



THEORY OF CHANGE

in International Development

EE365 Lecture 1-2

OUTLINE: THEORY OF CHANGE (TOC)

- **Definitions & Purposes**
- **Components & Levels**
- **Role of key concepts in ToC**
- **From theory to practice**

DEFINITION

(REF. HIVOS)



Theories of change are the ideas and hypotheses (theories) people and organisations have about how change happens

- An ongoing process of reflection to explore change and how it happens - and what that means for the part we play in a particular context, sector and/or group of people.
(Cathy James, Comic Relief Theory of Change Review, 2011)
- A theory of how and why an initiative works - the set of assumptions that explain the mini-steps that lead to a long term goal
- The connection between activities and outcomes (the key component of the ToC process), commonly involves exploring a set of beliefs or assumptions about how change will occur.

PURPOSE OF THEORY OF CHANGE



TECHNICAL TOOL

use as a precise
planning tool



TOC THINKING

suggested as the key
element of a ToC
process, use as a way
of thinking about how
a project is expected
to work



POLITICAL LITERACY

emphasis the need for
practitioners to develop
political literacy
(understanding of how
change happens, allowing
them to respond to
unpredictable events)

FOUR BROAD CATEGORIES OF PURPOSE

1. Strategic planning

map the change process and its expected outcomes

2. Monitoring and evaluation

articulate expected processes and outcomes that can be reviewed over time

3. Description

ToC allows organizations to communicate their chosen change process to internal and external partners

4. Learning


ToC helps people to clarify and develop the theory behind their organisation or program

TOC AS A WAY OF



THINKING (OVERALL APPROACH)

a thinking and action approach to navigate the complexity of social change



PROCESS (DOING A TOC ANALYSIS/ENQUIRY)

a ToC enquiry is an ongoing process of analysis and reflection



PRODUCT (RESULT OF A TOC PROCESS)

a ToC enquiry results in specific outcomes

CORE COMPONENTS OF A TOC PROCESS AND PRODUCT

**HIVOS's seven
core components
and key questions
to be addressed in
a full ToC process
and product**

- 1** What is the desired change, why and for whom?
- 2** Analysis of the system and the current situation
- 3** Mapping pathways of change
- 4** The assumptions underlying our theory of change
- 5** Strategic options
- 6** Strategic planning for the project period (theory of action)
- 7** Monitoring, evaluation and learning framework and process

CORE COMPONENTS OF A TOC PROCESS AND PRODUCT

1. What is the desired change, why and for whom?
2. Analysis of the system and the current situation:
 - context analysis: social, political, economic, ecological and other dimensions
 - stakeholder and actor analysis
 - power and gender dynamics, drivers of change, opportunities for change
3. Mapping pathways of change:
 - Who and what needs to change in order to realise the longer-term desired change?
 - How do we think the change process might evolve from where we are now?
4. The assumptions underlying our theory of change:
 - What do we assume about the needs, interests and behaviour of stakeholders and other key actors?
 - What do we assume about cause-effect relations in the logic of the change pathways?
5. Strategic options:
 - What is the best way for the organisation or project to contribute, what should its role be? (position, capacity, added value)
 - What do others do? Is there a need and opportunities for multi-actor collaboration?
6. Strategic planning for the project period (theory of action)
7. Monitoring, evaluation and learning framework and process:
 - How to document the change process?
 - What to monitor and how?
 - Learning agenda
 - When and how to revisit the ToC and reflect on what works?

THEORY OF CHANGE LEVELS

Macro theories of change
(development
perspectives and thinking
that influence us)

Sector or target group
theories of change

Organizational theories of
change

Project or programme
theories of change

THEORIES OF CHANGE @ DIFFERENT LEVELS



Figure 1:

Different levels at which a ToC process can be aimed

Reference: HIVOS

THEORIES OF CHANGE AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

Policy domain or thematic level

- Why is this theme or policy area critical?
- What kinds of people should benefit?
- What do we consider to be the main drivers and obstacles of change?
- What are the strategies we consider most effective for making progress on these themes and why?

