

# HOW TO WORK WITH A THEORY OF CHANGE

FOR YOUTH & SEXUALITY  
**CHOICE**



**Guidelines**

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, more and more organizations, donors, and other actors in the development world have started working with a Theory of Change (ToC). However, while working with a ToC definitely has its advantages, it can also be very confusing – particularly the first time you’re working with a ToC. Therefore, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality has developed this guide to help you to understand and work with a ToC. If this is the first time you’re working with a ToC, or reading about it, it might be helpful to read the guide from start to finish. If you’ve worked with a ToC before, feel free to skip through to the relevant sections that you feel need more explanation.

The core parts of the guide are parts 3 ‘The ToC Product’ and 5 ‘The ToC Process’. While the ToC product flows from the ToC process, you might find it helpful to go back and forth. To clarify things, use the annexes as support. Annex 1 presents a list of concepts that you are likely to come across when you’re working with a ToC. Annex 2 presents some examples of visual ToC products. Looking at these examples while reading this guide can help increase your understanding of the material. Annex 1 includes a list of the most important concepts – so if you come across a concept that you find difficult to get to grips with, or are unsure about, this list might be helpful.

Chapter 6, 'Additional Reading: ToC vs. LogFrame' is added for those of you who have worked with a logframe before, and want to learn the differences between working with a logframe and a ToC.

For now, good luck – and if, after reading this guide, anything is still unclear, feel free to contact us!

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## 1. A THEORY OF CHANGE - WHY?

Nowadays, many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and other organizations work with a Theory of Change (ToC), both for their programs and for their organization in general. For these organizations and programs, a ToC serves as a framework for understanding how a certain desired (social) change is supposed to happen. Since working with a ToC is becoming increasingly common, it's important to understand what a ToC is, what are the terms used, and how you can work with it. Moreover, working with a ToC can really help you structure your programs and even your organization. It enables you to think about the reasons why you're doing certain activities, and whether they lead to the desired outcome. In a nutshell - working with a ToC can improve your work!

**Because working with a ToC is so important, CHOICE has developed this guide to help you!**

## 2. WHAT IS A THEORY OF CHANGE?

A Theory of Change (ToC) is the ideas and beliefs people have, consciously or not, about why and how the world and people change. A ToC is therefore guiding for all steps of thinking and action in a program, or in an organization. Before working with a ToC became the norm, many organizations and programs in the development sector worked with a Logframe (Logical Framework). If you have worked with a logframe before, you can find an explanation on how a ToC differs from a logframe in Chapter 6 as additional reading.

A useful definition of a ToC is provided by Patricia Rogers:<sup>1</sup>

**Every program is packed with beliefs, assumptions, and hypotheses about how change happens – about the way humans work, or organizations, or political systems. Theory of change is about articulating these many underlying assumptions about how change will happen in a program. (In: Review of the use of Theory of Change, in international development, Isabel Vogel, 2012).**

<sup>1</sup> Vogel, Isabel (2012) Review of the use of Theory of Change, in international development <sup>2</sup> Hivos (2015) Hivos ToC Guidelines: Theory of Change Thinking in Practice ([http://www.theoryofchange.nl/sites/default/files/resource/hivos\\_toc\\_guidelines\\_final\\_nov\\_2015.pdf](http://www.theoryofchange.nl/sites/default/files/resource/hivos_toc_guidelines_final_nov_2015.pdf))

When thinking about a ToC, it is useful to distinguish between three different things:

- **ToC way of thinking: the overall approach**
- **ToC process: the analysis that is done in creating a ToC**
- **ToC product: the result of the ToC Process<sup>2</sup>**

**While, as you can see, these 3 things are related, it is helpful to look at them separately:**

## **TOC WAY OF THINKING**

The ToC Way of Thinking is the overall approach of working with a ToC – and therefore encompasses both the ToC process and the ToC Product. It can be seen as a way of looking at the world, not taking social processes for granted, but continuously questioning them. By ‘social processes’ we mean all the situations in which people interact with each other, interactions that establish relationships and define their behavior. This means that you will question things you might consider to be very normal, for example:

- Why is it that a lot of girls in my country get married at the age of 16?
- Why do adults seldom take young people seriously, even when they have something important to say?
- Why is it acceptable for a man and a woman to be together in a romantic relationship, but not for two men or two women?

These are the type of questions that you may not ask every day. They’re also the type of questions that usually do not have just one answer. The ToC way of thinking builds on the idea that social processes, like the ones described above, are complex and unpredictable, and that different perspectives on such social processes may exist. Therefore, if you want to change a social process, some guidance is necessary. For example, if you want to do something about the position of young people in your country (you want adults to listen to your generation more often!), this may seem like an incredibly huge and difficult task. This is where the ToC comes in: The ToC is guiding in everything that is done (thinking, planning, action, understanding) when you (or an organization, or a group of organizations) want to tackle such a complex problem.

## **TOC PROCESS**

The ToC as a process can be seen as an ongoing learning cycle, related to a program or organization. During the ToC process, you will analyze the questions as mentioned above, try to look at the problem from different angles, and step by step, you will break down the problem that might have seemed too complex to handle at first. These steps are further explained in chapter 4. The ToC process will lead to the development of the ToC product. The process doesn’t stop there, however, but encompasses continuously revising the ToC.

<sup>2</sup> Hivos (2015) Hivos ToC Guidelines: Theory of Change Thinking in Practice ([http://www.theoryofchange.nl/sites/default/files/resource/hivos\\_toc\\_guidelines\\_final\\_nov\\_2015.pdf](http://www.theoryofchange.nl/sites/default/files/resource/hivos_toc_guidelines_final_nov_2015.pdf))

