

# Theory of Change and research impact

Isabel Vogel for ESPA

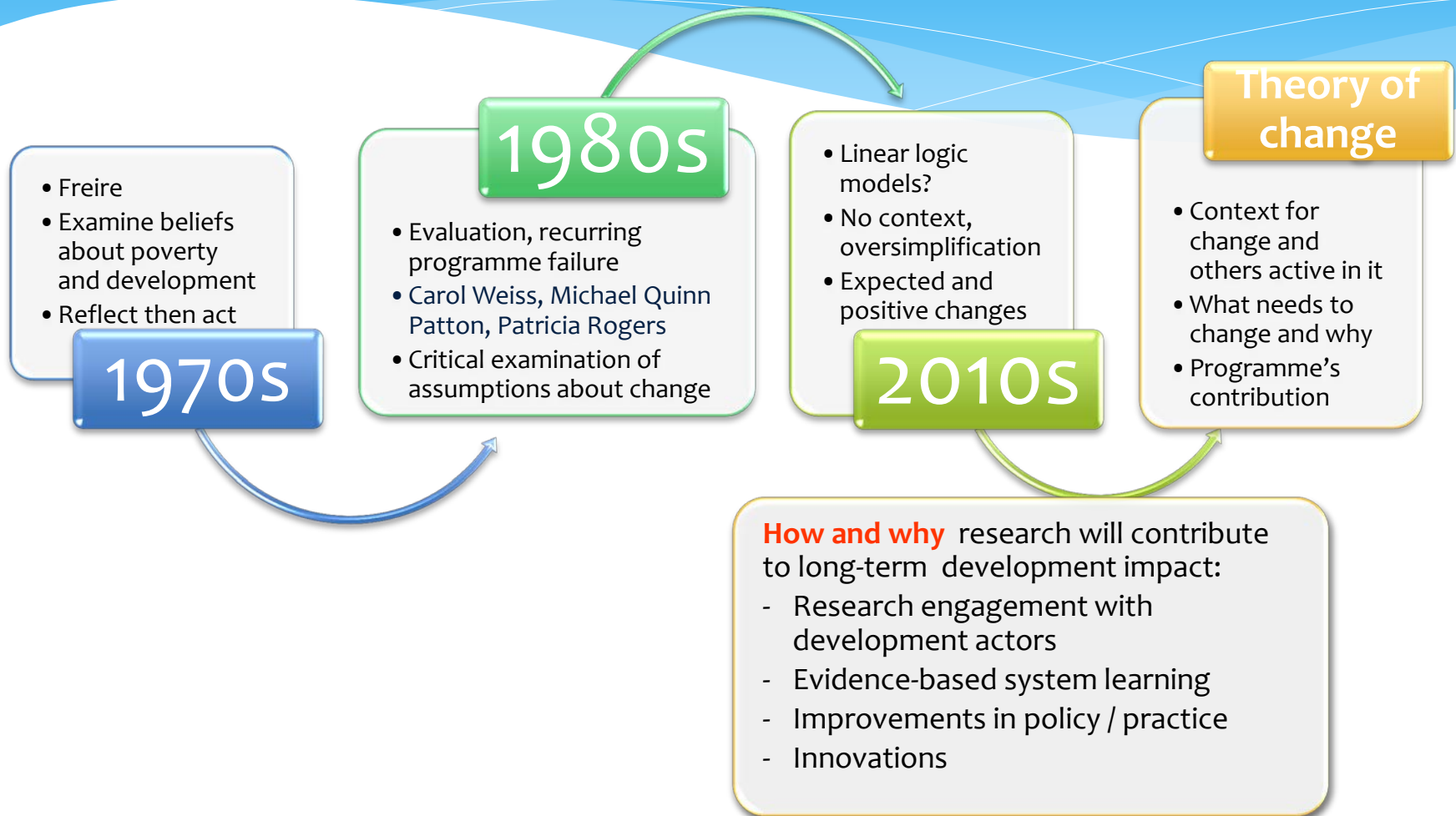
# What is theory of change?

