Evaluating Community Level Supply Chains in Sub-Saharan Africa using a Theory of Change Model

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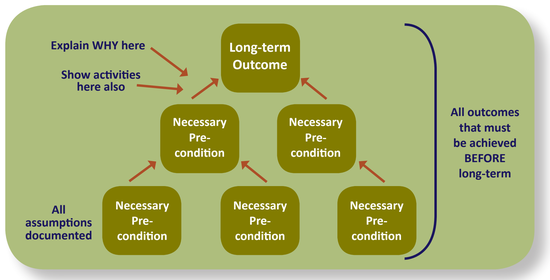
What is a Theory of Change?

- A Theory of Change (TOC) is an organization's clear articulation of what it wants to achieve and the steps it will take to get there
- It describes the process of achieving a long-term goal, via:
  - Outcomes
  - Results
  - Interventions
  - Assumptions

What Does a TOC do?

Theories of Change link outcomes and activities to explain **HOW** and **WHY** the desired change is expected to come about



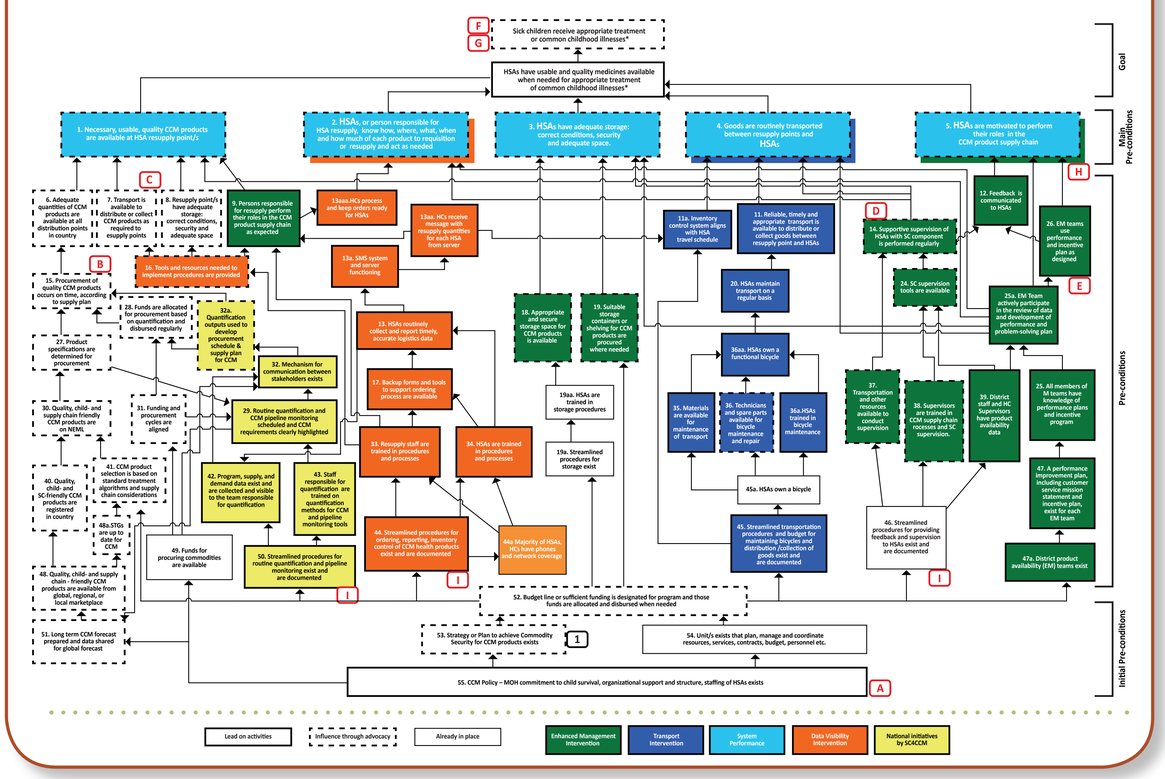
Why is TOC Different From Other Evaluation Frameworks?

- Shows **causal pathway** from here to there by specifying what is needed for the goals to be achieved (preconditions)
- Requires an explicit statement of the underlying **assumptions**
- Shifts thinking from what a project is doing to what it is going to **achieve**

Challenges for Using TOC in Monitoring & Evaluation

- Defining multiple (non-linear) relationships between preconditions
- Determining the level of influence project work will have on each precondition
- Determining which data are critical at interim stages, i.e. limiting amount of data collected for monitoring
- Adapting TOC to drastic changes in assumptions during implementation period

Malawi TOC



Step 1 Develop a Project TOC for SC4CCM

- Basic pre-conditions, structure, assumptions, and narrative written as a team
- Team reworked and finalized TOC based on feedback from internal reference group and external evaluation group
- Finalized **project** TOC (our hypothesis)

Step 2 Use TOC to Guide Baseline Assessments

- SC4CCM used the **project** TOC to develop country-specific baseline assessments of community supply chains in Malawi, Rwanda and Ethiopia.
- Baseline assessments collected data to characterize performance of each precondition
- Project TOC used for **indicator development**
  - 'Main' preconditions ~ 'Core' indicators
  - Each precondition ~ 1 or more indicators

Step 3 Develop Country-Specific TOCs

- Baseline data used to **prioritize most effective TOC pathway(s)** to achieving improvements
- Intervention strategy targeted prioritized pathways
- Country-specific TOCs visualize interventions planned to test in each country
- **All country-specific** TOCs have same 5 main preconditions that lead to the goal-level outcome, CCM product availability

Step 4 Use the TOC to Guide M&E During Implementation

- Country-specific TOC, indicators and narrative make up country-specific **M&E Plans**
- Data from routine monitoring are:
  - Reviewed in sequence with the TOC to identify gaps in the chain of preconditions
  - Used to analyze and plan intervention support, aiming to improve higher preconditions

Step 5 Evaluate the Country-Specific TOC

- Midline evaluations looked at the **validity** of TOC hypotheses
- Country-specific TOCs guided development of midline tools to evaluate:
  - coverage
  - quality of implementation
  - overall supply chain performance (*goal level indicator)
- **Data collected for each precondition in the causal pathways helped identify why an intervention worked or did not work**
- Where original assumptions did not hold, SC4CCM adapted midlines to assess current environments
- Midline findings discussed in terms of ability to support hypotheses from country-specific TOCs

Benefits of a TOC for Planning, Implementation, M&E for Supply Chains

- TOCs help define program indicators, diagram data relationships and evaluate hypotheses
- TOCs can be a useful tool for experienced supply chain managers even before having rigorous M&E data
  - Experience can be used to chart causal pathways, highlight interdependencies and identify likely bottlenecks and gaps
- Helps M&E and technical staff work together, looking at a common map
- Learning: TOCs allows the project to document how and why change happens
- Linking improved product availability to any one intervention is difficult; measuring the degree of implementation in TOC causal pathways allows you to **connect intervention results to changes in product availability**

Supply Chain Perspectives

- Theories of change have been used for many purposes, using them to guide supply chain improvements is **unique**.
- When working in complex health systems, it is important to understand each of the **building blocks as well as the relationships** between them.
- Theories of change offer supply chain managers a level of precision and a structure to help them prioritize; this is missing from current approaches.
- Theories of change can be a practical and useful tool for experienced supply chain managers to help them chart the pathway to improving a specific part of the supply chain.

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