

THEORY OF CHANGE

Creating Impact Together



— A PRACTICAL GUIDE —



MDF

EMPOWERING PEOPLE,
CREATING IMPACT



lotus
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THEORY OF CHANGE

Creating Impact Together

— a practical guide —

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MDF Training & Consultancy

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PREFACE 0



A Word of Welcome

This manual is a joint publication of MDF Training & Consultancy and Lotus Illustrations. Together, we have many years of experience in providing management training, advisory, evaluation, and visualisation services worldwide. We believe in building on existing knowledge and experiences to create long-lasting effects and empower individuals, organisations, and networks to increase their positive social impact.

Among other areas of collaboration, we often meet around Theory of Change development, review, or training. Theory of Change (ToC) is a topic we both feel passionate about because of its potential to make us understand social change and strengthen our capacity to achieve impact. Together we aim for ToCs that are cocreated with our clients, provide a well-defined path to social change, and are supported by clear and inspiring visuals.

In this manual we lay down our preferred way of working with ToCs. It is the result of extensive practical experience, but also of lively and lengthy debates on what works best or how to define *assumptions* and *conditions*. Developing the manual has been an enriching experience, to which many colleagues have contributed, and which we could not have done without the trust our clients have placed in us over the years.

We hope that this book will benefit you, whether you are a development practitioner, a student of social change, or a consultant, and that our joint efforts will lead to enhanced social impact.

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This manual

Public and social organisations need to be able to demonstrate social impact. Their allies and constituents, but also society, ask to be informed on the extent to which they succeed in generating social value. The Theory of Change (ToC) is an approach to jointly get a better grip on this social change.

This manual describes how to work with a ToC approach (check the inside cover page for the overview of the ToC steps). Practical examples will clarify each step.

An example used throughout this guide concerns a programme by SOS Children's Villages, who graciously granted permission to make use of their ToC. The version used here is simplified to allow for a clear illustration. A description of the case can be found on page 53.

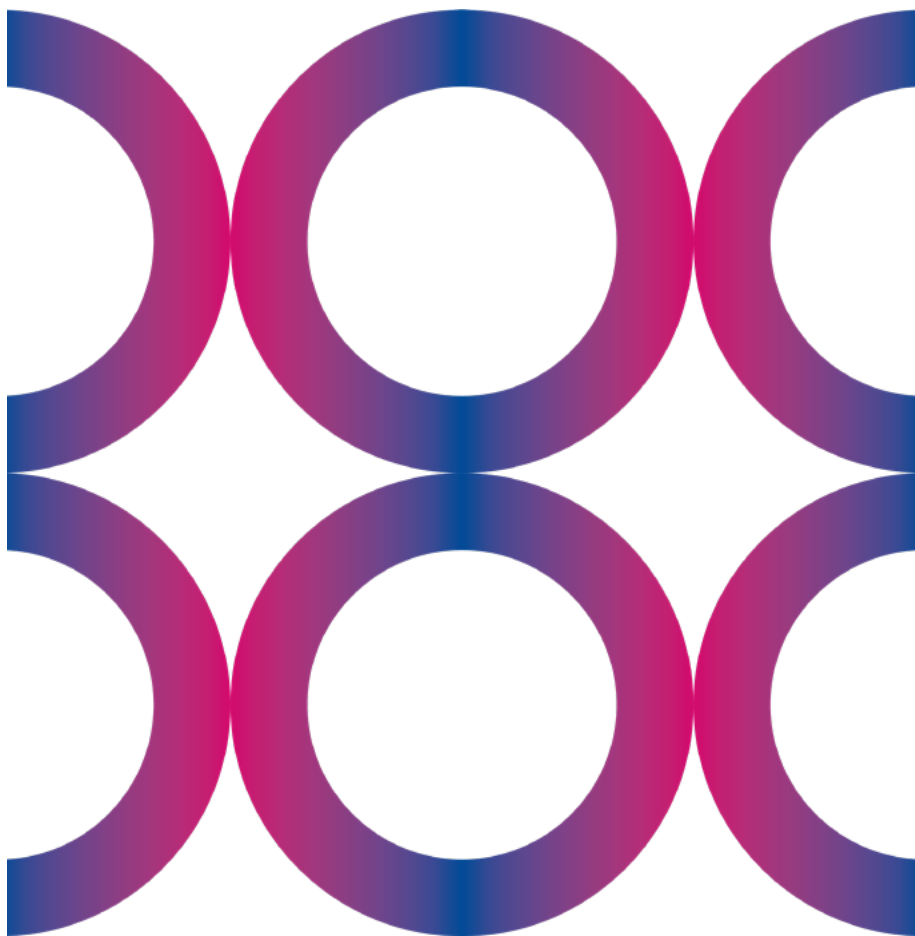
Different views

We are aware that different views exist on the use and application of the ToC. This manual describes our approach to working with a ToC and why we think it works well. An important advantage in our eyes is that the approach invites us to look beyond what we have always done or what we are good at. It rather encourages us to think more freely about ways to reach the desired change.

To keep this manual easy to read, we refer to the making of a ToC for your organisation, but the ToC approach can be applied as well by networks, alliances or entire sectors.

WHAT IS A THEORY OF CHANGE?

1



1.1 A Process and a Product

By building a ToC we try to understand change. A ToC shows why your organisation designs actions the way it does. Actions for social change are often based on implicit beliefs. By naming these explicitly, the organisation clarifies how it conceives that interventions will trigger change.

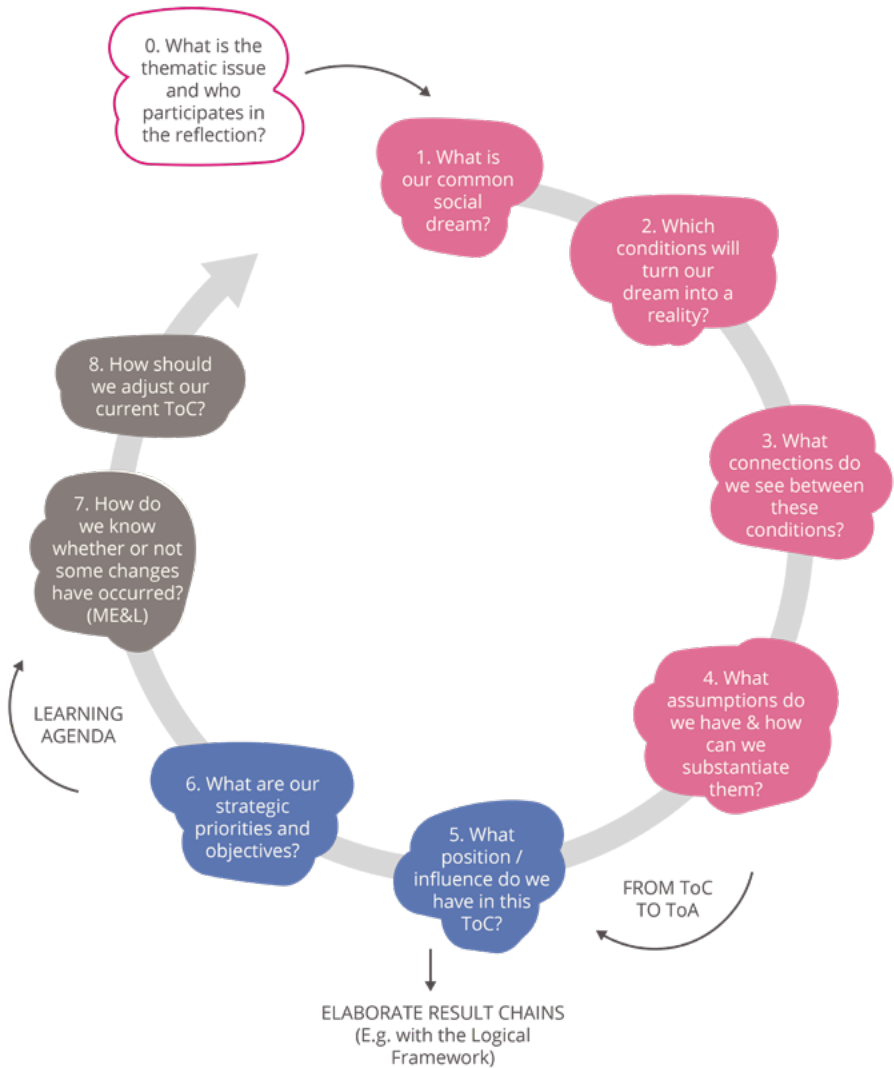
In a ToC you describe as clearly as possible the road, or paths of change, including steps and assumptions, that are necessary to achieve the dream and the wished-for social effects. A ToC document reveals how its authors think that change will occur. It describes “the substantive assumptions behind the intended change” (Carol Weiss, USA, 1995). A ToC describes the “theory” (not scientific) of how people think change is taking place.

