TOOLKIT n°6

Community Engagement Model Canvas

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1 - Rationale and Scope

This toolkit is conceived to guide the reader through the concrete development of The Theory Of Change through **step by step** explanations implemented by **practical tips, self-compiling schemes, questions and checklists.**

As introduced in Toolkit 5 The Theory of Change - hereafter shortened to Toc - is an approach to strategic design.
The ToC is a comprehensive description and illustration of the motivations and ways in which the desired change will manifest in a given context.
It represents the ideal point of conjunction between what the initiative produces (its activities) and the reasons that will enable the achievement of the objectives.
The ToC process begins from the ideal point of arrival, with the identification of the long-term impact objective, then proceeding backwards to recognize all the necessary preconditions that must be in place and how they relate in a "if-then" causal perspective (e.g., "if this output will be produced, then this outcome will be realized; if this activity will be implemented, then this output will be produced").
The ToC is an approach to strategic planning that is based on the construction of a shared collective vision.

Concretely the ToC is carried out through **a participatory workshop led by an experienced facilitator** who guides participants to define the impact plan, starting from the final goal and moving backwards to map the necessary and sufficient preconditions to achieve it, to test its underlying assumptions, and to identify indicators to evaluate its success and/or determine appropriate changes.

Specifically, the definition of the ToC involves mapping all the necessary and sufficient conditions to produce the impact goal (impact), moving backwards from long-term results (final outcomes) to intermediate and short-term ones that need to be achieved previously, both temporally and logically. This defines the so-called **"pathway to change"**, which represents the route to change on which the project elements will take shape.

The entire process of defining the ToC can be schematized into **three macro-phases,** where the role of the facilitator is fundamental: preparatory workshop; development; follow-up. This toolkit is divided into 3 main chapters, each of them focusing on a specific phase.

Phase 1
Preparatory workshop

Phase 2
Development

Phase 3
Follow-up

2 - TOC in practice: preparatory workshop

The Facilitator

In all stages of the ToC process, **the role of the facilitator is crucial.**
The facilitator manages the workshop and carries out the preparatory, intermediate and final work, arriving at the final definition of the ToC in alignment with the participants. Five aspects to pay particular attention to during the process are the following:

CORRECT EXECUTION OF THE PROCEDURE

SHARING AND MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICTS

OVERALL VISION AND NON-INTERFERENCE

TIME COSTS

BALANCE BETWEEN PARTICIPATION AND TIMING

Methodologies and approaches

Some central elements in the conduction of the ToC workshop are:

Brainstorming: each participant is asked to respond to the questions formulated from time to time by the facilitator, writing on post-it notes/papers;

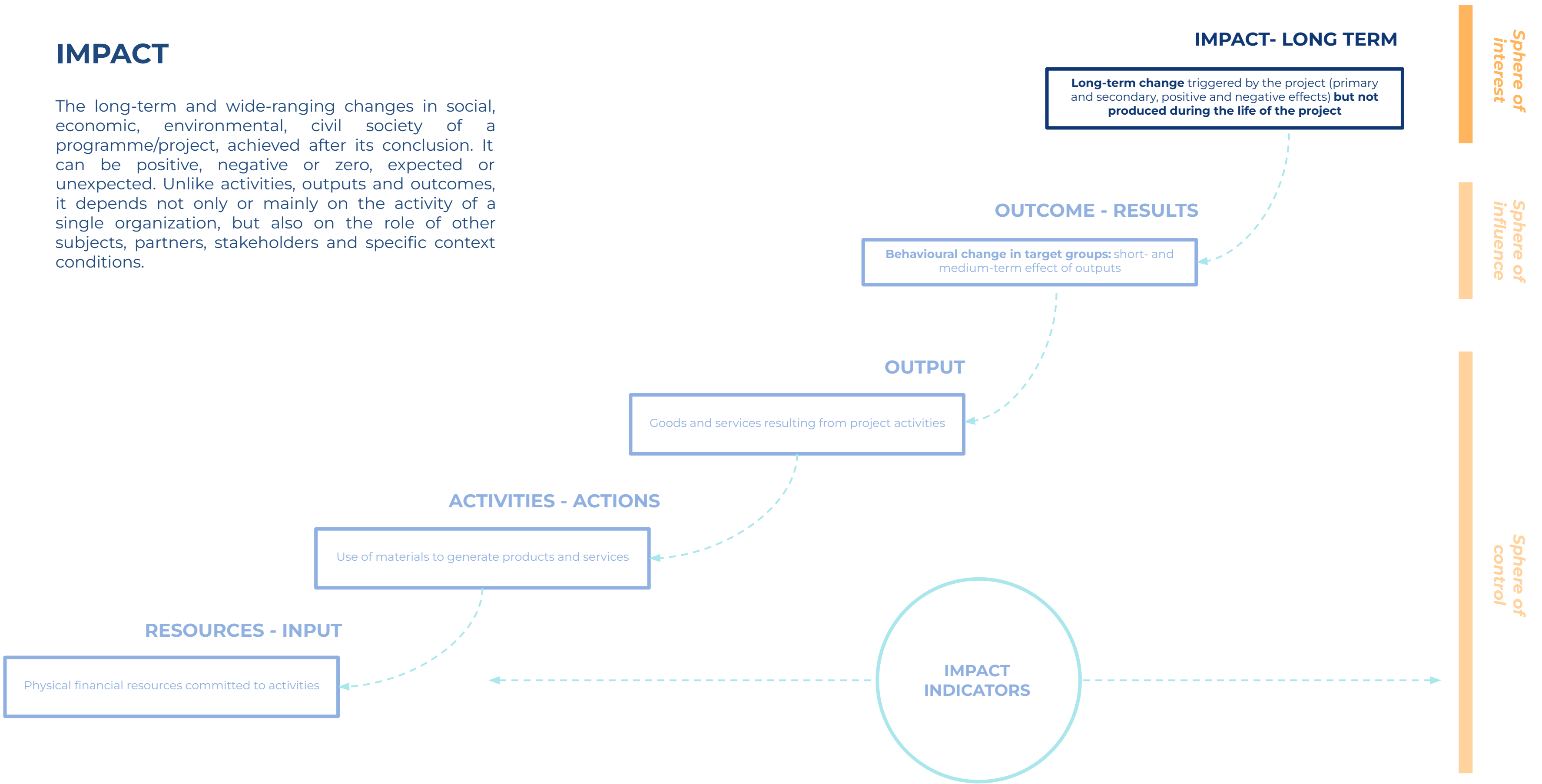
Sharing: from time to time, the post-its are attached to a board. It is up to the facilitator to group what emerges from the participants into coherent clusters and to find patterns underlying what the participants say.

