I. Introduction

A theory of change (ToC) is a system of ideas intended to explain **how we think change happens** or will happen in the area we want to address, and **how we intend to work to influence these changes**. It can be a powerful approach to support programmatic and organisational learning and adaptation processes.

ToC locates a project/programme within a broader 'bigger picture' analysis of how development happens, **acknowledges that change is complex** and rarely, if ever, linear and considers all the factors necessary for it to come about.

It is an **ongoing process of reflection and a framework** through which we continually explore the change(s) happening, whether it is actually happening as we thought and why, and what this means for the role we are playing and difference we are making in that context. It helps us **surface our beliefs** about how people behave or organisations or political systems work, etc., and who and what (groups, structures, systems, relationships, processes) needs to change.

A very useful background introduction to the evolution of ToC thinking in the sector is available here.[1] It describes how 'theory of change' is now used in different ways to refer to an approach, discourse, and management tool. CAFOD is focused on its use as an **approach**. The paper also suggests four key principles of a ToC approach: **1. focus on process, 2. prioritise learning, 3. be locally led, and 4. 'think compass, not map'. As a fifth, we would add 5. 'be political'** – in the sense that it is vital to include consideration of all the different stakeholders in the context, and their potential incentives, blockers and contributions to the change being sought.

ToC is **highly flexible** and can be used to support holistic strategy and planning at different levels: country (CSP), thematic, programme framework or project levels or at organisational level e.g. for capacity strengthening. ToC is a useful starting point for many other key aspects of programme design, including context/situation analysis, stakeholder analysis, options appraisal, risk analysis, etc.

ToC is a continuous and adaptive process of reflection, and not a static output in itself. The conversations you will have during the process will be of the greatest value. However, it is important to capture the results of your thinking to share with others, and to revisit in future. This is often represented as a diagram with an accompanying narrative summary. There is no standard format for developing a ToC and you should come up with one that works for you. However, the more visual and easy for different stakeholder audiences to understand, the more useful it is likely to be.

Tip: Think of developing a theory of change as starting off on a journey armed with a compass but not a map, **knowing the destination** but not exactly how to get there, and setting off in the general direction with a clear understanding of some of the **key landmarks/ milestones** which you will need to see on the way to confirm you are on the right path.

Developing a ToC has two key stages:

Stage 1: Analyse the context, understand how change happens, and your role in this

Stage 2: Develop your programme impact pathway(s), and surface your assumptions

A subsequent third stage, ongoing during implementation, is monitoring the evidence of change and using it to critically reflect on and evaluate your change pathways.

[1] Valters, C. (2015): Theories of Change: Time for a radical approach to learning in development, ODI, London.

One tried and tested method which has proved useful within CAFOD has been to develop an initial ToC as a structured conversation in a workshop format. This workshop guidance on "Developing a Theory of Change" will achieve Stages 1 and 2 above, and will help plan for Stage 3, which can be achieved during programme implementation and evaluation.

Please note, during some ToC workshops, certain levels of ToC (especially impact and potentially (ultimate) outcomes) will already be determined in a CSP. However, it is still a useful exercise to think through the impact pathways and surface any further assumptions. These guidance notes will need to be adapted if this is the case for you.

Positive experiences of using a ToC approach within CAFOD, and with partners, include:

- Developing a shared vision with multiple partners for an enterprise development programme in Honduras and Nicaragua;
- Reflection and adaptation during the development of the Sri Lanka CSP, through which the emerging priority themes of governance and reconciliation became clear, including rationalisation of the existing partner portfolio;
- Evidencing the added value of flexible strategic funding in supporting our programmatic working and organisational development priorities.

Principles to Enable a Productive Process

- Interact with other stakeholders wherever possible throughout the process to generate and include a range of perspectives, and to sense-check assumptions. Diverse perspectives, including representatives of different levels of organisational 'hierarchy' in CAFOD and partners, adds significant value to the process
- Keep an open mind – be willing to be challenged and change your thinking
- Maintain a safe context to be open
- Allow time to think creatively
- Be self-aware - of your own views and preferences or biases
- Ensure wide consultation, communication and acceptance – participatory approaches will be much more meaningful than more academic exercises.