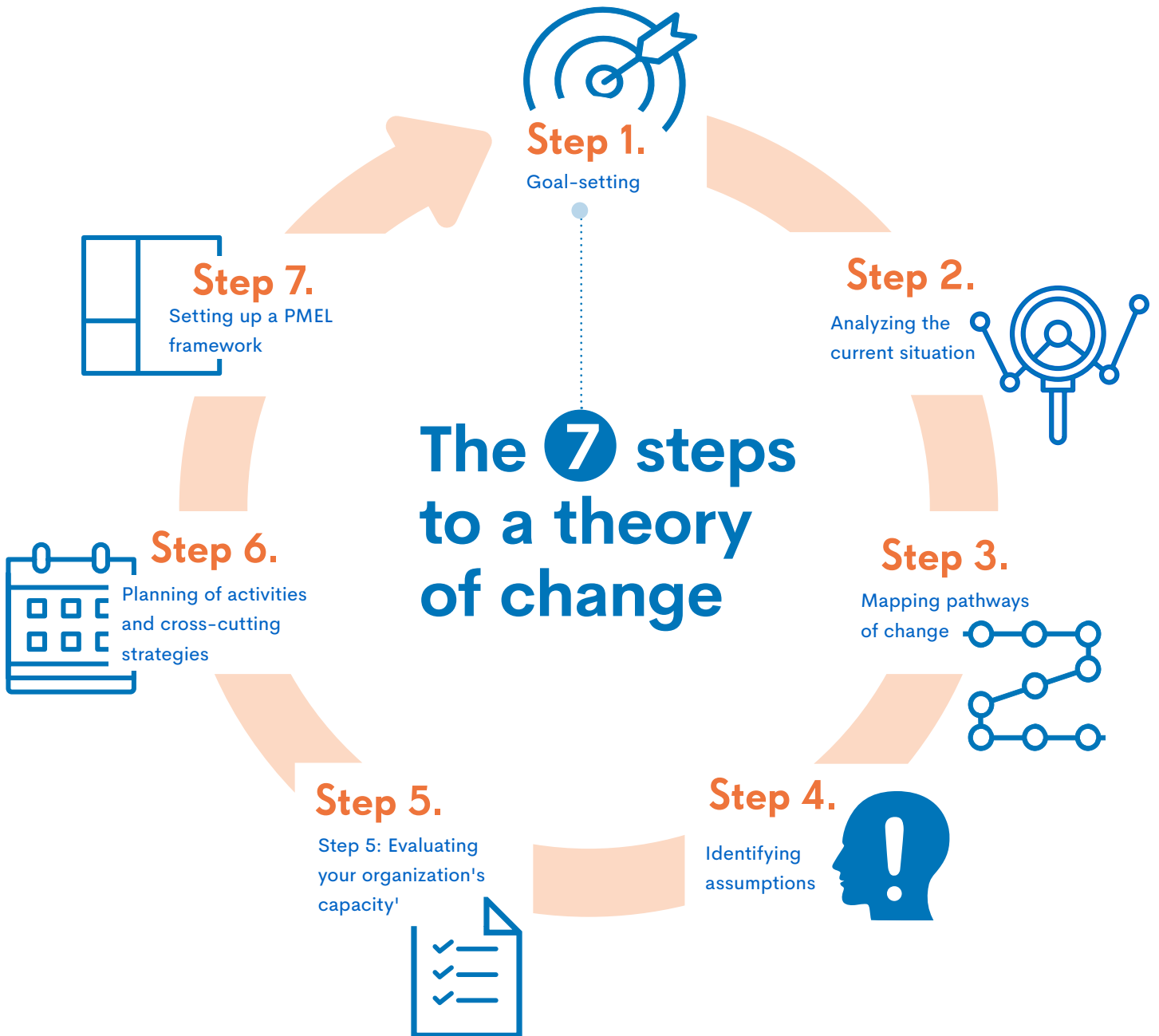


Figure 1: The 7 steps of the ToC process

## TOC PRODUCT

When people talk about a ToC, they often talk about the ToC product. 'Product' is a bit of an abstract name, but basically it comes down to a PDF or text document, which can be a drawing or a written story, or both. The ToC product is what comes out of the ToC process. As explained above, the TOC product is not static, but a living product that will change over time. The ToC product is used and adapted based on critical reflection within a program or organization. For example, if a far right-wing candidate wins the elections in your country, this will probably affect your ToC. Or, you simply found out that some of the activities you planned do not work the way you wanted them to. In this sense, a ToC is a bit like the scientific experiments you might have done at school; we are testing what causes (social) change. If we find that our activities are not having the impact we imagined, it's important to go back and adjust our ToC to reflect this. For this reason, ToCs are often described as 'fluid'; we can (and should) adjust our ToC as we advance. The ToC product and its different possible forms (narrative/visual) are further explained in chapter 3.

## 3. THE TOC PRODUCT

The ToC product is the outcome of the ToC process. While there's no fixed form, the ToC product is usually a combination of a complementary ToC visual and narrative. Although the ToC product follows on from the ToC process, it is easier to understand when you start by looking at the end product.

**The ToC visual** pictures the desired impact/goal of the organization/program, together with the different pathways of change. The visual shows the different steps of the pathways of change, how they relate to each other, as well as how they are interlinked. One example of a ToC visual, that of the Get Up, Speak Out – for youth rights (GUSO) program, is pictured below. In annex 2, more examples of ToC visuals are included. Different building blocks for ToC visuals are presented in table 2.

**The ToC narrative** complements the ToC visual, as it's not possible to visualize everything that will come up in the ToC process. At the same time, it's not possible to put everything in words – that's why the visual and the narrative are mostly used together. Table 2 indicates which of the building blocks are usually present in the narrative and which are usually present in the visual.

### **Example: ToC of the Get Up, Speak Out – for youth rights (GUSO) program**

*The Get Up Speak Out program (GUSO), works towards a society where all young people, especially girls and young women, are empowered to realize their SRHR in societies that are positive towards young people's sexuality. The GUSO program is a collaboration between six Dutch/UK organizations; Rutgers (lead organization), Aidsfonds, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, dance4life, Simavi, IPPF; and about 30 partner organizations. The program is implemented in two Asian countries (Indonesia and Pakistan) and in five African countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda), by in-country alliances.*



The GUSO ToC is used to explain the different building blocks that are usually part of ToC products. All the different building blocks are included in table 1. We say 'usually' because not every ToC will follow the same steps. Furthermore, you may also see different terms being used for the same steps (e.g. 'input' instead of 'resources'). While this may seem a bit confusing at first, the basic structure and concept of a ToC remains the same! Therefore, in most cases, you will be able to use this table to better understand a certain ToC – the steps used will, at least, be fairly similar.

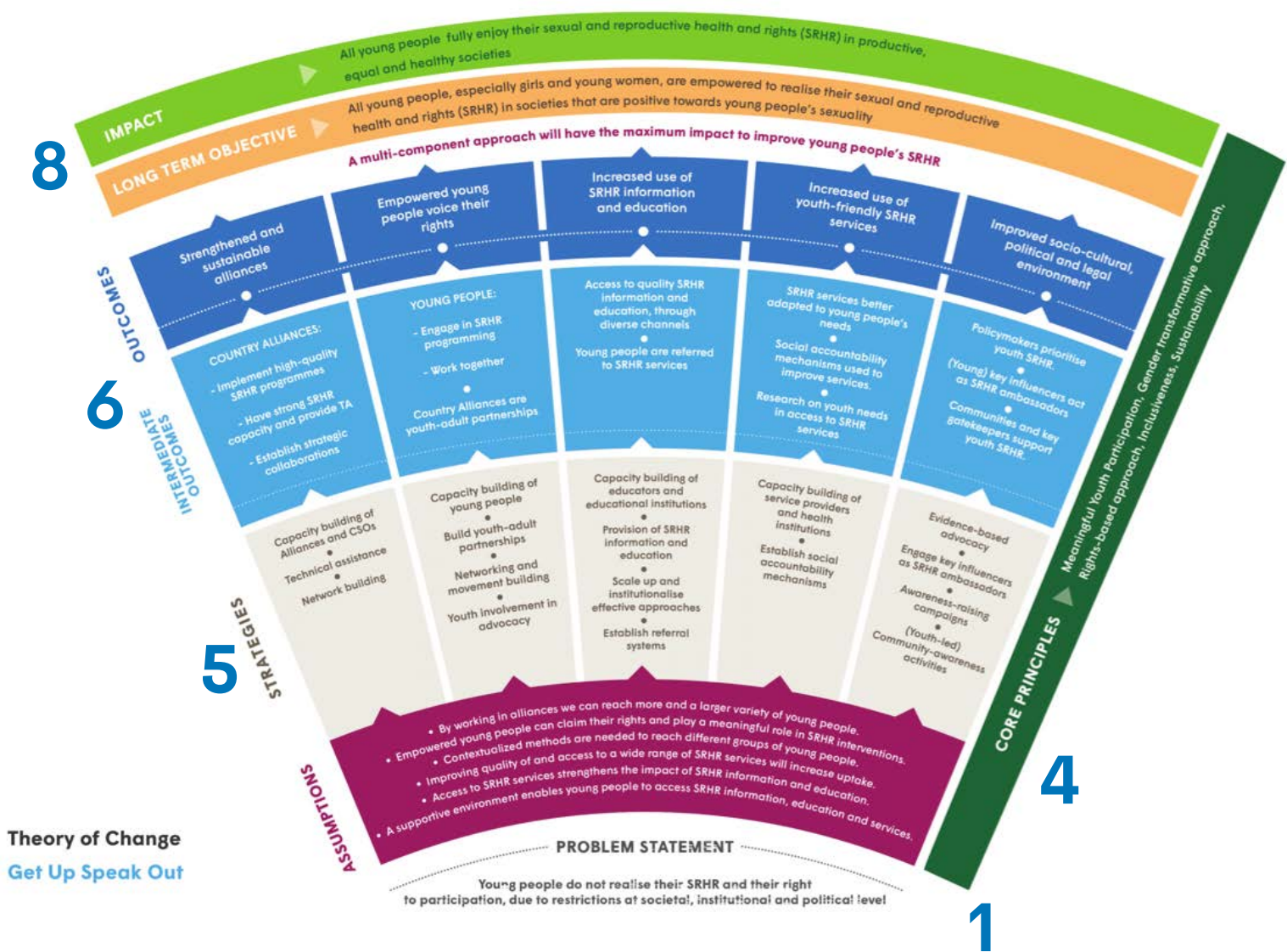


Figure 2: Theory of Change Visual of Get Up, Speak Out program

Table 1 works from the current situation (where you are now) to the desired situation (the ideal 'world' you want to achieve). In the GUSO ToC, you will need to start at the bottom ('problem statement') and read upwards (to 'impact'). As you can see in the GUSO ToC, a ToC has different pathways: different routes that contribute to getting from the current to the desired situation. All of these pathways are necessary, and are often connected to each other. For example, to improve young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), the GUSO program works on giving young people information on their SRHR, providing access to youth-friendly health services, and create an enabling environment (the three most right pathways).

