory of change to capture even more details.