What can drive an effective Theory of Change approach? – the DFID experience

Caroline Hoy, ISD, DFID
Theories of Change in International Development
ODI, 7th April 2015
The background

‘A Theory of Change is a clearly articulated description of the rationale for an initiative and an explanation of how it is expected to achieve its outcomes and impact. It makes explicit the underlying assumptions and surfaces the factors that are likely to affect the achievement of outcomes. It comprises a diagram that lays out the logic in visual form and a corresponding narrative description.’

– *But it is the process that matters …*

– Provides, detail, logic - and the gaps, strengthens programmes, communication, planning, M&E, unifies and clarifies, log frames …

– But, can oversimplify, be reductionist, exclude the unknown, promote linearity rather than complexity

– Use needs to be responsive and pragmatic
The Programme Partnership Arrangements’ Theory of Change

Figure A1: Revised PPA theory of change

DFID’s Strategic Rationale
DFID has 5 broad objectives for its work with civil society that enable it to achieve results that represent best value for money:
1. To provide goods and services to the poor, particularly the hard to reach;
2. To help people in developing countries to hold governments and others to account and influence decisions that affect people’s lives;
3. To help poor people to do things for themselves;
4. To build public support for development in the UK; and
5. To encourage the growth of an active civil society.¹

DFID’s Programme Interventions
- Project-based funding through GPFAG: GPFAG allows DFID to identify and fund the best ideas in the sector to meet the most off-track MDGs.
- Unrestricted funding through PPAs: Unrestricted funding to PPA holders provide them with the flexibility to decide how best to allocate DFID funding in order to strengthen their organisational capacities and the capacities of their partners – to reach and support socially excluded communities to deliver sustainable results that represent best value for money.

Impact
Contribution to achievement of the MDGs to reduce poverty as well as increasing human capacity and capital, improving health and well-being, building peace and stability and protecting human rights and the environment.

Outcomes
- Civil society: a stronger civil society is able to influence governments and hold them to account. Civil society organisations and socially excluded communities increase their ability to undertake their own initiatives, enabling them to achieve greater social, economic and political equity and to reduce the likelihood of violent conflict. ²
- State and duty-bearers: become more accountable and responsive to their citizens and engage in more transparent and participatory decision-making putting people at the heart of processes of building more prosperous, equitable and peaceful societies.

Typical Interventions by PPA Holders
- PPA holders deliver goods & services: Either through their partners or directly, PPA holders are able to reach and directly deliver goods and services to socially excluded communities, including humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and development support.
- PPA holders support the efforts of communities and organisations to build their capacities: PPA holders and their partners are together able to support local communities and socially excluded people to mobilise and organise themselves and to strengthen their organisations – enabling them to become more resilient and more active in decision-making about the equitable access to economic, social, natural and political resources and processes that address the key drivers of conflict.
- PPA holders influence policy change: PPA holders and their partners are able to challenge decision-makers at local, national and international levels to bring about policy changes, and undertake initiatives aimed at promoting equitable and responsible development to resolve and prevent conflicts.

CSO Resources & Inputs
As CSOs, PPA holders generally have the capacity to reach and support socially excluded communities because they are:
1. Able to operate and collaborate through a combination of local, regional and international partnerships.
2. Trusted by the communities and partners that they are supporting as relatively impartial, knowledgeable, credible and technically capable sources of support.
3. Able to efficiently and effectively manage the delivery of results for socially excluded communities in challenging high risk programme and policy environments.
4. Able to engage policy makers and partners at multiple levels to advocate for participation, transparency, accountability and political space.