Program or project level

- Derived from the ToC of the related (thematic) policy domain, but is made context-specific.
- It is based on the outcomes of a sound analysis of the current context, actors, opportunities, as well as the objectives and priorities (of donor)
- Usually called a ToC at this level a "Theory of Action"

One way of understanding the concept of levels in ToC is to look at the actors and targets of the intended change process

1

Individuals:

involves strategies that shift attitudes and perceptions, feelings, behaviours and motivations of participants in an intervention

2

Relationships:

networks, coalitions, alliances and cooperative relationships

3

Structural, institutional and systemic:

the primary focus for some conflict intervention program

THE ROLE OF KEY CONCEPTS IN THEORY OF CHANGE


- How terms (theory, assumption, hypothesis) are understood may change the way in which ToC is approached.
- Thus, the role of the terms 'assumptions' and 'evidence' was identified as in need of deeper analysis.
- ToC requires an engagement with wider social science theory and research-based evidence.
- Such work is ultimately an attempt to describe and understand how change happens in the world.
- This is central to those practitioners engaging with ToC

ASSUMPTIONS

- Assumptions are often referred to as the necessary conditions for change, or the underlying conditions or resources that need to exist for planned change to occur.
- Identifying and questioning assumptions is generally seen as central to the process of articulating a ToC.
- It is impossible to decide which of all possible beliefs and assumptions will be critical to success.
- If good knowledge is already available on a particular point, then we can change its label from 'hypothesis' or 'assumption' to something closer to 'fact' and move along.
- Assessing the plausibility of an assumption, either using strong theory or good evidence, remains a key challenge

EVIDENCE

Evidence is information that helps to turn strategic priorities into concrete, manageable and achievable plans.



- Clearly one way of making ToCs more robust is to link them to evidence, yet only a minority of the literature reviewed had an in-depth discussion of the use of evidence in ToCs.
- Indeed, the relationship between evidence, research findings, policy and practice has become a matter of lively debate.
 - When does a research finding constitute evidence?
 - Can other forms of evidence (such as the views of end users) be used as evidence?
 - Under what circumstances can evidence inform policy?
- Evidence base would consist of a combination of quantitative and qualitative data focused on testing and proving a plausible theory of change

Validity of assumptions, evidence and risk analysis

A risk analysis is useful in terms of knowing which assumptions are most critical to monitor

ASSUMPTIONS AND RISK ANALYSIS

RISK OF ASSUMPTION BEING INVALID	MILD CONSEQUENCES	SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES
Low likelihood of being invalid <i>(probably will prove to be true)</i>	Don't worry	Can consequences be mitigated?
High likelihood of being invalid <i>(probably will prove not to be true)</i>	Can risk be reduced?	Watch out! High risk - rethink design

Figure 2:
Risk analysis matrix

SOCIAL SCIENCE THEORY

- Social science theory may be useful in contextualising and understanding the evidencebase used for a ToC.
- The traditions of social science theory may be useful to clarify key points in theory of change thinking.
 - ex. political economy, rights-based approaches, innovation theory and power analysis
- Knowing about and incorporating existing social science theories into our strategies can sharpen our thinking, provide new ways of looking at the policy world, and ultimately improve our theories of change.