Discussion and elaboration: throughout the process, group discussion is encouraged on key points, on elements of consistency and divergence among participants. The facilitator notes recurring words and phrases, widely shared by the group, and helps to narrow the focus when necessary. It is indeed in the discussion that follows each activity that useful concepts for the following stages emerge.

3 - TOC in practice: development

IMPACT

The long-term and wide-ranging changes in social, economic, environmental, civil society of a programme/project, achieved after its conclusion. It can be positive, negative or zero, expected or unexpected. Unlike activities, outputs and outcomes, it depends not only or mainly on the activity of a single organization, but also on the role of other subjects, partners, stakeholders and specific context conditions.



The initial step is to establish the long-term objective. This is a critical point, as there often exist diverse perceptions of what is acknowledged as the "success" vision of an initiative. It is imperative that the group be as precise as possible at this juncture to avoid a vague definition of impact, which would complicate the mapping of necessary preconditions.

Leveraging a brainstorming approach, each participant is asked to inscribe their idea/vision of success on a post-it note. Subsequently, consensus is sought among all ideas to reach a shared definition of impact, which generally manifests in a relatively generic form (e.g., Enhancement of employment level).

This definition must now be made auditable, by highlighting:

- **target population**
- **geographic and temporal scope**
- **current status**
- **threshold level**

in order to concentrate the success criterion of the initiative and define truly achievable impact objectives

