

Interdisciplinary Research Hubs to Address Intractable Challenges Faced by Developing Countries

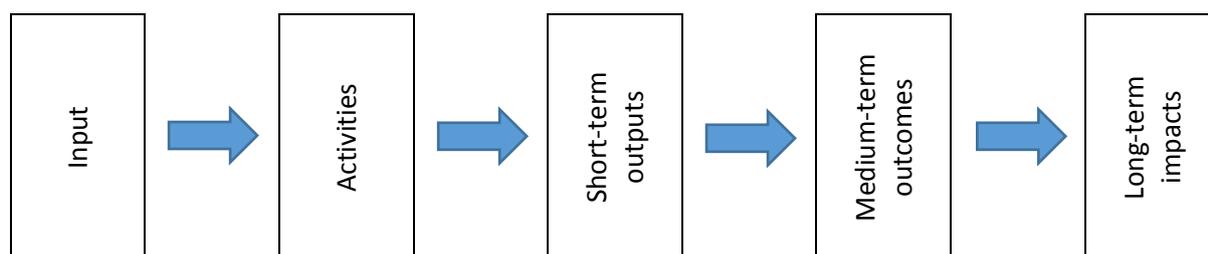
Guidance for developing a theory of change

What is a theory of change and why is it useful?

Designing a theory of change helps you to articulate the need you are addressing in your project, the changes you will make to address this need and what you plan to do to make these changes. Importantly, mapping these pathways will also help to flag up any assumptions or enablers in your work, highlighting risks, opportunities and potential challenges.

In terms of evaluation, a theory of change helps you to identify what should be measured and how you can draw upon existing evidence in the field to carry out your evaluation and demonstrate attribution.

There are a range of options available when it comes to selecting a model for your theory of change. The model proposed below is fairly simple and straightforward in its structure, making it appropriate for use in most projects, and provides a level of detail which meets the requirements of this stage in the application process. Applicants are not, however, obliged to use this model; if there is a theory of change model which better represents their project, they should include this in their application.



What are we looking for?

The purpose of the theory of change at this stage in the application process is to demonstrate that you have carefully considered the outcome pathways for your project, and how you will manage any complexities around these. The theory of change you submit should comprise of two parts:

1. A theory of change: a diagram mapping the key outcome pathways for your project. This should be a high-level visualisation, covering one A4 side.
2. A written narrative on the pathways set out in the diagram: this should focus on the assumptions and enablers underpinning your project's outcome pathways, and key opportunities and risks with a description of how these will be addressed.

Developing your theory of change

1. Identify your long-term impact(s)

The long-term impact(s) for your project can be described as the final goal of your project, or the main change that you intend to make for those benefitting from your research. Long-term impacts should be high-level, and you should only have a small number of them, three or four maximum. They are often indirectly attributable to your research.

2. Identify the preceding stages on your outcomes pathway

Having identified your long-term impacts(s), it will be easier to work backwards and add detail to the key stages in your project. In this model, the preceding stages are:

Outcomes	The medium-term, usually both direct and indirect, consequences of your work
Outputs	The short-term, usually direct consequences of your work
Activities	The work carried out in the project
Inputs	Resources in the broadest sense (financial, people, institutional, etc.)

3. Connect the stages together to demonstrate causality

This is a key stage in the development of your theory of change, as it encourages you to think about how you get from one stage to the next, and what the challenges and opportunities on this pathway may be. It is useful to ask yourself the following questions at this stage:

- What *assumptions* are underpinning this causal link?
- What *enablers* will be required for this causal link to happen?

Further guidance

The guidance here is sufficient for applicants to develop a theory of change meeting the requirements of this stage of the application process. However, should applicants want further information, the following sources are useful:

Ellen Harries, Lindsay Hodgson and James Noble (2014) [Creating your Theory of Change: NPC's practical guide](#)

Isabel Vogel (2012), [Review of the use of 'Theory of Change' in international development](#)

Cathy James (2011), [Theory of Change Review: A report commissioned by Comic Relief](#)