

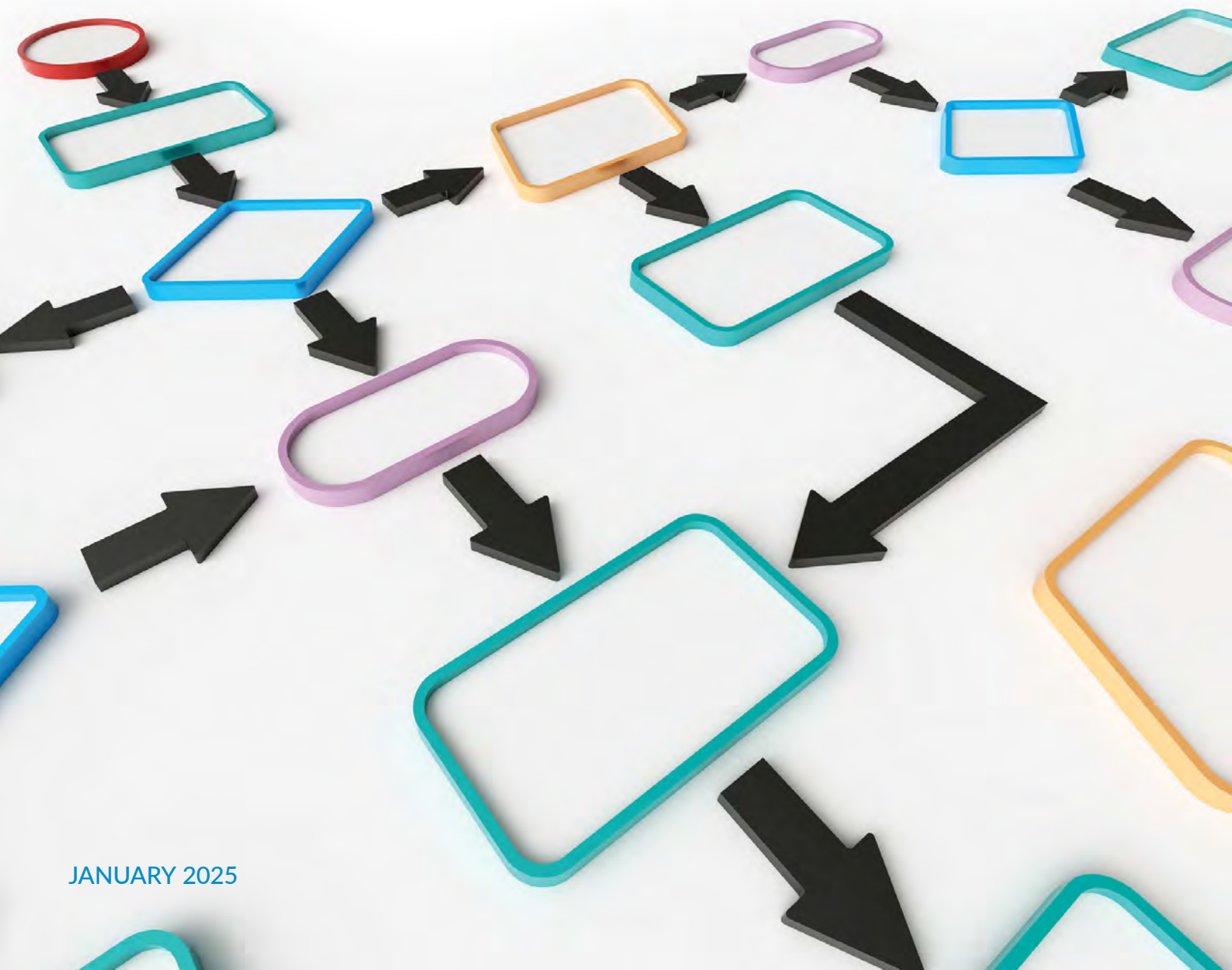


USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



THEORY OF CHANGE

A Facilitator's Guide for Program Design



JANUARY 2025

ABOUT IDEAL

Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning (IDEAL) is an activity funded by the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) that works to support the United States Government's goal of improving food and nutrition security among the world's most vulnerable households and communities. IDEAL addresses knowledge and capacity gaps expressed by the food and nutrition security implementing community to support them in the design and implementation of effective emergency and non-emergency food security activities.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Starr, L. (2025). *Theory of Change: A Facilitator's Guide for Program Design*. Washington, DC: Implementer-Led Design, Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (IDEAL).

EARLIER VERSIONS OF THIS GUIDE

Starr, L. (2019). *Theory of Change: Facilitator's Guide*. Washington, DC: The Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program.

Starr, L. (2017). *Theory of Change: Facilitator's Guide*. Washington, DC: TANGO International and The Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program.

GRAPHIC DESIGN

TM Design, Inc.

DISCLAIMER

This guide is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of the Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning (IDEAL) activity and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
FFP	USAID Office of Food for Peace
FSN Network	Food Security and Nutrition Network
IDEAL	Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning
IYCF	Infant and Young Child Feeding
LOA	Life of Award
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PCS	Program Cycle Support
PPT	PowerPoint
RFA	Request for Applications
RFSA	Resilience Food Security Activity
REFS	Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security (formerly RFS)
SLA	Strategic Learning Advisor
TOC	Theory of Change
TOPS	Technical and Operational Performance Support
TOT	Training of Trainers
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Acknowledgements

It has been more than 10 years since the first Theory of Change Facilitator's Guide was shared with the food security community. In that decade, I've worked with others to revise the curriculum several times in response to suggestions from implementers and changes in donor requirements. The 2025 revision is the most comprehensive to date. We've moved away from the structure of a 5-day workshop that simulates the theory of change (TOC) development process to learning and working sessions for teams as they move through the design process in response to a donor's request for applications.

I am extremely grateful to implementing partners, Sarah Titus and the Program Cycle Support team, and the staff of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, whose helpful suggestions and insights continue to refine and clarify how we present concepts in the TOC curriculum. Special thanks to Rachel Pierce (copy editor extraordinaire), Tina Cardosi (graphic designer extraordinaire), and IDEAL team members Maja Persson, Jenny Haddle, Anna Cloud, and Isabella Girthofer for their camaraderie and support in publishing this content.

I hope this updated guide proves to be a valuable resource in your TOC development journey.

Warmly,

Laurie Starr

Introduction

Many practitioners in the international development community currently use a theory of change (TOC) as the primary development hypothesis for programs and activities. Developing a TOC requires a more in-depth causal analysis of issues than other processes—an analysis rooted in a rigorous and evolving evidence base. Developing and using a TOC builds a shared understanding among stakeholders of the actions needed to achieve desired changes.

When the TOC, learning agenda, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan are aligned, this important power trio can guide all levels of program staff through the critical reflection necessary for adaptive decision making throughout the program cycle. A robust TOC with strong causal pathways is essential for ongoing reflection on program design or implementation strategies. A weak or overly complicated TOC can hinder the ability to understand whether change is occurring as expected. It can create barriers to revising our development hypotheses (also known as TOC logic) based on changes in context. Therefore, we want our TOCs to be as strong and clear as possible.

Guidance on how best to design a TOC varies. In this curriculum and supporting materials¹, we present one methodology that has proven effective. Participant feedback from 10 years of TOPS and IDEAL TOC workshops, as well as recent experience from Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) Refine and Implement events facilitated by Program Cycle Support (PCS), have all contributed to this curriculum, which has evolved over the past 10 years.

The target audience for this guide is any stakeholder in the public or private sector who has a responsibility or interest in holistic program design. The guide also includes specific tips for non-governmental organization (NGO) staff involved in developing a TOC for BHA-funded resilience food security activities (RFSAs) and other programming. Whether you're interested in a comprehensive guide to developing a quality TOC or simply want a refresher on specific steps or tools used in the process, you've come to the right place!

¹ Access the most current PowerPoint slides and handouts at <https://www.fsnnetwork.org/resource/theory-change-facilitators-guide-0>

How to Use This Guide

This facilitator's guide is one of three complementary documents to guide implementers as they facilitate the process of developing a TOC.

1. **Theory of Change Facilitator's Guide.** Provides detailed explanations for facilitating team learning and working sessions. The six sessions guide implementers through the TOC development process.
2. **Planning for Theory of Change Development: Roles, Responsibilities, and Timeline.** Provides a concise outline of each step in the TOC development process, including recommendations on when best to hold team learning sessions, whom to involve, and why each learning session may be beneficial to a design or implementation team.
3. **Process Quality Check: Theory of Change Development.** Provides a summary of guiding process questions to improve the quality and completeness of each step of TOC development.

The **primary learning objectives** for the entire package are to:

- Make TOC development easier for design teams by highlighting common challenges and providing practical tips for each step of the TOC development process, including roles, responsibilities, and timelines.
- Improve the quality of TOCs for RFSA's developed in response to a request for applications (RFA) from BHA.

Structure: The guide consists of an overview module and five team learning sessions, some of which include hands-on working sessions.

Each of the team learning sessions has a suggested duration of 45–120 minutes, which you can adapt according to the time available and the level of understanding of the participants. Implementing the content of each session can take anywhere from a few days to a few months.

NO.	MODULE TITLE	LEARNING OBJECTIVES
0	Overview	• Develop a common understanding among the team of the TOC process and the resulting product • Agree on team roles and responsibilities and the timeline for our TOC development process
1	Building the Evidence Base	• Agree on how the team will prioritize data collection needs for TOC development • Agree on the matrices that will guide data organization prior to analysis
2	Problem Analysis	• Emphasize the importance of using a problem tree as the basis for our project's TOC • Agree on how the team will use our evidence base to develop a problem tree • Agree on how the team will use causal analysis to explore cause-and-effect pathways, including cross-causal linkages • Agree on how the team will document and prioritize remaining information gaps
	Problem Analysis Working Session	• Use the evidence base to identify problematic conditions that affect specific populations • Draft clear, concise problem statements at all levels • Critically analyze and organize problems and causes into a logical flow that will inform the development of the TOC diagram • Document, prioritize, and develop an action plan to fill remaining information gaps
3	TOC Pathway Development	• Agree on how to transform the problem tree into a TOC • Agree on how to articulate different pathways for different populations • Agree on how to compile complementary documentation to support our TOC logic • Gain experience in checking TOC pathway logic • Gain experience in distinguishing between strong and weak examples of assumptions and rationales for the TOC pathways
	TOC Pathway Development Working Sessions	• Reframe problem statements into measurable results statements • Check causal logic • Distill TOC pathways into essential outcomes • Add assumptions and rationales as needed • Begin to compile complementary documentation • Prioritize information gaps that need to be filled prior to proposal submission and those that can be filled in a refinement/contextualization period
4	Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How	• Agree on the criteria we'll use to determine which outcomes our project can address • Agree on the process we'll use to identify outcomes that can be addressed by external actors • Agree on how we'll present the efforts of external actors in our TOC and complementary documentation • Agree on criteria for prioritizing intervention outputs • Agree on how we'll present intervention outputs in our TOC
	Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address Working Sessions	• Determine which TOC outcomes will be addressed by the project, and which will be addressed by other actors • Prioritize project interventions • Perform a logic and sustainability check • Graphically refine the TOC diagram to reflect external actor efforts, project outputs, and new rationales and assumptions • Document evidence for external actors, rationales, and assumptions in complementary documentation
5	TOC Review and Refinement	• Understand how to number the TOC to improve readability • Gain experience in determining the quality and completeness of a TOC diagram and complementary documentation, including BHA requirements

Useful Shading and Icons

Various shading and icons are used to highlight instructions and special information for facilitators. Below you will find the different types of shading and icons with an explanation.

SCRIPT: Text without shading is content that the facilitator can share as the slides are presented.



Cursor icon: Indicates slide animation, which means that a new bullet or sentence appears on the slide each time you click forward.

All content is also included on the speaker's notes page of the corresponding slide, with animation details.



ASK & DISCUSS: Opportunities to make learning engaging by soliciting participants' ideas and experiences.



PREPARE: Actions the facilitator needs to take before sharing content, such as modifying slides or the script to reflect the organization's preferences, replacing the sample tools with existing organizational tools, or setting up the room for an exercise.

Be sure to review these before your session.



CONSIDER: Suggestions for facilitators.



PRO TIPS: Lessons learned from 10 years of helping implementers develop TOCs.



BHA GUIDANCE: Key information or excerpts from BHA guidance documents with a link to the referenced document.



Slide icon: Slides referenced in the sample agenda for the working sessions. Be sure to review these slides before conducting the working session and edit them, as needed.

Need a refresher?

The facilitator of these team learning sessions should be well versed in TOC development and program design. If you'd like a refresher, the Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning (IDEAL) activity offers a free online course that covers the components and process of developing a TOC. The content in this facilitator's guide builds on the basic understanding of TOC development established in the course. You can access it at <https://www.fsnnetwork.org/resource/theory-change-toc-development-e-course>.

List of Key Terms

The following key terms are used throughout the TOC modules.

Activity/Project/Program: A set of interventions funded by a donor for a specified period of time to achieve a goal. The terms activity, project, and program are used interchangeably throughout this guide.

Assumption: Contextual or environmental conditions that are important to the success of a TOC but are beyond the control of a project. Assumptions are conditions that already exist or have a relatively high probability of occurring.

Cross-sectoral linkages: Linkages that describe how efforts and results in one sector contribute to or rely on those from another sector.

Causal analysis: The process of identifying why various problems exist by developing hierarchical relationships between causes and effects.

Development hypothesis: The TOC, logic, and relationships among the building blocks needed to achieve or contribute to a long-term development result. A development hypothesis states what will happen if a particular intervention or combination of building blocks critical to achieving a particular development outcome is implemented.

Outcomes: Changes that are expected to occur when all preconditions are met. Lower-level outcomes are preconditions for higher-level outcomes. An outcome is not an action, but a state of being.

Outputs: The direct product of project interventions. Outputs are preconditions for lower-level outcomes.

Pathway of change/TOC pathway: A graphic representation of all incremental outcomes and the order in which they occur.

Preconditions: The set of outputs and outcomes necessary to achieve an overarching goal. An output can be a precondition for a lower-level outcome. A lower-level outcome is a precondition for a higher-level outcome. A higher-level outcome is a precondition for a purpose or strategic objective.

Problem tree: The graphical product that results from the process of developing a hierarchical relationship between causes and effects (causal analysis).

Problem(s)/Cause(s): A condition or set of conditions that negatively affects people and contributes to compromised outcomes. Problems can be, and typically are, both causes and effects of other conditions. In this guide we distinguish different types and levels of problems/causes as follows:

- **Overarching problem:** The most significant problem facing a defined population, based on evidence.
- **Key problems:** The broad conditions that contribute to an overarching problem.
- **Underlying (root) causes:** Significant and specific contributors to key problems that are often the effects of other causes, such as behaviors, beliefs, knowledge or skill levels, or systemic weaknesses.
- **Contextual conditions:** Social, economic, political, or natural conditions that contribute to underlying causes and may be the result of key problems (i.e., the cycle of vulnerability).

Resilience: A set of capacities that enable households and communities to function effectively in the face of shocks and stressors and still achieve a range of well-being outcomes.

Risk: Conditions, both beyond the control of a project and those resulting from project interventions, that can negatively affect a project's progress but have a relatively low probability of occurring.

Stakeholders: The individuals, groups, or institutions who directly or indirectly affect or are affected by a project. Stakeholders include those who have a vested interest in or influence over the implementation of the project, those who stand to gain or lose from the intended outcomes of the project, and/or those who implement or support the project's approaches.





TEAM OVERVIEW:

Theory of Change Development

ESTIMATED SESSION LENGTH:

90 minutes

WHEN:

As soon as your organization determines it will be responding to an upcoming RFA.

WHO:

All team members who will be involved in the TOC development process (e.g., country office, technical advisors and leads, new business development, project managers, senior management).

WHY:

- To develop a common understanding among the team of the TOC process and the resulting product.
- To agree on team roles and responsibilities, and the timeline for our TOC development process.

SESSION RESOURCES:²

- IDEAL PowerPoint (PPT) 0: TOC Overview

PARTICIPANT PREPARATION:

- None

FACILITATOR PREPARATION:

Optional slide modification:

- ☐ 8, 9, 10, 15, 20, 26: Adapt to your organization's timeline and assignment of responsibilities.
- ☐ 13: Replace with conceptual framework to guide your process.
- ☐ 14: Replace sample stakeholder mapping template with your organization's preferred tool.
- ☐ 28: Review BHA guidance, if applicable.

Exercises and handouts:

- ☐ Flip charts and sticky notes for: "What makes the TOC process unique?" (slide 5)
- ☐ Timeline on wall & decks of color-coded cards for "Steps of TOC Development" (slide 6)
- ☐ Printed handout: TOC Terminology

Optional content refresher:

- ☐ [IDEAL TOC e-course: Theory of Change \(TOC\) Development](#)
- ☐ [IDEAL TOC Roles, Responsibilities, and Timeline workbook](#)

Introduction

This session provides a general overview of TOC development and the resulting product for all team members who will be involved in the process. Detailed guidance for each step will be provided in subsequent modules.



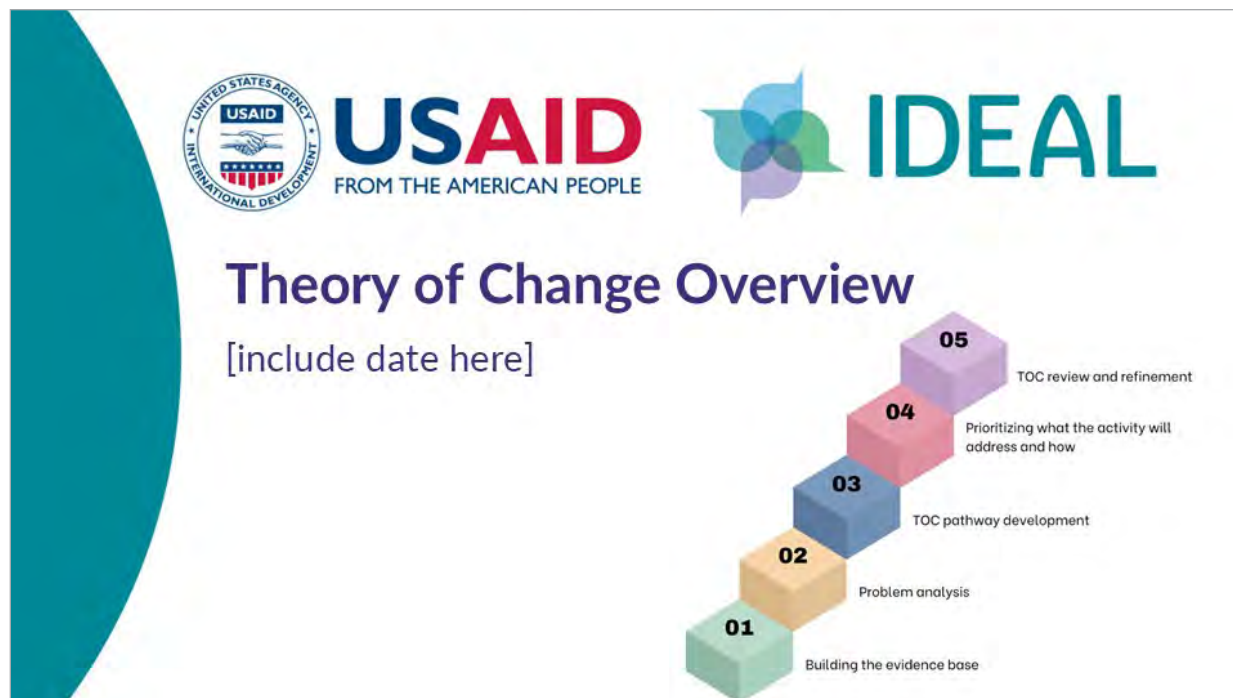
² Access the most current PowerPoint slides and handouts at <https://fsnnetwork.org/resource/theory-change-facilitators-guide-0>



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

The What and Why of TOC

SLIDE 1:



A TOC is a development framework for projects used by the international development community, including implementers and donors.

The way a TOC is developed and/or visually presented can vary widely among organizations and funders. The image shown on the screen is a common style for USAID/BHA-funded activities.



ASK & DISCUSS: What do you know about TOCs? How would you describe them in a few words? Why are they used?

NOTES:



What is a theory of change?