Theory of Change (ToC) refers both to the process of constructing it as to the product. On the one hand, constructing a ToC consists of a series of steps in which dialogue takes a central role. It is a joint investigation on how an intended social change may come about. On the other hand, it is also a product: the narrative and visualisation of the ToC demonstrate, also to outsiders, how you understand the process of social change and how you intend to work on impact. A ToC is not static, but develops as change unfolds with time and your organisation acquires more experience and understanding of that process of change.

THE PROCESS

The process follows a number of steps that we will examine together. These steps will refine your own views (as well as those of others) about change in a certain context. In that process you will question each other about the ways you look at the context and about different visions on changes in the context that will ultimately contribute to the shared, social dream.

Figure 1. Overview of ToC steps



THE PRODUCT

The ToC as a product has usually two dimensions:

- ▶ A general part that aims to understand the entire change
- ▶ A specific part that shows the specific change buttons that an organisation or a partnership decides to focus on for initiating change. This is also called Theory of Action (ToA).

It is common to elaborate the ToC both into a narrative and a visualisation of the change process.

1.2 Overview of ToC steps

The entire ToC process evolves through a number of steps: from its development to its application, and to measuring results and effects.

Steps 1-4 will lead you through the ToC development process. Steps 5 and 6 focus on the planning process. Steps 7 and 8 shape the organisational learning.

In the following chapters, this manual describes how the ToC process works. A practical example will clarify every step. See figure 1 for a visualisation of the complete ToC process.

1.3 Using a ToC

Organisations with a social objective have one thing in common: they want to create change in a society or contribute to a stronger society.

Achieving this requires a complex social process with preconditions and many intermediate steps. This process is often unpredictable, and organisations must display a capacity to adapt. The ToC can be instrumental in developing this capacity. A ToC helps an organisation learn how to successfully generate and optimise social added value.

The ToC approach stems from the ideas of Carol Weiss published between 1972 and 1995. It was initially developed as a means for evaluation research in the social domain. Classical evaluation research is often only focused on effect measurement; the reasons why something actually works are generally not taken into consideration. A ToC can help in an evaluation to investigate how, through which intermediate steps, an intervention works or why expected results are not achieved.

In international cooperation, ToCs are used for:

- ▶ Determining vision and strategic planning; making a ToC as the start of programming new interventions.
- ▶ Creating support for an intervention, possibly also in the form of funding.
- ▶ Explaining interventions, whereby the ToC is used as an analytical tool that forms the basis of the result chain of programmes and projects.
- ▶ Evaluating and learning: a ToC helps the organization to look self-critically at itself and at its programmes. A ToC then has a self-reflective function: to see whether the organisation's actions actually work and to assess one's contribution to a change.

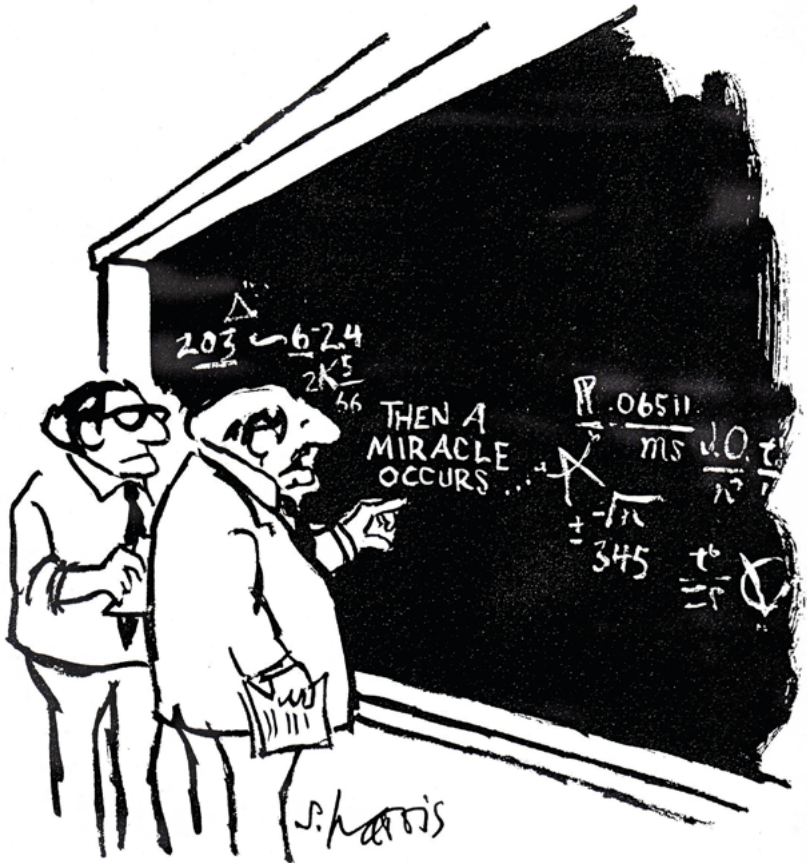
Initially, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) adopted the instrument into their practice, followed by civil society organisations.

A ToC can be created at different levels: at macro level, sector level, organisation, and programme or project level. An organisation may have several ToCs; for example five programme ToCs and a corporate ToC. It is important that these are mutually connected.

The success of the ToC approach depends on its proper use and on a number of other factors. Before getting started, it may be useful to ask yourself whether the process is suited to the context. Additionally, it is important to involve a broad group of stakeholders and make use of (local) knowledge of the context and experience in the professional field,

including from the past. Finally, expertise in the social scientific domain is important.

Figure 2. Cartoon by Sydney Harris, ScienceCartoonsPlus.com



"I THINK YOU SHOULD BE MORE EXPLICIT HERE IN STEP TWO."

DEVELOPING THE **THEORY** OF CHANGE

2



2.1 Preparing the Ground

The preparation of the ToC process starts by defining the subject. It must be clear what the theme of analysis is. Subsequently, based on the subject, a choice has to be made about the actors who will develop the ToC. The question is: who do you talk to?

The broader your theme, the more you will need to analyse. Similarly, the more actors you invite, the richer the dream and the analysis may become. Make a careful choice here, taking into account the time you wish to invest and at the same time ensuring that all desired parties have a say in the process. Making sure that everyone's voice is heard, increases the reliability and legitimacy of the analysis process.

Inclusivity principle: nothing
about me without me

Practical Example: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship

Theme

The economic perspectives of young people in many developing countries are extremely poor, and unemployment rates staggeringly high. Even when jobs are available, there is often a mismatch between the skills young people can offer and those required by employers. In some of these countries, poverty, lack of economic perspectives and social and political social instability lead to migration and radicalisation. This is why addressing youth unemployment ranks high on both international and local development priorities, including Dutch development policy and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

SOS Children's Villages, with its alliance partners 1% Club, Afrilabs, and ENVIU sought to address this issue through The Next Economy Project, used as a practical example throughout this manual.

Stakeholders

Young women and men from vulnerable backgrounds in Mali, Nigeria, Somalia/Somaliland (target group); families and friends of the target group; SOS Children's village (NGO, implementing agency; specialised in protection and youth); 1% Club (NGO, implementing agency specialised in crowdfunding); Afrilabs (Network of African Technology Hubs); ENVIU (NGO, implementing agency specialised in entrepreneurship); employers, business incubation hubs, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFa) (donor), governments in the target countries (specifically the ministries of Youth and Employment).



Tip: take photos and show them occasionally, so that the group can look back on its own process and follow the development of the ToC.

2.2 The Social Dream

What change would all of you like to see come true? This is the starting point of your thinking about change.

A dream is a sharp vision of the hoped-for change in a few years; an inspiring picture, projected on the longer-term perspective (5-10 years). It is about the change that your organisation wants to contribute to in a meaningful way.