In table 1, the following building blocks: resources (2), activities (3), outputs (5) and outcomes (6) are building blocks in different pathways, while the building blocks: current situation (1), cross-cutting strategies (4), accountability ceiling (7) and impact (8) are overarching for all of the ToC. All building blocks that can be seen in the GUSO ToC visual are indicated with numbers between brackets.

BUILDING BLOCKS	IN NARRATIVE OR VISUAL?	DESCRIPTION AND EXAMPLE
<b>1. Current situation (or: baseline, problem statement)</b>	ToC narrative or visual	<p>The current state of the issue you're working on.</p> <p><b>Example GUSO (1):</b> <i>Young people do not realize their SRHR and their right to participation, due to restrictions at societal, institutional, and political level.</i></p>
<b>2. Resources (or input)</b>	Included in the ToC narrative, or another option: in the work plan of the program.	<p>This is what you need to do the activities you have outlined - this usually includes financial resources, human resources, materials to use for activities, etc.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> <i>Not included in GUSO ToC visual, but include: funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, staff member working on GUSO in NL/UK and the seven different partner countries, teaching materials for peer educators to provide comprehensive sexuality education, etc.</i></p>
<b>3. Activities</b>	These can usually be found in the work plan of an organization or program.	<p>What the organization or program does to improve the current situation, to create change. Activities should be linked to the outputs (building block 5).</p> <p><b>Example:</b> <i>Not included in GUSO ToC visual, but activities in GUSO include: meetings with government officials to lobby for better access for young people to health services, peer educators delivering comprehensive sexuality education, training for health services providers on how to be more youth-friendly.</i></p>

BUILDING BLOCKS	IN NARRATIVE OR VISUAL?	DESCRIPTION AND EXAMPLE
<b>4. Cross-cutting strategies (or: core principles)</b>	In some cases, included in the visual, always included in the narrative.	<p>Values or strategies that you believe to be of utmost importance, that can therefore be seen as guiding the program/organization, and are integrated into all pathways of change.</p> <p><b>Example GUSO (4):</b> <i>GUSO has five core principles: meaningful youth participation, gender transformative approach, rights-based approach, inclusiveness, and sustainability.</i></p>
<b>5. Outputs (Sphere of Control)*</b>	Visual and narrative (narrative can include more explanation).	<p>Outputs are the direct impact of the activities that are being implemented (i.e. we believe the output(s) would not have occurred without these activities). Time wise, outputs directly follow activities.</p> <p><b>Example GUSO (5):</b> <i>Outputs are not included in the GUSO ToC Visual; but the strategies leading to the outputs are included. For example, the capacity of educators and service providers is built upon, which will lead to more capacitated educators and service providers with regards to SRHR.</i></p>
<b>6. Outcomes (Sphere of Influence)*</b>	Visual and narrative (narrative can include more explanation).	<p>Outcomes are the intended consequences of outputs, so outcomes will always come after outputs. Time wise, it is possible to differentiate between short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes.</p> <p><b>Example GUSO (6):</b> <i>The GUSO ToC visual contains both intermediate outcomes and outcomes. Included: young people are referred to SRHR services, policy makers prioritize youth SRHR (intermediate outcomes) and empowered young people voice their rights.</i></p>
<b>7. Accountability ceiling</b>	Visual, in most cases (usually as a dotted line). Narrative, in some cases.	<p>The accountability ceiling separates outcomes that an organization will monitor and take credit for, from those that are not within the organization's reach to influence (usually those that are outside the sphere of influence, and in the sphere of interest – see below). Outcomes/impact above the accountability ceiling are regarded as being influenced by too many external factors to be able to say that the organization or program has a direct influence on the outcome/impact.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> <i>The accountability ceiling is not included in the GUSO ToC visual. If it were included, it would be above the outcomes and below the long-term objective.</i></p>

## 8. Impact (Sphere of Interest)\*

Visual and narrative

The desired situation: the effect for society, not just coming from your organization/program, but something you're contributing to. Time wise, the impact will come after all the outcomes.

**Example GUSO (8):** *The desired impact of GUSO is 'All young people fully enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in productive, healthy, and equal societies'.*

### \*THE SPHERE OF CONTROL, SPHERE OF INFLUENCE AND SPHERE OF INTEREST

As you can see in table 1, outputs, outcome and impact are (sometimes) related to different 'spheres'. These different spheres help you understand how close you are to what the organization is doing, and how much influence you have – the sphere of control is really close to the organization, while the sphere of interest is 'far away', meaning: many other factors also play a role, so it becomes increasingly difficult to establish what the impact of your work is.

**Sphere of control (outputs)** – The sphere of control is literally 'controlled' by the organization: by performing activity X, you can be certain that Y will follow. For example, by organizing a sharing session about sexual health, you can be sure that the participants leave with the information you gave them.

**Sphere of influence (outcomes)** – As featured in table 2, the outcomes are the intended consequences of the outputs. While you might assume (based on your assumptions) that the outcomes will follow the outputs, this is in fact beyond your control. Other factors in society come into play here. For example, whether someone is using the information that is given to her/him in the sharing session, might also be influenced by other information that person is given.

**Sphere of interest (impact)** – Sometimes also called 'sphere of concern', the sphere of influence comprises the long-lasting, structural changes you want to achieve. However, since these are completely ingrained in society, it is impossible to trace what your specific influence on these changes is. For example, whether the information you gave in the sharing session ultimately led to improving young people's sexual health in the area you are working in, is hard to establish.

## 4. THE TOC PROCESS

We've already established that a ToC Way of Thinking implies that the world is complex (and social processes especially so). Therefore, the ToC process tries to understand social processes and how we think we can make changes to the world, without oversimplifying things. While this may sound like an incredibly difficult task, the different steps of the process should help you. Basically, during the process, you will be continually zooming in and out on the problem – looking at the bigger picture, then looking at specific steps needed to make (part of the) desired change happen, then looking at how these relate to the bigger picture again. Figure 2, illustrating the story of the six blind men and the elephant, shows the importance of continuing to zoom in and out: if we lose sight of the bigger picture, it's impossible to keep understanding what's going on – the elephant, in this case.