**‘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



# Influence and impact

## SITUATIONAL DRIVERS

Socio-economic, political,  
Technological factors

Existing policies,  
practices, beliefs

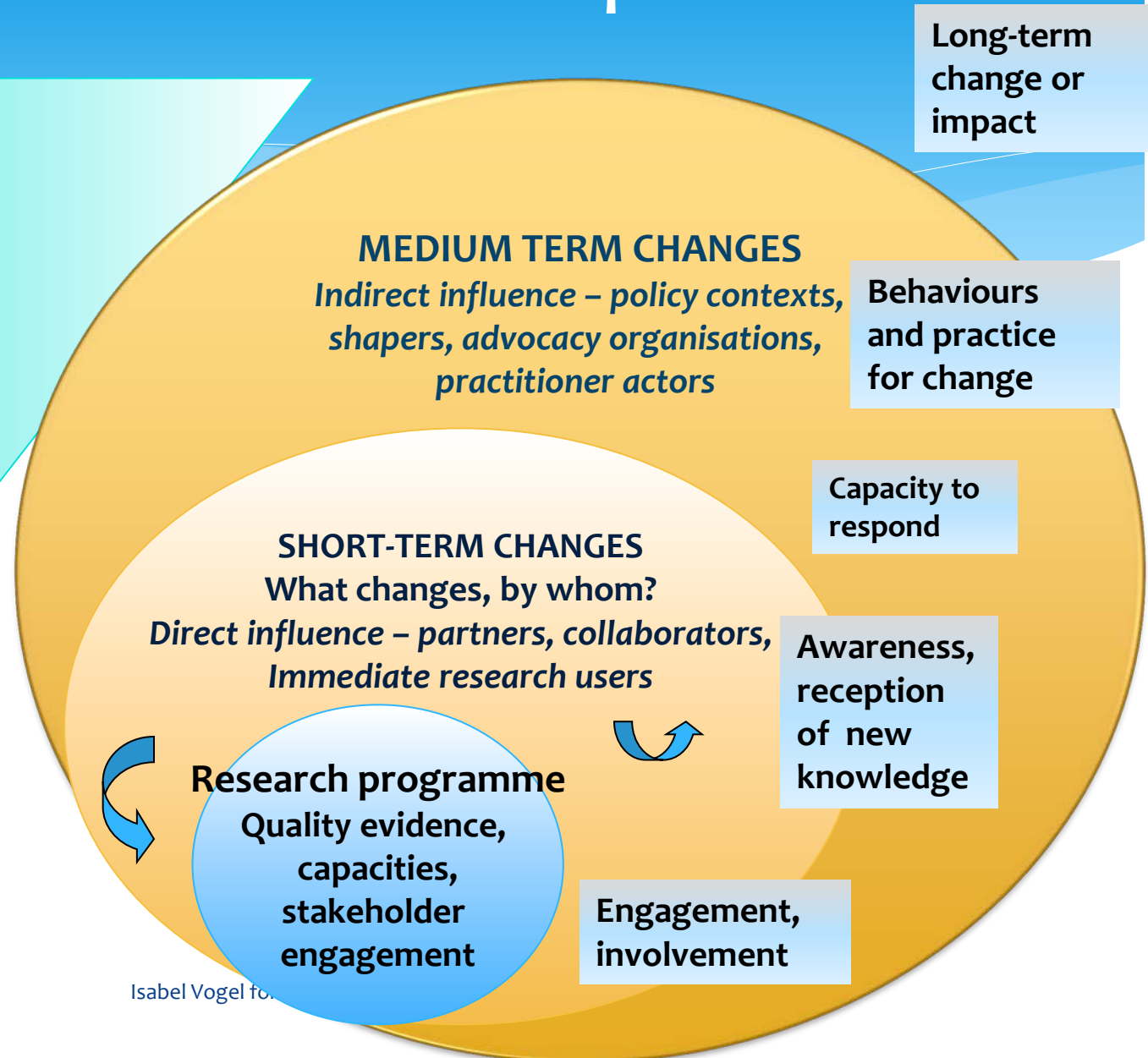
Other actors in research,  
policy and practice