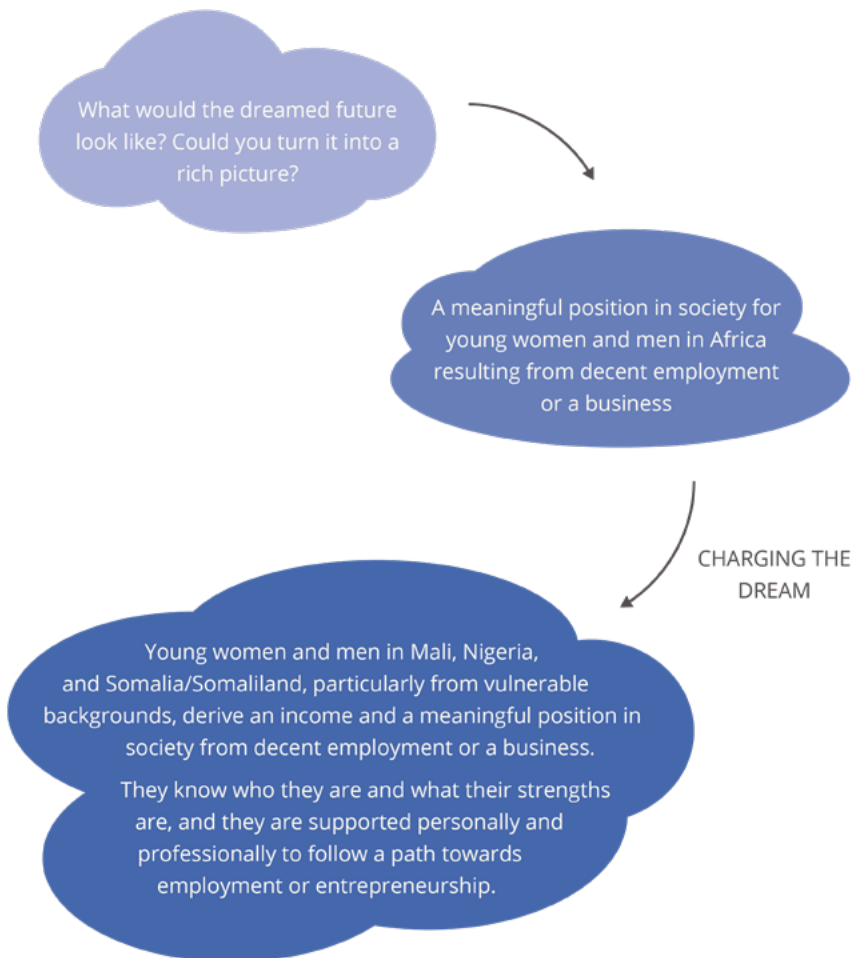
A good dream is:

- ▶ **Credible:** a realistically attainable new future situation.
- ▶ **All-inclusive:** a picture of all people and institutions involved in the change, including those beyond the reach of your organisation.

- Focusing on the target group: it states clearly who will benefit from the change.

Note: Here too, a broadly formulated, or high-level dream has implications for the scope of analysis of your ToC. You will need to balance ambition and feasibility.

Figure 3. Practical example: dream formulation



Make sure that the formulation of the dream produces a clear picture; you 'charge' the dream with an explanation of what it means in practice. You may think of using active verbs and describe what changes for the target group.

In the examples below, dreams are formulated around values that define quality of life: social meaning, personal development and economic growth.

Dorcas

Dorcas aims to create sustainable change by addressing poverty at three levels: at the individual level by helping people unlock their own potential, at the community level by encouraging people to exercise their combined strength, and at the level of society as a whole, by seeking the support of organisations and governments to contribute to the development process.

Dream: Flourishing communities where all individuals are included and treated with respect.

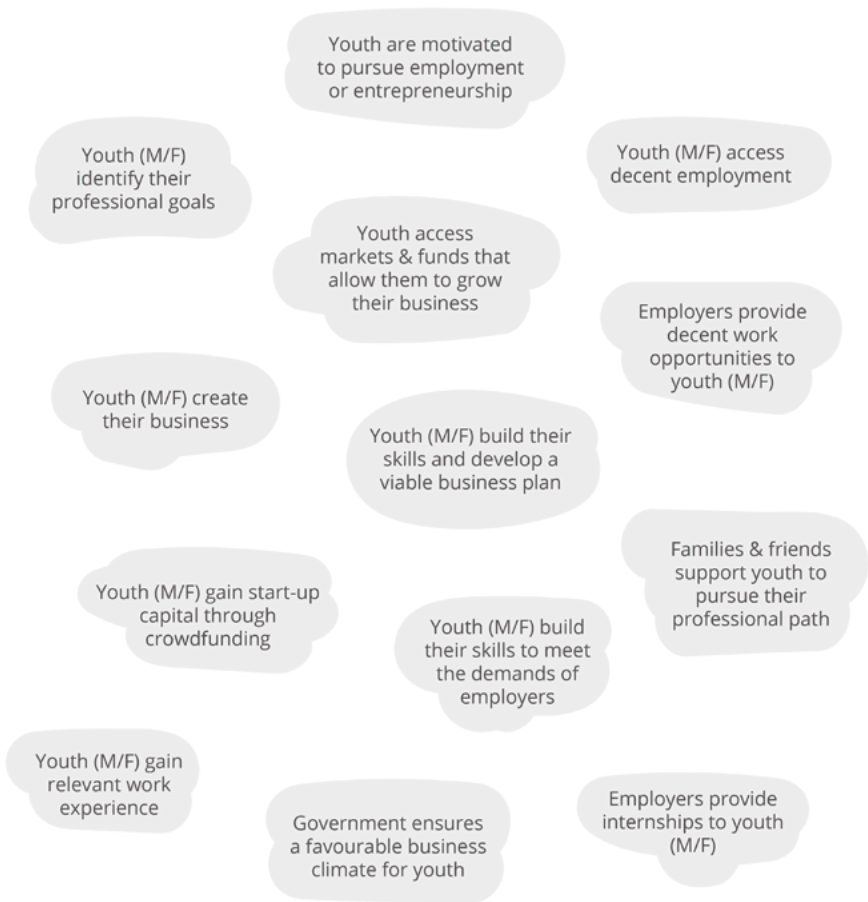
International Sport Alliance (ISA)

ISA taps into the potential of youth by connecting them to create a spark. On the playing field. In a safe, fun and enriching environment, young people are encouraged to discover and master skills on their own. Young people are given opportunities to take up new roles and put their newly acquired skills in action.

2.3 The Conditions

In step 2 you provide insight into how and why changes take place and how these contribute to the realisation of the dream. You describe the conditions that need to be fulfilled to make the dream possible. These can relate to both factors and actors.

Figure 4. Practical example: the formulation of conditions



In this process you look at the social, political, economic and ecological factors of social change. This includes considering the specific actors involved in the process and the power dynamics between them, bearing in mind principles of gender equality and inclusivity, opportunities for change, risks, and driving forces behind change.

You can approach this in different ways:

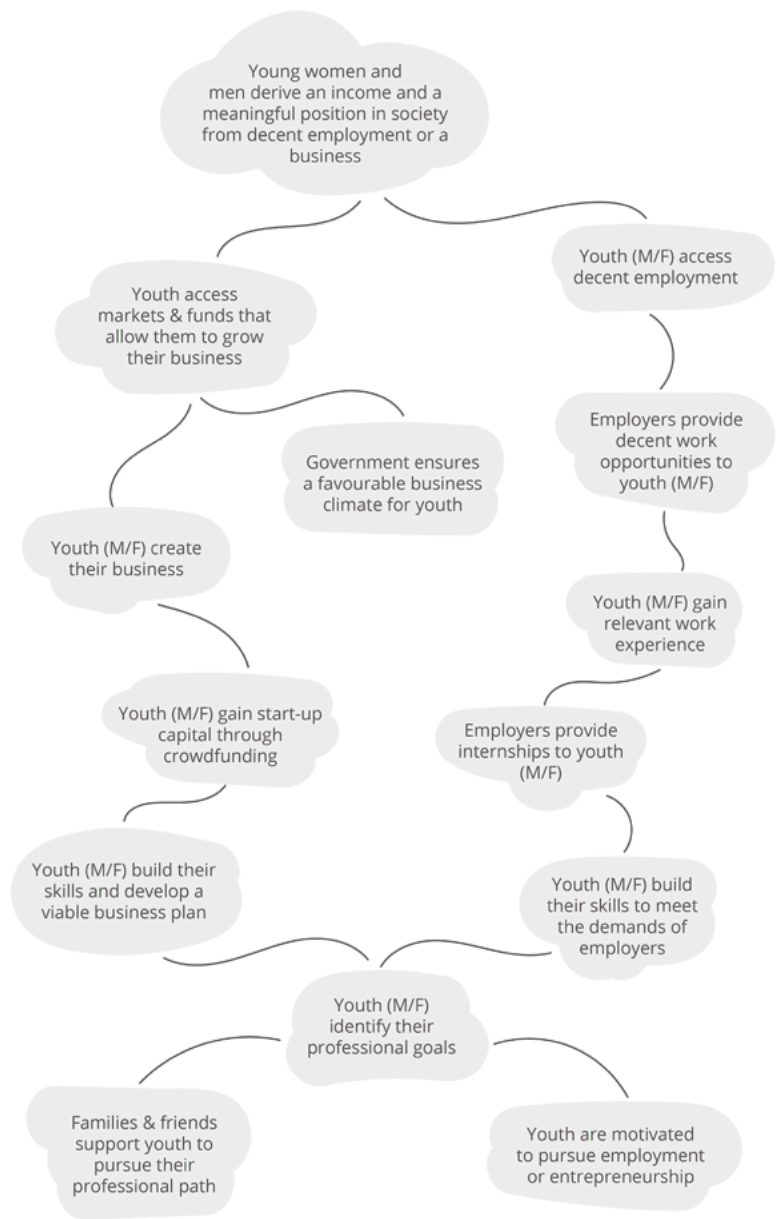
- ▶ By analysing all layers of the change areas one by one.
- ▶ Through an open brainstorm, to which you can add structure later.
- ▶ Using different thematic approaches (physical means, norms and values, capacities) that can be related to the dream
- ▶ By analysing the involvement of actors in the theme: are they in favour of the change or against it? Do they have a lot of influence and how would they use that in order to control a change process?

