**Social Development Consulting UK and Terre des hommes Foundation, Lausanne**

**AGENCY. ‘Action for Gender Equality, Non-Discrimination, Civil Society Strengthening and Youth Empowerment’**



**Theories of Change and the Logical Framework Analysis (‘the log frame).**

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**Discussion on the differences between Theory of change and Logframes**

Isabel Vogel emailed Knowledge Brokers’ Forum (KBF) for advice and suggestions for a review for the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) on how theory of change (ToC) is being used by a range of organisations in international development, how people perceive its strengths and weaknesses, and how they are supporting its effective use. This turned into a useful discussion about the difference between Logframes and ToCs between KBF members.

**Key points from the discussion**

Key points from this discussion are summarised below each heading:

1. **A good Logframe embeds a theory of change**

* A good logframe process develops a very robust theory of change which is captured in the interplay between the left- and right-hand columns (the goal/purpose/output/activity statements and the risks/assumptions column)
* A good logframe has a ToC embedded in its very structure:
* “If we do these Activities and these assumptions hold, then these Outputs will be delivered. If these Outputs are delivered and these assumptions hold then this Purpose will be achieved, and if this Purpose is achieved and these assumptions hold then this Goal will be achieved.
* The vertical logic of a logframe is often lost sight of as people tend to focus almost exclusively on the "horizontal logic" - i.e., how the indicators fit with the associated narrative statement.
* Every development intervention (should have) a theory of change embedded in it. Only that some theories of change are not explicit enough but if you listen to inherent assumptions, you can tease out certain implied theories.

1. **A theory of change helps explain the leap from outputs to impact in logframes**

* For most projects, they really struggle with the leaps of logic in the middle of the framework. Impact is easy e.g., health, wealth, and happiness; Activities are easy as we know what we want to do! The difficulty is getting from Activities to Impact in only four steps. ToCs really help / force projects to explain to Output to Impact logic, as this is rather hard if you only have one logic step to span this yawning gap!
* The leap between outputs and outcomes is not always easily described or explained – we recognised that while logframes were good for building dams or sending people to the moon they were less pertinent a tool for research or development projects. We often ended up with a series of intermediate outputs and outcomes that were sequenced in much the same way as a ToC.

1. **There are challenges to representing a Theory of Change that conveys complexity and is easy to understand**

* One of the basic challenges with ToC is finding good ways of representing them, which are both simple enough but not too simple.
* A Logframe is one of a number of ways of representing a project's ToC. It is not the only way, and has problems as well as merits, some of which are elaborated on at the end of this webpage <http://mande.co.uk/2008/lists/the-logical-framework-a-list-of-useful-documents>
* Whatever the tool, it is incumbent on the whole community to ensure that they continue to be used as they were intended, so that they give us valuable rather than just pretty information

1. **Many of the intricacies behind logframes have got lost and they are not being used as originally intended**

* There’s been a huge collective memory loss about logframes, which are now just accounting templates rather than stakeholder engagement tools (which is how we used to use them).
* I think one of the downsides of logframes is that they are a neat way of presenting information – so the intricacies and effort in developing one gets lost and it gets seen as a hoop to jump through
* There is often a trade-off between the explanatory and persuasive aspects of the underlying logic behind a Theory of Change and logframe

1. **Theories of change (and tools that employ them) serve two purposes:**
2. To model a situation to better understand it and programme around it
3. To simplify a complex situation to help explain it to others and persuade them of the logic of your proposed intervention (e.g., for funding).

And in practice there is often a trade-off between the explanatory and persuasive aspects of the underlying logic

1. **Why has ToC taken off so much, and the ToC dimension of the log-frame been side-lined?**

* ToCs have been championed to get people back on track with thinking about what they are doing
* One of the main reasons that logframes have become increasingly side-lined is because they've not been found to be useful in a lot of situations in development. As a result, people have increasingly switched to using theories of change instead, which is why they're currently flavour of the month.

1. **Are tools a distraction from the dynamics of development and embedding learning and reflection processes?**

* Does grappling with theories of change detract us from practical dynamics of development
* Are ToC, Logframes and OM (amongst other things) a distraction from the business of embedding learning processes and reflective practice?
* Is theory of change destined for the same fate as logframes?
* Theories of change may be destined for exactly the same fate as logframes.
* At the moment, the Theory of Change is so unfamiliar to people that they have to wrestle with the idea, and it forces them to think about their programme. This has a limited window of opportunity, and may, over time, evolve into just another exercise to get the funds released. As people become familiar with the ideas behind the ToC, and experts start offering consultancy to develop the ToC for programmes, the key idea behind them, getting people to think, may become as lost as it has with the logical Framework

1. **Thoughts for future: conducting a comparative analysis of tools and generating ways to ensure robust thinking, reflection, learning, and analysis is undertaken whatever tool used**

* It would be interesting to compare accounts of the use of logframes with accounts of the use of theories of change to see what significant differences, if any, have actually been experienced on the ground

* How can we facilitate the robust thinking and analysis, and move past the 'tick-box template' effect, whether for log-frames or theory of change?
* We think that the Theory of Change is a good tool but may not in the long term tackle the heart of the problem – that there is a need to embed learning

**Resources**

**NESTA**

This site allows you to download a theory of change toolkit.

<https://www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/theory-change/?gclid=CjwKCAjwsfuYBhAZEiwA5a6CDNgjhNwe3fADYcrm_NtlDTK49g9tsYmwMnMqnVFM4ktzyb1j3tFH6BoCavoQAvD_BwE>

**What is theory of change?**

<https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>

**Wikipedia**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_change>

**Blogs on Theory of Change**

* Ian Thorpe: <http://kmonadollaraday.wordpress.com/2011/06/23/ive-got-a-theory-of-change/>

**The Logical Framework: A list of useful documents**

Useful resource on the MANDE website (see above for the link).

Contents include: 1) Explanations of the Logical Framework, 2) Wider discussions of Logic Models, 3) Critiques of the Logical Framework, 4) Alternative versions of the Logical Framework, 5) The Editor’s concerns (about uses of the Logical Framework), 6) Online survey on views and usage of the Logical Framework

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