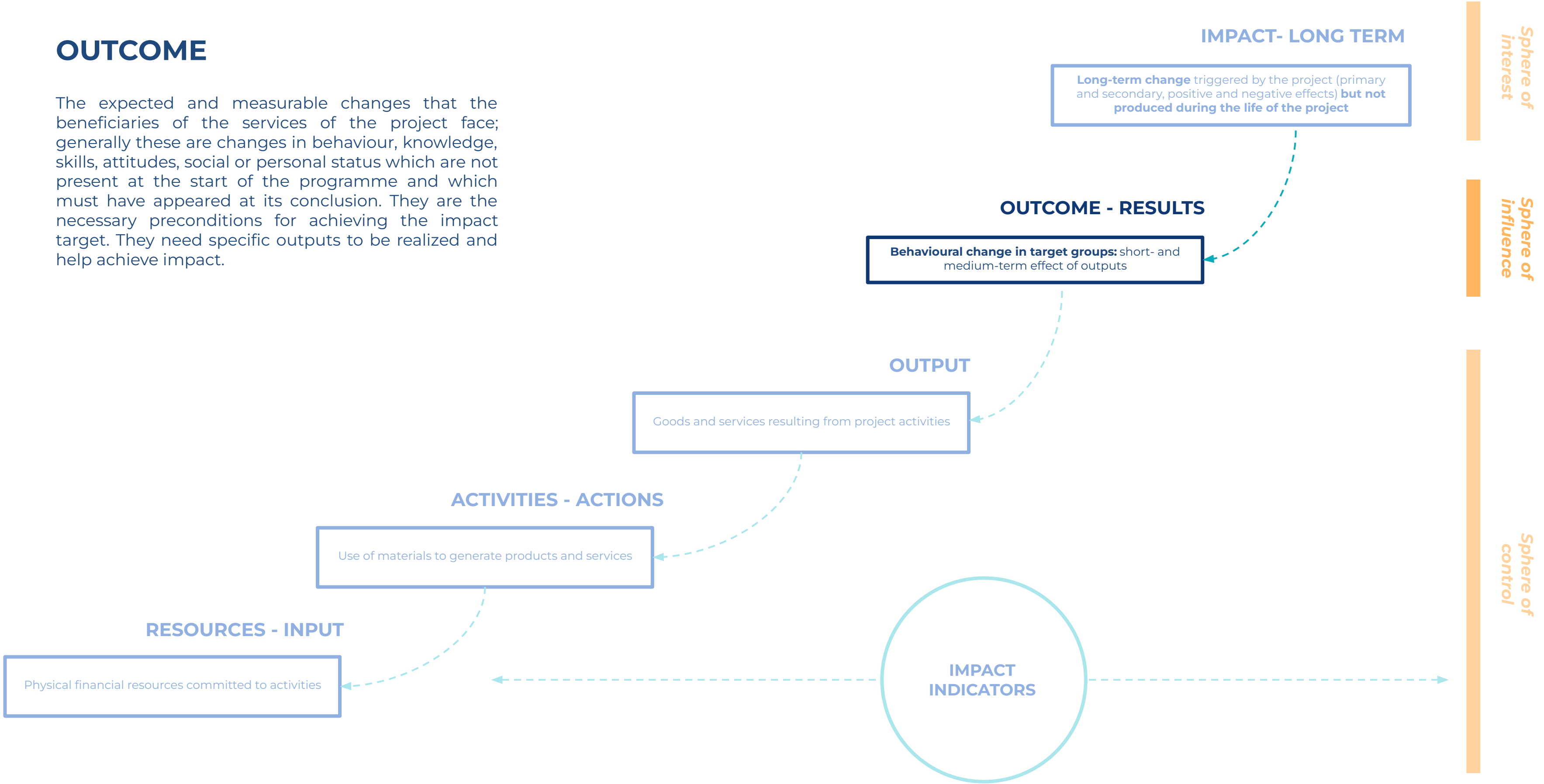
Example:
increase employment among low-income youth (24-35 years) over three years.

It's your turn! Write down the impact you would like to achieve answering the following question. Start with a verb and define the timespan:

What is the challenge that you want to address or the problem that you want to solve? What is the significant final transformation that you aspire to achieve?

OUTCOME

The expected and measurable changes that the beneficiaries of the services of the project face; generally these are changes in behaviour, knowledge, skills, attitudes, social or personal status which are not present at the start of the programme and which must have appeared at its conclusion. They are the necessary preconditions for achieving the impact target. They need specific outputs to be realized and help achieve impact.



The second step involves identifying all the necessary preconditions (outcomes) in reverse order so that the preset impact objective can be achieved.

These are mapped out on a path that proceeds in a linear and chronological manner: essentially, it is the sequence in which the outcomes must occur to reach the impact objective. The result obtained is a sort of **outcome map**, connected by unidirectional and bidirectional arrows, clusters of changes that determine one another or vice versa.

As we move away from the impact, we will define the logically preceding outcomes and those that need to be realized in time before (which are the preconditions) of those closest to the impact.

Using a brainstorming approach, **participants are asked to write the necessary and sufficient preconditions to produce the final result, which are subsequently discussed, compared, and grouped**. The facilitator helps the group to narrow the focus onto **4-6 shared final outcomes that will be placed directly under the impact objective.**

(example: beneficiaries have obtained stable jobs).

The procedure is then repeated, taking another step back, reasoning about the preconditions necessary in turn to produce the final outcomes (**intermediate outcomes**).

(e.g., iOC 1.1 - "Beneficiaries are more prepared for the world of work", "iOC 1.2 - Beneficiaries' motivation to work has increased", "iOC 1.3 - Beneficiaries' specific work skills have increased").

Once agreement has been reached, the activity will be repeated for each intermediate outcome identified, asking participants to identify the so-called **early outcomes** (e.g., "Increase in knowledge of the world of work", "Awareness of behaviors suitable for work environments", "Enhancement of basic skills", etc.).

Once the group has agreed on the necessary preconditions to generate the impact objective, it is advisable to reorganize the outcome map with the correct causal lines, so that the reference model for the subsequent work phases is clear and understandable to all.

PRACTICAL TIPS:
To explore and re-verify the outcome mapping, it is advisable to assign a subgroup of participants to identify all the barriers to achieving a specific outcome, so that it is easier to express these barriers in a positive form as necessary preconditions to consider. Ideally, the reverse process should be implemented until the group exhausts the decomposition of each outcome into all its preconditions ("unpacking"). It is suggested to carry out the procedure at least 3 times but no more than 5 to prevent the model from becoming excessively complex.

