THEORY OF CHANGE REVIEW
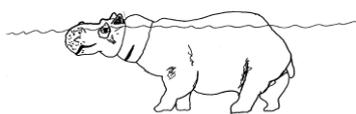
A report commissioned by Comic Relief

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Comic Relief's Vision is A Just World Free From Poverty

Comic Relief does three things. It raises much needed cash, it then allocates that cash to projects here at home and in the poorest countries in the world, and it raises awareness of the issues it feels strongly about.

This report is one of a series of Comic Relief commissioned learning reports. Some learning reports aim to bring the impact of and learning from some of the work Comic Relief has funded in helping change lives to a wider audience. Other reports aim to draw together learning on key issues from a range of stakeholders to inform Comic Relief's thinking and promote debate in the sector.

This report aims to draw together Comic Relief staff and partners' experiences in using theory of change; to identify others in development that are using theory of change and analyse their different approaches and experience; and to capture learning from everyone to promote debate, and to help inform what agencies using or advocating for the use of theory of change do next.

This report was commissioned by Comic Relief and written by Cathy James, an independent consultant. The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of Comic Relief.

Introduction

Theory of change is nothing new, according to this review. Yet it can provide a very powerful learning lens, which helps organisations ask themselves and others simple but important questions about what they are doing and why. It enables them to develop a clear framework for monitoring and evaluation; more common understanding, clarity and effectiveness in their approach; and strengthen their partnerships, organisation development and communication.

This review defines theory of change as follows:

An ongoing process of reflection to explore change and how it happens – and what that means for the part organisations play in a particular context, sector and/or group of people.

- *It locates a programme or project within a wider analysis of how change comes about.*
- *It draws on external learning about development.*
- *It articulates organisations' understanding of change – but also challenges them to explore it further.*
- *It acknowledges the complexity of change: the wider systems and actors that influence it*
- *It is often presented in diagrammatic form with an accompanying narrative summary*

The review approach

Comic Relief's international grants team commissioned this review of existing literature and experience on theory of change to identify who is using theory of change; analyse their different approaches and capture a range of experiences in using it; and to draw together learning from everyone to inform Comic Relief and the wider sector.

The review combined analysis of literature with 32 short interviews of people with experience and knowledge of theory of change. The literature included reports, guidelines, study notes, theory of change examples and other relevant documents. The review included interviews with members of Comic Relief's international grants team; Comic Relief grant partners (both UK and southern organisations); freelance consultants; UK organisation development consultants and researchers; North American research organisations, consultancy groups and foundations; International Non-governmental organisations (INGOs); and academics.

What are the origins of theory of change?

People have long explored theories of social change, debating what leads to development and how that influences the approach organisations take. The Brazilian educator, Freire, specifically advocated in the 1970s helping people to surface their beliefs about poverty and how to address it, then reflect and take action. He saw this as an empowering process in itself. Development organisations and practitioners are all, consciously or unconsciously, development theorists, drawing on macro theories of development as frameworks for action.

More recently, evaluators of complex programmes have urged a more explicit analysis of underlying theories of change, finding it difficult to evaluate programmes that are not clear about what they set out to do and why. In the 1990's a number of U.S. writers challenged programmes to articulate the changes they wanted to achieve and what needed to happen to reach them. The Aspen Research Institute's Roundtable on Community Change teamed up with ActKnowledge, an independent research and capacity building organisation in New York, to produce the first theory of change guidelines. ActKnowledge went on to develop its theory of change process and website.

Who is using theory of change?

More and more INGOs, foundations and evaluators in North America, Europe and Australia have started to use theory of change as an approach. Increasing pressure from organisations' boards and funders to articulate long-term impact has caused many to look for how to represent what they do. They want to find ways to explore and represent change that reflect more complex and systemic understanding of development, rather than portraying a linear process. Others have carried out internal reflections and impact studies that led them to recognise that people in their

organisations have very different understandings and approaches to generating social change. Some funders, organisation development providers and consultants have also started to use theory of change to help NGOs focus more on change, rather than just activity; and to help them to direct their energies more clearly.

Most of the southern organisations using theory of change (identified in the review) began because of a funder's influence or because they are affiliated to an international organisation.

<u>How is Comic Relief using theory of change?</u>

The review also summarised how Comic Relief's own interest in theory of change evolved. In developing a learning strategy, Comic Relief identified the importance of understanding both *what* changes it is helping to bring about and also *how* those changes happen. As Comic Relief began making larger, more complex grants, it saw that grantees were not always explicit about what changes they would contribute to and how change would come about. Comic Relief impact studies on specific grants programmes in 2008-9 recommended a need to identify more clearly the desired changes in people's lives, track more systematically progress towards those changes and analyse better the factors that contribute to change for particular groups of people.

Since that time Comic Relief has developed programme strategies that articulate some of its key beliefs about how change happens for a group of people. It has also facilitated a number of theory of change processes with individual partners and sometimes with groups of partners. It has also asked other large grant-holders to articulate their theory of change. There is some evidence of how theory of change processes have strengthened organisations and programmes, some quite dramatically. However, there is a recognition that theory of change should not become just another donor hoop to jump through.

What benefits can theory of change bring?

People and organisations that contributed to this review highlighted a large number of benefits that can emerge from using theory of change as an approach – though not everyone will experience them all. The benefits may depend on the purpose of the process, the approach taken and the situation of the organisation or partners. People mentioned the following benefits frequently:

- Developing a common understanding of the work and surfacing any differences.
- Strengthening the clarity, effectiveness and focus of programmes.
- Providing a framework for monitoring, evaluation and learning throughout a programme cycle.
- Improving partnership by identifying strategic partners and supporting open conversations.
- Supporting organisational development in line with core focus and priorities.
- Using theory of change to communicate work clearly to others and as a reporting framework.
- Empowering people to become more active and involved in programmes.

How are others defining and approaching theory of change?

The review found that people use a plethora of different terms to describe theory of change – such as programme theory, pathways mapping, programme logic, a road map and a direction of travel. People also sometimes use the same term to describe very different understandings and approaches. The review identified two broad categories of approach:

- Those that focus on how a project or programme *brings change* and develop a linear path of cause and effect;
- Those that explore *how change happens* more broadly and then analyse what that means for the part that a particular organisation or programme can play.

Approaches in the first category focus on articulating the programme logic: defining the long-term changes that organisations desire to bring (often starting with the overall vision) and then mapping back from those to identify changes that need to happen at other levels (the pre-conditions); and the interventions that will cause each change to happen, making explicit the rationale behind them.

They can range from basic logic models that only identify inputs, outputs and outcomes, but

attempt to explain the rationale behind the model; to more complex flow charts and diagrams that map the pathways for change and include specific indicators at each level of change.

Approaches in the second category take a more complex and systemic view of development, believing that even when the programme logic is carefully worked out, other factors outside organisations' control can cause a programme to fail. These tend to involve broader, contextual analysis of how change happens – including exploring other actors and defining their role in change – before analysing how an organisation or programme contributes to change.

What makes a good theory of change approach?

The review found that approaches people found most helpful had the following attributes:

- Stepping outside of a project box to think openly about change and how it happens, looking at the context for change, at organisational and not only project level.
- Looking at an organisation's overall theory of change, not just at a programme or project.
- Drawing on wider learning from others: research, other organisations, and those benefiting.
- Involving a range of people, including leaders who can help to shape and sustain a process; field staff; and the target group.
- Focussing on change and key actors, not just about what organisations do.
- Representing a theory with validity but simplicity, recognising you cannot capture everything.
- Building in on-going learning and reflection, not just carrying out a one-off workshop.

What should a theory of change process include?

While theory of change should not be one point in time but an on-going learning process, the review found that it was helpful to think about the following elements in an initial process to kick-start reflection and document a theory of change. This can happen prospectively – at the beginning of a programme or project or when organisations are reviewing their overall organisational strategy; or retrospectively, e.g. prior to an evaluation, when organisations want to test their theory out.

Some useful guiding areas and questions to cover might include:

1. The context for change – how change happens

   Who is the organisation aiming to support and why? (prioritising the key problems they face)

   Who are the groups and what are the structures and processes that influence change in the target group's lives? (ranked; and showing whether they influence positively, negatively or both)
   - How is this known? – what is the basis for this understanding/?

2. The organisational or programme contribution to change

   What are the long-term changes that need to happen in the target group's lives?
   - What is the overall vision for change?
   - What are the key long-term changes to a contribution can be made (ranked)?

   Who and what needs to change in order to achieve those long-term changes?
   - What changes need to happen at other levels in order to achieve the long-term changes (e.g. at community level or in policy or systems).
   - Who are the groups that need to be influenced? What changes need to take place in them?

   What factors, relationships, approaches and pathways influence change at each level?

   What are three to five key factors to which organisations can contribute that will be vital in bringing about change? (reflecting core beliefs about how to influence change)
   - How is this known? – what is the basis for this understanding?
   - Why is it thought that change will happen that way? (the rationale and assumptions)
   - What are the risks (external and internal) that might prevent change taking place?
   - How might the approach need to be tailored to specific groups?

3. Applying a theory of change

   How will an organisation measure if change has happened?

   How will lessons learnt be applied to organisations, programmes and learning?

Some helpful steps to consider include:

- An initial discussion with senior management to ensure buy in; find out what learning processes and systems the organisation uses already; and the timeframe and people involved.
- A workshop with as wide a group of people as possible to develop a theory of change, based on the kind of questions outlined above; then a task group/ groups to refine or complete work.
- A summary diagram and/ or narrative to draw together the analysis, showing links between elements; and both internal and external factors that influence change.
- Follow-through internally or with a mentor to apply learning by working through the implications for monitoring and evaluation, organisation development and programmes.
- Identifying moments to review, analyse and update the theory of change.

Facilitators use a variety of different tools to explore the different aspects of theory of change, such as focus group discussions, stakeholder analysis, power analysis tools, Venn diagrams, rivers/ journeys of life; ranking exercises; and role play.

What are the challenges of using theory of change effectively?

The review also found some common challenges that people face in using theory of change. The one most frequently mentioned was how to continue the process of learning: some did not manage to reconcile it with other organisational processes and tools; and many never reviewed their theory of change so left it as a one-off process. Not all facilitators adapt the process to the particular needs or stage of an organisation. Everyone agreed that it demands very skilful and sensitive facilitators. Some organisations also find it hard to represent their theory effectively, finding that the diagram over-simplifies or loses key elements of their analysis; or else becomes over-complicated.

Who is theory of change most useful for?

Most interviewees agreed that theory of change is particularly useful for complex programmes and partnerships and for organisations that do not directly deliver programmes, such as grantmakers and organisation development providers. Facilitators found that more experienced organisations that are open to learning benefit most. Those who are at the beginning of a programme cycle or strategic phase find it easier to engage with the process.

Some interviewees were concerned about whether or not it is appropriate for young, pioneering organisations to go through a theory of change process; or ones that are not open to learning for different reasons – perhaps as they are absorbed in more day to day issues of funding; because it threatens their work and identity; or because of lack of capacity.

This review concluded though that creating the opportunity to ask fundamental questions about change and how it happens is important for any organisation at any stage. It is vital, however, that the process for doing this is relevant to their existing learning processes, stage of development and capacity – so could be only at the level of informal conversations; or beginning to identify different pathways; or merely articulate existing thinking to test out at a later stage.

What should organisations using or advocating theory of change think about?

Some suggestions for Comic Relief's international grants team to take forward included:

1. Take time for team reflection: drawing on learning from this review, agree how you understand theory of change; explore the team's own broad theory of change across all its programmes; and work out how you will engage with partners in regard to theory of change.
2. Meet with other key groups and individuals who are using theory of change to share learning and agree some common principles and understandings.
3. Create opportunities for partners to explore their theory of change but avoid imposing it as much as possible. Take a flexible approach to what it might look like for different organisations. Provide opportunities for sharing through guidelines, visits and group workshops.
4. Take care in recommending facilitators and leading processes: invest in supporting training for team members and facilitators.
5. Integrate key questions, such as those outlined in the conclusions, into existing assessment, application, reporting and evaluation guidelines; and in partner visits and discussions.

CONTENTS

A.   INTRODUCTION

A1.   Why do this review?

Comic Relief has expressed a desire to learn more about what brings lasting change in the lives of poor and disadvantaged people; and to share that learning effectively. In the last few years, Comic Relief's international grants team has begun to explore with some partners the underlying theory of change in projects and in its own grants programmes. It has also become aware that many others externally in the development sector are also using or exploring theory of change.

This review therefore sets out to:

- capture theory of change learning from Comic Relief's international grants team and partners
- identify other development people and organisations who are using theory of change
- analyse the different definitions and approaches to using theory of change
- draw out learning for Comic Relief and the wider sector in how to use theory of change and how to support organisations in using theory of change

A2.   How was the review approached?

Comic Relief commissioned this review. It took place over 30 days between February and May 2011; and involved:

- an internet search to identify relevant documents and organisations using theory of change.
- 32 short interviews with members of Comic Relief's international grants team; Comic Relief grantees (including UK and southern organisations); freelance consultants; other UK organisational development consultants and researchers; North American research organisations, consultancy groups and foundations; INGOs; and academics.
- reviewing documents found on the internet and recommended by interviewees, including theory of change guidelines and resources, reports and informal write-ups of experiences.
- reading Comic Relief International Grants forms, guidelines and reports.

While the internet search led only to a few specific sources of information and a large number of passing references to theory of change, it was found that many organisations and individuals were exploring theory of change internally. Almost every interview opened up a new line of enquiry, some of which there was not time to explore. This is therefore not a complete overview of how people are thinking about and using theory of change, but an opportunity to capture some of the different perspectives and learning to inform Comic Relief's understanding and practice.

References have been given for everything included from written documents. Verbal comments have not been ascribed to individuals but to some broad groupings such as Comic Relief staff, UK grantees, southern partners, consultants, research organisations and foundations so it is clear from where different experiences and perspectives emerge.

A3.   What does the review cover?

Following this introduction, the second section (B) gives an overview of theory of change, briefly exploring its origins and current interest in it; and the different ways in which people understand and approach it.

Section C summarises how Comic Relief's international grants team's interest has developed, how it has approached theory of change and how its partners have responded. Section D focuses on impact, describing the difference that using theory of change has made to Comic Relief partners and the learning from others about its benefits. Section E draws out the learning from both Comic Relief and others about who theory of change is most useful for; what kind of approaches have been helpful; and the key challenges people have faced in using theory of change.

The final section highlights some 'hot topics' – some interesting debates which emerge from the review – then draws together the learning in some conclusions; and sets out some suggestions for those organisations using and advocating for theory of change to consider.

B1.   What are the origins of theory of change?

