

Pathways of impact

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A theory of change approach to research uptake

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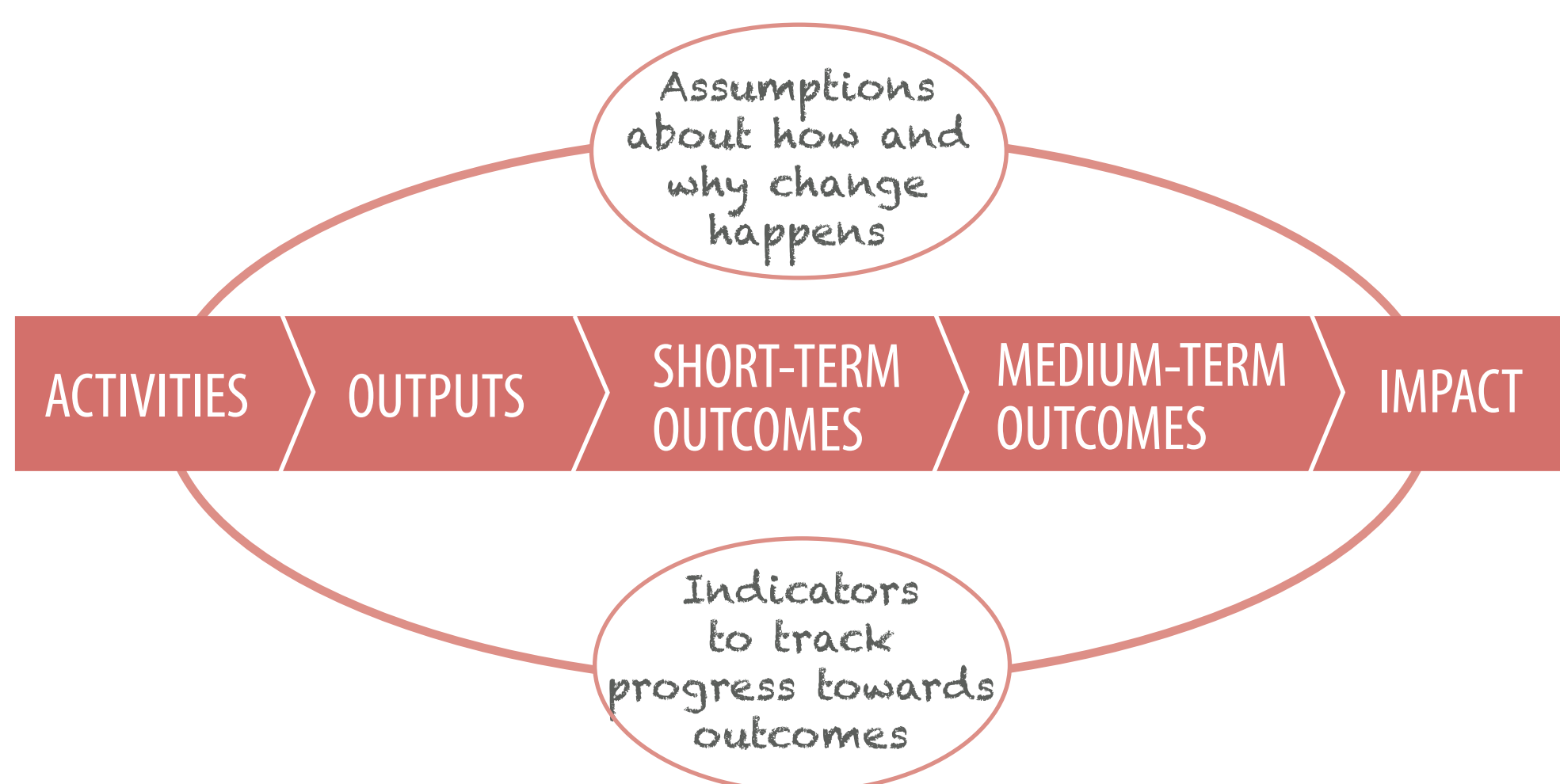


What is theory of change?