A hypothesized series of changes that are expected to occur in a given context as the result of specific integrated actions.

```
graph TD; GOAL[GOAL] --> PURPOSE1[PURPOSE]; GOAL --> PURPOSE2[PURPOSE]; PURPOSE1 --> SubPurpose1[Sub-purpose]; PURPOSE1 --> SubPurpose2[Sub-purpose]; PURPOSE2 --> SubPurpose1; PURPOSE2 --> SubPurpose2; SubPurpose1 --> IO1[Intermediate Outcome]; SubPurpose1 --> IO2[Intermediate Outcome]; SubPurpose1 --> IO3[Intermediate Outcome]; SubPurpose2 --> IO1; SubPurpose2 --> IO2; SubPurpose2 --> IO3; IO1 --> Outcome[Outcome]; IO2 --> IO4[Intervention Output]; IO3 --> IO4; IO4 --> IO5[Intervention Output]; Outcome --> IO5; Rationale1[Rationale] --> Outcome; ExternalAssumption1([External assumption]) --> PURPOSE1; ExternalAssumption2([External assumption]) --> PURPOSE2; Rationale2[Rationale] --> PURPOSE2; ExternalActor[Outcome produced by external actor] --> PURPOSE2;
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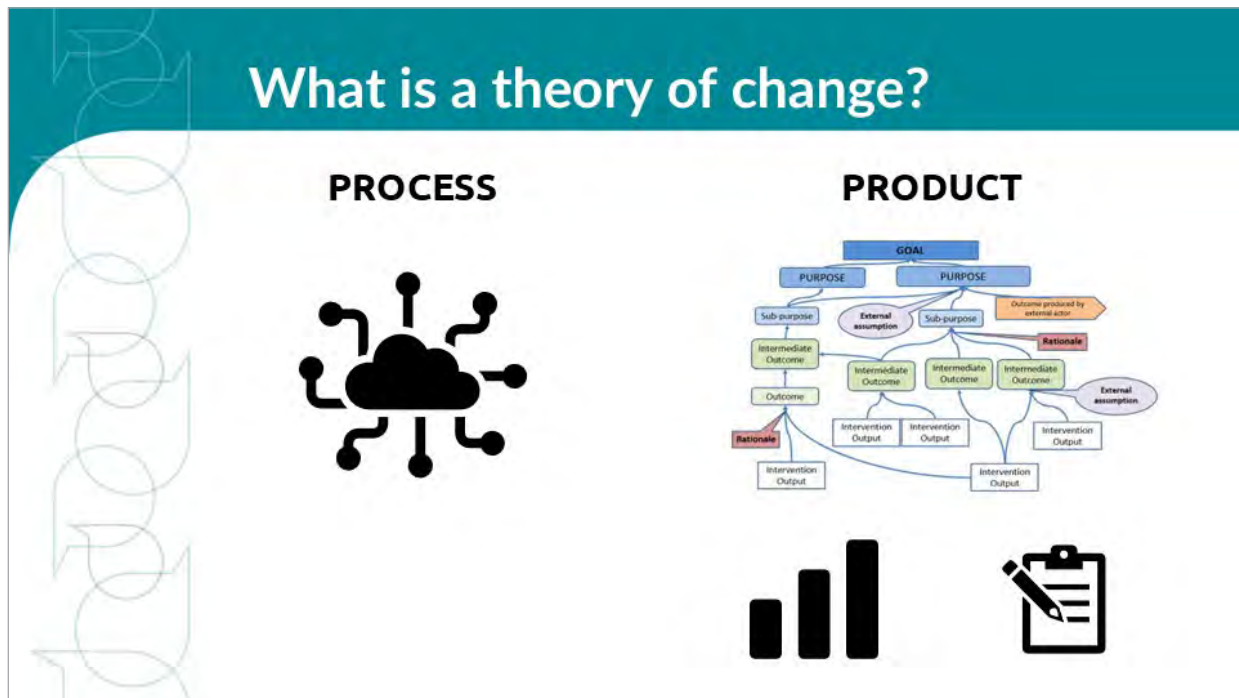
ASK & DISCUSS: How does this align with your definition?

[illegible]



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 3:



TOC development is **both** a process **and** a product:

- First and foremost, TOC development is a process that involves thinking about a problematic situation, recognizing the underlying causes of the situation, identifying the long-term change we want to see to improve the situation, and working through the steps to determine how we will achieve that change. The process also involves revisiting the TOC periodically throughout the program cycle, with ongoing reflection on whether, how, and why change is occurring as we hypothesized.
- The **product** that emerges from this process is the diagram or graphic representation of the TOC, which visually displays the long-term goal, high-level objectives, incremental outcomes, assumptions, rationales, and intended outputs, presented as pathways that we expect will lead to the desired changes.

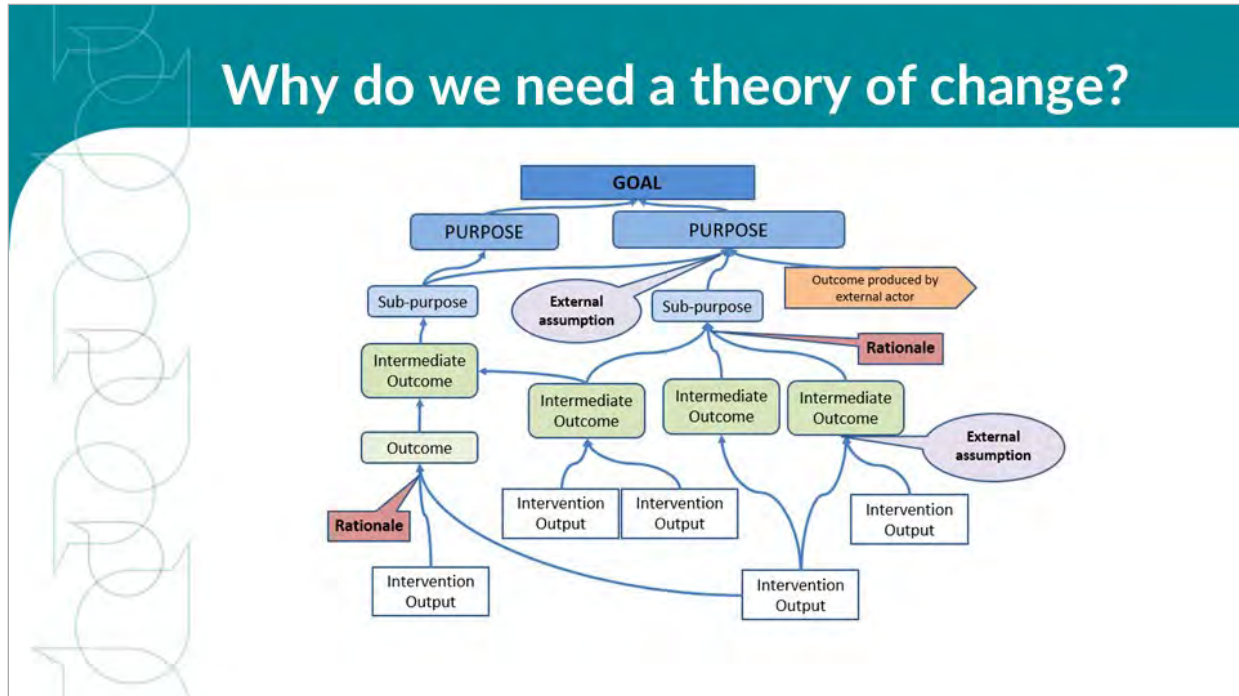
Other key components of the TOC product include:

- **Metrics for each component of the TOC** that tell us how to measure success at each step in the TOC pathway. For BHA-funded food security activities, metrics are shared in the logframe and are not required in the TOC. However, some project teams find it useful to include performance indicators in internal versions of the TOC.
- **TOC complementary documentation** to communicate information that is not easily interpreted from the TOC diagram.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 4:



ASK & DISCUSS: Why do you think we need a TOC for our project? Beyond being a donor requirement, why is it important and what purpose will it serve?

The TOC is intended to be a dynamic tool that encourages ongoing reflection throughout the project on whether, how, and why change is occurring as we hypothesized. We will use the TOC, our learning agenda, and our M&E plan as key guides for adaptive management. The components of this important power trio complement each other and can guide all levels of program staff through the critical reflection necessary for adaptive decision making throughout the program cycle. If no change occurs, what aspect of our implementation strategy should we modify?

We will strive to create a TOC with strong, clear causal pathways, because a weak or overly complicated TOC can hinder our ability to understand whether change is occurring as we expect. It can create barriers to revising our development hypotheses (the TOC logic) based on changes in context.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 5:



Exercise:
What makes
the TOC
process
unique?

Photo Credit: the IDEAL Activity



EXERCISE: What makes the TOC process unique?

OBJECTIVE: To reach a common understanding of how the TOC process may differ from previous efforts.

PREPARE: Flip chart on the wall. Sticky notes distributed.

ASK & DISCUSS: What makes the TOC process unique from other processes you've used to determine a project's development hypothesis?

BRAINSTORM: Participants take the next 3-5 minutes to write ideas on sticky notes (one idea per note) and place them on the flip chart at the front of the room.

SORT: Facilitator actively sorts ideas into similar categories as they are submitted.

DISCUSS: Emphasize the following points that participants identified as well as those that were overlooked.

The TOC process is unique because it requires:

- rigorous causal analysis supported by an evidence base;
- careful attention to underlying assumptions;
- a detailed assessment of the efforts of external stakeholders, because the TOC is not limited to the changes addressed by one project;
- a comprehensive examination of how multiple levels of action and conditions interact across sectors; and
- a periodic review and modification of the product (i.e., the TOC diagram, metrics, and complementary documentation), so that they remain relevant to the changing context.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 6:



EXERCISE: Steps of TOC Development

OBJECTIVE: To emphasize the importance of:

- spending enough time on the process; and
- completing certain steps in the process before others.

PREPARE: Create a timeline on the wall. If the draft RFA has not been released yet, use sample RFA release and submission dates to form the ends of the timeline. Above the timeline, place a header for each calendar month between the drop and submission date.

Prepare decks of color-coded cards outlining each step of the TOC process, with one card per step. Each step is a different color from the other steps, but the same for all groups. For example, “Build the evidence base” is blue for all groups and “Problem analysis” is green for all groups.

- Build the evidence base
- Problem analysis/problem tree
- TOC pathway development
- Compile complementary documentation
- Prioritize interventions
- Refine TOC diagram

Shuffle the decks before distributing.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SMALL GROUPS: Ask participants to break into small groups. Give each group a deck of cards and ask them to place the steps on the timeline. If they feel a step is unnecessary, place it outside the timeline.

DISCUSS: Conduct a brief check-in on elements that stand out, such as steps that people feel are unnecessary, widely varying placement of steps on the timeline, etc.



CONSIDER: Discuss whether the timeline accurately reflects current organizational practices. Why or why not? Did the process work well? Why or why not?

Additional discussion and reflection can occur after the draft RFA is released.



PREPARE: Adapt slides 8 and 9 to your organization's timeline and assignment of responsibilities before the team learning session.

Our TOC Process

SLIDE 7:





Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 8:

TOC Development Process and Timeline																							
	Month 1				Month 2				Month 3					Month 4				Month 5				Month 6	
WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Building the evidence base																							
Problem analysis																							
TOC pathway development (and compilation of complementary documentation)																							
Prioritizing what the activity will address and how																							
TOC review and refinement																							

We've outlined the major components of our TOC process and timeline on the screen. Over the course of the next [user insert #] months, we will begin data collection to build our evidence base and then conduct problem analysis using a problem tree. The problem tree will help us build an evidence-based TOC with strong logic. Once we have identified and prioritized the outcomes that will make the most difference in achieving our goal, our technical team will prioritize the interventions that will help us achieve those outcomes.

The final steps in our TOC development for the proposal include:

- refining the TOC diagram and complementary documentation;
- transferring the TOC outcomes to our logframe and assigning indicators for each outcome; and
- completing a thorough quality review.

It's important to note that the TOC development process is iterative. Although we will discuss five main steps for developing a TOC, the process is typically less linear and even a bit messy! As you can see in our timeline, it is normal for some steps to overlap (for example, building our evidence base and problem analysis). Certain tasks may occur at multiple steps in the process (such as collecting complementary documentation). And we may need to repeat some steps (especially when we revise or refine the TOC diagram after our review to ensure quality and completeness). It will also be common for different people to be involved in different steps.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)



BHA GUIDANCE

If you are developing a TOC for a BHA-funded food security activity, you may not need to include intervention outputs in the TOC diagram at the proposal stage. Check the most recent guidance.

PRO TIP



Even if you are not required to include outputs at the proposal stage, you still need to include them in your proposal's technical narrative. Using the TOC to determine which interventions to propose in the first place ensures that these interventions have a causal relationship to the outcomes we prioritize in the narrative.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 9:

Roles and Responsibilities Overview	
Task	Responsible Team members
Evidence base: Data collection and organization	
Problem Analysis: problem tree development	
Develop TOC diagram and Complementary Documentation	
Prioritize interventions	
Refine TOC graphics	
Quality and completeness review	

Sometimes we'll work in small groups. At other times, much larger and more diverse groups will be involved, including proposed implementing partners and local stakeholders. Here we outline who might be involved in each step. Next, we'll look at what each step involves.



CONSIDER: Why do you think we need a TOC for our project? Beyond being a donor requirement, why is it important and what purpose will it serve?

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 10:

Step 1 Building the Evidence Base																							
	Month 1				Month 2				Month 3					Month 4				Month 5				Month 6	
WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Building the evidence base																							
Problem analysis																							
TOC pathway development (and compilation of complementary documentation)																							
Prioritizing what the activity will address and how																							
TOC review and refinement																							

The first step is to build our evidence base. This includes primary and secondary data collection, data organization, and pre-analysis. A solid evidence base will help our team identify context-specific issues, rather than simply relying on generic analyses of the problems of the poor.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 11:



ASK & DISCUSS: *Before showing the slides.* What kind of information are we seeking?

- Record participants' responses on the flip chart.
- Add explanatory text below as needed.

To begin, we are looking for information that supports:



- the assertion that a problem exists and its root causes in the specific context;



- critical assumptions about existing conditions beyond the control or influence of our project; and



- causal links between problems and desired outcomes.

Our evidence base will evolve over time. Some questions we will be able to answer before we submit our proposal, while other information we may only be able to gather during our refinement period. Iterative rounds of data collection and organization will help us fill in information gaps so that we can more accurately determine the causal links between problems.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 12:

What might be key data sources?

- Program-specific information
- Community input
- Government research
- Donor research
- Academic/scientific papers

What is key to a robust evidence base?

- Balance between qualitative and quantitative data
- Diversity of relevant sources
- Reliability of sources

The slide features a teal header with the title 'What might be key data sources?'. To the left of the text is a faint, stylized graphic of a DNA double helix. To the right of the text are two icons: one showing a document with a pencil and a speech bubble, and another showing a magnifying glass over a bar chart.



ASK & DISCUSS: *Before showing the slides.* What might be key data sources?

- **Record participants' responses on the flip chart.**
- **Add explanatory text below as needed.**

The insights we gather will come from a variety of sources, including:

- project-specific information;
- community input;
- government research;
- donor research; and
- academic/scientific papers.

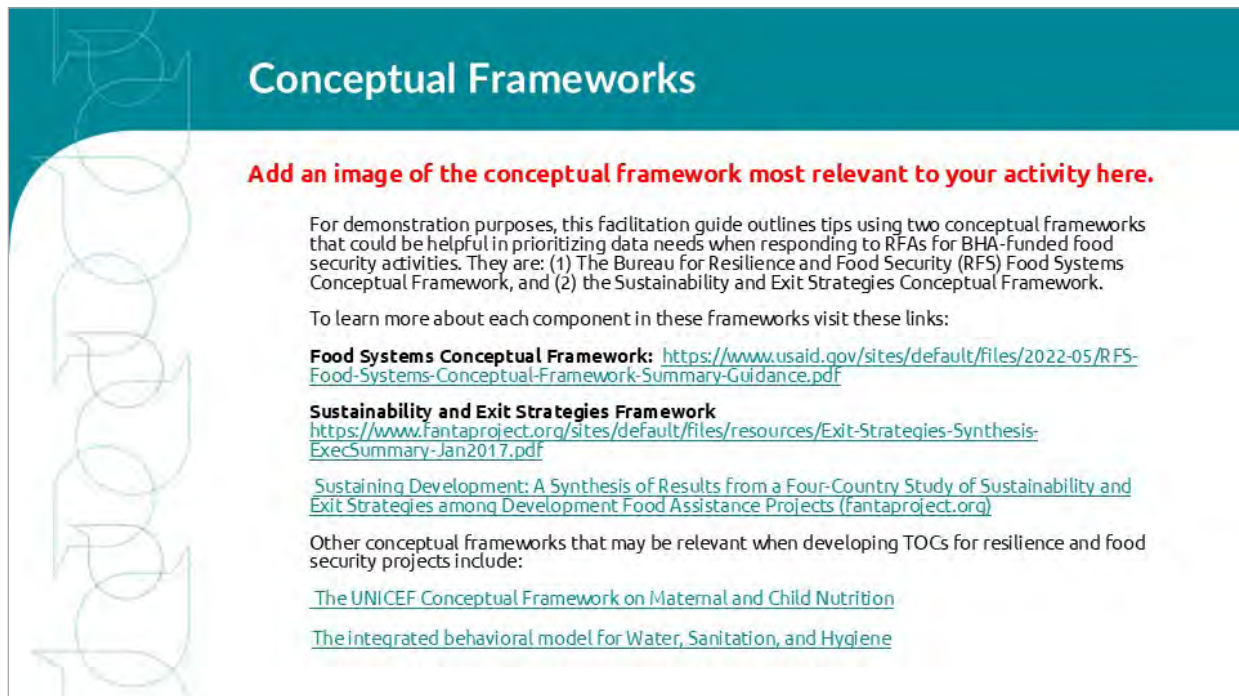
To build a robust evidence base of relevant and timely information, we'll need to ensure that we:

- strike a balance between qualitative and quantitative data;
- consult diverse and relevant sources of information; and
- consult reliable sources.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 13:



Conceptual Frameworks

Add an image of the conceptual framework most relevant to your activity here.

For demonstration purposes, this facilitation guide outlines tips using two conceptual frameworks that could be helpful in prioritizing data needs when responding to RFAs for BHA-funded food security activities. They are: (1) The Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) Food Systems Conceptual Framework, and (2) the Sustainability and Exit Strategies Conceptual Framework.

To learn more about each component in these frameworks visit these links:

Food Systems Conceptual Framework: <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/RFS-Food-Systems-Conceptual-Framework-Summary-Guidance.pdf>

Sustainability and Exit Strategies Framework
<https://www.fantaproject.org/sites/default/files/resources/Exit-Strategies-Synthesis-ExecSummary-Jan2017.pdf>

[Sustaining Development: A Synthesis of Results from a Four-Country Study of Sustainability and Exit Strategies among Development Food Assistance Projects \(fantaproject.org\)](https://www.fantaproject.org/sites/default/files/resources/Exit-Strategies-Synthesis-ExecSummary-Jan2017.pdf)

Other conceptual frameworks that may be relevant when developing TOCs for resilience and food security projects include:

[The UNICEF Conceptual Framework on Maternal and Child Nutrition](#)

[The integrated behavioral model for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene](#)



PREPARE: Determine which conceptual framework will guide your process and add it to the slide.

There is no single correct choice when selecting the conceptual framework(s) to guide your process. Your organization may have a preferred framework that it relies on. A donor may include a specific framework in the RFA. The important thing is that any framework chosen for this exercise is relevant to the broad scope of the proposed project.

For demonstration purposes, the next learning session provides tips using two conceptual frameworks that could be helpful in prioritizing data needs when responding to RFAs for BHA-funded food security activities. They are: (1) the Bureau for Resilience, Environment and Food Security (REFS) Food Systems Conceptual Framework and (2) the Sustainability and Exit Strategies Conceptual Framework.

Often there is so much information available that it is difficult to know what to collect and when to stop. Conceptual frameworks can be particularly useful as a basis for prioritizing data collection efforts. When used well, they help ensure that we collect the right types of information to perform the thorough causal analysis necessary for TOC development.

In our TOC process, we'll start with *[insert name of framework that is relevant to your project]* and then use components of the framework to create a list of potential information categories and begin to prioritize the most critical types of information we need to collect.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 14:

Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis								
Technical Area	Name of agency/contact info	Type of agency	Scope of assistance (time)	Scope of assistance (geographic)	Scope of assistance (participants)	Successful interventions & why	Unsuccessful interventions & why	Relationship with other stakeholders
Component: Health and Nutrition								
WASH								
Prevention/treatment of childhood illnesses								
Family planning services								
Nutrition services								
Component: Agriculture and Livelihoods								
NRM								



PREPARE: You may choose to modify slide 14 to reflect your organization's preferred tool for stakeholder mapping.

Stakeholder mapping will be very important in our process. Some donors, such as BHA, are clear that TOCs should not be limited to the work of one organization or consortium. The mapping process:

- helps build the evidence base for external assumptions;
- identifies conditions and resources already in place that are necessary to achieve outcomes; and
- informs problem prioritization for program focus:
 - » Who is doing what, where?
 - » How successful are their efforts?
 - » What are the gaps?

We will use stakeholder mapping and analysis throughout the life of our project to understand shifts in the relative efforts and influences of different stakeholders.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)



BREAKOUT GROUPS: Stakeholder Mapping Lessons Learned

Discuss previous stakeholder mapping efforts.

Be prepared to share the type of information that was most influential to program design or refinement and why.

Be prepared to share with the group information that was not collected that could have influenced program design or refinement. What should our team do differently?

POPCORN SHARING: 5-10 minutes

Participants share the ideas discussed in their breakout groups. Each participant may only share one time on one idea to give space to others. The facilitator can either choose to have each participant pass to another participant or let participants randomly volunteer themselves.

Jot down ideas for improving the process on a flip chart.



CONSIDER: Remind the group which team members will be involved in the process of building the evidence base and when this step will take place. *Information shared on slide 9.*

Share the date for the team learning session that will precede data collection.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 15:

Step 2 Problem Analysis																							
	Month 1				Month 2				Month 3					Month 4				Month 5				Month 6	
WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Building the evidence base																							
Problem analysis																							
TOC pathway development (and compilation of complementary documentation)																							
Prioritizing what the activity will address and how																							
TOC review and refinement																							

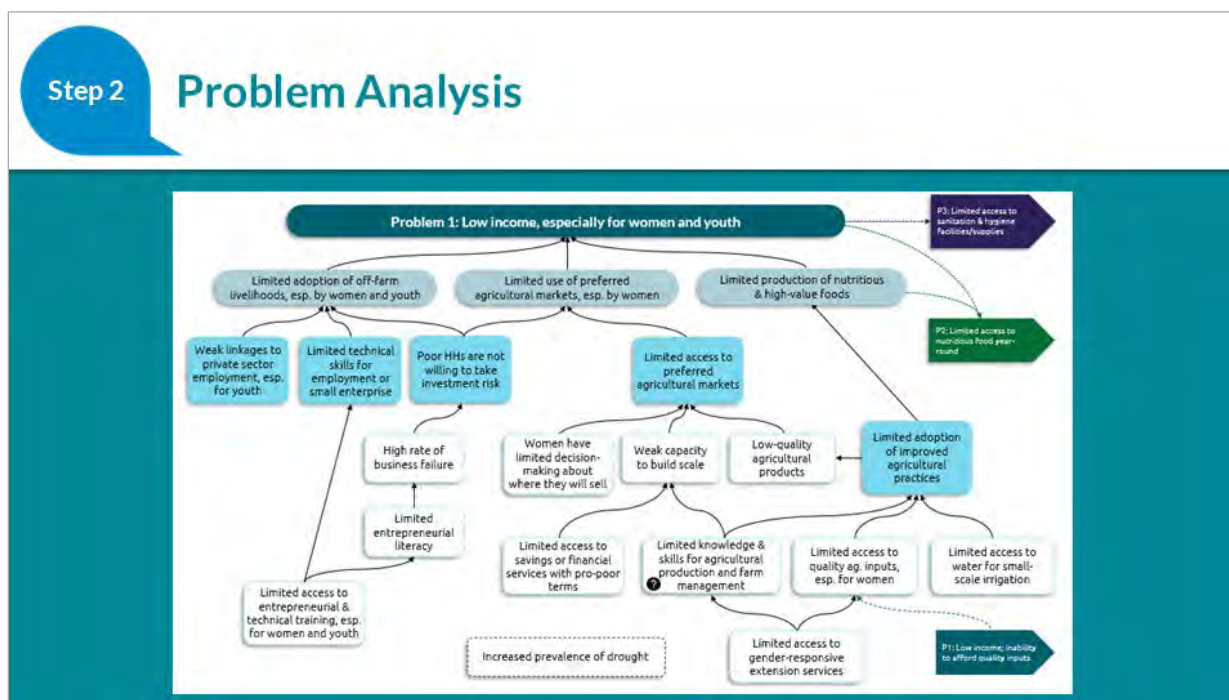
The second step in our TOC development process is problem analysis. One effective method for problem analysis is to develop a problem tree—a diagram that shows how problematic conditions are linked.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 16:



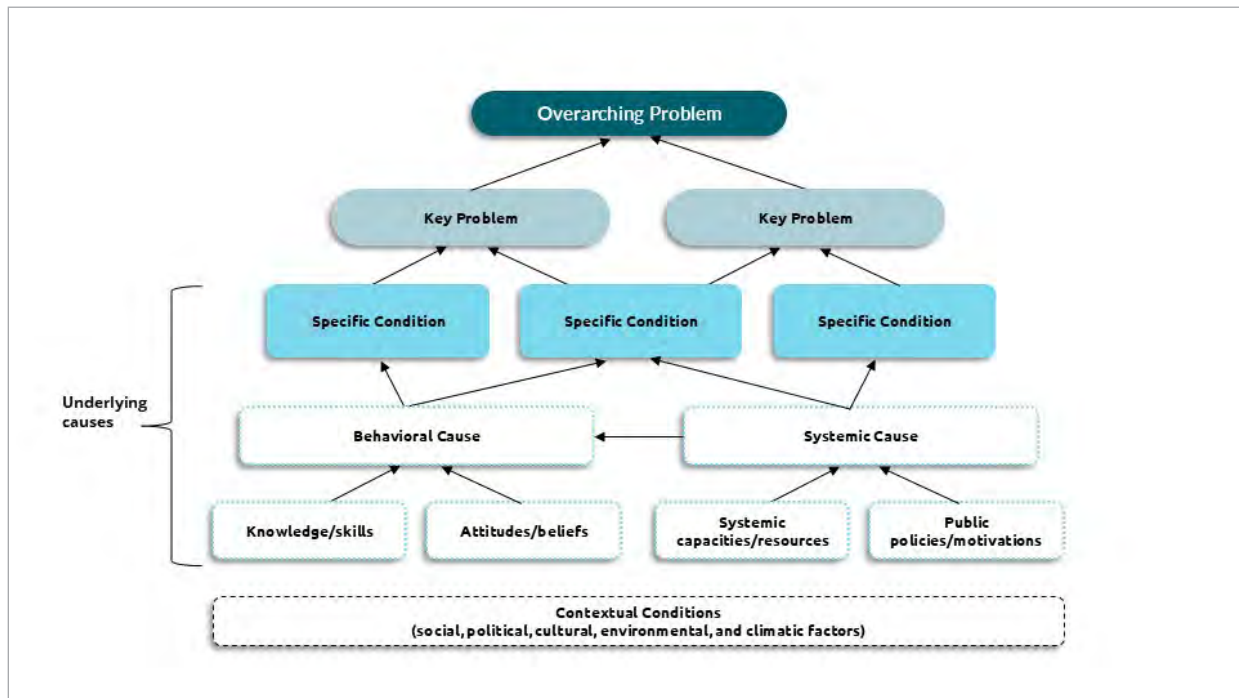
This method is very effective and efficient for TOC development because if we take the time to thoughtfully map causal streams that show how problematic conditions are linked, we can then “flip” the tree to positive results statements. The result is a series of incremental outcomes organized into pathways of change—in other words, a sequential representation of how we expect change to occur. We’ll learn more about this “flipping” process in a later module.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 17:



The process of mapping causal streams involves analysis of different types, or levels, of problems, including:

- the overarching problem and key problems form the top of the problem tree;
- the underlying/root causes form the middle of the tree; and
- the contextual conditions that generally feed in from the bottom.

Let's explore examples for each of these levels.

Overarching problem: The most significant problem facing a defined population.



ASK & DISCUSS: What might be a relevant example for our proposal?

Possible response: food insecurity

Key problems: Broad conditions that affect people in a negative way and contribute to the overarching problem.



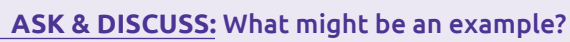
ASK & DISCUSS: What might be a relevant example for our proposal?

Possible responses: low income for women, inadequate food consumption, or unsustainable management of natural resources



- practices and behaviors;
- knowledge and skills, beliefs, or attitudes; and
- systemic conditions, such as public policy, systemic capacities and resources.

Contextual conditions: General social, political, cultural, environmental, and climatic conditions that contribute to the underlying causes and sometimes, in a feedback loop, result from the key problems.



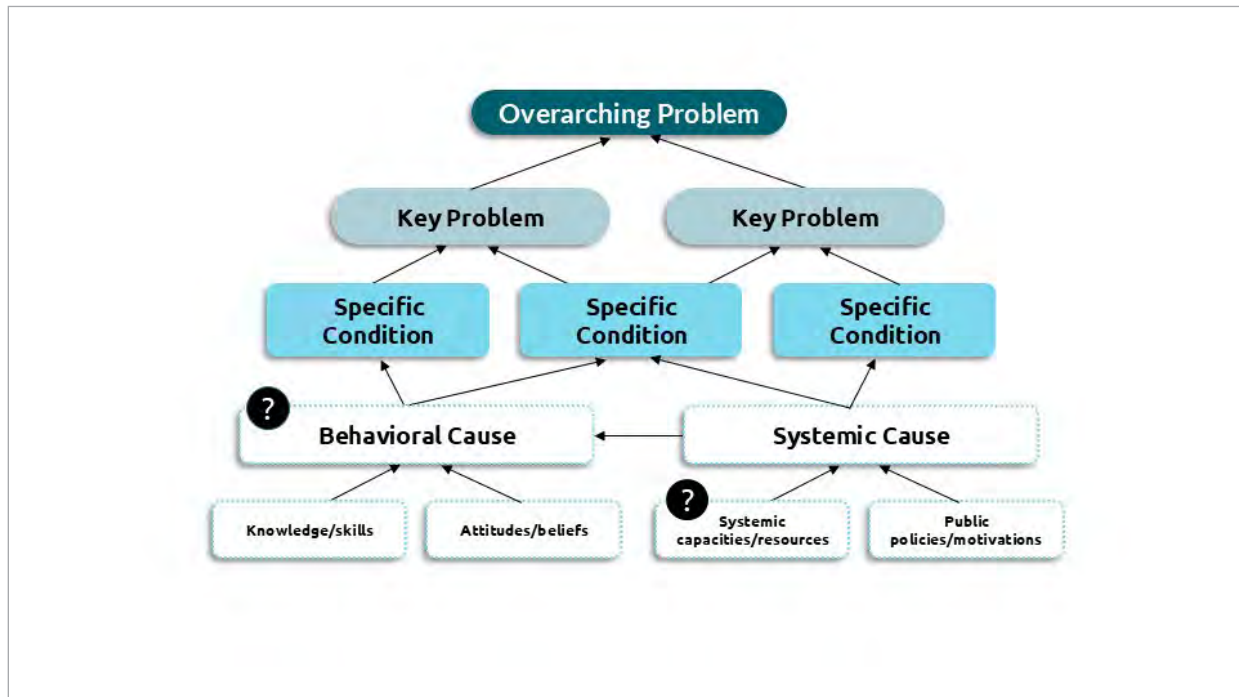
These are often conditions that we will not be able to solve through project interventions, but they will strongly influence our project design and intervention strategies.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 18:



Here are the key steps we will take to identify problems at all levels.

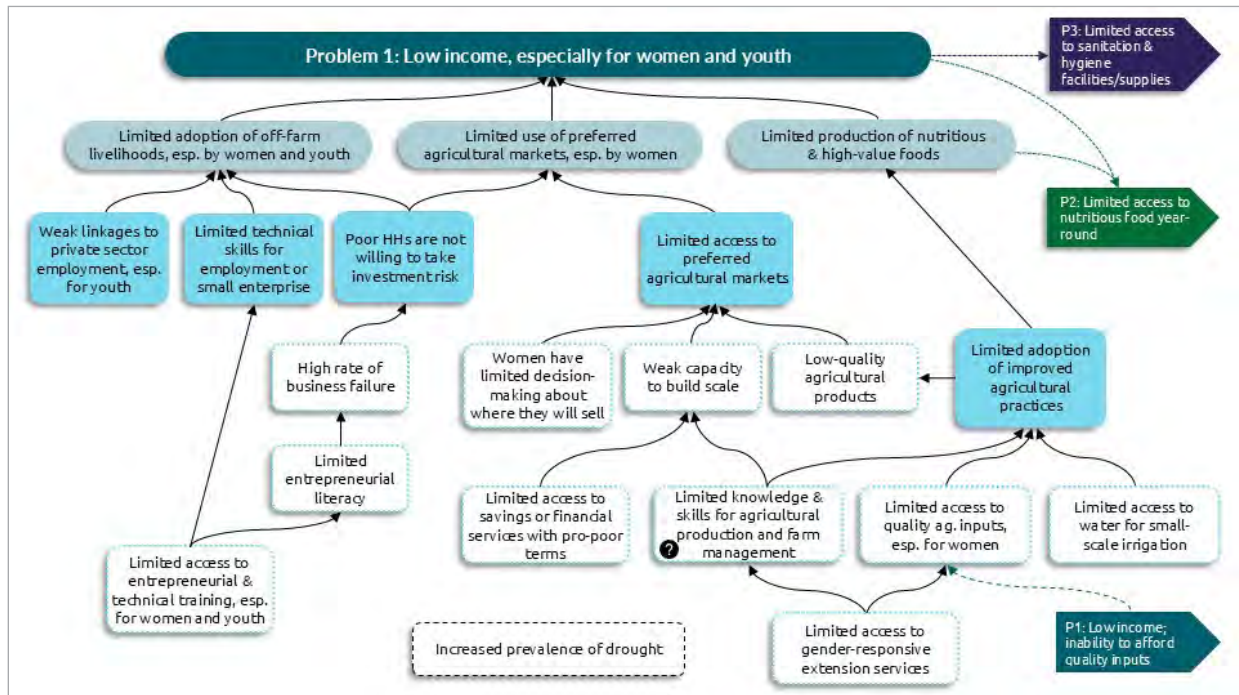
1. Identify the main problem that our project will address.
2. Then ask:
 - What are the main causes of the overarching problem?
 - In what order are problems connected to one another?
3. Point out information gaps in the causal logic.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 19:



