Overview

Theories of change provide the roadmap for how to respond to a specific development challenge. They are foundational to donor strategies and go on to guide how implementing partners spend their time and resources. A low-quality theory of change can result in a poor design and subsequent implementation challenges.

When done well, strong theories of change bring teams and local stakeholders together around a common vision, provide clarity on how change can happen and what success looks like, and identify interventions that are most likely to succeed based on the local context. They can also be used as a management tool during implementation to reflect on progress and adjust implementation accordingly.

Program Features

Left side has the three areas with icons
- TRAINING (with icon)
- FACILITATION (with icon)
- LEARNING REVIEWS (with icon)

Social Impact, Inc. (SI) staff bring an analytical, participatory, and evidence-informed approach to theory of change development and use. Learn more about our theory of change services and what sets us apart.

- **TRAINING for donors, implementers, and local stakeholders**

SI offers theory of change training to development practitioners to provide a shared understanding of what a strong theory of change is, how to develop a theory of change, and how to use it during

implementation as a management tool. SI experts can walk clients through a step-by-step theory of change development process and [associated workbook](#) that teams can use to develop stronger theories based on the specific context in collaboration with local stakeholders.

- **LEARNING REVIEWS to inform design and implementation**

SI experts are skilled in performance management and evidence reviews to inform theory of change development during design so that theories build on prior implementation experience and the existing evidence base. During implementation, SI's cadre of data analysts and facilitators and can support teams in reviewing their performance management information to determine if any adjustments to their theory of change are necessary to improve results, enabling teams to use their theory of change as a management tool to inform their decisions.

- **FACILITATION of an inclusive, evidence-based theory of change process**

Using a step-by-step process, SI experts can directly facilitate theory of change development with all relevant stakeholders, starting from assessing the local context to ensure evidence-based theories of change. This is most useful for donors involved in designing programs or for implementing partners needing to revisit and update their theory of change during start-up. By leading stakeholders through effective theory of change processes, teams are able to develop stronger theory of change products (narrative and visual). This process also results in clear entry points, outcomes, interventions, and assumptions, providing teams the roadmap they need to get started.

Case Studies

USAID Learns

Client: USAID
Country: Vietnam
Timeline: 5 years (2019 - 2024)
- 29 USAID/Vietnam staff attended theory of change training
- 5 implementing partners improved their theories of change during start-up
- 4 USAID design teams improved their theories of change

USAID Learns provides a comprehensive suite of theory of changes services to USAID/Vietnam and its implementing partners. USAID Learns works with each new partner in start-up to strengthen their theories of change. USAID Learns has also provided theory of change training to 29 USAID/Vietnam staff in partnership with USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning & Learning. Using the [five-step theory of change process](#) developed by SI, USAID Learns has supported four USAID design teams in strengthening their theories of change.

"[The USAID theory of change training] was a great refresher…I especially like the shift in thinking from If/Then to a more context-specific methodology." - USAID/Vietnam staff

"The [theory of change] tools are excellent, but at the end of the day it's the facilitation that counts. This has been an excellent experience because of your facilitation." - Implementing partner staff working with USAID Learns to update its theory of change during start-up

"I'm usually a little nervous about step-by-step tools that have users fill in boxes and then the result works out in the end, but I think this one works pretty well. It's a good way to think through the series of elements that go into a Theory of Change and have them build on each other." - Chief of Party

Building a Performance Monitoring System for ECA Programming

Client: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)
Country: USA (Washington, DC)
Timeline: 10 months (February-December 2019)
- 131 ECA program teams assisted
- 47 focus group discussions
- 1 redesigned result framework

SI assisted ECA to redesign its performance monitoring system starting with its theories of change and expected results. The highly participatory process led to the development of a Bureau-wide results framework and underlying theory of change that captures results across 131 programs. The results framework and theory of change allowed stakeholders to understand how the Bureau's unique programs work towards common objectives and provided a path forward for better program design and monitoring.

How we are advancing development effectiveness

SI's approach to helping clients with their theories of change is foundational to advancing development effectiveness. Our approach helps teams think critically about their work, understand the local system and context, and identify sound interventions that help affect change. It also provides a process by which local stakeholders can be engaged in developing and ultimately owning the theories of change that affect their lives. This work is difficult but necessary to ensure development practitioners - donors and implementers alike - spend their time and resources wisely and contribute to sustainable results.