To describe good outcomes, it is advisable to:

• Begin the sentence by specifying the stakeholder that needs to change, to make it easier to understand who needs to change and how, and to help make the concept concrete.
• Use active verbal voices to describe how some life conditions of the stakeholder will change when the desired change is achieved (the passive verb probably indicates that we are at the output level).
• Use only one verb per outcome (otherwise, we are mixing multiple outcomes in one sentence).
• State the goal as if the desired results have already been achieved and express it positively, avoiding negations.

Examples:
1 - Farmers apply drip irrigation techniques.
2 - NEET youths are stably employed *not* NEET youths are no longer unemployed."
Note: Farmers have been trained in drip irrigation techniques" is already the output of the activity "training courses in drip irrigation techniques.

It's your turn! Start with a list of barriers in order to identify the necessary and sufficient preconditions to produce the final result

Assumptions

Throughout the backward mapping, it is essential to articulate the beliefs (assumptions) underlying the reasons why, in our judgment, a strategy or project can achieve the expected results. Often implicit and not evidence-based, they risk being unfounded and negatively impacting the entire work of an organization.

We must therefore identify everything that we take for granted:
What needs to occur in the context for the ToC to function? - What are the assumptions on which our project or program should not intervene, but which are fundamental to achieving the results? - Why do we think our theory works? - What evidence do we have? - Are there reports from donors or research institutes? - Do we have documentation from previous projects that have achieved significant results in similar contexts? - Can we rely on the experience gained over the years by local partners as evidenced by their documentation?

If an outcome/pre-condition (A) describes "who needs to change and how" to produce a further change (B) in the path to impact, an assumption explains "why" (evidence) and "under what stable and confirmed contextual conditions" (background assumption) we are sufficiently certain that if we produce A, it will trigger change B.

1) *Report* here the *impact* you have identified

2) What *obstacle* do you see in achieving this *impact*?

3) *Rephrase* your obstacle to identifying your *final outcome*

Under what assumptions this outcome can be achieved?

4) What *obstacle* do you see in achieving this *outcome*?

5) *Rephrase* your obstacle to identifying your intermediate outcome

Under what assumptions this outcome can be achieved?

Reality Check

Once the outcome mapping is completed, the workshop participants will have realized that their efforts and resources are not enough to produce all the identified preconditions. At this point, it is the facilitator's task to assist the group in performing the reality check. This involves considering the mapped outcomes and dividing them into**: outcomes that the organization will directly produce, outcomes that will be achieved by other players active in the reference context.**

Usually at this stage, participants can work as a single group to map the organizations active in the specific areas of interest. Then, it may be appropriate to have a moment of individual reflection to bring to light existing collaborations, possible synergies, and contact opportunities that the participants could facilitate.

In this way, through context analysis and outcome mapping, the organization can define collaboration lines with external entities that contribute to the impact model, "outsourcing" outcomes where it lacks strong expertise to specialized players.

It’s your turn! Use the following questions to do a reality check:

What outcome the organization will directly produce aligned with its experience, skills, focus?

What outcome can be produced by stakeholder? Specific who?

OUTPUT

Products, infrastructures and services generated, provided and/or managed (courses provided, schools built, microcredits granted, etc.) and requiring specific resources (inputs). They help the organization achieve the desired outcomes. They are the means to the end (the change), not the end itself.

IMPACT- LONG TERM

Long-term change triggered by the project (primary and secondary, positive and negative effects) **but not produced during the life of the project**

OUTCOME - RESULTS

Behavioural change in target groups: short- and medium-term effect of outputs

OUTPUT

Goods and services resulting from project activities

ACTIVITIES - ACTIONS

Use of materials to generate products and services

RESOURCES - INPUT

Physical financial resources committed to activities

IMPACT INDICATORS

Sphere of interest

Sphere of influence

Sphere of control

The definition of output is crucial as it precisely defines the scope of opportunities that are intended to be offered to the target group, and therefore, the conditions that allow the project to hypothesize with reasonable certainty that a real change will be obtained at the end of the action. **The output cannot be just the product or service delivered, as it also needs to clarify the minimum standard level of "delivery" to the target group.**