This is an example of a completed problem tree.

As you can see, identifying the causal linkages between problems allows us to organize these conditions into a hierarchical cause-and-effect flow that includes cross-sectoral linkages, such as the green shape (limited access to nutritious food year-round) that shows the link between agriculture and nutrition challenges.

Agreeing on an evidence-based cause-and-effect flow is a precursor to identifying TOC pathways.



CONSIDER: Revisit which team members will be involved in the problem analysis and when this step will take place. *Information shared on slide 9.*

Share the date of the team learning session that will precede the problem analysis.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 20:

Step 3 TOC Pathway Development																							
	Month 1				Month 2				Month 3					Month 4				Month 5				Month 6	
WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Building the evidence base																							
Problem analysis																							
TOC pathway development (and compilation of complementary documentation)																							
Prioritizing what the activity will address and how																							
TOC review and refinement																							

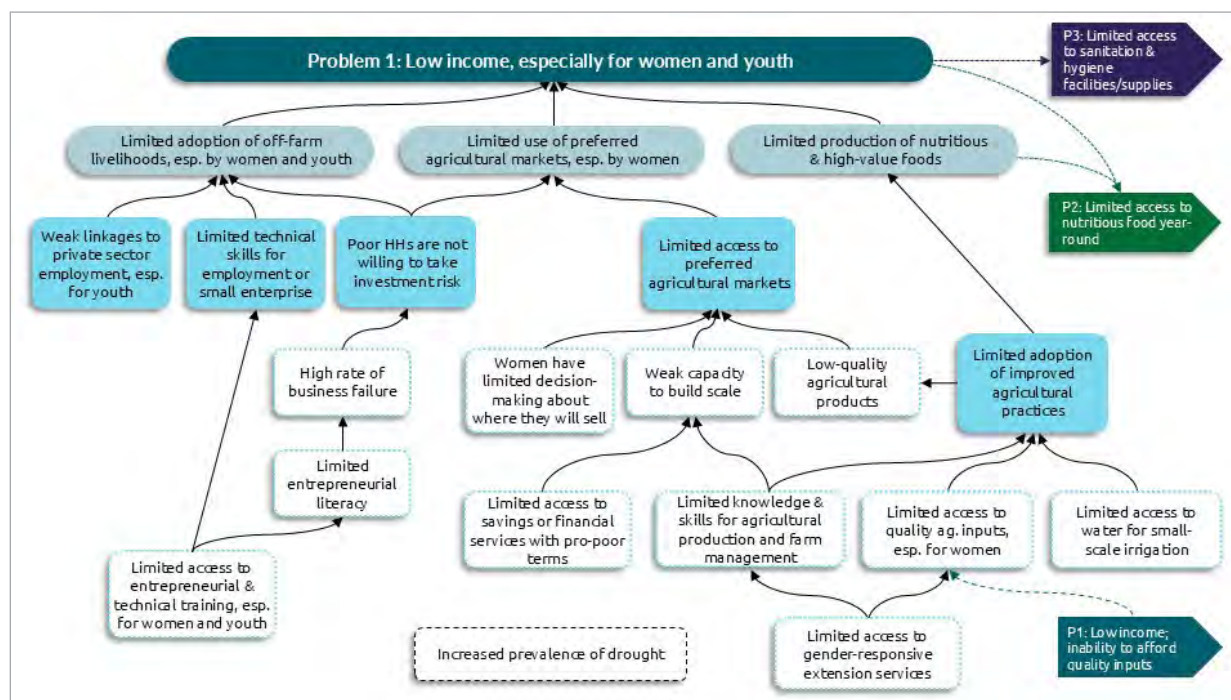
Once we have identified the main problem that our project will address and the causal pathways that lead to it, the next step is to develop a TOC diagram that shows the results that our project aims to achieve and the pathways for bringing about the desired changes.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 21:



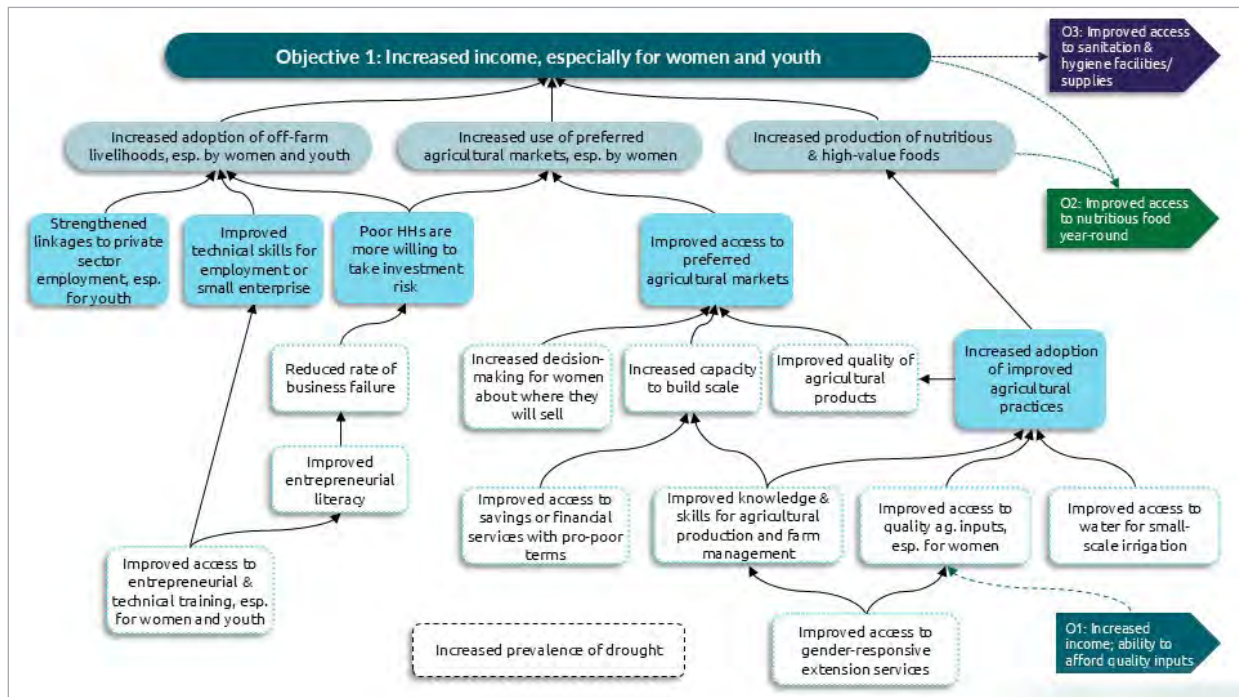
We'll start by transforming the problem tree into a solution tree. We do this by rephrasing all the problem statements into positive result statements (i.e., solutions) that describe the desired changes needed to achieve the program goal. The act of rephrasing problem statements is often called "the flip." Here, we see a problem tree for one key problem. On the next page, we'll see this problem tree flipped into a possible solution tree.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 22:



Notice in this solution tree how all the problem statements are now positive results statements.

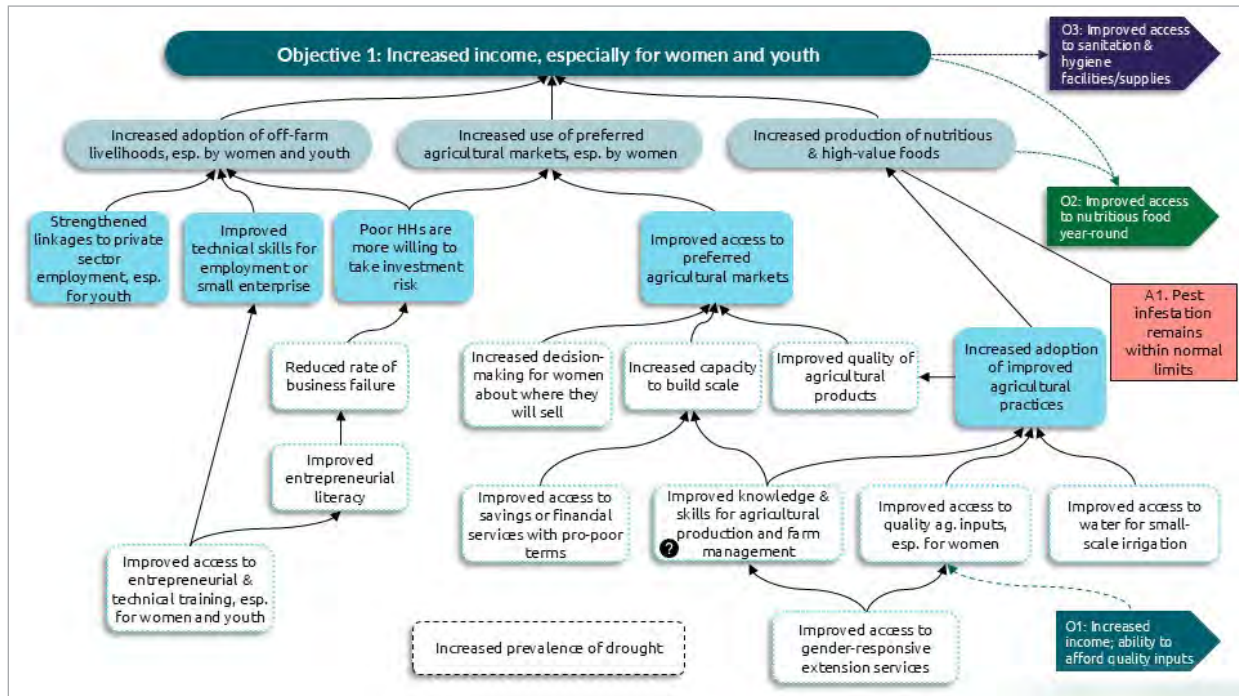
A common mistake at this point in the process is to flip only the problems that our project plans to address. It is very important to flip every problem in the problem tree into a solution. We want to keep a comprehensive view of all the solutions necessary to achieve the stated goal, even if our organization does not plan to address them.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 23:



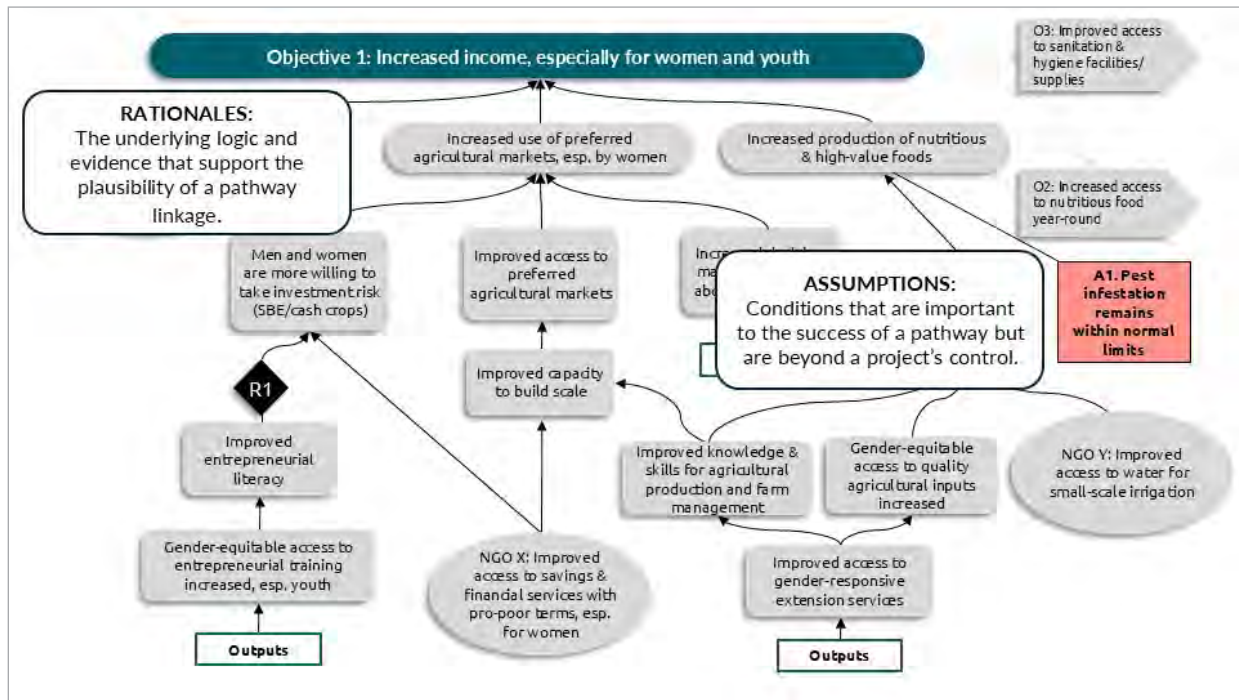
After flipping problems into solutions, we'll perform a logic check on each solution pathway. Logic checks help us identify where we need to add **assumptions** and **rationales**, where we have **outstanding information gaps**, and sometimes help us identify where we should emphasize **cross-sectoral linkages**. Once these components are added to our diagram, we can start calling it a TOC instead of a solution tree.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 24:



ASK & DISCUSS: Can someone explain what BHA considers an assumption, a rationale, or a cross-sectoral linkage?

Add explanatory text below as needed.



Assumptions are contextual or environmental conditions that are beyond the control or influence of our project, but that have a significant impact on the success of the entire TOC or any part of it. These conditions are already in place, and we do not expect them to change during the life of award (LOA). Evidence-based assumptions strengthen the plausibility of our theory and the likelihood that stated outcomes will be achieved.

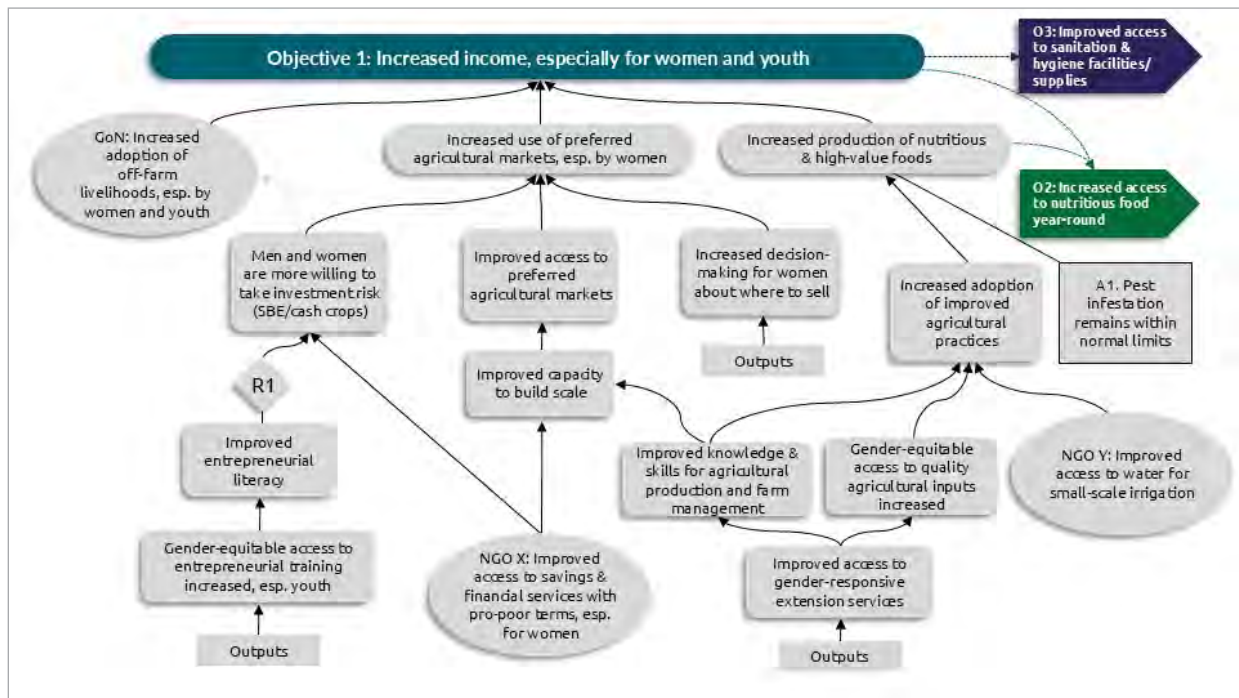


Rationales differ from assumptions in that they are not conditions that exist, but rather explanations and evidence that show why the causal logic in our TOC is plausible. For example, evidence that men and women are more willing to take investment risks when communities experience a lower rate of business failure in the specific operating context. We do not need to provide a rationale for every link in a pathway—we only include rationales when the link between two preconditions is supported by new or obscure evidence.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 25:



Cross-sectoral linkages show how efforts and results in one sector contribute to or depend on those in another sector. These **cross-sectoral linkages** are a key strength of TOCs compared to results frameworks or other linear logic frameworks.

It's common for assumptions, rationales, and cross-sectoral linkages to be treated as an afterthought, contributing to weak logic in the TOC. We'll make sure to incorporate these elements early in the process.



CONSIDER: Revisit which team members will be involved in developing the TOC and when this step will take place. *Information shared on slide 9.*

Share the date of the team learning session that will precede TOC development.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 26:

Step 4 Prioritizing What We Will Address and How																							
	Month 1				Month 2				Month 3					Month 4				Month 5				Month 6	
WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Building the evidence base																							
Problem analysis																							
TOC pathway development (and compilation of complementary documentation)																							
Prioritizing what the activity will address and how																							
TOC review and refinement																							

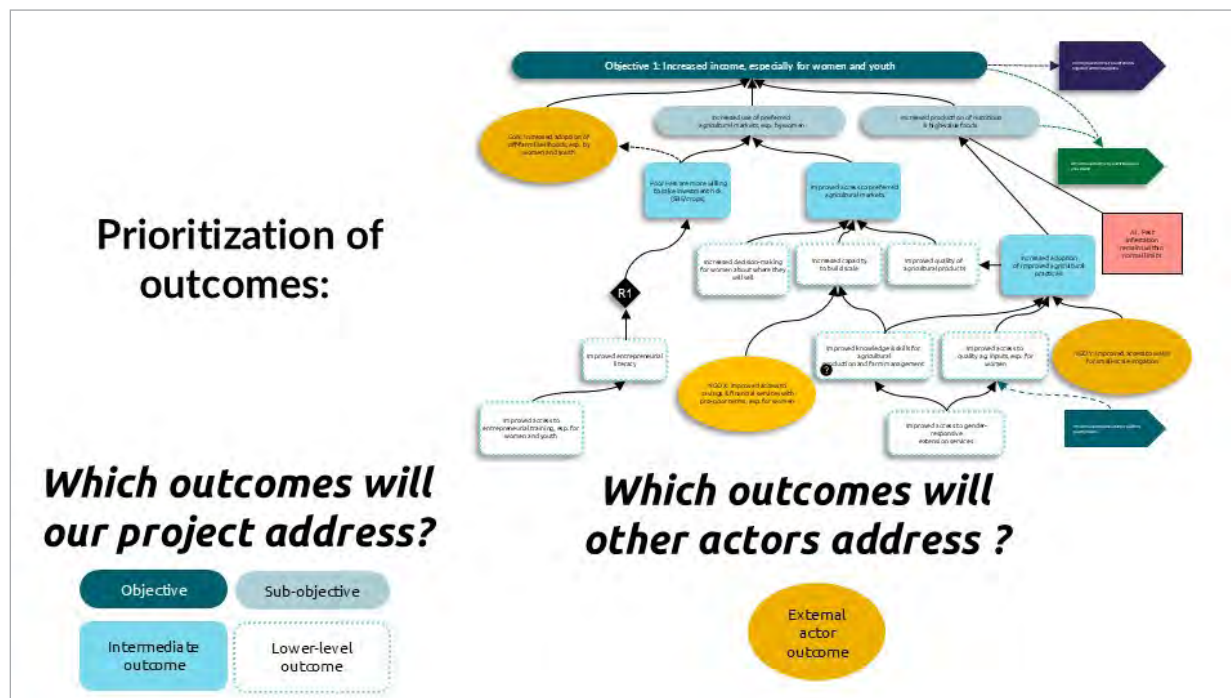
Because a TOC takes a broad view of what needs to change in a given context to achieve the overarching goal, TOC pathways should not be limited to the changes that one organization can stimulate. We must always think about other actors (public, private, local, national, international, etc.) who are already contributing to the goal or who might be persuaded to contribute to the overarching goal.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 27:



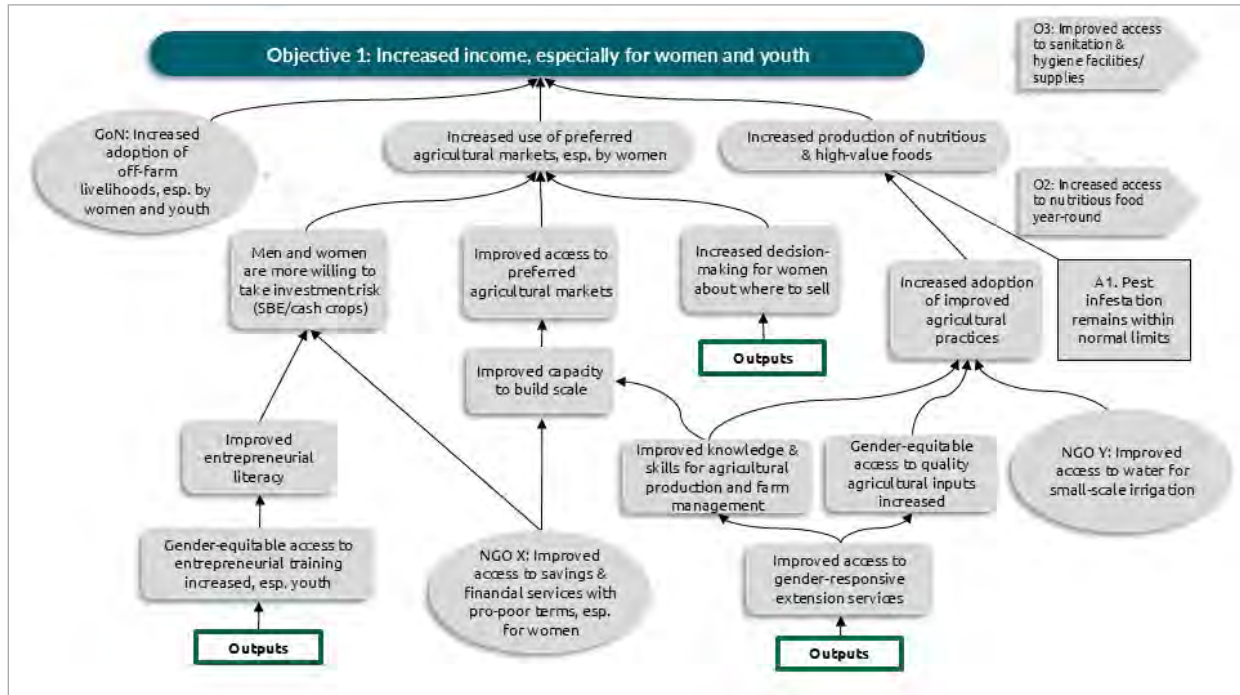
Although our initial analysis may suggest that numerous outcomes are needed, prioritization exercises will help us justify why we will not address all of them directly.

Sometimes this means that external actors will address an entire pathway; more often it means that external actors will be responsible for multiple outcomes or outputs along a pathway. The stakeholder mapping exercise we discussed earlier will be a key source of information for these decisions. Our design team will establish criteria to help us prioritize which outcomes our project will address.

NOTES:



SLIDE 28:



PREPARE: If you are developing a TOC for a BHA-funded food security activity, review the most recent BHA guidance to determine if intervention outputs are required in the TOC submitted with the proposal. In 2024, they were not; however, proposed interventions were required in the technical narrative of the proposal.

Further development of the TOC can help teams prioritize which interventions to propose in the narrative. Examples are provided below.

Determine in advance whether your team will either:

- stop developing the TOC at the annotated level, or
- continue to develop the TOC through the outputs to use the TOC logic to prioritize the interventions proposed in the technical narrative. The Pro Tip below may help you justify the benefits of fully developing the TOC to your team members.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

PRO TIP

Outputs may not be required in the TOC submitted with a BHA application, but they are required in the technical narrative of the proposal, and we need a rigorous process for prioritizing what we propose.

Continuing to develop the TOC will help us:

- review the logic of the interventions proposed in the technical narrative and how they are expected to stimulate change
- prioritize the interventions to be proposed in the technical narrative (e.g., those expected to address the most limiting factors)
- think through sustainability planning, for example:
 - » **prioritize behaviors needed to stimulate sustained change**
 - » **identify areas where local service and input providers will be needed to sustain outcomes**
- identify critical learning priorities for the refinement period



Once we determine responsibility for the various outcomes, we can begin to consider the most effective interventions that will help set the wheels of change in motion for the outcomes for which our project will be responsible.

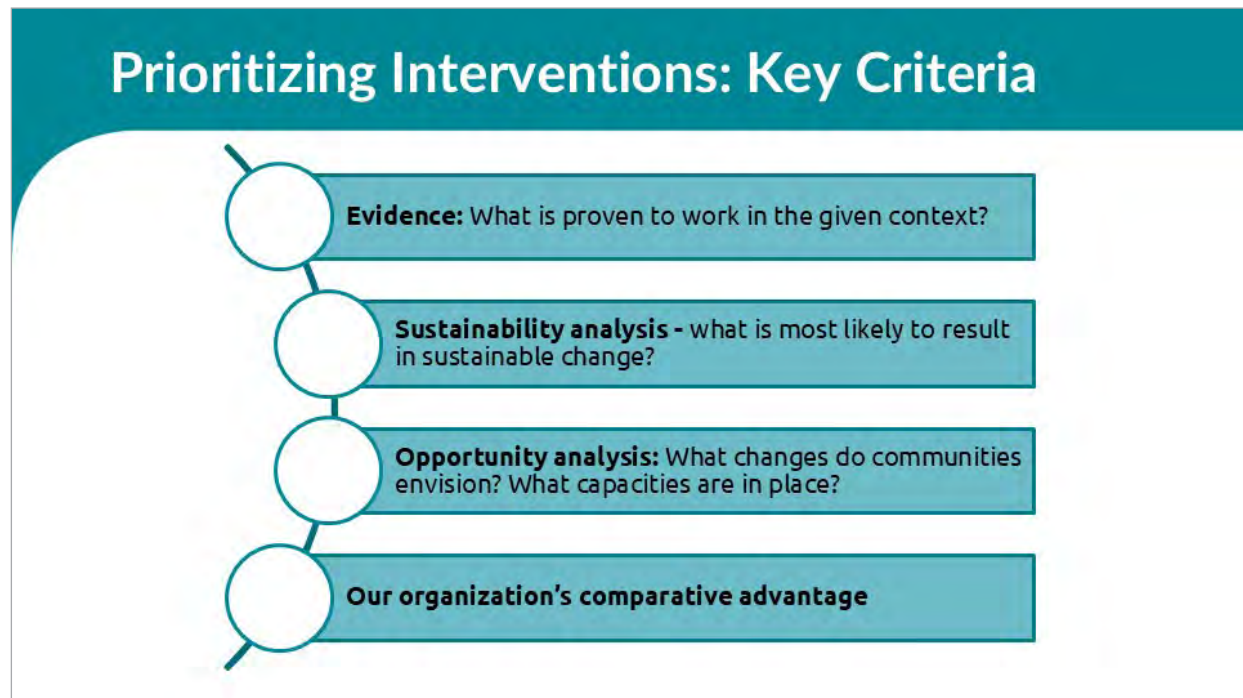
Practitioners often want to implement every possible intervention that might alleviate hardship. The reality is that budget, staffing, and time constraints limit what we can address. In addition, **implementing too many interventions may result in none of them being very effective, ultimately undermining the overall results.**

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 29:



Many donors, including BHA, encourage implementers to prioritize interventions in the proposed project design and throughout the LOA.

Careful consideration of criteria such as those listed on the screen can be an effective way to begin the prioritization process.



BREAKOUT GROUPS: Lessons Learned in Prioritizing Interventions

Discuss previous prioritization efforts, both successful and unsuccessful.

- What factors contributed to successful prioritization?
- What factors contributed to unsuccessful prioritization?

What should this team do to improve the effectiveness of our prioritization efforts?

POPCORN SHARING: 5-10 minutes

Participants share the ideas discussed in their breakout groups. Each participant may only share one time on one idea to give space to others. The facilitator can either choose to have each participant pass to another participant, or let participants randomly volunteer themselves.

On a flip chart, record ideas for improving the prioritization process.



CONSIDER: Remind the group who will be involved in the process of prioritizing interventions and when this step will take place. *Information shared on slide 9.*

Share the date of the team learning session that will precede this step.

[illegible]

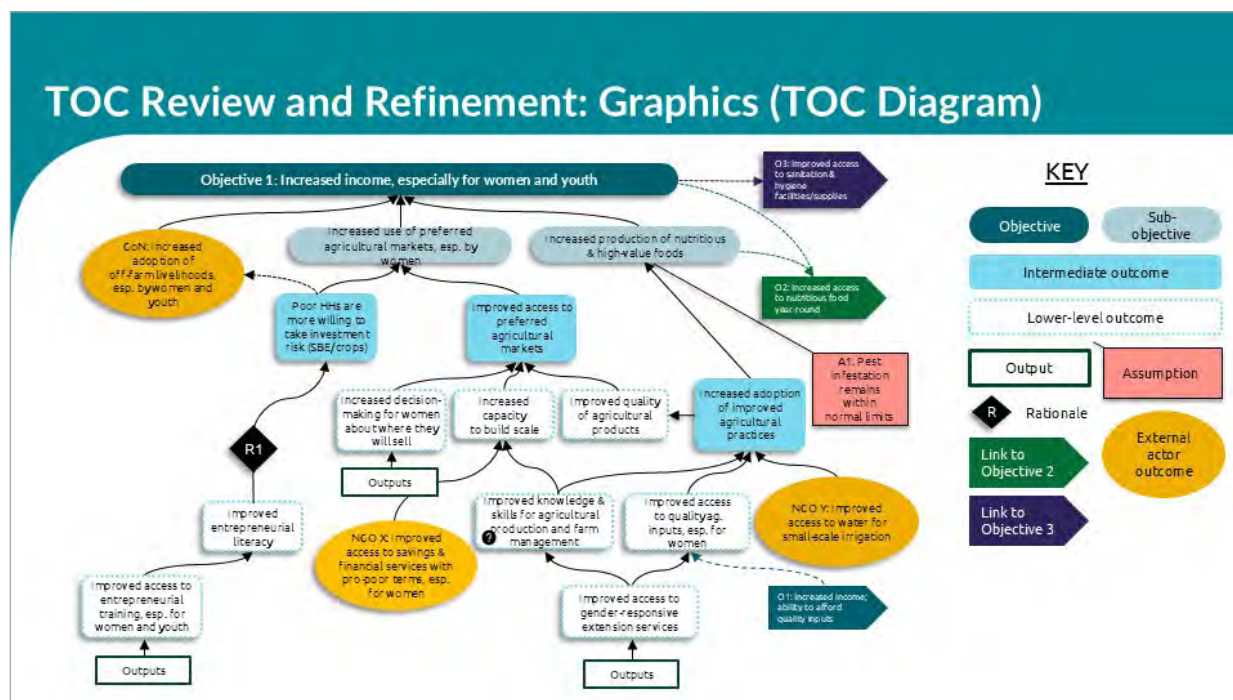
NOTES:

[illegible]



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 31:



We will need to make an effort to make the TOC diagram easy to read for those who have not been as close to the process. We will make sure there is a key to the different colors, shapes, borders, text, and other graphical elements we use to differentiate the TOC components.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 32:

TOC Review and Refinement: Complementary Documentation

Sample Assumptions Matrix

Assumption	Underlying evidence without which the TOC and outcomes may not be achieved	How to monitor & document these assumptions	How to address potential assumptions
Example: The likelihood of the assumption: Existing MCH health insurance has been rolled out in two districts and it is planned to expand it over the country as a priority activity for the next 2 years. Government has already allocated the budget for running the program.	Medium risk. Assumptions will be disrupted from the effective insurance schemes, which may make them more economically vulnerable to managing health risks, however, because of the integration of efforts to improve risk income, and to develop internal ability, it is expected that they will have alternative coping strategies to manage health risk.	Activity will monitor key elements of MCH and MCH workers and budgets via Ministry annual reports.	Staff will be trained with key information before a year of national health survey.
Assumption: Policy will be implemented. For example, government will implement the Social health security policy (Country X) Program.	Report of Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOL) of Country X.	Ministry of Health (MCH) of Country X.	

Sample Rationale Matrix

Rationale/Notes and References	Connection between precondition and outcome
Example: R8. Physical Abuse in Pregnancy increased the risk of Low Birth weight. Valdeson E, Ellsberg M, Pena R, Hogberg U, Persson L. Physical Partner Abuse During Pregnancy: A Risk Factor for Low Birth Weight in Nicaragua. The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists. Vol. 100, No. 4, October 2002.	Reduced prevalence of gender-based violence contributes to increased birthweight.
Physical and Sexual violence against mothers before or during pregnancy, increased risk of under 5 mortality. Monem AA, Pena R, Ellsberg MC, Persson LA. Violence against women increases the risk of infant and child mortality: a case-control study in Nicaragua. Bulletin of World Health Organization 2003; 81: 10-18.	
R1:	
R2:	
R3:	

Sample External Actor Matrix

Outcome or output	Actor	Scale relative to activity coverage	Expected level of collaboration with activity	Timing of when outcome is expected and required	Likelihood of achievement	Risk to the activity if outcome is not realized in time	Monitoring plan

Explanation of how the activity addresses cross-cutting areas: Sample gender matrix

Outcome or Output	USAID Gender Domain Influenced	How activity will address gender considerations
2.3.1 Small farmer knowledge and skills on CSA practices improved	Access to and control over assets and resources;	Ensure equitable participation in farmer's groups (portal for training) for men and women.
2.3.2 Increased HH access to agriculture technology & climate smart inputs	Access to and control over assets and resources; Gender roles, responsibilities and time use.	Promoted technology [specify] shows promising contributions to a decrease in women's time burden. Promoted technologies are adapted to rural women's needs and constraints.
Etc.		

As we develop the TOC, we will also compile our complementary documentation. This documentation allows us to communicate information that is not easily interpreted from the TOC diagram. It is a place for us to share references to evidence that supports the causal logic, to identify external actors responsible for achieving outcomes in the TOC and provide details about their efforts, and to explain and provide evidence for assumptions and rationales.

Although we are discussing complementary documentation as a final step, compiling the information it contains will be an integral part of our TOC development process. As we identify rationales, assumptions, and external actors, we will provide details documenting each of these elements.



BHA GUIDANCE

If you are developing a TOC for a BHA-funded activity, you are expected to support your TOC diagram with complementary documentation. The complementary documentation should not summarize the TOC or include what is already in the TOC diagram—it should provide additional information. Many practitioners find it most efficient to use matrices to convey this information, but it is also possible to provide the text, web links, and references in paragraph form. BHA has no preference as to how you communicate the information, as long as it is clear.



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 33:

TOC Review and Refinement: A Useful Tool for TOC Quality Review

Theory of Change Checklist

A Theory of Change (TOC) must include the following elements or meet the following conditions:		Y	N	Note further actions needed
		e	a	
Diagram Elements ¹				
General				
1.	An overall goal, stated as a completed condition or state.			
2.	All pre-conditions needed to achieve the goal are depicted in the diagram, including: a) Outcomes: Purposes; Sub-purposes; intermediate outcomes b) Outputs: include key outputs from interventions promised in the Award document c) Assumptions: Contextual conditions, outside the activity's scope of influence that are backed by sufficient evidence. See 20-22 for more detail. (There should be no assumptions about participant motivation, openness, willingness, etc. These should be addressed by interventions.) d) Outputs and outcomes produced by other actors. Critical preconditions to pathway achievement that will not be directly realized by the activity.			
3.	Rationales that support the likelihood of connections/changes along a pathway (required when reason for expected change is not clear to readers)			
4.	Integration of cross-cutting areas (i.e., gender, environment, community participation, sustainability, and conflict-sensitivity) a) As a cross-cutting purpose diagram; or b) As represented in the wording of the outcomes and outputs in the diagrams (e.g., "gender-equitable", "climate change sensitive", "inclusive", "conflict-sensitive"); or c) Other representation in diagram			
Pathways				
5.	All elements are portrayed in logical sequence, using directional arrows, showing the causal pathways that follow through from outputs, to outcomes, to the goal.			

One of the last steps in our TOC process will be to check the quality and completeness of our diagram. The Theory of Change Checklist is a tool that can help us do this. It is a summary of all the requirements outlined in BHA's TOC guidance, as well as best practice recommendations compiled from working sessions with implementing partners conducted by the BHA-funded PCS and IDEAL activities.

Once we've completed the quality review and made any necessary refinements, our TOC should be in good shape. This may be the first version of the diagram we use to explain our project's development hypothesis, but it will not be the last.

NOTES:



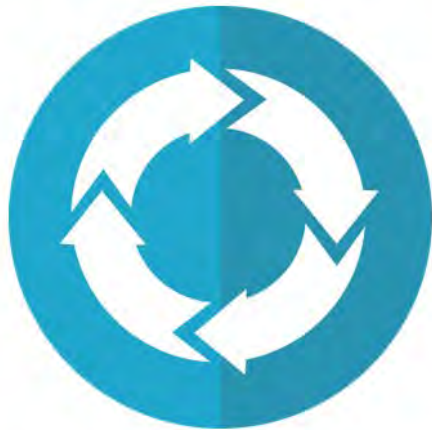
Theory of Change Development (cont.)

SLIDE 34:

TOC Review and Refinement

A TOC is never actually “final.”

It’s an iterative process and a dynamic adaptive management tool that should be updated regularly.



Because the TOC process is iterative, the TOC graphic is a dynamic tool that our country staff will update regularly. As we learn more about the operational context, either through formative research in the first year of our program or operational research during implementation, our team will routinely review and modify the graphic.



CONSIDER: Revisit which team members will be involved in reviewing and refining the TOC and when this step will take place. *Information shared on slide 9.*

Share the date of the team learning session that will precede the TOC review and refinement.

NOTES:



Theory of Change Development (cont.)

Wrap-up



ASK & DISCUSS: What are the key takeaways from this session?

Add explanatory text below as needed.

- A rigorous and comprehensive TOC process is the key to developing a quality TOC product.
- The ongoing multi-step process:
 - » starts with building an evidence base
 - » includes in-depth causal analysis
 - » requires us to focus considerable attention on assumptions and rationales (evidence)
 - » is not limited to what our project can do
 - » is iterative. We will revisit completed steps as new information emerges

Next Steps



CONSIDER: Share the most immediate next steps.

- **Team learning session: Building Our Evidence Base**
- **Prioritize initial data collection needs**
- **Agree on matrices to guide data organization and further prioritize data collection efforts**



TEAM LEARNING SESSION 1:

Building Our Evidence Base

ESTIMATED SESSION LENGTH:

90 minutes

WHEN:

Before beginning any data collection (e.g., desk review or field visits).

Optional: Review session content after the first round of data collection is completed and before data organization and preliminary analysis begins.

WHO:

Team members who will be involved in designing data collection tools, collecting data (desk review or primary research), or analyzing data.

WHY:

- To agree on how the team will prioritize data collection needs for TOC development.
- To agree on the matrices that will guide data organization prior to analysis.

SESSION RESOURCES:

- IDEAL online TOC course: Module 1: Building the Evidence Base
- IDEAL Process Quality Check Booklet:
 - #1 Data Collection
 - #2 Data Organization

PARTICIPANT PREPARATION:

- Read the relevant RFA.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION:

Optional slide modification:

- ☐ 3-4: Modify team timelines and assigned responsibilities.
- ☐ 7-13: Modify using your organization's conceptual framework of choice.
- ☐ 21 & 25: Modify to reflect your organization's existing data organization tool or review the sample IDEAL template and modify to fit your organization's needs.

Exercises and handouts:

- ☐ Identify an area from the RFA that the group can explore in detail for the Tangible/Intangible Resources exercise (slide 12).
- ☐ Printed handouts:
 - ☐ Conceptual framework of choice
 - ☐ Guiding questions for prioritization

Optional content refresher:

- ☐ [IDEAL TOC Development e-course: Module 1](#)

Introduction

Developing a TOC is a multi-step process that begins with a strong evidence base. This base relies on a well-organized, comprehensive understanding of the assets, resources, linkages, motivations, capacities, and needs of societal systems, communities, households, and individuals. A strong evidence base requires focused data collection that allows us to identify context-specific problems, rather than simply relying on generic analyses of the problems of the poor.

Ultimately, the information collected and organized in this step will ensure that the next step of TOC development (problem analysis) is evidence-based.





Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)



PREPARE: Slides 7-13 will need to be adapted to the conceptual framework(s) your organization chooses to use in this process.