A Quick Guide to the Levels of Theory of Change

The number of levels should be adapted according to the complexity, scale and stage of the context/issue.

Outcomes are CHANGES in state resulting from the delivery of outputs, during or soon after a programme or project period, including any unintended changes. They will be fundamentally changed political, economic and social relationships, structures and situations. Behaviour change is also an outcome. Changes should be attributable to CAFOD and partner efforts to some extent, directly or indirectly.

Intermediate outcomes are interim changes in groups, structures, processes, relationships and systems which are necessary to achieve the (ultimate) outcome. These changes are likely to be expressed at many different levels (partners, communities, sub-groups within communities, duty bearers, other CSOs, Church structures, etc.). Changes should be attributable to CAFOD and partner efforts to a significant extent, directly or indirectly.

Outputs are the results (products or services, tangible or intangible) achieved directly from the implementation of project activities, using the resources (inputs) available. Outputs are directly attributable to CAFOD where we have implemented activities, or to partners (they are largely within the management control of CAFOD or partners when implementing a project, though not entirely: outputs might also be affected by others, e.g. by participants in the target population, or involvement of other actors, e.g. government, private sector or other civil society organisations).

Assumptions are conditions which need to be in place before you can move from one level to another: for activities to be able to achieve their planned outputs,

and outputs to achieve their expected (intermediate and ultimate) outcomes/impact. These could include factors that are currently taken for granted, accepted as true or considered as highly likely/certain to happen in relation to, for instance:

- causality e.g. hygiene education will lead to improved handwashing practices, training in agroecology leads to improved production practices, more and better information leads to improved decision-making
- programme implementation e.g. outreach workers will go to the most remote communities
- external factors e.g. security conditions in programme areas will be stable.

II. Workshop Preparation

Allow at a minimum two facilitated half-day workshops to develop your initial ToC (Stages 1 and 2), although a **full day for each of the two stages** is ideal to allow for fuller and richer discussion. If time constraints mean an abbreviated process is all that is possible, then advance sharing and reading of any key background documentation, e.g. context analysis, by all participants is of huge benefit in accelerating the process.

A short break between the two workshops will allow time for write-up and further reflection. If two half-day sessions aren't feasible, please see the note on strategic break points in order to aid facilitation of further sessions.

For subsequent follow-up, ToC reflection, and revision sessions (Stage 3) during implementation, allow another half-day to allow sufficient time for the review of key sources of evidence. Workshops will be kept this short if participants come well prepared having read key background documents in advance.

Workshop Inputs

These may include:

- Key programme (and partner) staff – managers and field staff
- CSP + annual reflection notes
- Internal context analysis, inc. needs analysis
- External context analysis, inc. vulnerability analysis, power analysis, etc.
- Lessons learned and recommendations from previous projects
- CAFOD thematic frameworks and theories of change
- Community feedback, stakeholder feedback
- Research and evaluations, etc.

Workshop Materials

- Flipchart paper (or column headlines (input, output, outcome, etc.) – flipchart paper can be too small in some cases)
- Note cards of different size/colours
    - If possible, its useful to have cut outs of people-shaped note cards (representative of stakeholders)
- Marker pens of different colours
- Blue tack

Workshop Set-up

Five pieces of flipchart paper tacked together (portrait format), and to a wall or table. On each piece, a different heading should be written: inputs, outputs, intermediate outcomes, outcomes and impact. The first step is a reflection process on 'how things are now' which will produce key points which should be displayed for reference for the remainder of the workshop.

It is also extremely useful to have an experienced programme officer/manager or partner staff member **co-facilitating the workshop**. He/she can help 'ground' the discussion by having a nuanced view of both the partners' context and CAFOD's ways of working. It also makes the logistics easier, sharing/splitting roles of facilitating group discussion, note taking/documenting, clustering, etc.

As you read through this guidance when planning your workshop, consider the group dynamics/formats which work best for each activity in your context, e.g. small groups or main group plenary. Also think about how you can mix up group composition to best ensure a diversity of perspectives, experience and knowledge in each group.