It is difficult to trace exactly when people first started using the term 'theory of change'. The review, however, identified two key streams of thinking that influenced current practice: one originating from broader thinking about theories of social change; and one from the field of evaluation.

Theories of social change

In the 1970s, there was increasing debate about how development occurs. Recognition that economic growth often led to a greater gulf between rich and poor; and that many development projects did not lead to sustainable change made many people question the assumptions behind existing development thinking. Voices from the south – such as Freire (the Brazilian educator) and Nyerere (the Tanzanian President and development thinker) – brought in a radically different analysis of the causes of poverty and different approaches to addressing it. Freiran thinking underpins much of theory of change. He advocated for combining theory and action – 'theory in use' – to create social change: getting people to reflect on and name their reality was in itself an empowering process. **"We are all programme theorists."**

Since then, theories of development have continued to emerge, each using a different lens and based on different understandings of how change happens. All development thinkers draw on a number of different frameworks for practice – macro theories of development – whether consciously or unconsciously. These inform the way we think, work and interact with others and those benefiting from development work. It is therefore important to remember that, in this sense, 'theory of change' is nothing new – it is only the idea of using it as a specific approach or tool that is evolving currently.

Evaluation of complex programmes

In the 1990s, evaluators were increasingly struggling to deal with complex projects as there was no clear framework against which to assess them. It was often not clear what programmes had set out to do and how; so impossible to know whether and how they had achieved it. A number of writers in the U.S. such as Weiss, Chen and Patton began to call for programmes to be clearer about their desired outcomes and impact, and the avenues to achieve them (Connell & Kubiscsh 1998). The Aspen (research) Institute's Roundtable on Community Change began exploring these issues. In 1995, it published an article by Weiss that argued for the need to make the connection between outcomes and the activities that lead to them, by defining early and mid-term changes – a pathway that was "plausible, doable and testable" (Shapiro 2005). Weiss challenged complex community based initiatives to articulate the 'theory of change' guiding their work in order to improve their evaluation plans and be able to take credit for outcomes they had predicted in their theory (www.theoryofchange.com). This led to a number of U.S. community initiatives trying out this approach in the 1990s. ActKnowledge, an independent research and capacity-building organisation affiliated with City University of New York, has then built on these foundations to refine and develop a 'theory of change' process and website.

Current interest in theory of change

It is clear in carrying out this review, that there is immense interest among INGOs in the North and other 'developed' countries in theory of change processes, what they look like and what benefits they might bring. Evolving from broader thinking about social change and from the field of monitoring and evaluation, this interest is triggered by:

- A dissatisfaction with logical frameworks, especially in planning complex programmes and addressing difficult issues like advocacy and governance.
- People taking a more complex, systemic or network based approach – looking at their role in change as a small part of a much broader whole – rather than change as a linear process.
- Organisations' own learning, monitoring and evaluation processes that have led them to question the impact they are having and how they are making a difference.

- More demand from funders to demonstrate impact, sometimes at global level.
- A recognition that programmes have focussed on activities rather than change.
- Understanding that programmes often try to do everything and then struggle to achieve their aims – and so need to focus their priorities and energies better.

B2.   Who else is interested in theory of change?[1]

In the UK and elsewhere, many of the PowerPoint presentations and guidelines on theory of change that facilitators shared with me or that are available on the internet draw their information from ActKnowledge's theory of change website[2] and from Andrea Anderson's original and seminal guidelines (Aspen undated).

There is also a stream of evaluation-based literature that presents theory of change as one of a range of approaches to evaluation. Currently, much of the thinking and learning about theory of change as an approach is sitting, however, within individual organisations. They approach theory of change from different perspectives and in different ways. This section gives a brief overview of those who are interested; while B3 and B4 outline different understandings and approaches.

North American foundations and research/ consultancy groups

A number of Northern American foundations and research/ consultancy groups are drawing on the evaluative stream of writing about theory of change and programme theory. Some have produced specific guidelines for developing theories of change (cf Box1 below). ActKnowledge also provide training in theory of change and help facilitate processes.

Linked to Harvard University, the Pathways Mapping Initiative and the Harvard Family Research Project have been exploring ways to map programme theories. A World Bank programme, the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET) in Ottawa Canada also provides training and support for those wanting to engage with theory of change processes.

American foundations that are using theory of change approaches in their own thinking and systems; and in assessing and evaluating partners, include California Endowment, James Irvine Foundation, Ford Foundation, Barr Foundation, Elma Foundation and Unbound Philanthropy.

Organisation Development and/or evaluation academics, researchers and consultants

Across a number of different countries, monitoring and evaluation organisations, consultants and academics are thinking and writing about theory of change, including the International Development Research Centre; 3IE; Patricia Rogers from RMIT University, Melbourne; Jim Woodhill from Wageningen University, Netherlands; Lisbeth Schorr from the Harvard Pathways Mapping Initiative; the Institute of Development Studies (Sussex); Charity Evaluation Services UK; Rick Davies; Diana Leat; and the Overseas Development Institute. Some academics and consultants share their thinking on internet blogs. Keystone Accountability has developed a set of guidelines for using theory of change and has been helping to facilitate processes with some clients both in the UK and South Africa. INTRAC associate Maureen O'Flynn facilitates theory of change processes with a number of organisations; and other INTRAC associates have also used theory of change, particularly in evaluation, such as Nigel Simister.

> Box 1: Theory of Change guidelines include:
> - ActKnowledge
> - The WK Kellogg Foundation
> - The Annie Casey Foundation (written by Organizational Research Services)
> - Keystone Accountability
> - Charity Evaluation Services UK

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[1] See appendix 2 for sources
[2] www.theoryofchange.com

Southern Organisational Development Providers

Most of those thinking, writing about and/or using theory of change as a specific approach are from northern/ developed countries – or their southern partners. While many southern organisations and organisational development consultants or evaluators may explore underlying theories of development in other ways, such as through action learning processes, most of those spoken to were not aware of the current interest in theory of change as an approach. CDRA in Cape Town South Africa, an organisation development thinker and provider, often helps to straddle the gap between northern and southern research and practice. One of their staff, Doug Reeler, wrote an interesting paper on Theories of Social Change (2007), examining the larger theories that underpin thinking and exploring different kinds of change that take place. Reeler is also planning to explore current thinking about social theories of change in a sabbatical. On the basis of his paper, the Dutch funder, Hivos, contracted another CDRA consultant, Sue Soal, to work with them, and a group of other consultants on theory of change. Hivos is both reflecting internally on their own theory of change and in the work with partners in South Africa and Latin America (cf Box 2 below).

> <u>Box 2: Building southern organisational capacity through theory of change</u>
>
> Dutch funder, Hivos, became interested in theory of change as a way to support its 800 southern partners to focus more on outcomes than activities and to improve their planning, learning, monitoring and evaluation. Hivos did not prescribe a rigid format for partners to present information to them, but they noted that many have to use logframes for other donors and rarely find them helpful for their own monitoring – and even less for learning.
>
> So Hivos tried a flexible approach to results-oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation, based on indicators developed by their partners. Hivos found, though, that the quality of planning, reporting and learning did not improve as much as they expected. They therefore decided to explore further theory of change – which they had already reflected on in an internal policy paper in 2004.
>
> Since 2007, Hivos therefore carried out a number of workshops with partners in different regions, facilitated by consultants. The workshops went well and most participants were initially very positive about the approach. But Hivos found that very few managed to continue the process, even where they were offered consultancy and funding support to do so. It was not always clear what held them back. Some partners complained that it was just a way of imposing yet another kind of logic model on them. Others feared that it would mean extra work as other donors continue to demand logframes.
>
> So Hivos reached a wall. They still thought theory of change could be useful in helping partners improve the effectiveness of their strategies and their learning, as well as deal with donor demands. But the capacity building workshops were not working in the long-term. Hivos also recognised that to integrate theory of change thinking in organisational practice needs very good facilitators who can adapt the process to different kinds of organisations.
>
> To take the process further, Hivos engaged a small group of consultants – from CDRA in South Africa, Wageningen University in the Netherlands and their Latin American consultant. They began an action learning process with partners in Southern Africa and South America to explore the value of applying theory of change thinking in different ways and in different contexts. In South America, Hivos invited partners to apply to be part of a longer term learning process – and received a very enthusiastic response. Some partners in Bolivia are developing a group theory of change together, as well as reflecting on their own organisational theory.
>
> As the processes in the regions develop, Hivos hopes that the groups will gradually expand to incorporate more partners and more consultants, generating interest locally, rather than imposed by them as the funder. Hivos is also thinking about setting up a web-based resource base.

INGOs/ UK NGOs/ grantmakers

Many INGOs have been going through a variety of internal processes and reflection over a number of years, some deriving from and specifically using theory of change approaches, such as Oxfam, Christian Aid and VSO (see Box 3 below for a more detailed example). For a number of these INGOs, using theory of change has come out of wider reviews of their impact and change strategies.

<u>Box 3: Telling our story through theory of change</u>

Pressure from funders to report on impact at global level led VSO to bring in an external consultant who introduced theory of change as a way to think about change and how it happens.

VSO analysed different dimensions of change, identifying changes and following through a 'so that…' process to arrive at long-term changes in poor people's lives. Exploring the different levels, they were able to analyse their contribution – from sending volunteers, through to partners, and to end results. Although VSO had discussed these issues before, they found that bringing them together in this process helped them tell their story – to pull together their thinking.

At the same time, VSO was in discussions with Comic Relief about a grant to support girls' education in Ghana. VSO Ghana subsequently facilitated a theory of change process with its team and partners there. The process helped them:

"to make sense of essential components of change, visualise pragmatically what is needed; and peel back the layers to bring our monitoring and evaluation framework to life."

VSO found that the theory of change approach fitted with the way they work and with other methodologies they had used like 'Most Significant Change'. Inspired by the benefits for themselves, especially in demonstrating their impact, they trialled theory of change with partners and with groups benefitting from projects, drawing on their existing participatory tools.

"Historically, we launched from programmes into logframes with partners and lost their interest along the way. Theory of change is a story-telling type of methodology that asks simple questions, involves everyone and makes the technical (measurement) part afterwards easy."

VSO now embeds theory of change in every project plan and proposal; and in their local and global monitoring and evaluation frameworks. It has systematically built the feedback from target groups into an action learning cycle. It has just developed a new strategy and revised theory of change based on that learning. For VSO, the challenge is now to keep theory of change as a living framework.

Oxfam's interest in theory of change evolved from giving more attention to country-level analysis and strategies and from a commitment to link humanitarian, long-term development and advocacy work to achieve lasting and greater change. It began using theory of change to help partners and community members agree a joint vision of what to achieve and how. Oxfam GB has now woven the process for articulating theories of change into its programme guidance and planning, documenting them as logic models in its management information system. Each programme develops its own theory of change to bring a shared understanding among stakeholders, to communicate what it does and as a foundation for monitoring, evaluation and decision-making.

World Vision International spent two years developing a comprehensive programme approach to its work globally; but is now also looking at how theory of change can support its reflection and practice. It has produced internal papers and guidance notes on theory of change. It is reflecting on the range of macro theories of development that underpin their theory and action; and whether different theories should take different priority in different areas of development. For example, an empowerment, rights-based approach may effectively support gender programming but might not be appropriate for climate change – a theory that in itself needs testing. World Vision Australia has begun mapping theory of change at different levels, beginning with its economic programme.

CARE International has undertaken a process of impact analysis, assessing how to capture unintended changes better and going through extensive reflection in each country over ten years. CARE has called this a 'programme approach'. In each programme area, they have examined the context, how change happens, who the key actors are and what that means for the work they do with a particular population, especially women. They have tried to look at the wider system in which

change happens, to recognise that change is not linear, to identify 'breakthroughs' – moments when change becomes irreversible – and to articulate the assumptions that sit behind each breakthrough. This process has included ongoing consultation with stakeholders.

The Department for International Development in the UK (DFID) has also been using theory of change internally and in some of its programmes. As part of a stronger focus on outcomes and evidence, all DFID departments and country programmes commissioning work or seeking funding now include a theory of change analysis to underpin their log-frame and strengthen programme design, evaluation and learning. These then form part of the intervention business cases, which DFID publishes on its website for transparency.

Using theory of change is not a requirement for DFID grantees, but some programmes have found it very useful to use – especially in relation to research, advocacy and the Governance and Transparency Fund (DFID, consultants). Where partners use theory of change, DFID has not prescribed what the theory of change contains or how it is presented – but instead is emphasising its usefulness for thinking, analysing and documenting the process of change. DFID encourages some research programme partners, for example, to develop a theory of change, providing them with support and examples, to help them integrate the research design and uptake with developing the log-frame and monitoring and evaluation.

Bond (an international development network for UK NGOs) has developed a framework in its effectiveness programme to help NGOs increase their impact. The 'Im-prove it!' framework (Box 4 right) contains some key elements of a theory of change as it articulates principles and strategies for achieving change in focus areas – though without the actors that influence change.
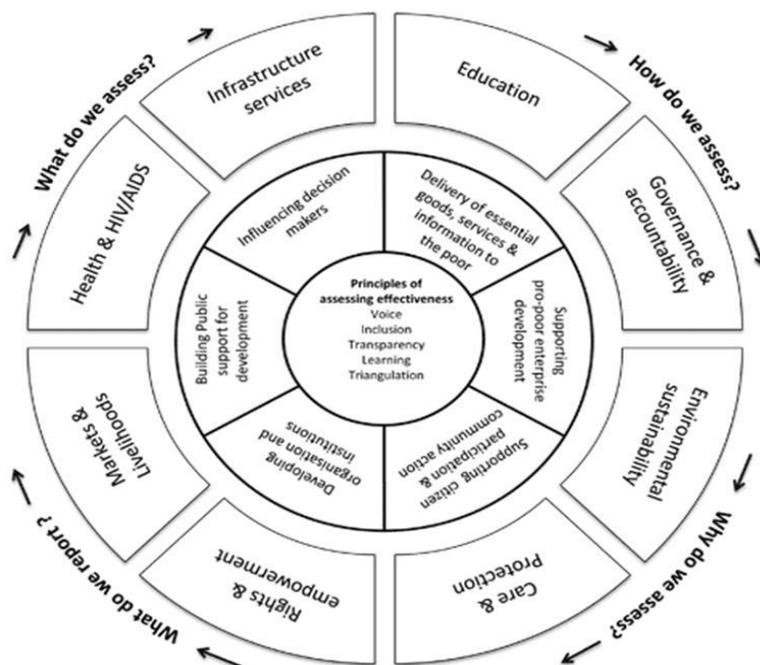
Box 4: Bond's 'im-prove it!' framework - www.bond.org.uk

B3.   What do people mean by theory of change?