It is important not to depart from your own organisation ("What are we good at?") but look at what is needed in society to make the dream come true.

This may help you formulating conditions:

- ▶ Conditions are to be formulated as the behavioural change of one or more actors: which actor should display what kind of behaviour, for it to contribute to the realisation of the dream?
- ▶ Where possible, make sure you specify the actors.
- ▶ Avoid formulating activities that you already do as an organisation.
- ▶ Discuss the conditions wondering: what helps or stands in the way of achieving the dream?
- ▶ Make sure you do mention all the conditions. Refrain from making a selection yet.

Figure 5. Practical example: establishing causality



2.4 The Connections

The next step is to explain the relationships between the conditions that you have specified and add more conditions if necessary. This way, you will build a visualisation of changes and conditions that must come about before you can realise the dream. They can be short-term results or medium to long-term outcomes for individuals, organisations or communities and may, for example, reflect changes in behaviour or attitude.

Make sure to place the conditions in a logical sequence; "If this happens, then that can happen next"; one condition leads to the other as to finally reach the final dream. Perhaps you may not be able to connect all conditions. Some can occur independently, while others are strongly connected. They may happen one after the other or simultaneously.

Think about how the conditions influence each other. Is there just a single cause to effect relation or do different conditions influence each other? Do the paths go forward at all stages or do they include back-loops? At which point do paths meet?

For the sake of clarity, the connections in our example on youth employment and entrepreneurship are rather straightforward (Figure 5), but the questions above indicate that causality is not necessarily linear - indeed in most cases it is not.

For The Next Economy Project the dream to create economic prospects for youth from a vulnerable background led to a programme with four tracks:

Track 1: leading towards employment

Track 2: leading to business start-up

Track 3: leading to business growth

Track 4: leading to an improved business environment

2.5 Assumptions and Substantiation

Once the conditions and mutual relationships are defined, you investigate the assumptions you have made in the process. Revisiting the entire change process, you formulate the underlying assumptions explicitly and describe why you believe changes will occur in a certain way.

At this point in the development of the ToC, you are actually conceiving your theory. You describe why and how you think the change process will work. What makes you think that A will lead to B? Assumptions are working hypotheses that you try out in practice. They further refine your logic and help you to identify the actions required.

Articulating assumptions is only a first step: to strengthen your theory you need to look for substantiation by including the sources on which the assumption is based. These sources can be both internal and external: they may refer to your own research or experience, or to available scientific findings.

If certain assumptions cannot be sufficiently substantiated yet, you may wish to plan for additional (action) research or pilot your intervention on a smaller scale first. In this way you can use your change programme itself to build further evidence about the nature of the change and contribute to new insights.

Example 1

An intervention in which a radio programme daily mentioned the prices of agricultural products on the market in Peru rested on the assumption that farmers' decisions to sell their produce were based on price levels. The expectation was that providing them with knowledge about the level of prices would give farmers the opportunity to increase their income. Unfortunately, decisions to sell were driven more by the need for cash than by profit margins. Increasing income then becomes a lot harder. This is an example of an assumption that did not survive further investigation.

Example 2

Objective A: higher participation in sports leads to Objective B: better educational performance.

Assumption: Sport builds discipline, self-esteem, drive and collaboration skills, which is bound to have a positive impact on other spheres of life, such as education. (Substantiation: source: NOC / NSF)

Example of assumption and substantiation: Sport implementation programme, Municipality of Rotterdam

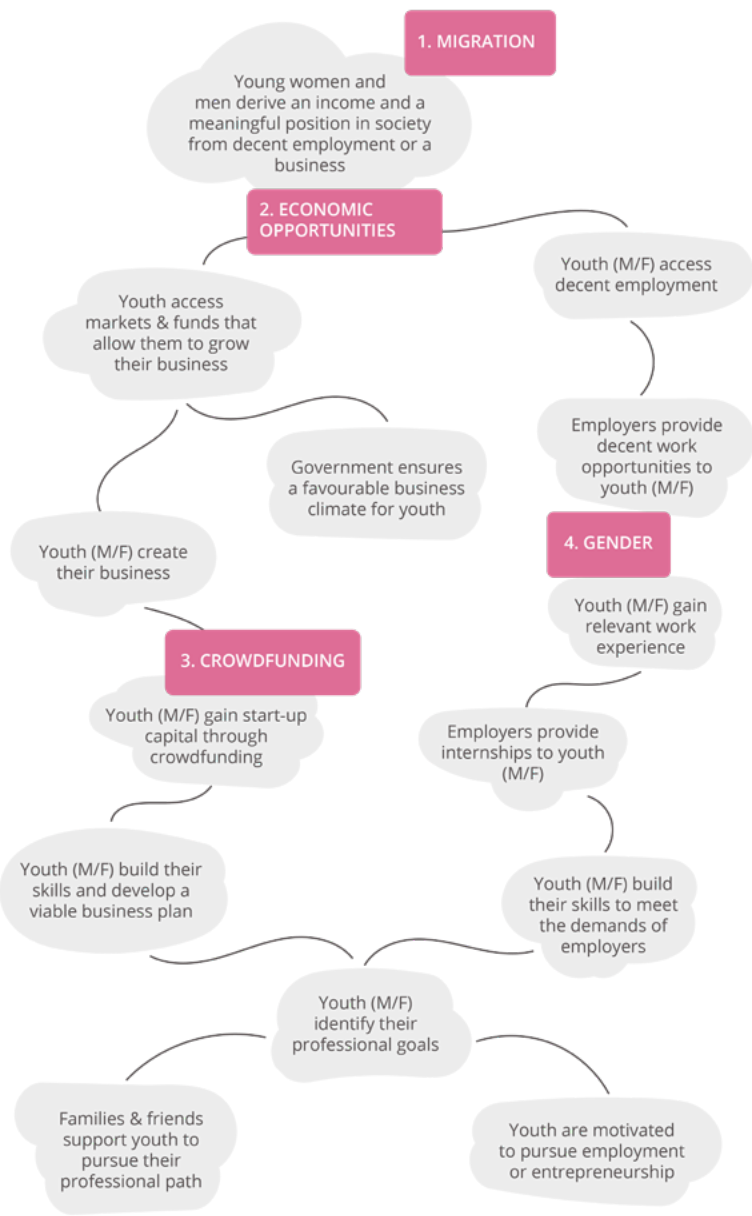
Step 4 is not easy because assumptions that were implicit so far must now be made explicit. To discover assumptions, it often helps to explain the process to outsiders. You may ask them to challenge you by questioning the logic of your theory of change.

The following questions may help: why does one change trigger the next? What does it take to change? What motivates the actors concerned?

Consider the following aspects:

- ▶ An assumption is a deeper explanation of the causality between conditions ("why does A lead to B?"); it is not part of the change path itself.
- ▶ Assumptions relate to the willingness or the possibility of actors to change.
- ▶ Assumptions are linked to the context; they are not general statements.
- ▶ They should not be formulated negatively (they are different from risks) and refer to your world view or research into how change happens.