Theory of change (TOC) is an approach that is increasingly being used by research projects to design, plan for and evaluate the impact of their research. It maps out the expected pathways or links between a project's activities and its intended impact, whilst taking into account different contextual factors that might influence change.

This process encourages strategic planning for research impact from the beginning of the research cycle, and ongoing reflection and critical thinking about how change happens. Anticipated pathways of change are made explicit as assumptions and tested using indicators.

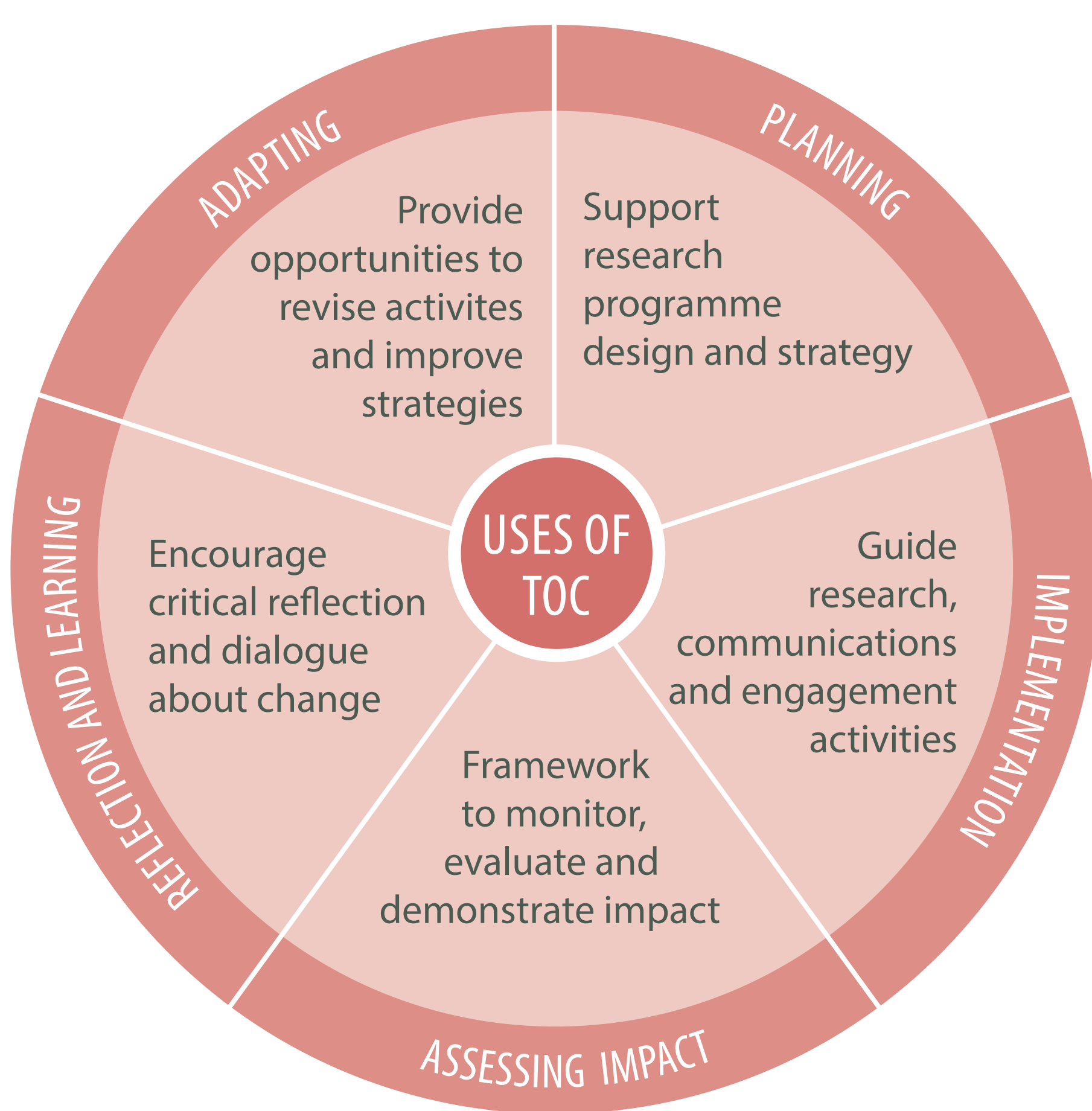
Figure 1: The components of theory of change



Uses of theory of change for research projects

TOC is useful for research projects because research influences policy and practice through non-linear, iterative pathways. Thinking through how research evidence might be communicated, taken up and applied by stakeholders in different country contexts from the outset can strengthen the design of the whole research process and maximise its prospects for impact.