Though most of these organisations and individuals use the phrase 'theory of change', there are a number of different ways in which people describe and approach theory of change (cf Box 5). This section outlines some of the different terms people use; some broad ways to categorise different perspectives on theory of change; and the different levels at which people use theory of change. The following section then describes in more detail how these translate into different approaches.

Box 5: Ways people describe theory of change
- Programme theory/ logic/ approach
- A causal pathway/ chain/ model/ map
- Intervention theory/ framework/ logic
- A clear and testable hypothesis
- A blueprint for evaluation
- A direction of travel
- A road map for change
- Pathways mapping
- A process of open enquiry and dialogue
- A logic model
- Back to basics
- A sense of direction

Different perspectives on theory of change

As well as using different terms to describe theory of change, individuals and organisations have a range of understanding and perspectives. Although there is much overlap across them all, articulating some emerging categories may be helpful in understanding the divergence of views.

- Evaluative or formative: Whether the primary purpose is for accountability or learning. While many evaluation specialists find that theory of change is useful as it is a more formative approach, their emphasis from the beginning is on using theory of change for evaluation. Those that come with a primary emphasis on learning often shape the process quite differently. Evaluation focused theory of change can also be prospective (designed from the beginning of a programme) or retrospective (carried out at the time of the evaluation to understand what has underpinned practice (Shapiro 2005).

- Explanatory or exploratory: Some approaches seek to make explicit – to **explain** – the existing theory for an organisation or programme in order to then learn and test whether it works:

  "A theory of change is essentially an explanation about how a group of stakeholders expect to reach a commonly understood long-term goal." (Anderson, undated)

  Others some set out to **explore** their theory from the outset without holding preconceptions. For them, it is more about "trying to achieve a type of conversation" (INGO informant).

  "A theory of change is an exciting and often liberating process of interaction that helps organisations see beyond their familiar frames and habits." (southern informant)

- Linear or complex: some seek to lay out a very specific set of steps of cause and effect that can be tested at each level; while others seek to think about and represent theory of change from a more systemic or network perspective that reflects the complexity of change processes and shows the actors, chains, linkages and learning loops.

Different levels of theory of change

People also think about theory of change at different levels: macro theories of change (development perspectives and thinking that influence us); sector or target group theories of change; organisational theories of change; and project or programme theories of change. Most approaches focus on a particular level, usually project or programme level change, but may include exploring broader levels too. They are not mutually exclusive.

Some broad frameworks for theory of change

Perhaps approaches fall into two main categories, which frame the analysis below (cf Box 6):

Box 6: Approaches to theory of change

Approach 1: Those that focus on how projects or programmes expect to *bring change* OR

Approach 2: Those that explore *how change happens more broadly* and then what that means for
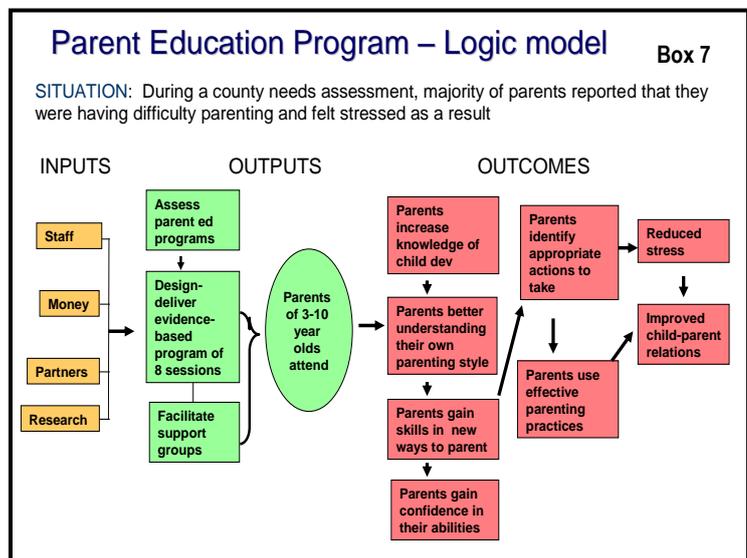
B4.   What approaches are people taking to theory of change?

Depending where people stand in regard to the broad frameworks outlined above, they approach theory of change in different ways. It is impossible to fit approaches tidily into each category, but in a sense, it does not matter. The purpose of describing them here is to prompt questions about where organisations lie on different spectrums and why; and understand what they are doing.

Approach 1: How programmes bring change

Theory of change as a logic model

Some take a logic model approach to theory of change, merely extending the traditional logic model to explain the rationale behind a programme. Logic models more frequently present theory in a set of boxes (see Box 7 right) rather than a complex diagram. Rogers (2006) distinguishes theory of change from logic models by arguing that it should intentionally draw on wider research based theory, while logic models may just set out the set of beliefs about change held by practitioners. Logic models also do not often explain the rationale behind a programme.

Parent Education Program – Logic model   Box 7

SITUATION: During a county needs assessment, majority of parents reported that they were having difficulty parenting and felt stressed as a result

Programme theory

Monitoring and evaluation specialists mainly use a 'programme theory' approach. Programme theory focuses on articulating the "components, mechanisms, relationships and sequences of causes and effects which are presumed to lead to the desired outcomes" (Colter&Taylor10) – what issues a programme seeks to address and how – in order to test these out in evaluation. Programme theorists also argue the importance of drawing on an existing body of research (Shapiro05) to "think more systematically about what it will take to promote and sustain the changes they want to bring about." (Guthrie et al 2005).

> **Programme theory is "A simplified model of how activities are understood to contribute to a chain of intended outcomes, and finally to the ultimate outcome that helps to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate an intervention."** (Rogers 2006)

'Realist evaluation' and 'theory based evaluation' are other streams of work closely linked to programme theory and which explore "what works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects, and how?'" (Pawson&Tilley04).

Most people do not distinguish between programme theory and theory of change, using the terms interchangeably. Where they do make distinctions, they describe programme theory as a "lower order of theory of change" (INGO informant) and a more "causal model"; while theory of change sets out: "to illustrate the relationships between outcomes at different levels and interventions, with accompanying explanations behind it" (Rogers 06).

Theories of change (at programme/ project level)

PROJECT SUPERWOMAN: A THEORY OF CHANGE

(Box 8 - ActKnowledge 2003)
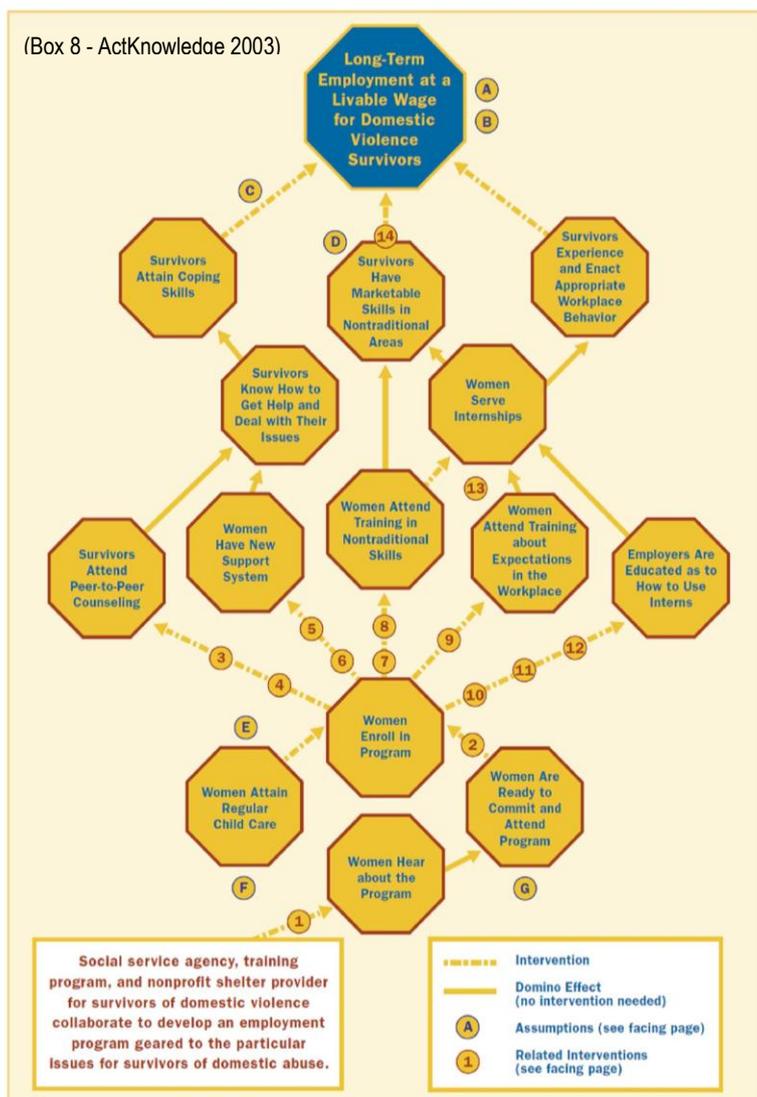
ActKnowledge's approach to theory of change (www.theoryofchange.com), evolving also from evaluation roots and focusing on mapping out the causal pathways for a programme sets out to make those relationships and explanations very clear (cf Box 8 left). It advocates a process including the following steps:

1. Identifying goals and assumptions.
2. Backwards mapping and connecting outcomes (pre-conditions) – at least at three levels.
3. Developing indicators (who or what needs to change; how much; and over how long).
4. Identifying interventions.
5. Writing a narrative (to support the diagrammatic representation).

The work of ActKnowledge has become the most frequently used source of information about theory of change, drawing on both its process and its terminology – many different streams of theory of change use the term "pre-conditions" to describe the intermediary changes that form a pathway to the final outcomes. Most of the North American guidance support processes like this.

Similar to programme theory approach, the Harvard Pathways Mapping Initiative defines its process as one that: "makes explicit the links among actions, the contexts in which actions occur, and intended outcomes" (Schorr & Marchand 2007).

8

All of these approaches involve defining a causal path to outcomes for a specific programme or project in order to test the where it works and where it falls down. A key measure of the success of this kind of approach is whether or not it is "**plausible, doable and testable"** (Anderson, undated). Yet all these forms of theory of change still make a conscious attempt to move beyond simple cause and effect (World Bank04), from **"political arithmetic to enlightenment"** (Pawson & Tilley04, quoting Weiss & Bucuvalas 1980).

Approach 2: Exploring how change happens more broadly

Approaches that explore more broadly how change happens in a particular context – and from that, distinguish their own part – tend to be less linear. Jim Woodhill (Wageningen 2010) argues for linking theory of change much more closely with complexity thinking as initiatives can fail because they have not been well enough planned or thought through; but also because we are intervening in complex situations where cause and effect are unpredictable and often impossible to understand. Rick Davies (2004) argues for the need to find ways to represent change processes from a network perspective, rather than the usual one-dimensional, hierarchical nature of many models: to recognise also that there are other actors and events beyond us that influence each other:

"Removing the one-directional nature of change leads us from thinking about a chain of events to a network of events, and from a chain of actors to a network of actors." (Davies 2004)

Keystone Accountability (see Box 9 right), for example, suggests a process that sets out an overall vision and all the changes necessary to achieve the vision – not just what the organisation can do itself. These include both long-term changes and what they too refer to as 'pre-conditions' – the interim changes that need to take place. From there it maps the system in which the organisation operates – the key actors that influence change, whether positively or negatively. This becomes the basis for deciding what kind of relationships the organisation needs with whom to achieve change effectively. It uses its own template diagram, mapping each actor and the changes that need to take place. For Keystone Accountability it is essential that an organisation steps out of its project box:

> Box 9: Keystone Accountability's theory of change approach
>
> 1. A vision of success – plausible and dynamic (short but realistic picture of sustainable future); and the specific desired outcomes
>
> 2. Preconditions of success: the short and intermediate changes that need to take place
>
> 3. System mapping: identifying the actors who influence positively or negatively/ and the relationships we need to build with them to achieve our vision
>
> 4. Then consulting with other constituents and starting to align strategies: identifying those that an organisation can do directly and those that it

"Through dialogue the participants emerge with a much clearer understanding of the way change happens in the context, and the range of strategic options that are open to the organization – and to the other actors in the system." (Keystone guidelines)

Diana Leat (2005) has written about theory of change, starting from articulating a 'theory of the problem' and then the causal story, including defining the actors who influence that story. Another approach is evolving through the work that Hivos' consultants are developing, though it is still in progress. They look at four key areas:

- Context (thinking about my environment)
- Actors (reflective learning from our experience about what works)
- Ideas (broader theories about change from others' learning)
- Strategy (how I will act)

B5. How is theory of change different and fit with other processes?

Interviewees in the review had quite different ideas and experiences of how theory of change linked with other learning and monitoring processes that they use in their work (see Box 19 p.27). Those that took a broader approach to exploring change and then analysing their contribution found that it fitted well with approaches like Outcome Mapping and 'Most Significant Change' as it

is **"an enabling exercise: not a tool; it fits with what you do anyway and helps you to express what you are already doing"** (southern informant). Organisations that do not find logframes helpful have been able to use theory of change instead – while others have found it useful to use logframes still to describe the detail of a particular project within the framework of the overall theory of change.

Logical frameworks (logframes)

Much of the existing documentation and guidance focuses on differentiating theory of change processes from the use of logical frameworks. Some informants acknowledged that, for them, theory of change is really just a "glorified logframe", allowing people to think more deeply, to explain the rationale behind the project and to be able to avoid lumping information into boxes.

"Theory-based evaluation has similarities to the Logframe approach but allows a much more in-depth understanding of the workings of a program or activity." (World Bank 2004)

Many organisations reported that they could combine different processes and tools quite effectively to meet both their needs and their donors. Many use theory of change to explore their organisation or programme at a broader level – to develop an overall vision and understanding of change – and then use logframes to define specific projects. Some also use other tools associated with logframe analysis like problem and objectives trees to complement their theory of change process. Key informants and written documents expressed many similar descriptions of the difference between theory of change and logframes, summarised below (Box 10):

Box 10: Differences between theory of change and logical frameworks

Theory of change:

- Captures the complexity of change much better – it can take into account relationships and the interdependence between different programme elements – it is less linear
- Acknowledges an initiative's starting point (captures existing change processes).
- Is broader than just a project: it takes into account programme and non-programme factors affecting change.
- Focuses on change and how to get there, rather than programme components.
- Is simpler and more flexible – more 'organic' and less 'mechanistic'.
- Is not rigid in its terminology and so is more free-flowing.
- Is an exercise or process, rather than a tool.
- Enables organisations to think about their work and their organisation more deeply.
- Is more interactive and fun – it is easier to involve a broad group of people.