There is no single correct choice when selecting the conceptual framework(s) to guide your process. Your organization may prefer a framework that it relies on. A donor may include a specific framework in the RFA. The important thing is that any framework chosen for this exercise is relevant to the broad scope of the proposed project.

For demonstration purposes, this facilitator's guide provides tips using two conceptual frameworks that could be helpful in prioritizing data needs when responding to RFAs for BHA-funded food security activities. They are: (1) the RFS Food Systems Conceptual Framework and (2) the Sustainability and Exit Strategies Conceptual Framework.

To learn more about the components of these frameworks, follow these links:

Food Systems Conceptual Framework

<https://www.fsnnetwork.org/resource/rfs-food-systems-conceptual-framework>

Sustainability and Exit Strategies Framework

<https://www.fantaproject.org/sites/default/files/resources/Exit-Strategies-Synthesis-ExecSummary-Jan2017.pdf>

[Sustaining Development: A Synthesis of Results from a Four-Country Study of Sustainability and Exit Strategies among Development Food Assistance Projects \(fantaproject.org\)](#)

Other conceptual frameworks that may be relevant in developing TOCs for resilience and food security projects include:

[The UNICEF Conceptual Framework on Maternal and Child Nutrition](#)

[The Integrated Behavioral Model for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene](#)

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

Overview and Timeline

SLIDE 1:



Developing a TOC is a multi-step process that begins with a strong evidence base. This base relies on a well-organized, comprehensive understanding of the assets, resources, linkages, motivations, capacities, and needs of societal systems, communities, households, and individuals. A strong evidence base requires focused data collection that allows us to identify context-specific problems, rather than simply relying on generic analyses of the problems of the poor.

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 2:

Building our Evidence Base

Objectives:

- Discuss some conceptual frameworks that can help us prioritize our initial data collection needs;
- Discuss the importance of early and ongoing stakeholder mapping; and
- Introduce the sample matrices we've selected to guide data organization and further prioritize our information needs.

Today we will:

- discuss some conceptual frameworks that can help us prioritize our initial data collection needs;
- discuss the importance of early and ongoing stakeholder mapping; and
- introduce the sample matrices we've selected to guide data organization and further prioritize our information needs.

Ultimately, the information collected and organized in this step of the process will ensure that the next step of TOC development (our problem analysis) is evidence-based.

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 3:

Step 1 Building our Evidence Base																							
	Month 1				Month 2				Month 3					Month 4				Month 5				Month 6	
WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Building the evidence base																							
Problem analysis																							
TOC pathway development (and compilation of complementary documentation)																							
Prioritizing what the activity will address and how																							
TOC review and refinement																							

SLIDE 4:

Building our Evidence Base										
WHAT	WHO	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week
Develop and/or agree on data synthesis and stakeholder mapping templates	Technical leads, M&E, SLA, (4-8 people representing diverse perspectives)									
Enter all secondary information into templates										ONGOING
Identify and prioritize info gaps for primary data collection										
Draft data collection tools & review with team										
Preliminary analysis; draft problem statements based on available data Create high-level basic problem tree based on secondary data										
Vet basic problem tree with full team										
Collect primary data										
Enter primary data into data synthesis and stakeholder templates	E.g., 2-3 person team; M&E staff									



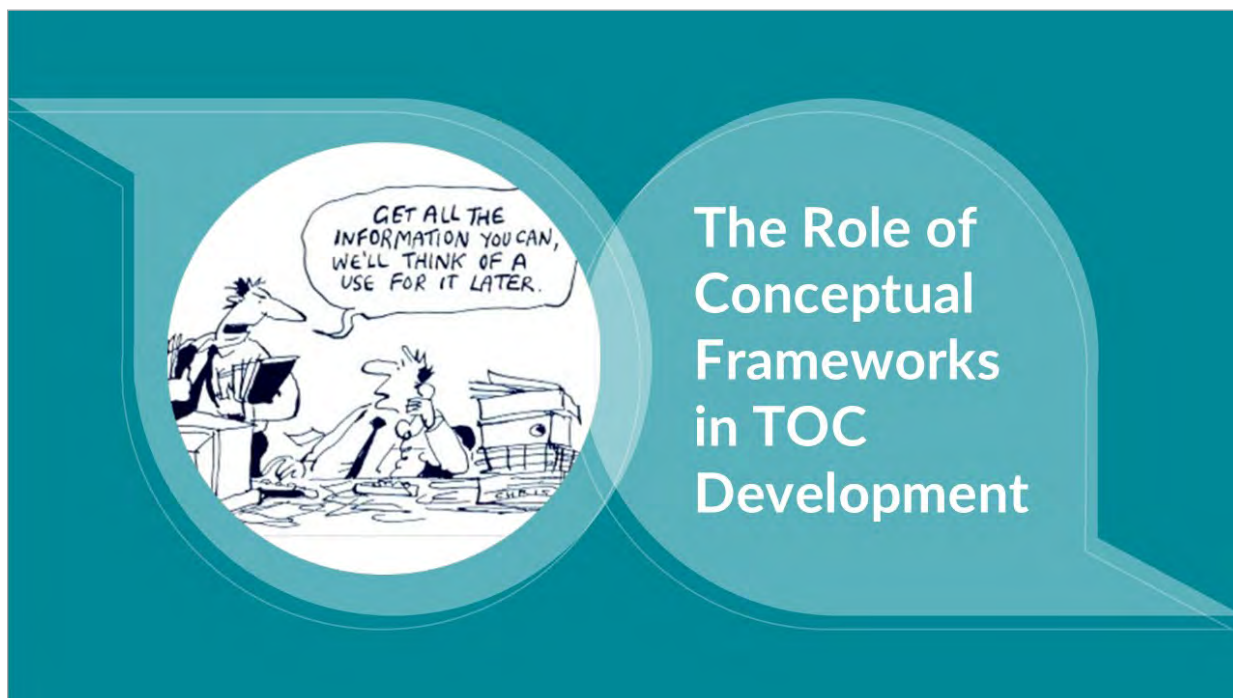
PREPARE: Adapt the slide to your timeline. Offer an outline of steps, deadlines, and who will be involved. Revisit the slide at the end of the session to answer any questions.



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

The Role of Conceptual Frameworks in TOC Development

SLIDE 5:



Often there is so much information available that it is difficult to know what to collect and when to stop. Conceptual frameworks can be particularly useful as a basis for prioritizing data collection efforts. When used well, they help ensure that we collect the right types of information to conduct the thorough causal analysis necessary for TOC development.



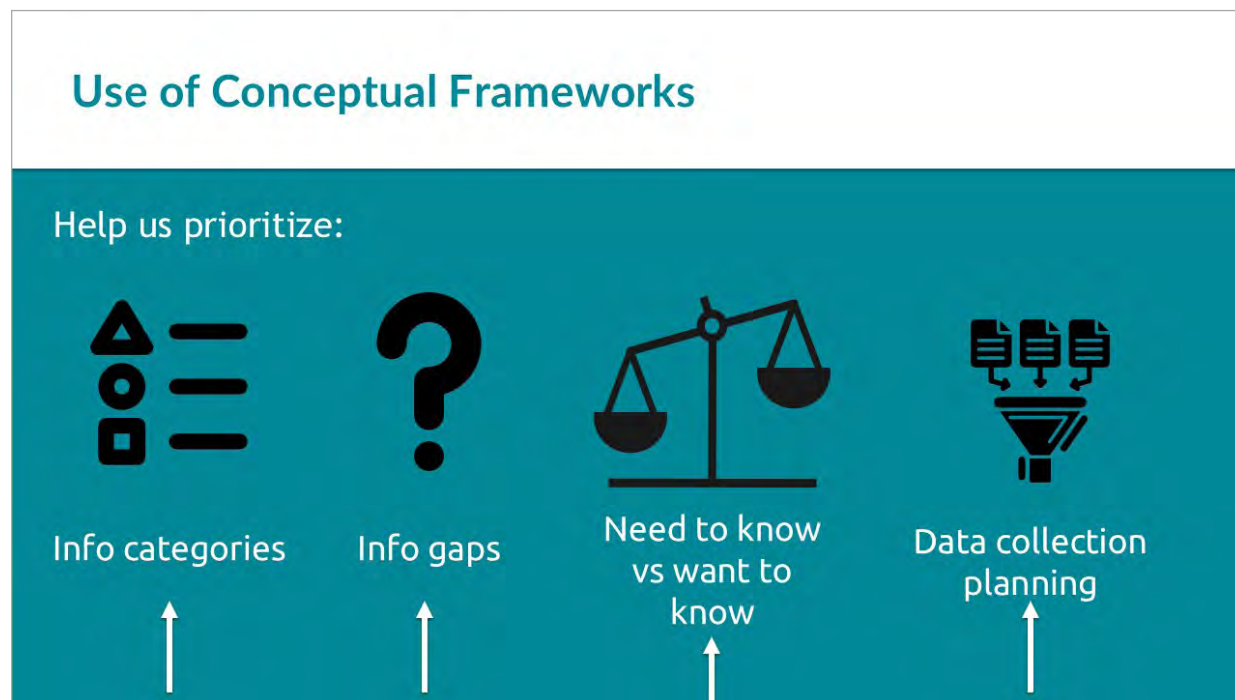
ASK & DISCUSS: Why do you think we need a TOC for our project? Beyond being a donor requirement, why is it important and what purpose will it serve?

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 6:



By first identifying a conceptual framework that is relevant to the project we are designing, and then using components of the framework to create a list of potential information categories, we begin to prioritize the most critical types of information we need to collect. Once we have prioritized information categories, the next step is to identify several key questions within each category.

We can use the same conceptual framework to design data organization matrices, which will help us to:

- systematically document and identify what we do and don't know (information gaps);
- distinguish categories of information we need to know from those we simply want to know; and
- determine what information can be collected through a desk review and what information gaps are better filled through primary data collection.

Ongoing data collection and analysis then helps us fill those gaps so that we can more accurately determine the causal links between problems.



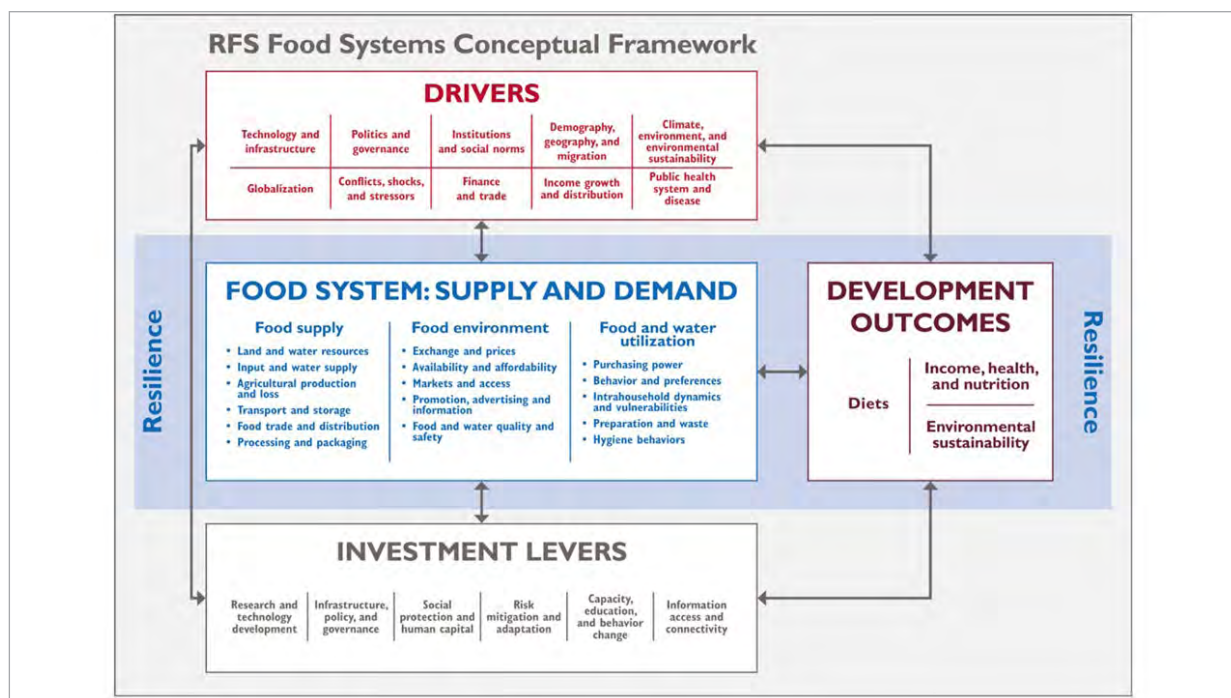
PREPARE: Reminder! Slides 7-13 will need to be adapted to the conceptual framework(s) your organization chooses to use in this process. The following script simulates facilitation using two sample conceptual frameworks.



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 7:

The Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security (REFS) Conceptual Framework*



This framework illustrates how key elements of USAID's work come together as part of the food system, specifically: agriculture-led economic growth, water, nutrition, and resilience.

NOTES:

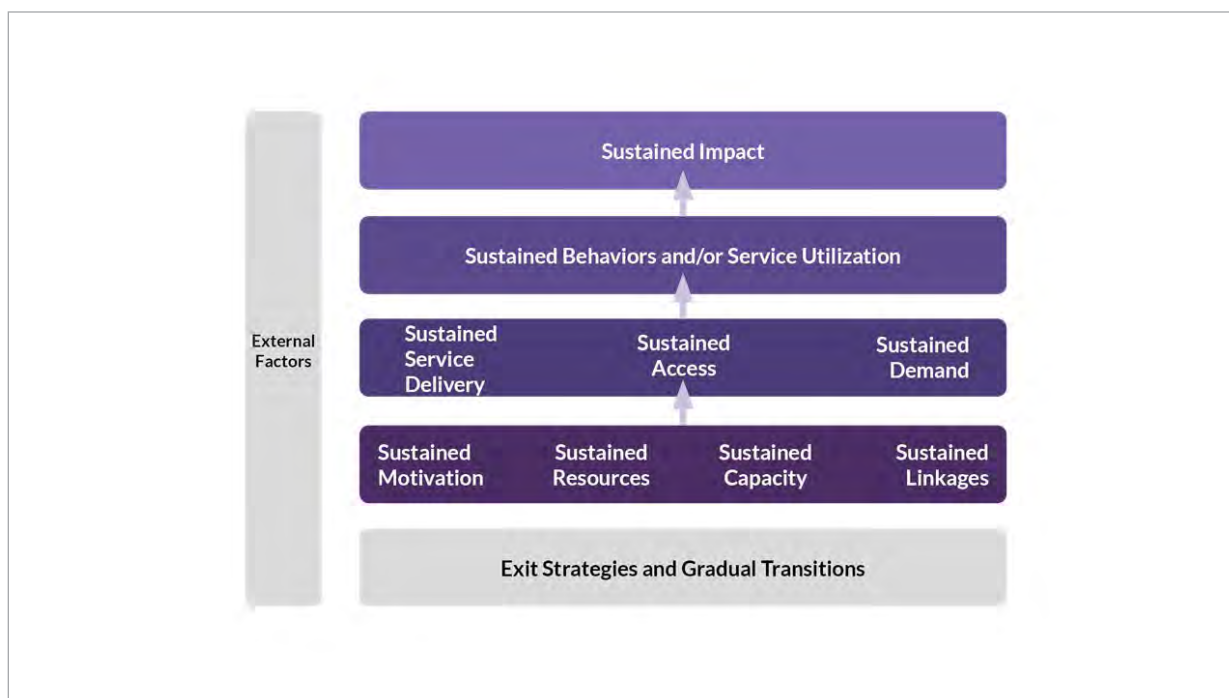
*Formerly known as the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS)



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 8:

Sustainability and Exit Strategies Conceptual Framework



The Sustainability and Exit Strategies Conceptual Framework identifies factors that increase the likelihood of sustained program benefits. It emphasizes “a sustained source of resources, (2) sustained technical and managerial capacity, so that service providers can operate independently of the project, and (3) sustained motivation (of beneficiaries and service providers) that does not rely on project inputs. [A fourth factor] is also central to sustainability in many circumstances: linkages to governmental organizations and/or other entities that can augment resources, refresh capacity, and motivate frontline service providers and beneficiaries to provide and make use of services and continue project-promoted practices.”

NOTES:



Critical Information Categories

SLIDE 9:



PREPARE: Pass out hard copies of the conceptual framework you have chosen to guide the process. As participants look at the hard copies, review the information categories.

We can identify critical information categories by breaking down the components of our chosen conceptual framework.

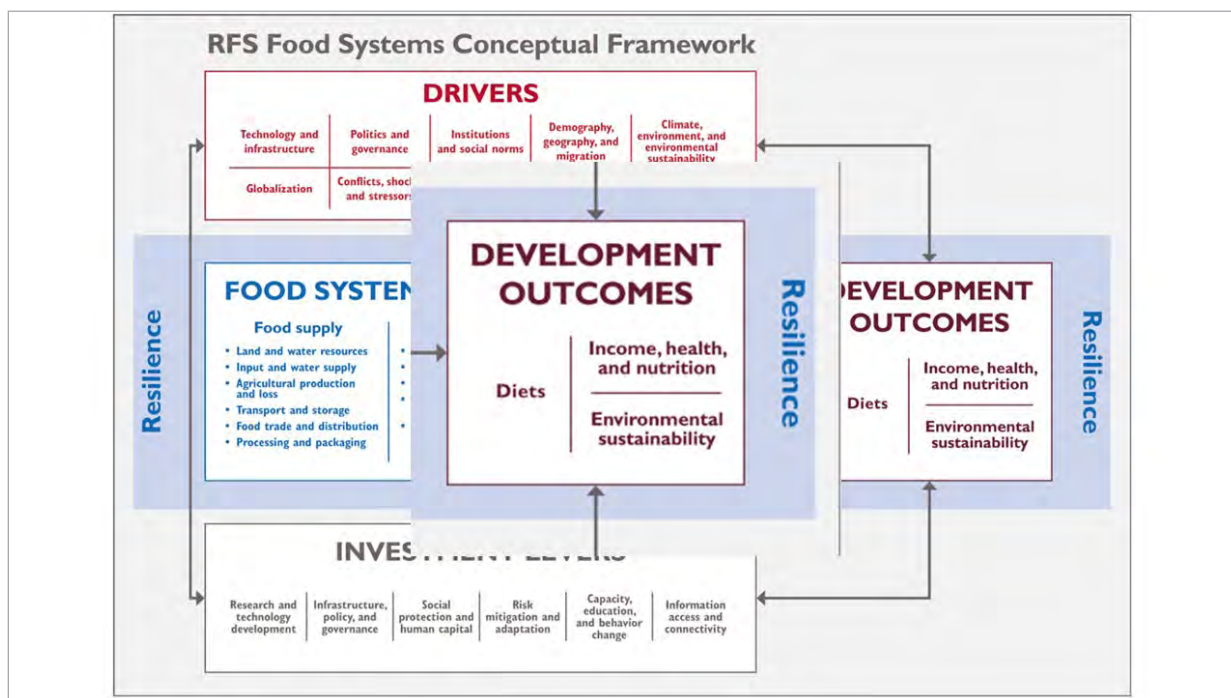
Each information category will have corresponding key questions. Let's start with two information categories that we can often obtain through a desk review.

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 10:



Well-being or development outcomes are a category of information that is often initially obtained through a desk review as opposed to primary data collection. Well-being outcomes are determined by the level of risk exposure of individuals, households, or communities and the strategies they use to adapt.

We can learn how successfully different segments of society are reducing and managing risk by examining well-being outcomes, some of which are shown in this graphic. The prevalence of these outcomes can be key to setting strategic objectives, or sub-purposes, in our TOC. Outcome measures are typically shared in the form of population-based data, and a thorough desk review is a good place for us to start gathering this information.



ASK & DISCUSS: What key questions might help us understand well-being outcomes?

Designate a team member to record the group's input on a flip chart or electronically.

SAMPLE RESPONSES:

What is the current prevalence of food insecurity?

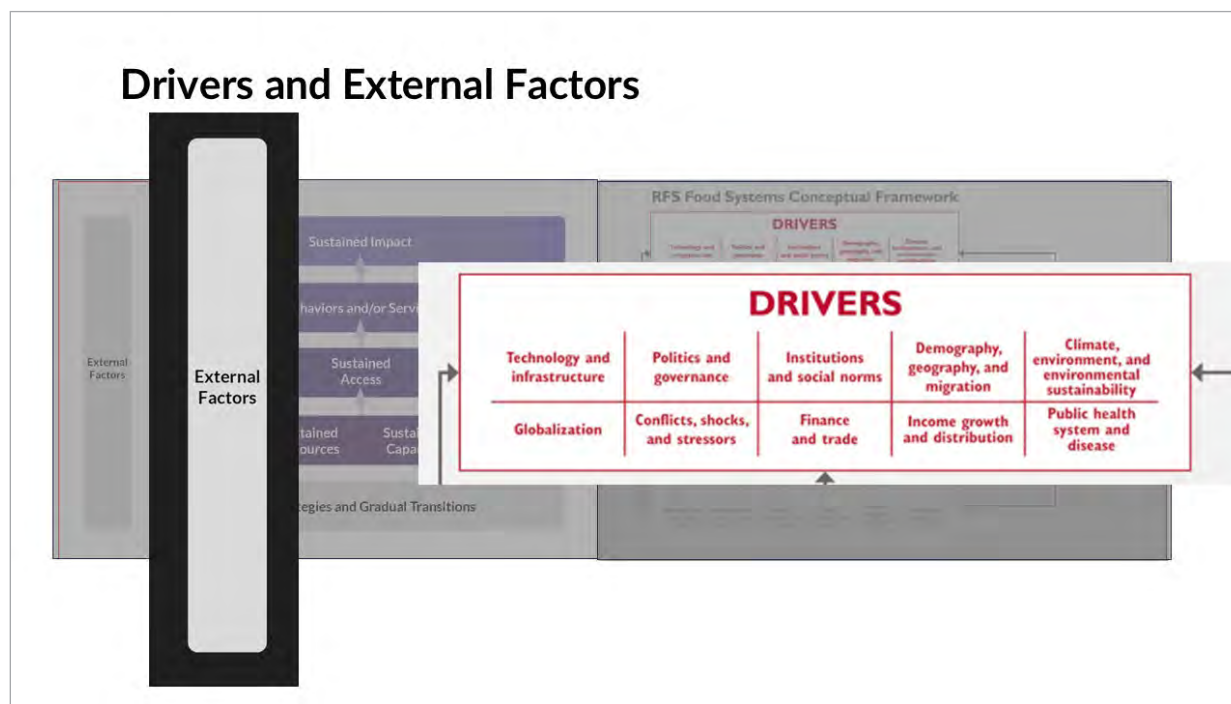
- *Malnutrition?*
- *Illness?*
- *Poverty?*
- *Environmental degradation?*

How do these vary by age? Gender? Ethnicity? Ecological zone? Livelihood zone? Education level? Livelihood group? Household size?



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 11:



Understanding **drivers, or external factors**, is a first step in setting the stage for problem analysis and TOC development. “Drivers represent external forces that impact, and may be impacted by, the food system in both positive and negative ways.”

External factors/drivers include broad social, economic, political, environmental, demographic, historical, and infrastructural trends that influence the choices and behaviors of individuals, households, and communities. We can often obtain initial information on drivers/external factors through a desk review, supplemented as necessary by primary data collection.



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)



ASK & DISCUSS: What key questions might help us understand some of the drivers identified in the RFS framework?

Designate a team member to record the group's input on a flip chart or electronically.

SAMPLE KEY QUESTIONS:

- **Technology and infrastructure:** What is the overall availability and quality of technology, public infrastructure, and services in the target area (roads, electricity, schools, markets, etc.)?
- **Politics and governance:** What laws, regulations, and policies affect people's lives and the food systems on which they depend?
- **Institutions:** What institutions exist? What services do they provide? Who benefits from services and who does not? How well do they work? What is the quality of these services?
- **Social norms:** What social, cultural, gender, or religious norms exist? How do they affect people's access to food? Level of health? Environmental sustainability?
- **Conflict, shocks, and stressors:** What are the most common shocks in the target area? What are the most common long-term stressors? What types of conflicts, shocks and stressors affect the populations of interest? How frequently? Does exposure to shocks vary by age, sex, ethnicity, or other demographic characteristics?
- **Demography, geography, and migration:** What broad trends exist that may affect people's well-being, including seasonal (e.g., pest infestations) geographic, or demographic trends (e.g., migration)?
- **Globalization:** What broad trends related to food supply chains and global food price may affect food availability?
- **Climate, environment, and environmental sustainability:** How have environmental or climatic conditions changed over time?
- **Finance and trade:** What, if any, trade policies affect food imports and exports (e.g., subsidies, tariffs)? What trends exist related to food import dependency?
- **Income growth and distribution:** What are the broad trends in poverty rates and economic growth or decline?
- **Public health system and disease:** What is the overall availability and quality of the public health system? What is the prevalence of disease?

NOTES:



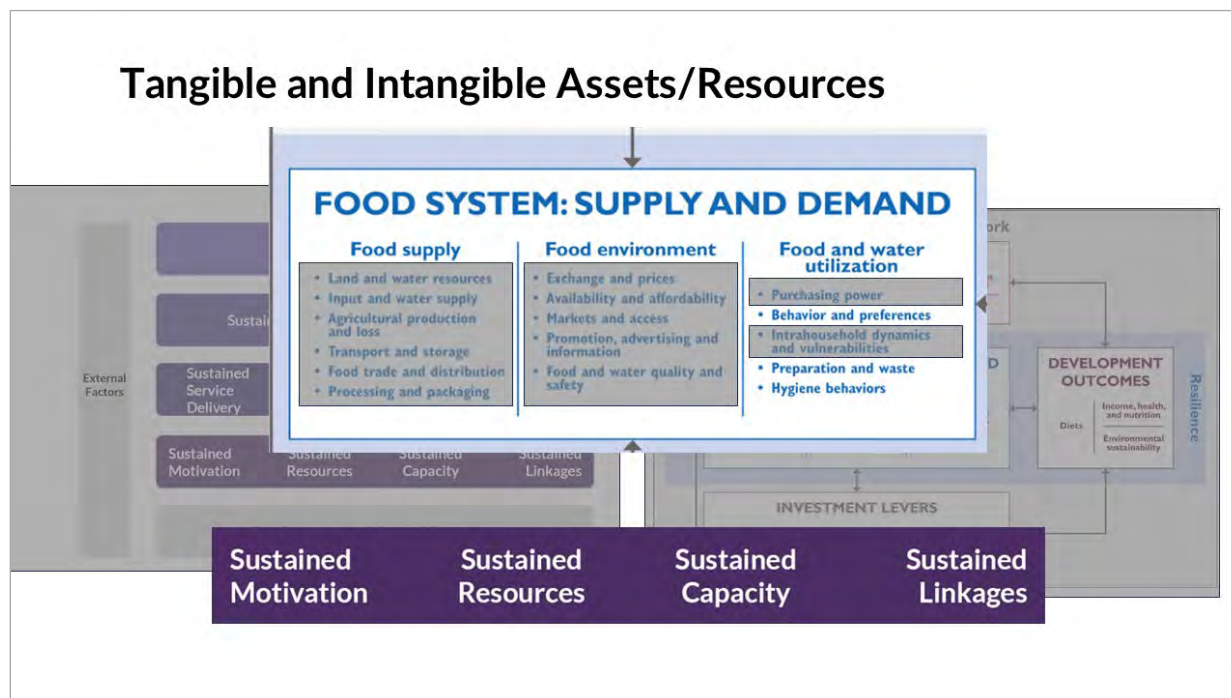
Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)



PREPARE: Reminder! Prior to this session, identify an area from the RFA that the group can explore in detail, e.g., pastoralist livelihoods, urban context, chronic conflict.

The following script simulates facilitation using an example of assets relevant to livestock-dependent livelihoods.

SLIDE 12:



Tangible and intangible resources, also called “assets” or “capital,” shape the extent to which individuals, households, and communities can sustainably meet their needs and manage risks.

Tangible assets include financial, physical, and natural resources. Intangible assets or resources include:

- capacities, skills, and knowledge (sometimes referred to as human capital);
- psychosocial factors, such as attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations; and
- linkages (sometimes referred to as social, human, or political capital).

The ability to adopt and sustain various practices (e.g., recommended dietary diversity, community sanitation, household hygiene, or natural resource management) depends, among other factors, on a sustainable combination of tangible and intangible resources.

Accordingly, understanding what resources different groups (e.g., men, women, youth, older adults, pastoralists, urban dwellers) have access to or possess, and the quality of these resources, is critical to informing TOC development.

We will collect this type of information through a combination of secondary and primary research.



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 13:

Tangible and Intangible Resources

Sample key questions:

- *Which resources do communities, males, females, youth, and other sub-populations have access to?*
- *Who has greatest access? Who has the least access? Why?*
- *What is the quality of those resources? What factors impact their quality?*

The sample questions on the screen are at a high level. We will need to tailor them to address specific areas of interest in more detail.

SAMPLE KEY QUESTIONS:

- *What resources do communities, men, women, youth, and other subpopulations have access to?*
- *Who has the most access? Who has the least access? Why?*
- *What is the quality of those resources? What factors affect their quality?*

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 14:



Small Group Exercise: Tangible and Intangible Resources

Photo Credit: the IDIAL Activity



SMALL GROUP EXERCISE: Tangible and Intangible Resources

OBJECTIVE: To brainstorm priority categories of information related to assets/resources.

PREPARE: Modify the example to make it relevant to the RFA your team is responding to. Participants form small groups.

ASK & DISCUSS: We know that much of the population in the targeted area depends on livestock for their livelihoods. What key questions should we ask about tangible and intangible resources in this context?

Sample responses (to identify tangible and intangible resources/assets for livestock livelihoods):

- *Who (men, women, youth, wealth groups, other distinct populations) has the most access to livestock in a community? Who has the least access? Why? (tangible)*
- *Who has access to veterinary inputs? Who does not? Why? (tangible)*
- *How does livestock health vary among different populations? (tangible: quality of resources).*
- *Who has access to grazing land and who does not? Why? (tangible)*
- *Are financial services available to smallholder livestock owners? (tangible)*
- *How does access to water for livestock vary among different populations? (tangible)*
- *To what extent are livestock owners aware of basic good animal health practices? (intangible: knowledge/skills)*



- PLENARY SHARING AND DISCUSSION:** Small groups share and compare key questions. Discuss why participants believe the suggested questions are or are not priority information categories. Did groups remember to include questions about intangible assets in addition to tangible assets?

NOTES:

THEORY OF CHANGE: A FACILITATOR'S GUIDE FOR PROGRAM DESIGN



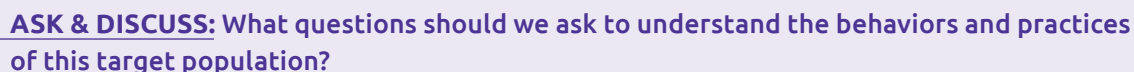
Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 15:



Finally, priority information includes that which allows our team to understand the behaviors, practices, and overall strategies that individuals, households, and communities use to improve their well-being. This includes livelihood strategies, risk management strategies, coping strategies, and decisions about how to use different resources.

Some of this information can be gathered through a desk review (especially if your organization has recently been working in the target area), but to specifically understand what most influences people's behaviors, we will most likely gather this information through primary research, including but not limited to community consultations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and other participatory research methods.



SAMPLE RESPONSES:

- *How do people in the target area make a living?*
- *What opportunities are available to specific populations (e.g., women, youth, people with disabilities)?*
- *What strategies do specific populations use to avoid or reduce exposure to risk?*
- *How do they cope with the effects of shocks and stressors?*
- *Do people make proactive and informed decisions that allow for effective responses to changing environmental, climatic, social, political, and economic conditions? Why or why not? What, if any, norms influence these choices?*
- *What behavioral choices do people make to improve their overall well-being (e.g., food choices, marriage, education, diversification, hygiene, sanitation investment, food preparation, resource management)? What influences their choices (e.g., norms, attitudes, beliefs, assets)?*
- *What motivates different populations to continue positive behaviors?*

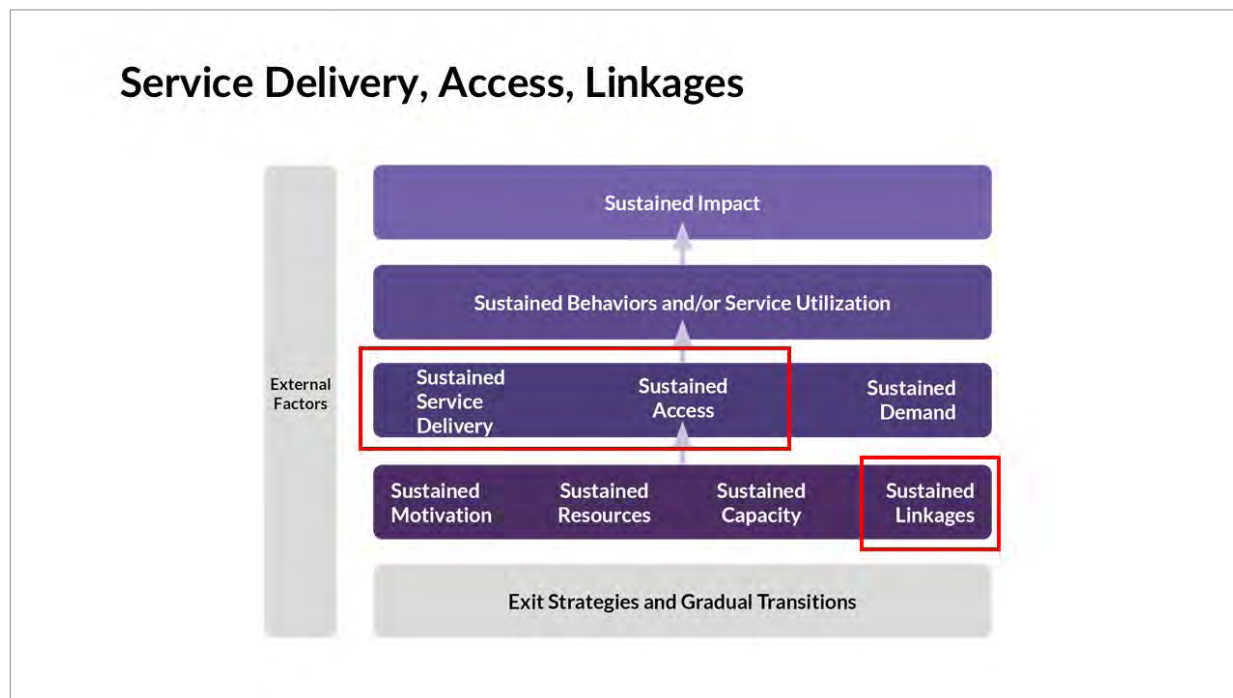
NOTES:

[illegible]



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 16:



As shown in the Sustainability and Exit Strategies Conceptual Framework, sustained service delivery, access, and linkages will be critical to sustained adoption of behaviors, practices, and strategies.

Demonstrating how our efforts will layer and integrate with those of other actors operating in the same area will strengthen our TOC.



BHA GUIDANCE

TOCs for BHA-funded activities are not limited to the work of one organization or consortium.



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)



EXERCISE: External Actor Efforts

OBJECTIVE: To brainstorm key questions to identify the existing efforts of other actors.

PREPARE: Place 2-4 flip chart pages on the wall with a set of markers near each chart.

Participants form small groups near each flip chart.

ASK: What questions should we ask to understand the existing efforts of other actors?

Participants write their ideas on the first flip chart, then rotate every 3-4 minutes to look at the other flip charts. Place a star by each question they agree with, an X next to each question they disagree with, and a question mark next to each question that is unclear.

Sample responses:

- *What actors (e.g., government, local NGO, international NGO, United Nations, community-based organization, private business) are implementing activities to improve food security or resilience?*
- *What is the project lifespan of these efforts? Who are the target participants?*
- *How successful have the activities been? Is there local buy-in for these efforts? Why or why not? What contributes to activities that are considered ineffective?*
- *To what extent are these actors coordinating with similar projects implemented by other stakeholders?*

DISCUSS: Conduct brief check-ins on elements that stand out, such as questions with many stars. If time permits, clarify areas of disagreement or ambiguity.

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)



PREPARE: Reminder! Prior to this session, identify your organization's preferred stakeholder mapping template or modify/use the [IDEAL sample](#)

SLIDE 17:

Technical Area	Name of agency / Contact info	Type of agency	Scope of assistance (time)	Scope of assistance (geographic)	Scope of assistance (beneficiaries)	Successful interventions / & why	Unsuccessful interventions / & why	Relationship with other stakeholders
Component: Health and nutrition								
WASH								
Prevention & treatment of childhood illnesses								
Nutrition services								
Component: Agriculture and livelihoods								
Post-harvest loss								
Natural resource management								
Seed distribution								
Market linkages								

Stakeholder templates are a way to track the existing efforts of many types of other actors, such as national and local government agencies, NGOs, UN agencies, or community-based organizations.

We can use key thematic areas from our conceptual framework and themes that emerge from our desk review to outline areas of interest, such as the sectoral themes shared in the left column of the sample template.

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 18:

Exercise: Stakeholder Mapping

The stakeholder mapping effort should include:

- All types of agencies (relevant to key thematic areas), even those we do not anticipate forming partnerships with. (Left side of the room)
- Only the agencies our project is considering for partnerships. (Right side of the room)

SLIDE 19:

Exercise: Stakeholder Mapping

The stakeholder mapping effort should include:

- only the types of services (relevant to key thematic areas) that our project will likely also provide (left),