III. Suggested Workshop Structure

The following set of activities have been used in prior CAFOD ToC workshops. However, please feel free to adapt the structure/format should you need to do so.

Workshop Day 1 – Stage 1: Analyse the context, understand how change happens, and your role in this

Activity 1.1: Introduce Theory of Change

Purpose of this activity: To presentation the key elements of the ToC approach

TIME REQUIRED: 30 minutes

This initial activity will set the scene for staff and partners who may not already be familiar with ToC, addressing what it is and why we use it. You will introduce partners to the ToC terminology and levels of change (see Tip below). It may help to show/present a relevant existing CAFOD country/SCP or thematic ToC and discuss the pathways to change. It is important to adapt your explanation of ToC to the partners' needs, circumstances, and area of work. Factor in a few minutes for a quick Q&A session.

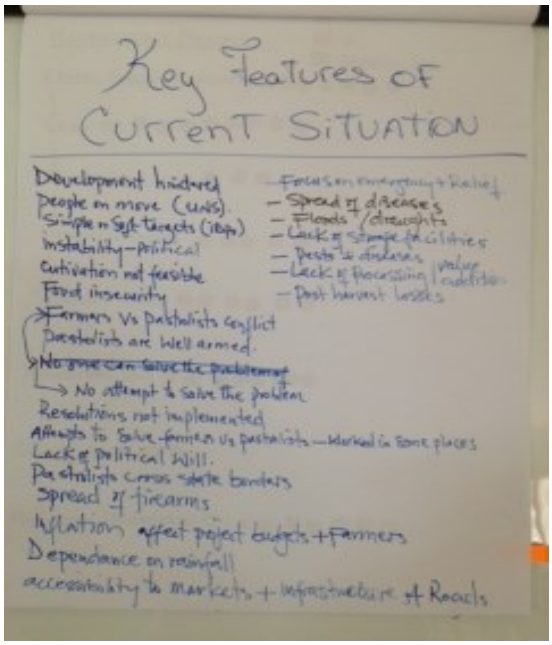
Tip: It is helpful to attribute a symbol to each level to explain the progression of change. This symbol should be relevant to the subject. For example, it has been particularly helpful to illustrate the process of change for livelihoods projects in the following way – with pictures:

- SEED (Input)
- SPROUTING SEED (Output)
- TREELING (Intermediary Outcome)
- TREES WITH FRUIT (Outcome)
- INCOME FROM HAVING A BASKET OF FRUIT TO SELL (Impact)

Activity 1.2: Consider the 'Status Quo'

Purpose of this activity: To discuss and achieve a broad shared understanding of how things are now, and why

TIME REQUIRED: 1.5 hours



This conversation identifies where partners are now and helps identify the key features of the current situation. As a group or in small groups (assigned different topical areas – such as political, economic, sociocultural, ecological/environmental, legal, etc), brainstorm the key features of the current situation.

Then, consider and identify different key stakeholder groups, both currently and which could be more involved. For each, consider the main incentives which serve to keep things as they currently are, and possible motivational factors for change.

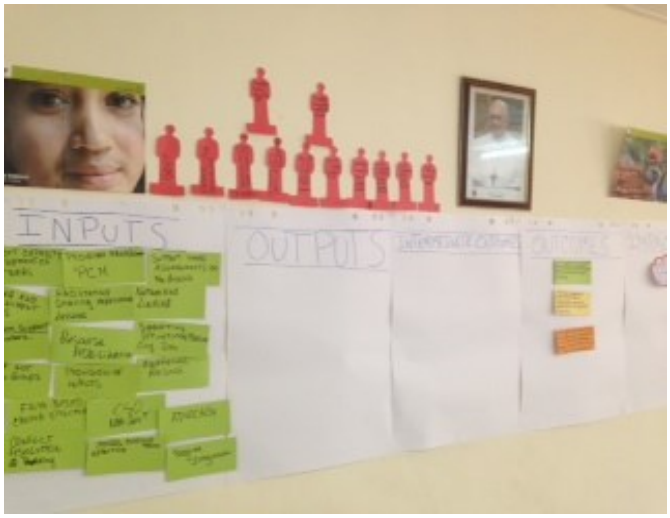
Tip: Use the people-shaped notecards here to identify stakeholders as they emerge in the discussion.