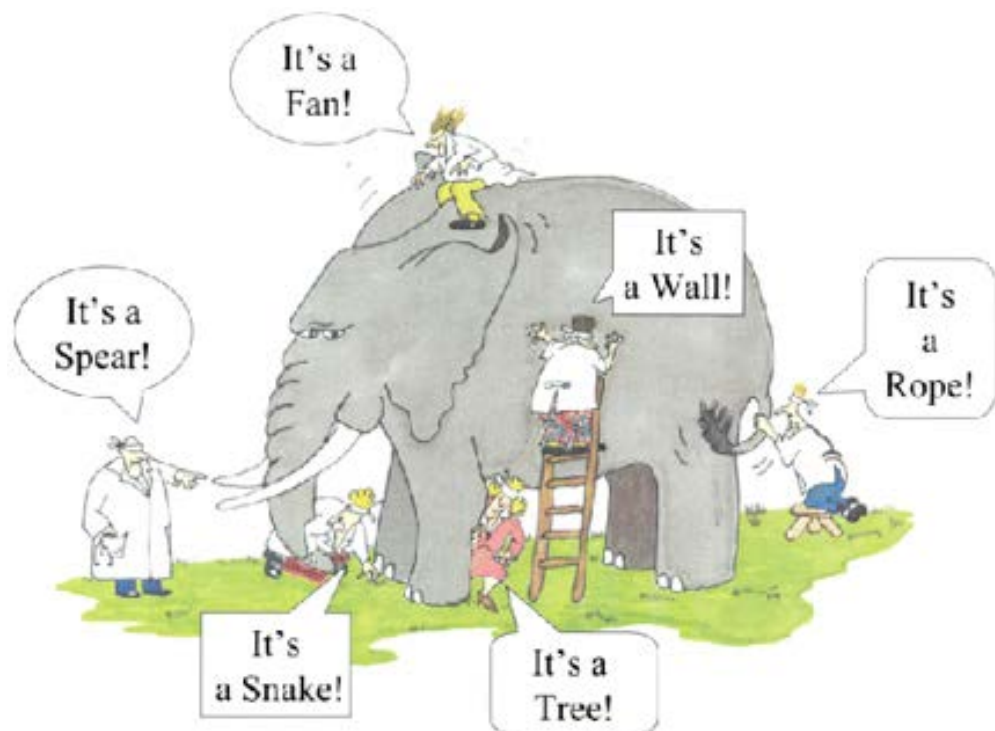


Figure 3: *The Six Blind Men and the Elephant.*<sup>3</sup>

It is useful to distinguish seven different steps in the ToC process (based on Hivos, 2015). To clarify the steps, a simplified example is used of a ToC process that relates to the GUSO program. In addition, a visual is presented for each step, highlighting the part of the ToC process being discussed.

It must be noted that this is an ideal situation, and that in reality, not all these steps are always taken. However, this doesn't mean that they are not important!

<sup>3</sup> Image adapted from Avatar Babaji Foundation, Must Read Story: 6 Blind Men and The Elephant, unknown author'

# STEP

# 1

## GOAL-SETTING: WHAT IS THE DESIRED CHANGE?

While we worked from the bottom up when describing the ToC product (with the current situation, or problem statement), in the ToC process you start at the top: first, you establish where it is you want to go to. If you see a ToC as a process of establishing how to get from A (the current situation) to B (the desired situation), you start by questioning what B exactly is. For an organization (and in some cases for a program too), this goal-setting will relate to the mission and vision of the organization (see Annex 1: List of Concepts). In this step, you will need to establish:

- What is the desired situation
- Why is change to the current situation desirable
- Who will benefit from the envisioned change (the beneficiaries of your ToC)

**Example GUSO:** *In an ideal world, all young people would be able to fully enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This is needed, because currently, lack of fulfilment of their SRHR hampers young people to fill their potential in many ways. If this were the case, all young people would benefit, but also broader society.*



Figure 4: Step 1: Establishing the goal of your organization.

### TIPS FOR THIS STEP:

- Dream big! At this stage, nothing is too crazy.
- Take some time to answer the ‘why’ question: why is it that you want to tackle this problem specifically?
- When thinking about beneficiaries, don’t stop at the obvious target group. For example, related to the GUSO program, benefits for young people will spill over to the rest of society too: if young people get healthier, everyone will benefit.

### INITIAL QUESTIONS TO GET YOUR THOUGHTS GOING:

- If I dream about the world in ten years, what would my ideal world look like?
- If I could tackle one problem in my country/city/neighborhood, what would it be?
- Why do I want to work on this problem, and not another one?



**WHEN THINKING ABOUT BENEFICIARIES, DON'T STOP AT THE OBVIOUS TARGET GROUP. FOR EXAMPLE, RELATED TO THE GUSO PROGRAM, BENEFITS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WILL SPILL OVER TO THE REST OF SOCIETY TOO: IF YOUNG PEOPLE GET HEALTHIER, EVERYONE WILL BENEFIT.**



# STEP

# 2

## ANALYZING THE CURRENT SITUATION AND THE SOCIAL PROCESSES YOU'RE WORKING WITH

In step 1, you established where to go (B). Now, in step 2, you will establish from where you are leaving (A). While this may seem contradictory, this order of working is crucial in a ToC Way of Thinking. The reason for working this way? A ToC process is all about 'thinking back': you have a certain desired change in mind that you want to establish, and now you are going to think about how you will get there. If you don't start from where you want to go, but from where you are, it is much more tempting to think of activities and strategies you're already working with or that are easy to carry out – and you might not end up at B at all. Time to think out of the box! Step 2 however is more than just establishing 'A' – the aim is to also analyze the 'system' you're working in. By the system, we mean all social processes that are relevant to the situation that you want to change.

**Therefore, step 2 might include:**

- **Context analysis:** Do a (literature) review on the social, political, economic, cultural situation (and any other dimensions that can be relevant for the program/organization).

**Example:** *For the GUSO program, it would be important to analyze the situation with regards to young people's SRHR in every country involved. For example, do young people have access to contraceptives? Will young people receive sexuality education in school? What are the laws with regards to child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and other relevant topics? How is adolescent sexuality viewed in society, is it a taboo to discuss or not?*

- **Stakeholder analysis:** A stakeholder is literally someone who has a 'stake' with regards to a certain situation: someone who has an interest or a concern in something. As you can see from this definition, this can involve many different people. Usually, the more complex the problem you're working with, the more stakeholders will be involved. Create an overview of which stakeholders are important when working on your problem; who will benefit from the desired change, who doesn't, who is an ally, a key influencer, or an 'enemy'?

**Example:** *For the GUSO program, stakeholders involved can be: young men and young women, their parents, community leaders, school teachers, religious leaders, local and national policy makers, etc.*

- **Explore power dynamics:** After having established who the important stakeholders are, it is important to think about power dynamics between the different groups of people you have identified. For example: is there high inequality between men and women (gender inequality), and how does this play out? What is the relationship between young people and adults? Based on an analysis of power dynamics, you will be able to map out opportunities and challenges for the program.

**Example:** *One of the power dynamics that is important in the countries from the GUSO program, is that hierarchy comes with age. Young people are often not taken seriously by adults.*



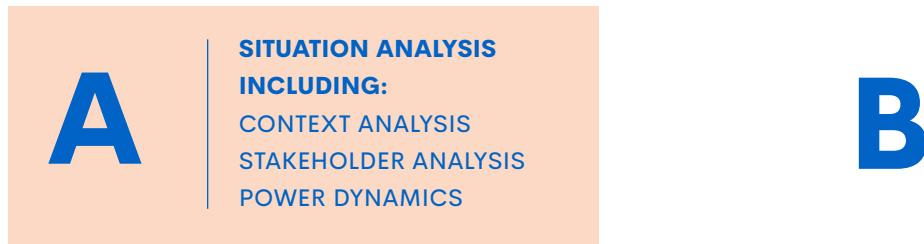


Figure 5: Step 2: Situation analysis.

### TIPS FOR THIS STEP:

- If you plan to work in different areas, or even in different countries, it is important to look at the different contexts of all the places you will be working in.
- When identifying stakeholders, try to think beyond the usual suspects. Keep asking ‘who else might have a concern in this issue?’
- Often, exploring power dynamics is not easy. Try to find recent (!) literature, or ask people in the area you want to work in.

### INITIAL QUESTIONS TO GET YOUR THOUGHTS GOING:

- What exactly is the geographical context I want to work in? Is it a district, a few villages, a city, etc.?
- Which aspects of the context are relevant for what I want to achieve? Do I need to look at the cultural norms, political context, economic situation, etc.?