Figure 2: Uses of theory of change



With clearly defined outputs and intended outcomes, TOC provides a framework to monitor whether the research project is on track to achieve its expected results, and evaluate progress towards impact. It also encourages projects to critically reflect upon how and why change happens and adapt activities in response to changing contexts.



RESYST theory of change

RESYST is an international research consortium that aims to enhance the resilience and responsiveness of health systems to promote health and health equity and reduce poverty. The intended impact is to influence health system policy and management decisions at the international level and within member countries including South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, India, Thailand and Vietnam.

This long-term goal was the starting point for developing the TOC framework – a process of mapping backwards and considering what

outcomes, then outputs, then activities, are needed to reach the goal and what needs to be in place for each of these to happen.

Despite the diverse contexts, personal engagement with research users is key to explaining the RESYST TOC. It is through collaborating and building relations with stakeholders that we can ensure that research is relevant, researchers have a reputation for credible research and have strong and trusting relationships with policymakers. These factors, when combined with capacity and willingness of policymakers to use evidence, are essential for the use of research in policy and management decisions.

THEORY OF CHANGE

ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM OUTCOME	IMPACT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development and maintenance of a well-functioning research consortium Research plans and questions that are aligned with national priorities Collaboration with key stakeholders including policymakers to develop plans and strategies Rigorous and high quality knowledge synthesis and primary research activities Mapping of policy processes, communications contexts Research uptake, capacity strengthening, M&E strategies are developed and implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A well-functioning research consortium High quality and innovative research with policy relevant messages and recommendations Multi-study synthesis for international stakeholders Strengthened capacity of researchers to conduct high quality research Research outputs are available and accessible to different stakeholder groups Strengthened capacity to disseminate research effectively and to engage with key stakeholders Regular reviews of strategies and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key stakeholders are aware of and supportive of RESYST and research produced by members Members of RESYST consortium are viewed as a trusted and high-quality source of evidence on health systems topics by academics and policymakers New or strengthened relationships with policymakers and other key stakeholders at local, national and international levels Research users are able to understand and analyse evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research by RESYST members informs policy and management decisions in member countries and at the international level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research from RESYST members contributes to policy and management changes that enhance the resilience and responsiveness of health systems in low and middle-income countries

ASSUMPTIONS & INDICATORS

ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM OUTCOME	IMPACT
<p>ASSUMPTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consortium members are willing to participate and contribute to successful functioning of the partnership across all its output areas Research areas continue to reflect national priorities Members have sufficient human resources to participate in activities Policymakers are willing to take part in consultative processes about research Staff turnover among policymakers and research users is not excessively high External resources are available for formal training for junior staff 	<p>INDICATORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of research products produced including research reports, briefs, working papers Number of papers published (disaggregated by Southern members as the leading author, open-access, gender of leading author) Number of capacity development events/opportunities funded or facilitated by the RPC Number of interactions where knowledge outputs are disseminated (country / international level) e.g. policymaker meetings, workshops, conference presentations 	<p>ASSUMPTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff turnover among research users and policymakers does not interfere with research uptake <p>INDICATORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of citations of RPC work Number of innovative research approaches developed New research consultancy or advice requested from RPC members by policymakers at the national/ international level Number of unique users to the RESYST website and downloads of research outputs from the website 	<p>ASSUMPTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political and resource environment remain conducive to policymakers using evidence Global policy agenda is aligned with the project's research agenda <p>INDICATORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of policy decisions or management practice changes that draw on RPC members' research Number of policy debates, discussions, discourses influenced by RPC members' research 	<p>ASSUMPTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National and global contexts are favourable to health outcome improvements, including factors relating to economic and financial situation, governance, environment, food, environment etc.



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<http://resyst.lshtm.ac.uk>