After, in plenary, capture the main bullets on a piece of flipchart, which can be displayed for reference for the remainder of the workshop.

Activity 1.3: Identify your Inputs

Purpose of this activity: To discuss and achieve a broad shared understanding of the resources and assets we bring with us to this equation.

TIME REQUIRED: 30 minutes



After identifying the status quo, a discussion – in plenary - on available inputs will help ground the next few activities in the reality of partners' circumstances and availability of resources. Inputs are all the resources, in whatever form, at your disposal and which can be drawn on for this project/programme, etc. These could include:

- Advocacy accompaniment
- Research and research partnerships
- Capacity-building and technical support
- CAFOD and partner staff expertise
- Established partnerships
- Church structures
- Tools, guidance and M&E approaches
- Relationships with duty-bearers
- Community knowledge and vision
- CGF and institutional donor income

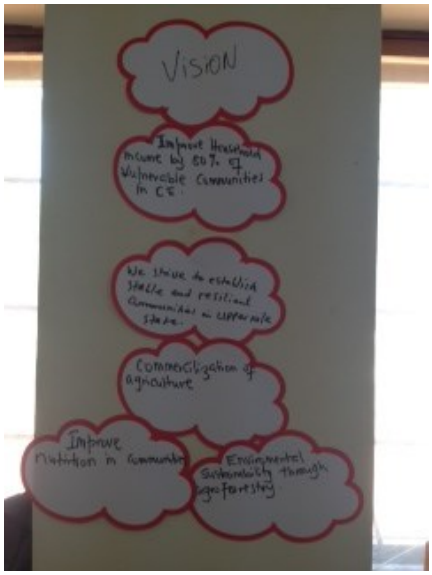
In plenary, brainstorm all possible inputs. Write each on separate notecards, and place in the inputs column.

Further additions can be made at any point during the ongoing ToC discussion.

Activity 1.4: Identify your Desired Impact(s)

Purpose of this activity: To discuss and achieve a broad shared overall vision for the change(s) we ultimately seek - If all issues and their underlying causes were successfully addressed, what would this look like?

TIME REQUIRED: 30 minutes



Once project inputs have been identified, the discussion can move on to our desired impact(s). Partners will probably already have identified this, e.g. the ultimate impact of their programme, often articulated at the community level. Examples might include:

- Women and men are able to influence the systems, resources and decisions affecting their livelihoods
- Communities are healthy and thriving, self-sustained and self-reliant

Tip: One way of creating a shared positive vision is by encouraging partners to imagine a newspaper headline in 10 years' time, which would reflect the main change they would like *and be proud* to see. The headline should answer the question "what does success look like?" The visioning exercise can be done in small groups, and then in plenary the facilitator can help merge visions to reach consensus on a shared impact(s).

It is useful here to engage in a visioning exercise, so that partners can easily see the links between their vision and the ToC impact.

Write the final shared impact on a notecard (or each one on a separate notecard if more than one) and place under the impact column.

Activity 1.5: Getting from Inputs to Impact (backwards)
Purpose of this activity: To discuss and achieve a broad shared understanding of what and who needs to change, for whom, and how?
TIME REQUIRED: 2-3 hours

In this activity, it can be helpful to **work backwards from impact towards inputs** rather than vice versa. This is to ensure that the outputs identified are relevant and consistent with the ultimate impact and supporting outcomes, and avoid potential bias towards particular activities which might be more familiar or comfortable from previous experience but not necessarily what is most suitable for the change being sought.

Tip: Remind partners to:
- Identify and include internal changes which are needed within CAFOD and our partners and link this to capacity development statements, and to
- Consider the different stakeholders one by one and explore what needs to change within and for them.

During this activity, partners will surface key things that need to change without trying to define or categorise them (as outputs, outcomes, etc.) yet. This activity can be done in plenary or in small groups. Partners should write down one idea per notecard.

After the initial brainstorming, come back together as a group (if working in small groups). Read the change statements out one by one, then sort and place the notecards on the flipchart paper under the relevant headings as appropriate.
The facilitator should cluster notecards with related ideas together in broad key themes. Continue to map the notecards to the different levels of output, intermediate outcome, and outcome, and as more ideas arise during this discussion and are added on, others should be moved to different levels.