- only the services (relevant to key thematic areas) that our project does not expect to provide (center),
- all types of services (relevant to key thematic areas), that each stakeholder currently provides (right).



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)



EXERCISE: Stakeholder Mapping

OBJECTIVE: To reinforce concepts important to stakeholder mapping.

SLIDE 18:

PREPARE: Ask participants to move to the left or right side of the room based on their response.

Stakeholder mapping should include:

- (left side) all types of agencies (relevant to key thematic areas), even those we do not expect to partner with *CORRECT*
- (right side) only those agencies with which our project is considering partnerships

Answer feedback:

In order to build a case for assistance and prioritize what our project will implement, we need to develop a comprehensive picture of what support exists and what is needed.

Therefore, it is important to include all types of agencies in the stakeholder template, even if we do not anticipate partnering with them.

SLIDE 19:

PREPARE: Ask participants to move to the left, center, or right side of the room based on their response.

Stakeholder mapping should include:

- (left side) only the types of services (relevant to key thematic areas) that our project is also likely to provide
- (center) only the services (relevant to key thematic areas) that our project is not expected to provide
- (right side) all types of services (relevant to key thematic areas) that each stakeholder currently provides *CORRECT*

Answer feedback:

In order to emphasize complementarity and collective efforts to achieve our project goal, it is important to include all types of activities, even if we do not intend to implement similar activities.



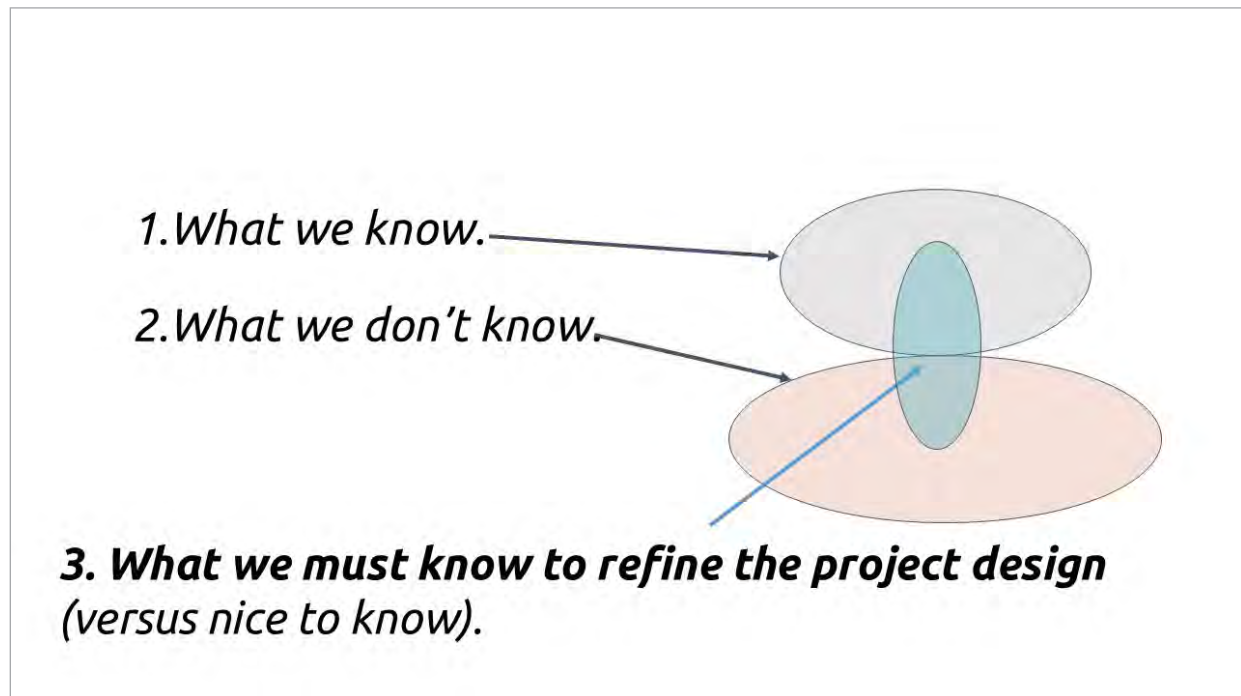
CONSIDER: If you are planning a break in the session, this is an optimal time because the conversation now shifts from all the types of questions we could ask to prioritizing the questions we need to ask.

To lay the groundwork for the next conversation about prioritization, give the group time to walk around the room, gallery style, to broadly review all the questions recorded on the flip charts during the previous discussions. Display all electronically recorded questions on the screen.



Prioritizing Information Needs

SLIDE 20:



After using a conceptual framework to prioritize information categories and brainstorming potential key questions that can inform each category, we need to go back and prioritize the key questions.

This amounts to:

- taking a critical look at what we need to know to design an effective project; and
- reconsidering what might simply be “nice to know.”

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 21:

Using a Matrix to Organize and Prioritize our Information Needs			
Key information categories	Sub-categories	Key Questions (incomplete example)	Research Justification: explain why this knowledge essential to: <i>confirming that the challenges we assume are present, actually are present; or understanding existing strengths and capacities that we can build on; or identifying strategic stakeholders to engage for long-term sustainability of input or service provision; or understanding why distinct populations engage in various behaviors and what motivates them to sustain desired behaviors; or identifying the most appropriate interventions for distinct populations; or prioritizing the most effective suite of interventions; or identifying the best timing for an intervention.</i>
Tangible/ intangible assets	Asset (e.g. livestock)	Who (males, females, youth, wealth groups, other distinct populations) has greatest access to livestock in a community? Who has the least access? Why?	
	Asset quality	How does livestock health vary among different populations?	
	Natural resources	Who does and does not have access to land for grazing? Why?	
		How does water access for livestock vary among different populations?	
	Inputs	Who has access to veterinary inputs? Who does not? Why?	
	Financial	Are financing services available for smallholder livestock owners? Does access vary by herd size?	
	Knowledge/ skill	To what extent are livestock owners aware of basic good practice for animal health? Variances by herd size?	
	Attitudes / beliefs	How, if at all, do local beliefs influence animal health choices?	



PREPARE: Modify slide to align to your organization's preferred tool(s).

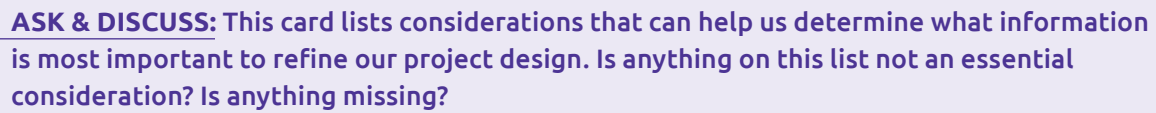
A matrix can help us organize and prioritize our information needs. For example, we can list all the key areas of inquiry highlighted in our conceptual framework in one column, all relevant subcategories in a second column, proposed key questions in a third column, and a research justification in a fourth column.

Articulating the **research justification** is a critical step in prioritizing the data we will collect. It helps us agree on whether the question is truly a “need to know” information gap versus a “nice to know” gap. If it is not a “need to know,” it is best to eliminate the question from our long list of information needs.

Reducing the number of information gaps requires careful consideration of what type of information has the most potential to influence project design and implementation decisions.



PREPARE: Before the discussion, distribute the guiding questions (see sample card below).



GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PRIORITIZING INFORMATION GAPS

- *confirm the existence of identified challenges or strengths (i.e., validating assumptions)?*
- *contextualize information that is only available at a national or regional level?*
- *understand existing strengths and capacities that we can build on?*
- *identify strategic stakeholders to engage for long-term sustainability of input or service provision?*
- *understand why distinct populations engage in certain behaviors and what*
- *motivates them to sustain desired behaviors?*
- *identify the most appropriate interventions for specific populations?*
- *narrow the project design down to the most effective suite of interventions?*
- *determine the best timing for an intervention?*

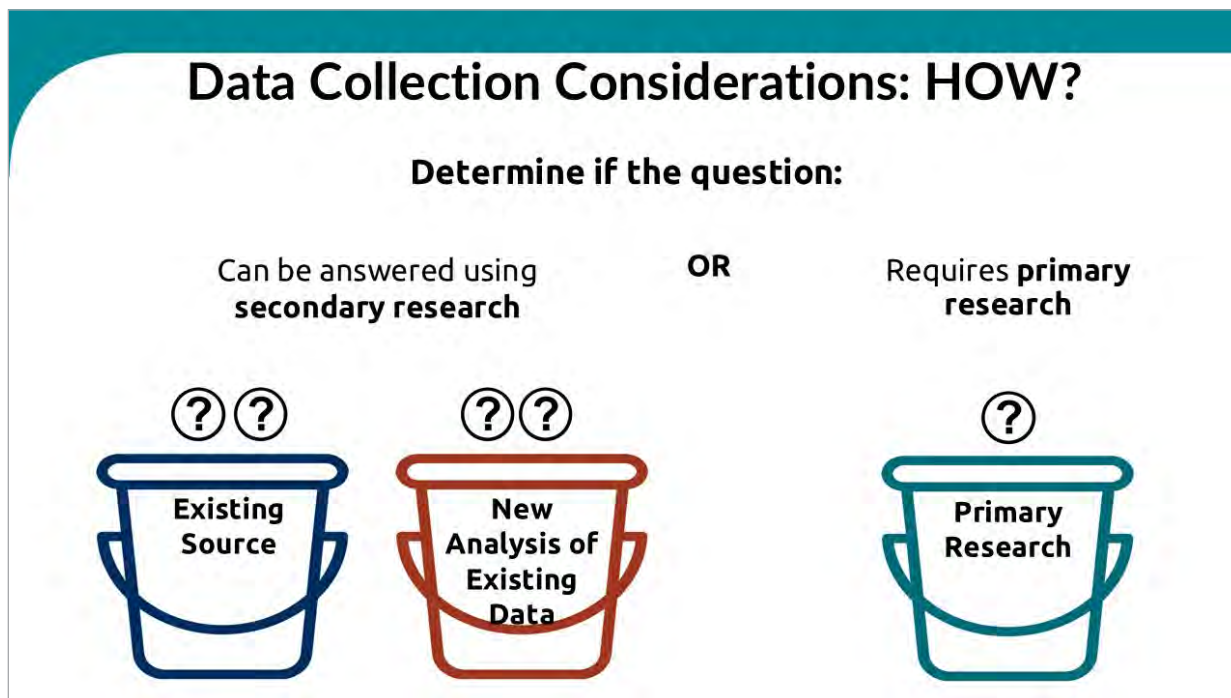
[illegible]



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

Collecting, Organizing, and Analyzing Data

SLIDE 22:



Once we have prioritized our “need to know” questions that will inform the development of the TOC, we need to reach preliminary agreement on HOW each information gap can be filled and by whom.

For example, can a desk review provide the necessary information, or do we need to conduct primary research? We should always try to identify what information may already exist through secondary sources before planning primary data collection. This saves time and resources and is generally considered best practice.

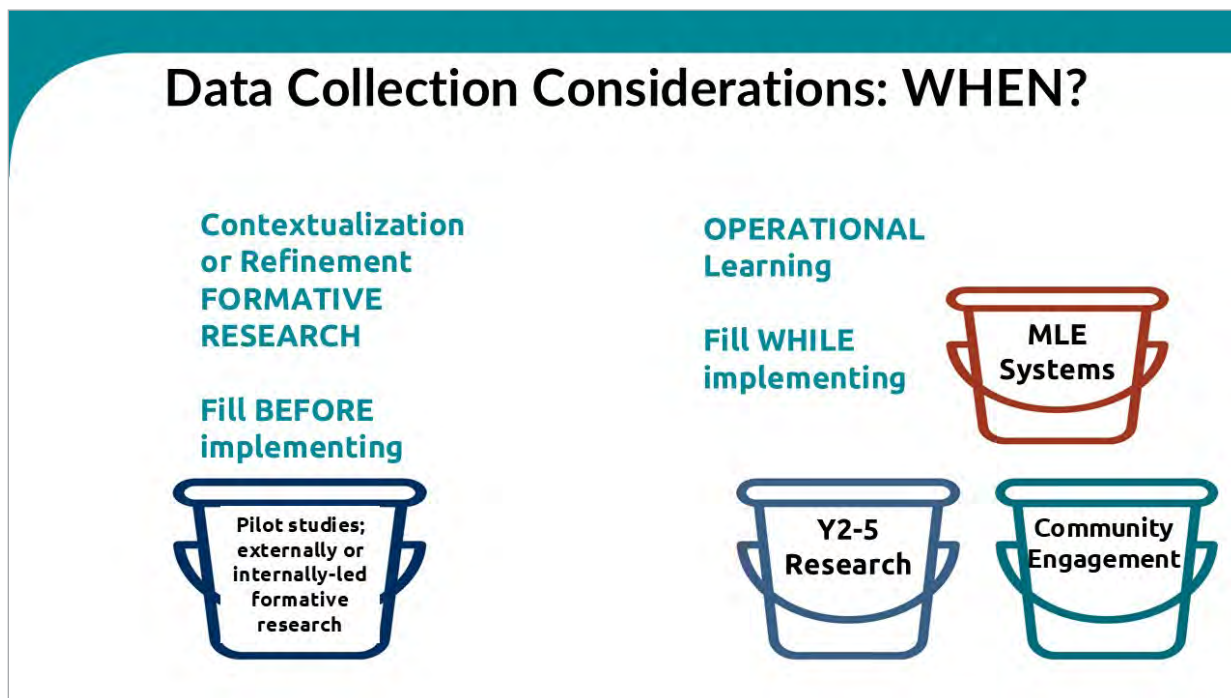
In addition to traditional desk reviews, which rely on the findings of others, we often have access to existing data sets that can be analyzed in new ways to fill our information gaps. This is another form of secondary research.

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 23:



Another important consideration is when is the most appropriate time to fill the information gaps.

It is okay and even encouraged to mark areas in our TOC that are still questions. This shows that we are already thinking about a learning agenda that will help us contextualize and refine the proposed design.



CONSIDERATION FOR BHA-FUNDED ACTIVITIES

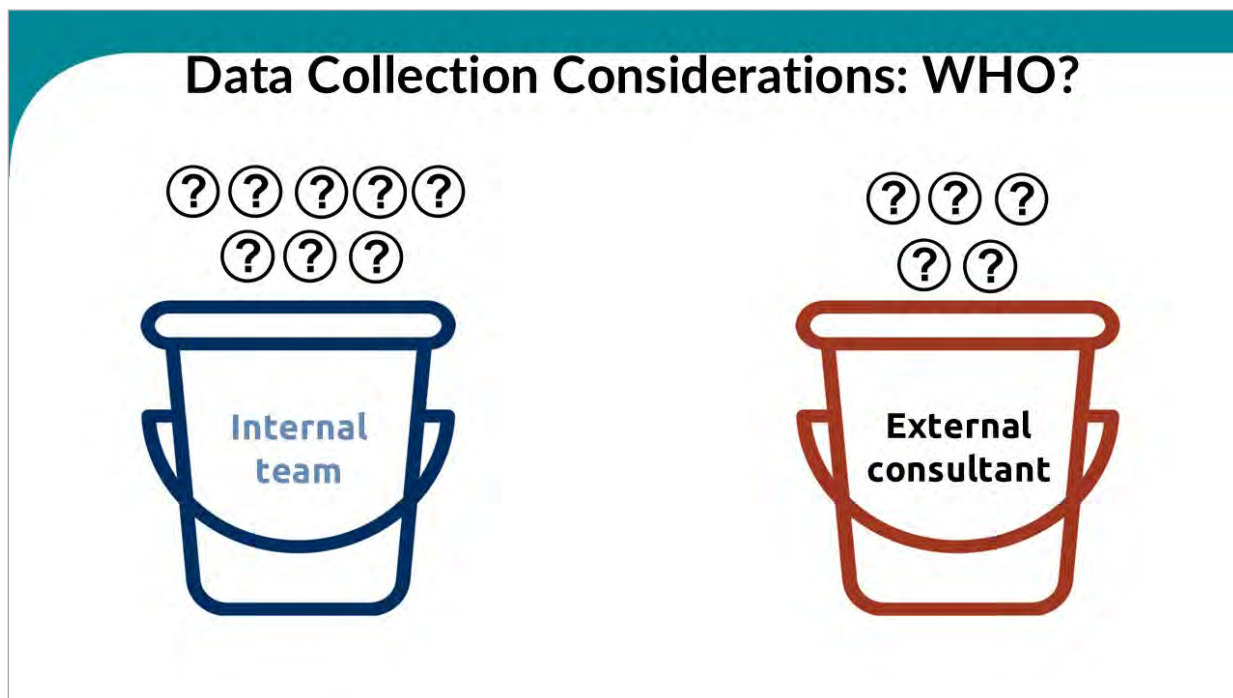
Currently, most BHA-funded development activities begin with a refinement or contextualization period, the purpose of which is to learn as much as possible about the operating context in the first year and to use that information to refine the activity design.

Some of the questions we consider critical to informing our TOC can be more effectively answered during this refinement period.



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 24:



Finally, another important consideration is whether our internal team can carry out the learning effort or whether we need to hire a specialized research consultant.

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 25:

Evolving Information Gap Matrix						
Key information categories	Sub-categories	Key Questions (incomplete example)	Research Justification: i.e., Why do we need to know this? / How will findings be used/applied?	Methodology	Timing of data collection (e.g., pre-application or post-award contextualization period)	Who is responsible for collecting data? (e.g., internal team or external consultant)
Tangible/ intangible assets		Who (males, females, youth, wealth groups, other distinct populations) has greatest access to livestock in a community? Who has the least access? Why?		Desk review		
	Asset (e.g. livestock)	How does livestock health vary among different populations?		Desk review		
	Asset quality	Who does and does not have access to land for grazing? Why?		Desk review/ primary		
	Natural resources	How does water access for livestock vary among different populations?		Desk review		
	Inputs	Who has access to veterinary inputs? Who does not? Why?		Desk review/ primary		
	Financial	Are financing services available for smallholder livestock owners? Does access vary by herd size?				
	Knowledge/ skill	To what extent are livestock owners aware of basic good practice for animal health? Variances by herd size?		Primary research		
	Attitudes / beliefs	How, if at all, do local beliefs influence animal health choices?		Primary research		

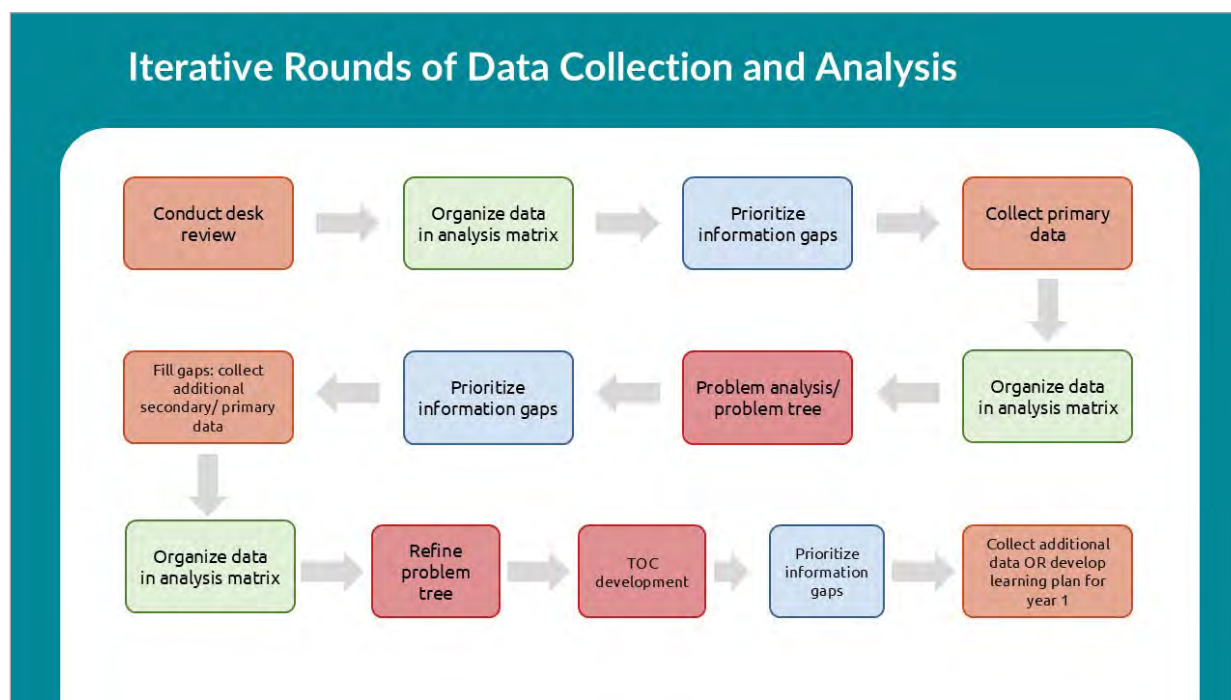
Let's add a few columns to our existing matrix that list the most likely methodology, the preferred timing of data collection, and the candidates for collecting the information.

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

SLIDE 26:



Once data collection begins, we'll use an iterative process of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data, prioritizing remaining information gaps and collecting information to fill those gaps.

NOTES:



Building Our Evidence Base (cont.)

Wrap-up



ASK & DISCUSS: What are the key takeaways from this session?

Use the possible key takeaways below to guide the discussion, as needed.

A strong evidence base:

- is the foundation for a quality TOC; and
- requires iterative prioritization of data collection efforts.

Conceptual frameworks are useful tools for:

- prioritizing and planning data collection efforts;
- organizing data to identify what we know and don't know (information gaps); and
- organizing data by key themes to facilitate interpretation.

Next Steps



CONSIDER: Share next steps.

- **Prioritize initial data collection needs**
 - » Need to know vs. want to know
 - » Primary vs. secondary research
 - » Pre-award vs. post-award data collection
 - » Data collection by internal team or external consultant
- **Outline timeline for desk review**
- **Finalize primary data collection tools and data organization matrices**



TEAM LEARNING SESSION 2:

Problem Analysis

ESTIMATED SESSION LENGTH:

90 minutes

WHEN:

Once the initial round of primary and secondary data is collected and entered into a synthesis matrix.

WHO:

8-20 people representing diverse perspectives (e.g., country office staff (if relevant), technical leads, M&E, learning advisors, new business development).

WHY:

To emphasize the importance of using a problem tree as the foundation for our project's TOC.

To agree on how the team will:

- use our evidence base to develop a problem tree;
- use causal analysis to explore cause-and-effect pathways, including cross-causal linkages; and
- document and prioritize remaining information gaps.

SESSION RESOURCES:

- IDEAL PPT 2: Problem Analysis
- IDEAL Process Quality Check Booklet: #3: Problem Analysis

PARTICIPANT PREPARATION:

- Read relevant RFA.
- Review findings from data capture.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION:

Optional slide modification:

- ☐ 3 & 4: TOC development timeline and workplan
- ☐ 7 & 8: Articulate the overarching problem
- ☐ 21-22: Priority learning areas
- ☐ 24: Next steps

Exercises and handouts:

- ☐ Societal layers of underlying causes:
Prepare flip chart headers.
- ☐ Handout: Next steps

Optional content refresher:

- ☐ [IDEAL TOC Development e-course: Module 2](#)

Introduction

In this team session, we'll discuss plans for organizing our evidence into a problem tree—a diagram that shows cause-and-effect pathways. Problem trees are a way for us to explore the challenges faced by target populations and how they intersect. They can help us test our assumptions about why various problems exist. This method is very effective and efficient for TOC development because if we take the time to thoughtfully map causal streams that show how problematic conditions are linked, we can then “flip” the tree to positive results statements. The result is a series of incremental outcomes organized into pathways of change—in other words, a sequential representation of how we expect change to occur. We'll learn more about this “flipping” process in a future session.

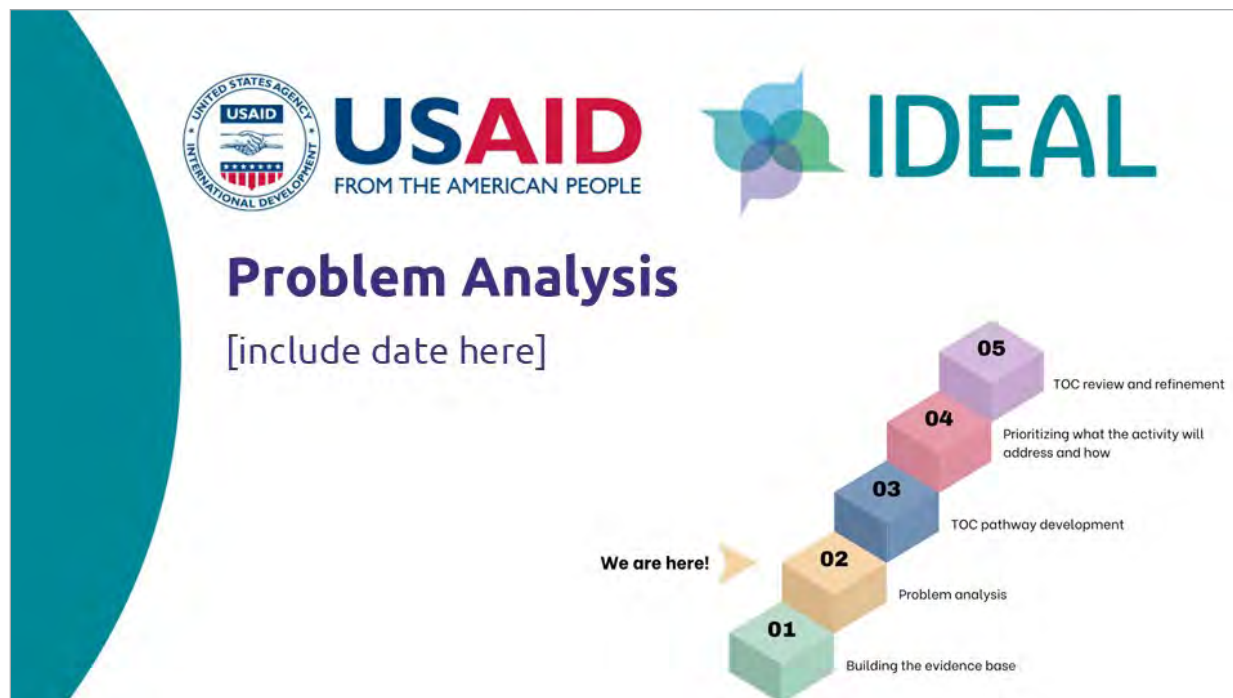




Problem Analysis (cont.)

Overview and Timeline

SLIDE 1:



ASK & DISCUSS: Why is problem analysis critical to project design?

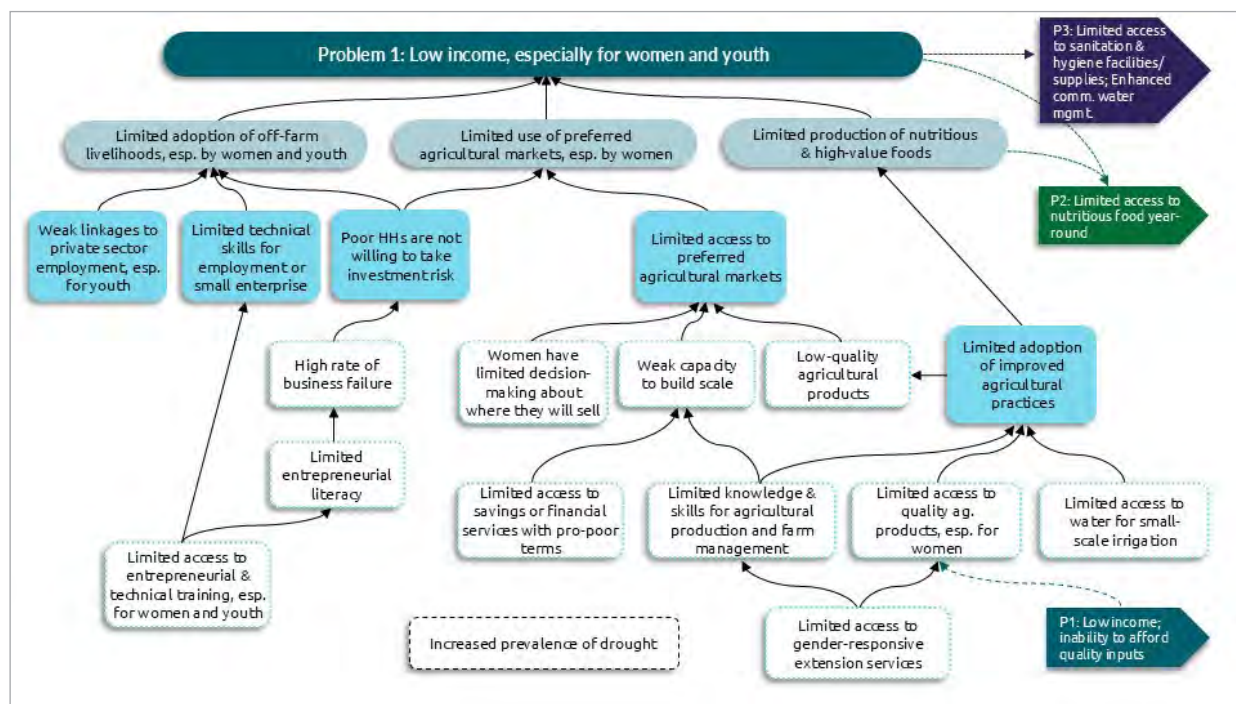
Before diving into project design and proposing activities, it is critical to understand what we do and do not know about why each of the evidence-based problems exists. Populations around the world may face similar challenges, such as low agricultural productivity or poor WASH conditions, but the reasons why these challenges exist will vary by context, as will the likelihood that any change in these conditions will be sustainable.

Problem analysis helps us understand the root causes for each focus area so that we can design an activity that addresses them in a contextually appropriate way. We cannot fix the problem (the symptoms) without addressing the cause (the disease). Multiple causes will emerge during this process. Problem analysis can help us prioritize the most limiting factors so that we can focus our efforts on those more likely to produce transformative, sustainable change.



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 2:



Food and nutrition security outcomes are typically multifaceted and much more complex than a simple, linear cause-and-effect stream. Simple, linear models rarely allow for rigorous problem analysis—the most critical (and often overlooked) element of project design. A more effective way to organize problems and causes is to create a problem tree.

Well-designed problem trees represent a systems-thinking approach to cause-and-effect analysis and, in this light, are extremely useful in the TOC process because they help us identify multiple causal linkages. Understanding multiple causes allows us to design layered interventions and explore in depth what may contribute to or limit sustainable change.

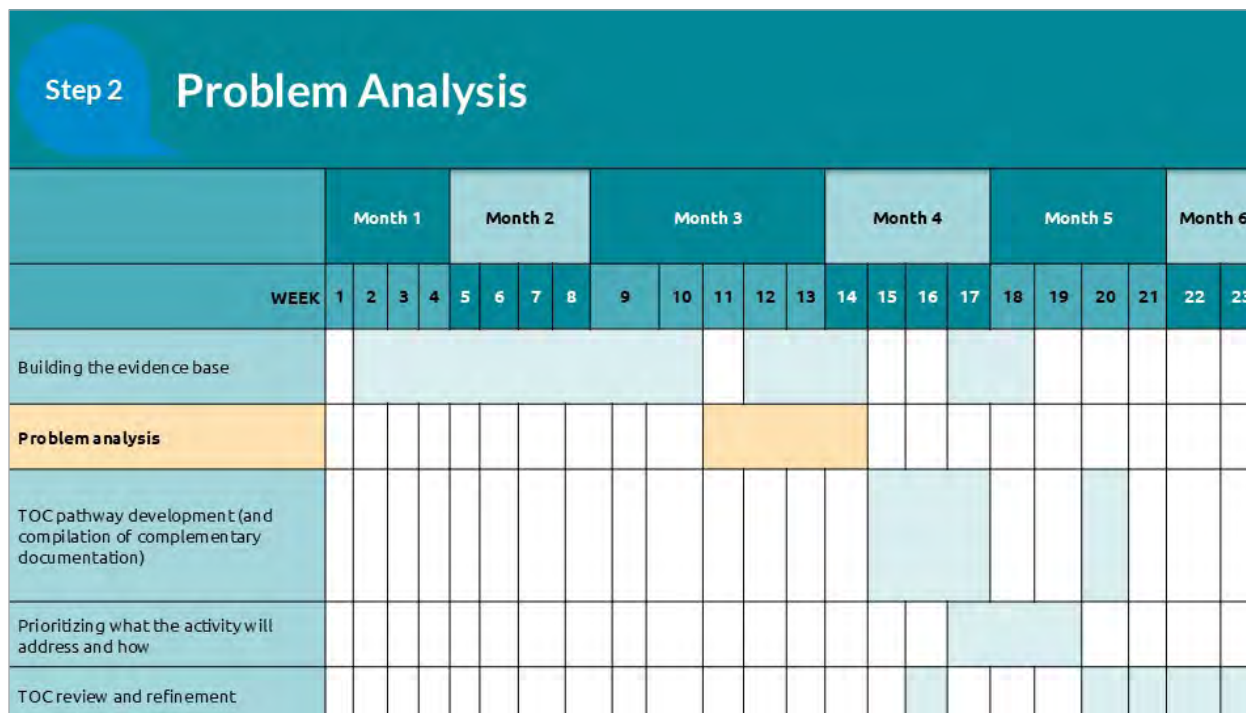
A systems thinking approach also facilitates the design and implementation of integrated programming. Integrated programming refers to a sector-neutral or cross-sectoral approach in which sectors and stakeholders use complementary strategies to address common problems. It's a “we’re in this together” methodology. We all know the value that BHA and other donors place on integrated and layered interventions.

NOTES:



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 3:



PREPARE: Modify slide to fit your organization's timeline. Provide an overview of deadlines and who will be involved. Revisit this at the end of the session for questions.

As shown in this timeline, our problem analysis will build on the evidence base we've established. Note that more than half of the time devoted to our TOC process is spent building the evidence base and conducting the problem analysis!

Many practitioners have stories of rushing through the problem tree exercise during the activity design process, only to end up with a TOC with weak and confusing pathways. Let's learn from their mistakes and allow enough time for a thorough and systematic problem analysis.

Our work plan shows that the process is highly iterative, with additional data capture taking place during the problem analysis stage. We'll return to this later in the session, but first let's examine these steps in more detail.

NOTES:



Workplan for Problem Tree Development, Validation, and Refinement

NOTES:

THEORY OF CHANGE: A FACILITATOR'S GUIDE FOR PROGRAM DESIGN



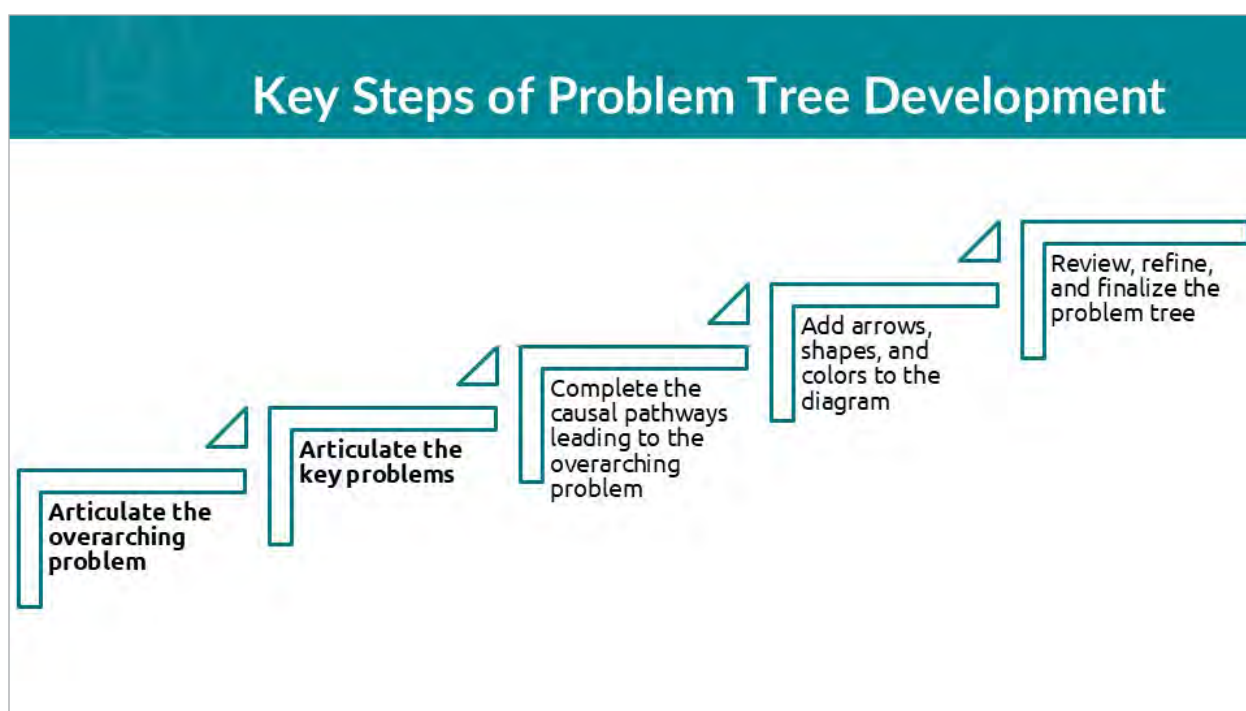
Problem Analysis (cont.)

The Process of Problem Tree Development

SLIDE 5:



SLIDE 6:



Let's review each of these steps in detail.



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 7:

Chronic food insecurity continues to plague [Country X]. About 1.9 million people in rural areas will need food assistance during the next hunger season, comprising approximately 22 percent of the total rural population. Districts A and B recorded the highest food insecurity prevalence in the most recent vulnerability assessment. Although the availability of food throughout has improved, chronic malnutrition rates remain high.

The program development objective is to sustainably increase food and nutrition security among the extreme poor and vulnerable populations in [Country X].

Chronic food and nutrition insecurity



PREPARE: If desired, adapt slides 7 and 8 to the focal problem outlined in the RFA. The following script simulates the facilitation of an RFA focused on improving food and nutrition security.

The first step in developing a problem tree is to prioritize an overarching problem using our evidence base (e.g., all of our organized data) and the RFA requirements.³

We want to take this overarching problem and frame it as a clear and concise problem statement.



ASK & DISCUSS: What are the outstanding limiting conditions mentioned in this section of the RFA?



Possible answers appear with a click. Alternatively, ask a team member to capture the team's input on a sticky note or flip chart.



ASK & DISCUSS: Once we've identified the limiting condition or WHAT, what other information do you think might strengthen our problem statement?



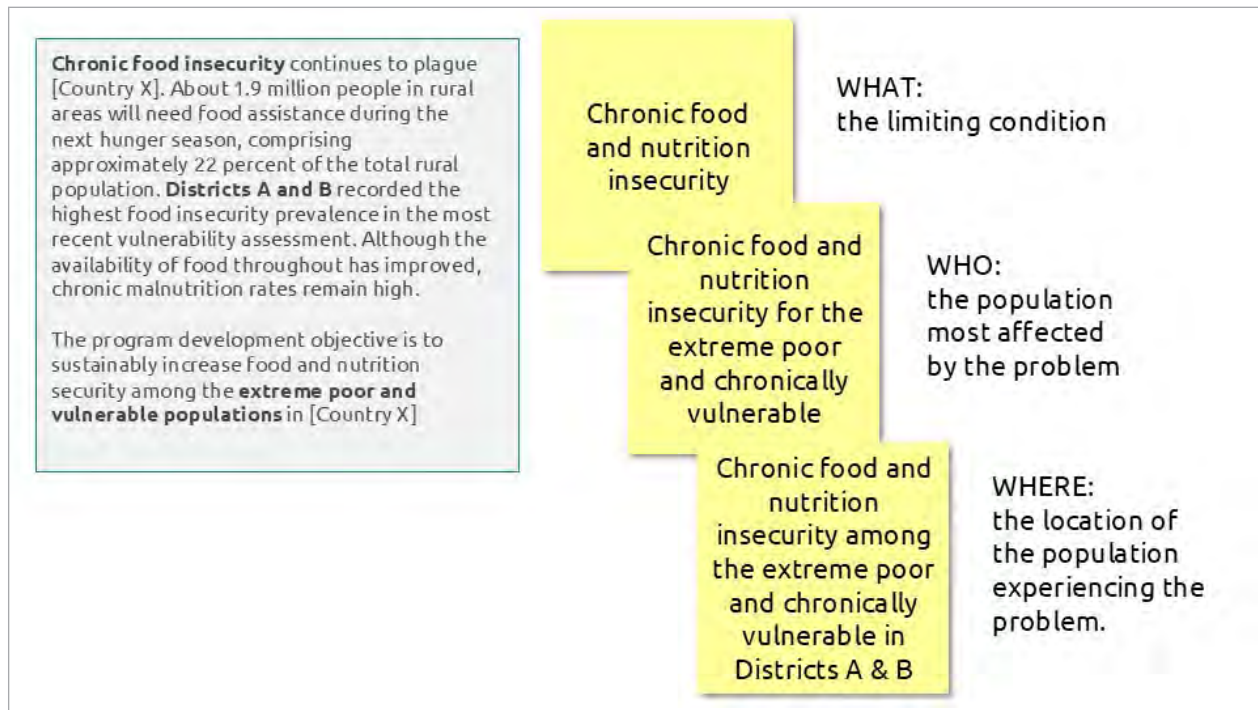
Possible answers appear with a click. Alternatively, ask a team member to record or revise the overarching problem on a sticky note or flip chart.

³ In BHA-funded development activities, the overarching problem is often pre-determined to be food and nutrition insecurity.



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 8:



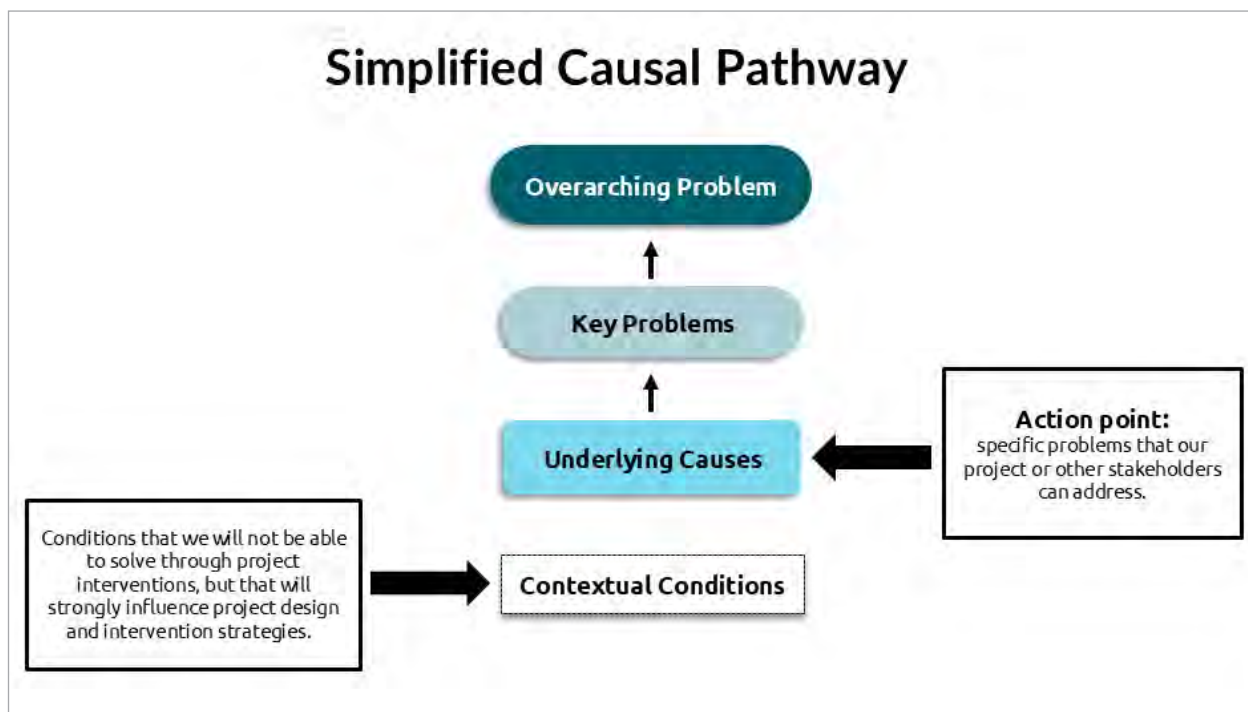
The overarching problem must be specific, identifying **what, who, and where**. It defines the focal problem that our project will be designed to alleviate.

NOTES:



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 9:



Once we have articulated the overarching problem, we can continue to develop the problem tree.

To do this, we first need to identify the **causal pathways** that lead to the overarching problem—in other words, the key problems, their underlying (or root) causes, and the contextual conditions that will strongly influence the project design.



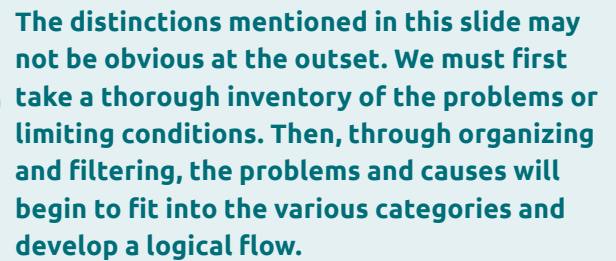
ASK & DISCUSS: The problem category definitions were discussed in team learning Session 1. Ask a team member who attended to explain them and add to them as needed.

Key problems are broad conditions that contribute directly to the overarching problem. A BHA RFA often identifies the key problems (e.g., inadequate income, poor health status, inability to manage risk, etc.), but we should use our evidence base to confirm that they are indeed the main contributors to the overarching problem and the areas we want to prioritize.

Underlying (or root) causes are the whole set of conditions that contribute to the key problems. A city or rural region may have the same overarching problem (e.g., food insecurity) and key problems (e.g., low income, poor health status) as other regions, but the **specific** underlying causes of these problems may be different in each context and for different populations within each context. In the TOC process, we must try to identify **context-specific** causes.



PRO TIP

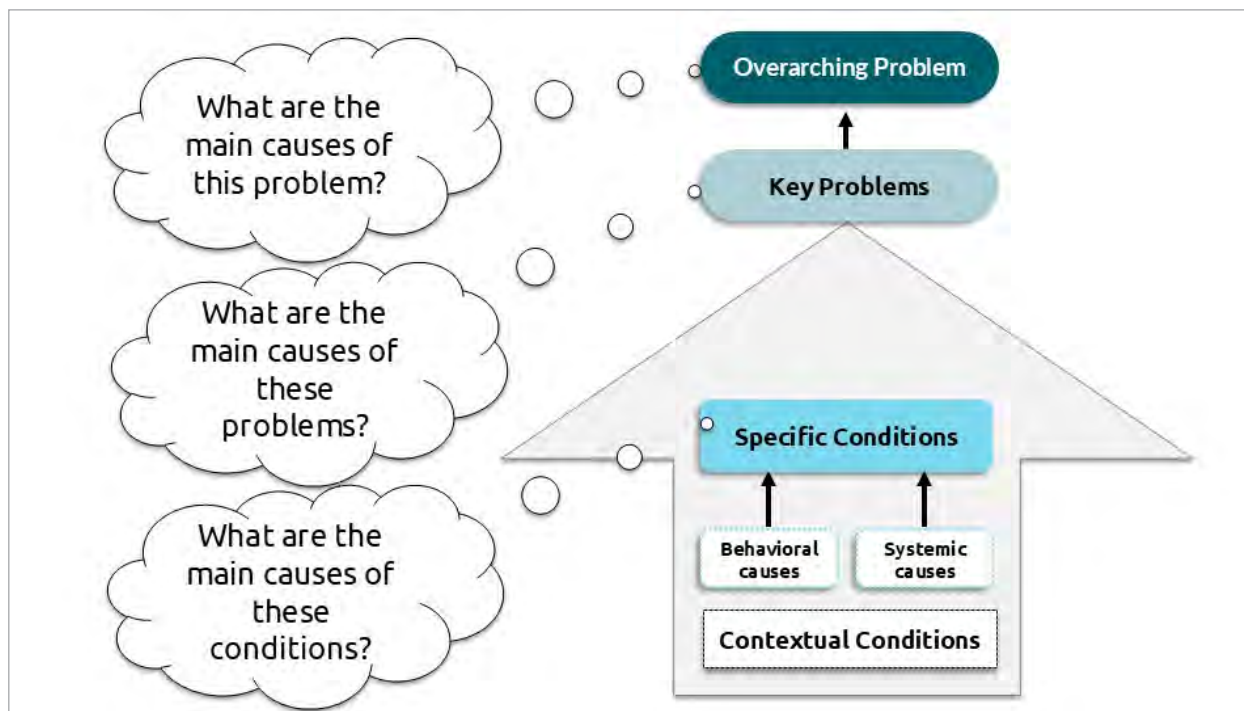


This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 10:



We'll explore the causal pathways leading to the overarching problem by asking at each level, "What are the main causes of this problem?"

- Asking this question at the level of the **overarching problem** will help us identify the **key problems**.
- Asking this question about each **key problem** will help us identify **a sequence of underlying (or root) causes**, the first of which may be a specific condition that cannot be addressed directly.
- Asking this question about the **specific conditions** will help us identify **behavioral and systemic causes**.



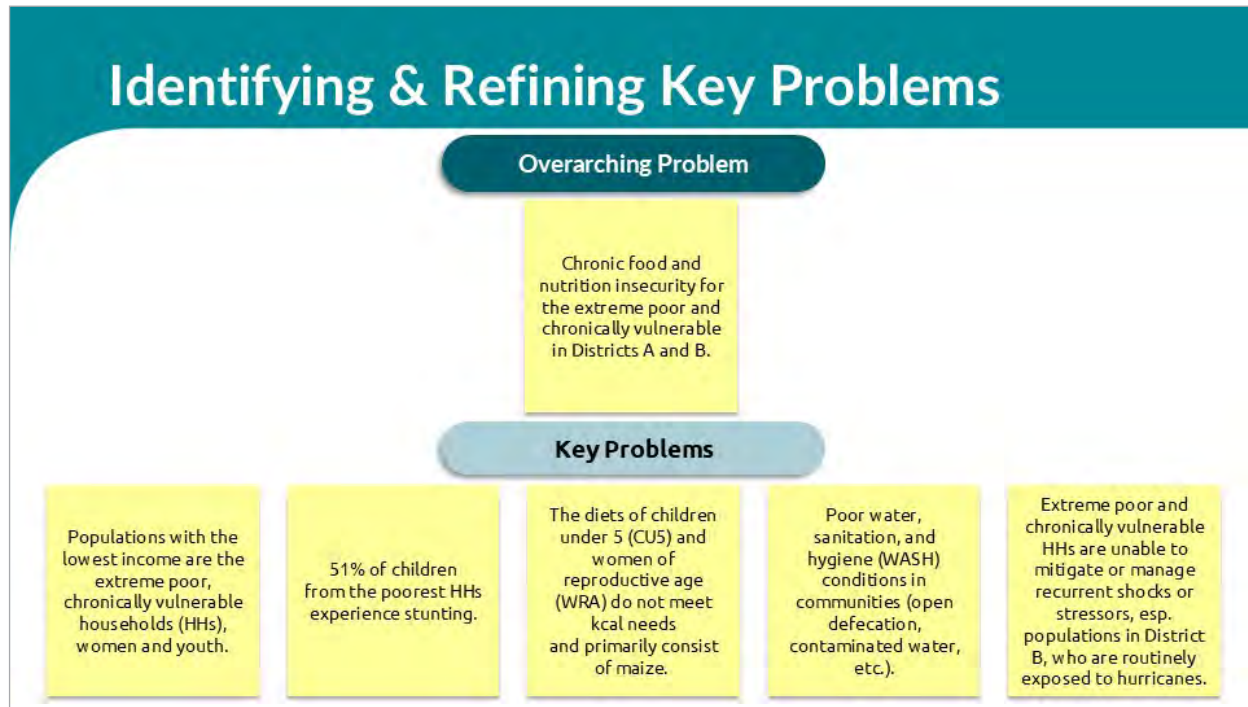
Asking this question about **behavioral and systemic causes** will help us identify the **beliefs, attitudes, or knowledge and skill levels** that contribute to a particular behavior, and the **systemic weaknesses (e.g., policies, capacities, attitudes, resources)** that contribute to inadequate access to key resources.

NOTES:



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 11:



Using our established evidence base, including the donor's RFA, we'll select the most logical high-level causes of the overarching problem.

Once we agree on the key problems, we'll refine these challenges into clear and concise problem statements.

As we refine the problem statements, we may or may not need to specify who and where—this will depend on whether a subset of the population or a region is disproportionately affected by the problem.

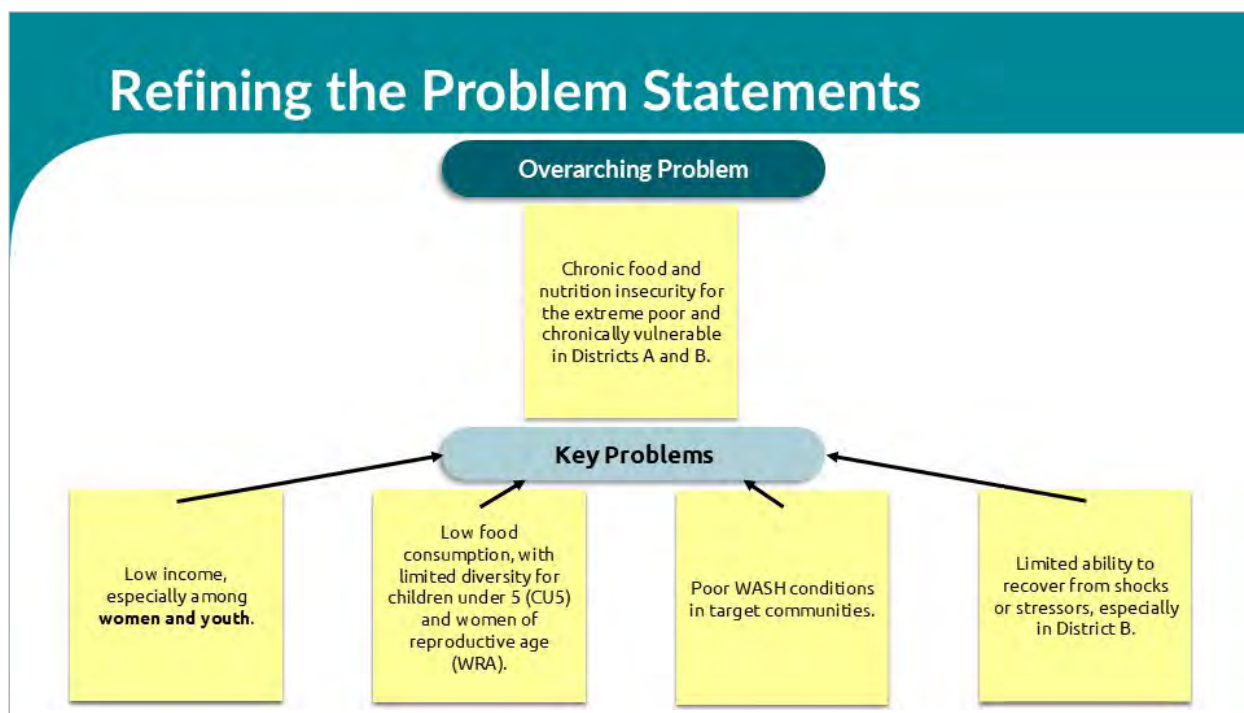