Outcome mapping

A number of informants felt that theory of change fits well with outcome mapping, where it takes approach 2 (see p.9) that looks at how change happens in the wider context. Outcome mapping is an approach to planning, monitoring, and evaluating social change, initially developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada. Like some approaches to theory of change, it draws out the actors that influence change; presents change in a non-linear way; supports continuous and flexible learning; and encourages participation and accountability (Jones & Hearn 2009). It does not explain, however, *how and why* change comes about, so theory of change analysis can complement outcome mapping. Alternatively, outcome mapping provides useful tools within a theory of change process for not only identifying the actors, but analysing which ones are strategic partners, which the project can influence.

Strategic planning

Some interviewees did not differentiate between theory of change and strategic planning, identifying detailed approaches to achieving each outcome. Others argued, however, that theory of change is different and much broader, providing a framework for good strategic planning but not replacing it. In the Keystone theory of change process, for example, organisations outline their vision, outcomes at different levels and the actors that influence change; but stop short of looking at the factors that bring change, seeing that as part of the strategic planning that follows. The case study (see Box 11 below) outlines a third approach. It shows how two consultants found theory of change

a valuable foundation for strategic planning in identifying the key changes and actors at different levels and then also focusing on the core factors that the organisation believed could contribute to change. These factors could then help the organisation to plan detailed strategies in line with its core beliefs about how change happens.

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<u>Box 11: Theory of change case study</u>

A UK and local consultant guided an African street children NGO through an organisational theory of change process, discussing target groups, their needs and the different duty-bearers that influence change in their context. Participants identified the changes that need to happen in children's lives and among duty-bearers to achieve them. They analysed how change happens using real case studies of children; and identified six core factors that influence change. The consultants summarised learning from a Comic Relief study on the impact of its Street and working children programme on flip charts so staff and board could discuss each issue in the light of their own experience and wider learning.

Once participants began discussing the key strategic questions facing the organisation, the consultants noted that they reverted to describing the activities that they already carried out, rather than drawing on their core beliefs about how change happens. They therefore encouraged participants to think more carefully about their approach, grouping their ideas under each of the core factors from their theory of change; and using this process at the same time to test out their beliefs, seeing where strategies did not fit in their theory and why. This resulted in a much more thought-out strategy, grounded in wider learning.

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C.   HOW IS COMIC RELIEF USING THEORY OF CHANGE?

C1.   <u>How has Comic Relief's international grants team used theory of change?</u>

How the grants team's interest developed

<u>A greater emphasis on learning and accountability</u>

Comic Relief wants to understand what difference it has made and what it has learned from its grantmaking about how change happens – what works in a particular context and why. In 2007, the international grants team took on a Learning Manager and embarked on a more systematic learning process. A series of impact studies highlighted some common issues across Comic Relief international grants programmes:

- Some key learning about what lasting change looks like and what influences change for vulnerable groups of people.
- Lack of systematic information about the changes its grantmaking has helped to achieve in people's lives as many programmes monitored activities, not impact. Evaluations often did not question the validity of an approach, but only assessed project progress against its objectives.

Comic Relief developed a learning strategy based on a 'learning cycle' of articulating what it believes; testing out those beliefs; and applying learning to explore both *what* changes have taken place and *how* changes happens – in effect, its theory of change.

<u>Developing 'special initiative' grants</u>

Comic Relief mainly awards grants to UK NGOs working in partnership with local organisations, and mainly in Africa. In recent years, it has extended its grantmaking models from conventional project grants to also include larger 'investment' grants (providing core funding for southern NGOs funded via a UK NGO); 'special initiative' grants (aiming for systemic change); and devolved grantmaking (providing core funding to African grantmakers).

In 2006-7, the team made its first 'special initiative' grants – some of which involved multiple partners and countries. These grants included a scaled-up learning component to understand how

change happens and to collate better evidence to strengthen their programme learning and related advocacy.

These grants raised a number of different issues: how to tackle change at a more systemic level; differences among grantees in understanding how change occurs (cf Box 12 below); lack of clarity in the outcomes; and overly ambitious aims. Senior members of the Comic Relief team, influenced by their own reflection and reading on systems thinking, the importance of on-going (double-loop) learning and Diana Leat's exploration of theories of social change (2005), began trying to explore more explicitly partners' understanding of change.

Box 12: Why explore theory of change?

In one special initiative grant, Comic Relief took the opportunity to explore the grantee's theory of change. In a joint meeting, the UK grantee and the southern partners discussed their key beliefs about how change happens in two groups: one with the two African partners; and one with Comic Relief and the UK grantee. The two discussions took very different paths. Three out of the five core beliefs about how change happens that the southern partners reported back were not evident in the previously submitted written 'theory of change' or project documents; nor the discussions from the other group.

This highlighted for everyone present both the importance of coming to a shared understanding of a programme; and of reflecting the experience and knowledge of those implementing the work.

Comic Relief staff began more of these kinds of conversations with partners and potential partners – both in the office and during project visits – delving more into how social change takes place, including the actors that influence change. Special initiative grant managers discussed together with each other and with partners the 'theory of change' underlying each grant. In a joint process with partners, they developed a short narrative and summary diagram – usually comprising the programme's overall goal, up to five core changes in people's lives; the key actors; and the priority factors, relationships and approaches that led to change (see Box 13 below). From these discussions, conversations with partners and a brief review of documents on the internet, Comic Relief then drew up some simple guidance notes for special initiatives on theory of change.
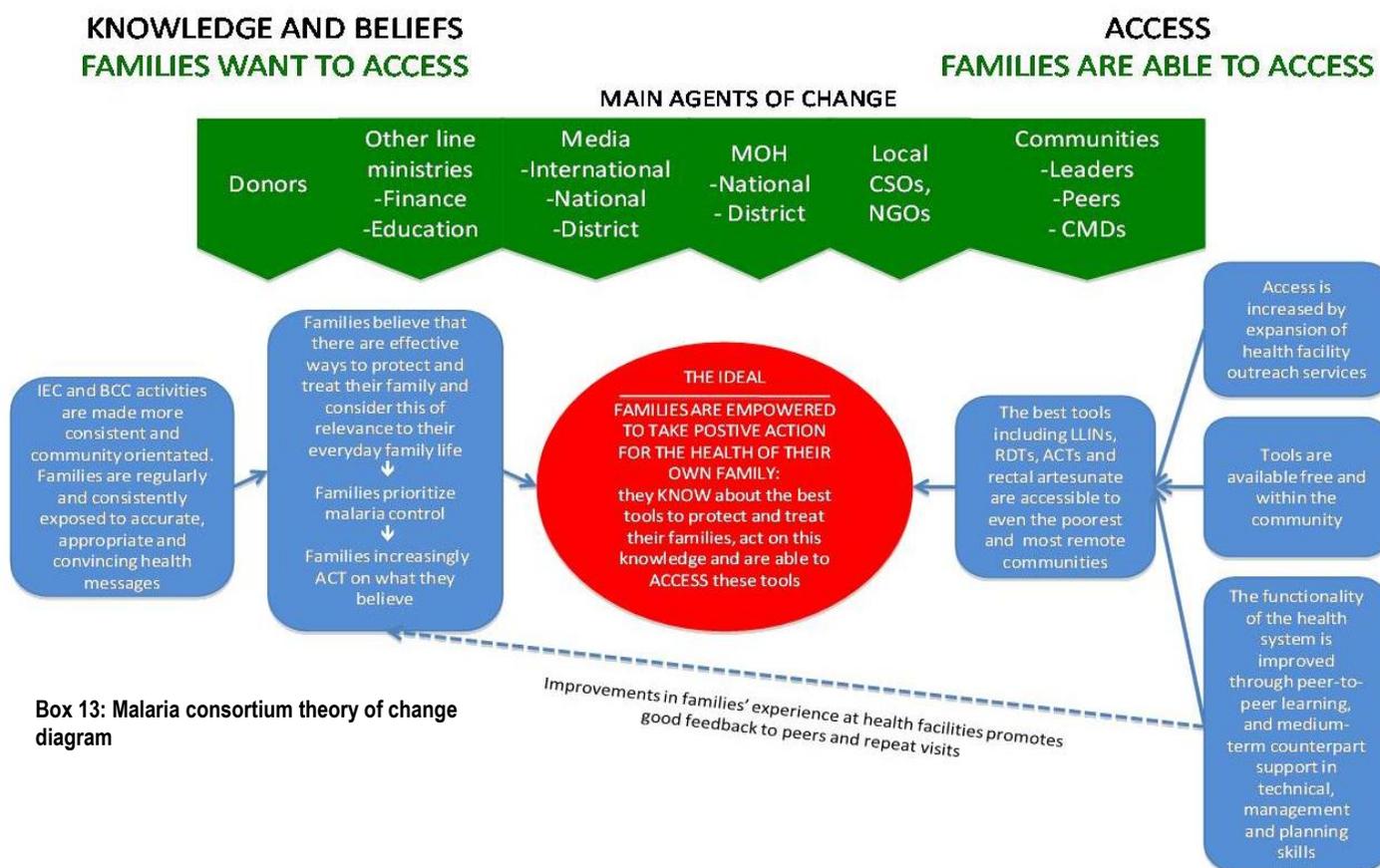
Box 13: Malaria consortium theory of change diagram

How Comic Relief understands theory of change

In the special initiatives guidance, Comic Relief developed a working definition of theory of change:

"A 'Theory of Change' represents people's understanding of how change happens – the pathways, factors and relationships that bring and sustain change in a particular context." (Comic Relief 2007)

Box 14: Comic Relief– principles for developing a theory of change

o Those benefitting from the programme and implementing partners should be at the forefront of developing a Theory of Change
o It should not be viewed as a static document but as a working document for regular review which captures learning on an ongoing basis
o Be flexible about making changes but keep a good record of what changes have been made and why
o Try to show the different weight or emphasis given to different approaches, relationships etc.
o Acknowledge where change has already taken place or where things are outside the influence of the initiative
o Keep the diagram and language simple and as jargon-free as possible to make it accessible to many audiences

The guidance laid out some key principles for developing a theory of change (see Box 14 left) and some broad questions. It suggests an approach that lies somewhere between the two broad approaches of how programmes bring change and how change happens. While focusing on a particular programme and starting from an analysis of the problems, it also explores the actors and both programme and non programme factors that influence change. It encourages a flexible, ongoing learning process that regularly reviews and adapts the representation.

Since then, Comic Relief has used and adapted this process based on its own practice but has not had the chance to draw on wider learning from others and revise its written guidance until this review.

How the grants team has used theory of change

Developing programme strategies

In 2008-9 the international grants team reflected on their learning from the previous four years of grant making and management to develop new programme strategies. The team explored their vision for their programmes and articulated the key changes in people's lives to which they hoped to contribute; and their core beliefs about how change happens.

Applicants and grantholders are now required to show how their project will contribute to one or more of the Comic Relief programme outcomes; and grantmaking processes assess the extent to which a project fits within the Comic Relief programme beliefs about how change happens.

Comic Relief also requires grantees to complete a 'grant start-up form' that states outcomes (including data collection methods) and outputs; target group numbers, and learning questions to explore in the project. Some grantees have found this exercise similar to completing a logframe.

Using theory of change processes more widely

In addition, the international grants team has started to use theory of change more widely in their grantmaking and management, often involving the components described below (Box 15):

- Large grants: staff have asked and/or encouraged 'investment grant' and their 'devolved grantmaking' partners to articulate their theory of change. Some

Box 15: Comic Relief led theory of change processes

Interactions have ranged from informal conversations to more formal processes, usually involving:
o identifying key problems and their causes
o identifying the actors responsible
o identifying changes needed in people's lives – and how that relates to your organisational mission
o assessing what other actors should be doing differently to achieve those changes
o exploring the factors that influence change and prioritising 3-4 key beliefs about how change happens
o drawing together the thinking in a diagram or picture; and sometimes as a summary narrative.

Programme Managers, supported by the learning team, have facilitated theory of change processes themselves with their grantees.

- Street and working children workshop: In July 2010, Comic Relief held a workshop in Chennai, India as part of the follow up to the Street and Working Children and Young People programme impact study (James 2008). The workshop brought together partners in Asia to share learning with each other. In groups, they explored the theory of change for particular groups of children, such as children living on the streets, involved in sex work and at risk of child labour (cf Box 16 below).

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Box 16: Exploring theory of change for different groups of children

The Chennai workshop explored theories of change for specific groups of children, rather than focussing on one programme or organisation. One participant said of the process:

> **"It gave us an opportunity to really question and discuss change in our work…, to begin to understand what we do and what exactly we want to achieve with a particular activity."**

The facilitating team also designed a process to involve children themselves in contributing to the analysis. Before the workshop, Comic Relief asked two southern partners to explore some theory of change questions with the children they work with, using their own methods. The partners documented the process and responses; and the facilitating team captured them on posters displayed in a 'children's corner'. As participants discussed each issue in groups, they also then checked what the children had said, thus keeping everyone grounded in reality and enabling them to check their own understanding against the children.

The team also designed the workshop activities as ones that partners could use with children directly as well. Venn diagrams were used to analyse individuals and groups that influence change for their target group; children's case studies helped participants identify changes in children's lives; a matrix was created to plot changes at family, community and policy level; and children's 'journeys of life' were used to analyse what external and programmatic factors led to positive and negative change. At the end this was drawn together in a diagrammatic or pictorial summary; then shared commitments and action plans for follow up were agreed. An example of one organisation's next steps is described in Box 17 (p.15).

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- Sports research: A report for Comic Relief (Coalter 2010) drawing together the findings from five years of research into the impact of sport for development projects also found that it was difficult to assess impact because so many of the programmes were unclear about how they expected to bring change. In a workshop in November 2010, organisations that participated in the research spent a day exploring their theory of change.

> **"There is a clear need for both (programme providers and funders) to articulate *how* programmes are meant to work and the precise nature of the issues which they seek to address."** (Coalter 2010)

- Grant making and management: Comic Relief has also begun introducing questions linked to theory of change in its grant documents. For example, its evaluation guidelines now ask that the consultant outlines the programme theory of change and assesses whether or not it has been effective; and the annual report asks grantees whether learning has confirmed or changed their overall approach.

Comic Relief has discussed theory of change when presenting its strategy to grantees and potential applicants; talked about it in report feedback at times; discussed it with its external assessors; made theory of change an explicit part of its learning strategy and is considering how it can support partners in theory of change, including some potential workshops to share experiences and learning.

C2.   How have Comic Relief partners used theory of change?

Partners' experiences of theory of change

Amongst the Comic Relief partners that have been involved in theory of change processes, there is a range of ways in which they have become involved.

Comic Relief senior managers have most engaged with special initiative and devolved grantmaking

holders about theory of change, often through informal conversations about how change takes place in their context and who are the key actors who influence change. Some of these grantholders have then gone on to develop their own theory of change based on examples and guidelines from Comic Relief; one had gone for training and then facilitated their own process; while others contracted an external facilitator to guide them. For some of these partners, the discussions with Comic Relief coincided with their own internal organisational reflections or impetus that also influenced the path they took.