MOVING FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

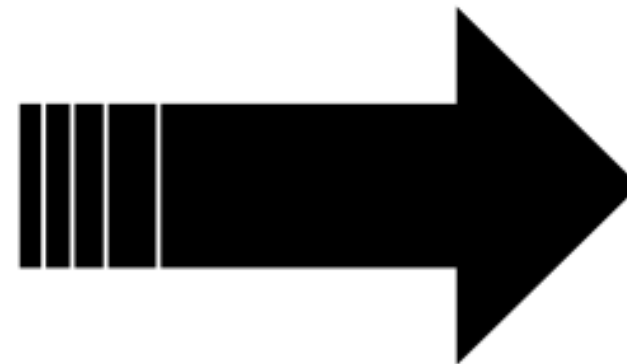
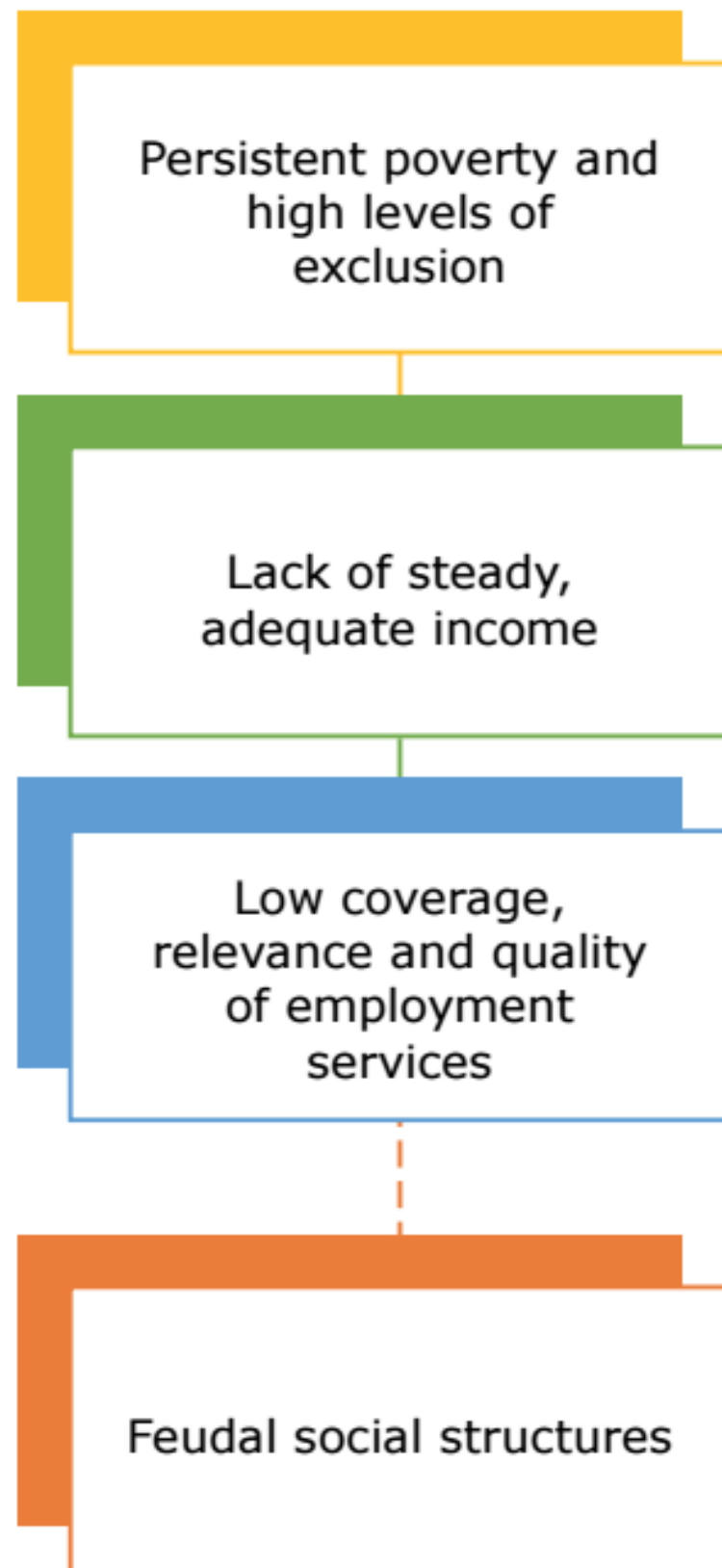


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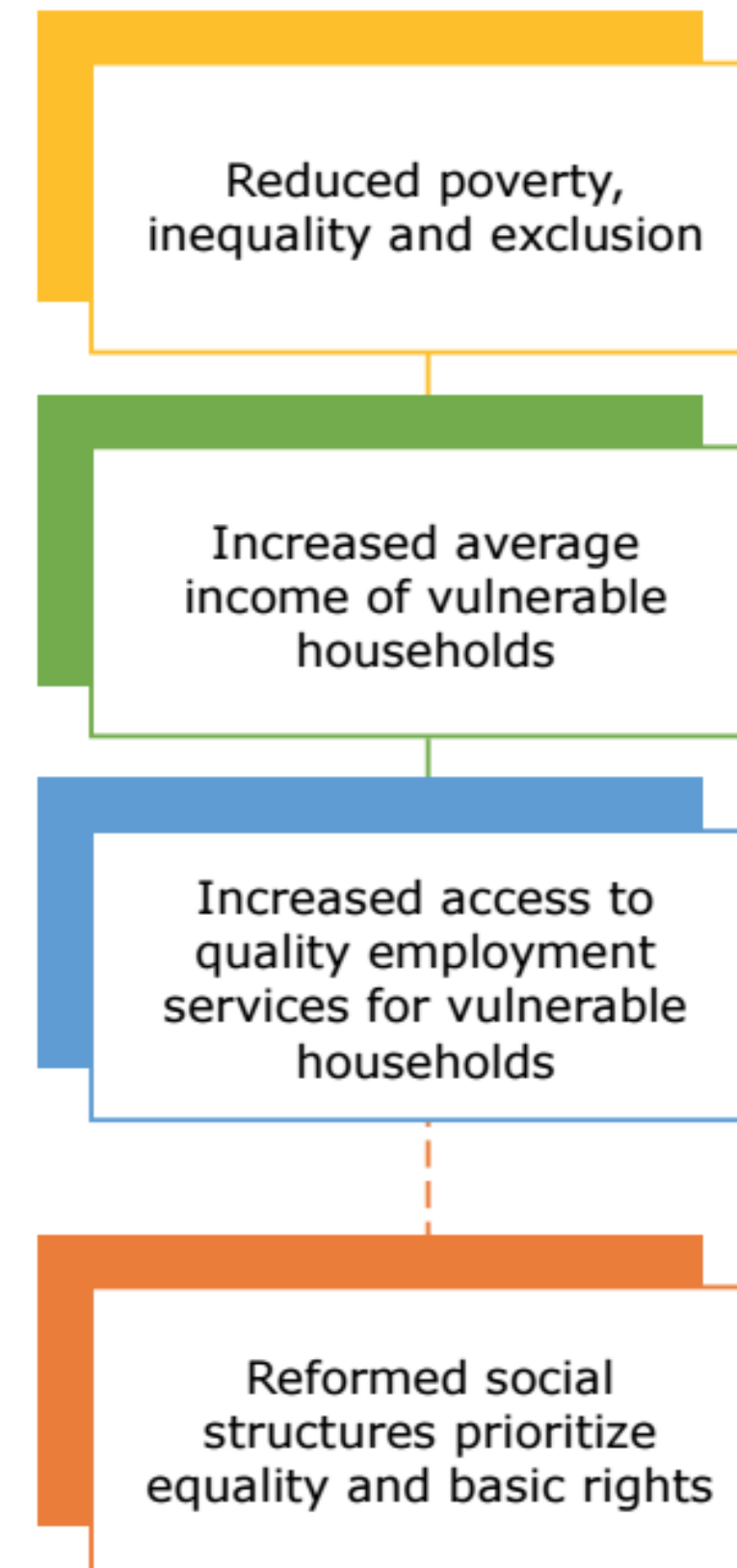
Turning a branch of a problem tree into a solution tree

