Chapter 3

Theories of Change and Programme Logic

Fanie Cloete and Christelle Auriacombe

3.1 Introduction

Academic researchers normally seek to identify and understand the nature and scope of societal problems and the details of governmental strategies to improve or counter them (i.e. for new knowledge generation). Evaluation researchers routinely take these results further and assess whether prevailing insights into and actions to address problems have led to changes in the nature of those problems, and how the outputs and outcomes of governmental and other agencies can be improved to address the perceived problems more effectively and efficiently. In other words, evaluators tend to assess the internal activities and processes of different agencies and how these attempts to convert resource and other inputs into concrete output products as well as short to medium term sectoral outcomes and long term, integrated impact consequences that might have changed the *status quo ante* more in line with the initial goals of these interventions. Evaluation therefore adds an explicit problem-solving focus to the initial phase of problem identification that is not always present in academic research. Such systematic policy, programme and project evaluations therefore comprise more applied research with a clear focus on the improvement or transformation of the status quo into a new and better status quo.

Although not in all cases, policy evaluation therefore frequently tests to what extent the normative and empirical assumptions of policymakers have been implemented appropriately and to what extent the programme and project interventions based on these assumptions have resolved or improved the problems that they were supposed to address. Used in this way, policy, programme and project evaluations test the causal linkages between the identified problem, policy decisions and actions adopted to resolve, mitigate, regulate, alleviate or manage that problem and the consequences of such interventions. The main question to be answered in such exercises is to what extent, if any, the interventions under scrutiny have been effective in their results and what can or should be done to obtain more efficient and effective results.

This causal logic constitutes what has become known in evaluation circles as the “*theory of change*” underlying a policy, programme or project intervention. It refers to the reasons behind government decisions to intervene in society in a specific way aimed at problem resolution or improvement. In order to ensure that government interventions add value to the status quo and improve it, the identification of policy issues and problems must therefore be done accurately, while appropriate and feasible policy transformation goals must be drafted and policy change programmes, based on an appropriate theory of change

as well as implementation strategies based on an appropriate programme logic, must be developed to achieve the transformation of the unsatisfactory status quo into more desirable future conditions.

This chapter assesses the nature of theories of change, how they relate to programme logic models, how they should be employed and how they can contribute to successful evaluations. Different approaches to evaluation and models of evaluation that are also sometimes referred to as “*theories of evaluation*” (e.g. Alkin, Vo & Hansen, 2013) are addressed in Chapter 4 because they deal with the evaluation itself and not with the object of the evaluation which is the policy, programme or project intervention concerned.

3.2 Nature of Theories of Change

A theory of change is not simple to explain. Theories of change are alternative or competing sets of logical sequences of linked theoretical and practical assumptions, and explanations about the reasons why a specific intervention in society is necessary, and why such policy, programme or project should be successful (should achieve its outcomes) (see also in general Taplin & Clark, 2013:1; Collins & Clark, 2013; Keystone, 2014:18; Stachowiak, 2013:2; Jackson, 2013:100; Vogel, 2012:12; INTRAC, 2012; Stein & Valters, 2012:3; Coryn, Noakes, Westine & Schroter, 2011; Ortiz & Macedo, 2010; ORE, 2004). James (2011:27) defines a theory of change as: “*an ongoing process of reflection to explore change and how it happens – and what that means for the part we play in a particular context, sector and/or group of people ...*”

- *“It locates a programme/project within a wider analysis of how change comes about.*
- *It draws on external learning about development and how change happens at different levels.*
- *It articulates our understanding of change – but also challenges and opens it up.*
- *It acknowledges the complexity of change: the wider systems and actors that influence.*
- *It is often presented in diagrammatic form with an accompanying narrative summary.”*

Guijt and Ratolaza (2012:3) also conclude that a theory of change can on the one hand be seen as a complex phenomenon that can sometimes be an output, and on the other hand sometimes be seen as a programme logic process. For the purposes of this book it can be seen as a mental model underlying the intervention. As is already clear from the above analysis this means that a theory of change contains normative, structural and operational attributes. It should be seen as a framework of both thinking and action (James, 2011:6). Theories of change are the backbones of systematic policy, programme and project analysis and assessment. They provide intellectual and conceptual tools to researchers, analysts and evaluators to better understand the phenomena and events that they investigate (Reeler, 2007).

Vogel identifies the following uses for theories of change:

Table 3.1: Different applications of theory of change thinking

Programmes, implementation organisations, grant-making programmes	Donors and foundations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clarifying impact pathways in multiple operational contexts and sites ▪ Linking activities to changes at different levels: community, sub-national, national, international ▪ Results-management, evaluation and impact assessment ▪ Linking multiple projects to a higher-level theory of change ▪ Foundation for monitoring and evaluation planning ▪ Identifying synergies between strategies ▪ Identifying trade-offs and negative or unintended consequences ▪ Programme scoping and design, strategic planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Theory-based evaluation of large-scale programmatic areas ▪ Approaches to programme design and commissioning, country, sector and thematic ▪ Clarifying strategies and impact pathways
Civil society organisations and international NGOS	M&E trainers, consultants, organisational development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clarifying links between organisational values, vision, mission, strategy and programmes ▪ Conceptualising impact, mapping thematic theories of change ▪ Country programme impact, mapping thematic theories of change ▪ Country programme impact pathways ▪ Mapping collaborative relationships and influencing strategies ▪ Monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks ▪ Linking multiple projects to a higher-level outcomes framework ▪ Testing links in theories of change in complex programme areas ▪ Supporting empowerment by linking individual change to wider change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Theory-based impact evaluation for large-scale complex programmes ▪ Theory of change foundation for programme design, monitoring and evaluation and learning ▪ Theory of change-based strategic planning ▪ Exploring theory of change-based methodologies for small-scale evaluations

(Source: Vogel, 2012:13)

Theories of change comprise different combinations of “subjective”, normative beliefs, values and principles as well as more “objective”, facts and figures that constitute empirical evidence to substantiate the assumptions and proposals for specific types of interventions. To develop a theory of change a basic, fundamental theoretical and practical understanding of the social problem to be addressed, is needed. A theory of change therefore needs to be grounded in, or at least be informed by, both prior basic research evidence and knowledge of good practice. Basic research should act as the foundation for applied science (Auspos & Kubisch, 2004). In this way policies could be built on a solid knowledge foundation based on what the stakeholders perceive to be working in both theory and practice (Vogel, 2012:40).