Figure 6. Practical example: assumptions and associated substantiation



A thorough analysis and substantiation of the assumptions will make your ToC more robust. You may find that in the process of articulating assumptions you further reflect upon and improve your ToC by reformulating the conditions and to establishing different connections.

WORKING WITH ASSUMPTIONS

When resting on hard evidence, or on very obvious logic you do not need to emit assumptions about a change. Assumptions are meant to support those things that you are not sure about.

As suggested earlier, if you cannot sufficiently substantiate an assumption, you can make it part of the organisation's learning agenda and have it examined later for the improvement of the ToC.

The search for evidence can also be a reason to monitor developments in the context. Contextual changes may, in turn, lead you to identify new conditions or connections. The learning agenda and context monitoring help you to adjust your ToC over time.

For our case study on youth employment and entrepreneurship we identified four assumptions (Figure 6 on the previous page). The text box below shows the assumptions and the corresponding substantiation for each.

Migration

Economic opportunities will reduce irregular migration by young women and men from Africa to Europe.

This is the main assumption that underpins the framework developed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs under which The Next Economy was funded (the Local Employment for Development in Africa (LEAD) programme, launched in 2015). It was not, as such, an assumption of the project, but the rationale behind its funding.

While economic opportunities do play a role in youth's motivation to migrate, research by the United Nations, among others, demonstrates that the causes of international migration are infinitely more complex and often comprise a mix of social, cultural, environmental, political, and security aspects. Additionally, migration to Europe requires means that the target group of vulnerable young women and men are unlikely to have. This is an example of an assumption requiring better substantiation. (World Youth Report, UN 2013.)

Crowdfunding

Tools such as co-creation and crowdfunding enable young entrepreneurs to quickly connect and develop new companies.

In cities in Mali, Nigeria and Somalia, most of the employment is not found in the traditional jobs in large companies and the government, but more and more in the flexible economy of start-ups and micro-enterprises.

In many sub-Saharan countries, access to the Internet, mobile phones and other technology is rapidly increasing. Tools such as co-creation and crowdfunding enable young entrepreneurs to quickly connect with global networks and like-minded people, companies and institutions.

This offers room for win-win situations in which a young digital generation develops new companies that can also be used to solve social problems. (SOS Children's Villages and the 1% Club)

Economic opportunities

When young, vulnerable people are offered the chance of a job and an income, they have the chance of a better future, of self-reliance and can build a life of their own.

Providing a sustainable income and promoting inclusive economic growth creates room for young people to get inspired to work together on a local economy that is accessible to all. Young Somalis,

Nigerians and Malians are therefore able to creatively shape an inclusive economy in which companies focus on realising real value rather than just financial profit, creating good and fair jobs and generating impact: they form the next economy. (SOS Children's Villages)

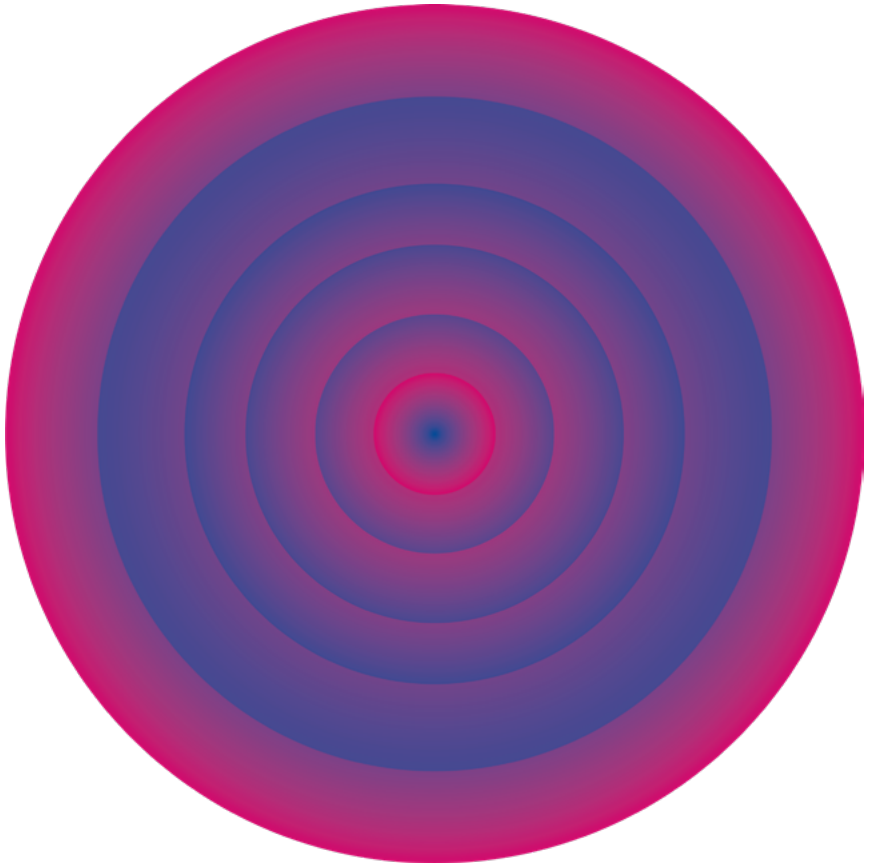
Gender

If young women are offered with the same services as young men, they will benefit equally.

This was an implicit assumption of the programme. At mid-term, certain dropout by women from the employment track made the programme staff realise that their participation required special measures, as the women encountered gender specific challenges.

USING THE **THEORY** OF CHANGE

3



In the following steps (5 and 6), each organisation positions itself in the overall change process. These steps imply choices that every organisation makes for itself. Make sure that step 0 was clear for all persons participating in developing the ToC, so that mutual expectations are known to all. It is possible that everyone remains involved; it may also be that some stakeholders decide to go their own way from here. From step 4 to 5 you make the transition from defining the ToC to drafting a Theory of Action (ToA), in which you identify your own strategic priorities and actions.

3.1 Positioning

Who are we and what is our influence? So far, we have been building a Theory of Change, describing an overall change process encompassing many actors over a longer period of time. The following steps help you to decide on your own role in contributing to this larger and longer change process.

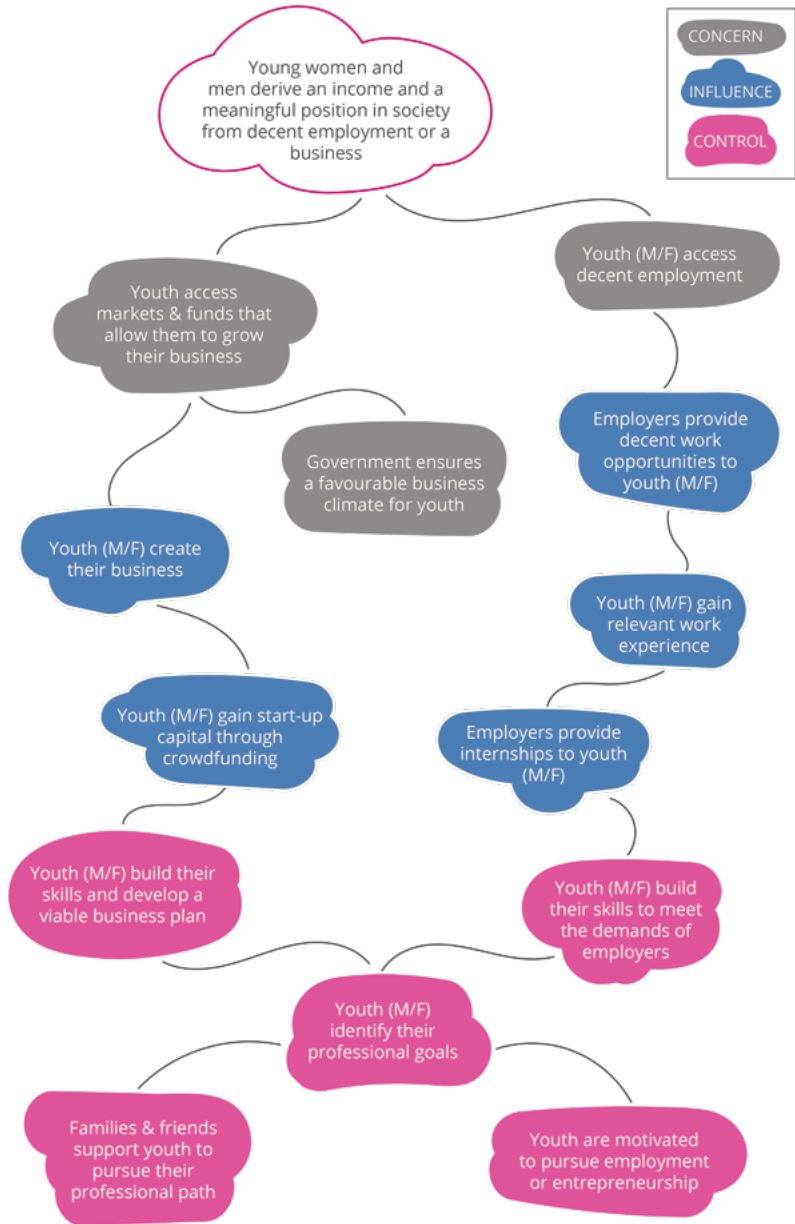
The mandate of your organisation determines the influence that you can have on the intended change. A municipal government, for example, has a different kind of influence than a lobby organisation or a trade union.

