

Theory of Change (ToC)

One of the most important tools to create a valid logical model is the Theory of Change (ToC).

Theory of Change is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It provides the big picture of expected change, including both changes that will be the direct outcome of your project and those that are not directly linked to the project activities, but must occur to achieve a long-term goal.

The ToC defines the project's long-term goal and the strategic area of intervention. It maps the preconditions necessary for long-term change to occur, identifies the assumptions that need to be taken as true for the project to be successful and finally provides the evidence that is available to support assumptions.

The ToC in particular seeks to "fill in" what is in the middle between the initiative you have in mind and how it can lead to the achievement of the desired goals. It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then working backwards to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that need to occur (and the causal links that tie them together) for the goals to be realized. These are then mapped to the Results Framework (RF) that we will look at later.

But, before moving on, remember that different donors may have their own specific requirements for developing a ToC.

How to create a ToC?

However, as we have already said, the ToC is a visual support, and its advantage lies in the fact that it helps to visualize complex data and ideas in an image that is easier to understand. Now, let's see what a ToC consists of and what are the best practices to adopt to build one. A ToC has three standard components that are:

- Long-term change or goal, is the desired lasting impact that the intervention aims to support;
- Preconditions and pathways of change, which are linked. Preconditions are the requirements that must exist for the long-term change to take place; these are determined by a "backwards mapping" process. Ask yourself what needs to happen for long-term change to occur. Using this process, you will be able to identify domains of change, that are the major strategic areas of focus that most directly contribute to achieving the ToC's long-term goal.
After identifying these change domains, continue working backwards, identifying the preconditions necessary for success in each domain. Next, organize the preconditions into pathways of change, and then identify how the preconditions intertwine with each other. It helps to understand if there are preconditions that will significantly undermine the project's ability to deliver on its commitments. These are the assumptions. Assumptions are the conditions (or resources) that are outside the direct control of project management, but must still be met to achieve the long-term goal.
- Connections between the pathways of change, looking at them, you may find that some preconditions contribute to more than one change pathway in the ToC. It is important to clearly identify when preconditions drive multiple change pathways, because this requires

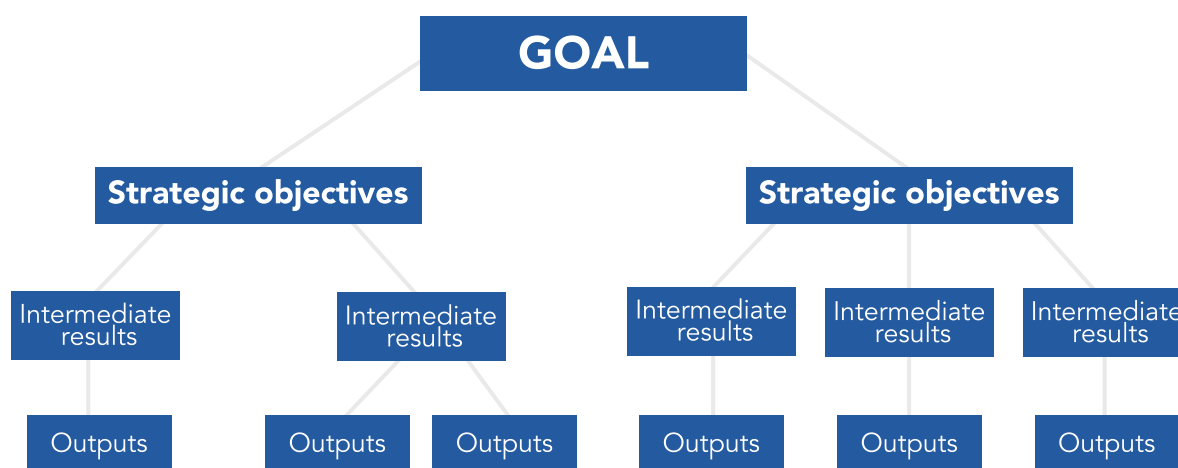
establishing strong communication and coordination among people working on different change pathways.