Theoretical ideas as well as practical knowledge or practice wisdom could be linked together to explain underlying assumptions. Assumptions are the conclusions reached on the basis of the state of knowledge and experience that the stakeholders have about the problem or situation at a given moment before the new policy intervention is started.

Differently stated, this is the “theory” or set of coherent underlying beliefs about how and why a programme or policy will work if it is designed and implemented in a specific way. These assumptions are validated by means of knowledge gained from basic research and practice wisdom (University of Wisconsin, n.d.).

Below are four examples of theories of change which are normally drafted in a visual, logical flow model approach to indicate the linear or non-linear causal relationships postulated between causes and effects:

Figure 3.1: CLEAR Theory of Change

(Source: CLEAR, 2013)

Figure 3.2: Theory for Change of the Hunger Project in Africa

(Source: THP, 2013:162)

Figure 3.3: Theory of Change for the Impact Investing Initiative

(Source: Jackson and Harji 2012)

Figure 3.4: Theory of Change for Enhancing Results-based Management in Organisations

Legend: [C] control, [DI] direct influence, [I] influence, [O] outside of influence

(Source: Canada, 2012:17)

The scope and nature of change processes can either be small, restricted to a narrow focus, straightforward and relatively simple, or they can be wide-ranging, comprehensive and highly complex (Rogers, 2008). Rogers summarises the differences between complicated and complex programmes as follows: It *“draws on Glouberman and Zimmerman’s conceptualization of the differences between what is complicated (multiple components) and what is complex (emergent). Complicated programme theory may be used to represent interventions with multiple components, multiple agencies, multiple simultaneous causal strands and/or multiple alternative causal strands. Complex programme theory may be used to represent recursive causality (with reinforcing loops), disproportionate relationships (where at critical levels, a small change can make a big difference – a ‘tipping point’) and emergent outcomes”* (Rogers, 2008).

At the individual or group level alternative or competing theories of change provide different explanations of and specific policy, programme and project strategies and implications for individual or collective attitudinal development and change (Retolaza, 2011). These theories of change may try to explain the basic or fundamental needs of individuals and how need satisfaction should be undertaken (Maslow, 1943; Max-Neef, 1991). They might also try to explain how individuals experience change processes cognitively, ideologically and emotionally and how these change processes in society should or can occur to achieve the best and most durable results (Coffman, 2007; Cloete, 2011:2013; Howlett & Ramesh, 2009; Stachowiak, 2013).

Intermediate theories of change attempt to describe, explain or predict activities and changes at community, regional or sectoral levels. They may include alternative or competing explanations for and proposals for very specific policy, programme or project strategies to efficiently and effectively –

- develop stable, vibrant and sustainable communities,
- improve community participation in municipal services delivery,
- alleviate poverty in a community,
- reduce crime in the community,
- improve regional economic development,
- improve regional public health conditions,
- maximise agricultural harvests,
- improve educational literacy levels,
- stimulate optimal economic growth, and
- protect and manage the environment.

For example, these intermediate theories of change attempt to explain why specific types of job creation (e.g. small entrepreneurs) should work better than other types (big corporate jobs), why visible police patrols might be more effective to reduce crime than heavy penalties for certain crimes, why outcome-based education is supposed to produce better educated entrants for the marketplace, etc. (see also Vogel, 2012:17). They will inevitably be based on some of the normative assumptions contained in the grand theory ideologies summarised below, or on more empirical knowledge, experiences, evidence and good practices that might have emerged over time in these specialised policy sectors and professions. The normative values underlying these intermediate theories of change are, however, in many cases very indirect, while strategic, tactical and other

empirical considerations like the context within which the intervention takes place, the latest knowledge, experience, technologies and other variables like the best strategies for policy change to achieve eventual social change might be more prominent (see for example Stachowiak, 2013; Vogel, 2012:18; Cloete, 2011:230).

Some theories of change are more normative and prescriptive than others, focusing on specific recommended courses of action at a macro policy level to achieve desired goals. Ideologies like capitalism, socialism, liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, democracy, theocracy, authoritarianism, feminism and environmentalism are excellent examples of prescriptive theories of change to a more desired state of affairs that may underlie policy, programme and project interventions in order to improve specified conditions in society according to the ideology concerned. One can, for example, identify socialist-type redistributive policies, programmes and projects directly controlled by government to promote more social and economic equality in order to kick-start more equitable economic growth and development in society. This is frequently contrasted with the opposite focus of other policies, programmes and projects by government just to create an enabling environment for more capitalist, free-market competition-type job creation and economic growth initiatives in the business sector, in order to generate more surpluses for a more equitable redistribution of resources in society.

Other examples of prescriptive ideological theories of change include predominantly conservative policy, programme and project interventions that aim at consolidating and improving morals, ethics and “good”, stable family values and social institutions in society (the so-called interventionist, dominant, nanny state). This approach to social change might in other cases be contrasted by interventions predominantly aimed at maximising the independence, autonomy, liberty and freedom of choice of individuals through minimal state intervention and prescription in order to promote personal development, creativity, innovation and self-fulfilment (so-called minimal or absent state).

The above examples of ideologies focussed more on the contents of interventions, i.e. what to do in order to achieve the desired results. Other ideologies prescribe specific processes through which social interactions and change should take place, for example more peaceful, evolutionary, gradual, negotiated reform and change in democratic processes over longer periods of time, versus more violent, authoritarian, dramatic revolutionary change processes within shorter time frames (see in general also House & Howe (1999) on values in evaluation).

There are therefore many alternative or competing theories of change at different levels of organisation (James, 2011:6). In contrast to the theories of change at individual, community and regional levels which can be regarded on the one hand as grassroots or intermediate level theories, the ideologies summarised above can be applied at the “grand theory” or macro level, as they try to explain why and how change takes place in society in general or in specific sectors of society (Guijt & Retolaza, 2012:3). As explained above, some theories emphasise economic reasons for societal change (e.g. capitalist or socialist explanations for change). Others emphasise social and cultural reasons for change (e.g. development, underdevelopment, nationalism), while others focus on political power relationships that change (e.g. democracy, elite relationships that change, etc.). These theoretical explanations

of change generally also follow specific processes and time frames: either fast, dramatic changes to societal structures and interactions accompanied by upheavals, conflict and frequently violence (e.g. revolutionary changes) or more gradual, evolutionary, incremental changes over a longer period that are more peaceful (e.g. negotiated, constitutional, democratic reforms in society).