Your ToC will ease your own strategic choices: on which (sub) change(s) will your organisation focus its attention? Up to which level can you exert control? Where do you have influence, but not control? And what part of the change is beyond your direct influence?

In ToC thinking we distinguish three spheres:

- ▶ **Sphere of concern (impact):** these are the changes that we believe we should contribute to in some way, because they correspond to our mission or vision of society. Yet we have no direct influence on these changes.

Figure 7. Practical example: positioning



- ▶ **Sphere of influence (outcomes):** these are changes that we can influence in view of our experience, capacity, network or other means.
- ▶ **Sphere of control (outputs):** these are conditions that we can realise largely by means of our own actions, whether or not in a partnership.

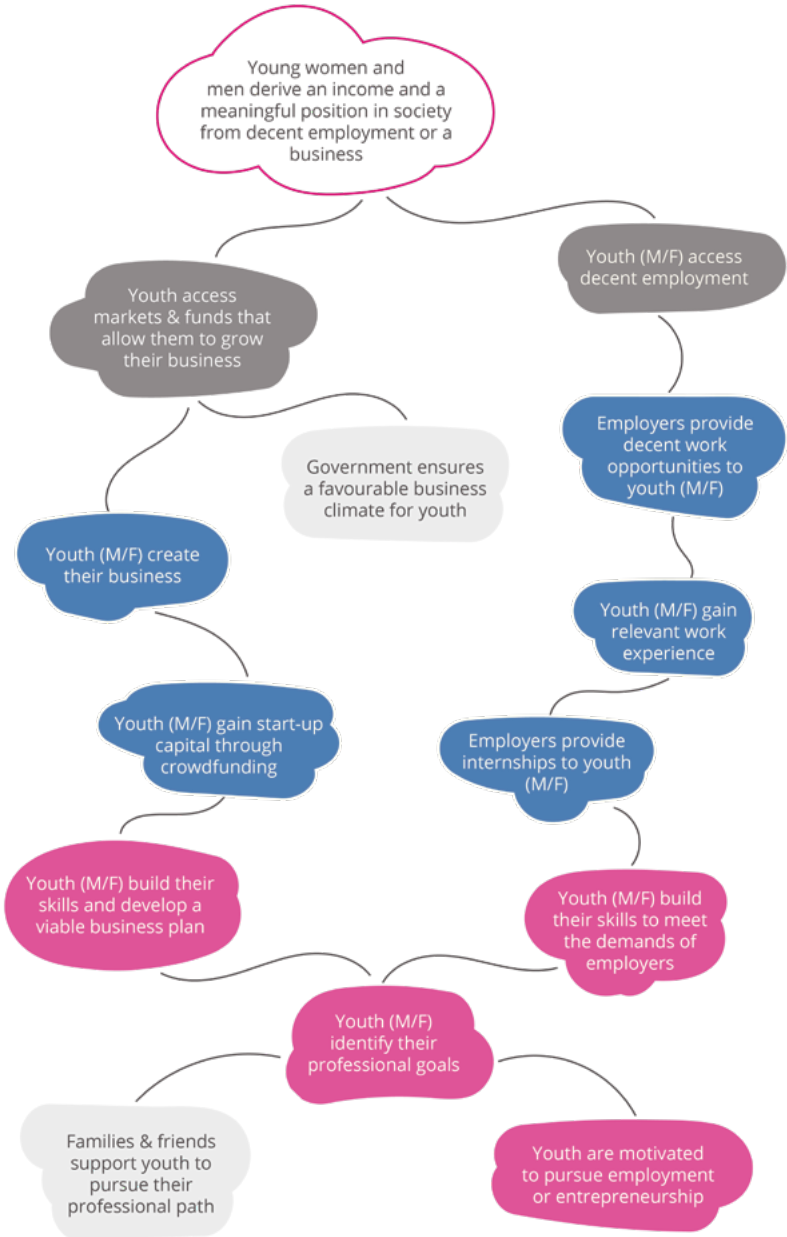
Introducing colours into your Theory of Change will help you distinguish between the different spheres. In our example we have used pink for the sphere of control, blue for the sphere of influence, and grey for the sphere of concern. The spheres reflect the point of view of your organisation: other organisations will have a different influence on the change process. They help you therefore, to set your ambition: what can you realistically achieve within the set timeframe and with the means at your disposal? Who do you need to partner with? Once you are clear about your general ambitions, you can begin to define your strategic priorities.

3.2 Defining Strategic Priorities

The changes that you have captured in the ToC may not all be within your sphere of influence. You will probably have to make choices as to where you will intervene. You make these choices based on criteria such as: the experience and mandate of your organisation, the willingness of stakeholders to change (feasibility), the priorities set by the target group, available time and/or financial resources (or the resources that you expect to secure).

Using the ToC as a reference, your organisation can select the areas of change that it intends to focus on specifically. This specific ToC forms your “Theory of Action”. You link the goals to these priorities and develop these into result chains of projects or programmes. The conditions you defined earlier now become your outputs and outcomes: they are results that you aim to achieve. If you wish, you can make use of a Logical Framework at this stage, to support the elaboration of the result chains.

Figure 8. Practical example: strategic priorities



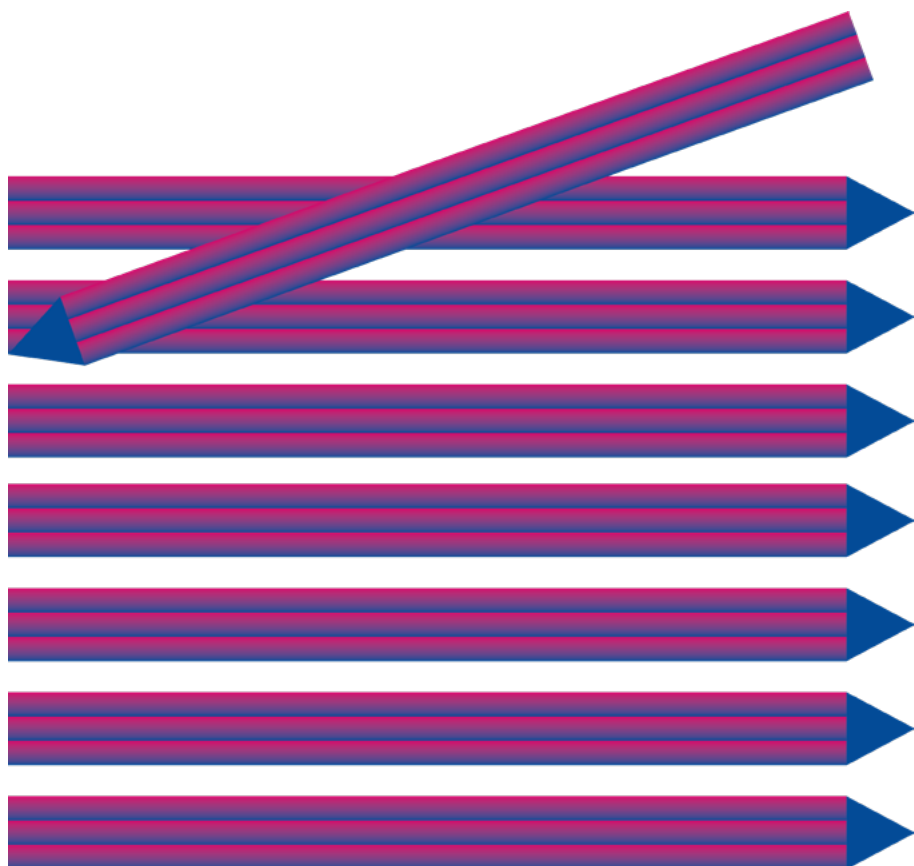
Defining result chains helps you to determine change indicators to ultimately determine your Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning trajectory. This exercise may also provide you with a realistic assessment of the contribution that your organisation can make to the change.

