Objectives of this presentation

- To give an overview on the **concepts** of Theory of Change (ToC) and Research Impact Pathway (IP)

- Understanding on the **application** of the Theory of Change approach and **Research Impact Pathways**

- To provide guidance on formulating **outcomes & outputs** and the development of **indicators**
Theory of Change

‘A Theory of Change articulates the assumptions about the process through which change will occur, and specifies the ways in which all of the required early and intermediate outcomes related to achieving a desired long-term change (=Impact) will be brought about and documented as they occur.’

(Anderson, 2006, p.1)
Example: dimensions of change

Conceptual changes:
Change in the understanding, in the way of thinking or raised awareness on the issue

Instrumental changes:
Concrete change to policy, interventions, practices or pathways for implementation of interventions

Capacity development:
Developing skills to provide and use relevant research findings/evidence
Theory of Change: Why?

- helps to think critically about the desired societal change

- illustrates how the complex process of change will unfold over time

- helps / forces projects to explain Output to Outcome to Impact logic

- helps to manage and steer a research project
**Theory of Change: What?**

- Unravelling the problem: direct and indirect causes and their interrelations
- Shows a roadmap, pathway of change, change process
- Includes and spells out assumptions
- The ToC is descriptive and takes into account aspects less easy to quantify (e.g. awareness raising, power changes)
- Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts clearly spelled out
- Can be used for M&E
Theory of Change: How?

- Identify the problem area to be addressed by your research
  - (preconditions and causes)
- Identify the long-term and intermediate objective of your research project
- Develop an impact pathway
- Develop indicators
Assumption

Research leads to better understanding, which asks for continuous reflection and adaptation of assumptions.
Assumptions consider

- Pathways of change
- Cause-effect relations
- Sequences in change processes
- Appropriateness/effectiveness of strategies to support change processes
Theory of Change

Problem area to be addressed → Cause(s) → Underlying knowledge-related cause(s) → Research output(s) → Research outcomes(s) → Impact

Research questions + activities
Problem area – knowledge gaps

PROBLEM AREA TO BE ADDRESSED

CAUSE(S)

UNDERLYING KNOWLEDGE-RELATED CAUSE(S)

✓ Describe the problem areas and underlying causes (e.g. problem tree)

✓ Define the knowledge-related causes//gaps

✓ They essentially form the rationale for your research
Impact Pathway: From Output to Outcome and Impact

- The changes in environmental, economic and social conditions that a research project aiming at

- Outcomes relate to the changes in behaviour, relationships, actions, or activities of stakeholders as a result of sharing and uptake of research

- Outputs are the most direct and immediate results of a research project
An ‘impact pathway’ may suggest a linear relationship between output, outcome and impact, in practice this is hardly ever the case. *Change* is a complex process that depends on a variety of actors and factors of which the research is only one.

Only research outputs fall under the direct sphere of control of a research project or programme, outcomes and impact belong only to sphere of influence of a research project or programme.
An Impact Pathway: with stakeholders

Team input: research/comm’s/partner org. + M&E strategies

First Outputs

Early outcomes

Capacities & skills

Interm. Outcomes

Awareness & influence on knowledge networks/policy shapers

Knowledge brokers & intermediaries: up-scaling & out-scaling

Final outcomes

Research in use / changes in policy & practice

Time/body of knowledge/circle of engagement/influence sphere/uptake

First Outputs

More/other outputs

Final set outputs
Indicators: Why?

- Illustrate how success will be recognised at each step in the pathway of change
- Enable to verify if your research project is on track and where it can improve
- Help you to steer and manage your research project
Indicators can be defined as “quantitative or qualitative factors or variables that provide a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect the changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor” (OECD/DAC, 2009, p.32)

**Quantitative indicators** are measures of quantities or amounts

**Qualitative** indicators are judgements or perceptions about a subject: *quantifiable*
Indicators: How to define?

- Indicators have to be defined for each Output and Outcome

- No indicators for Impact: beyond project duration/direct influence sphere

- Indicators must be specific to know what data are needed to verify progress (= means of verification)

- Useful questions when developing indicators:
  - Who or what is the target population of change?
  - How much change has to occur on this indicator for us to claim to have successfully reached an outcome?
  - How long will it take to bring about the necessary change in this indicator in the target population?
Indicators: SMART

- **Specific**: accurately related to the defined output or outcome as well as clearly and unambiguously formulated

- **Measurable**: the unit of measurement is defined (qualitatively or quantitatively)

- **Achievable**: the change anticipated should be achievable by the project (what is the baseline for the indicator?)

- **Realistic**: the set target values for the indicators should be ambitious yet realistic

- **Time-bound**: the time for achieving the indicator is defined
## Example: SMART Indicators

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Your proposal: Research Impact Pathway

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Time
Keep in mind

- Ensure that your impact pathway is in line with the general objectives of the research programme

- The Theory of Change and impact pathway are instruments for your project management

- Outcomes and outputs are ‘hardware’, but the ‘software’ i.e. strategies to get research in-to use and underlying assumptions are equally important

- Keep focused: do not try to capture every research activity, potential outcome and all outputs but focus on the most important outcomes and major outputs

- Indicators must be verified and thus be verifiable