Comic Relief Programme and Learning Managers have themselves facilitated processes with investment grant holders. Some Comic Relief linked consultants have used a partner's existing theory of change as a framework for a mid-term review; and also worked with organisations to develop a retrospective theory of change as a basis for an evaluation. They have also facilitated processes for project grant holders from whom Comic Relief has requested a theory of change or a clearer outline of the approach they want to take and why.

Some of these theory of change processes involved very broad conversations about change within a particular context or for specific groups of people; then went on to explore contribution at organisational or programme level. Others focused more on the organisation as a starting point but then brought in wider learning in different ways, such as from the Comic Relief impact studies. One involved project visits to other organisations working on similar issues to learn from them; and another drew on wider learning from the sector through its facilitator.

A UK partner, ChildHope, that attended the Chennai workshop asked to meet Comic Relief to discuss theory of change further. They had also heard about it through Comic Relief strategy presentations. Following this meeting, their staff then facilitated processes with their partners in Peru (with staff and then with the children benefiting), the Gambia and Tanzania. Some of the Asian partners that attended the Chennai workshop also took their learning forward. Sanlaap India, for example, went on to use the workshop methods to explore with over 60 children the long-term and interim changes that happen in their lives and how they happen. Another partner, Prajaak, adapted the theory of change process used in the workshop to their context (see Box 17 below):

> ### Box 17: Transforming organisational theory of change
>
> Following a theory of change process, Prajaak, an organisation working with railway children in Calcutta India, has refocused its strategy, restructured roles and reinvigorated relationships.
>
> After attending the India workshop, Prajaak's director closed his organisation for eight days. He took 25 staff through open and deep discussions based on the India workshop process, but adapted them to also look at roles and responsibilities. Each staff member tore from a magazine a picture that they felt represented their role in the organisation and presented it on flip chart with a description of their responsibilities. They added queries and questions on post-its to each others' chart, and then put these aside while they explored their theory of change. Their discussions raised some key issues:
> o that children's mental health was a crucial and unaddressed factor in bringing change;
> o that their work needed to focus more on the areas where children were coming from, not just the railway platforms where they ended up;
> o that they needed to do more to influence political leaders, not just the Minister for Railways;
> o and that they needed to mobilise communities to provide support that government might find it difficult to supply, including resources and skills.
>
> At the end of the workshop, staff analysed their roles in the light of the discussions, sharing what they wanted to do differently or new. This process healed conflicts that had simmered under the surface for a long time as people became clearer about what they wanted to do and why.
> **"(Before this process) we were missing the group processes that bring up new things from staff and children. This was a process of joint revelation and decision-making. It was a valuable collective exercise that generated consensus about the direction we should go."**
>
> Prajaak staff also took about 30 boys that they work with through a similar process. They took five days to discuss intensively with them about change and how it happens. Children explored the problems

at home, on the railway stations and in the project, presenting them as flowers that could become the basis for growth. They represented their past, present and future, mapping the changes they needed to achieve. Prajaak framed each part of the process by helping children understand the question or issue through pictures, symbols and exercises. For example, they created a smiling face out of different materials and then involved the children in moving these around and adding to them to create a new face each day or at the end of session, encouraging them to see change as positive and non-threatening. They used the symbol of balloons held down by stones to represent both external and internal factors that affect change: the stone holding it down and the air inside driving it up. They also made sure that they allowed time for discussions, breaking them up with multiple games, exercises, dance, songs and drawing, but extending them over sometimes five to eight hours. They found that children surprised them with their contributions, including:

- o identifying abuse and the need for protection as a priority issue;
- o defining themselves as key stakeholders in bringing change and identifying 23 things they could do to help themselves – also linking back to mental health issues identified by staff;
- o and identifying key issues with which the government could help them.

Prajaak finished the exercise by getting children to wrap themselves in newspapers as a symbol of transferring all the things they wanted to change to the paper – and then burning the papers. They identified what they could contribute to each other and wider society and made paper boats which they released symbolically to each other; and received each others' help.

Prajaak is now in the process of reviewing their logframe in the light of their theory of change. Since the process, staff turnover has reduced greatly, their satisfaction has increased and they contribute much more to the organisation. A recent external evaluation found the atmosphere had significantly improved in Prajaak's drop-in centres; and that staff were much more involved in actively contributing to decision-making.

Railway children from Prajaak, portray their needs as flowers that lead to positive growth; change, as a smiling face; and the development of a child from past to present and to future, identifying the changes they want to make.

How partners have responded to theory of change

"It was never imposed on us. …it takes you through what you are already doing, so it's not like a formula or tool that you need to adapt to. It was drawing me out and enabling me to think more clearly about what we are doing – it's enabling more than imposing." (southern partner)

Comic Relief partners have had a range of responses to using theory of change. A recent study of the research component of special initiative grants found that most of the special initiative partners had found the conversations and processes that they went through very helpful (Chapman & Mancini09) and that conversations had prompted their own thinking and explorations. Participants at the Chennai workshop said that they initially felt a bit dubious, wondering if it was to be an academic discussion; but ending up describing it as *"the reality of change"*; a process that *"helps us see where we can hit the critical points and zoom in"* and that enabled them to *"really question and discuss change in the work we are doing"*.

While some grantees have embraced the thinking process, others felt it was like 'jumping through a hoop'. Some of the participants in the sports workshop, for example, recognised that sport was only a small part of how change happens, and felt demoralised that the process had shaken their very 'raison d'être. A couple of partners also said that they had a double reaction to the theory of change process: firstly wondering why they had to do this at all beforehand; but then finding it very helpful afterwards and glad that they were part of it.

D.   WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS THEORY OF CHANGE MADE?

DI.   What difference has theory of change made to Comic Relief partners?

This review clearly highlighted that theory of change work has had a variety of impacts on grantees – some things which made a considerable difference to their organisation and approach; others which affected them in smaller ways. Common themes include clarifying organisations' goals and approaches; improving monitoring, evaluation and defining outcomes; improving internal and external communication; reducing conflict; and empowering those involved.

Clarity
- making our intentions and assumptions clearer
- developing a much clearer and common understanding

Approach
- finding new strategic actors
- making our advocacy clearer
- leading to mainstreaming child rights
- changing us from reactive to proactive in our approach to grantmaking
- connecting contributing factors and support with change
- helping us focus on outcomes, rather than activities

Monitoring, learning and evaluation
- helping us define our monitoring and evaluation better
- helping think more about longer-term change
- focusing on fewer outcomes and indicators
- changing the design of our monitoring forms
- contributing to wider reviews and learning processes
- starting learning circles
- helping us understand strategies that have not worked well
- leading to more questions, such as: how much impact are we having at societal level? how can we sustain change? whose view of change matters?

Partnerships

- better and clearer communication with donors and other external stakeholders
- supporting discussions / conversations with stakeholders
- changing the way we thought about and interacted with other stakeholders to realise that we need others to play their part and differently
- realising that the project alone can't bring change
- realising that there were things we didn't need to do
- sharing theories among partners to understand commonalities and differences
- helping us understand the added value of working together

<u>Organisation Development</u>

- helping with staff induction and training
- using it in our approach on other projects
- resolving relationship conflicts and redefining roles
- changing our roles to generalists – and therefore affecting who we recruit
- empowerment: partners commented frequently on the quality of discussion in all the interactions which led to significant reflection and was in itself empowering. People described discussions as **"lively, critiquing the views of others"** (Cunningham 2010), and **"impressive, giving an opportunity to really question and discuss change in the work we are doing** (India workshop – James 2010).

Box 18: Cotton farming or farming livelihoods?

Oxfam made three radical changes to their programme to support cotton production in Mali as a result of theory of change processes.

In 2007, Comic Relief gave a five-year special initiative grant to Oxfam for their cotton programme. Staff discussed with Oxfam UK and Mali the underlying theory of change. Oxfam sent one Mali and one Oxford staff member to Canada for two-week training on theory of change (logic model style) from the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET).

On their return, they developed a theory of change with partners. As they discussed, they said that **"Everything was out on the table: we really discussed impact."** Two significant issues emerged:

- Climate change: where they had previously articulated a logframe assumption that there would be sufficient rainfall for production over the five years, they now realised as they discussed the programme in real depth that this was not realistic. Rather than leaving it as a risk – a variable – they added a new climate change adaptation component to the programme to address it pro-actively.
- Gender strategy: As they discussed lasting change in people's lives, they realised that enabling women to access land was not sufficient but that they had also to look at quality and security of land. This led to a change in their gender strategy.

"When we saw the final product that was the 'wow' part. We saw what the special initiative was all about and how it linked to the outcomes. We had a much clearer and common understanding – before that, each partner was presenting the programme from a different point of view."

Reviewing their theory of change a year into the project also led Oxfam to change their approach. Where the programme had aimed to improve cotton production by tackling issues like subsidies, they now reoriented their approach to helping farmers diversify their livelihoods and become more business-like and effective. They also now use theory of change with other local partners and programmes.

Oxfam Mali is planning a major review this year when they will go back to their theory of change and rework it to take into account the new learning and any changes in the context.

D2.   **What do others say about the benefits of using theory of change?**

Advocates of theory of change cite a wide range of benefits of using a theory of change process, some very in line with Comic Relief's experience. Both the literature and key informants provided some helpful and practical examples for many of these. Those mentioned include:

A common understanding: Theory of change processes can help people surface differences and disagreements to develop a common understanding of priorities. For example, one key informant asked the staff of a large organisation to position themselves along a line of agreement to show where they felt their organisation's primary focus lay: on capacity building or poverty alleviation? Their responses were polarised between field staff and the leadership. Another found that participants had completely different views about gender equality and what that meant; yet were not aware previously that there was any divergence though it was central to their work.

A focus on what really matters: A theory of change process can help people think through what they do, what others are doing, and focus their use of resources and personnel.

Questioning their theory: Many examples were given of programmes that had redefined their approach, after thinking through their theory of change.

A framework for learning and evaluation: Grantmakers gave examples of how thinking through their own theory of change had helped them clarify the key areas that they wanted to track, thus focusing their monitoring and evaluation. It could also help improve the quality of evaluations by getting evaluators to ask better questions and therefore analyse programmes more deeply. Consultants had also found theory of change very helpful as the basis for evaluation, focusing on whether the organisation is achieving key long-term changes and whether its core beliefs and strategies work.

Strengthening advocacy: Much of the writing and use of theory of change focuses on its benefits in research and advocacy work. A theory of change process can help focus advocacy targets better and define more clearly the pathway to achieving them, drawing on broad theories about how advocacy works. Academic studies, some theory of change guidance and key informants also argue that it provides a convincing 'story' to use to influence policy – which can be more effective than the 'thumping fact'.

> *"Research is unlikely to produce the thumping 'fact' that changes the course of policy making. Rather, policies are born out of clash and compromise of ideas."*(Pawson & Tilley 2004)

Communication: Developing a theory of change helped organisations communicate much more clearly with their board about what they were doing and in reporting to donors though no one gave clear examples of how reporting had improved in practice.

E.   WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED ABOUT THEORY OF CHANGE?

This section draws out views from Comic Relief, its partners and others about theory of change approaches: who they are most useful for; what kind of approach and processes are most helpful; and what are the main challenges people have faced.

E1.   Who is theory of change most useful for?

Complex programmes

Comic Relief staff found that theory of change was very important with complex programmes, such as special initiatives, investment grants and project grants with multiple partners. Key informants agreed, giving examples like DFID's Partnership Programme Arrangements.

Non-delivery and network based organisations

Theory of change is also useful for network based organisations and those coordinating activities across a range of programmes. Grantmakers, foundations and a number of Comic Relief's intermediary partners in the UK and Europe said that they found it a useful way to explore their work, which would not fit well into more frequently used logframes.

More open, learning organisations

Theory of change works well for organisations that are **"able to think and looking for new ways of doing things"** and for demand-led organisations that need less rigid ways of thinking through and representing their work. Comic Relief staff had similar experiences but were not sure whether it was still valuable for more traditional or less open organisations to use a theory of change process:

some thought that every organisation still benefited; while others gave examples of partners that they thought had not necessarily gained anything from the process.

More experienced organisations

Organisations that have already been through some kind of learning journey and have developed systems and ways of working may find it more helpful and easier to think through their theory of change. Some staff and key informants questioned the value of theory of change processes for younger and more pioneering organisations that might need freedom to experiment and learn from practice without having to try to hone their thinking at too early a stage.

Programmes that are at an early stage in the grant process

One informant had found that it was harder for an organisation to think openly about its theory of change once it was already well into a project and had set up many of its systems. A UK grantholder also found that, where an organisation had recently developed its strategic plan, it was hard for them to go back to thinking about their underlying theory of change at that point. A facilitator that had used a theory of change process as the foundation for a strategic planning process found that it provided an excellent framework and reference point that participants returned to when discussions lost their focus or there were disagreements about key strategies.

Key informants pointed out, however, that theory of change can be used retrospectively. Some evaluators use participatory processes to draw out the theory of change as a framework for the evaluation, even where it has not existed before. Others have also gone through project documents to draw out themselves the underlying theory of change and then present that back to organisations.

E2.   What kind of approach has been most helpful?

It is difficult to make a comparison of southern partners' experiences of different kinds of approaches as each has only experienced one form of interaction. Most of them had very positive responses resulting in real impact. There were some common areas of learning, however, that emerged from Comic Relief staff and other key informants' experiences, about good approaches.

A broad and open process

- Both informal and formal processes are important.
- It is important to move outside mechanistic means of development and a project box to understand change.
- It is useful to explore change in the wider context before taking it down to organisational or project level to understand actors and pathways for change outside our influence.
- Looking at theory of change at organisational, rather than project level, as it helps people step outside of details and take more responsibility for creating change.

"Informal discussions and conversations based on asking the right questions are important as well as more formal processes."(CR)

Involving a wide group of stakeholders

Involving a range of stakeholders works well, especially key leaders who are enthusiastic; southern partners who implement the work (both at strategic level and front line staff); and groups of people benefitting from the programmes. Different stages of a learning process can draw in different stakeholders. Some facilitators had found it helpful to do some thinking with a larger group and then leave the refining or other components for the organisation to work on in smaller teams.

Drawing on external learning

Theory of change processes need to be contextualised within the sector or type of work to draw on wider learning. Sometimes theory of change processes become too narrow and fail to draw on broader theories of social change, which should inform the programmes.

Ownership is critical

Where organisations owned the process and involved people from all levels, they were generally very positive about the process; but some that felt it was imposed on them, struggled to gain much value from it and did not follow through with it afterwards.