- For example, if a problem disproportionately affects women, youth, or another specific population, we want to include the **WHO** in our problem statement. In our example, these are the challenges of income and low consumption.
- If one location is disproportionately affected by a problem—in our example, risk management and recovery—we want to include the **WHERE** in the problem statement.



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 12:

The animation shows the before and after statements.



PRO TIP



While refining problem statements is necessary to the development of a user-friendly TOC, preserve the detail in the original problem statements in your evidence tracker. This detail can help smooth the handover to a new country team who may question how the design team arrived at the statement. Additionally, monitoring, evaluation, analysis, and learning teams often require the detail to develop solid indicators.





Plenary: Gain initial agreement on the key problems proposed by the small groups and write each key problem as a heading on separate flip chart pages or whiteboard space.

Plenary: Review the revised statements. For each key problem:

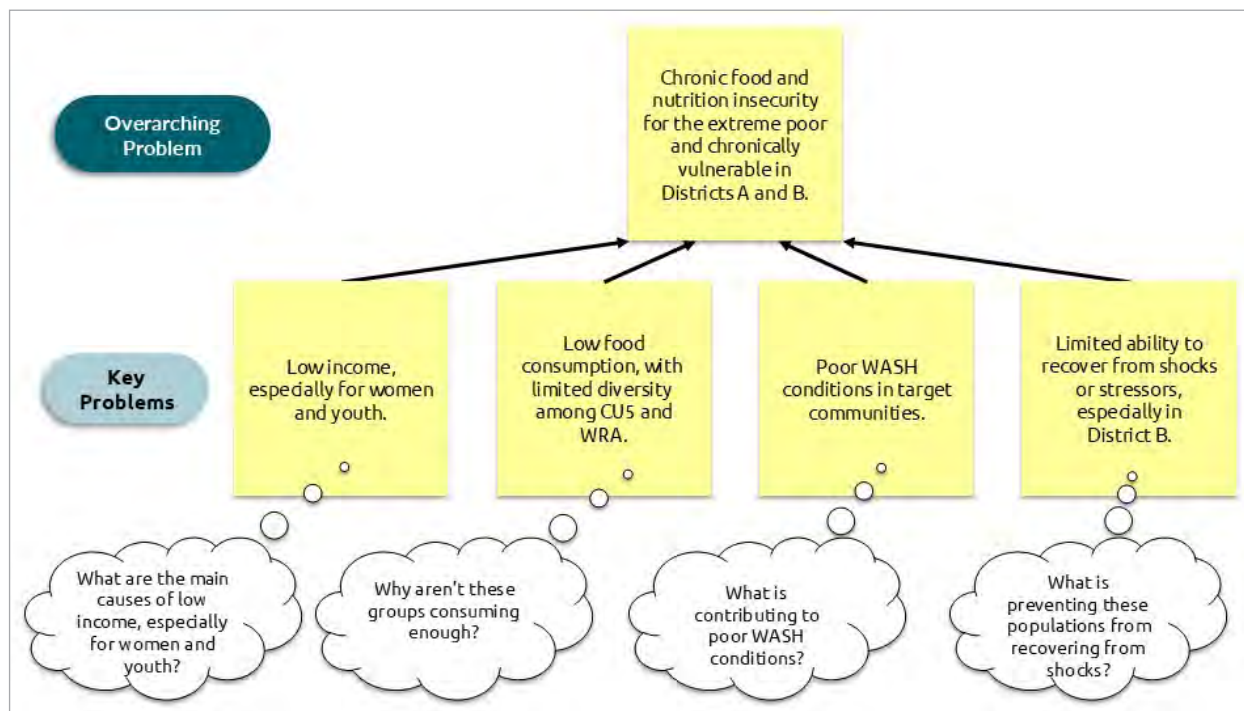
- If time permits, agree on one revised statement for each key problem and use it in subsequent exercises.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 13:



To identify the underlying or root causes, we'll repeat the process. For each key problem (one at a time), we'll ask, "What are the main causes of THIS problem?"

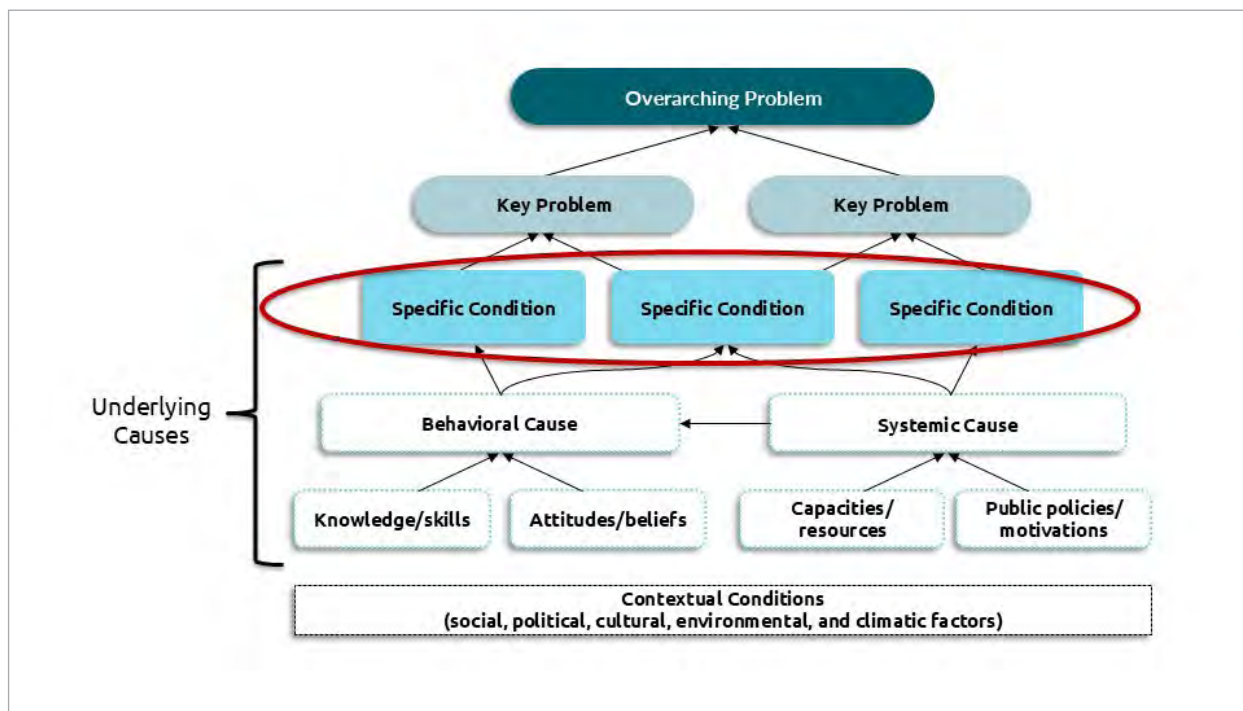
Using our evidence base to answer these questions, we will identify a set of main causes for each key problem. For each main cause, we will continue downstream and ask, "And what are the main causes of THIS problem?" Using this method, we will eventually identify multiple streams of underlying causes leading to each key problem.

NOTES:



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 14:



As we consider the causes of each key problem, let's remember to think about the following elements.

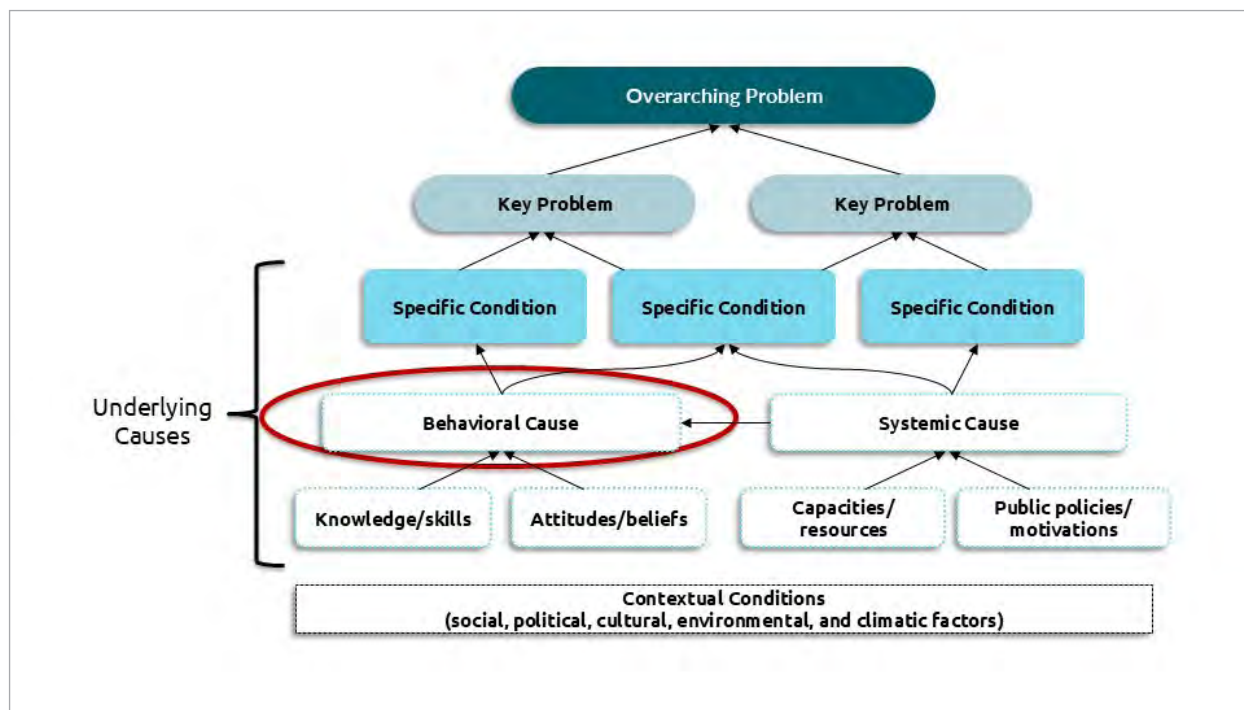
We often find **specific conditions** in the highest tiers of a problem tree, just below the key problems. They do not always emerge during the problem analysis, but when they do, they include problematic conditions such as unprofitable enterprises, low agricultural production, severe soil erosion, or poor animal health. These are conditions that an intervention would not directly address because they are the result of **problematic behaviors and practices and systemic issues**. Our goal is to trace the causal stream down to the point where the condition can be influenced by an intervention.

NOTES:



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 15:



ASK & DISCUSS: What are examples of problematic behaviors and practices?

Some examples of problematic **behaviors and practices** include weak natural resource management; limited adoption of WASH, sustainable agriculture, or infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices; limited use of health and nutrition services; limited use of risk management strategies; and low participation of marginalized populations in local decision-making bodies.

They may also include the behaviors and practices of system actors, not just individuals and households. For example, traders and producers do not supply local markets with diverse, affordable, and safe foods year-round; financial institutions do not provide loans to women; and so on.



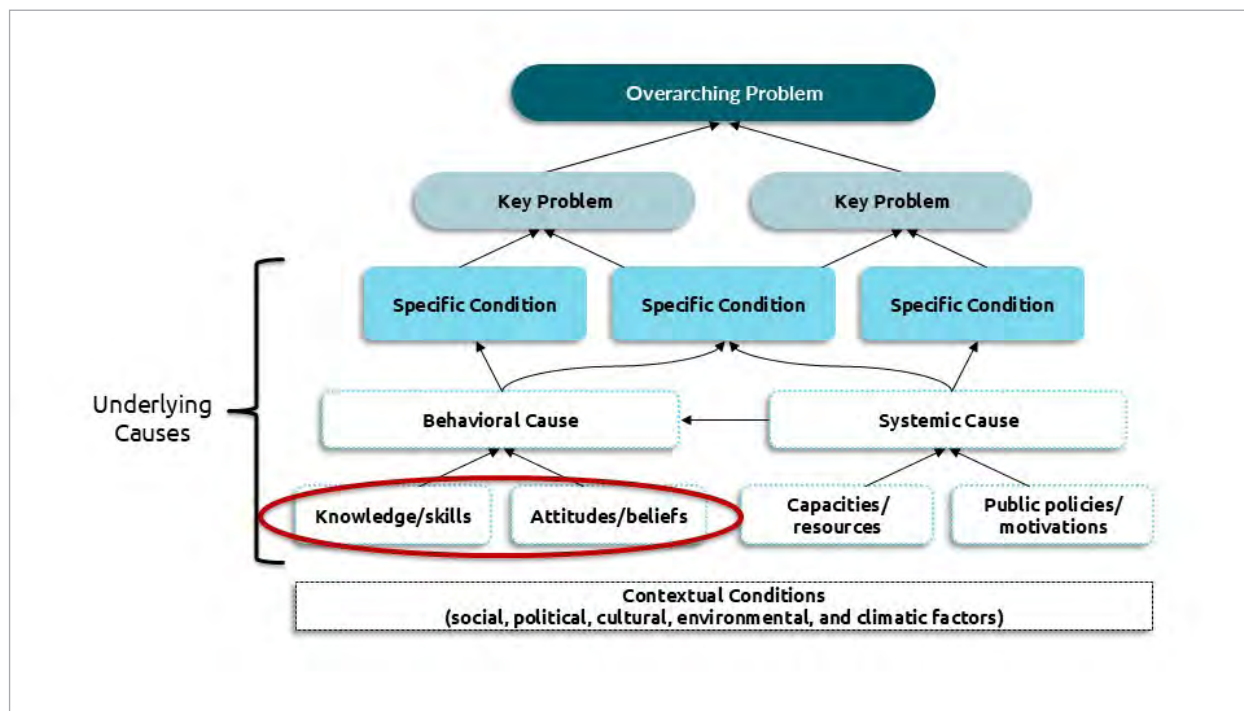
ASK & DISCUSS: What influences problematic behaviors and practices?

Behaviors and practices are strongly influenced by knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs, as well as systemic issues and contextual conditions.



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 16:



ASK & DISCUSS:

- What are examples of challenges related to knowledge, skills, attitudes, or beliefs?
- What influences knowledge, skills, attitudes, or beliefs?

Knowledge and skills and **attitudes and beliefs** include problems such as limited knowledge of optimal nutrition practices or conservation techniques, low financial literacy, the belief that women should never travel alone outside their community, or the attitude of youth that there is no future for them in agriculture.

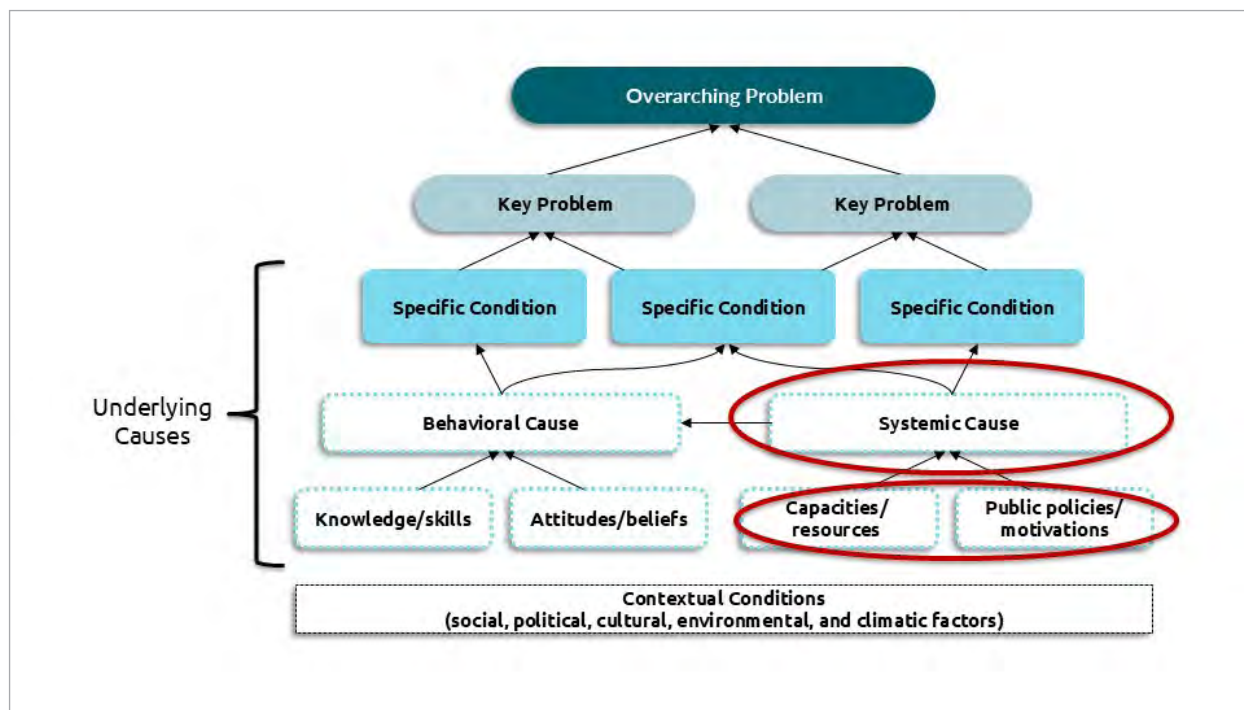
Knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs are most often rooted in contextual conditions and influenced by systemic issues. They often end up in the lower to middle tiers of the problem tree.

NOTES:



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 17:



ASK & DISCUSS:

- What are examples of systemic challenges?
- What influences them?

Systemic causes include problems such as limited access to basic infrastructure and services.

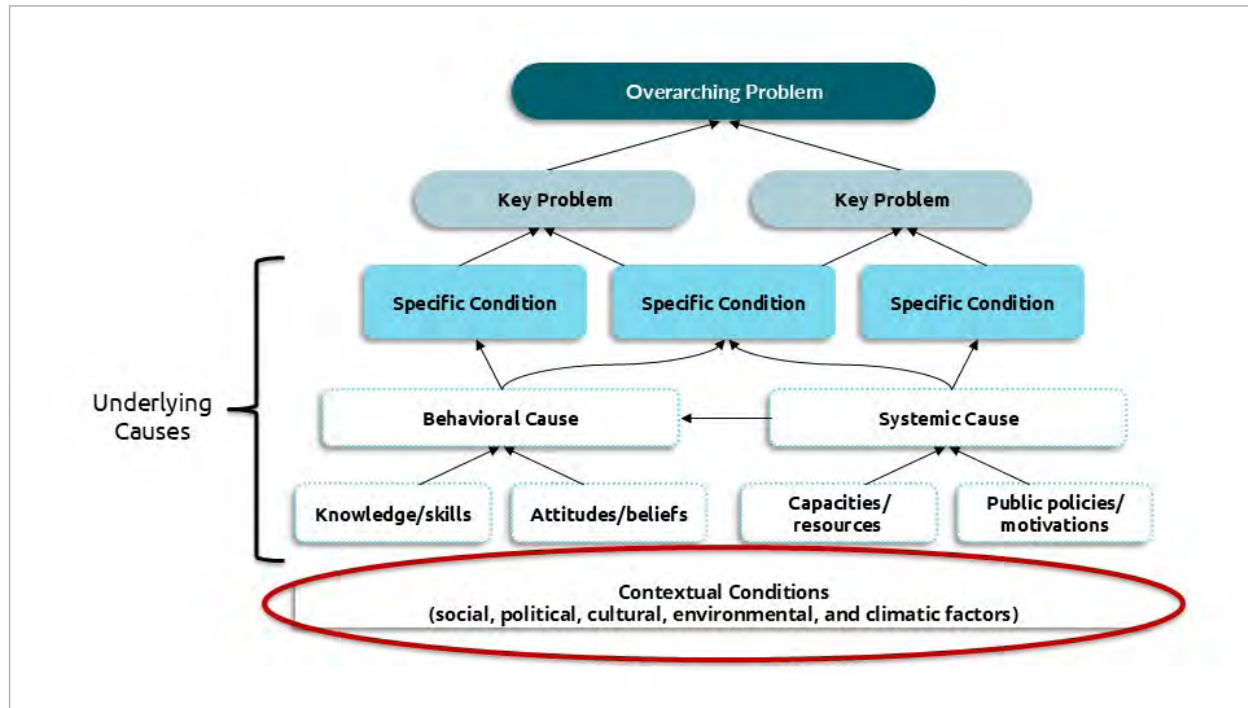
These issues arise primarily due to low institutional capacities, insufficient resources, or weak public policies. Systemic causes often end up in the lower to middle tiers of the problem tree.

NOTES:



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 18:



Contextual conditions affect everything, so place them at the very bottom of the evolving problem tree.

These are usually conditions that will not be solved by project interventions but will strongly influence project design and intervention strategies (e.g., chronic drought, chronic conflict, epidemics).

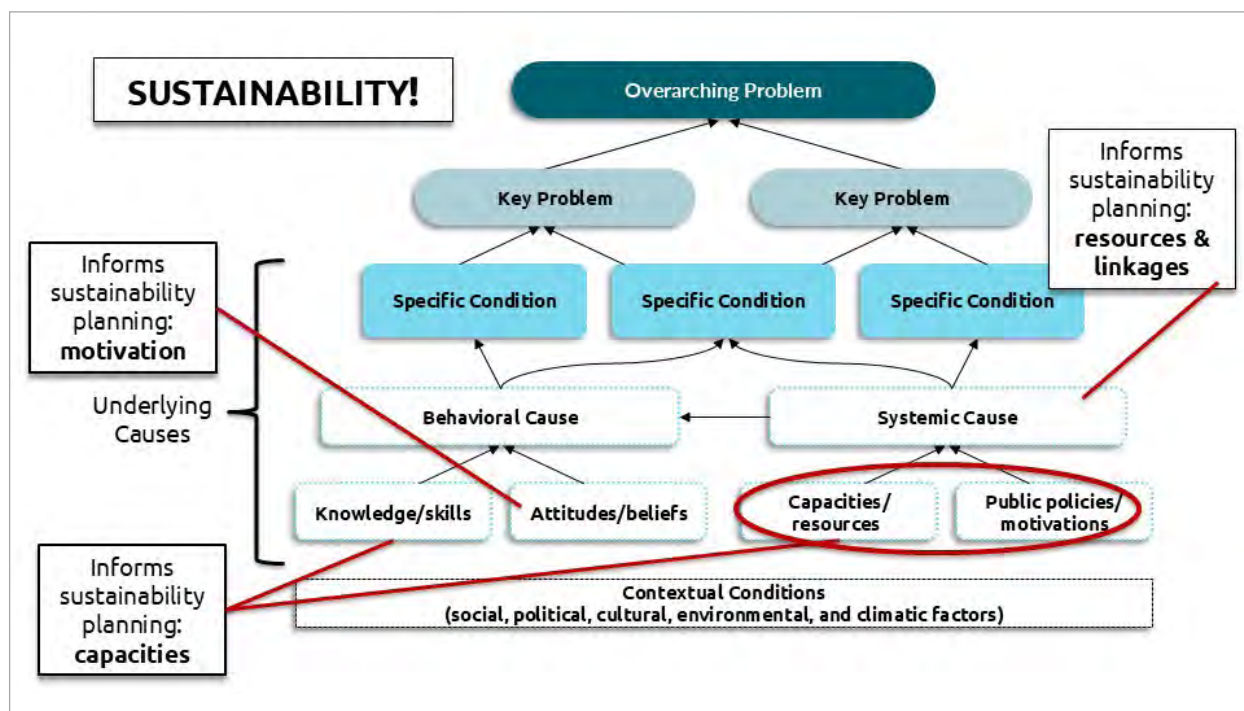
NOTES:



Problem Analysis (cont.)

Other Considerations During Problem Tree Development

SLIDE 19:



Let's explore how understanding all types of underlying causes can inform sustainability planning early in the design process.

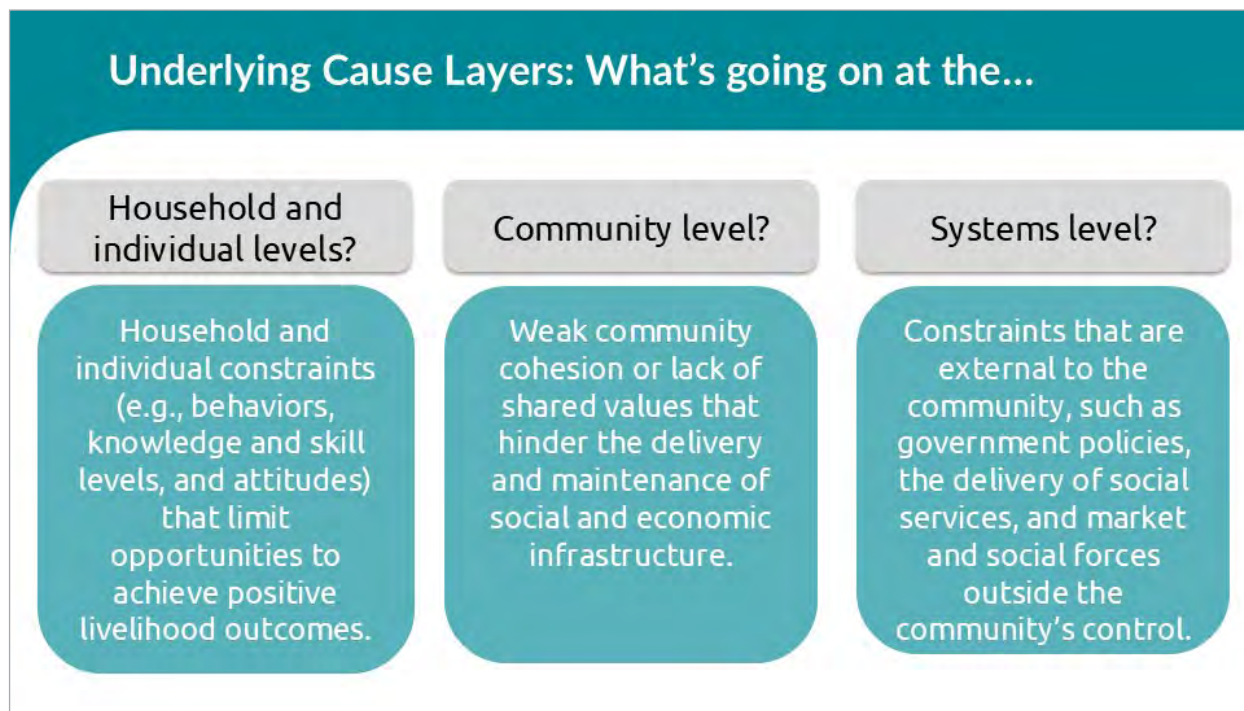
- Behavioral change is the foundation of sustainable change, so it is critical that we carefully analyze the **problematic behaviors and practices** of all system actors.
- Understanding **attitudes and beliefs** will inform sustainability planning in relation to the **motivations** of all system actors (individuals, households, service providers, etc.).
- Understanding **knowledge and skill levels** will inform sustainability planning in relation to the **capacities** of all system actors (individuals, households, service providers, etc.).
- Understanding **systemic causes** will inform sustainability planning in relation to resources and linkages.

NOTES:



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 20:



When thinking about the underlying causes of key problems, it is also helpful to consider, at each step of the causal pathways, how limiting factors manifest themselves at various levels of society.

As we consult our evidence base, we'll look carefully for causes that manifest themselves at the individual, household, community, and systems levels.

NOTES:



Problem Analysis (cont.)



EXERCISE: Societal Layers of Underlying Causes for Key Problems

PREPARE: For each key problem, hang four pieces of flip chart paper on the wall with the headings:

- Individual level
- Household level
- Community level
- Systems level

Divide the participants into four groups. Each group will spend 3-4 minutes at each flip chart brainstorming examples of underlying causes that manifest at each layer based on their understanding of the evolving evidence base. You can do this exercise tackling each key problem one at a time, or to save time, assign participants to a key problem and then divide participants in each key problem into four groups.

Groups rotate. Notify the groups when it is time to rotate to the next flip chart. Instruct them to 'star' the ideas they agree with, put a '?' on examples they do not understand or question whether they are evidence-based, and add new causes.

Sample responses

INDIVIDUAL	HOUSEHOLD	COMMUNITY	SYSTEMS
<i>Women have limited decision-making power over what food the household produces.</i>	<i>Very few households operate off-farm small businesses.</i>	<i>Weak community motivation for collective action.</i> <i>Few community safety nets.</i>	<i>Discriminatory land use policies.</i> <i>Limited access to mother and child health services</i>

Plenary discussion to review the flip chart content.

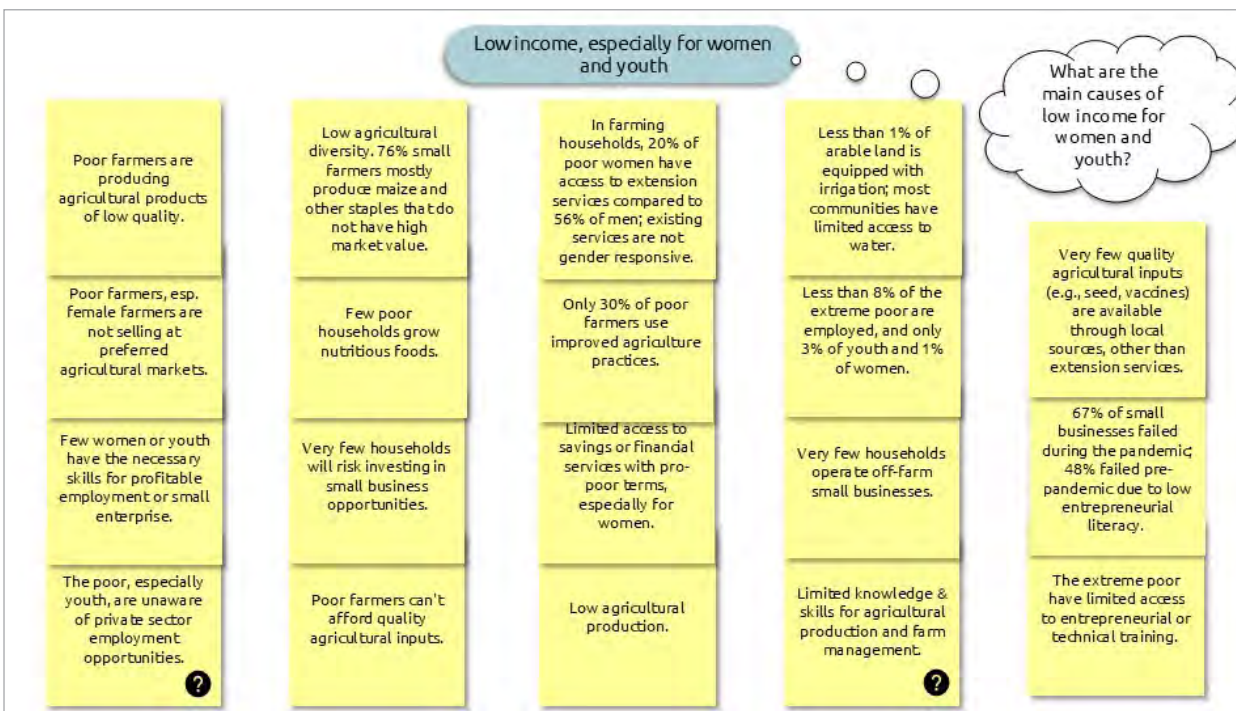
- What questions do we have about some of the items (those marked with '?')?
- Was it easier or harder to identify examples in a particular category?
- Is there a category that we as an organization tend to forget? A category that we tend to place intense focus on? Why is that?
- What, if anything, do we want to do differently when approaching this problem analysis?

During the discussion, participants may disagree that there is evidence of a listed problem. Use this as an opportunity to discuss priority learning areas (next slides).



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 21:



PREPARE: In the example, we use a question mark to flag learning priorities—the problems that are not yet grounded in evidence. Some practitioners use a different colored sticky note to distinguish learning priorities. Feel free to develop your own coding system and adapt the slide accordingly.



ASK & DISCUSS: What if we have a strong hunch about the causes of a problem, but we don't yet have evidence?

Sometimes we have a strong hunch about a cause, but we don't yet have evidence. While we strive to make the foundation of our initial TOC primarily evidence-based, continuous learning and refinement is a key component of many current development activities, including those funded by BHA. In situations where we have a strong hunch based on experience in similar contexts, we may include the cause if we clearly mark it as a **priority learning area**.

It is important to distinguish between **what we know** from evidence and **what we think we know or assume** based on experience.

We may be able to explore some of these learning priorities iteratively as we continue to develop our proposal. It is also common to explore them during the award refinement or contextualization period.

PRO TIP



Remember that in a BHA-funded activity that includes a refinement or contextualization period, we are expected to spend time learning more so that we can design the most effective, efficient, and contextually appropriate intervention strategy. Not knowing at the proposal stage is not only okay, it is expected.



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 22:

Document Evidence Base			
Problem statement	Evidence, examples.	Source	Link
Limited consumption of nutritious foods by CUS and Women of Reproductive Age	11% of CUS and 16% of WRA meet standards for minimum acceptable diet.	DHS, 2022, Country, etc.	
Limited adoption of improved IYCF and maternal nutrition practices	The percentage of children under five who were exclusively breastfed is 50%. Add other data points for introduction of complementary foods, micronutrient supplementation, etc.	2023 SMART survey	
Limited HH access to nutritious food year-round	Economic turmoil has eroded HH purchasing power and access to food and agricultural inputs.	DHS, 2022, Country, etc.	
Inequitable decision-making power over HH food production & purchases	Women tend to spend a greater proportion of household income on food purchases compared to men and when they have more input in making decisions and have nutritional knowledge, they may act on that knowledge to provide higher quality diets for themselves and their families.	Final report, project name, etc. NIH, 2023, Article name, etc.	
Socio-cultural norms discourage adoption of recommended infant, child, and maternal nutrition practices	Info GAP- confirm during formative research		
Caregivers and communities have limited knowledge and skills for infant, child, and maternal nutrition practices.	Info GAP- confirm during formative research		



PREPARE: If applicable, modify the slide to reflect your organization's existing structure for documenting evidence and learning priorities. You can also transfer this template into a spreadsheet.

We will document the evidence source for each underlying cause in an organizing matrix. If there is not yet evidence that an underlying cause exists for the target population, but there is a strong hypothesis and group agreement to include the constraint, we'll code the sticky note as a learning priority and note the information gap in our team's running list of gaps.

NOTES:



Problem Analysis (cont.)

SLIDE 23:

Summary of Key Concepts

- Different populations or different regions may appear to have the same broad categories of problems, yet it is critical that we identify **context-specific** underlying causes.
- **Causes occur at multiple levels** (individual, household, community, and systems) **and in various forms** (behaviors/practices; knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs; and systemic weaknesses).
- A problem tree helps us to visualize the **non-linear causal logic** of problematic conditions.
- A problem tree with strong causal logic can be **easily transformed into a TOC** with strong causal logic.



ASK & DISCUSS: What are your key takeaways from this session? Some of our key concepts are listed below to supplement the discussion.

Summary of Key Concepts

- Different populations or regions may appear to have the same overarching problem and broad categories of causes, but it is critical that we identify context-specific underlying causes.
- Causes occur at **multiple levels** (individual, household, community, and broader systems and institutions) and in **multiple forms** (behaviors and practices; knowledge, skills, and attitudes; and systemic weaknesses).
- A problem tree helps us visualize the **non-linear causal logic** of problematic conditions.
- A problem tree with strong causal logic can be easily transformed into a **TOC with strong causal logic**.

What do we hope will make this effort more effective than previous problem analysis efforts? (if applicable)

Are you convinced that putting significant effort into the problem tree exercise will save time and improve the quality and rigor of our TOC diagram? Why or why not?



Problem Analysis (cont.)

Wrap-up



PREPARE: Prior to the team learning session, adapt slide 24 and the Next Steps handout to your organization's timeline and assignment of responsibilities.

SLIDE 24:

Next Steps (user to modify)

- **Team Preparation**
 - -
 - -
- **Problem tree development session**
 - -
 - -
- **Refine the problem tree**
 - -
 - -

Refer to the Next Steps table on the following page and adapt slide 24 to your organization's timeline and assignment of responsibilities.



Problem Analysis (cont.)

Steps:	Dates:
1. Team Preparation	
<i>All team members involved in developing the problem tree become thoroughly familiar with the RFA and the evolving evidence base. (This may include presentations and question and answer sessions with technical leads or other staff).</i>	
<i>Optional: During the evidence review, each participant documents underlying causes in organizing matrices (e.g., societal layers or problem types) and brings their matrices to the problem tree development session.</i>	
2. Problem Tree Development Session	
<i>Critically analyze and organize problems and causes into a problem tree.</i>	
<i>Document the evidence for each problem statement in an easily referenced template (to be used by proposal writers and country offices post-award).</i>	
<i>Identify and prioritize remaining information evidence gaps.</i>	
<i>Capture the problem tree in electronic format.</i>	
3. Refine the Problem Tree	
<i>Data collection Round 2: Attempt to fill priority information gaps through secondary data capture (or primary, if feasible).</i>	
<i>Document the evidence for each problem statement in an easily referenced template (to be used by proposal writers and country offices post-award).</i>	
<i>Refine the problem tree based on filled information gaps.</i>	
<i>Vet the problem tree with other relevant stakeholders.</i>	
<i>Refine the problem tree based on stakeholder feedback.</i>	



TEAMWORKING SESSION 2A:

Problem Tree Development

ESTIMATED SESSION LENGTH:

Spread over 3-4 weeks:

- Problem tree development: 1 week
- Review and refine problem tree: 2-3 weeks

WHEN:

After the first round of primary and secondary data is collected and entered into a synthesis matrix.

WHO:

8-20 people representing different perspectives (e.g., country office staff, technical leads and advisors, M&E and learning advisors, new business development, etc.).

WHY:

In this session, the team will:

- use the evidence base to identify problematic conditions affecting specific populations;
- draft clear, concise problem statements at all levels;
- critically analyze and organize problems and causes into a logical flow that will inform the development of the TOC diagram; and
- document, prioritize, and develop an action plan to fill remaining information gaps.

SESSION RESOURCES:

- IDEAL PPT 2a: Problem Analysis
- IDEAL Process Quality Check Booklet: #3 Problem Analysis

PARTICIPANT PREPARATION:

- Become thoroughly familiar with the RFA and the evolving evidence base.
- Optional: During the evidence review, each participant documents underlying causes in organizing matrices (e.g., societal layers or problem types) and brings their matrices to the problem tree development session.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION:

Materials:

- ☐ Sticky notes or index cards (different colors and sizes)
- ☐ Large piece of butcher paper on the wall (one for each key problem)
- ☐ Colored markers
- ☐ Sticky dots

Optional slide and handout modification:

- ☐ Supplementary slide 11: Modify Team Timelines and Assigned Responsibilities.
- ☐ Next Steps handout: Modify Team Timelines and Assigned Responsibilities.

PRO TIPS



- When creating the problem inventory on sticky notes or index cards, it can be helpful to use different colors for the different types of problems (systemic, knowledge/skills, behaviors/practices). This allows for visual cross-checking during the process to ensure that your team does not overlook a category.
- Get into the habit of noting the source of evidence for each underlying cause, either on the back of the sticky note or, better yet simultaneously record the problem and its evidence in a spreadsheet or other document. This will help proposal writers later. Try to limit the causes you include to those for which the team has evidence.
- If we don't yet have evidence for an underlying cause, but there is a strong hypothesis and group agreement to include the constraint, code the sticky note to indicate that this is a learning priority (e.g., use a question mark, different colored paper, or a different colored marker), and note the learning priority in the team's running list of information gaps.





Problem Tree Development (cont.)

Sample Agenda

MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES
Plenary	Objectives Overview of the problem analysis timeline Working session overview	
Identify key problem main causes (45-60 minutes)		
Plenary	Review the overarching problem statement and key problems agreed upon during the team problem analysis learning session.	Write each key problem on a separate whiteboard or large piece of butcher paper taped to the wall. Create a separate workspace for each of the key problems (i.e., scatter them around the room).
	Refresh the team on the process for drafting causal streams.	 PPT 2a Slide 2 provides an example.
	Review the inventory of causes that participants were asked to bring to the session. For each key problem, identify the causes that contribute most directly to each key problem. Write them on large sticky notes and place them directly under the key problems.	The process is iterative. It is common for teams to add a cause that they believe is a direct contributor and later discover that another cause is a better fit for this upper tier of specific conditions. When this happens, simply set aside the sticky that is no longer valid to be used later in the development of the problem tree.
	Get initial agreement from the group on the main causes of each key problem before proceeding.	There is no set number to aim for, but a range of 2-5 main causes is common.
	Refine the agreed causes into clear, concise problem statements.	Cross-check: Is it necessary to identify a specific population or geographic location in the problem statements (i.e., is a subset of the population identified in the overarching problem statement disproportionately affected by the challenge?)?
	For each key problem, assign a team member to record the problem statements in an organizing matrix and document the source of the supporting evidence.	 Evidence matrix – template is in PPT 2a Slide 5 and can be transferred to a spreadsheet for this process.
Identify underlying causes of key problems (30-45 minutes)		
Small groups	Divide the team evenly among the key problems.	The goal is to have cross-sector representation in each small group as opposed to siloed groups. Everyone will have an opportunity to contribute to the problem analysis for each key problem.
	Each small group will create an inventory of evidence-based underlying causes related to each key problem on sticky notes.	To ensure that the team considers the different types of causes (systemic; knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs; and behaviors and practices), it may be helpful to use a different colored sticky note for each type or to use other coding on the sticky note. As the problem tree evolves, the team will start to recognize if they have overlooked any types of causes.  PPT 2a Slide 3 provides an example.



Problem Tree Development (cont.)

MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES
	Small groups can cluster related causes but should wait to place them in a cause-and-effect hierarchy.	 PPT 2a Slide 4 provides an example.
