Theory of Change[1] for the Implementation Science Initiative
A Guidance Note for Country Teams

Background

Theories of Change (ToC) have increasingly been used in program planning and evaluation, most specifically to explain how a program is expected to lead to desired results (Mayne, 2015). At its core, a ToC explains how and why an intervention or program is expected to have its intended effects. It should also include external factors that may affect its ability to achieve those effects. In this Implementation Science Initiative, the ToC will correspond to an underline implementation ToC, and will be used for different purposes presented in this guidance note. This document was prepared based on the literature and in response to the experiences and challenges expressed by the country core teams during the proposal writing process.

The country teams have already put together a ToC, so this will be the starting point at the workshop. Among the core team members, views may differ on various elements related to the ToC. The different perspectives are important to discuss because they can help clarify and strengthen the ToC. In addition, the work of the members of the core team may be located at different points of the national system. This means that some actors may have a partial but deeper understanding of some parts while others may have broader systems view. This participatory workshop brings the opportunity for the actors to build on their tacit knowledge, which will help strengthen the ToC.

Purposes of the ToC

ToC can be used for various purposes and 10 of them are enumerated below (Mayne, 2015). For this initiative, we envision that there will be three main purposes of the ToC (#6-8).

Designing/planning interventions
1. Designing interventions
2. Understanding and agreeing on interventions with stakeholders
3. Identifying and addressing equity, gender, and empowerment issues
4. Ex ante evaluation of proposed interventions

Managing interventions
5. Designing monitoring systems
6. Understanding implementation, managing adaptively, and learning

Assessing interventions
7. Designing evaluation questions, methods, and tools
8. Making causal claims about impact
9. Reporting performance

Scaling
10. Generalizing to the theory, to other locations and for scaling up and out

In this guidance note, we discuss only the purpose #6, which focus on implementation. The ToC will help the core team to put their perspectives in common on how the intervention of interest (IFAS) is expected to be implemented. The ToC is a tool that should not be considered as finalized as it will probably be refined throughout the initiative as more information is obtained on different selected elements of the ToC, for example.

How to build a solid ToC?

For this initiative, various ToC could be developed. The focus of the present ToC should be on the implementation of IFAS intervention. There are a few steps that can be followed to properly develop a ToC. Those are described below with an orientation towards implementation.

Step 1: Develop the logic model
Begin with a logic model to illustrate the various activities of the implementation of IFAS intervention, and how they are expected to lead to the desired results. The following elements are commonly seen in logic models: inputs, activities, outputs, intermediate outcomes, long-term outcomes, impact.

Be careful to stay focused only on the activities for the implementation of the IFAS (the intervention), and not on the mechanisms of the intervention itself neither on the activities of the focal program of the NGO. Activities of the implementation often fall into three categories: policies, product supply management and behavior change approach. Those can be used as a starting point.

Step 2: Articulate the assumptions behind the links in the logic model
A link leads each element of the logic model to the subsequent one. The second step is to formulate assumptions for each of these links.
- What salient events **have to occur**, or what conditions **must be in place,** for each link to work as expected?
- What is **necessary** for the link to work?
- What is the basis for believing this link will occur (e.g., evidence from previous formal studies, prior experience in this setting or others, strong theoretical considerations, authoritative statements from normative or expert institutions, etc.)

An assumption is an **explanation** of how and why the link should happen. It is not a description of a link.

Step 3: Think about the external influences
Consider the external influences that can be at play. External influences are events or conditions, **unrelated to** the implementation of IFAS intervention, that could affect this implementation either positively or negatively. They can include political events, economic or social trends, weather or natural shocks, other interventions or programs in the area.

Step 4: Identify unintended effects
Try to identify some unintended effects of the implementation of IFAS intervention. The unintended effects can be defined as positive or, more usually, negative effects that occur **as a result of** the activities and results. Some unintended effects can be anticipated (which you are asked to do in this step) and others come as a surprise and can only be identified through ongoing vigilance and assessments during implementation.

Table 1 presents a checklist to help you consider various elements and figure 1 provides an illustration of an implementation ToC for micronutrient powder (MNP) to address micronutrient (MN) definciencies).

Table 1: Checklist to create a proper ToC

		Yes	No	Further action
	Step 1: *Develop the logic model*			
1	The focus of the ToC should be the <u>implementation</u> of IFAS intervention. Is there anything in your ToC that do not belong to the implementation of IFAS?			
2	A ToC can be shown at any level of detail. When it is too detailed, it may not be as useful as it becomes very complex. Do you feel that you have the right level of detail?			
3	Activities represent the main actions of different people involved in the implementation of the IFAS intervention. Have you thought about the following categories of activities: policies, product supply management and behavior change approach?			
	Step 2: *Articulate the main assumptions behind the links in the logic model*			
4	Each of the assumptions can be a threat to the realization of a particular link. In other words, the assumptions **need to occur** for a particular link to work. Is this the case for each of your assumption?			
	Step 3: *Think about the external influences*			
5	Are your external influences really **unrelated** to the implementation of the IFAS intervention?			
6	Have you considered political events?			
7	Have you considered potential natural events?			
8	Have you considered/identified other programs that are occurring concurrently?			
9	Have you considered social or economic trends?			
	Step 4: *Identify unintended effects*			
10	Are your unintended effects really **related to** the implementation of the IFAS intervention?			
11	What could be some negative effects of the implementation of IFAS intervention?			
12	What could be positive effects of the implementation of IFAS intervention?			

Figure 1: Example of implementation ToC

CAUSAL LINKAGES ASSUMPTIONS

- Government is reached and understand its role in promoting MNP distribution
- MNP management is not discontinued
- Providers and HWs are reached and understand their irreplaceable role in MNP distribution
- Mothers and children are reached

- MNP distribution stays a priority
- Mothers and children have access to MNP
- Mothers can afford costs

- Practices prove practical
- Practices stay optimal
- Adherence to MNP supplementation stay strong

Activities | Outputs | Intermediate Outcomes | Long-term Outcomes | Impact

Policies → MNP intervention is integrated in government program → MNP distribution is prioritized

MNP Management → Production, supply, delivery and quality are ensured → MNP of quality available in country

Behaviour Change Approach → Providers and HWs are trained to adequately distribute MNP / Mothers and children are screened → Mothers, caregivers and children know, demand, and have ability to appropriately use MNP

Increased intake of MNP → Decreased MN deficiencies

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

- Other organization work on MNP distribution
- Environmental or health situation
- Political situation

- Improved IYCF practices
- Improved food intakes by mothers and children

UNINTENDED EFFECTS