There are generally causal linkages among theories of change at different societal levels, because the strategies employed to change individual or community attitudes are supposed to be logically derived from intermediate and macro-level models and theories. The purpose why a cash transfer programme or a job creation or wealth distribution programme is conceived and the strategies on how they are implemented, are always underpinned by one or another competing macro-level ideological assumption, belief or viewpoint. Liberal macro-economic policy programmes and projects to stimulate economic growth are totally different from socialist-type wealth redistribution policies, programmes and projects. The first typical capitalist strategy attempts a linear redistribution of wealth through economic growth, while the second typical socialist strategy attempts to achieve growth through the redistribution of wealth. The obvious, middle of the road compromise policy position would be to synchronise growth and redistribution in a more complex, non-linear, parallel manner and not in an oversimplified, linear cause-effect relationship. This implies projects that explicitly attempts to fast-track growth, existing simultaneously with projects deliberately aimed at maximising the redistribution of scarce resources (e.g. the creation of a balance between job creation on the one hand and a social security network that does not disincentivise recipients to take up a job, but which does provide for a minimum income to poor individuals who do not have a stable income). This is obviously easier said than done, but it is the challenge of good governance facing every government. The development of theories of change at individual grassroots or intermediate community levels therefore always has to be conceptually linked to the philosophical, religious or ideological paradigm underlying such a policy, programme or project. This underlying value framework can be explicit or implicit.

Retolaza (2011) explains in a practical way how a theory of change can be constructed. James (2011:26) provides a useful visual summary of the application of the principles of a theory of change at different levels of organisation: *"The diagram below shows the different levels at which people explore or describe their theory of change, from macro to project level; and where some other tools or processes can fit in within the cycle of learning (in blue): from analysis to planning to implementing to review which then feeds back into a revised theory. While a broad approach involves analysis at organisational level (in green) and can link with processes like outcome mapping; logframes and associated tools are more useful at project level (in orange) to describe what you plan to do and to help review progress at that level"*.

Figure 3.5: Macro Theory of Change

(Source: James, 2011:26)

If the theory of change is valid and accurate, the intervention should be successful if it has been designed correctly, is feasible and is implemented as planned. If the intervention proves to be unsuccessful, the reasons for failure must lie in one or more of the following:

- The *theory of change* is not correct (e.g. it is based on incorrect, inaccurate or incomplete assumptions, data or logic, i.e. a bad theory of change), and/or
- The *design* of the policy, programme or project intervention has flaws (e.g. it is too narrowly focused and does not take multi-dimensional contributions of other policies, programmes and projects sufficiently into account or it did not take into account unintended consequences, i.e. it was bad planning, but not a bad theory of change), and/or
- The *implementation* of the policy, programme or project was defective (e.g. the timeframes were wrong, resources were insufficient, contractors defaulted, i.e. it was bad management and not a bad theory of change) and/or
- *External factors* beyond the policy, programme or project designer's control (e.g. a natural disaster, a regime change, a war, a financial disaster, etc. amounting to just plain bad luck but not to a bad theory of change).

Lempert (2010) provides a useful assessment of good governance practices that can improve the chances of success of evaluations themselves.

3.2 Origins of the concept “theory of change”

There seems to be relatively widespread agreement among scholars that the theory of change approach was suggested for the first time by Carol Weiss in a 1995 publication, *“New Approaches to Evaluating Comprehensive Community Initiatives”*, by the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change (Weiss, 1995). Weiss, a member of the Roundtable’s steering committee on evaluation, argued that a key reason why complex policies and programmes are so difficult to evaluate is because the assumptions that inspire them are poorly articulated or in some cases not even identified at all. This leads to confusion as to how the process of development and implementation will unfold and therefore places little attention on the evaluation of early and mid-term indicators (formative evaluation) that need to be implemented in order for a longer term goal to be reached. Weiss suggested an alternative type of evaluation namely “theory-based evaluation” that investigates the “theories of change” that underlies the intervention.

Chen (2005) refers to the theory of change as conceptual theory and distinguishes it from what he calls action theory (also called programme logic), which comprises a series of consecutive steps that need to be taken in order to achieve the intended results. The theory of change and the programme logic, which is the strategy on how it is implemented, are inextricably linked. The programme logic in essence unpacks the mental model that comprises the theory of change in a concrete, practical way that is supposed to be measurable.

Figure 3.6: Conceptual theory and Action Theory

James (2011:2-3) provides an excellent summary of the development of the theory of change approach – how it is currently perceived and applied by different stakeholders.

3.3 Developing a Theory of Action’s Programme Logic

A theory of change leads policy designers and implementers to develop a programme logic model to explain the activities and processes of the intervention that will have to be made in order to achieve the transformation goals set. These are the desired effects or outcomes and impacts of the envisaged policy. The programme logic of the theory of change is

therefore its action or business plan or its implementation strategy. An evaluation focuses on what activities have been decided upon, how they have been implemented and what their consequences were. This will shed light on which aspects of the policy or programme are working, which not and why? These evaluation insights can inform future decisions regarding maintenance, termination or adaptation to the policy in question, in order to improve its efficiency and effectiveness in future (Bichelmeyer & Horvitz, 2006).

It is therefore important to frame the problem(s) or issue(s) to be addressed within a sound theoretical framework of change. If this basic research homework is not done, a defective understanding of the nature of the problem is possible, leading to the development of a policy programme or project to resolve the problem or improve it, but that are based on incorrect assumptions and therefore doomed to fail. Unfortunately this is a general weakness in many policy, programme and project interventions, where the explicit development of the theory of change underlying a specific intervention is frequently absent (Vogel, 2012:21). This complicates the theory-driven evaluation of such an intervention, because the originally envisaged logic underlying the decision to undertake that intervention is absent and then has to be constructed or reconstructed in order to be able to do the evaluation effectively (Taplin *et al.*, 2013:4).