Drawing on stakeholder perspectives and local knowledge, the ToC should be based on a broad and comprehensive needs assessment so that it can take root in specific, real-world circumstances. Do it in a participatory way, involving a cross section of staff and key stakeholders, and treat it as a living document: the logic model should be updated as needed or when new information is brought back.

Now let's take a look at what and how you can create a Results Framework, how it relates to the ToC, and why it is important to build them in sequence.

The Results Framework (FR)

The second instrument used in order to design the logical models is the Results Framework.



The RF is a logic model tool that organizes the expected results of a project into a series of “if-then” relationships, mapping the logic of the project strategy, as does the ToC, but unlike it the RF includes only those interventions that are the direct responsibility of the project team. In addition, the RF model used by a project will depend on the requirements of the donor or the requirements of the organization.

In order to tangibly clarify the intervention strategy chosen by the project, outputs should be included in the hierarchy.

How to create a ToC?

To create an RF you first determine the scope of the project and then transfer the content from the ToC. This is very important, because while the ToC provides a general picture, the RF should focus only on the work that is the direct responsibility of the project.

Then you must clearly identify and prioritize the criteria that you want to use to decide which components of the ToC will be included in the RF (like resources availability; institutional capacity; appropriateness etc.).

First you have to transfer the chosen ToC elements and organize them into the project RF:

- The goal is the long-term change, that usually is aspirational, and it is written as if already achieved (example: "Improved the living conditions of the population x");
- The strategic objectives level (SOs) in the RF corresponds to the statements found at the domains of change level of the ToC and express the central purpose of the project that the team will implement;
- Intermediate Results (IRs) correspond to the preconditions of the ToC, express the changes in behaviors, systems, policies, or institutions that are expected as a result of project outputs and activities and that are necessary to achieve the SOs;
- Outputs are also known as the results of the project and correspond with the precondition of the ToC. They include products, goods, services, knowledge, skills (an output statement may include "tot people trained" or "quality roads built" ect.). Obviously there can be more than one outcome for each IR.

The RF is driven by vertical logic, so starting at the top, from long-term change, and moving down the hierarchy of goals shows HOW an outcome will be achieved by reaching the underlying outcome(s), while moving up the hierarchy of goals shows WHY a lower-level outcome is necessary to reach the next-level outcome.

The next step is to build the logframe and understand how the three models relate to each other.

The Logical Framework

Once the Results Framework is complete, we begin to develop the logical framework, which is a logic model that describes the key features of the project: objectives; indicators; measurement methods; and assumptions. There is a logical connection, which we will explore later, that ties these models together.

The purpose of the logframe is to communicate the key components of a project as clearly and simply as possible, and it contains elements absent from ToCs and RFs, such as indicators and measurement methods. Indicators are used to indicate what steps will be taken to monitor progress, while measurement methods indicate how the project will collect data to track progress on the indicators.

	Project summary	Indicators	Means of verification	Risks/ Assumptions
Goal				
Outcomes				
Outputs				
Activities				

Three Model Relation

As mentioned earlier, the three models are interdependent, but how are they aligned with each other?

Each model builds upon the previous one (ToC, RF, Logframe), for this reason, it is best to create them in sequence. In fact, while the ToC outlines the expected long-term change, major change pathways, underlying assumptions, and non-project stakeholder contributions that are necessary for change to occur, the RF derived from the ToC maps out the hierarchy of project goals and the different levels of the project and organizes the project outcomes into a series of if-then relationships.

Lastly, we have the logframe, which is based on the RF's goal statements and tracks the high-level MEAL framework, including indicators and means of verification. The logframe also tracks assumptions, drawing from the ToC.

In the next module, “Why should you build a good logframe?”, we will analyze specifically how to build it and how indicators and measurement means are established.

If you are interested in knowing more about project writing and evaluation, and would like to have the assistance of professionals, you can email us at ssr@signis.net. At [SIGNIS Services Rome](#) we are experts in the sector and have been involved in project writing for the creation and development of communications projects all over the world for decades.

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