Measuring outputs and outcomes

In steps 7 and 8 your organisation will pay attention to measuring of outputs and outcomes and adjusting the ToC.

LEARNING FROM AND WITH A TOC

4



The aim of developing a ToC is learning to understand how change works, as a means to creating (more) impact. Monitoring programme and project progress and changes in the context will help you assess the quality of your Theory of Change. You will:

- ▶ learn to what extent the assumptions you made when you developed the ToC were correct.
- ▶ learn whether the relationships between impact, outcomes, outputs and interventions actually work the way you had anticipated; and
- ▶ learn whether the change paths on which you focused effectively contributed to changes.

4.1 Output and Outcome Measurement

First, determine how you want to measure the change: for each result chain or pathway of change, you need to develop indicators or other instruments to measure progress and to assess to what extent the intended change has been achieved.

Investigating whether your ToC does justice to the complex reality within which your interventions take place, requires a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators. While the former provide data that can easily be compared, the latter are necessary to make sense out of these data and the changes observed. Suitable methods could be: Most Significant Change (MSC) developed by Rick Davies and Outcome Harvesting developed by Ricardo Wilson-Grau.

INDICATORS

Indicators in a ToC approach focus on measuring change, rather than implementation. If we provide training, we are less interested in knowing how many people participated in the training sessions, or what know-

ledge they gained, than understanding how that knowledge led to changed practices. Referring to our example: if the programme worked with employers to build their understanding of how providing internships can be of use to them, we want to know if this led to new internship opportunities.

As a general rule, each condition requires an indicator, which shows whether the condition develops and what the effect is on the overall change.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Most Significant Change (MSC) is a form of participatory progress monitoring and evaluation that allows for collecting data at all levels (output, outcome, impact) in a ToC. The essence is to bring together a collection of significant stories (stories that have meaning) in a structured way. These stories are gathered in the field, where the effects can be felt.

Outcome Harvesting (OH) is another form of qualitative M&E and is used to identify, describe, verify and analyse changes. It is designed to collect evidence for change and to use this retroactively to understand how an organisation or programme contributed to the change. The resources mentioned in the bibliography provide more information on these methods.

Only well-structured progress monitoring systems and evaluation exercises will enable you to adapt the ToC. Questions to think about are:

- ▶ What information do we need in order to assess change?
- ▶ Who needs to receive that information and for what use?
- ▶ What is the best way to collect data and who is responsible to do so?
- ▶ Who else is involved in the monitoring and evaluation process?
- ▶ How are the outcomes reported and with whom are they shared?
- ▶ How will you close the learning loop? I.e., how will you make use of the findings for learning, steering, etc.?

4.2 Adjusting the Theory of Change

Regularly reviewing the indicators and using qualitative data helps you to learn and to adjust the ToC. We have seen in this manual that making a ToC together starts with establishing the collective dream and the social changes that help to realise this dream. Adjusting the ToC requires you to go through the steps again, by asking yourself three learning questions.

The **first learning question** that needs to be answered is: what social change (often expressed in changed behaviour of important actors) do we observe and what effect does this have on the target groups we intend to reach? The adaptation in this phase is about the relationship between the dream, the social changes and the intended effects. The question that you ask is: are the connections in our ToC still consistent with the reality we have observed at this level? Adjust your ToC where necessary.

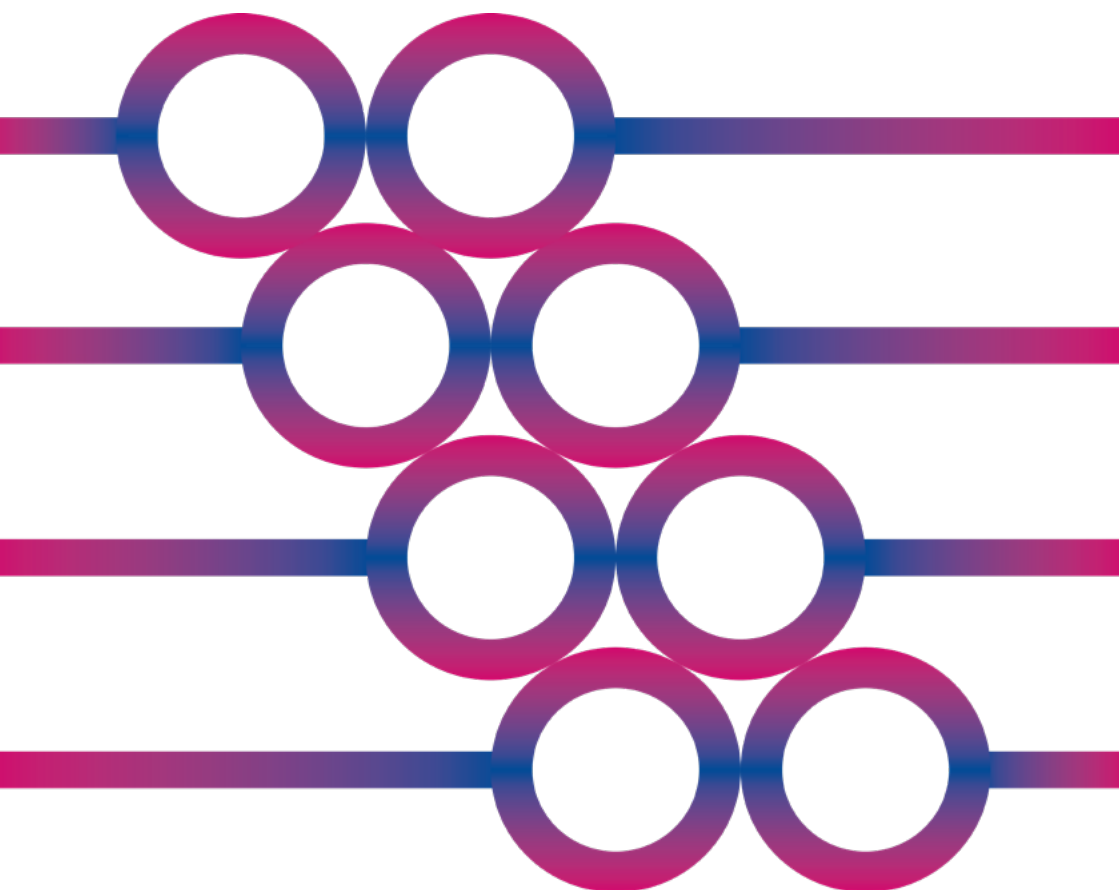
The **second learning question**: are the change paths we have chosen still the right ones? Have we made a correct assessment of our social influence and are the connections between our interventions, outputs, and the desired outcomes consistent with the reality we have observed? Again, adjust where necessary.

The **third learning question** is about the assumptions made when drafting the ToC. Investigate whether your assumptions still correspond to reality. By seriously considering these assumptions, a (partially) new view of reality often arises. Use this updated insight on the assumptions and adjust them in your ToC.

It is useful to keep these learning questions in mind while implementing your interventions. Outcome Harvesting and Most Significant Change are some of the methods that can keep you sharp when answering these questions, but there are other methods as well. Make sure that you choose the instruments that best suit the culture of your organisation, partners, and target group.

OUR VISION OF WORKING WITH A TOC

5



TOC PROCESS

1. By engaging in a ToC process you want to learn to understand how change works and determine what your organisation can achieve.
2. Working with a ToC leads to a theory, which represents the views of those who drafted it. By adding new thinking power, it is inevitable that adjustments will be made to this Theory of Change.
3. The preparation of a ToC is an iterative process. This means that the participants in the process regularly consult their constituency to get feedback or further input.
4. The more varied the actors involved in drafting a ToC, the richer the dream and analysis. Increase reliability and legitimacy by adhering to the inclusivity principle: **nothing about me, without me.**

TOC PRODUCT

5. The final product of a ToC process shows others how your organisation understands change and what change ambitions you have, given the context in which you operate.
6. A ToC is the portal for the development of strategies and programmes and must be supplemented with methods for programmatic (project-based) working and tools for monitoring, evaluating and learning.

SELF-REFLECTION, CRITICAL THINKING

7. Working with a ToC requires a capacity for critical reflection on the way you previously looked at reality. Try to avoid so-called 'group thinking' (the blind spots of your own sector), which may influence your inclination to think "out-of-the-box", which make the ToC approach so valuable.