The programme logic approach is generally accepted as the most useful way to unpack the practical implementation of the theory of change. The origins of the programme logic model are traditionally traced to Suchman (1967), Weiss (1995), Bennett's (1976) hierarchy of evidence and Wholey's (1979) evaluation techniques. The programme logic model is an analytical tool used to plan, monitor and evaluate projects. It derives its name from the logical linkages set out by the planner(s) to connect a project's means with its ends (University of Wisconsin, n.d.).

The programme logic model identifies the following elements of a policy intervention:

- the issues being addressed and the context within which the policy takes place;
- the inputs, i.e. the resources (money, time, people, skills) being invested;
- the activities which need to be undertaken to achieve the policy objectives;
- the initial outputs of the policy;
- the outcomes (i.e. short and medium-term results);
- the anticipated impacts (i.e. long-term results); and
- the assumptions made about how these elements link together which will enable the programme to successfully progress from one stage to the next.

The programme logic model assumes sequential, linear cause and effect relationships. A leads to B leads to C. For example, "capacity" building could reflect the following dynamics: training (A) leads to increased knowledge (B), which leads to employment (C). This approach offers a format for connecting levels of impact with evidence and begins by requiring specification of the overall goal and purposes of the project. Short-term outputs are linked logically to those purposes. Activities are identified that are expected to produce outputs (Patton, 1997). The language of the programme logic model can be confusing because the term goal is also referred to by some proponents of the logical framework

as mission, and purposes are called objectives or outcomes and outputs are short term, end-of-project deliverables. For every goal, purpose, output and activity, the framework requires specification of objectively verifiable indicators, means of verification (types of data), and important assumptions about the linkage between activities and outputs, outputs to purposes and purposes to goals (Patton, 1997).

Figure 3.7: Introduction to programme logic

(Adapted from <http://www.audiencedialogue.net/proglog.html>)

The Canadian International Development Agency bases its activities on the following logic model:

Figure 3.8: CIDA logic model

Fillable form.

(Source: CIDA, 2008)

Since 1962, the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI, 2010) has researched, developed, implemented and evaluated organisational and individual performance improvement programmes. Its Human Performance Technology (HTP) theory of change and programme logic model is in frequent use by Certified Performance

Technologists in over 50 countries, including annual conferences in the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region. The ISPI Programme Logic locates the various forms of evaluation centrally, in the Human Performance Technology model (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9: The Human Performance Technology (HPT) Model
Performance Analysis

The most authoritative programme logic model in South Africa is that of National Treasury in the following form:

Figure 3.10: Key performance information concepts

(Source: National Treasury, 2010:3)

The programme logic model is also referred to in performance measurement circles as the results chain:

Figure 3.11: Results Chain

(Source: Canada, 2012:5)

When a government's evaluation system is mainly based on a linear design of cause and effect where the main links are between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes, a reductionist approach is followed. This assumption of linear relationships between causes and effects has a restricted utility, because many public sector programmes are multi-dimensional and span across many sectors which makes it difficult to isolate sectoral programme effects from one another. Hovland (2007:4), for example, argues that focusing purely on the separate elements of the programme logic model (resource inputs and activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts) is not sufficient for policy development. Nevertheless, any complex system consists of a rich interaction between simple variables that one can evaluate at smaller scales. Important new methodologies to evaluate bigger complex systems have also started to emerge that supplements the over-simplistic programme logic model summarised above (Patton, 1997; Rogers, 2008).

The process of developing the programme logic of the theory of change normally starts by first establishing the overall transformative vision or impact to be achieved in the long term and then working backwards by breaking that vision down into measurable medium-term outcomes to be achieved in a specific shorter timeframe. These outcomes are then broken down further into a range of required measurable concrete deliverables or outputs that constitute critical milestones that provide evidence of progress towards coming closer to the envisaged outcomes and eventually the final transformative impact (Taplin *et al.*, 2013; Keystone, 2014). In this way a logically consistent and coherent set of measurable causal linkages can be established between the baseline state of the current problem to be addressed and the desired transformative impact to be achieved. This then comprises the theory of change and its inherent programme logic. Taplin *et al.* (2013:11) refers to a useful video on Youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJSMa7AA3cU>), summarising the theory of change of the University of Arizona's intervention to increase the number of its minority students. Duignan (2009) also provides another useful explanation on Youtube of theories of change and programme logic models. Numerous other video clips on these topics are available on Youtube. In his above video clip, Duignan explains the different terms used to refer or relate to the idea of a theory of change, including "*impact pathways*" and "*outcome mapping*" (Earl, Cardin & Smutylo, 2001; James, 2011:10).

Vogel (2012:17) has also compiled a useful table copied below, listing different concepts used in theory of change models.

Various concrete implementation monitoring templates in the form of logical framework templates (known as logframe templates) were also developed as a measuring tool by evaluators seeking a better way to measure causality, evaluating the impact of a programme and assessing the accuracy of theories of change (Weiss, 1997). The use of this logic matrix as a planning and monitoring tool allows for precise communication about the purposes of a project, the components of the project, the sequence of activities and the expected accomplishments to be achieved (McCawley, n.d.). The logframe template is therefore normally designed in the form of a matrix combining inputs, outputs and outcomes with time frames, budgets and responsible agencies or persons (Table 3.2).

Figure 3.12: Concepts used in theory of change thinking

(Vogel, 2012:17, as adapted from James 2011)

Most donors in the international arena use some or other version of a logframe template for this purpose. The version developed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) could be regarded as the most popular one for this purpose (Taylor-Powell & Henert, 2008). Vogel (2012:18-21, 46) assesses the main points of contemporary criticism against the too dogmatic use of logframe templates in practice (especially in the UK), that tends to conflate these monitoring tools with a theory of change which it clearly cannot be (also see James, 2011:10; Muspratt-Williams, 2009; Örtengren, 2004; NORAD, 1999 & <http://www.knowledgebrokersforum.org/wiki/item/theory-of-change-vs-logframes> for other useful assessments of the use and the utility of the logframe template approach).