Tip: At the end of Day 1, it may be useful review the clusters identified in the previous session with the PO/PM. Continue to group the notecards by theme/area and start to organise the charts logically, to set up the group for Activity One on Day 2 of the workshop.

Surfacing different understandings and points of view in the group is healthy and different perspectives should be encouraged and explored to help come to a common understanding of the issue, and possible ideas or options.

Workshop Day 2 – Stage 2: Develop your programme impact pathway(s), and surface your assumptions

Activity 2.1: Identify our Impact Pathways
Purpose of this activity: To discuss and achieve a broad shared understanding of how identified changes at the different levels are linked in the context we are working.
TIME REQUIRED: 1-1.5 hours

Start Day 2 of the workshop by reviewing the work from Day 1 of the workshop with the group. Show partners how ideas have been grouped and get consensus on the current state of the ToC columns.

Then, as a group, start to draw arrows between:
- all the inputs which support the different outputs (if relevant - if all the inputs support all the outputs one overall arrow is sufficient)
- all the outputs which support the different intermediate outcomes (this should be more specific than input to output)

- all the intermediate outcomes which support the different (ultimate) outcomes.

Tip: Most note cards are likely to have more than one arrow pointing from or to them.

Activity 2.1: Review Underlying Assumptions

Purpose of this activity: To discuss and achieve a broad shared understanding of the conditions which need to be in place to enable/deliver change when moving between different levels.

TIME REQUIRED: 2 hours

Discuss with the group why it is important to surface and document assumptions. They are risks which need to be monitored. These could include factors that are currently taken for granted, accepted as true or as certain to happen in relation to, for instance, causality, programme implementation and external factors (see examples of page 3).

Tip: If the language of 'assumptions' is not helpful, the following questions might be used to draw out the thinking in a different way:

- What conditions need to exist for this link to be valid/possible? What is the least that needs to be in place to be able to move from this level to the next?
- What are the 'success' factors which directly underpin progress between these levels?
- What are the missing links for us to get from A to B?
- What are the key internal/external factors which together are sufficient for the [link] to occur from this starting point?
- We need to build a bridge between these levels. The [outputs/intermediate outcomes] are on one side of a river and the [intermediate outcomes/outcomes] way over on the other side. What are the key 'planks' which have to be in place to build a solid bridge?

Tip 2: A risk register can be populated through this activity, as **assumptions are risks.** Assumptions are subject to change and should be regularly monitored and actively managed during implementation.

Ask the group to consider the underlying assumptions between the impact pathways. If existing notecards are actually assumptions, mark them with an "A" or rewrite them on notecards of a separate colour. Place them and any new assumptions that the group identifies in 'parking spaces' at the join between the right levels of flipchart.

Look at the assumptions between the different levels. As a group, assess:

- Have all assumptions been comprehensively captured? If so, make a balanced assessment of what they represent together as a whole.
- If there are too many assumptions or they seem unrealistic, can the inputs realistically contribute to reaching the outcomes/intermediate outcomes? For example, if you have a budget of £100,000, but multiple key factors would have to be in place to reach the next level of change, is your approach still feasible with this amount of resource?
- Are there any further outputs (and supporting activities) within our control or influence which *can* be incorporated into the approach to bolster the probability of key conditions (assumptions) being in place, or the sustainability of outcomes beyond the programme/project timeframe?

Acid test: Can your ToC be easily understood and summarised verbally by a wide range of stakeholders?

Activity 2.3: Testing your Logic

Purpose of this activity: To sense check our ToC so far, and identify any improvements.

TIME REQUIRED: 1-1.5 hours

For both the impact pathways and the assumptions, consider:

- Why did we think that 'x' will lead to 'y'? What makes us think that?

- What might hinder this from happening (e.g. costs, opposing views, lack of trust/capacity/technology, people losing assets, etc)?
- What are the gaps in our ToC? Are there any missing links (that we can influence)?
- Who else might need to be involved? Who else can we connect with who can aid in our progress towards our desired impact?
- Looking at the pathways again, are there better ways of getting to our goal?
- Are there things we are not sure or confident about?
- What if the assumptions don't hold true?
- Have we clearly identified what is and is not in control of the programme? And what CAFOD's role is in this?