8. Articulating and substantiating assumptions is an important part of working with a ToC approach. It helps us to identify the right actions and to evaluate the change process.

THE USE

9. The focus of a ToC is very much on behavioural change. This means that we constantly pay attention to how the various actors (can) adjust their behaviour, and why.

10. A ToC is not static and requires a willingness to regularly adjust the theory based on new information or on experiences gained in the context.

VISUALISING TOCS

As mentioned earlier, a Theory of Change as a product is not complete without a visualisation of the change process. The examples in this manual demonstrate that a visual helps to show the connections between the results. This can be a simple flowchart, but organisations may also choose to use the visualisation to bring across their vision and views of how change will take place.

Visuals can serve different purposes:

- ▶ They provide a quick and accessible overview of the change process
- ▶ A nice visual can inspire and convince interested parties and potential donors
- ▶ A visual in every office of project staff and partners can help everyone to keep their eyes on the ball during implementation: focus on results rather than activities.

Case Description

The Next Economy is a project funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which aims to create employment for young men and women in Nigeria, Mali and Somalia/Somaliland. This case is based on Phase I, which ran from 2016-2019. Phase II is currently being implemented.

An alliance of four organisations (SOS Children's Villages, 1% Club, Afri-labs, and ENVIU) implemented the project, which - in collaboration with the private sector- prepared and coached youth towards obtaining a decent job or own business.

Following a common training in life skills, in which the youth discovered their strengths and ambitions, they could opt for an employment path or an entrepreneurship path, in which they were further trained and accompanied. Additionally, the project sought to improve the ecosystem in which employment and business creation can thrive by means of physical infrastructure and networks, as well as creating a supportive and enabling economic and employment climate.

The project approached the latter mainly by working with the private sector and business incubation hubs. Their mandate and resources led the alliance partners to choose not to work with government on improving the tax and registration laws to facilitate youth entrepreneurship. Another choice was not to work directly with parents and spouses of the participating youth, which, in retrospect might have had a positive impact on the retention of the young women in some countries. This was a lesson that the project took into its follow-up phase.

Between 2016 and 2019 the project successfully strengthened the employability and entrepreneurship capacities of over 4,000 youth, a good deal of whom found employment. More information can be found on the project site: soskinderdorpen.nl/project/the-next-economy-how-african-youth-make-it-work/.

FURTHER READING

Theory of Change

Weiss (1995). 'Nothing as Practical as Good Theory: Exploring Theory-Based Evaluation for Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families' (Connell, J, Kubisch, A, Schorr, L, and Weiss, C. (Eds.) *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.

theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/

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Outcome Harvesting

betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/outcome_harvesting

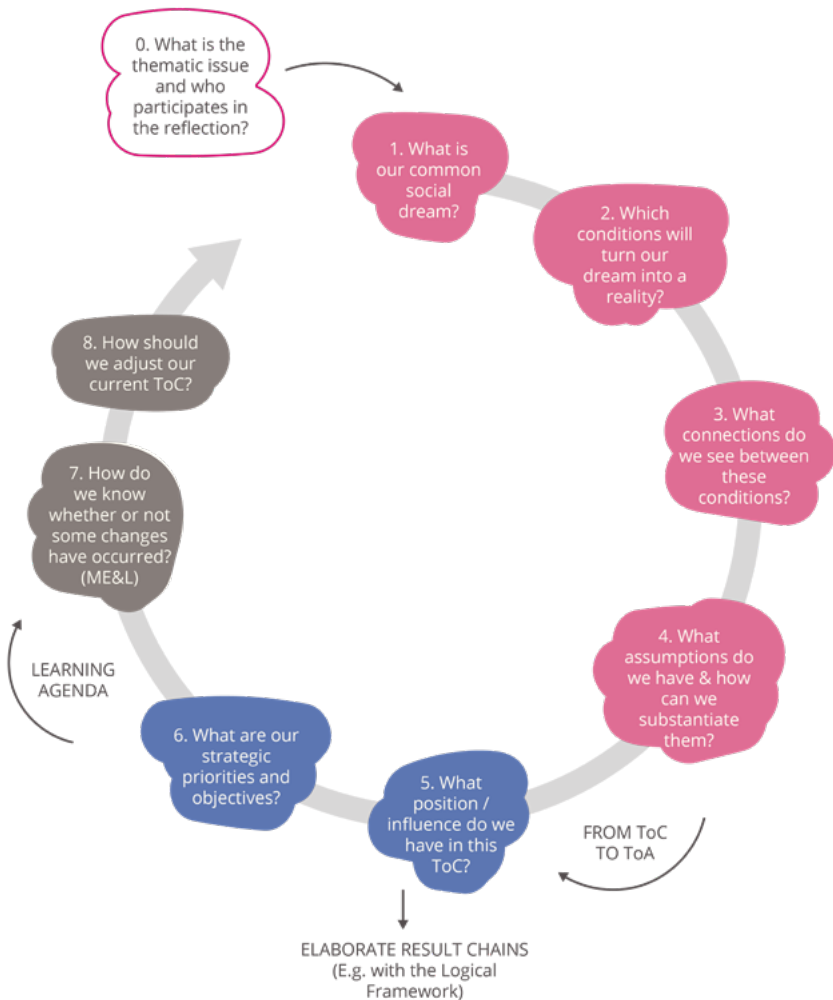
outcomeharvesting.net/welcome/

Most Significant Change

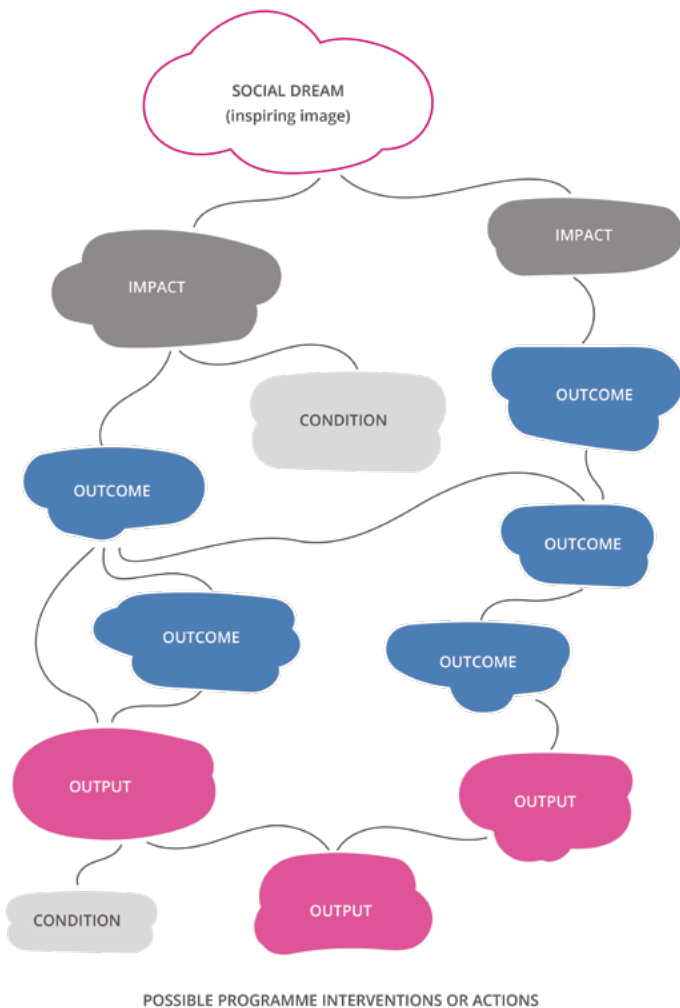
Davies, Rick & Jessica Dart (2005), *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique - A Guide to Its Use* - mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf

betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/most_significant_change

Overview of ToC Steps



ToC Model



Although no ToC looks the same, we try to show a generally applicable structure with this model. It is not a fixed format or blueprint for what a ToC should look like, but as a rule, a ToC is more than a result chain and the paths are often non-linear.

Colofon

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Creating Impact Together

Theory of Change has proven to be an effective approach to understanding and influencing social change. Although first developed half a century ago, it continues to gain in popularity and is widely used by development practitioners and agents of change around the world.

The approach implies that a group of stakeholders jointly describe how they believe a desired change process will unfold. While the basic idea is simple, its application requires some practice and stamina. Having been involved in Theory of Change development, review, and training for many years, we felt the time had come to share our experience. Ours is just one way to approach Theory of Change. It has worked well for us though, and we hope it is of value to you too.

Would you like to exchange or receive more information? Please do get in touch with either of us at one of the addresses provided below.

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