As indicated earlier, the programme logic model itself or its implementation plan in the form of the logframe matrix should only serve as a broad systematic framework for evaluation. They guide the evaluator to collect data that can help to determine what has to happen and what actually happened during the intervention (Bichelmeyer & Horvitz, 2006). Clark (2004) provides a useful overview of how to determine the scope of a theory of change.

Table 3.2: The logframe monitoring tool

The logframe represents a means of check-listing
exhibiting key implementation planning data

Hierarchical Objectives	Key Performance Indicators	Means of Verification	External Factors/ Dependencies
GOAL-OUTCOMES/IMPACT			
The higher order objective to which the project contributes	Measures to verify accomplishment of the GOAL	Sources of data needed to verify status of the GOAL level indicators	Important external factors necessary for sustaining the objectives in the long-run
PURPOSE			
The effect or impact of the project	Measures to verify accomplishment of the PURPOSE	Sources of data needed to verify status of the PURPOSE level indicators	Important external factors needed to attain the GOAL
OUTPUTS			
The deliverables or Terms of Reference of the project	Measures to verify accomplishment of the OUTPUTS	Sources of data needed to verify status of the OUTPUTS level indicators	Important external factors needed to attain the PURPOSE
ACTIVITIES			
The main activities that must be undertaken to accomplish OUTPUTS	A summary of the Project Budget	Sources of data needed to verify status of the ACTIVITIES level indicators	Important external factors that must prevail to accomplish the OUTPUTS

(Source: McCawley, n.d.)

Vogel (2012:14) summarises the core content of a theory of change as follows:

“As a minimum, theory of change is considered to encompass a discussion of the following elements:

- *Context for the initiative, including social, political and environmental conditions and other actors able to influence change.*
- *Long-term change that the initiative seeks to support and for whose ultimate benefit.*
- *Process/sequence of change that is anticipated in order to create the conditions for the desired long-term outcome.*
- *Assumptions about how these changes might happen, as a check on whether the activities and outputs are appropriate for influencing change in the desired direction in this context.*
- *Diagram and narrative summary that captures the outcomes of the discussion.”*

The task of evaluation is to explore the causal linkages foreseen in the theory of change along the programme logic results chain which unpacks the theory of change in measurable units from inputs through activities and outputs to impacts. Keystone (2014), a registered charity in the UK, South Africa and the US, aims to improve the effectiveness of social purpose organisations. It works with such organisations to develop better ways of planning, measuring and reporting social change. It, inter alia, specialises in the development and promotion of theories of change for evaluation purposes, and it has developed a number of tools for this purpose. One such tool is a practical guide and template to develop a theory of change (<http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/resources/guides>). The International Network on Strategic Philanthropy (INSP, 2005) has also developed a manual to assist

stakeholders in development programmes and projects to develop theories of change for their activities. Similar guidance is inter alia available from Spreckley (2009), James (2011), Taplin and Clark (2012) and Guijt and Retolaza (2012).

Keystone (2014) suggests the following practical benefits of developing an explicit theory of change at the start of the intervention:

3.4.1 Benefits and uses of a theory of change

“When you have a good theory of change you have:

- *A clear and testable hypothesis about how change will occur that encourages learning and innovation and enables you to demonstrate accountability for your results.*
- *A visual representation of the change you want to see in your community and how you expect it to come about.*
- *A clear framework for developing your strategies and a blueprint for monitoring your performance with your constituents because measurable indicators of success identified have been identified.*
- *Agreement among stakeholders about what defines success and what it takes to get there.*
- *A justification for developing your organisational capabilities.*
- *A powerful communication tool to capture the complexity of your initiative.*

You can use your theory:

- *As a framework to check milestones and stay on course.*
- *To document lessons learned about what really happens.*
- *To contribute to social learning about what works in development.*
- *To keep the process of implementation and evaluation transparent, so everyone knows what is happening and why.*
- *To persuade donors to invest in longer term outcomes rather than short projects.*
- *As a basis for reports to stakeholders, donors, policymakers, boards.”*

(www.keystoneaccountability.org)

Vogel (2012) has undertaken the most comprehensive assessment so far of the nature and different uses of the concept “theory of change”. Her generic model of theory of change thinking is the most accurate reflection yet of the issue concerned, and is shown in Figure 3.13.

The ideal way to integrate the development of a theory of change into the general policy management cycle is summarised well in Figure 3.15.

Figure 3.13: Generic theory of change thinking model

Adapted from Montague 2007

(Source: Vogel, 2012:22)

Figure 3.14: Theory of change and the project cycle

(Source: Vogel, 2012:71)

3.4 Theories of Change in the African Context

Two theories of change that have been developed for application in the African context have been included above: the envisaged theory of change underlying the activities of CLEAR-AA in Africa (CLEAR, 2013), and the theory of change underlying the Hunger Project (2013:162). Buonaguro and Louw (2013), included at the end of this chapter, contains another example of a theory of change application for a project in Mozambique.

The theory of change approach has also been fully embraced and institutionalised in the South African public sector. The National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) which guides and regulates public sector evaluations in South Africa from the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency defines a theory of change as a “... tool that describes a process of planned change, from the assumptions that guide its design, the planned outputs and outcomes to the long-term impacts it seeks to achieve” (NEPF, 2011:20). It states explicitly that “(e)valuation can be applied to new programmes, as well as existing ones. In new ones the key components to be used first include diagnostic evaluations to understand the situation and develop a theory of change, and design evaluations to check the design and theory of change after the planning has taken place” NEPF (2011:10), and also that a “good quality plan should include a diagnostic analysis of the current situation and the forces at play, and which are likely to be the main strategic drivers of change. It should also explain the logic model or theory of change of the plan, in other words, the causal mechanisms between the activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. It should explain the underlying hypothesis that if we do what we suggest, we will achieve certain objectives and targets. It should also be explicit about the assumptions being made about the external environment.” “One of the purposes of evaluation is to test this logic model by asking questions such as:

- Were the planned outcomes and impact achieved, and was this due to the intervention in question? (Changes in outcome and impact indicators may have been due to other factors)
- Why were the outcomes and impacts achieved, or not achieved?
- Were the activities and outputs in the plan appropriate?
- Did the causal mechanism in the logic model work? Did the assumptions in the logic model hold?” (NEPF, 2011:4).