## STEP

# 3

### MAPPING PATHWAYS OF CHANGE

Now you’ve established A (the current situation) and B (the desired situation), as well as everything that is relevant with regards to the context and system you’re working in, step 3 serves to establish how to get from A to B. As explained in chapter 2, a ToC outlines different pathways of change. A pathway of change comprises different steps that are needed to get from A to B. Usually, a ToC has different, often interlinked pathways of change, that are all needed to get from A to B (the GUSO ToC has five pathways of change). Simplified, this is how it looks (illustrated here with three pathways, but there can be more or less):

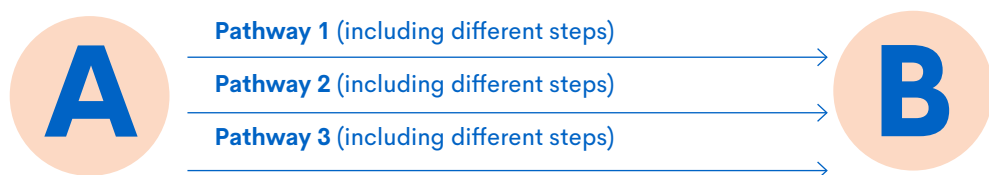


Figure 6: Step 3: Drawing pathways of change

As explained, a ToC starts from the premise that the world, and especially social processes, are complex. This is why one linear pathway is not enough to get from A to B, and also why the pathways are interlinked. This links to step 2, in which multiple dimensions of the context (e.g. cultural norms, the political situation), as well as relevant stakeholder and actors were analyzed. This serves to inform what and who needs to change to get from A to B. This will be the basis for designing the different pathways.

Each pathway has different steps. All the 'building blocks' that are usually part of ToC pathways are explained in table 1, which you can find in chapter 2 that explains the ToC product (resources, activities, outputs, outcomes).

To go from one step to the other, guiding questions to use are 'only if' (going back from B to A) or 'so, that' (going forward from A to B). For example, going from B to A, if the outcome is 'young people take informed action on their SRHR' (outcome) this can be only if 'young people are informed about their SRHR' (output). Or, the other way around, from A to B, 'young people are informed about their SRHR' (output), so that 'young people take informed action on their SRHR' (outcome).

**Example:** *The GUSO ToC contains five pathways of change. From left to right, these are 1. Creating sustainable alliances of organizations working on SRHR in every country, 2. Empowering young people by meaningfully engaging them in the GUSO program, 3. Informing young people about their SRHR, 4. Creating access to youth-friendly health services, 5. Creating an enabling political, socio-cultural, and political environment for young people's SRHR.*

#### **TIPS FOR THIS STEP:**

- Try to look at the problem from as many different angles as possible to explore what different pathways of change you will need for achieving your goal.
- When designing the steps in the different pathways, use the guiding questions 'only if' and 'so, that' as explained above.
- Remember that pathways of change are always interlinked: successful outputs and outcomes on one pathway will also affect the other pathways!

#### **INITIAL QUESTIONS TO GET YOUR THOUGHTS GOING:**

- What different things will I need to work on to get from the current situation to my desired goal?
- How can I include all the relevant stakeholders I identified in step 2 to get to my desired goal?
- How are the different things I want to do to achieve my goal related to each other?

**Every ToC has assumptions: they connect the different steps of the pathways to each other, and are therefore what holds a ToC together.**

# STEP

# 4

## STEP 4: IDENTIFYING ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE TOC

Every ToC has assumptions: they connect the different steps of the pathways to each other, and are therefore what holds a ToC together. Assumptions guide the cause-and-effect relationships that were drawn in the different pathways – so it is important to question the assumptions. In many cases, the assumptions are based on evidence and research. The assumptions guiding a ToC are usually written down in a narrative accompanying the visual version of the ToC. In some ToCs, the most important assumptions are included in the visual – for example in the GUSO ToC.

Assumptions are also made about the different actors and stakeholders: in mapping actors and stakeholders involved, you usually assume they have a certain role and interest. It is important to think these through, and how these effect different steps in the program.

**Example:** In the GUSO ToC visual, the six most important assumptions are listed. Three of these assumptions are: Empowered young people can claim their rights and play a meaningful role in SRHR interventions; Improving quality of and access to a wide range of SRHR services will increase uptake; A supportive environment enables young people to access SRHR information, education, and services.

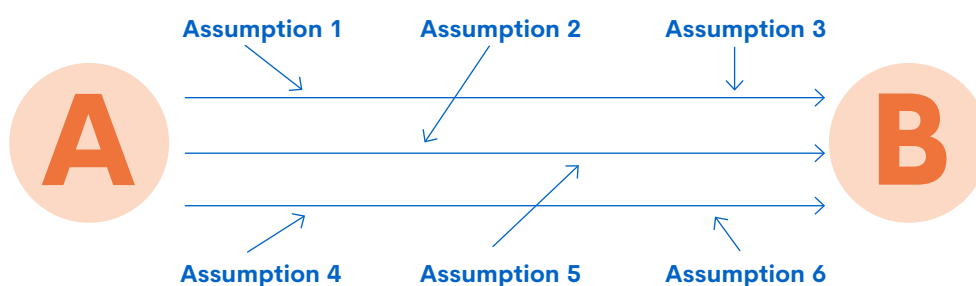


Figure 7: Step 4: figuring out assumptions underlying the different pathways. As you can see from the visual, assumptions can link to different steps in the pathways.

### TIPS FOR THIS STEP:

- Be critical and keep on questioning!
- Remember: all the different steps in your ToC will feature assumptions on why you think one step will lead to another.
- Check if you can find literature about your assumptions and whether they are valid.

### INITIAL QUESTIONS TO GET YOUR THOUGHTS GOING:

- Why do I think the things I want to do will lead to my desired change?
- How do the different steps in my pathways of change lead from one step to the next?

## STEP

## 5

## EVALUATING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S CAPACITY AND DEFINING STRATEGIES

Now you have an idea of what you're doing and why you're doing it, it's time to think about your role in all of it: what is the added value of your organization, what will be your capacity, what are your strengths and weaknesses, and where might you need capacity strengthening? If you're working with more than one organization on a program, it is important to think about the different roles of each organization, where they complement each other and where they overlap. If you're working on your own, it might be good to think about where you need support from others. After defining different roles for all organizations, based on what your organizations can do, you will define strategies. A strategy is an overarching term that can incorporate multiple activities (see example). Each pathway of change can have multiple strategies, and strategies can relate to multiple pathways of change.

**Example:** In the ToC visual for the GUSO program, strategies are included (see nr. 5). One strategy is, for example, 'Capacity building of educators and educational institutes' (third pathway of change). Activities under this strategy can include the training of peer educators, development of an SRHR curriculum, and many others.

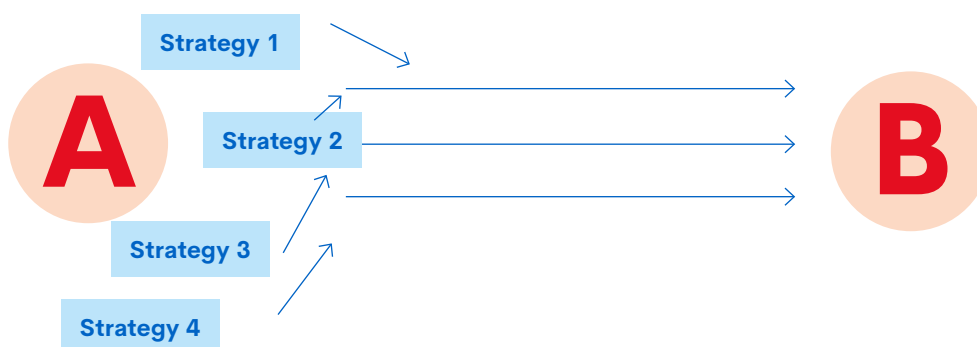


Figure 8: Step 5: Defining strategies

## TIPS FOR THIS STEP:

- If you work with multiple organizations, explore what each organization's strengths are, what you can learn from each other and how you can achieve the best result together.
- Be honest about your strengths and about your weaknesses. It is better to recognize upfront that you do not have capacity to do something (yet), than to discover this when you have started implementing activities.
- What you cannot do yet, you can learn! While it is important to be honest about your weaknesses, it's also not good to give up too easily. Be creative when thinking about options you have for capacity strengthening.