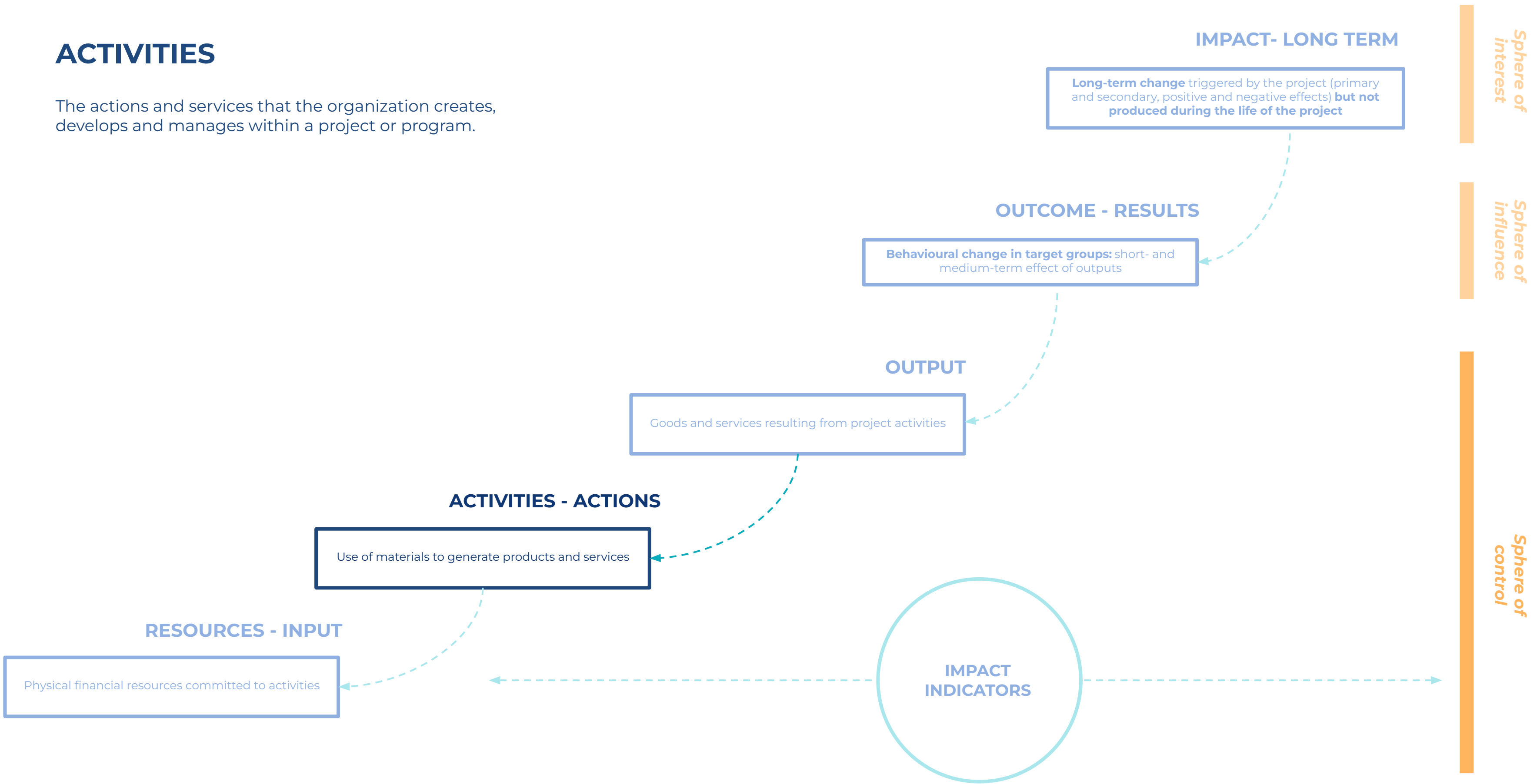
The distinction between output and outcome is very important as it marks the line of demarcation between the direct responsibility of an intervention and a less direct one.

In other words, we could say how much, in the vision of action-change, is under the project's control (the output: substantially attributable to the project) and how much, instead, should occur (the outcome) if the stated assumptions are correct. This distinction is particularly relevant when defining a project's indicators: is a failure (or success) due to the failure (or success) of the theory (outcome)? Or is it due to the failure (or success) of the implementation (output)?

It's your turn! Make a list of outputs needed for each identified outcome:

ACTIVITIES

The actions and services that the organization creates, develops and manages within a project or program.



The identification of activities is generally the simplest part for organizations, as members are experts and accustomed to planning interventions, and will be eager to define the actions to be implemented.

In this phase, the role of the facilitator is generally limited: it is normally appropriate to divide the group, assigning one or two outcomes from the map to subgroups or individuals, and asking them to define the activities that can produce them. Subsequently, each subgroup reports to all participants to achieve alignment - attaching post-it notes with the designed interventions under each reference outcome.

It's your turn! Read the following questions and make a list of activities :