The NEPF explicitly identifies the prominent role of a theory of change in the design of government interventions in Figure 3.15.

The theory of change underlying the system of public sector evaluation in the country is summarised in Figure 3.16.

Figure 3.15: Types of evaluation

(Source: NEPF, 2011:8)

Figure 3.16: Outline of the South African Government's Evaluation Programme logic

(Source: The Presidency, 2007:6)

3.5 Case: Developing impact theory for a social protection programme in Maputo, Mozambique

Lucilla Buonaguro and Johann Louw

3.5.1 Introduction

In the last ten years or so the literature on social protection has expanded significantly, and there is consensus on its importance as a poverty alleviation strategy (Barrientos & Hulme, 2008; Gentilini & Omamo, 2011). Despite this consensus, there is a wide range of programmes and policies that are counted as part of social protection, which complicates conceptual clarity and understanding of what is delivered in practice. In addition, policy approaches that offer social protection to vulnerable members of society vary from region to region. Norton, Conway and Foster (2002:543) have pointed to the danger of this, that different researchers and development agencies will have different meanings in mind when they write about it. In this paper we follow their definition: “Social protection refers to the public actions taken in response to levels of vulnerability, risk and deprivation which are deemed socially unacceptable within a given polity or society”.

Mozambique is a country where, despite significant socio-economic progress in the last 15 years, many people are still exposed to the vulnerabilities, risks and deprivations referred to in the definition given above. In 2011, Mozambique was classified as a “low human development” country and ranked at 184 out of 187 countries on the human development index (United Nations Development Programme, 2011). Life expectancy at birth was estimated at 50.2 years, and 54.7% of the population was living below the national poverty line. Many survive on the street, and the informal economy for them constitutes the only opportunity for survival and social security.

As for social protection legislation, Mozambique, compared with other developing countries, has a broad and comprehensive body of laws and regulations (Mausse & Cunha, 2011). However, the institutional social protection system is still insufficient and inefficient (Maleane & Suaiden, 2010). According to the last available data, formal social protection in 2007 in Mozambique was available for 200 000 to 250 000 public workers and 236 760 private companies’ employees – out of a population of approximately 22.3 million citizens. In this context, individuals remain generally dependent on informal safety nets, and families represent the principal lifeline during crises (Maleane & Suaiden, 2010).

3.5.2 The programme

In 2011 the government of Mozambique launched the third Poverty Reduction Action Plan (PARP III) for the period 2011-2014 (Republic of Mozambique, 2011). PARP III is a five-year programme to combat poverty and promote inclusivity, aligned with the Millennium Development Goals. The PARP III documents recognise the challenge in expanding the number of vulnerable people covered by social protection programmes given the government’s capacity. In April 2010, the Mozambican Council of Ministers approved the National Strategy for Basic Social Security (NSBSS) for the period 2010-2014, in which the

broadening of the social security provisions for vulnerable people was seen as a factor in poverty reduction. The NSBBS focuses on the collaboration between non-governmental actors, arguing that a partnership with civil society organisations will be a potentially successful tool to extend coverage (Mausse & Cunha, 2011).

In June 2011 one such collaborative programme was launched as part of the NSBBS: the Social Protection and Informal Work Promotion Among Street People Project (SPIWP). It is this programme that is the focus of the present study, as well as what can be learned from its planning and early evaluation efforts.

The SPIWP was planned as a three-year intervention, implemented in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique. It is funded by the European Commission, as part of its strategy to reduce vulnerability, social exclusion, and poverty through social protection mechanisms. The programme is administered by a group of eight organisations, drawing from both civil society and Mozambican government institutions, led by the Italian non-governmental organisation (NGO) Centro Informazione Educazione allo Sviluppo (CIES – Development Information and Education Centre), which is also the agency responsible for the grant contract with the European Commission.

Two sets of service recipients are envisaged: the vulnerable and poor, as well as organisations working with them. Included in the first group are children, scavengers (the term scavengers may have a negative connotation, but it is the closest meaningful translation of the Portuguese word *catador*, as used in Mozambique), and mentally ill people living on the streets of the city centre of Maputo. Vulnerable families of six Maputo neighbourhoods are also included in this group, people who experience difficulties in accessing social protection services, with many at risk of becoming street dwellers, especially children and mentally ill people.

The second level of beneficiaries of the SPIWP includes government institutions, civil society, and local communities. Several of its activities are aimed at creating and enhancing the capacities and abilities of these organisations to provide services to the primary beneficiaries, and that is why they are included here.

Collaborative programmes like these are difficult to design, implement, and work with, and the SPIWP is no exception. It is implemented by organisations that evolved from different backgrounds, with different organisational values and tasks, and that have different expectations about what they regard as desirable outcomes. The programme activities furthermore consist of three interrelated sets of interventions that are implemented at three different levels of society: institutional, civil society, and community level.

Researchers recognise that the creation of linkages between statutory and community-based social protection systems can have positive influences on poverty reduction and vulnerability in developing countries (Coheur, Jacquier, Schmitt-Diabaté & Schremmer, 2007; Lund, 2009; Mupedziswa & Ntseane, 2013). These partnerships are typically aimed at facilitating access to social protection schemes of those vulnerable groups that are usually not covered by the statutory social security mechanisms, such as informal workers and street people (Jacobi, 2006). This collaborative approach can be considered as a response to the inefficiency and non-sustainability of social protection policy frameworks that, in many developing countries, remain attractive but non-affordable social welfare and anti-poverty actions (Devereux, 2002; Low, Garret & Ginja, 1998).

3.5.3 Evaluation

When the SPIWP was launched in 2011, three factors combined to make the involvement of programme evaluation expertise attractive, and indeed advisable. First, as we indicated in the beginning, the range of programmes and policies that can be regarded as fitting social protection goals and objectives strongly suggests that conceptual clarity would be important, and that an external evaluation agent could be useful in this.

A second factor was the complexity contained in the intervention itself: eight quite different organisations must collaborate to address the needs of a vulnerable and difficult-to-reach population. In the case of complex interventions, programme partners, or even members of the same partner organisation, bring to the programme their own values and agendas that may be reflected in different programme assumptions (Chen, 2005; Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004). In the present circumstances, it was quite possible that they did not share views on programme processes and outcomes (Funnell & Rogers, 2011).