Reference: UNDG-UNDAF

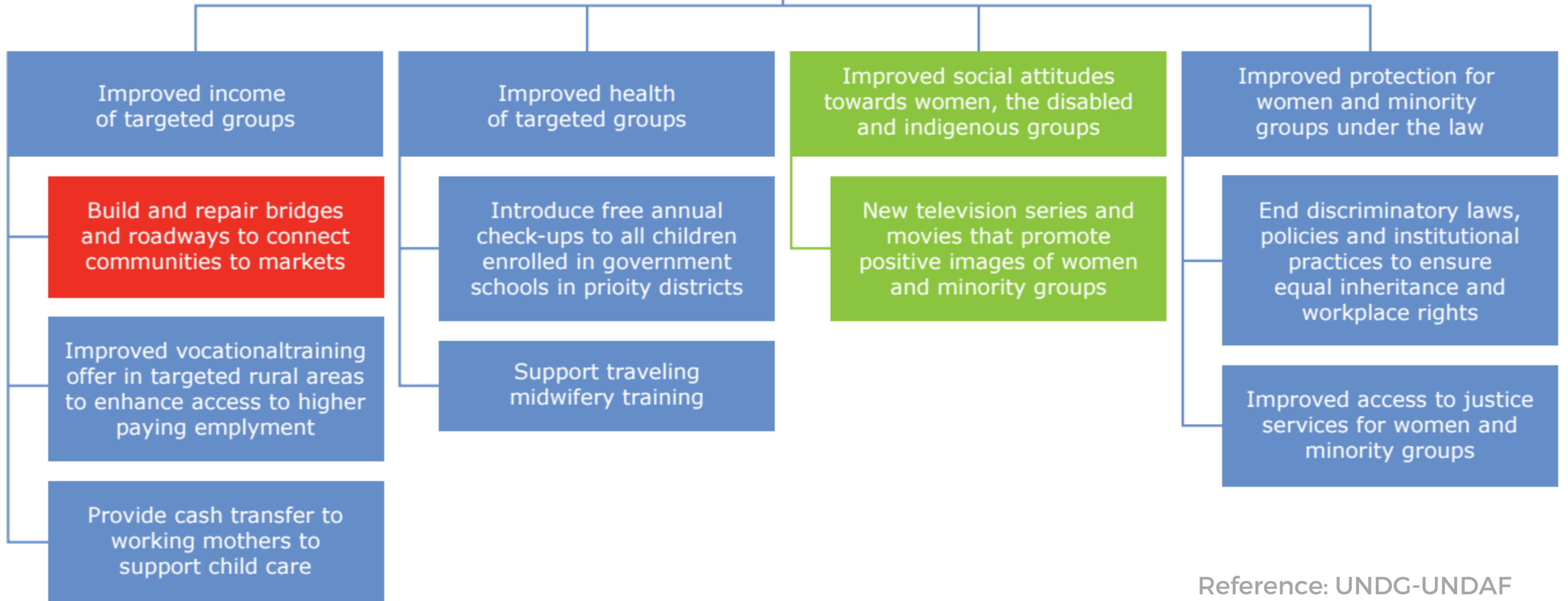
Problem



Solution



Reduced inequalities for women,
the disabled and indigenous groups



Reference: UNDG-UNDAF