	Assign a team member to document the source of evidence for each underlying cause in an organizing matrix. This will help proposal writers later.	 PPT 2a Slides 5-6 provide examples. Try to limit the causes you include to those for which you have evidence. If you don't yet have evidence that an underlying cause exists for the target population, but there is a strong hypothesis and group agreement to include the constraint, code the sticky note as a learning priority (e.g., question mark, different colored paper, or different colored marker) and note the information gap in the team's running list of gaps.  Evidence matrix – template is in PPT 2a Slide 5 and can be transferred to a spreadsheet file for this process
	The facilitator checks in before the groups rotate. Do our problem statements identify subpopulations that are disproportionately experiencing a challenge? Are problem statements that are not yet evidence-based coded as learning priorities?	
Identify underlying causes of key problems, subsequent rounds		
Small groups	Small groups rotate to the next key problem and repeat the process.	Repeat as many times as necessary to cover all key problems.
	Each small group conducts a brief review of the challenges listed. Add any additional underlying causes. Try to avoid duplication.	Use different colored sticky dots to flag: • questions/need for clarification; • disagreements; and • recommended changes to the problem statement. Draft suggested language on a sticky note and place it next to the original statement.
	The facilitator checks in before the groups rotate. Do our problem statements identify subpopulations that are disproportionately experiencing a challenge? Are all problem statements that are not yet evidence-based coded as learning priorities?	
Wrap-up		
	The facilitator leads a group review of the sticky notes marked for clarification or disagreement.	If the group cannot agree on the problem statements in question, either place them in a parking lot for later discussion with a smaller group or identify sector experts to make decisions. If time permits, the group can also review problem statements that have been flagged for language modification. Wordsmithing, however, can be a long and tedious process. It is usually more efficient to do it later with a smaller group of relevant people.



Problem Tree Development (cont.)

MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES
Draft causal pathways		
	Move the contextual conditions to the bottom tier of each key problem's workspace.	Remember: Contextual conditions are the social, economic, environmental, political, or climatic conditions that contribute to the underlying causes and sometimes result from the overarching problem. They are conditions that we cannot solve through project interventions, but they will strongly influence project design and intervention strategies (e.g., chronic drought, chronic conflict, epidemics).
	Organize the causes to show how they occur sequentially or simultaneously. One by one, for each main cause, ask "What are the main reasons the problem exists?" Refer to the evidence-based inventory of sticky notes. Keep asking "Are there any other reasons?" until you have identified all the causes that can explain most of the problem.	 PPT 2a Slide 7 provides an example, if needed. Remember: This process is iterative. As we revisit our logic, new ideas about causes may emerge. If the group feels strongly that conditions may be contributing factors, but there is not yet evidence to support them, add them and clearly mark them as priority learning areas. Because problem trees are based on systems thinking, cross-sectoral challenges will emerge. For example, the challenge of low income may appear at some level in all key problems. We can save time and duplication of effort by flagging cross-sectoral challenges as a linkage. The full causal stream for the flagged linkage will be explored in the causal stream for the relevant key problem (e.g., income), rather than in the problem to which it contributes (e.g., WASH practices).
Check causal logic		
	Before sharing the analysis with the rest of the team, each group should: Check the causal logic moving downstream (top to bottom) using statements such as "Condition A exists because of Condition X and Condition Y and Condition Z." Check the causal logic moving upstream (bottom to top) using statements such as "Because of Condition X and Condition Y and Condition Z, Condition A exists." As the logic begins to hold, draw lines to indicate the connections between the problem statements.	 PPT 2a Slides 8-9 provide examples. It may seem redundant to move both upstream and downstream, but the team will be amazed at the different insights that come from testing the logic in both directions.
	Review the causal analysis in each key problem tree with other team members.	Do this in plenary, one problem at a time, or combine small groups into 2-3 larger groups. A few original members of each key problem group should stay with their key problem tree to explain the logic to team members working on different key problems and to answer any questions.



Problem Tree Development (cont.)

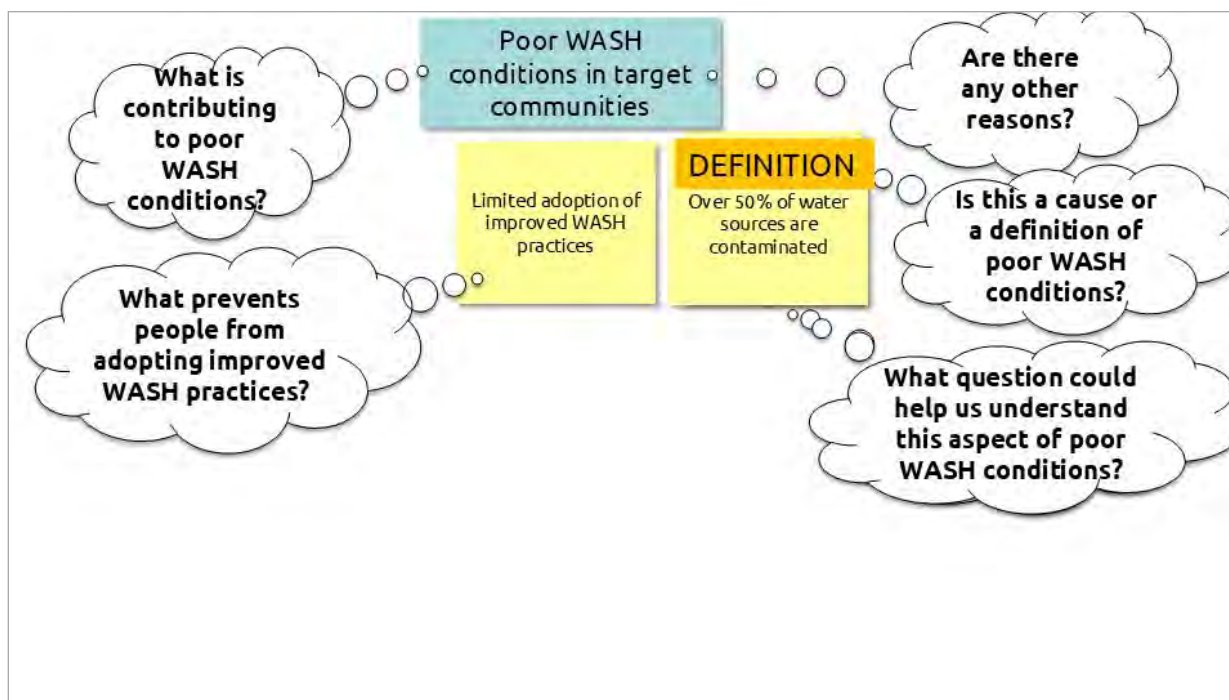
MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS AND RESOURCES
Identify and prioritize remaining information gaps		
	Review the evidence matrix. Has the team documented the evidence and its source for each problem statement? Are all problem statements that are not supported by evidence flagged as information gaps? Review all information gaps to confirm whether they need to be understood to refine the program design.	Remind the team, do we NEED to know, or do we WANT to know? If we NEED to know, do we NEED to know now, or can we learn about this area during the refinement or contextualization phase?
Discuss next steps		
	Share and discuss key next steps in the problem tree development process.	 Adapt PPT 2a Slide 11 and the handout to your organization's timeline and assignment of responsibilities.
Post-working session: Capture the sticky note problem tree in an electronic format		
	1-2 team members will transfer the sticky note problem tree to a more permanent electronic graphic (e.g., Excel, Miro board). This will make the transition from problem tree to TOC much easier. Don't forget to tag the learning priorities.	In past years, when developing a TOC for a BHA-funded food security activity, BHA has required a separate page for each purpose (i.e., key problem). However, the 2024 guidance only suggests that separate pages may make the diagram more reader-friendly. Different shapes and colors will be used to represent different TOC components. While it is not critical to determine what all the colors and shapes will be at this point, it will be helpful to use a distinct shape to represent cross-sectoral linkages.  PPT 2a Slides 10-11 provide examples.



Problem Tree Development (cont.)

Facilitator Notes for Slide Deck 2A Problem Analysis

SLIDE 2:



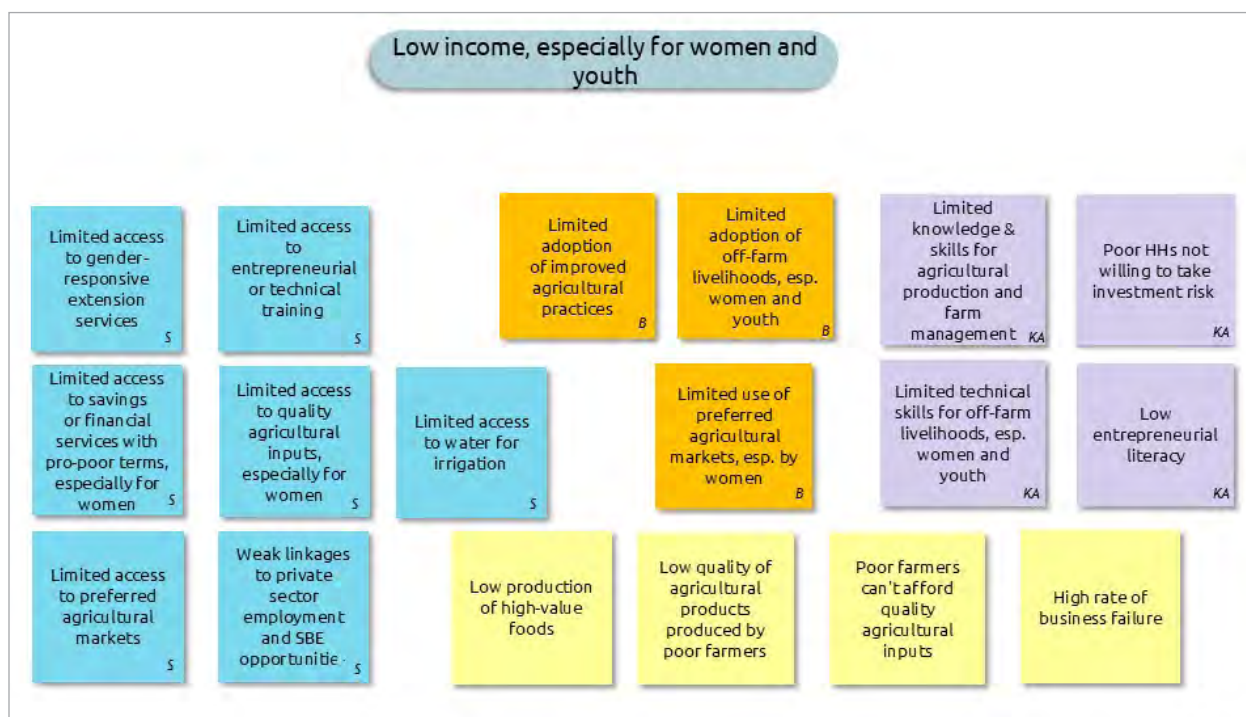
This diagram shows how the problem analysis for poor WASH conditions might evolve.

- The question “What is causing poor WASH conditions in the target communities?” led us to the cause of “limited adoption of improved WASH practices.”
- Next, we want to ask if there are other main causes of poor WASH conditions.
- Sometimes team members may suggest a problem statement that defines the details of the key problem, rather than the cause of the key problem (e.g., more than 50% of water sources are contaminated).
- When this happens, to refine our logic, we’ll ask what causes the detailed condition and replace the sticky with a problem statement that is a direct contributor rather than a definition.
- Later in the process, we’ll go through each of our problem statements one by one to identify the full range of underlying causes—for example, by asking, “What is preventing the adoption of WASH practices?”



Problem Tree Development (cont.)

SLIDE 3:



To ensure that the team considers the **different types of causes (systemic; knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs; and behaviors and practices)**, it may be helpful to use a different color sticky note for each type or to use different coding on the sticky note. As the problem tree evolves, the team will begin to see if they have missed any types of causes.

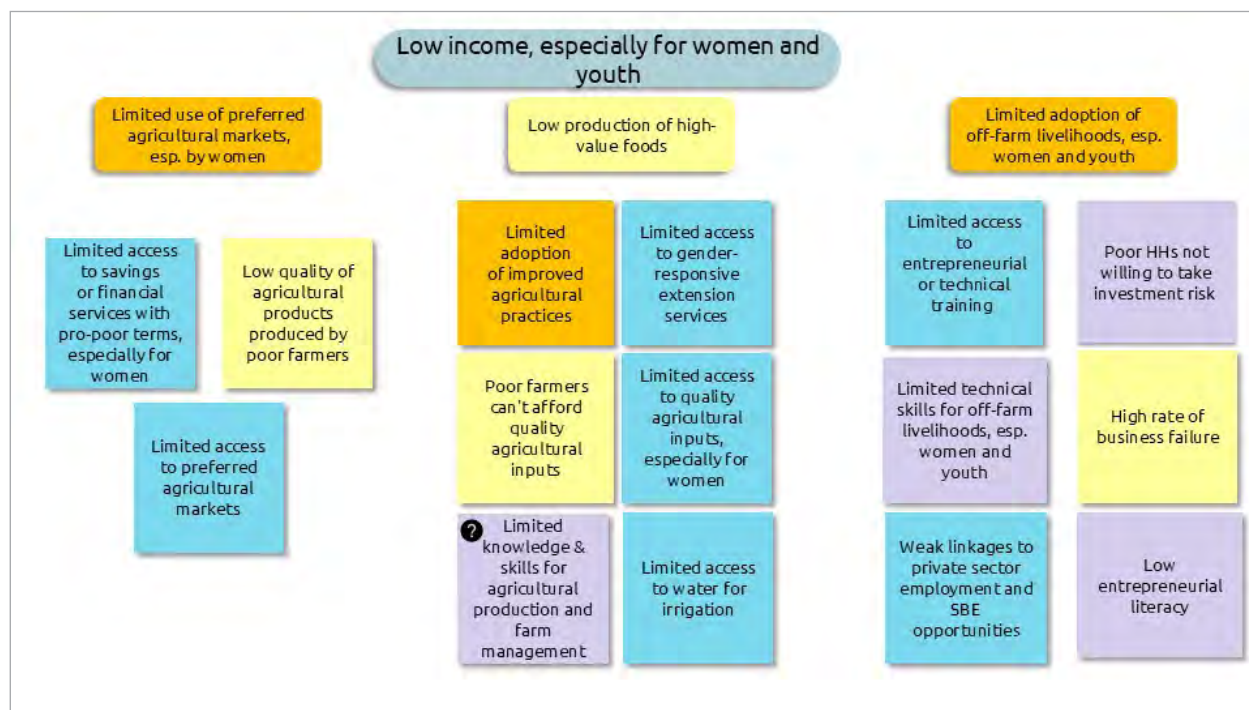
In this example, we can easily see that the team has considered systemic causes (blue with S in the corner); causes related to knowledge, skills, or attitudes (purple with KA in the corner); and behavioral causes (orange with B in the corner). Using the colored or coded sticky notes also helped to identify some specific conditions—challenges that are typically the result of other challenges and not directly addressed by interventions (yellow).

NOTES:



Problem Tree Development (cont.)

SLIDE 4:



Small groups can cluster problem statements related to each main cause of a key problem but should wait to place them in a cause-and-effect hierarchy.

NOTES:



Problem statement	Evidence, examples.	Source	Link
Key Problem: Limited consumption of nutritious foods by CUS and Women of Reproductive Age	11% of CUS and 16% of WRA meet standards for minimum acceptable diet The percentage of children under five who were exclusively breastfed is 50%. Add other data points for introduction of complementary foods, micronutrient supplementation, etc.	DHS, 2022, Country, etc.	
Key behavior: Limited adoption of improved IYCF and maternal nutrition practices <i>Limited HH access to nutritious food year-round</i>	Economic turmoil has eroded HH purchasing power and access to food and agricultural inputs. Women tend to spend a greater proportion of household income on food purchases compared to men and when they have more input in making decisions and have nutritional knowledge, they may act on that knowledge to provide higher quality diets for themselves and their families.	2023 SMART survey DHS, 2022, Country, etc. Final report, project name, etc. NIH, 2023, Article name, etc.	
Inequitable decision-making power over HH food production & purchases			
<i>Socio-cultural norms discourage adoption of recommended infant, child, and maternal nutrition practices</i>	Info GAP - confirm during formative research		
<i>Caregivers and communities have limited knowledge and skills for infant, child, and maternal nutrition practices.</i>	Info GAP - confirm during formative research		

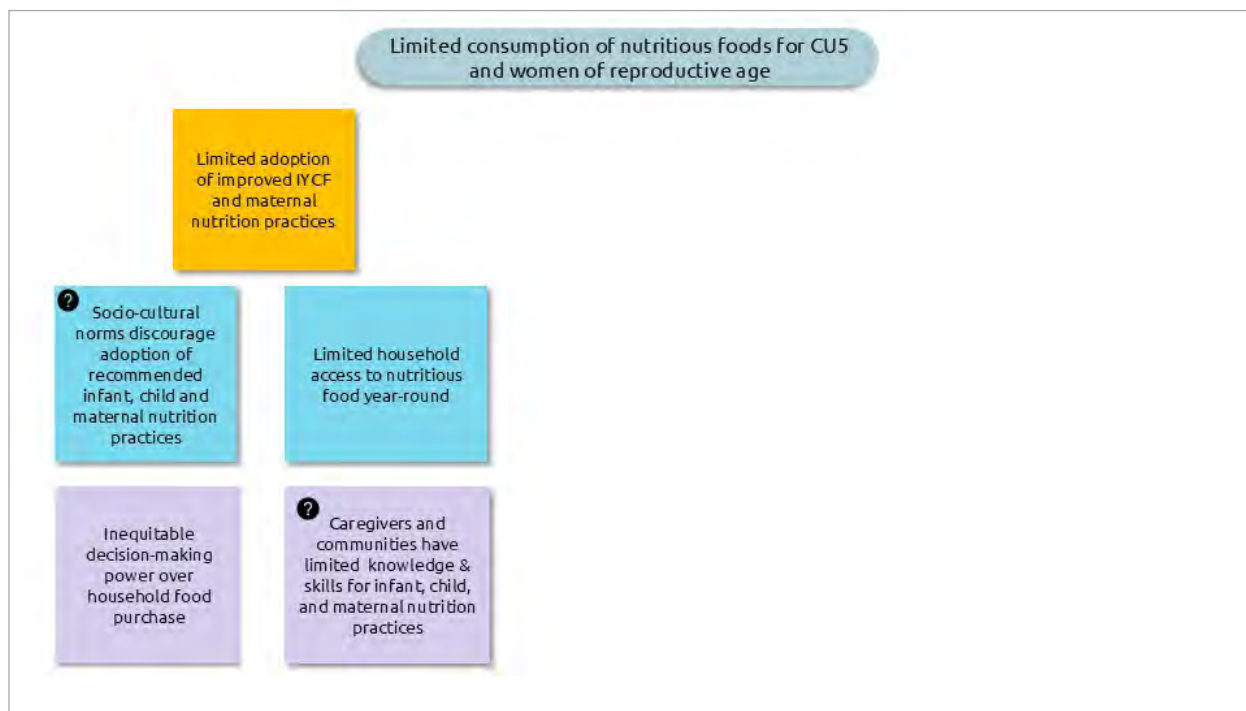
NOTES:

[illegible]



Problem Tree Development (cont.)

SLIDE 6:



If there is no evidence yet that an underlying cause exists for the target population, but there is a strong hypothesis and group agreement to include the constraint, code the sticky note as a learning priority and note the information gap in the team's running list of gaps.

NOTES:



Problem Tree Development (cont.)

SLIDE 7:



Organize causes to show how they occur sequentially or simultaneously.

One at a time, for each main cause, ask “What are the main reasons problem X exists?” Refer to the evidence-based inventory of sticky notes. Repeat this process for each cause identified.

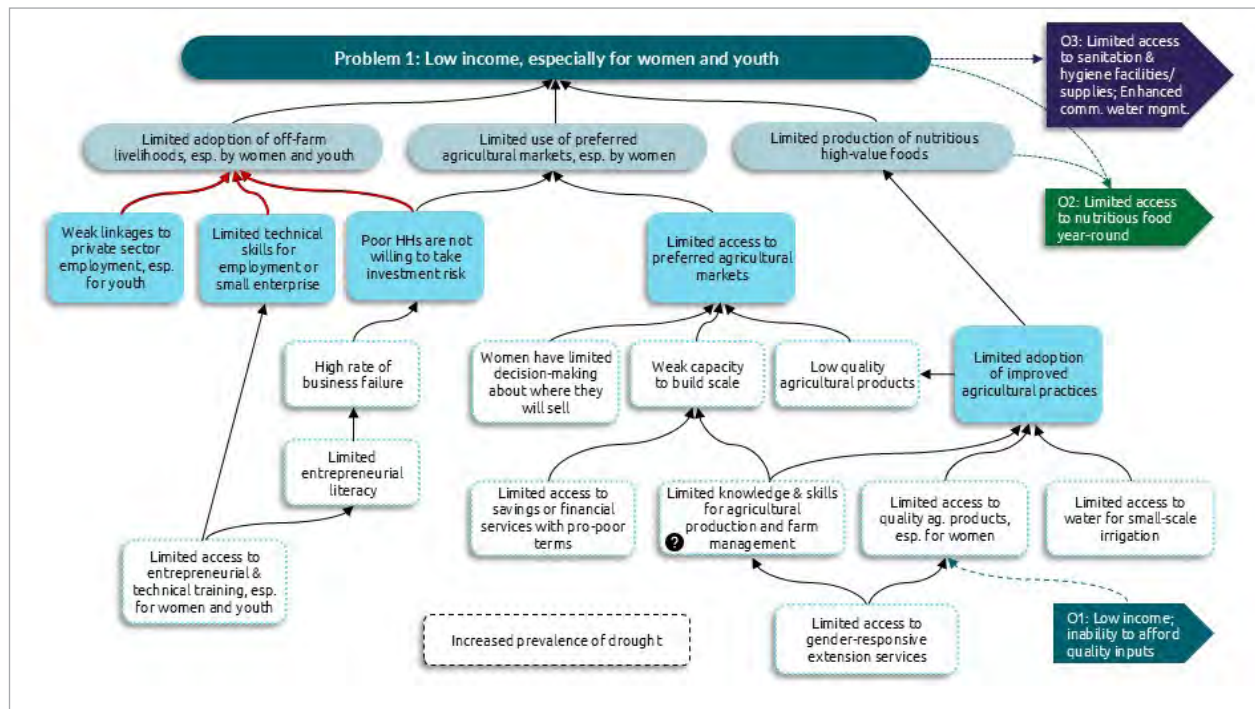
Because problem trees are based on systems thinking, cross-sectoral challenges will emerge. In this example, when we identified why access to sanitation supplies and services is limited, the cross-sectoral challenge of limited income is a main cause. Because limited income has been identified as a key problem, we will highlight this problem statement as a linkage to the income problem tree. We will explore the causes of low income in this branch of the tree. The flagged linkage will be the end of this causal stream in our WASH problem tree.

Slide notes provide animation details.

NOTES:

Problem Tree Development (cont.)

SLIDE 8:



Now we will methodically check the causal logic moving downstream using statements such as “Condition X exists because of Condition Y.”

For example, “Income is low, especially for women and youth, because there is limited adoption of off-farm livelihoods, especially by women and youth, limited use of preferred agricultural markets, especially by women, and limited production of nutritious high-value foods.”

Slide notes provide animation details.

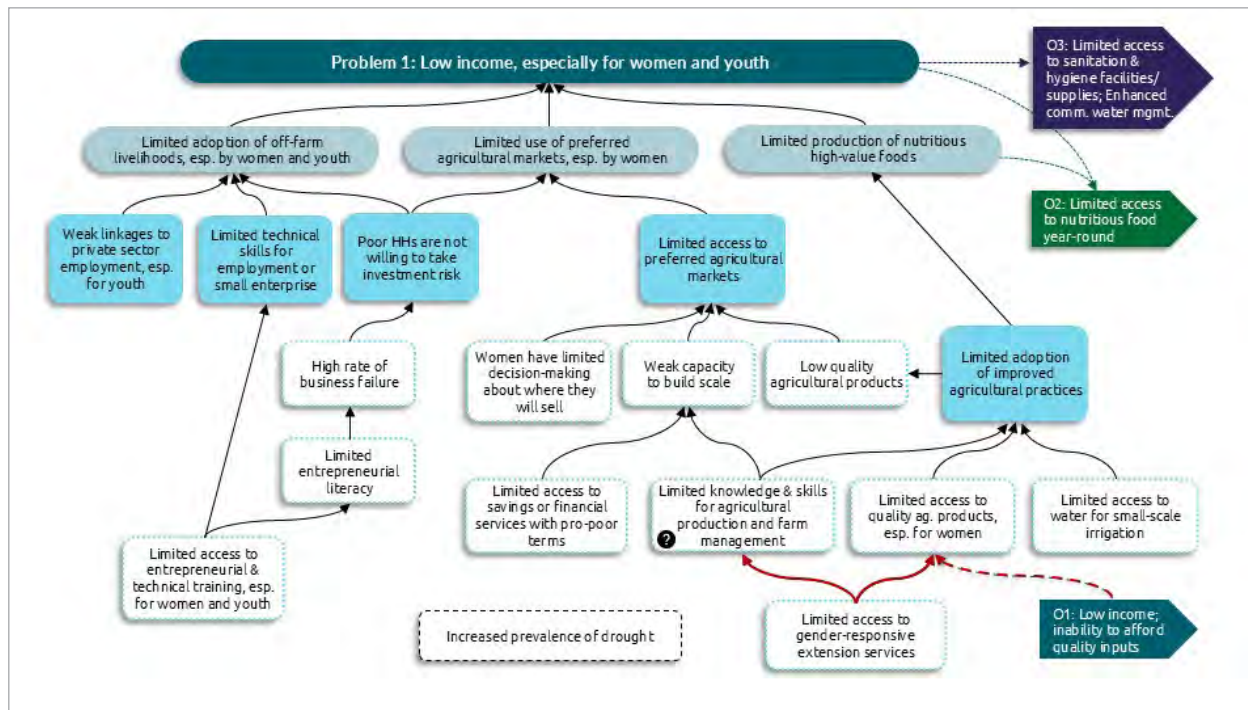
Do we think these three causes can explain the challenge of low income for women and youth?

If so, repeat this process for each of the underlying causes of the key problem. If not, what else needs to be added to our learning priorities?

NOTES:

Problem Tree Development (cont.)

SLIDE 9:



Next, we will check the causal logic by following the arrows from the bottom of the causal pathway to the top. Slide notes provide animation details.

Because there is limited access to gender-responsive extension services AND low income, there is limited access to quality inputs, especially for women.

In addition, because there is limited access to gender-responsive extension services, there may be limited knowledge and skills for agricultural production and farm management.

Repeat this for each problem statement at the “tail” of a causal pathway (tails are the lowest level problems with no arrows leading into them).

It may feel unnecessary to go through each step of the causal logic in this way, but this is typically how we catch flaws in the logic.

NOTES:



Problem 1: Low income, especially for women and youth

- Limited adoption of off-farm livelihoods, esp. by women and youth
 - Weak linkages to private sector employment, esp. for youth
 - Limited technical skills for employment or small enterprise
 - High rate of business failure
 - Limited entrepreneurial literacy
 - Limited access to entrepreneurial & technical training, esp. for women and youth
- Limited use of preferred agricultural markets, esp. by women
 - Poor HIs are not willing to take investment risk
 - Limited access to preferred agricultural markets
 - Women have limited decision-making about where they will sell
 - Weak capacity to build scale
 - Limited access to savings or financial services with pro-poor terms
- Limited production of nutritious high-value foods
 - Low quality agricultural products
 - Limited adoption of improved agricultural practices
 - Limited knowledge & skills for agricultural production and farm management
 - Limited access to quality ag. products, esp. for women
 - Limited access to water for small-scale irrigation
 - Limited access to gender-responsive extension services

External Factors:

- P1: Low income; inability to afford quality inputs
- P2: Limited access to nutritious food year-round
- P3: Limited access to sanitation & hygiene facilities/supplies; Enhanced comm. water mgmt.
- Increased prevalence of drought

[illegible]



Problem Tree Development (cont.)

SLIDE 11:

Problem Analysis Next Steps					
WHAT	WHO (examples only)	Week	Week	Week	Week
Critically analyze and organize problems and causes into a logical flow, including cross-causal linkages (problem tree) Identify and prioritize remaining information and evidence gaps	Tech leads, M&E, SLA, NBD, CO staff (6-10 people representing diverse technical /contextual perspectives)				
➔ Capture the problem tree in electronic format	Graphic leads				
Data collection Round 2: Attempt to fill priority information gaps through secondary data capture (or primary, if feasible) Document the evidence for each problem statement in an easily referenced template (to be used by proposal writers and by country office post-award)	Tech leads, M&E, SLA, CO staff, interns 1-2 person team (M&E, interns, etc.)				
Vet the problem tree with other relevant stakeholders	In-country team; regional government if possible.				
Refine the problem tree based on stakeholder feedback and filled information gaps	2-3 person team (from original problem tree working group)				



PREPARE: Adapt slide 11 to your organization's timeline and assignment of responsibilities and share with your team as either a handout or a soft copy.

NOTES:



TEAM LEARNING SESSION 3:

TOC Pathway Development

ESTIMATED SESSION LENGTH:

120 minutes

WHEN:

Once the electronic version of the problem tree is complete.

WHO:

8-20 people representing different perspectives (e.g., country office staff, technical leads and advisors, M&E and learning advisors, new business development, etc.).

WHY:

To agree on how the team will:

- transform the problem tree into a TOC;
- articulate different pathways for distinct populations; and
- compile complementary documentation to support our TOC logic.

The team will also gain experience in:

- checking TOC pathway logic; and
- distinguishing between strong and weak examples of assumptions and rationales for the TOC pathways.

SESSION RESOURCES:

- IDEAL PPT 3: TOC Pathway Development
- IDEAL Process Quality Check Booklet:
 - #4 Problem Tree Flip
 - #5 TOC Pathways

PARTICIPANT PREPARATION:

- Carefully review the electronic version of the problem tree.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION:

Optional slide modification:

- ☐ 4-5: Modify team timelines and assigned responsibilities.
- ☐ 6: Decide whether to identify the goal (sometimes it is predetermined by the donor).
- ☐ 37 & 51: Replace images with your organization's preferred templates for complementary documentation.

Exercises and handouts:

- ☐ Optional: Modify examples with goal statements from your organization's past efforts (slide 9).

Optional content refresher:

- ☐ [IDEAL TOC Development e-course: Module 3](#)

Introduction

This team learning session builds on all the previous sessions. In our last session, we used causal analysis to create a problem tree. With this background, we can now delve into potential solutions and identify the conditions that need to be in place to achieve an overarching goal. The purpose of this session is to illustrate the transition from problem tree to TOC.





TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

Overview and Timeline

SLIDE 1:



Team learning session 3 builds on all the previous sessions. In our last session, we used causal analysis to create a problem tree. With this background, we can now delve into potential solutions and identify the conditions that need to be in place to achieve an overarching goal. The purpose of this session is to illustrate the transition from problem tree to TOC. There will be a heavy focus on TOC pathways, so let's do a quick review.

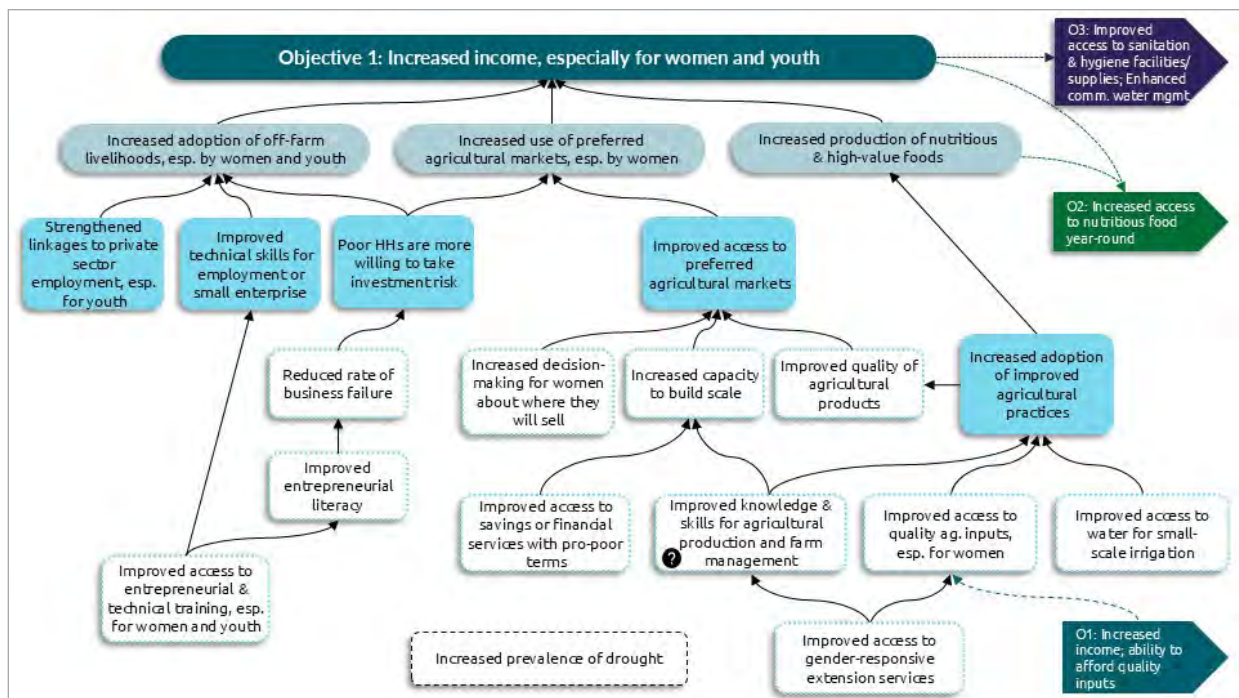
ASK & DISCUSS: Who would like to explain in their own words what a TOC pathway is?

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 2:



A TOC **pathway** illustrates a series of incremental changes (outcomes) that, when taken together as a set, are sufficient to achieve a goal.

As shown in this example, we can identify a TOC pathway by tracing all the linkages that lead to a particular outcome.

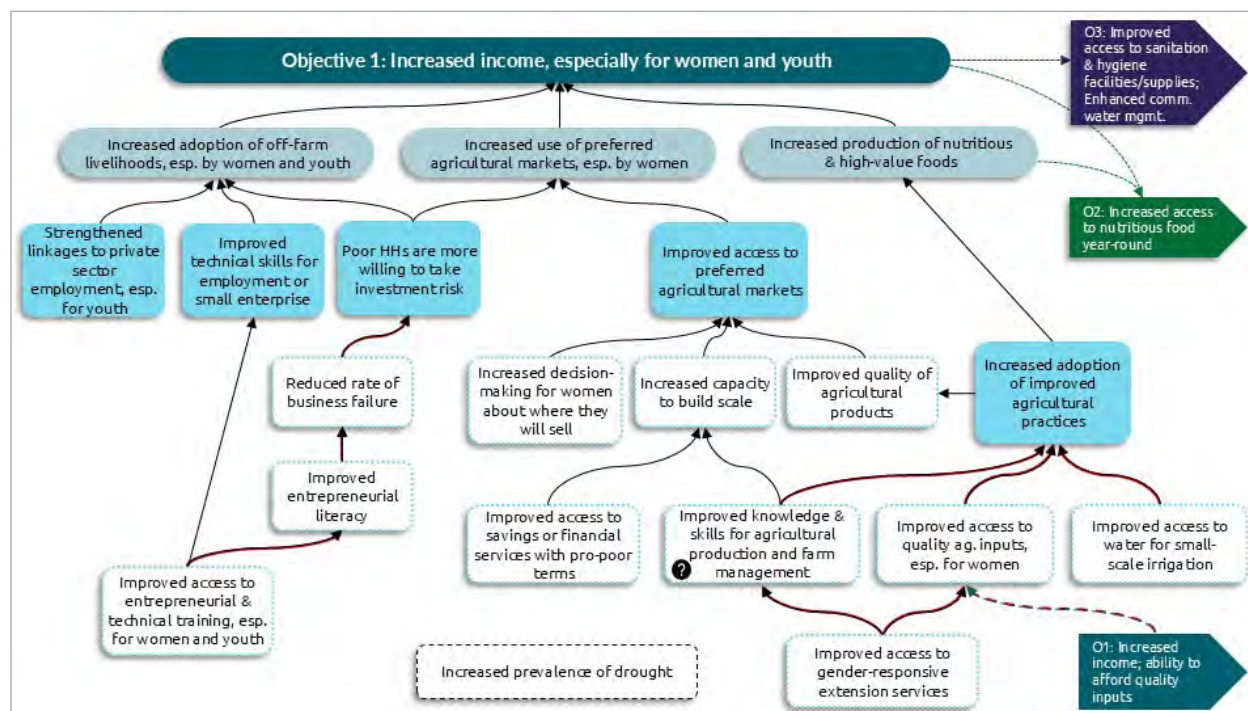
Each strategic objective or purpose will have a complete pathway, and it is common for implementers and donors to refer to them by the sectoral theme (e.g., “the nutrition pathway” or “the income pathway”).

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 3:



Within each objective pathway, there are several shorter pathways that lead to each outcome (e.g., the pathway to “Poor households being more willing to take risks,” the pathway to “Increased adoption of improved agricultural practices”).

Within each objective pathway, there are several shorter pathways that lead to each outcome (e.g., the pathway to “Poor households being more willing to take risks,” the pathway to “Increased adoption of improved agricultural practices”).

Remember: Some outcomes contribute to more than one strategic objective or outcome and should be considered as part of each pathway to which they contribute.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 4:

Step 3

TOC Pathway Development

	Month 1				Month 2				Month 3				Month 4				Month 5				Month 6		
WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Building the evidence base																							
Problem analysis																							
TOC pathway development (and compilation of complementary documentation)																							
Prioritizing what the activity will address and how																							
TOC review and refinement																							



PREPARE: Modify the slides to fit your organization's timeline and workplan. Provide an overview of deadlines and who will be involved. Revisit this at the end of the session for questions.

TOC pathway development builds on our problem analysis. With a solid, evidence-based problem analysis as a foundation, we should be able to efficiently complete the remaining steps.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 5:

TOC Pathway Development Workplan							
WHAT	WHO (examples only)	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week
Flip the problem tree into a solution tree	1-3 people; M&E lens to ensure measurable results statements						
Causal logic check	6-12 staff representing diverse perspectives (e.g., Tech leads, M&E, SLA, NBD, CO staff)						
Add assumptions and rationales							
Keep problem tree up-to-date							
Prioritize information gaps that must be filled pre-proposal and those that can be filled in refinement period	Technical leads; M&E; SLA						
Document supporting evidence for rationales and assumptions in complementary documentation	2-person team to document; support from full team to provide evidence						

Following this learning session, some team members will transform our problem tree into a solution tree. Solution trees represent the series of incremental changes (outcomes) that, when taken together as a set, are sufficient to achieve a goal.