Activity 2.4: Identifying Ongoing Sources of Evidence

Purpose of this activity: To prepare/plan for how the ToC will subsequently be reviewed

TIME REQUIRED: 30 minutes

Close the workshop by planning to revisit the ToC document in order to monitor progress and update the assumptions made (Stage 3 – see page 11). End Day 2 by identifying what monitoring information and sources of evidence you will collect throughout implementation to assess, understand and report what has been happening and why.

Engage the group with the idea of planning another half-day workshop to achieve subsequent Stage 3 (see section 'V. After the Workshop' to help guide your discussion here). Document how and when this will be done. At a minimum (and ideally more often), plan to revisit/review the ToC **at least once a year** as part of ongoing participatory monitoring or reflection workshops (NB. this will support foundational programming standards 9f 'monitoring must inform project and partner learning' and 21 'the project adapts on the basis of lessons learnt from monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanisms').

Activity 2.5: Conclusion/reflections for facilitators

TIME REQUIRED: 30 minutes

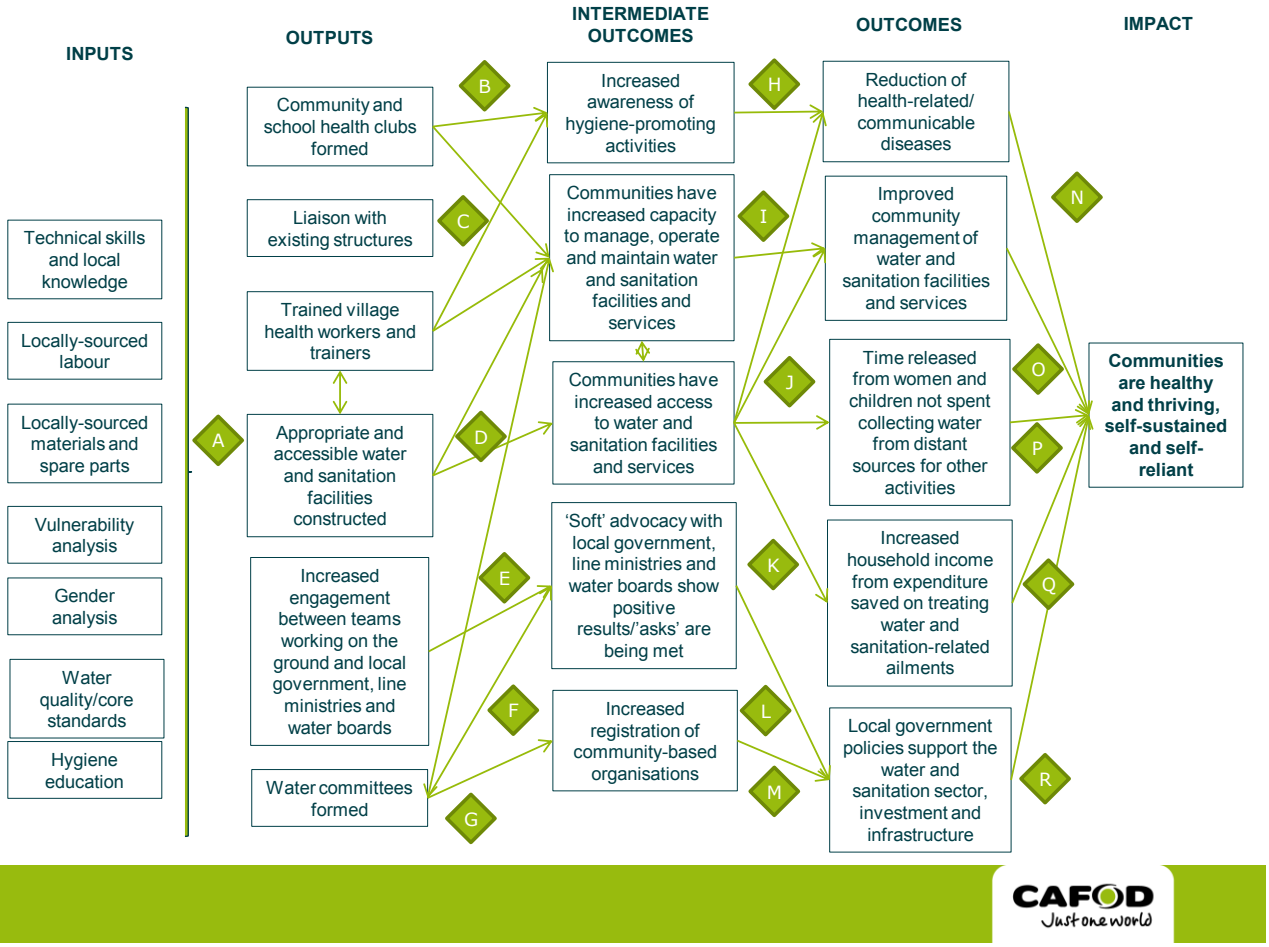
As a group, it may be useful to have the following conversations as you conclude the ToC workshop:

