

Theories of change in international development

April 7th, 2015

This event builds on recent research on Theory of Change approaches, as part of the Justice and Security Research (JSRP) and The Asia Foundation (TAF) collaboration (Stein and Valters, 2012; Valters, 2014). It also draws on Overseas Development Institute (ODI) research on adaptive, flexible development programming (Booth, 2014; Wild et al. 2015).

This closed workshop is an opportunity to critically reflect on an approach that has rapidly gained traction in international development circles, but is currently under researched. There remain very different understandings of what a Theory of Change approach is, how it should inform development thinking and practice, and what it can achieve. Despite this, this closed workshop aims to move the debate forward onto a set of common principles that can help guide the approach, based upon the shared experiences of experts in the room.

It is also hoped that this will be a future platform for ongoing work between ODI, TAF and JSRP and other organisations on these issues. All presentations will be no longer than 10 minutes.

Agenda

09:30	Welcome and introduction Welcome and aims of the day, <i>Pilar Domingo</i> JSRP-TAF collaboration, <i>Matthew Arnold</i>
09:45	What do we already know about Theories of Change? Chair: <i>Mareike Schomerus</i> What is a Theory of Change approach why does it matter? <i>Duncan Green, Oxfam</i> How are Theories of Change being used in practice? <i>Craig Valters, ODI</i> Questions/clarifications for presenters, followed by open discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do we have clarity on what a Theory of Change approach is?• Do Theories of Change matter? Why?• What are some of the possibilities and problems so far?
11:00	Coffee break

11:15	<p>What organisational approaches to Theories of Change are being taken? Chair: <i>Leni Wild</i></p> <p><i>Heidi Ober (CARE/Crown Agents)</i> <i>Andrew Koleros (GRM)</i> <i>Debra Ladner (TAF)</i></p> <p>Questions/clarifications for presenters, followed by open discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are these approaches different and what benefits/challenges do they bring? • What are the tools being used alongside a Theory of Change approach? • To what extent do Theory of Change approaches depend on existing organisational dynamics and understandings of change?
13:00	<p>Lunch</p>
14:00	<p>What drives effective use of a Theory of Change approach? Chair: <i>Patrick Barron</i></p> <p><i>Caroline Hoy, DFID</i> <i>Rick Davies, Consultant</i></p> <p>Questions/clarifications for presenters, followed by open discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What core principles should underpin the use of Theories of Change? • Should we promote learning over accountability through a Theory of Change approach? If so, how? • What can we learn from how institutional pressures are negotiated by practitioners?
15:30	<p>Coffee break</p>
15:45	<p>Where do Theories of Change go from here? Chair: <i>Marta Foresti</i></p> <p>Results, evidence and the future of Theories of Change, <i>Mareike Schomerus (LSE)</i> Monitoring and evaluation while doing development differently, <i>Leni Wild (ODI)</i></p> <p>Questions/clarifications for presenters, followed by open discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we stop Theories of Change becoming a logframe on steroids? Is it too late and/or inevitable? • How can Theory of Change approaches be meaningfully integrated into adaptive, reflective ways of working? • What broader institutional shifts are required for them to be more effective? <p>Summing up: <i>Patrick Barron (TAF) and Craig Valters (ODI)</i></p>
17:15	<p>Drinks reception</p>

Reading material

Blogs

Green, D. (2013) What is a theory of change and how do we use it? FP2P Blog Post, 13 August 2013, <http://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/what-is-a-theory-of-change-and-does-it-actually-help/>

Schomerus, M. (2014). 'Making the evidence agenda in development more plausible', Justice and Security Research Programme Blog Post, 23 January 2014

Valters, C. (2014a) [Theories of Change in international development: communication, learning or accountability?](#) Justice and Security Research Programme Blog Post, 18 August 2014 (link to the full paper in the blog)

Valters, C. (2014b) Can Theories of Change help us do development differently? In Asia Blog, December 10th 2014, <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2014/12/10/can-theories-of-change-help-us-do-development-differently/>

Papers

Big Push Forward. (2013). [The Politics of Evidence Conference Report](#). April 23-24, 2013 at Institute of Development Studies, UK

Booth, D. (2014) ['Aiding Institutional Reform in Developing Countries, Lessons from the Philippines on What Works, What Doesn't and Why'](#). London: ODI and The Asia Foundation.

CARE International UK. (2012). [Defining Theories of Change](#). London.

Faustino, J. and Booth, D. (2014) [Development Entrepreneurship: How Donors And Leaders Can Foster Institutional Change](#). London: Overseas Development Institute

Guijt, I. (2010) "Exploding the Myth of Incompatibility between Accountability and Learning". Capacity Development in Practice.

James, C. (2011). [Theory of Change Review: A report commissioned by Comic Relief](#). London.

Stein, D. and Valters, C. (2012). [Understanding 'Theory of Change' in International Development: A Review of Existing Knowledge](#). JSRP Paper 1, London: JSRP and The Asia Foundation

Vogel, I. (2012). ['Review of the use of "Theory of Change" in international development'](#) DFID, (April)

Wild, L., Booth, D., Cummings, C., Foresti, M. and Wales, J. (2015) ['Adapting Development: Improving Services to the Poor'](#). London: ODI.