## INITIAL QUESTIONS TO GET YOUR THOUGHTS GOING:

- Looking at the different pathways of change, what is my organization good at? How can we best contribute to the program?
- Looking at the different pathways of change, what can my organization not do and what do we need other organizations for? Are there organizations in the program who can do this?
- Looking at the different pathways of change, what does my organization not have experience with yet, but does want to learn about? Are there possibilities for capacity strengthening?

## STEP

## 6

**PLANNING OF ACTIVITIES AND CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGIES**

You've established what you want to do and why you're doing it, and you've made the most important strategic decisions on who's responsible for doing what (if working with multiple organizations) and established the capacity of your own organization. Now, it's time to get more concrete and to start thinking about actual activities that will feed into the pathways of change you've developed. You're normally working per pathway in this step. You start developing a rough draft of an activity plan, also thinking about the logical order of the activities. Additionally, you can start thinking about 'cross-cutting strategies'. Cross-cutting strategies, sometimes also referred to as 'core principles' (or something similar), are values or strategies that you believe to be of utmost importance and therefore guiding, and are integrated into all the pathways of change.

**Example:** In the ToC visual for the GUSO program, core principles are included (nr. 4): meaningful youth participation, gender transformative approach, rights-based approach, inclusiveness, and sustainability. Activities are defined per strategy. For example, capacity building of young people (pathway 2) can include a training for young people on youth leadership, developing resources on youth-led advocacy, involving young people in research processes in the program, etc.

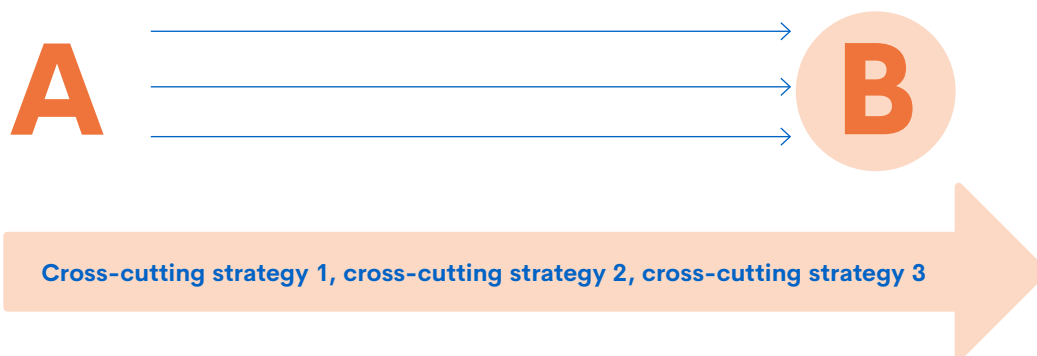


Figure 9: Step 6: Defining cross-cutting strategies and activities. Activities are not included in the visual, since they will mostly be included in a separate activity plan.

**TIPS FOR THIS STEP:**

- If you define cross-cutting strategies (or core values/principles), make sure all organizations involved support all the cross-cutting strategies. It's crucial that everybody is on the same page here.
- When planning activities, try to think beyond the things you're already doing as an organization. This is your chance to do something new! Get adventurous!

**INITIAL QUESTIONS TO GET YOUR THOUGHTS GOING:**

- Which values can we identify to be at the core of our ToC? Are these values shared by everyone involved?
- What activities can contribute to the strategies we identified?

# STEP

# 7

## SET UP A PLANNING, MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK

A Theory of Change is guiding for an organization's or program's process of Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (PMEL). PMEL consists of four elements (P, M, E, and L – although the P and L are in some cases left out) that work together through all program and organizational cycles.

- **Planning** is the process of setting goals and targets, assigning responsibility, and deciding on time frames for certain activities.
- **Monitoring** is the tracking of activities while they are ongoing.
- **Evaluation** happens after the implementation, and encompasses measuring the impact of the activities.
- **Learning** happens throughout the cycle, and includes the sharing of information and the continuous improvement of programs.

It's important to think about how you will share information retrieved from monitoring and evaluation activities, and how you will use the information. It's also important to establish when and how you will review the ToC. A visual of the PMEL cycle is included in figure 10.

**Example:** All activities in the GUSO program need to be monitored. For example, for the training on youth leadership, a report will need to be written including the number of participants and what the sessions were about. All participants will do a pre and post-test to assess what they have learned. Monitoring will be done through focus group discussions at different times during the program, to find out whether young people are becoming increasingly empowered through the program. Findings will be shared during in-country workshops and at SRHR conferences around the world.

### TIPS FOR THIS STEP:

- A lot of people find PMEL complicated. If PMEL is new to you, it may be beneficial to find someone who has more experience to help you.
- Don't see PMEL as something you must do or as a donor requirement: you can learn a lot from it, and your program will improve when you monitor and evaluate what you do!



Figure 10: The PMEL cycle'

## 5. ADDITIONAL READING: THEORY OF CHANGE VS. LOGFRAME

Before the idea of working with a ToC came up, the development sector was accustomed to working with a logframe (logical framework). If you haven't worked with a ToC before, it may be a little bit confusing to also consider the concept of a logframe. If that's the case, feel free to skip this part! However, if you have worked with a logframe before, your understanding of how ToC thinking works might increase by comparing it to a logframe.

The purpose of a logframe was similar to that of a ToC: guiding thinking on how a certain social change can happen, and identifying the assumptions this expected change is based on. However, while the purpose of a logframe and ToC are similar, they look quite different. Working with a logframe was defined by its form: that of a matrix. An example of a logframe is included in Figure 1. The matrix form structures thinking about social change in a linear way, as can be seen in figure one: If (activity) And (assumption) Then a certain output is supposed to happen. This is similar when you go further up in the logframe (for example: If (outcome) and (assumption) then a certain goal is reached).

	PROJECT SUMMARY	INDICATORS	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS / ASSUMPTIONS
<b>Goal</b>	10% increase in the number of Grades 5-6 primary students continuing on to high school within 3 years.	Percentage of Grades 5-6 primary students continuing on to high school.	Comparison of primary and high school enrolment records.	N/A
<b>Outcome</b>	Improve reading proficiency among children in Grades 5-6 by 20% within 3 years.	Reading proficiency among children in Grades 5-6	Six monthly reading proficiency tests using the national assessment tool.	Improved reading proficiency provides self confidence required to stay in school.
<b>Outputs</b>	500 Grade 5-6 students with low reading proficiency complete a reading summer camp	Number of students completing reading summer camp.	Summer camp attendance records.	Children apply what they learnt in the summer camp at school.
<b>Activities</b>	Run five summer reading camps, each with capacity for 100 Grades 5-6 students.	Number of summer camps run.	Summer camp records.	Parents of children with low reading proficiency are willing to send them to the camp.

Diagram annotations: A yellow circle highlights the 'Outputs' cell. A yellow circle highlights the 'Activities' cell. A yellow circle highlights the 'Risks / Assumptions' cell in the 'Activities' row. A yellow arrow points from the 'Activities' cell to the 'Risks / Assumptions' cell, with the word 'AND' written below it. A yellow arrow points from the 'Outputs' cell to the 'Risks / Assumptions' cell, with the word 'THEN' written above it. A yellow arrow points from the 'Activities' cell to the 'Outputs' cell, with the word 'IF' written below it.