Components of a theory of change process

People disagreed about whether a process should contain standardised elements or be based simply on principles and key questions to guide the process. There were also different views on the sequence a process should follow and what should be included. The most common components that people mentioned were:

- a focus on long-term change: many processes start with the overall vision and changes;
- 'backward mapping' to identify the changes (often referred to as pre-conditions) that need to take place at other levels in order to achieve long-term change;
- some kind of diagrammatic representation of the theory of change, often building it as a group throughout the discussion process – but sometimes drawing it together after the discussions;
- the factors that lead to change: some focused on project interventions and activities, while some looked more widely at relationships, systems, structures and strategies.

Other elements that some informants emphasised as important include:

- Context analysis: For some, this took place before and outside the process; while for others the process focussed on mapping the broader context;
- An analysis of the different actors and how they influence change both positively and negatively: this was part of the broader context analysis but also part of how change happens;
- An analysis of the target group;
- Indicators: Many processes include identifying indicators as a crucial part of the theory of change process as it ensures that a theory can be tested by defining ways to measure.

There were differing views, however, about where the starting point for any theory of change process should be. Some argued that it is important to analyse the key problems and their causes. Others warned that it can take everyone too quickly into well defined patterns; that a problem focus might itself be validating a 'deficit' model of development; or might not be relevant to that context. For example, in situations where there are crises, it is not helpful to go in the same circles (Reeler 2007). It is possible to start instead with a positive vision for change and uncover obstacles to that vision as you analyse the actors and influences on change. Others felt that the starting point was not important and should vary according to the organisation. For example, some partners need to start by clarifying the core group of people they aim to support, while others may already be clear. Some facilitators found that a process worked better if they could take more time to explain and map out what they would cover beforehand. Others preferred to leave it very informal and allow the process to evolve.

Time and follow-through

While most of the processes that Comic Relief facilitated or funded were only over one or two days, most people felt they were too rushed. People found four to five days more useful, while Prajaak's director found that he needed eight days to take his organisation through a process himself (see Box 18 p.18). Some facilitators prefer to space out sessions, rather than having consecutive days, allowing time for synthesis and questions in between. Those that use theory of change, particularly in evaluation, argued that you can easily support an organisation to articulate its theory of change in a one or two day process (that may not cover all aspects); and then allow this representation to become the basis for further learning, reflection and adjustment later on. ActKnowledge expect a process to be at least over six months to draw up the initial representation. They may initiate thinking with a workshop but then expect participants to continue to work on areas of their theory together or in working groups, sending information back to ActKnowledge for review and comment through email exchanges.

One of the key learnings, though, was the importance of ensuring that theory of change was not a one-off process and product. People need time to go back and refine and work on their theory of change in smaller groups and with different stakeholders before agreeing a representation. They also need check-in points to refine and capture learning as well as to use it as a formal framework for reviews and evaluation.

The tools/ methods used

The ways in which people have carried out the process have depended to a great extent on the facilitator. Most have relied on group discussions, grouping answers and ranking exercises. Others have specifically set out to use more activity based discussion sessions to encourage people to step outside of their 'project boxes' and to draw in a range of participants. The street and working children workshop in India, for example, used activities that participants could adapt and use directly with children they work with so drew on a number of 'Participatory, Learning and Action' tools such as Venn diagrams, bean ranking and case studies. To engage participants in analysing how change happens, they drew a child's 'journey of life' marking the ups and downs of their change process and then identifying key factors that had led to the changes – both negative and positive. This enabled people to think about both programme and external factors that might influence change. People found the methods engaging and refreshing. Those that went on to use some of them to explore change with children described the tools as "unique"; and the journey of life exercise as particularly useful. As a Sanlaap India informant stated:

Journey of life "helps us to connect the contributing factors with the changes that have occurred in a child's life;…and understand the strategies that work well and those that have failed."

Organisations such as Keystone also draw on a range of participatory methods such as writing an epitaph for a programme or organisation to identify the goal; and systems mapping of actors. Power analysis tools are useful for discussing who needs to change and how. ActKnowledge has found that even an online survey tool can help people at a distance contribute either to kick-starting a process or filling in specific gaps along the way.

People also used a variety of ways to analyse and think about different types of change. Keystone uses a tool to analyse four dimensions of change: individual, relationship, institutional and cultural. Some Comic Relief processes analysed change at individual, duty-bearer level and policy level. Doug Reeler (2007) analyses three types of change: emergent (people's day to day conscious and unconscious adaptive learning processes); transformational (in crisis situations); and predictable (dealing with more visible problems in fairly stable conditions). Understanding what kind of change is needed may affect the key factors and approaches that will be appropriate for that context. For example, an action learning approach (using methods such as exchanges, mentoring and Participatory Learning and Action) may support emergent change effectively.

'Aha moments' in a theory of change process

Some participants and facilitators describe the whole process as illuminating. ActKnowledge finds that each time, it has uncovered assumptions that people have not thought through. Although people described a range of times when they felt like the discussions had made a particular impact – and those clearly varied across organisations – there were some parts of the process or discussions that people frequently mentioned as being especially illuminating:

- Mapping the different actors involved in change in a particular context.
- Thinking more simply and clearly about long-term changes: Facilitators had to find ways to help people do this, such as linking the discussion back to the organisational mission; referring to what those benefitting have said; constantly asking: So what? Why is that important? What does this lead to?; or by brainstorming all the changes and then sifting and categorising them.
- Identifying an organisation's contribution, prioritising changes and ways to influence change.
- Drawing together the thinking and analysis into a summary diagram and/ or narrative paragraph. Facilitators that used a flow diagram or template to build a theory of change with participants recognised that they were sometimes too linear but generally felt they were still helpful representations. Those that were more experimental in trying to help people find ways to convey and communicate linkages better had more varying experiences in using diagrams.

Sticking points in a process

There were also some key points in the process that were often challenging – although some of them actually led to some of the 'aha' moments and were a valuable part of the process.

- Both facilitators and organisations found the most common sticking point in supporting organisations to articulate their theory of change was in expressing the long-term changes in people's lives. Some also found it hard to think about changes at stakeholder or duty-bearer

level. Some organisations said they were used to thinking only of short-term changes. Others had lost their way among the jargon and overcomplicated change. Facilitators found that it helped to allow them just to brainstorm and then analyse; to keep asking "why is that important"/ "so what?"; to give examples from other organisations; and to draw on what people benefitting said about the changes they are proud of and what more they want to achieve.

- Some organisations struggled to think about how change happens, so Comic Relief staff found that it can be helpful just to take them from the starting point of what they do and get them to think about why they do it, to try to surface their underlying beliefs. Sometimes, even letting an issue lie overnight and then returning to it the next day can help participants process their thoughts.

- Another key sticking point in the process for many was how to represent their theory of change. While some found drawing their theory of change together in diagrammatic form very helpful, others do not think diagrammatically and struggled to do this. While showing examples of theories of change helped in some cases to think about how to represent their own, in others it became a distraction or took them down a path that did not work for their own programme. Some representations were over detailed and complex; while others lost the linkages and over-simplified their analysis. One UK partner highlighted the tendency to end up with something very linear that oversimplifies and to leave something out if does not fit. Some people also found others' representations hard to understand, preferring ones that were explained through a PowerPoint or narrative format. The organisations that were most content with their representation were those who had taken it back into their organisation and spent time working on it, discussing it, and reformulating it until they felt it represented them well. A summary narrative explanation of the diagrams also can help others understand it.

- It was hard to discuss theory of change across different organisations with different target groups (such as at the Comic Relief sport for development partners' workshop).

Avoiding jargon

Comic Relief staff found that it was better to avoid as far as possible using any jargon. They preferred to talk about changes rather than outcomes; and to avoid the term 'theory of change' – especially in the early stages of discussion – framing the process as one of reflection and learning. People found use of the term 'assumptions' particularly confusing as it is used in different ways to mean different things. Theory of change processes tackle right from the start the key assumptions – the beliefs about how change happens in a programme or context (such as the belief that children attending school will prevent or reduce them engaging in child labour). Logframes refer to assumptions in terms of 'risks' to a project (such as: elections will not destabilise the programme).

E3. What have been the main challenges?

Becoming just another donor hoop to jump through

Although most of the interviewees had had positive experiences of theory of change processes, there was awareness that, for some organisations, it did just feel like jumping through a hoop and they never really engaged with the learning. A number of reasons were cited for this: some were insecure about their future funding and therefore focussed on internal processes; some found the discussions actually led to uncomfortable questions (with implications they did not want to face); and some were over confident or not open enough to learning. A UK grantee also found that partners could be quite anxious about fitting their theory with donor requirements and that they were able to have a more open process before or without any donor involvement.

Linking theory of change with other organisational processes and tools

Some special initiative grantholders struggled to link theory of change to other areas of their work. For example, Comic Relief asked them to come up with two or three learning questions to explore during the grant and expected them to base these questions on some of the key hypotheses about how change happened, but not all grantholders were clear about the link. Some had long lists of questions that they were interested in; and others felt they had to adopt examples that Comic Relief suggested (Chapman & Mancini 2011). An investment grant holder also experienced this challenge when they facilitated a theory of change process with southern partners and found it hard to make the link recommended in Comic Relief guidance with learning questions.

> **"Animated workshops grind to a halt under the weight of reports and logframes."**

There was a disconnect between different parts of organisations' work so that learning and reflection from theory of change processes were submerged under existing monitoring and evaluation frameworks, logframes and other donor reporting requirements (consultants, Chapman & Mancini 2011, CR). Some still had to draw up logical frameworks for other donors and had difficulty reconciling them with the theory of change; though others found that they could fit it quite well into the format once they were clear about their core theory.

A small number of informants also commented that some of the more recent Comic Relief forms, such as the grant start-up form, felt contradictory to theory of change processes, pulling them back into a logframe mode of thinking.

Sustaining theory of change thinking and learning

Helping people think openly and not just revert to listing the activities that they do, demands **"sustained thinking and imagination"** (Pawson & Tilley 2004). It is very time-consuming to do well. Theories of change can also sometimes cover a range of different target groups or geographical areas and then lose their validity – so sometimes it may be better to have a number of different theories.

One of the main challenges raised by theory of change facilitators and one UK partner especially was about how to sustain the learning and reflection beyond whatever processes or conversations kick-start the initial thinking. The review of special initiative research found that it was difficult for partners to create the space for strategic thinking and reflection (Chapman & Mancini 2011). Without ongoing support for the learning process, it

> **"We could do more to reflect on it systematically rather than just adhoc reflections without actual adjustment and without integrating it in our daily operations."**

may fail to become embedded in an organisation. Even where theories of change exist, organisations often do not use it for follow-up and as a basis for evaluation: **"Sometimes too much time is spent developing the programme theory and not enough on how to use it"**. (Rogers 2006)

Talking to Comic Relief staff and to southern partners, however, they had examples of ongoing reflection and influence on their work. Yet only one or two had actually gone back to their initial representation of their theory of change and updated it based on their learning. Discussions had filtered into thinking and action; but not into documented change.

Who facilitates or initiates the process

Some Comic Relief staff and UK grantees raised concerns about who facilitates the learning process. If Comic Relief staff facilitate, does that bring too much caution into people's thinking or does that depend at what stage that facilitation takes place – i.e. before funding is approved or once the grant is secure? UK grantees also mediate Comic Relief funding and therefore hold that power too; so to what extent are they able to facilitate processes?

It is also easy for theory of change to become a set mechanistic process that everyone follows, without understanding an organisation's particular experience and ways of learning, so there is great need for excellent facilitators.

A UK partner pointed out the importance of allowing time for participants to express their culture and faith. Children consulted during the Comic Relief 'Street and Working Children Programme' impact study spoke of the impact their faith and religious practices (such as prayer) had on motivating them to change and sustain change – something that southern organisations may be reluctant to express in front of a northern funding organisation or consultant and yet may be a significant part of their theory of change. Southern partners also frequently emphasise how subjective change is: something can be very important to people in a particular context that does not seem a priority in wider learning and experience. Facilitators need to understand the organisational and target group culture and beliefs and be able to surface their impact on how change happens.

Balancing validity and simplicity

It is difficult to avoid presenting change as a simple chain of cause and effect. It is also easy to over-simplify by not looking beyond the theory for unintended outcomes and other explanations for

what has happened (Rogers 2006).

Avoiding it becoming a funder imposition or fad

During the review, it became evident that most of those thinking about and using theory of change as an actual approach or process were from Northern or more developed countries – or, like the Comic Relief partners, had become involved through a funder. Southern partners and key informants that I spoke to were generally positive, however, about funder support for theory of change, wherever it genuinely encouraged open thinking and could lead to changes in programmes based on that learning.

"Donors need to be encouraging authentic learning processes. People need help to ask good questions more systematically."

At this stage, Comic Relief staff are more concerned about it being a donor imposition than organisations interviewed in this review, though this may because of the relatively small number interviewed. Some suggested that theory of change should be framed simply as supporting people to think about what they are doing – something that already exists but that provides a learning lens that allows them to present and measure change more easily. Several organisations reinforced the advantage of introducing theory of change as an opportunity to reflect clearly on change and how it comes about; as a way to crystallise thinking about their work – not another tool.

F. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

People all come to development work, whether as funders, practitioners, consultants or academics shaped by their learning and experiences. This shapes the theory of change they bring to their work.

So theory of change is nothing new: it cannot be something for which anyone claims to have the copyright. Back in the 1970s the Brazilian educator, Freire, advocated a constant combining of theory and practice to shape learning: articulating theories in order to examine them and adjust them. More recently evaluation specialists have encouraged programmes to articulate the changes to which they aim to contribute and the beliefs about how change happens also so that they can examine and adjust them.

At this stage, there is little documented about theory of change as a particular approach though there is much thinking and learning going on internally in many organisations. The danger at this stage is that people draw on just one or two sources of learning; or just evolve their own 'method' from experience without benefitting from the range of learning from others' practices.

This review has sought to open up rather than close down the discussion about how to facilitate exploration of theory of change. Below some of the 'hot topics' are summarised, and suggestions provided on a broad definition of 'theory of change', and on some principles to consider in the use of the approach.

F1.   Hot topics

During the review, some key areas emerged where people had quite different views and experiences. While many of them overlap, it is useful to think about where a particular organisation needs to lie across a spectrum. These are described as 'hot topics'.

Explanation versus exploration

Some key informants differentiated theory of change processes from other tools like logframes because a theory of change *explains* the rationale behind a programme or way of working, while a logframe *describes* what the project does and sets out what is to be measured. For others, however, the primary focus of theory of change processes went one step further than explaining to *explore* change beyond individual projects, and how it comes about. Rather than being about a particular process, this seemed to be more about the mindset of the facilitator: one of prescription or creativity. It could also be determined by the organisation – whether it has the confidence and the manoeuvring room to feel it can open up a debate.