- What are the top priorities? How do we prioritise activities from a ToC?
- How does our programme ToC link with/fit into the CAFOD country/CSP or thematic ToC? If no country/CSP or thematic ToC exists at present, would this be useful?

Finally, decide how you and/or the partners will produce the final ToC 'product'. At this point in the discussion, there will be a mapped out ToC, but it will be physically displayed in the room, rather than jotted down on paper. It is important that someone document the outputs of the workshop – in a visual format which is useful for sharing with all participants -so that the ToC can be revisited at a later date.

Tip: After facilitating a ToC workshop, if you have practical suggestions or tips as to how this process or this guidance can be made more user-friendly, accessible or effective, please feed them back to the PCM Adviser for inclusion in future versions of this document.

One example of what a ToC written 'product can look like'



V. After the Workshop – subsequent Stage 3: Reviewing the ToC

Throughout implementation, it is important to monitor the progress of your project and assess that against the ToC. Consider plans to achieve the following:

- Continue to situate your ongoing analysis of progress in the bigger picture of change, not just against your own project plans.
- Think about any additional monitoring efforts required for those areas identified as least well understood and most uncertain/risky.
- Gather and analyse the sources of evidence to test and inform your ToC.
- Refer to sources relating to the external as well as internal (project) environment, where possible.
- Actively seek feedback on your ToC from key stakeholder groups.

At the end of your project cycle, it should be appropriate and feasible to critically reflect and adapt the ToC. To do this, partners should ask themselves:

- To what extent are the impact pathways still valid?
- Are we working with the right people, and in the right way?
- How do changes that we influence link to each other?
- To what extent have anticipated changes led to improvements in the lives of the people we seek to support?
- What do we understand better now?
- What additional/unintended impacts are we seeing?
- What needs to change in our understanding of how change happens and our impact pathways?
- What are these reflections telling us about CAFOD's stewardship of resources (human,

environmental, financial, knowledge/information)?

Key inputs to this may include:

- Key partner and programme staff – managers and field staff
- Existing theory of change
- Partner reports and feedback, monitoring trip reports, etc.
- Community feedback, stakeholder feedback
- Research and evaluations, etc.

In reflection/review workshops, pay special attention to those areas which were previously identified as **least well understood and most uncertain/risky**.

As you work through these questions and pull out key points from your sources of evidence, categorise them according to whether they generally seem to be validating elements of your previous thinking, or actually suggest something might be different or missing from the ToC. **Interrogate any apparently conflicting evidence** and if this cannot be resolved, flag it as an area for closer investigation and evidence-gathering during the next implementation period.

Tip: Keep old theory of change write-ups archived electronically with a date/version number system; this will show how your programme approach and thinking has evolved throughout implementation. The very first version can act as a baseline for reflection of how far things have come.

The different versions of your ToC will also be important inputs to any mid-term or final evaluation as evidence of ongoing relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. They can also inform the development of the evaluation framework for any review activity, by indicating important types of evidence.

VI. Further Reading

Useful tools and resources can be found here, here and here: