WHAT IS THEORY OF CHANGE?
What is ‘Theory of Change’?

• *Every* program or project has a theory of change: a hypothesis for how change will happen.

• However, with traditional planning approaches, this is often hidden – we describe activities, outcomes and impact, but make *assumptions* that each of these will lead to the next.
What is ‘Theory of Change’?

• Theory of Change (capital letters) is an approach where we discuss and clearly document these assumptions – the chain of cause-and-effect that will achieve our desired impact.

• The term ‘Theory of Change’ is used for both the process (the approach used to understand and plan change) and the product (a description/diagram of how change will happen).

• There is not just ‘one way’ of applying this approach nor one ‘right’ type of diagram. The key is to have a participatory process that enables stakeholders to share their different assumptions about how change will happen and to build consensus about the most effective way forward.
Activity: Implement eLMIS for medicines

Activity: Refurbish 100 facilities

Activity: undertake MoH recruitment drive

Activity: roll out basic EMOC training

Output: Facilities have necessary drugs and equipment

Outcome: increase in skilled attendance at delivery

Outcome: more women with 4+ ANC visits

Outcome: improved contraceptive prevalence rate

Impact: reduced maternal mortality

A. Causal link:
Local patient surveys indicate that **if** drugs and equipment are available, **then** more women will have facility deliveries.
How is ‘Theory of Change’ different?

• **Similar to traditional planning approaches**
  - Work backwards from our desired impact to identify the outcomes, outputs and activities needed to achieve it.

• **Different to traditional planning approaches**
  - Documents ‘causal links’ (cause-and-effect), drawing on *evidence* that the expected change will work in this context.
  - Includes external factors, not just our own activities.
  - Not linear – causal links can flow sideways and backwards.
When and why do we develop a ToC?

- During the **identification and prioritization of IC strategies**, to inform discussions on the best ways to achieve the desired impact;

- Prior to **developing the Results Framework** – if the Results Framework is structured around the IC Theory of Change, the whole chain of cause-and-effect can be monitored and course-corrections made if issues arise;

- **During IC implementation**, to help understand and test the assumptions that have been made around cause-and-effect to enable course correction as needed (e.g. during mid-term review).

- At the **end of the IC cycle**, in order to evaluate how the original assumptions and change logic played out in practice and to gain valuable learning for future cycles.
**A simple example: traditional planning**

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### Outcome: increase in skilled attendance at delivery

- Output: Facilities have necessary drugs and equipment
  
  *Activity: Implement eLMIS for medicines*

- Activity: Refurbish 100 facilities

- Output: facilities have trained staff
  
  *Activity: undertake MoH recruitment drive*

  *Activity: roll out basic EMOC training*

### Outcome: more women with 4+ ANC visits

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**Causal link:** strong global evidence base that increasing skilled attendance directly reduces maternal mortality.

**Outcome:** increase in skilled attendance at delivery

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A simple example: Theory of Change

**Activity:** Implement eLMIS for medicines
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**Causal link:** Local patient surveys indicate that more women will seek facility deliveries if drugs and equipment are available.

**Impact:** Reduced maternal mortality

**Outcome:** More women with 4+ ANC visits
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Causal link: Refurbishing 100 facilities in 4 high-need districts will address 75% of identified equipment shortages.
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Causal link: implementing electronic stock control will ensure facilities do not have drug stock-outs.

Activity: undertake MoH recruitment drive
Output: facilities have trained staff

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Activity: roll out basic EMOC training
Outcome: improved contraceptive prevalence rate
When developing your Theory of Change, there are two important questions you can ask for each set of causal links:

- Is each of the causal links outlined here necessary for change to occur – is anything unnecessary or irrelevant?
- Are the causal links preceding each step sufficient to achieve change – are additional steps (‘pre-conditions’) needed to ensure this change actually happens?
- As you work through your Theory of Change, keep these two questions – necessary and sufficient – constantly in mind.
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Is this an evidence-based assumption? Is electronic stock control sufficient to eliminate stock-outs?
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Causal link: better equipped facilities may also help to retain staff.

Change is not just linear – there can be knock-on effects or even feedback loops.