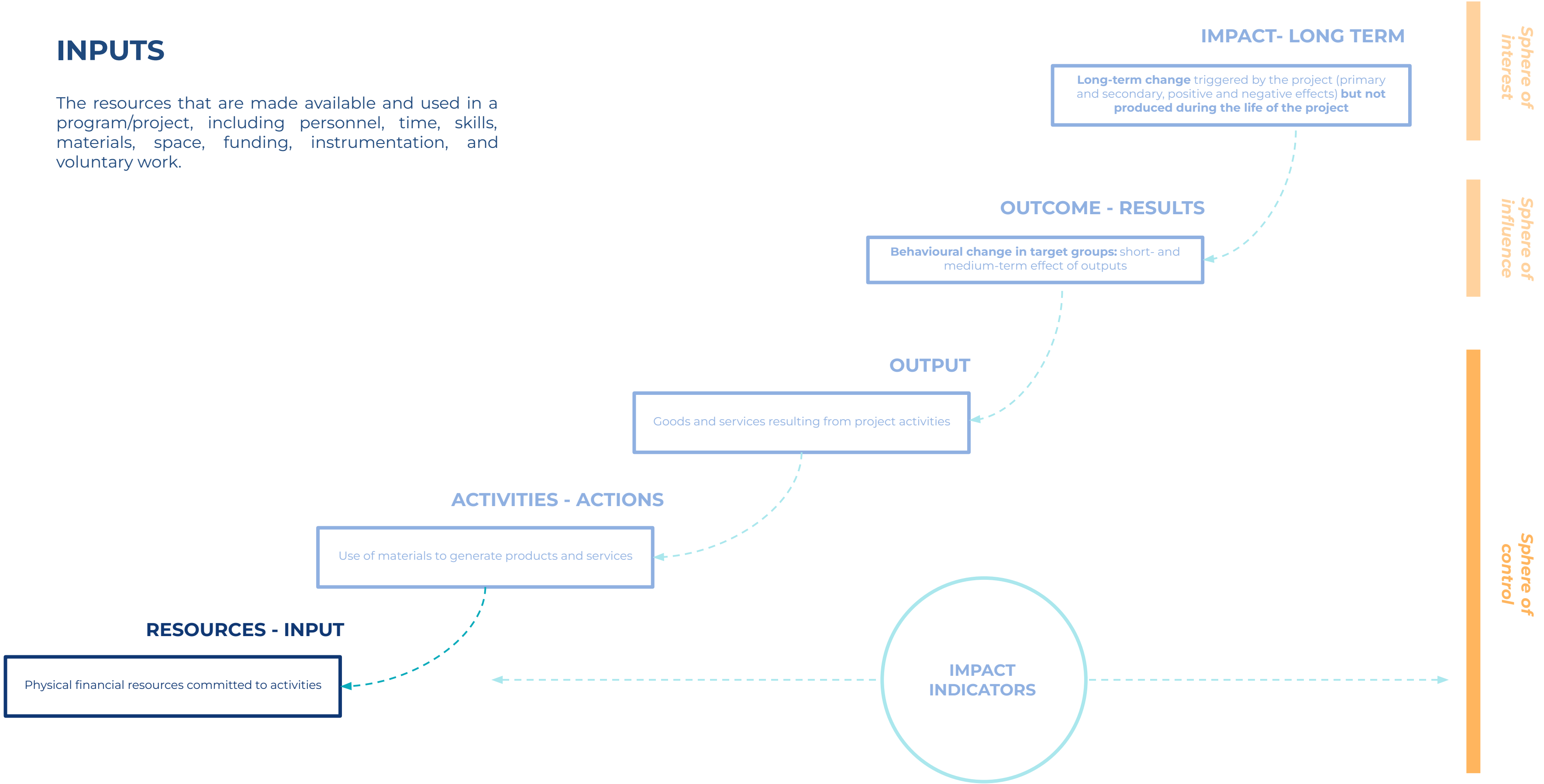
What type of intervention is needed to produce the outcome?

Which activities that we already implement can produce the outcome?

What actions are necessary to initiate the partnerships we need to produce specific outcomes?

INPUTS

The resources that are made available and used in a program/project, including personnel, time, skills, materials, space, funding, instrumentation, and voluntary work.