Accountability versus learning

Many people come to theory of change from the perspective of evaluation – to explain and test the rationale for a programme. For them, it is essential that any theory of change is 'provable': it has to lay out all the steps needed to achieve change so that where it has not worked can be assessed and adapted. While there is a strong element of learning for many within this – organisations test, learn and adapt – an emphasis on accountability shapes the way an organisation goes about the process. Those that come with a primary purpose for learning have spent more time on the broader discussions of how change happens in a particular context or group of people; and draw more on wider learning and thinking.

Imposition versus ownership

In a situation where funders and northern organisations are promoting and using theory of change, ownership by the organisations implementing the work is going to be a key issue. To what extent can people be pushed into a process of reflection and learning if they are not ready for it or do not understand its use for them? Is it useful to promote theory of change only with organisations that are already open to learning or to push those that need it into a process that they do not own?

A tool versus an approach

For some people, theory of change is about the kind of conversations that take place, the questions asked, the thinking and analysis that is prompted over a period of time. It includes particular moments for review, but should prompt ongoing reflection and adaptation. For others, theory of change is simply another but more flexible tool to replace or strengthen logframes and may not have a broader purpose beyond those moments of design and formal review. The diagram below shows the different levels at which people explore or describe their theory of change, from macro to project level; and where some other tools or processes can fit in within the cycle of learning (in blue): from analysis to planning to implementing to review which then feeds back into a revised theory. While a broad approach involves analysis at organisational level (in green) and can link with processes like outcome mapping; logframes and associated tools are more useful at project level (in orange) to describe what you plan to do and to help review progress at that level.
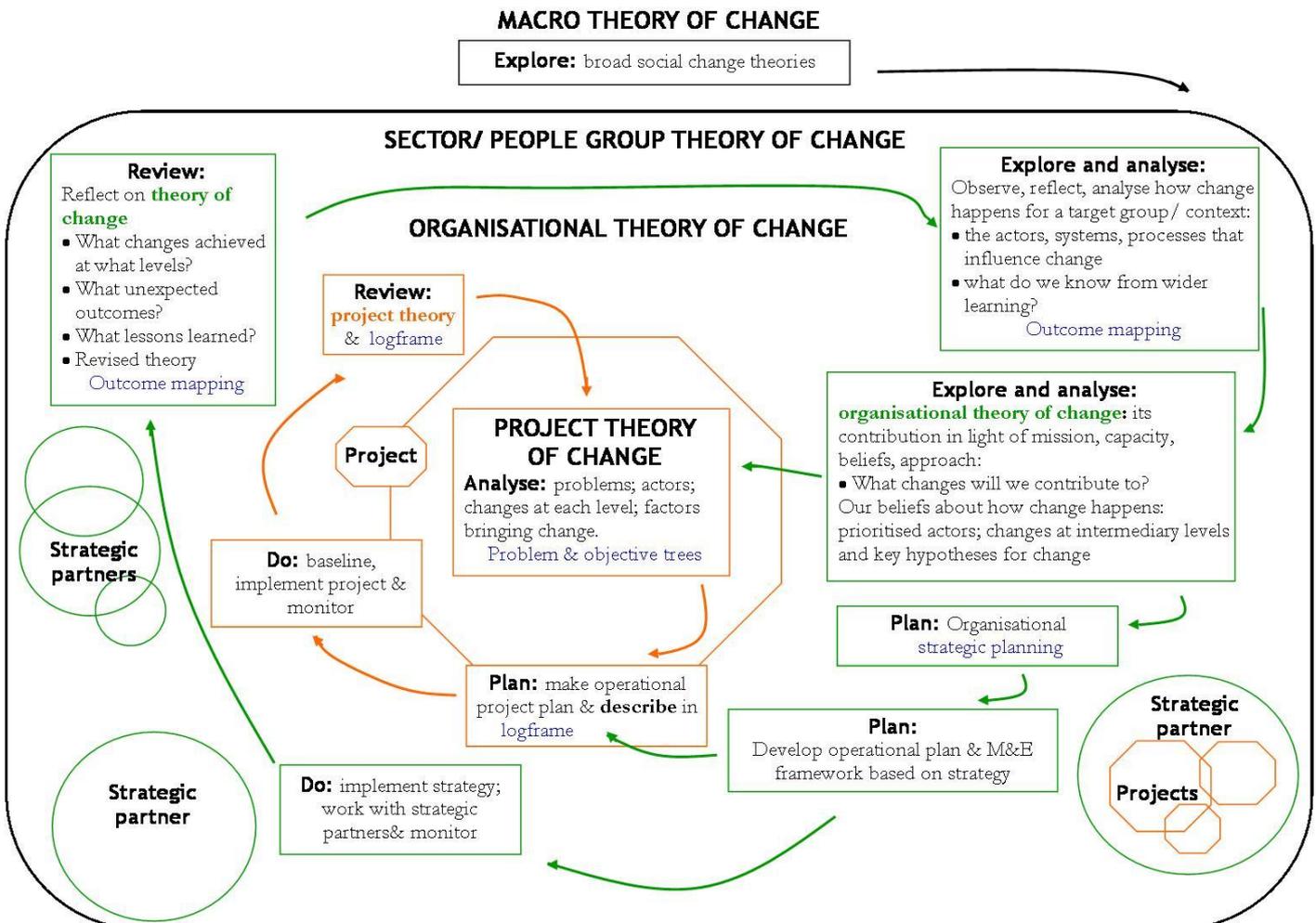
F2.   Conclusions

What is theory of change?

Defining theory of change

While there is no right answer to this, it is perhaps helpful to try to encapsulate an understanding of what is meant by theory of change. The learning from this review would point to an expanded, more open view of theory of change than Comic Relief's current definition – including it but not limiting it to a 'product' but also a learning process to support reflection over a period of time:

Theory of change is 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.
- **It locates a programme/ project within a wider analysis of how change comes about.**
- **It draws on external learning about development and how change happens at different levels.**
- **It articulates our understanding of change – but also challenges and opens it up.**
- **It acknowledges the complexity of change: the wider systems and actors that influence.**
- **It is often presented in diagrammatic form with an accompanying narrative summary.**

This definition advocates a broader approach that locates a programme or project within a wider view of how change comes about; is exploratory as well as explanatory; formative, not only evaluative; and more systemic than linear. While particular processes to kick-start reflection may be about articulating or evaluating the existing theory and may even be represented in a quite linear way, this definition promotes a longer-term process that will make room for more open and creative thinking.

There are different levels at which it is possible to articulate a theory of change approach from macro to sector or target group to organisational to project/ programme theories to personal. This broader approach would probably include thinking about all of them at some point, exploring change more widely in a particular context and then drawing on wider theory to analyse how a programme might contribute to change.

Explaining theory of change

A good number of people interviewed in the review found the very term 'theory of change' difficult and unhelpful. Some found it better to use instead terms like 'a sense of direction' or 'a road map' or simply ' a process of reflection on change and how it happens'. Others found it better to use the term and agree how to define and explain it. Perhaps the key factor here is to be aware of how and with whom you are using it and when it is appropriate. Where organisations have no prior experience or knowledge, then it might be better not to use it in the initial stages at least.

What benefits can theory of change bring?

The review shows that organisations that have used theory of change processes, whatever the approach, have benefited in a number of ways and some have resulted in considerable impact on the organisation and/ or programme. In summarising these benefits, however, it is important to remember that, while there are examples of each of these benefits happening, it is unrealistic to expect an organisation to experience them all.

- **Common understanding:** or at least an awareness of differences in understanding that can lead people to explore and test out different theories.

- **Clarity and focus of programmes:** enabling people to understand the part they play and what really matters; and to focus on strategies and ways of working that make most difference.

- **A framework for monitoring, evaluation and learning:** both at design and review stage, helping people to redefine concepts, adjust approaches (stop, add or change something) and demonstrate their contribution to change.

- **Supporting partnership:** helping people identify strategic partners and who they need to influence; and to have useful and open conversations among partners including donors.

- **Supporting organisational development**: helping organisations recruit, induct and train staff, and bring systems in line with their core focus and priorities.

- **A communication tool:** helping agree, summarise and present what is important.
- **Empowerment:** by making people think about and discuss their own beliefs and practices and their role in creating change; and become more active and involved in programmes.

Who is theory of change most useful for?

There was considerable consensus that theory of change is particularly useful for **complex programmes and partnerships.** Grantmakers, network and advocacy organisations, and others that are not directly delivering development also found it helpful to explain and capture their work.

It also emerged clearly that it is easier to take **experienced organisations that are open to learning**, on a journey through theory of change processes.

It was less clear what would be appropriate for those that do not fit into these categories. Some people felt that it was helpful for all organisations to go through a process; but several informants highlighted the danger of guiding young pioneering and innovative or experimental organisations through a process at too early a stage. Although theory of change is about ongoing learning, it may not always be helpful to make organisations articulate and hone those beliefs too early on, rather than allowing beliefs to evolve and emerge in a less structured way. Ultimately, it comes down to the skill of a facilitator in getting an organisation to reflect on change and how it happens in a way that is appropriate to their existing learning processes and development.

Some very young organisations, for example, have benefited from quite structured theory of change processes that have enabled them to define what they do, draw on some wider learning and focus on what really matters. Others that are more pioneering could explore different theories of change and test out which avenues work best in their context.

What is appropriate may also depend on the stage of a programme or cycle of work. Organisations that have just been through a strategic planning process may find it overlaps too much. Organisations well on in a particular project may find it helpful to articulate their theory of change, but may not be open to explore their thinking more openly until there is a formal review process which opens up the opportunity for change. Those with funders that expect them to stick to a particular project delivery plan may struggle to reconcile the different pressures on them.

What makes a good theory of change?

The learning from the review suggests that many organisations have benefited from quite different approaches, so there is no one way to facilitate or support a theory of change process. The approach that a facilitator follows will depend to a great extent on their own underlying theory of change – their broader beliefs about development. Some key principles, however, emerged as useful in considering what makes a good theory. These are outlined below, and do not refer to a particular 'moment' or workshop but as factors to take into account over a longer process.

A good approach should:

- **Help people to step outside of a 'project box'**: A theory of change approach should primarily make people more thoughtful and curious about change and how it happens. It should make people conscious about what they are doing and challenge their beliefs about change.

- **Consider the overall organisational theory of change:** Where possible, exploring an organisation's theory before getting down to project level can help ensure that learning feeds into wider organisational processes and structures.

- **Draw on wider learning from others:** Theories are based on experiences and learning. It helps to be explicit about where beliefs come from; and to make sure people draw on broader academic literature and social theories, as well as learning from the sector, against which to compare and verify personal experiences.

- **Involve a range of people:** The experiences of organisations and facilitators clearly point to identifying thinking leaders who can help to shape and sustain a process; and to involving field staff and those benefitting from projects to help keep everyone in touch with realities.

- **Be change and actor focussed**: A process should help organisations articulate clear changes in people's lives and who/ what needs to change at other levels to get there.

- **Represent theory with validity but simplicity:** Theory of change processes should aim to avoid using confusing terms that mask reality – but instead use an organisation's existing vocabulary. Summary diagrams or narrative should try to show linkages and priorities, but recognise that change is more complex than we can express.

- **Build in on-going theorising and learning:** The review highlighted the value of both formal and non-formal opportunities for exploring change; and of continuous learning through both key checkpoints (such as budgeted reflection and review) and other learning activities such as exchanges.

<u>Initiating the process</u>

While this review advocates for an on-going process of learning, it recognises that specific moments are helpful to kick-start reflection – usually a workshop or series of workshops – and often ending with some kind of product – a narrative and/or diagram representing an organisation or programme's theory of change. When an organisation is exploring their theory of change at the beginning of a new organisational or work phase, people have found it helpful to have four to eight days for the initial workshop if possible – and then more follow-up work in smaller groups and with other stakeholders. When a programme evaluator guides an organisation to articulate their theory retrospectively, s/he often takes a shorter time – perhaps one to two days. It can be helpful to have an initial discussion between the facilitator and the leadership before a process starts to ensure buy in; find out what learning processes the organisation uses already; and plan the steps.

While processes have had different starting points and different components, some common elements and questions that may be helpful include.

Box 19: Some guiding questions to use in the process

1. **The context for change – how change happens**

   Who is the organisation aiming to support and why? (prioritising the key problems they face)

   Who are the groups and what are the structures and processes that influence change in the target group's lives? (ranked; and showing whether they influence positively, negatively or both)
   - How is this known? – what is the basis for this understanding/?

2. **The organisational or programme contribution to change**

   What are the long-term changes that need to happen in the target group's lives?
   - What is the overall vision for change?
   - What are the key long-term changes to a contribution can be made (ranked)?

   Who and what needs to change in order to achieve those long-term changes?
   - What changes need to happen at other levels in order to achieve the long-term changes (e.g. at community level or in policy or systems).
   - Who are the groups that need to be influenced? What changes need to take place in them?

   What factors, relationships, approaches and pathways influence change at each level?

   What are three to five key factors to which organisations can contribute that will be vital in bringing about change? (reflecting core beliefs about how to influence change)
   - How is this known? – what is the basis for this understanding?
   - Why is it thought that change will happen that way? (the rationale and assumptions)
   - What are the risks (external and internal) that might prevent change taking place?
   - How might the approach need to be tailored to specific groups?

3. **Applying a theory of change**

   How will an organisation measure if change has happened?

   How will lessons learnt be applied to organisations, programmes and learning?

Some processes begin with an analysis of problems and their causes; while others prefer beginning with a focus on the long-term vision or changes. The appropriate starting point and components may vary according to both the organisation involved and the context in which they

operate. Those that are stuck in a crisis or difficult context where things are not working may benefit more from stepping out of that cycle and focusing first on the change and then analysing how to get there. Some of the organisations that have never thought in this way may need to start with what they do – and then step back to explore why they do it to reach an awareness of their own underlying theories. Some organisations also need mentoring support to apply learning to monitoring and evaluation processes, organisational development and programmes.

What emerges clearly therefore as a non-negotiable element of any process is to have:

- **a sensitive and flexible facilitator** who is aware of their own beliefs about development and can adapt to an organisation's own ways of learning, experience, culture and way of thinking.

<u>Some useful tools/ methods in theory of change processes</u>

Most theory of change facilitators have built some kind of flow diagrams as they go through the process, either using an existing template or simply sticking up papers on the wall as they go through. Comic Relief has tended to go through a process and then encourage people to pull together the learning in a diagram at the end. Some organisations that went through facilitated processes with a template then redrew their theory of change in their own way at the end. Perhaps again this depends on the organisation and how people think. Where people struggle to represent things diagrammatically or where they are not used to exploring issues like this, it may help them to map things as they discuss. More experienced organisations may benefit more from free-ranging analysis and then the exercise of summarising it in their own way at the end.

