Theory of Change and research impact

Isabel Vogel for ESPA

What is theory of change?

'On-going 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/group of people.'

Cathy James, Comic Relief review, 2011

Structured technique for understanding how a programme is likely to contribute to long-term change, in the issue context

Theory of Change: Evolution not revolution

- Freire
- Examine beliefs about poverty and development
- Reflect then act

1970s

1980s

- Evaluation, recurring programme failure
- Carol Weiss, Michael Quinn Patton, Patricia Rogers
- Critical examination of assumptions about change

- Linear logic models?
- No context, oversimplification
- Expected and positive changes

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Theory of change

- Context for change and others active in it
- What needs to change and why
- Programme's contribution

How and why research will contribute to long-term development impact:

- Research engagement with development actors
- Evidence-based system learning
- Improvements in policy / practice
- Innovations

Influence and impact

SITUATIONAL DRIVERS

Socio-economic, political, Technological factors

Existing policies, practices, beliefs

Other actors in research, policy and practice

Capacity of target groups to respond

Receptiveness of context

Organizations, resources, systems, skills

Adapted from S. Montague, 2002

MEDIUM TERM CHANGES

Indirect influence – policy contexts, shapers, advocacy organisations, practitioner actors

Behaviours and practice for change

Long-term

change or

impact

SHORT-TERM CHANGES

What changes, by whom?

Direct influence – partners, collaborators, Immediate research users

Research programme
Quality evidence,
capacities,
stakeholder
engagement

Isabel Vogel to.

Capacity to respond

Awareness, reception of new knowledge

Engagement, involvement

How does theory of change help?

Breaks down change into feasible stages: short-term, medium-term and long-term

Critical examination of cause-effect assumptions, research-based change, contextual drivers Evidence and reality check interventions

Identify intermediate results and indicators

Evaluation questions

Impact-aligned research design, research uptake, monitoring and evaluation

Maximising opportunities for research impact

Serendipity

Established relationships and networks with user communities

Working with knowledge brokers as amplifiers and network providers

Developing applications for policy and practice with non-academic partners

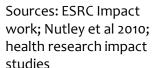
User-engagement and knowledge exchange strategies

Portfolios of research activity that builds reputation with research users

Involving users at all stages with research

Good infrastructure, leadership and management support





ESPA Theory of Change: Impact

Longer-term social. environmental and economic impact (Super goal)

Impact in ecosystem and poverty reduction domain

Longer term changes in policy, practice, planning, institutions and markets for ecosystem services

Functioning ecosystems, reduced poverty and increased economic growth

People, communities and development actors sustainably manage ecosystems for poverty reduction and inclusive

Development actors successfully applying ecosystem services and poverty alleviation research and evidence in planning, practice,

Example outcome: Multi-stakeholder, mutli-sector commission on ecosystem management or for management of specific convene platforms ecosystem e.g. river

Assumption: Context, external, political factors determine the scale of adoption

Research evidence taken up and applied

Assumption:

Policy, practice and private sector actors

adopt ES for PA approaches and

take to scale

Boundary where development actors in policy, planning and implementation take over

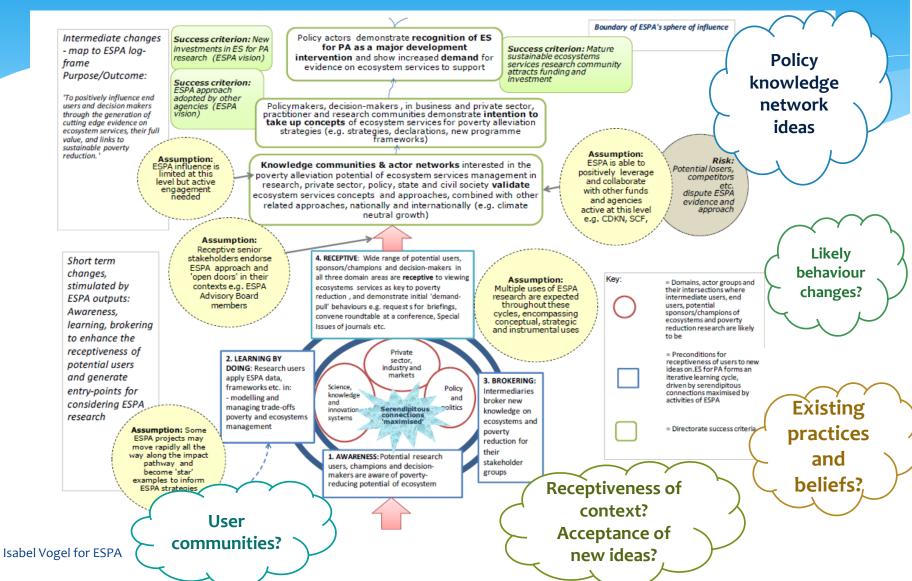
Stakeholder groups

for action informed

ecosystem services

by evidence on

ESPA ToC: Outcome level



ESPA Theory of Change: Output level

Output 1: High quality, interdisciplinary, extensive body of knowledge on

ecosystems services generated, their dynamics and human use, that builds a credible, evidencebased foundation for their sustainable management for poverty alleviation and growth.

Success criterion:

Research portfolio is balanced between:

- blue skies research
- research relevant to policy and practice
- research relevant to advancing future research on ES for PA
- research relevant to business and private sector on ES for PA
- other key areas that emerge as important

Output 2: Capability built amongst ESPA researchers to conduct interdisciplinary ecosystems services and poverty alleviation research that meets the needs of users in national and international scientific and research communities. policy, politics and implementation,

institutions and markets, supported by new interdisciplinary methods, frameworks, data, tools and syntheses.

Output 3: Demand for ecosystems and poverty alleviation research is stimulated by the ESPA Directorate and

ESPA-supported researchers engaging actively in knowledge exchange in academic and policy debates, setting agendas, forming partnerships and networks across disciplines, domains, sectors, in national and international contexts to build the field of ecosystems services for poverty alleviation research.

Success criterion:

Output 4: New Southern-led institutional relationships, networks and partnerships

formed for ecosystems services and poverty-alleviation research, influencing and impact, nationally and internationally.

User needs and demand?

Nature of research?

capabilities needed?

Different institutional patterns?

- ESPA Directorate provides the right tools and

support to ensure that projects, especially

Southern-led projects, have the maximum

potential for impact locally and the optimum chance of generating positive outcomes for the

poorest people in ESPA regions and beyond.

New

Theory of change...

- conceptual model of impact
- feasible research contribution story that can be evidenced
- sense of purpose and momentum
- 'rough guide' to change that can be revised and adapted as the journey unfolds...