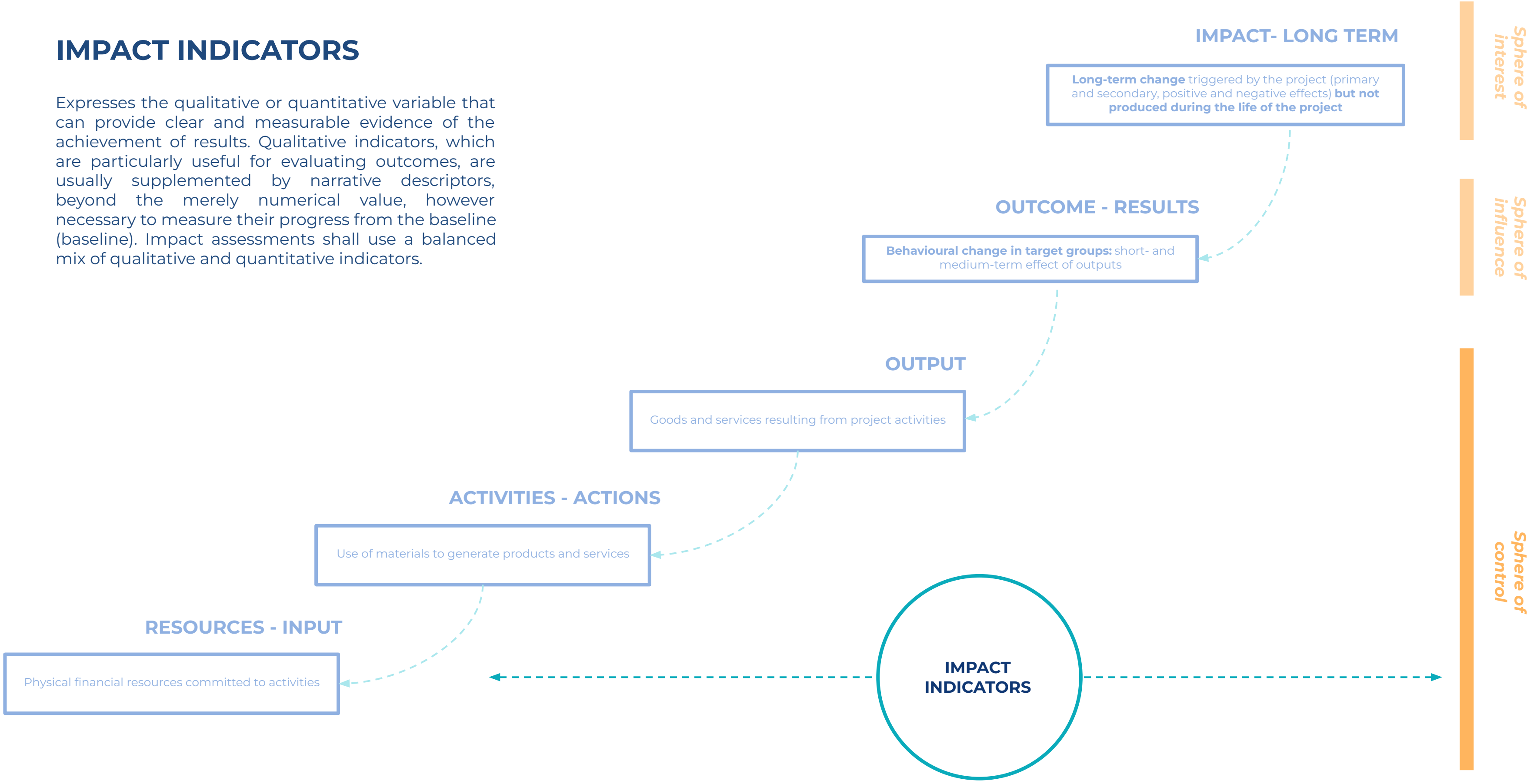


It’s your turn! Write down your inputs:

What resources are available for the project?

IMPACT INDICATORS

Expresses the qualitative or quantitative variable that can provide clear and measurable evidence of the achievement of results. Qualitative indicators, which are particularly useful for evaluating outcomes, are usually supplemented by narrative descriptors, beyond the merely numerical value, however necessary to measure their progress from the baseline (baseline). Impact assessments shall use a balanced mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators.



The development of a framework of indicators is certainly a crucial moment in the preparation of a program/project: in fact, it not only lays the groundwork for a good monitoring and evaluation plan but also represents the moment in which results and objectives are explicitly stated, clarified, and concretely defined within the limits that the program/project sets.

If the ToC's task is to define what is necessary (the outputs) to initiate change (the outcomes) and how changes can occur in a rigorous and analytical form, the central question becomes how to put an inherently abstract process into an observable (= measurable) form and defined by sometimes complex and difficult-to-decipher concepts.

It is therefore essential to clearly define the indicators at the output level (where the minimum standard of "delivery" to beneficiaries is clarified) and the indicators for the outcomes (where it is fundamental to define the "standard" that qualifies a certain behavior as a success of the initiative).

Impact indicators, or KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), serve to understand whether the objectives set are being achieved through the project and whether "the game is worth the candle". They must be: quantifiable (they can be presented in the form of numbers); practical (they integrate well with the current processes in the organization); directional (they help to determine if improvement is being made); operational (they can be related to the practical context to measure an actual change).

To operationalize the ToC, the group must arrive at the definition of indicators by combining quantitative and qualitative metrics.

The **quantitative indicator** is defined as an indicator that expresses/indicates a quantity in the form of a number, index, ratio, or percentage; it is useful for determining a statistical correlation between a problem and a cause.

The **qualitative indicator** defines a property, a characteristic of what is observed; it focuses attention on aspects related to the quality of interventions and the opinion of the target groups affected by the interventions; it supports quantitative indications to contextualize the results obtained.

This is a demanding and time-consuming phase, in which it is likely that not everyone will be able to contribute valuable input, but it is nonetheless important to stimulate participation to promote the growth of an evidence-based organizational culture and to have staff members (traditionally focused on different professional areas) discuss their mutual needs (e.g. monitoring referent, field staff, communication area, etc.).

The basic KPIs refer to:

Purpose: Why are we doing this project?

Benefits: What benefits do we want to achieve for vulnerable people, for the Community, for the organization, for the territory?

Quality: What are the elements that define the desired quality?

Risk: What is the risk we are taking? What is the anticipated risk? What is the unforeseen risk that we cannot assume?

Timing: Quantification of time in different phases.