Figure 11: Example of a logframe' en vervolgens een voetnoot. In de voetnoot mag dan worden toegevoegd 'Image credit: Toolsfordev.org

This linear way of thinking accompanying the logframe, forms the main difference between a logframe and a ToC. A logframe simplifies reality, and while a ToC does this as well, a ToC has more room for complexity and stimulates critical thinking. A logframe is static, while a ToC includes more features of social reality (different stakeholders, assumptions, socio-political

## OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

context, etc.), and, most importantly, is able to show their interconnectedness.

There are many useful online tools that can help you better understand how a ToC works. Some examples that might be helpful include:



**Basic Monitoring and Evaluation:** Video explaining the different steps and concepts used in a ToC, in an easy to understand manner.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR8FalapJf0&>)



**3 Ways to tell the Difference between an Output and an Outcome:** If you have a hard time understanding the difference between output and outcomes, this video might help!

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLPPIx0kqTo>)



**The Horse Parable:** This simple story of a thirsty horse can help to clarify the different steps and concepts used in a ToC. (Source: MDF Consulting). The Horse parable can be found here: USAID 2011: Capacity Development and Information Base for Improved Fisheries Management in the Western Region, [http://www.crc.uri.edu/download/GH2009IFISH015\\_508.pdf](http://www.crc.uri.edu/download/GH2009IFISH015_508.pdf)



## ANNEX 1: LIST OF CONCEPTS

### ACCOUNTABILITY CEILING

A lot of ToCs have an 'accountability ceiling', usually visualized by a dotted line. The accountability ceiling separates outcomes that an organization will monitor and take credit for, from those that are not within the organization's reach to influence (usually those who are outside the sphere of influence, and in the sphere of interest – also included in list of concepts). Outcomes/impact above the accountability ceiling are regarded as being influenced by too many external factors to be able to say that the organization or program has a direct influence on the outcome/impact. Examples of ToCs that feature an accountability ceiling are the ToC of the Rights, Evidence, Action program (ToC 2 in Annex 1) and of the Right Here, Right Now program (pictured as the 'accountability watch owl', ToC 3 in Annex 2).

### ASSUMPTIONS

Every ToC has assumptions: they connect the different steps of the pathways to each other, and are therefore what holds a ToC together. Assumptions answer the question 'Why do we think a certain output leads to an expected outcome?' Or, 'Why do we think a certain outcome leads to the desired impact?'. So, we assume that X needs to happen for Y to occur – but in many cases, the assumptions are based on evidence and research. The assumptions guiding a ToC are usually written down in a narrative accompanying the visual version of the ToC. In some ToCs, the assumptions are included in the visual – an example of this is the ToC of the Get Up Speak Out program (ToC 1 in Annex 2).

### CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGIES/CORE PRINCIPLES

Values or strategies that people believe to be of utmost importance and therefore as guiding, and are integrated into all the pathways of change.

Examples can be 'meaningful youth participation', 'gender transformative approach' or 'sustainability'. Examples of a ToC showing core principles are the ToC of the Get Up Speak Out program (ToC 1 in Annex 1) and the Right Here, Right Now program (pictured as the sun, ToC 3 in Annex 1).

### MISSION & VISION

Particularly if you're working with a ToC for an organization, the ToC will often be linked to the overarching mission and vision. These two are usually presented together, but can also get confused, so make sure you're able to distinguish one from the other!

**Vision:** The vision encompasses the optimal future situation the organization wants to achieve. If well-formulated, the vision of the organization will be guiding for all employees while at the same time being their 'drive': it's what they're doing it all for. The vision of an organization does not have to be within reach or be likely to happen.

### EXAMPLE: CHOICE VISION

#### WE WANT TO LIVE IN A WORLD IN WHICH ALL YOUNG PEOPLE:

- ... openly and safely express their sexuality and who they love.
- ... freely enjoy the pleasures of sex if, with whom and when they choose.
- ... are sexually healthy and can make well-informed choices about their sexual actions.
- ... can openly and safely choose if, with whom, when and how to have children.
- ... meaningfully participate in decision making that affects their lives and the lives of their peers.

#### WE WANT TO LIVE IN A WORLD IN WHICH THE CHOICE IS (Y)OURS.

Programs can also have a vision (and not just an impact statement – although in some cases they look very similar), and in some cases, the vision is put on top of the visualization of the ToC. An example of this is the ToC of the Rights, Evidence, Action program (ToC 2 in Annex 2).

## MISSION

The mission of the organization defines the present state or purpose of the organization, and answers three questions on why the organization exists: What it does; Who it does it for; and How it does what it does. The mission is usually formulated in a very concise manner, in 1–3 sentences.

### EXAMPLE: CHOICE MISSION

CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality is an ambitious and bold youth-led organization. We advocate for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people worldwide and support them to meaningfully participate and to voice and claim their rights.

## LOGICAL FRAMEWORK (LOGFRAME)

The 'predecessor' of the ToC, the most important difference being that the logframe is more linear, while the ToC is better able to show complexities and interconnectivities. For more elaborate explanation, see chapter 3 of this guide.

## OUTCOME

Outcomes are the intended consequences of outputs, so outcomes will always come after outputs. Time wise, it is possible to differentiate between short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes.

## OUTPUT

Outputs are the direct impact of the activities that are being implemented (i.e. we believe the output(s) would not have occurred without these activities). Time wise, outputs directly follow activities.

## PLANNING, MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING

A Theory of Change is guiding for an organization's or program's process of Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (PMEL). PMEL consists of four elements (P, M, E, and L – although the P and L are in some cases left out), that work together through all our program and organizational cycles. By Planning, we mean the process of setting goals and targets, assigning responsibility, and deciding on time frames for certain activities. Monitoring is the tracking of activities while they are ongoing, while Evaluation happens after the implementation,

and encompasses measuring the impact of the activities. Learning happens throughout the cycle, and includes the sharing of information and the continuous improvement of programs.

## SPHERE OF CONTROL (OUTPUTS)

The sphere of control is literally 'controlled' by the organization: by performing activity X, you can be certain that Y will follow. For example, by organizing a sharing session, you can be sure that the participants leave with the information you gave them.

## SPHERE OF INFLUENCE (OUTCOMES)

As featured in table 2, the outcomes are the intended consequences of the outputs. While you might assume (based on your assumptions) that the outcomes will follow the outcomes, this is beyond your control. Other factors in society come into play here, for example, whether someone is using the information that is given to her/him in the sharing session, might also be influenced by other information that person is given.

## SPHERE OF INTEREST (IMPACT)

Sometimes also called 'sphere of concern', the sphere of influence comprises the long-lasting, structural changes you want to achieve. However, since they are completely ingrained in society, it is impossible to trace what your influence actually is on these changes.

**THE TOC VISUAL** pictures the desired impact/goal of the organization/program, together with the different pathways of change. The visual shows different steps of the pathways of change, how they relate to each other, as well as how they are interlinked. Examples of ToC visuals are included in annex 1. Different building blocks for ToC visuals are presented in table 2.