Finally, when the approach was made for evaluation expertise, the programme had not yet been implemented. This provided a unique opportunity. Chen (2005) and Owen and Rogers (1999) remarked how the development of an evaluation plan can benefit a programme that is still in its early stage of development: it can serve as a foundation to organising programme implementation and identify sources of problems when the programme is still highly fluid and open to modification.

When the present authors became involved in an evaluation of the SPIWP in 2011, these possible contributions were more implicit than explicit. The question was what form evaluation efforts could take in this early phase of the programme's development, as evaluation is typically considered as something that comes towards the end of a programme's life cycle. We were able to convince the programme partners that one particular form of evaluation, programme theory evaluation, would be useful before the programme is even launched. The rest of our paper describes this approach, how it was implemented in the present evaluation, and what its effects were.

Programmes have a certain logic to them, which Rossi *et al.* (2004) captured as a hierarchy of four steps: it starts with a valid conceptualisation of the problem to be addressed (generally known as needs assessment); followed by designing the appropriate means identified to remedy it (programme theory); then the implementation of that design (the implementation phase); and if appropriately implemented, concluding with achieving the intended improvements (impacts). Programmes can be strengthened at every step of the way, and in the present paper, we are particularly concerned with the role of programme theory evaluation (step 2 in their programme logic hierarchy) in improving the programme before it was launched.

Bickman (1987:5) defined programme theory as "the construction of a plausible and sensible model of how the programme is supposed to work". For Rossi *et al.* (2004), this plausible model contains two sets of assumptions: about the outcomes a programme is expected to achieve (called impact theory); and about its activities and organisation (process theory). The programme impact theory describes the cause-and-effect sequence of events generated by programme activities that provoke the change in the situation that the

intervention intends to modify. This logical chain describes the steps toward the change, from the most proximal (immediate) outcome to the most distal (long term). For social protection programmes like the SPIWP, proximal outcomes would refer to the more or less immediate benefits for target groups, and distal outcomes would include the reduction of deprivation and vulnerability.

In their scoping study of social protection research, Ellis, White, Lloyd-Sherlock, Chhotray and Seeley (2008) identified a lack of knowledge about impacts as one of the major gaps in this field. They argue that monitoring often is limited to the rollout of the project itself (what we call here “process”), and that the monitoring function comes to an end when the programme winds up. Thus we learn little about “the downstream impacts on the welfare and well-being of beneficiaries” (p. 12), or the macro level impacts, on poverty for example. This of course is what we called aspects of “impact theory” above. The present paper will address only the impact part of programme theory development, and not process theory as such.

We wanted to elicit the assumptions about impact as they existed in the minds of the eight programme partners, and not necessarily as they exist in the literature. Extracting programme impact theory in this way has the potential to contribute significantly to new, start-up programmes like the SPIWP. First, and most obviously, it makes these expectations of impact explicit, if they are tacit at the start. Second, and as a result of having more explicit impacts, programme staff are alerted early to potential inconsistencies between them in what impacts they wish to achieve and for whom (Chen, 2005; Owen & Rogers, 1999). Third, drawing out stakeholders’ programme theory actively involves them in the process, which can result in an improvement of communication, contribute to awareness-raising about programme rationale, and contribute to the formation of consensus on the programme goals and outcomes (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). Fourth, it gives stakeholders the opportunity to examine and compare the logic of their ideas (Donaldson, 2007). Finally, having an agreed-upon impact theory is fundamental in constructing a framework for outcome monitoring and developing the appropriate measures to capture the expected change (Weiss, 1998). We thought this final aspect was particularly important in the light of the observations made concerning programme impacts in the social protection literature. Thus although an approach and a study like the present one cannot say anything about actual results achieved, we believe it is a demonstration of how important conceptual clarity is in the early stages of programme development, especially about what impacts are expected.

Methodologically, an inductive, participatory mode of working is recommended to elicit stakeholders’ programme theory, and evaluators often rely on working group sessions and individual interviews (Chen, 2005) to achieve this. The working group mode is considered particularly appropriate with programmes that have been designed by multiple stakeholders and that present complicated aspects (Chen, 2005; Funnell & Rogers, 2011; Weiss, 1998).

3.5.4 Impact

A brief review of programme documentation, in particular the SPIWP Grant Application Form (CIES, 2010), revealed the overall goals of the programme:

1. An improved social protection system for vulnerable groups, which envisages strengthening the overall social protection system through the creation of better coordination between government institutions and civil society. The implicit assumption here is that such coordination can improve the services offered to the most vulnerable. The programme activities related to this expected result are targeted mainly at secondary beneficiaries: programme partners, community organisations, civil society, and government departments.
2. Increased opportunities of socio-educational and occupational reintegration for street children, scavengers, and mentally ill people living on the street. It is envisaged that activities such as awareness campaigns about street dwellers' and vulnerable peoples' rights, education, and vocational training, will contribute to the reintegration of these groups into society.
3. An improved capacity of the public social protection system to identify and respond to existing social needs. The activities implemented to achieve this result include networking and advocacy, and social research.

After this brief review of programme documents, a first set of interviews was conducted with the programme designers, discussing the design of the programme as described above. As a result of an iterative series of interviews, a first draft of the programme impact theory was developed, representing the change process as originally understood by the programme designers. This was followed up by interviews with two representatives from two programme partners, two local experts on street children and mentally ill people, and the European Commission's officer in charge of programme supervision, to discuss the draft. This procedure is in line with Chen's (2005) proposal for how best to develop programme theory through participatory modes of working.

When this first draft of SRIWP's impact theory was presented to the representatives of all the organisations, it became clear that this was not everyone's understanding of what the programme was trying to achieve. This was an important finding, as discrepancies like these can lead to disagreements and confusion. Following Funnell and Rogers' (2011) suggestion, a working group was formed to address these discrepancies, where all programme partners were represented. The group met twice in Maputo and the sessions were conducted in Portuguese. Using large sticky notes on a wall, a visual representation of the programme's impact theory was built up over the two sessions, starting with immediate outcomes, and ending with long-term impacts. The result was an organised and consensual model involving 30 different outcomes, re-worked by the authors into a coherent set of outcomes, accepted by all partners as an accurate reflection of their thinking. Figure 3.17 presents this final model, with separate outcomes indicated for secondary and primary beneficiaries. We stress again that this is the "mental map" of the SRIWP's impacts, as it exists in the minds of its significant stakeholders. It is not an indication of what exists in the social protection literature on outcomes and impacts, and remains very much a work in progress.