Costs: Actual costs and project costs.

Financial costs. Overall commitment (hours spent for all resources involved).

Impact Indicators/ KPI (Key Performance Indicator): Indicators are composed of three main elements: target population, threshold level, and timeline.

It's your turn! For each outcome try to answer the following questions:

Who will the impact occur on? By how much will the beneficiaries change?

When will the change occur?

Verification Of Assumptions And Enablers

Once the group has defined the elements of the ToC, one of the last - but decisive - steps to take is to verify those conditions only partially under the organization's control. The goal is to identify the assumptions underlying the envisaged ToC that can determine the model's success or failure, including internal or external facilitators (enablers) in the reflection, and where possible, anticipating appropriate countermeasures.

PRACTICAL TIPS:
To start the process, the facilitator can go through the ToC, this time moving "forward" - starting from activities to reach the impact goal - and pausing at each causal step to ask the group questions like: • What factors ensure the success of this step? • What evidence do we have of this step? Is there consolidated evidence or is it necessary to conduct specific research? • Which internal or external players can add value at this stage? Who can hinder the achievement of this result? How can we involve them?

4 - TOC in practice: follow-up

Between one meeting and the next and at the end of the workshop, the facilitator has the task of collecting the evidence shared by participants on sheets, post-it notes, whiteboards, etc., and organizing them in a consistent and accessible format.

The main task typically consists of refining the outcome definitions and their positioning: the facilitator must ensure the clarity of each step, eliminating any redundant elements, perfecting the phrasing, and monitoring the steps of the causal model. Naturally, this requires a good ability to tune in on the part of the facilitator in order to produce a professional feedback without distorting the instructions expressed by the participants.

At the same time, if a lack of qualitative-quantitative evidence supporting certain steps of the ToC has been found, the facilitator will search for the necessary data to substantiate the choices made by the group or suggest possible changes to maintain the coherence of the model.

Final Report

The result of this phase of work translates operationally into a final report which is shared with the organization for validation and usually includes: workshop agenda and participants; glossary; background information; context analysis and stakeholder mapping; target population; Theory of Change. The latter will be presented both as a graphical summary (diagram) and an extended explanation of all the elements considered in the process (impact objective, outcomes, outputs, etc.), including the assumptions underlying the ToC, possible areas on which the organization reserves the right to carry out further analysis, and the list of indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

The goal of the final ToC report is twofold:

- on one hand, it represents the strategic plan that the organization has internally to guide the implementation of the initiative in all its phases;
- on the other hand, it can be used to extract communication material, sharing parts of it, more or less extensive, depending on the objectives and the specific stakeholder (major donors, partners, beneficiaries, etc.).

Quality Check

Once the participatory process is completed, the validation of the ToC touches on 3 levels:

The first concerns the degree of sharing of the model within the organization.

The ToC should be evaluated in terms of:

• **plausibility:** Does the ToC summarize a convincing model without logical jumps in the causal arrangement of the outcomes?

• **feasibility:** Is it likely that the model can produce the impact objective? Does the organization have the resources and skills to implement the activities? Are other partners needed?

• **measurability:** Are the indicators solid, measurable, and based on information that the organization will be able to find? Will they be able to provide useful indications to assess the degree of success of the initiative?

The second level consists of a formal verification of the elements of the ToC, which can be conducted following a checklist:

• Does the ToC include all elements (activities, outcomes, ...)?

• Is the ToC based on a solid context analysis?

• Does the ToC clearly identify the target population?

• Is the need that the initiative addresses well defined? •

Are the outcomes and the final objective measurable?

• Are the outcomes expressed in a simple, specific, and unambiguous way?

• Are the causal steps clear and understandable?

• Are the causal steps based on evidence?

• Have a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators been identified?

The third level consists of verifying whether the ToC is able to "speak" to an external interlocutor.

For this reason, it is important to package a short narrative description, a summary of the ToC of a maximum of 2-3 pages that summarizes the logic of the model, the main steps, and assumptions, providing a quick overview of the vision and motivation behind the project.

The narrative should be viewed by an external interlocutor, who has no knowledge of the initiative to verify if the ToC manages to transmit the project's logic in a synthetic and distinctive way.

A quality ToC should be able to immediately position the impact model even to those who do not have specific competencies in the relevant project sector.

5 - Conclusions

Professionals are called upon to cultivate specific competences and skills to act within these phases as **managers, facilitators, guides, analysts, communicators** and as **third parties** that are able to perform not only a **facilitating function** but a true **enabling function of local relationships,** increasing the awareness and intentionality of collaboration, bringing attention to the challenges that unite the actors involved and that can become new opportunities

What are those professionals? How to call them?

What kind of competencies they should develop, learn and embed to effectively act as process enablers?

Toolkit 7 is based on HECSOS Competence Framework for professional development in the field of community engagement as an orientation tool for professionals dealing with an innovative fields of research and actions around competencies and skills that are more likely to be required in new hybrid and multisectorial working profiles.

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