

Annex

Theory of Change Approach

The Theory of Change (ToC) is an approach to explain how results of programmes contribute to changes. The ToC is a structured reflection of the intervention logic for achieving the intended results of a programme or project. It explains the results framework and the results chain from inputs to output, to outcomes to impact, and states which assumptions and risks are seen to be crucial for whether the engagement will be successful or not. The ToC helps prepare the narrative that will underpin the result framework – explaining in clear and simple language the support to change and the rationale/justification for the engagement.

The theory of change approach is used as a tool to guide design, implementation and evaluation of the programmes. The theory of change approach will be applied to:

- Define what changes Denmark wants to support based on an analysis of the context, Denmark's comparative advantage and what role Denmark can play.
- Define a clear intervention logic describing the linkages between objectives and activities as well as define assumptions and risks for this to realistically be achieved.
- Define the results framework.
- Form a reference point for the implementation as the theory of change will have to be revisited at regular intervals during implementation to adjust implementation to be able to reach the desired results.
- Form the basis for the evaluation to identify attributions at the output level and contributions at outcome and impact levels.

The theory of change approach is not meant to be a huge and specialised exercise. It is only meant to be a structured way of establishing and explaining the intervention logic of the programme or project. To kick off the theory of change approach to programming, the following 7 questions can be used to guide the explanation of the intervention logic of the engagement, the results chain as well as the identification of assumptions and risks:

1. How will the desired situation or development (expressed in our objective) be different from the present one?
2. Which are the main changes that will need to take place in order for this shift to happen?
3. Who – or which developments or factors - are the most important drivers of these changes?
4. How will we contribute to the changes? Will we contribute to all of them? Are we a main contributor?
5. Why do we think that the changes will happen? Which are the main conditions for them to happen; which other processes will need to take place? Are they in place or taking place, or will they? Why do we think so?
6. Which are the main assumptions that will need to hold true for the changes to happen?
7. Which are the main risk factors that may prevent the changes from taking place, or delay them, reduce their significance, etc.?

The theory of change is first and foremost an approach to explain and maintain the rationale of a programme or project. It should be used as the core which connects the results framework, the assumptions and the risks. During implementation a major development in a risk scenario could for example make it relevant to revisit the theory of change to assess whether the rationale and the chain of results are still completely relevant or should be revised.

There is no template for the theory of change and as such no mandatory product. It is mandatory, however, to produce a very clear and simple narrative to explain the rationale for the programme or project, the overall results chain as well as the major assumptions and risks that are seen to be of major importance for achieving the objectives. For country programmes this is done for each of the thematic programmes.

The narrative is the “executive summary” of the theory of change. It explains the intervention logic, the key preconditions and implicit assumptions that determine the interventions and the expected results. It resembles and overlaps with the rationale/justification requested in the programme documentation.

The narrative should be short, preferable no more than one page. The narrative does not replace a description of activities, structure for programme management etc.

A product of the ToC process can be a graphical illustration of the thinking. However, most graphical ToCs are hard to understand. Therefore, a narrative is imperative for communicating the ToC.

Tips when drafting a narrative

- Start with the long-term goal of the programme/project
- Describe what needs to change (the preconditions/outputs you need to create) to reach the goal, test whether you give a reply to the 10 questions.
- Describe the logic in the chain of results. This can for example be done by constructing sentences using “so-that”.
- Articulate key assumptions and risks in the ToC.