Capacity of target  
groups to respond

Receptiveness of context

Organizations,  
resources,  
systems, skills

Adapted from S.  
Montague, 2002



# 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**



**Involving users at all  
stages with research**



**Good infrastructure,  
leadership and management  
support**



**User-engagement and  
knowledge exchange  
strategies**



**Developing applications  
for policy and practice  
with non-academic  
partners**



**Working with knowledge  
brokers as amplifiers and  
network providers**

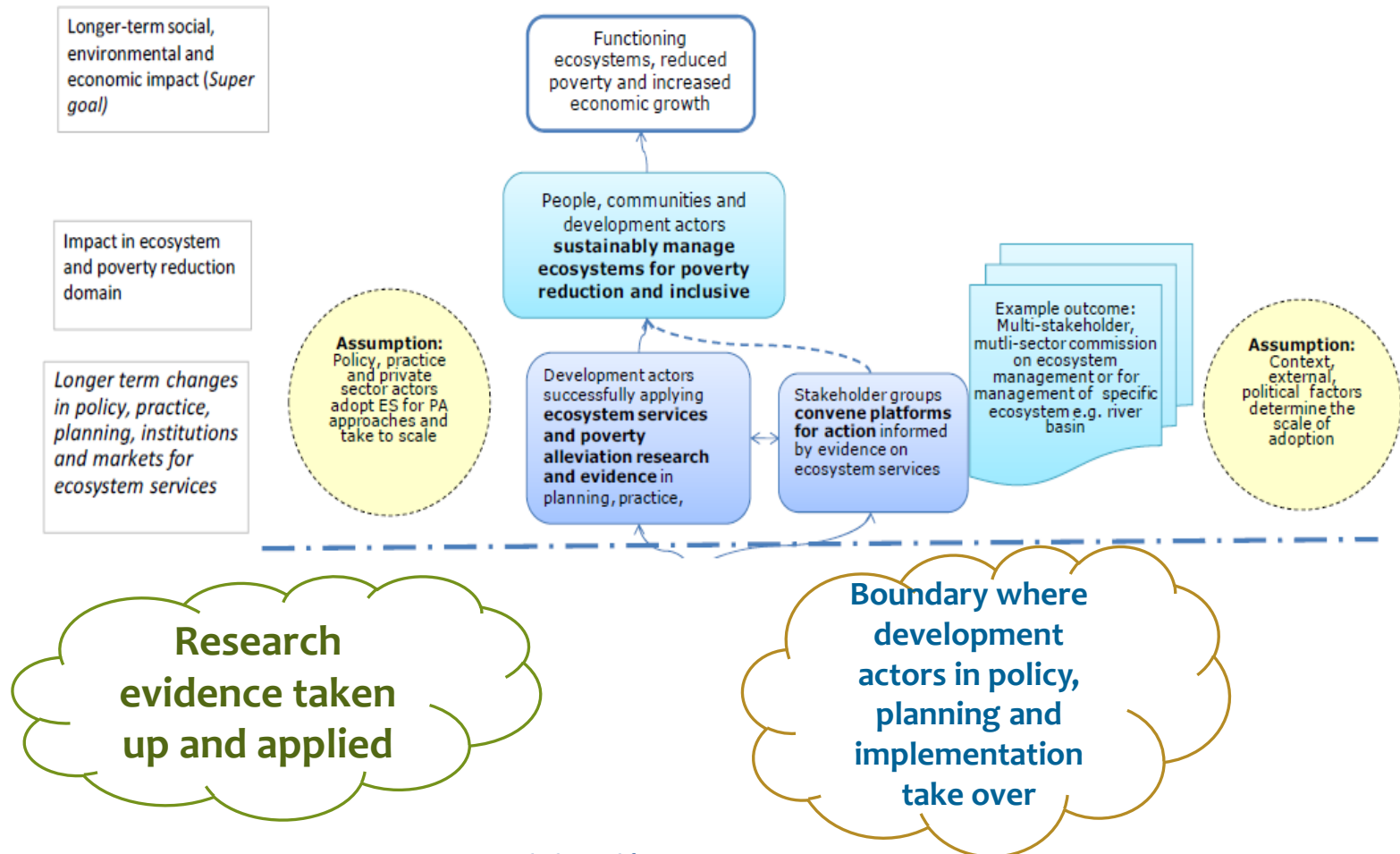


**Portfolios of research  
activity that builds  
reputation with research  
users**



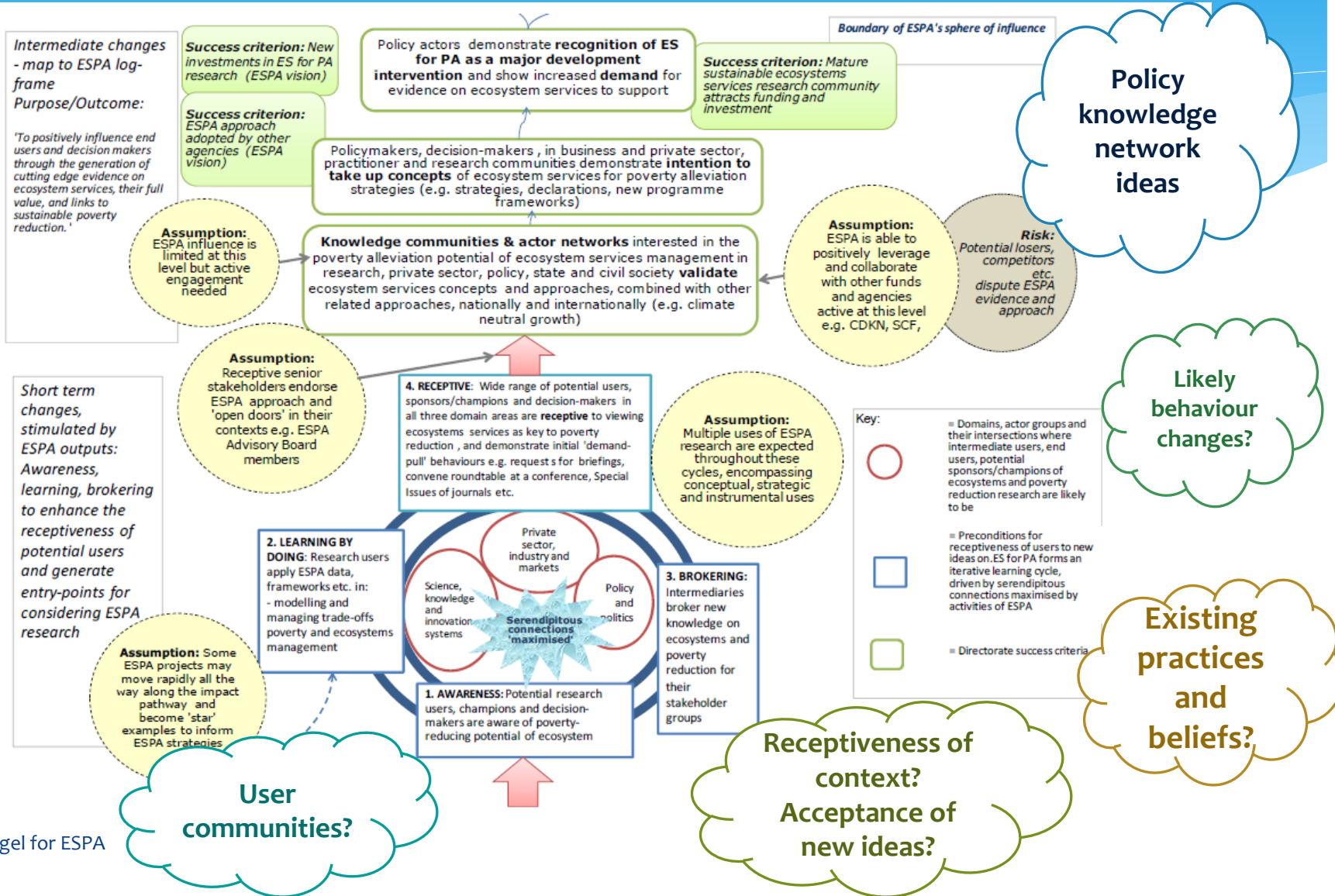
Sources: ESRC Impact work; Nutley et al 2010; health research impact studies

# ESPA Theory of Change: Impact



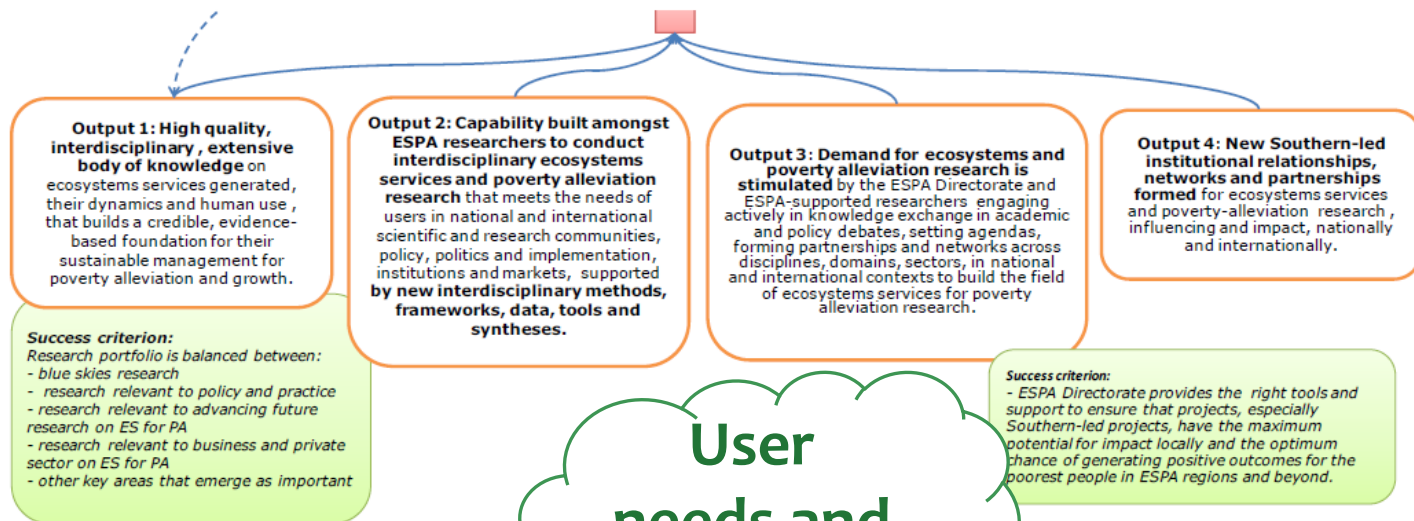


# ESPA ToC: Outcome level





# ESPA Theory of Change: Output level



# 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...