Figure 3.17: Final programme impact theory

The fine-tuned programme theory reveals the assumptions that programme stakeholders hold in terms of how the programme impacts should come about. For the scavengers, a cooperative must be established, to improve access to the formal social protection system. It is expected to increase the visible benefits of their work, which in turn will lead to greater inclusion within their communities. The stability thus provided is expected to result in a decrease in the acts of vandalism, such as rubbish bin fires, and increased access to the social protection system. Younger street children are expected to re-enter school, which in turn ought to create opportunities to renew the bond with their families. For teenaged street children, enrolment in vocational training is regarded as a first step towards job opportunities and to get them off the street. Services like occupational therapy are to be provided to mentally ill street people to improve their job prospects, which in turn ought to increase the chances that they will be welcomed back into their families.

All these activities at primary beneficiary level are to be supported and enhanced by conditions introduced at secondary beneficiary level. This starts with better coordination of service delivery provided by all the actors involved in social protection, leading to improved capacity to identify and respond to the needs of the primary beneficiaries. Better coordination is also expected to increase the interest of governmental institutions to include vulnerable people's social protection needs in the legislative framework.

3.5.5 Case conclusion

In countries dominated by the informal economy, such as Mozambique, achieving universal social protection coverage through formal (institutional) mechanisms is a great challenge. We have tried to show in this discussion how evaluators can work with stakeholders at the front end of a programme that aims to extend available social protection coverage by creating connections between different levels of service provision. It demonstrates how evaluators could work with a programme in its early phases, even before implementation, to strengthen it and to increase the chances that it will make an impact. It was clear to us that participating in this process resulted in a number of positive results for the programme stakeholders:

- The programme logic was much clearer to all the stakeholders, and could be reviewed over time as it evolved.
- The different roles that different partners must play in the implementation of programme activities were made explicit via this process.
- Participants experienced a sense of team building and organisational development, and a sense of ownership of the programme.
- It drew attention to outcomes and impacts, and not just to activities and outputs.
- The theory evaluation in the start-up phase of the programme had an important formative function, through the clarification of programme outcomes, and the appropriateness of activities given the programme logic. The definition of the programme outcomes was helpful in elaborating an appropriate outcome monitoring framework.

One could of course ask how feasible it is that such a framework will lead to the expected outcomes. This work was done as part of our investigation, but is not reported here. Suffice

it to say that the key assumptions presented above seem to be supported by evidence from the literature. For example: working in a recognised cooperative will increase income and social protection opportunities for scavengers; the combination of institutional and community-based social protection can extend the coverage of social protection services for vulnerable people (Coheur *et al.*, 2007); coordination among civil society, government institutions, and communities can improve responses to the demand for social protection of vulnerable groups (Cook & Kabeer, 2009); and the provision of health and educational services can reduce exposure to risk (Lund, 2009).

The next set of evaluation questions of course would refer to implementation, if we follow Rossi *et al.*'s (2004) step-wise hierarchy: in the next three years, how has this programme been implemented? Given its complexity, and developmental approach, we will not be surprised if implementation provides serious challenges to programme staff, and it is quite likely that actual service delivery will differ from the "programme as designed". Ultimately the important question is one of impact: Did the programme work as intended? For this, we of course require longitudinal studies, to find out what the longer term effects have been on the well-being of the vulnerable and deprived groups who are considered as the target population of this set of social protection activities.

3.6 Conclusions

Programme evaluation overlaps with but is also slightly different from more basic academic research in terms of the purpose of data collection and the standards for judging quality. Basic scientific research is generally undertaken to discover new knowledge, test existing theories, to establish truth and to make generalisations across time and space, whereas programme evaluation is explicitly undertaken to inform decisions, clarify options, identify improvements and to provide information about policies and programmes within the contextual boundaries of time, place, values and politics (Patton, 1997).

Over the past decades there have been major changes in evaluation research and the way it is implemented. The most important changes include the emergence of new evaluation methodologies, the heightened role of theory and a stronger emphasis on the use of systematic programme evaluation logic as an integral part of policy programme development. The result is that there is a growing appreciation of the value of using applied research findings or evidence to improve policy content and processes (Hovland, 2007:5).

Using a theory of change as part of the process for the development of a policy as well as the programme logic to unpack the different stages of the policy process, makes it easier to develop and implement policy since each step (from the ideas behind it, to the outcomes it hopes to achieve, to the resources needed) is clearly defined within the theory and displayed within the logic model (Auspos & Kubisch, 2004). Theories of change structured in programme logic format are, for a number of reasons, vital to the success of an evaluation. Grounding a policy or programme explicitly in the transformation theory that it is supposed to implement, maximises the achievement of the envisaged desired outcomes. The absence of the theory of change underlying a policy, programme or project

further severely complicates any systematic reflection about and evaluation of the value that the intervention has added to the state of the problem that it was supposed to address.

A programme logic framework could be used very effectively to evaluate policy development and implementation. The logframe matrix approach provides a practical tool for integrating planning, implementation, evaluation and reporting of policy development and implementation (Hovland, 2007:4). However, the logical framework itself should only be regarded as the monitoring and implementation instrument to maximise the success and use of the evaluation. *"It creates an illustration of all the various moving parts that must operate in concert to bring about a desired outcome"* (Anderson, 2004:3). The full cycle of policy, programme or project intervention development, implementation, evaluation, review and improvement, however, comprises much more than just completing a logframe template. The underlying theory of change is crucial in understanding why an intervention is made, what it is supposed to achieve and whether that has happened.

Theories of change are playing increasingly important roles in determining if government programmes and policies are achieving their objectives, and whether they are effective or not (AEA Evaluation Policy Task Force, 2009). This is also true for systematic evaluation practices in Africa and South Africa.

Numerous guides, manuals, templates, approaches and procedures are freely available from stakeholders across the globe involved in attempts to improve the quality of development interventions through the more explicit use of theories of change in the design, implementation and evaluation of the interventions.

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