



Shaping policy for development

odi.org.uk



Why analyse the use of Theories of Change?

Increasingly a dominant tool and discourse, but what are its actual effects? Can lead to...

- Better strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation and **learning**
- Generating (or aligning with) adaptive development

BUT...

How can it escape the more damaging effects of the results and evidence agenda?



What did TAF's approach look like?

- Learning through doing – not much guidance out there
- Linked programmes to higher level processes of social change
- Killing 3 birds with one stone: used to communicate, learn and be held accountable



Communication

- ❑ A Theory of Change approach is *“a way of getting to some agreement on strategies...we can see it’s useful for a tool of communication and collaboration”*
- ❑ *“How are Theories of Change actually developed? Is there enough consultation with the people who are supposed to benefit? If there is proper involvement, not token involvement, then these problems [of misleading Theories of Change] wouldn’t come up.”*



Learning

- ❑ *“I maybe have three versions [of Theories of Change] in the same day, literally; we are trying to constantly clarify and challenge ourselves to say ‘is that what we understand is going on?’”*
- ❑ *“...as far as the donors are concerned, they use it to see if it [the programme] is justifiable...and as far as I know there is no particular tool to go back and look at whether it is right or not.”*



Accountability

- ❑ *“If you are candid with them [donors] and tell them what you know and don’t and make them part of the process, it’s much more engaging for them”*
- ❑ *“...if you take the donor out then it’s a much more solid kind of process, then you don't need to be putting round pegs in square holes”*



Conclusion

- A Theory of Change approach can be helpful, but also may be an illusory learning process
- Importance of organizational culture and individual personalities – along with type of project or programme
- Results and evidence: a “corporate stick to beat people with”?
- Thank you!