Most facilitators interviewed mainly used questions with group discussion as the basis for any process. Many also used grouping and ranking exercises helpful in analysing and prioritising after a broader brainstorm. Some organisations like Keystone use particular participatory exercises to help people discuss and analyse. Some Comic Relief processes have also used a number of different participatory group activities, depending on the facilitator. These can sometimes help a wider range of people to be involved and can again help people to step out of their 'project box'. They have proved especially helpful for organisations going on to use similar processes with those benefitting. A summary of some of the tools people have used is included in appendix 3.

What are the challenges in using theory of change effectively?

The review also highlighted some key challenges in taking a theory of change approach and supporting and carrying out theory of change processes, including:

- **Continuing the learning and reflection:** people tend to focus on a particular moment to articulate a theory of change and it is difficult to make sure that the learning continues.

- **Reconciling it with other design, monitoring and reporting processes and tools:** people sometimes carried out a theory of change process which impacts them, but if they did not have time or support to link it to other processes, they miss the opportunity to build on that learning.

- **Representing a theory of change with validity and simplicity:** some found the analysis and thinking very illuminating, but lost some of the useful complexity in their representations of it; while others remained overly complex and difficult to understand and use.

- **Balancing learning and accountability:** agreeing how provable a theory of change needs to be and how open a process; then effectively designing a process that achieves the key purposes and builds on existing learning processes, not just following set guidelines.

- **Adapting processes to an organisation and context:** while many people were aware that different starting points or different processes might be better for certain organisations, people tend to follow the same thing with each of the organisations.

- **Skilled facilitation:** all of this calls for sensitive facilitation – not a mechanistic process.

- **Using it as an effective basis for evaluation**: framing evaluations on the theory of change, testing out its validity and exploring unintended outcomes and alternative explanations.

F3.   <u>Suggestions for those using or advocating theory of change to think about</u>

From this review and the advice and experience of those who have contributed some key areas for organisations and donors using or advocating theory of change to consider.

Defining theory of change

Based on this review, organisations could benefit from stepping back to agree how they define theory of change; and where they sit in relation to the different approaches defined here. This could include agreeing what terms they find helpful in talking about it. This review advocates for a flexible definition for theory of change, seeing it as an ongoing process and approach, not a particular moment.

Supporting organisations to develop a theory of change

Donors need to agree how they will frame theory of change for grantees; similarly UK organisations with their southern partners: who they think will benefit most from support; and their own level of engagement. Based on learning from this review, it may be better to avoid too much use of the phrase 'theory of change', especially in the early stages of a discussion with an organisation or programme (and where they are not already familiar with it); and in written feedback and questions. Instead, discussions could be framed around key questions, such as those listed in box 19 (page 29), as 'opportunities to reflect on change and how it happens' that are useful for all organisations in understanding a programme.

Donors and UK organisations also need to think about the extent to which they expect all grantees and southern partners to fit within their beliefs about how change happens, as expressed in their strategies. Instead of closing down the debate, donors and UK organisations could present their programme theories as their own understanding at this point and challenge organisations to bring in different perspectives. Donors need to take care to differentiate their strategy – what they will and will not support – from their beliefs about how change happens and how far they is willing to support organisations that have different beliefs.

Donors and UK organisations also needs to consider how to support grantees and southern partners most effectively to ensure that theory of change processes don't just focus on the initial workshop or reflection; but become built into the ongoing life of an organisation and programme.

Work with other organisations and networks to share ongoing learning

It would be helpful if organisations and individuals who are using or interested in theory of change came together to discuss their approaches and thinking. As Bond is already exploring similar approaches, perhaps Bond could convene such a discussion. The meeting could explore some of the issues raised in this review and agree some key principles and questions useful for supporting theory of change approaches.

Aim to create opportunities for grantees and partners to reflect on their theory of change

Avoiding imposing

Wherever possible, donors and UK organisations should avoid imposing theory of change in any blanket way on grantees and southern partners. Many grantees have benefited enormously from informal conversations about change that have made them eager for support, rather than needing it as a condition or pre-grant requisite. Many of the processes have also been de-linked directly from funding because they have taken place once the grant has been approved. Therefore it may be better to look flexibly at the appropriate point for a theory of change process to take place, rather than making it a condition of an application or grant.

Take a flexible approach

It is important for donors to be aware of what is appropriate for different organisations at different stages and in different contexts.

- Some complex grants may need different theories of change for different local partners that can be tested and learned from, rather than trying to draw them together into one unified and over simplified picture.
- Some organisations may benefit from conversations based on some of the key questions

without going through any formal process, such as young pioneering organisations or organisations working in a very difficult and quickly changing context, such as conflict.

Recommend and/ or choose facilitators with care

Comic Relief has facilitated theory of change processes with partners through its own staff and through external facilitators – whether directly contracted or through funding support for partners to choose their own facilitator. With each of these, the review has raised some particular advantages and cautions. Any facilitator needs to be aware of personal biases and how they might influence a process; be sensitive to what an organisation needs; and have an understanding of an organisation's own culture and faith and the part that these factors might play. For donors and for UK organisations, in their role as funders of southern organisations, there is clearly an additional power dynamic which also needs recognising. Donors may need therefore to consider investing time and resources in supporting the training of staff and consultants that they can then recommend and use.

Integrate questions and thinking into the work

If donors continue to use a theory of change approach and integrate it more into their work, they need to consider the implications across each part of their grant making, management and learning processes.

Without over-complicating things, it can ensure that some key broad questions, such as those outlined in the conclusions, are covered and integrated into existing assessment, application, reporting and evaluation guidelines. Staff visiting projects can use the questions, making theory of change a living approach, rather than a tool with a limited shelf life.

"We can only proceed…by committing ourselves to continuous and relentless reflection on action. So that we are learning, and unlearning, all the time. This is the accountability which can, and must, be demanded of the sector, by the sector." (Kaplan 2010)

Theory of Change Review
Appendix 1: Review Sources

<u>Key informants</u>

Organisation	Name
External informants	
ActKnowledge	Heléne Clark
CDRA	Doug Reeler, Sue Soal
CARE Sierra Leone	Muhamed Bizimana
Consultant	Angela Cunningham
Consultant	Rick Davies
Consultant	Antonella Mancini
Consultant	Isabel Turner
DFID	Isabel Vogel
Hivos	Marjan Van Es
Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex	Simon Batchelor
INTRAC (associates)	Maureen O'Flynn
KeyStone Accountability	Andre Proctor
Overseas Development Institute	Harry Jones
TripleLine Consultancy	Richard Burge
Unbound	Taryn Higashi
World Vision Australia	Lucia Boxelaar
World Vision International	Amanda Bueno
Comic Relief partners	
ChildHope	ChildHope Emily Mulvillle
MIFUMI	Simon Ndira
Nelson Mandela Children's Fund	Moipone Buda-Ramatlo, Adern Nkandela
Oxfam	Dominic Vickers
Oxfam Mali	Aboubacar Traore, Abdoulaye Dia
Prajaak	Deep
VSO	Nicola Chevis; Polly Kirby
Women Win	Cindy Coltman
Comic Relief international grants team staff	
Annemarie Elsom	
Stefano D'Errico	
Richard Graham	
Kate Harrison	
Pontso Mafethe	
Rupal Mistry	
Joanna Monaghan	
Helen Rahman	

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External theory of change notes and other documents

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Theory of change process notes

Theory of change examples

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Forms and guidance notes

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International project report format, 2010.

Recognising a good theory of change presentation for assessors' workshop, 2011.

Special initiative theory of change guidelines, 2007.

Theory of change process notes

Theory of change examples (from partners)

CRARN theory of change

Healthlink theory of change

HOVIC theory of change

Malaria consortium theory of change

MIFUMI theory of change

Nelson Mandela Children's Fund theory of change & presentation

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Appendix 2: Theory of change tools

Facilitators use a range of tools in exploring theory of change with a group of people, drawing on activities and methods they use in other processes. Some can be used in a range of ways and to explore different issues so the table below is not meant to be rigid – things may fit in other places – but just to capture some of the different ways people have explored some of the key areas.

COMPONENT	TOOLS/ METHODS USED
The context for change	
• Target group: who we aim to support • Problems and their causes • The actors and structures that influence change, positively, negatively, or both • The organisational context – staff roles and responsibilities • External learning	<u>Target group</u>: List key groups you work with; and then separate them into circles of need, ending up with the most vulnerable in the centre. <u>Problems</u>: Brainstorm up to eight key problems those benefitting are facing and write each on a post-it. Put the post-its on the wall and sort them into similar groups. Rank the top 6-8 issues either by ordering the post-its or by bean ranking – giving each group a set number of beans where they all decide how many to give each issue; and then discuss and move them around until they come to a consensus. Garden of life: Identify different situations the target group operates in eg home; project; work; and their future. Represent these as flowers – as needs that can be used to stimulate growth – and then form into a large tree. <u>Actors and structures</u>: Venn diagrams: Use different size circles placed on and around the target group to map the most important influences on their lives. Represent their importance to the target group by the size of the circle and show the level of interaction with the target group in the overlap or distance of the circles from them. To distinguish whether they influence change positively, negatively or both, add coloured dots to the circles. Systems mapping: With the target group in the centre, place four quadrants around showing those with positive influence and similar culture and purpose; those with positive influence but different culture and purpose; those with weak influence; and those with negative influence. Brainstorm the actors and place in the quadrant closest to their main influence. Closeness to the target group represents the extent of their influence. Discuss and analyse. Or divide the stakeholders into key constituents eg those benefiting, project, community and state. Brainstorm the key actors in each constituency. Define who is causing the problems and who is helping or both. <u>The organisational context</u> Roles and responsibilities: Find a picture in a magazine to represent the role you play and put it on a flip chart with notes. Use a gallery walk to allow everyone to see each others and post comment on them. Return to these to review and amend them at the end of the process, in light of the learning. <u>External learning</u> Review existing literature before the theory of change workshop – or identify gaps in learning during the process and follow up afterwards.

Involve a facilitator or participants with specific sector knowledge who can bring in their wider learning to discussions.

Carry out visits to other programmes before, during or after the programme to learn from what they are doing.

Capture bullet points from a key study and/or from those benefitting t=in posters that discussion groups can refer back to.

Our organisational or programme contribution to change

• Vision • Long-term changes • Intermediary changes (pre-conditions)	<u>Vision</u> Epitaph: Ask what you would like your organisation to be remembered for – write a short sentence finishing "Because of (the organisation) …" and outlining what changes you expect to see for whom. Draw a picture or symbol that represents your organisation's contribution to change. Discuss why it represents it and what it says about your vision. Line of agreement: Where there is divergence in agreeing the key vision, ask people to stand somewhere along a line that illustrates the spectrum of views and say why they have chosen that position. <u>Changes</u> Case studies: Ask participants to bring some real 'success' stories and analyse what makes them successful – what changes have already taken place in their lives and what further changes still need to happen to achieve 'success'. Inverting problems: Refer back to key problems you identified and analyse what their inverse would be – the positive change if that issue was resolved. The 'so what? Chain: Brainstorm all the changes that you expect to see and then keep asking 'so what?' or 'why is that important?' to identify the long-term changes in the lives of the target group. The others may fit as intermediary changes needed to achieve the long-term impact. Linking back to the mission and vision: Ask what those changes would like in the lives of individual people benefiting. The visit: Ask and brainstorm - If a visitor went to your community, what changes would s/he expect to see in whom? What different behaviours/ attitudes/ conditions? Draw past, present, future of an individual benefiting – describe him or her at each stage and draw out the envisaged changes. Rank: Use any scoring or ranking exercise to prioritise 4-6 long-term changes Dimensions of change: Look back at the analysis of key actors and influences at different levels e.g. community, societal, policy level or culture, relationships, systems. Identify what needs to change in these other dimensions to achieve the long-term changes in individual target group's lives. Ripple diagram: Represent changes at different levels from the original target group in the centre circle outwards to other layers of change.

Our organisational or programme influence on change

• The factors, relationships, pathways and approaches to	Journey of life: Map out the lives of individual people benefitting, showing the key ups and downs of their journey to change. Discuss what has caused the ups and downs, identifying the external and programme factors that contribute to or obstruct change. Draw out from different groups the common programme

achieve change • The 3-5 key factors through which we can influence change • The rationale for why those are important • The external risks that might affect the project	factors that contribute to change and rank them to get the 3-5 core beliefs about how change happens. Discuss and note why we think these work. Draw out the external factors that hinder change and that we cannot influence directly to identify key risks. Forum theatre: A group identifies a particular problem or issue that they are facing (or refers back to previous work). One person acts as the individual benefiting and the others as key actors that influence change. Finish the role play at the point of crisis and then bring in others to identify what solutions might exist. Ask what s/he could do differently; what changes need to happen; who might be able to do what; what you would do in that situation etc. Bridge model: Construct a diagram of a bridge between where you are now and where you want to be with the key factors that link them as pillars holding up the bridge. Add post-its, pictures etc as ideas of factors to form the bridge, then group, analyse and prioritise. Relationship continuum: Analyse actors from the original brainstorm along a spectrum from alignment to collaboration to partnership. Use this to identify levels of interaction and on what issues in order to achieve the changes. Balloon and stone image: Use the image of a balloon weighted down by a stone to discuss the internal and external factors that can help of hinder change. Ask: what would you need to do to stop these changes happening? Then use the answers to analyse key factors in bringing change. Force field analysis: Use a set of scales to represent hindering and helping forces. Ask people to put ideas on post-its or papers attached to stones or other objects of similar size. Place each in the appropriate side of the scale. Analyse positive and negative factors emerging.

Documenting our theory of change

• Diagrammatic representation • Narrative summary	<u>Diagrammatic representation:</u> Map the process visually on the wall as you go using cards and transferring other parts like Venn diagrams into the main chart at appropriate points. Use a template from existing guidelines and fill it in as you discuss. Draw together all the discussions from individual activities in a summary diagram or pictorial representation at the end. Show people a variety to spark off ideas; or encourage people just to draw a flow diagram and then see if it fits better in another form afterwards. <u>Narrative</u> Summary: Try to encapsulate the key changes and beliefs about how change happens in a summary paragraph. Append notes from individual activities and discussions to the diagram to capture the detailed analysis; or transfer your theory of change into PowerPoint to show how the diagram builds and to add some narrative notes.

Applying our theory of change

• Measuring change • Linking it with organisational processes and tools	Develop no more than 3 key indicators or markers of progress for each long-term outcome, making sure they are specific, timebound etc. Identify the tools and processes you will use to gather and analyse the information. Roles and responsibilities: return to initial exercise to review and see what needs to change in the light of the review