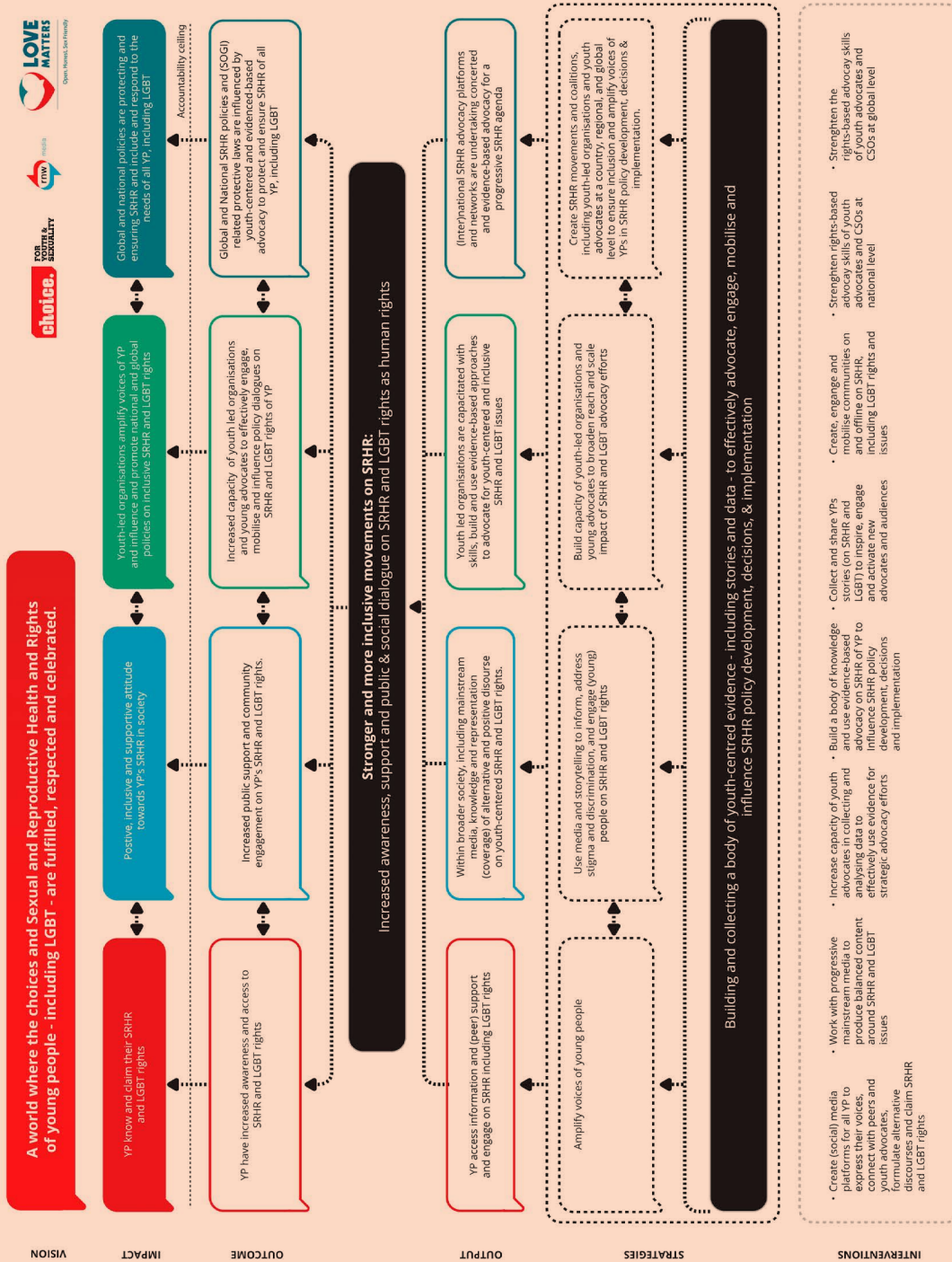
## THE TOC NARRATIVE

complements the ToC visual, since it's not possible to visualize everything that will come up in the ToC process. At the same time, it's not possible to put everything into words – which is why the visual and the narrative are mostly used together. Table 2 indicates which of the building blocks are usually present in the narrative and which are usually present in the visual.

# ANNEX 2: MORE EXAMPLES OF TOC VISUALS

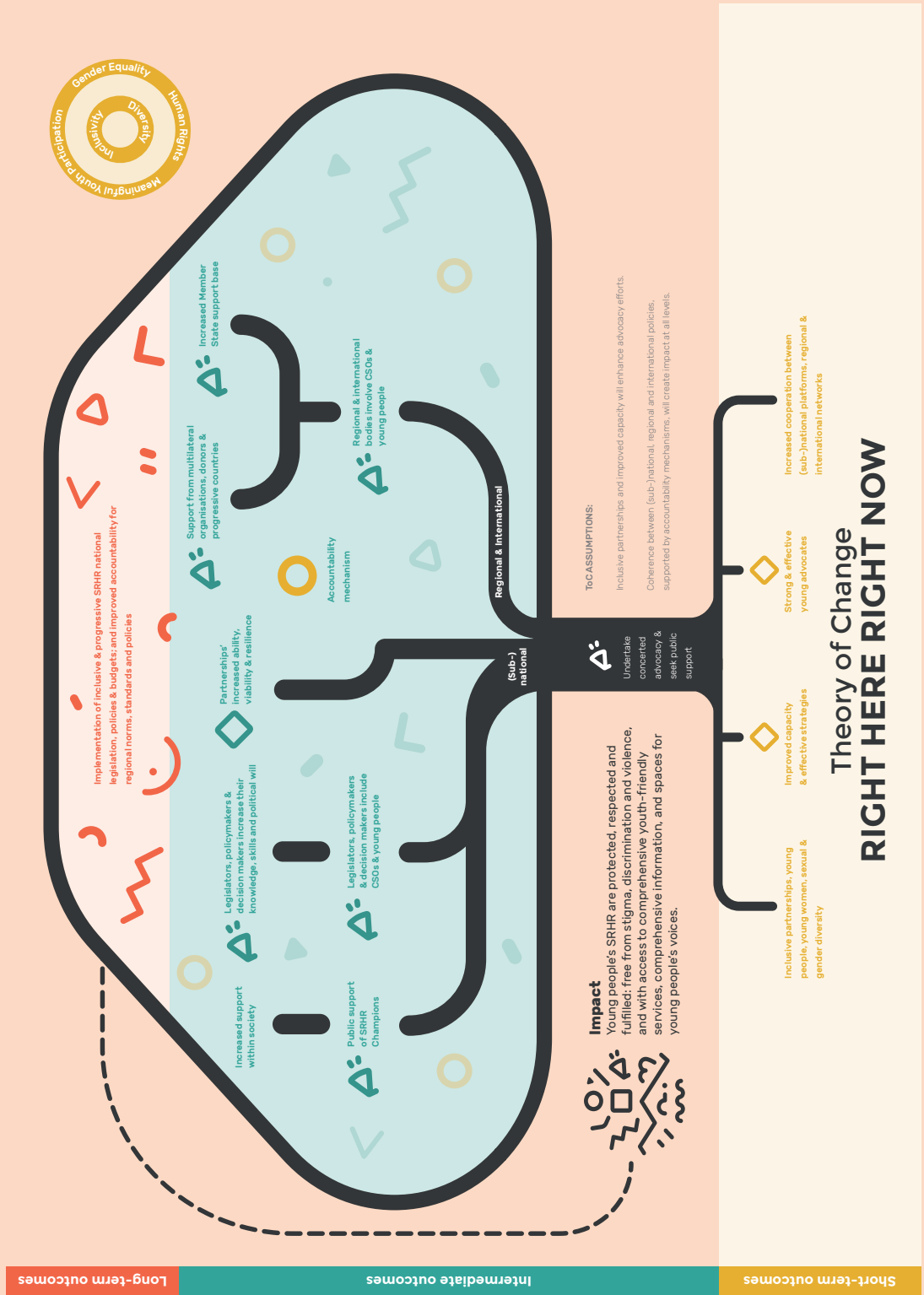
## 1. Rights, Evidence, Action (REA) program

(CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality & RNW Media – Love Matters)



## 2. Right Here, Right Now program

(ARROW, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, dance4life, Hivos, LACWEN, Rutgers)



### **CHECK OUT OTHER RESOURCES!**

Do you want to learn more about MYP, youth-led advocacy, or SRHR in general? On our website you can find many more resources: [www.choiceforyouth.org](http://www.choiceforyouth.org).

**Do you have additional questions? Or any feedback on these guidelines? Please contact us at CHOICE!**

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