Remember the logic checks we performed on our problem tree? We'll repeat that exercise for our evolving TOC, making sure that each outcome we include is **necessary**. We'll also verify that these outcomes, when combined, are **sufficient** to drive the desired change.

As we refine the pathways, we'll add assumptions and rationales. This is when the solution tree begins to transform into a TOC diagram.

Building our evidence base is an iterative process. During our logic checks, information gaps will surface. We'll prioritize what we need to know versus what would be nice to know to design an effective project. We'll also prioritize a timeline for when we need to fill these gaps.

PRO TIPS

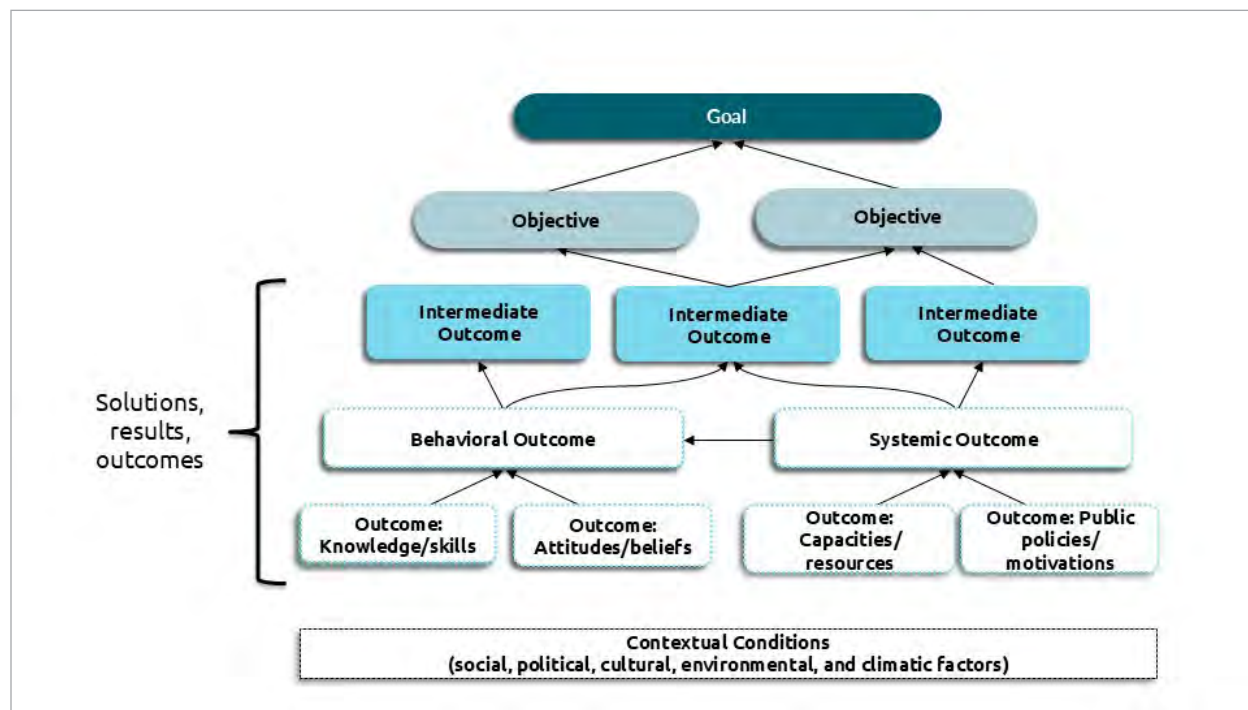
- For this process to work smoothly, the causal linkages in the problem tree must be logical and agreed upon. Many practitioners have stories of rushing through the problem tree exercise during the project design process, only to end up with a TOC that has weak, overcomplicated, and confusing pathways. Learn from their mistakes! If you haven't spent enough time checking your problem tree logic, slow down, take a step back, and thoroughly review the logic with your team members before you start flipping things!
- Before your team starts flipping all the problem statements, copy the electronic version of the problem tree and save the new file as "TOC." This will ensure that you always have an original version of the problem tree for reference.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

From Problems to Solutions

SLIDE 6:



PREPARE: Sometimes a donor, such as BHA, dictates the goal. In these cases, adapt the script for slide 6 and then skip to slide 11 and continue the process from there.

Modify the script for bullets 2 and 3 to reflect the donor's or your organization's preferred terminology.

The easiest way to create a solution tree is to invert or “flip” the problem tree. We reframe each problem statement in terms of the desired change and state it as if it has already been achieved. Then we carefully check to make sure that we have stated all our solutions in terms of measurable results.



The problem statement becomes the goal.



The key problems become purposes or strategic objectives (depending on the donor's or your organization's preferred terminology).



The remaining underlying causes become solutions, results, or outcomes (depending on the donor's or your organization's preferred terminology).



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 7:

Convert Problem Statement to Goal

Overarching problem

Food and nutrition insecurity for the extreme poor and chronically vulnerable in [target location].

Project goal

Improved food and nutrition security for the extreme poor and chronically vulnerable in [target location].

Now let's go through the first step of flipping the problem tree into a solution tree.

The goal should specify the kind of lasting change we hope to see in the lives of an impact population. Now that we have created a strong overarching problem statement, we can use it to create our overarching goal by “flipping” it. To flip the problem statement into a goal, we will reframe it in terms of desired change and state it as if it has already been achieved.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 8:

Project Goal – What, Who, Where, Not How

Project goal

Improved food and nutrition security for the extreme poor and chronically vulnerable in [target location].

WHAT: the change we hope to see	WHO: the impact population	WHERE: the targeted geographic area
---------------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------------

HOW? 

Let's make sure we have all the critical components in our newly formulated goal: the WHAT, the WHO, and the WHERE.



ASK & DISCUSS: Do we need to include the HOW? Why or why not?



No! Our goal does not need to address the HOW. This is a classic pitfall. The “how” will be explained by our TOC pathways and complementary documentation.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 9:

Review Goal Statements

1. To improve food security, income, and resilience for chronically food-insecure, rural women through their social and economic empowerment.
2. Improved food security of vulnerable households in South Kivu and Tanganyika provinces, contributing to a sustained reduction in rural poverty.
3. To improve local facilities and to empower and engage 10,300 targeted households in agricultural productivity, income, and employment towards improving their food security in the districts of Jalapa and San Isabel.
4. Improved food and nutrition security in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region.

SLIDE 10:

Errors in Goal Statements

1. To improve **food security, income, and resilience** for chronically food-insecure, rural women **through their social and economic empowerment**.
2. Improved food security of vulnerable households in South Kivu and Tanganyika provinces, **contributing to a sustained reduction in rural poverty**.
3. To **improve local facilities** and to **empower and engage 10,300 targeted households in agricultural productivity, income, and employment** towards improving their food security in the districts of Jalapa and San Isabel.
4. Improved food and nutrition security **[for whom?]** in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)



SMALL GROUP EXERCISE: Strengthening Goal Statements

OBJECTIVE: To identify common mistakes in goal statements and ways to improve them.

OPTIONAL PREPARATION: Modify the slides with examples from your organization's past efforts.

INSTRUCTIONS: Display slide 9 and ask participants to work in small groups to discuss how each goal statement could be strengthened.

In plenary, discuss the groups' observations about the problematic parts of the goal statements and how they propose to refine each statement.

Feedback (on slide 10), if not mentioned by participants:

GOAL #1: *To improve **food security, income, and resilience** for chronically food-insecure rural women through their social and economic empowerment.*

- **Error 1:** Food security, income, and resilience = too many goals in one statement. Apart from the fact that multiple goals are an M&E nightmare, sufficient income and resilience to shocks are typically preconditions for food security. By refining our analysis, we can usually determine the causal hierarchy of these multiple outcomes and simplify the goal statement by dropping income and resilience to shocks to the strategic objective level.
- **Error 2:** "...through their empowerment" tells how the project will do this. The "how" should not be in the goal, but rather demonstrated in the TOC pathways.
- **Error 3:** The goal statement does not specify a target geographic region.

GOAL #2: *Improved food security of vulnerable households in South Kivu and Tanganyika provinces, contributing to a sustained reduction in rural poverty.*

- **Error 1:** This statement includes an outcome beyond the goal: a sustained reduction in rural poverty. It is usually very difficult to reliably measure the contribution of a project's goal to a higher-level outcome.
- **Error 2:** More importantly, you may have noticed that, as in our first example, the relationship between food security and poverty reduction is inverted. Poverty reduction is usually a precondition for improved food security, rather than food security contributing to poverty reduction.

GOAL #3: *To improve local facilities and to empower and engage 10,300 targeted households in agricultural productivity, income, and employment toward improving their food security in the districts of Jalapa and San Isabel.*

- **Error:** It is difficult to find the true goal (improving food security) in this complicated statement. Most of it describes how the project will achieve the goal.

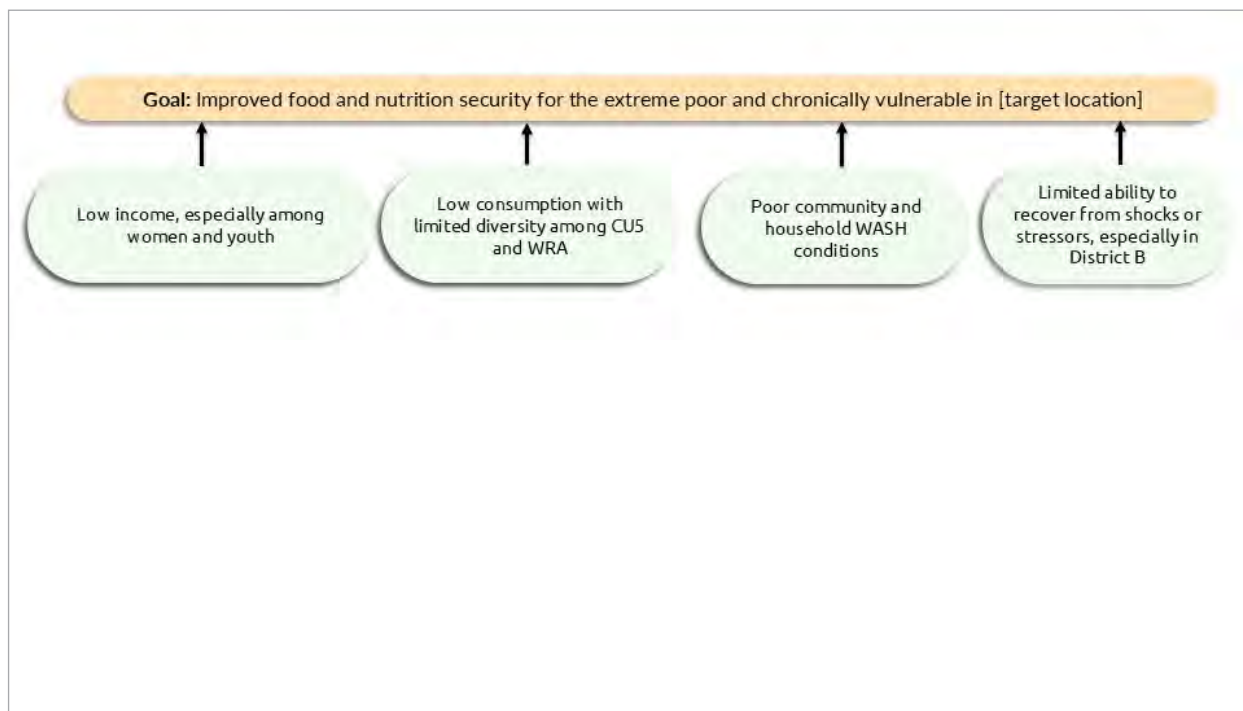
GOAL #4: *Improved food and nutrition security in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region.*

- **Error:** The goal statement does not identify the target population.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 11:



To “flip” the key problems, simply rephrase them in terms of desired change. We’ll need to choose our words carefully, knowing that each of these outcomes will need to be measured with an indicator (e.g., increased, improved, reduced).

We now have our strategic objectives or purposes, depending on the donor’s preferred terminology.

PRO TIPS

- During the “flip,” resist the urge to eliminate a strategic objective because you know your organization does not plan to address it or because the donor’s RFA does not include it as an area of focus. We tested our logic during the problem analysis. For now, we’ll leave that logic in place. Later, we’ll discuss how to demonstrate how other stakeholders contribute to the goal.
- Each solution should be framed as a results statement. It should convey a condition that has already been resolved. Common pitfalls include communicating something that will happen in the future, or an action.



OPTIONAL PREPARATION: Modify the slides with examples from your organization's past efforts.

- Ask participants to stand and stretch.
- Display the slides one at a time.
- For each example slide, ask participants to:
 - » Physically move to the right if the flip resulted in a strong result statement.
 - » Physically move to the left if the wording needs to be improved.
- Check in with a participant from the right and left to understand their choices.
- Click on each slide to reveal the answer.
- Provide examples (below) of what needs to be improved if not mentioned by team members.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 12:

Exercise: Review Solutions

Is the 'flipped' solution a strong results statement?

Key problem: Childhood malnutrition

Solution

- ✓ Childhood nutritional status improved
- ✗ Childhood nutritional status will improve



The first statement is more powerful. It conveys a resolved condition (i.e., a result).



The second statement conveys something that will happen in the future.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 13:

Exercise: Review Solutions

Is the 'flipped' solution a strong results statement?

Underlying cause: Children under age 5 consume inadequate amounts of nutritious foods

Solution



Increasing consumption of nutritious food for children under age 5 through MCHN education.



Increased consumption of nutritious food for children under age 5.



The first statement describes an action and explains how a condition might be resolved.



The second statement is more powerful. It conveys a resolved condition (i.e., a result).

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 14:

Exercise: Review Solutions

Is the 'flipped' solution a strong results statement?

Underlying Cause: Children who get diarrhea do not receive oral rehydration therapy (ORT).

Solution

- ✓ Increased administration of ORT by caregivers of children with diarrhea.
- ✗ Reduced prevalence of diarrhea in children.



The first statement is more powerful. It conveys a resolved condition that is specific to the underlying cause.



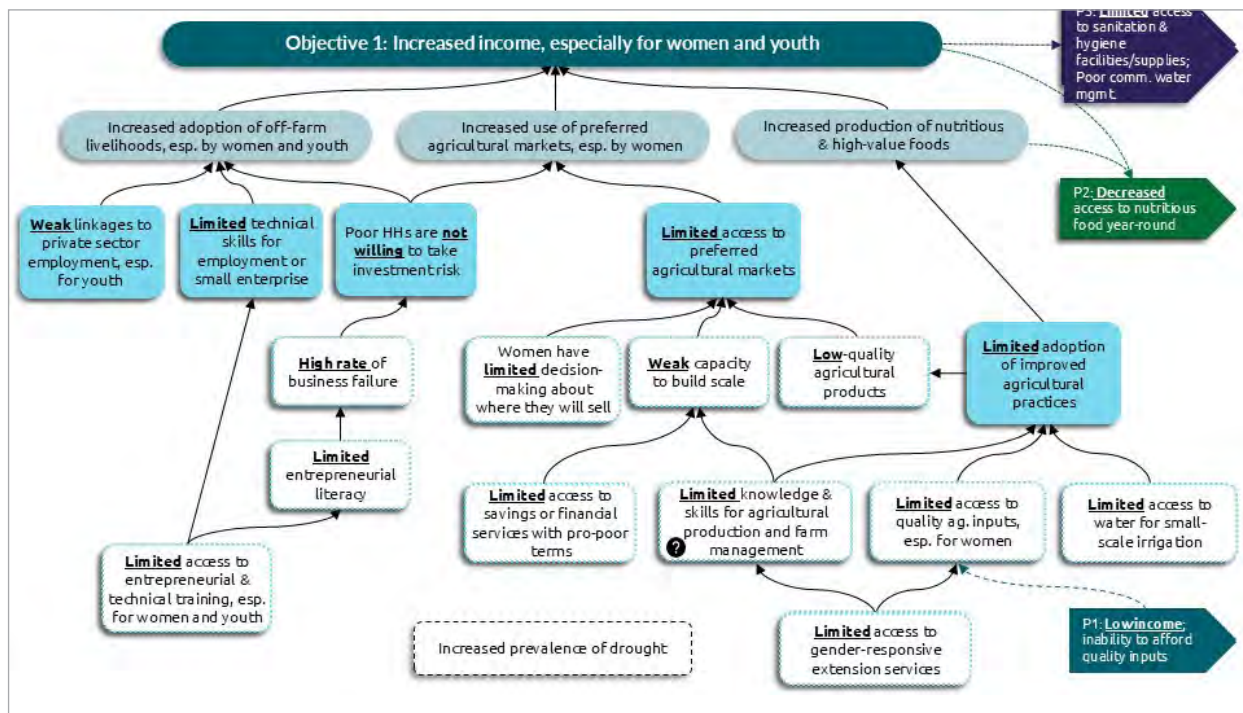
The second statement is a logical leap. Although it is framed as a result, it avoids the challenge of ORT (oral rehydration therapy) administration.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 15:



Next, we'll follow all the causal pathways in the problem tree and flip each problem/cause the same way.

Animation: All problems flip to solutions

PRO TIP

- As we begin to flip problems into solutions, don't forget to clearly identify the subset impact populations—groups that are disproportionately affected by the problem—in our solution statements.

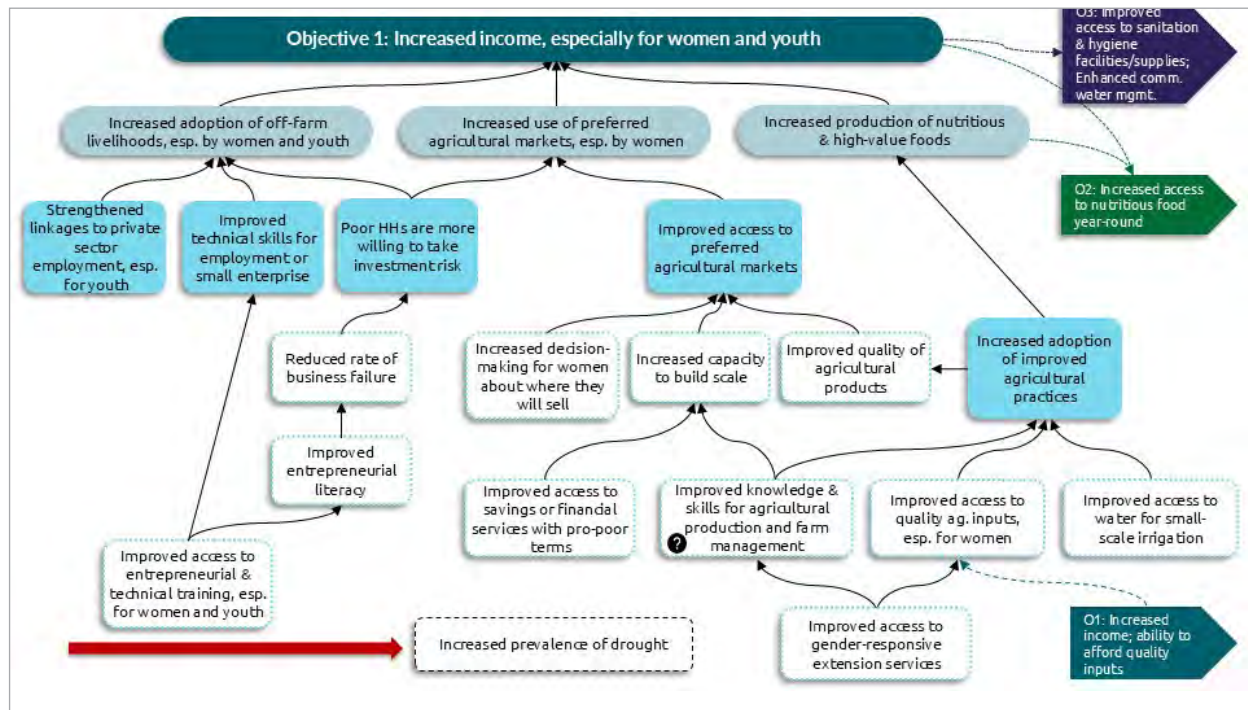
NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

Special Considerations in the TOC

SLIDE 16:



Typically, it does not make sense to flip contextual problem statements because they are conditions that cannot be solved by programming (e.g., increased prevalence of drought).

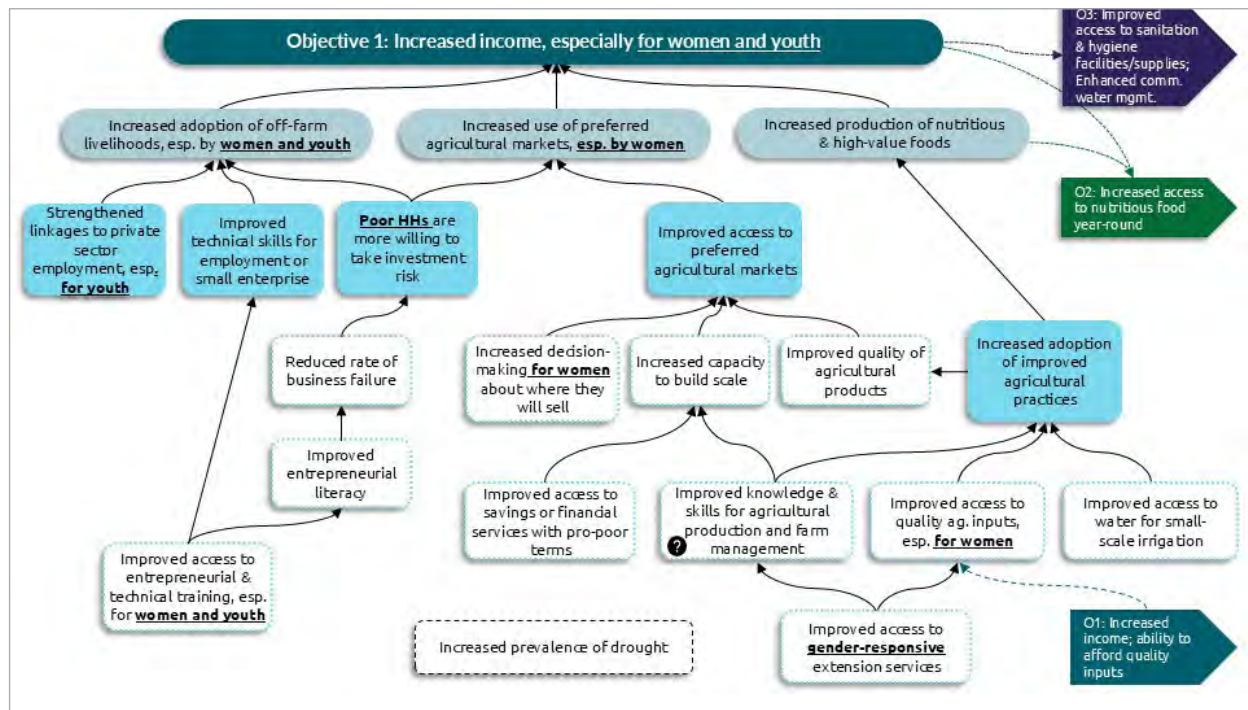
We'll leave the **contextual conditions** at the bottom of the diagram. When it comes to designing effective interventions, these contextual conditions will serve as reminders that our interventions must respond to the challenging context.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 17:



Did you notice that when we flipped our problem statements, we retained all information about **distinct impact or target populations** (i.e., populations that are a subset of the group targeted in the goal or objective statement)?

Just as we made sure to clearly identify groups that are disproportionately affected by a problem, we want to make sure that these same groups stand out in our solution statement. This will help ensure that the interventions we design are effectively targeted to specific populations and that our monitoring systems appropriately disaggregate results.

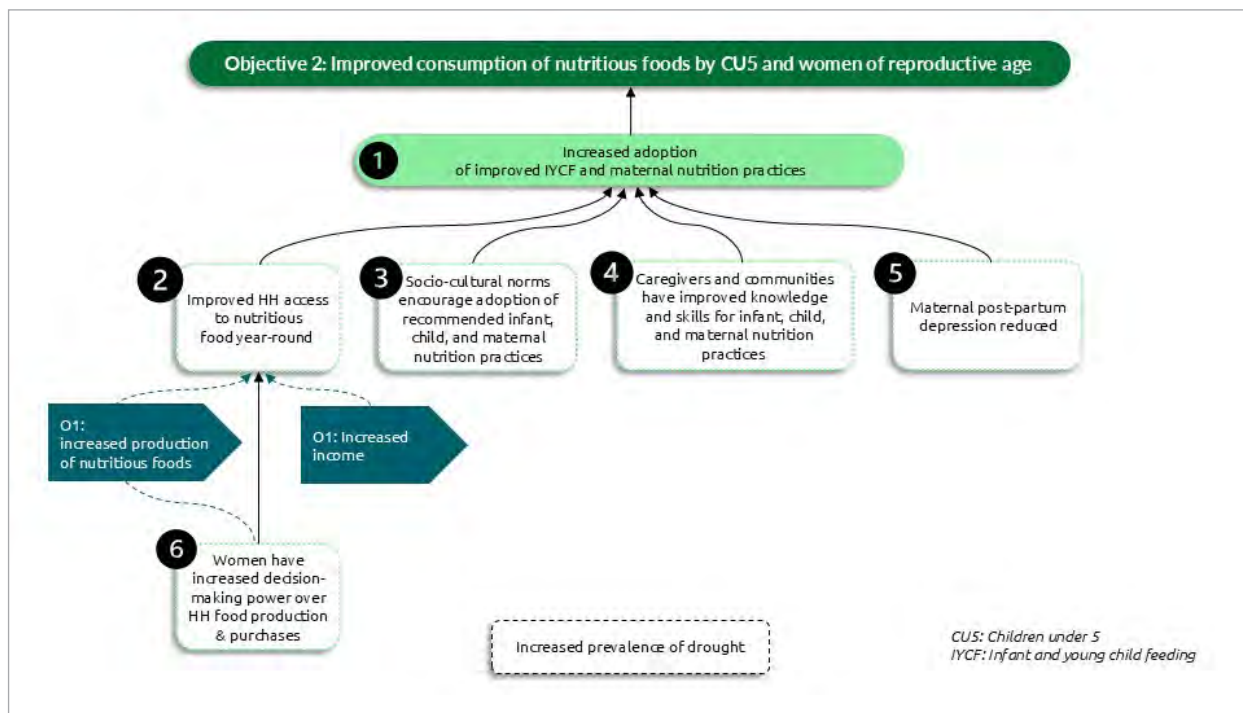
In some cases, instead of identifying women as a target group, we may choose to highlight gender inclusiveness or responsiveness in the solution statement and coordinate with our M&E team to ensure that we are capturing data that will allow us to determine the extent to which women's access is improving.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 18:



EXERCISE: Identifying Subset Impacts or Target Populations

OBJECTIVE: To recognize when results statements can be strengthened by emphasizing subset populations.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Ask participants to pair up.
- Display slide 18.
- Each pair will note the number of each outcome statement that identifies a subset impact or target population that is different from the impact group in the objective (children under 5 and women of reproductive age).
- Ask for volunteers to share their observations.

ANSWERS:

#2 Household access to nutritious food

#4 Caregivers and communities have improved knowledge

#6 Women have increased decision-making power... (broader group than women of reproductive age listed in the objective)

- Follow with a discussion. If this were our project, would you use additional or different language to highlight subset populations? Where? Why?

Possible response: Increased adoption of improved (IYCF) and maternal nutrition practices could include the target group (e.g., by whom).



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 19:



Photo Credit: the IDEAL Activity

Exercise: Highlighting Cross-cutting Themes

The TOC can be an effective way to demonstrate the integration of relevant cross-cutting areas, such as gender, conflict, environmental concerns, etc.



BHA GUIDANCE

BHA guidance states that the “TOC diagram and complementary documents should clearly show how the activity is integrating relevant cross-cutting areas, such as gender, community engagement, the environment and conflict sensitivity.”



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)



EXERCISE: Highlighting Cross-cutting Themes in the TOC

OBJECTIVE: To brainstorm keywords that can help highlight relevant cross-cutting themes mentioned in the RFA.

PREPARE: Distribute flip chart pages around the room. Each page will have a different heading for a cross-cutting theme. For example:

- Gender
- Community Engagement
- Environment
- Conflict

Modify the headers to reflect the themes in the donor's RFA.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Break participants into small groups.
- Each group will have 2-3 minutes at each flip chart to brainstorm keywords to highlight each of the cross-cutting themes.
- After each rotation, participants add new words or make a mark to indicate the existing keywords that they feel will help the team effectively demonstrate the integration of the cross-cutting themes.
- Discuss in plenary as appropriate.
- Save or combine the flip chart pages for use later in the TOC development process.

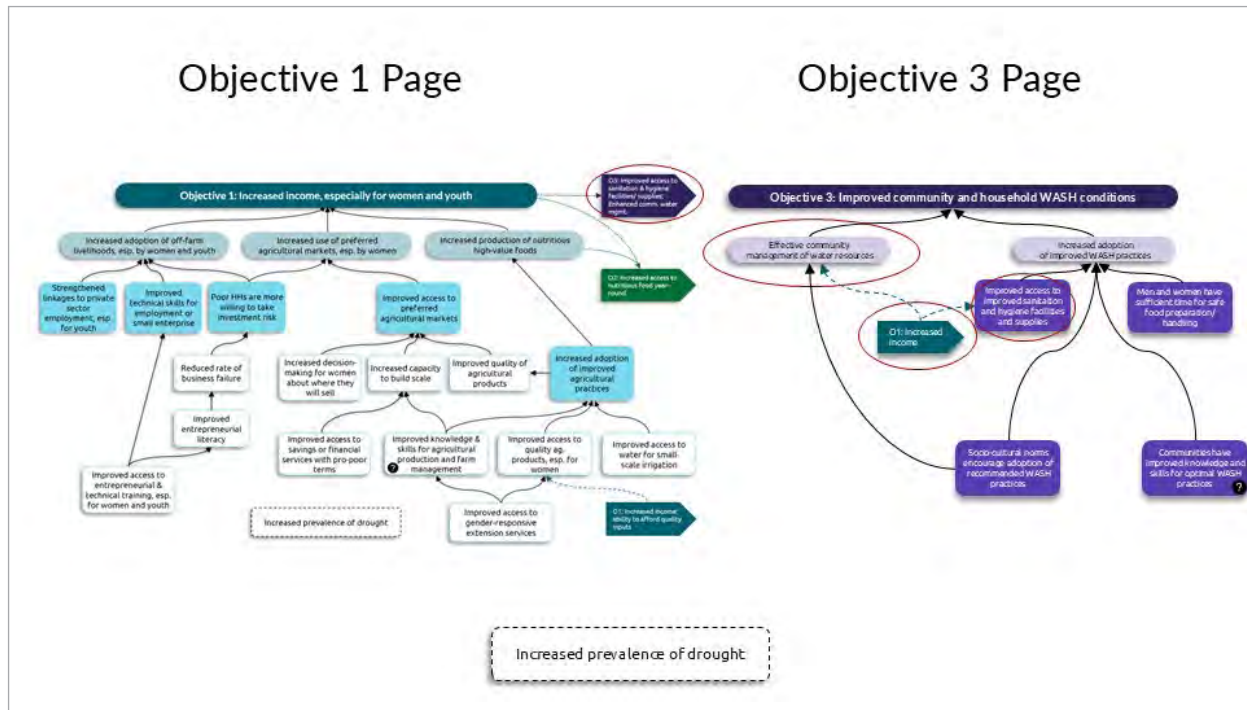
The chart below highlights some potential key words or phrases your team might identify for each cross-cutting theme. This is not an exhaustive list, and your team can expand it:

GENDER	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	ENVIRONMENT	CONFLICT
Gender inclusive	Inclusive	Climate smart	Conflict sensitive
Gender responsive	With broad community input	Environmentally appropriate	Peacebuilding
Gender sensitive	Participatory	Good environmental practices	Social cohesion/ socially cohesive
Gender equitable		Climate change sensitive	Non-violent
			Reconciliation



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 20:



Like the problem tree, the TOC diagram may need to span multiple pages to be user-friendly. It is common to present each objective/purpose pathway on a separate page.

When using separate diagrams, it is helpful to clearly show all cross-objective linkages.



BHA GUIDANCE

"Because BHA resilience activities are multi-sectoral and complex, an activity TOC diagram may not fit onto a single page. To keep the diagrams reader-friendly while maintaining detail, the TOC may comprise a set of diagrams (e.g., one summary diagram with each purpose and additional purpose specific diagrams)."

BHA requires us to repeat outcomes that contribute to multiple purpose pathways on both purpose pages.

In this example, Objective 1 (increased income) is a precondition for two outcomes on the Objective 3 page. We demonstrate this on the Objective 1 page AND we also put Objective 1 into a linkage shape and show how it contributes to the Objective 3 outcomes.

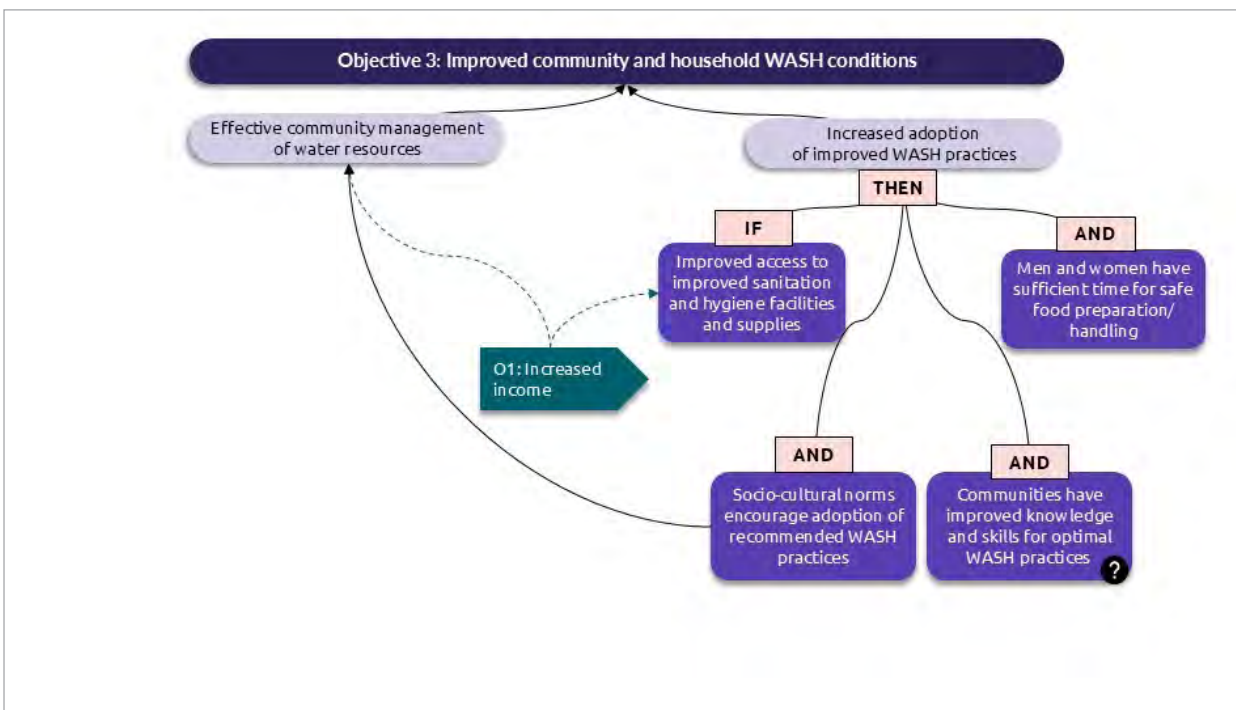
We want users to be able to easily look across the different pages and follow the logic of these cross-objective links, so be sure to identify the objective to which it links (e.g., O1, O2, or O3). Also, we will write out enough of the specific outcome it links to so that users can easily follow the logic to the corresponding page.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

Check Causal Logic

SLIDE 21:



Just as we did with the problem tree, it is important for us to examine each outcome and its expected contribution to driving change. After the flip, we will re-check the logic of all the pathways.



Starting at the “tail” of each pathway (the outcomes that have no preconditions), we read the logic moving up the pathway, using IF-AND-AND-AND-THEN statements to describe the story of change.

We methodically ask ourselves: Is each precondition **necessary**? (In other words, evidence suggests that this outcome must be achieved for a higher-level change to occur.)

We methodically ask ourselves: Is each set of preconditions **sufficient** to drive **sustainable change** in the outcome above? If not sufficient, what else is needed?



ASK & DISCUSS: What kinds of changes might be sufficient to drive sustainable change?

Possible responses

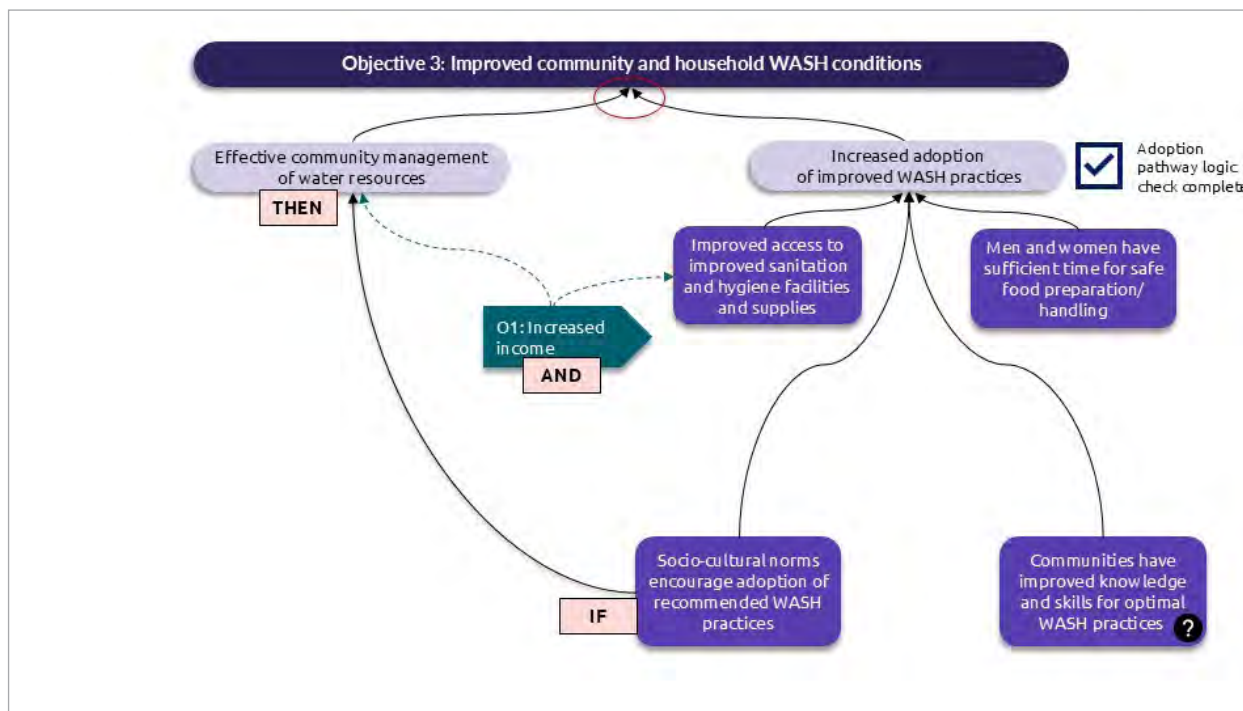
- *Changes that will help sustain behaviors*
- *Changes or linkages to resources*
- *Changes in capacities (skills and knowledge)*
- *Changes in motivation (attitudes and beliefs)*

Note: Until we develop the TOC further and include interventions, we may not see as many linkage-related changes.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 22:



- When we come to a point in a pathway where several preconditions converge, we'll return to the "tails" of any pathways we haven't reviewed yet before continuing.
- In this example, we have completed the logic check for increased adoption of improved WASH practices. We do not want to continue checking the logic through Objective 3 (the point where two preconditions converge) until we complete a logic check for the second precondition of Objective 3: Effective community management of water resources.
- We return to the "tail" of this outcome's pathway and once again read the logic moving upstream, using IF-AND-THEN statements to describe the story of change.

We methodically ask ourselves: Is each precondition necessary?

Is each set of preconditions sufficient to drive sustainable change in the outcome above? If not sufficient, what else is needed?

PRO TIP

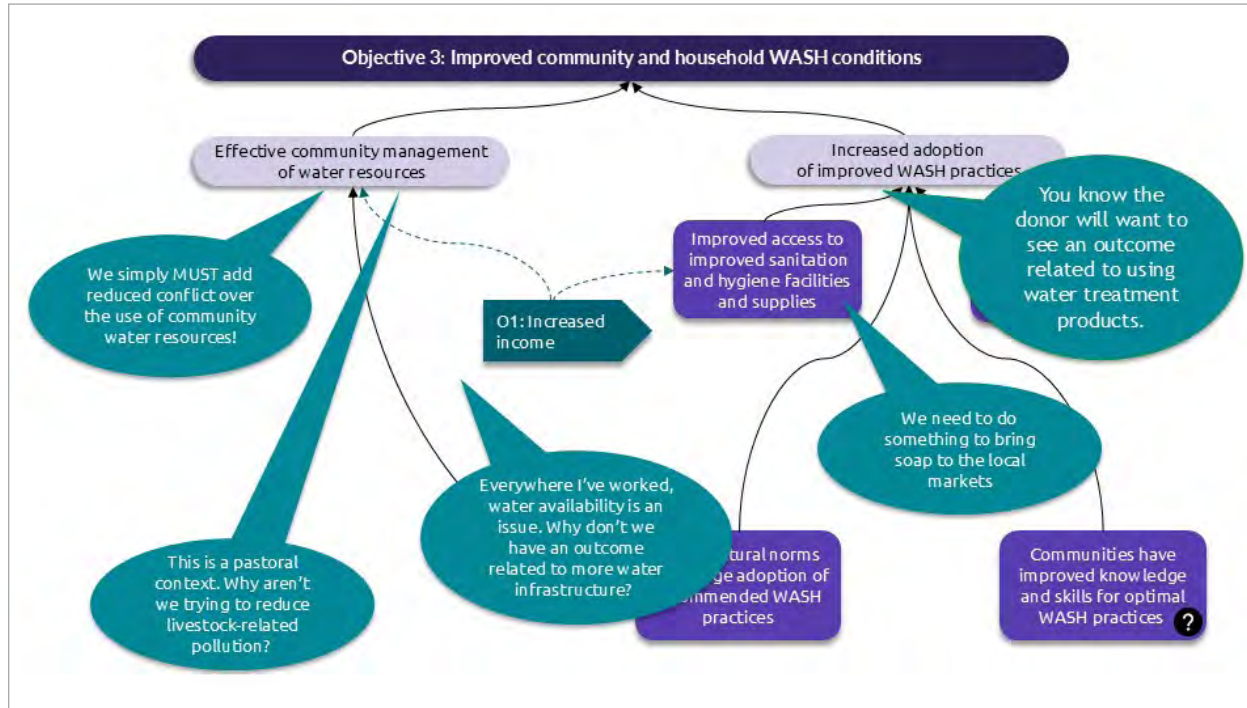
- To avoid repetition, agree on a way to indicate that you have completed the logic check on lower-level pathways (check mark, different arrow color if you're working on the electronic version, etc.).





TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 23:



As we go through the logic check it is common to get carried away and start inserting preconditions that we think are necessary to drive change. If this happens, it won't be long before our TOC is no longer rooted in an evidence base.

When we are tempted to add a new precondition to the evolving TOC, we'll go through a series of cross-check questions.

NOTES:



SLIDE 24:

Cross-check Questions for Adding a Precondition

Do we think this precondition is absolutely necessary?

- ✓ **Precondition necessary:** Continue with cross-check.
- ? **Uncertain:** Continue with cross-check.
- ✗ **Not necessary:** Don't add it to the diagram.

Is this precondition necessary? In other words, is it unlikely that the outcome to which it contributes can be achieved without achieving the precondition?

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 25:

Cross-check Questions for Adding a Precondition

What is the corresponding problem? What evidence confirms that this problematic condition exists (evidence base)?

- ✓ Evidence problem exists:** Add the new outcome to the evolving TOC and update the problem tree to include this evidence-based challenge.
- ✗ Evidence problem does not exist:** Not necessary, don't add it to the diagram.
- ? No evidence yet:** Do we need to fill this information gap before submitting our proposal, or can we include it as part of our learning plan?

If the team agrees that the gap needs to be filled, assign a team member to research the topic.

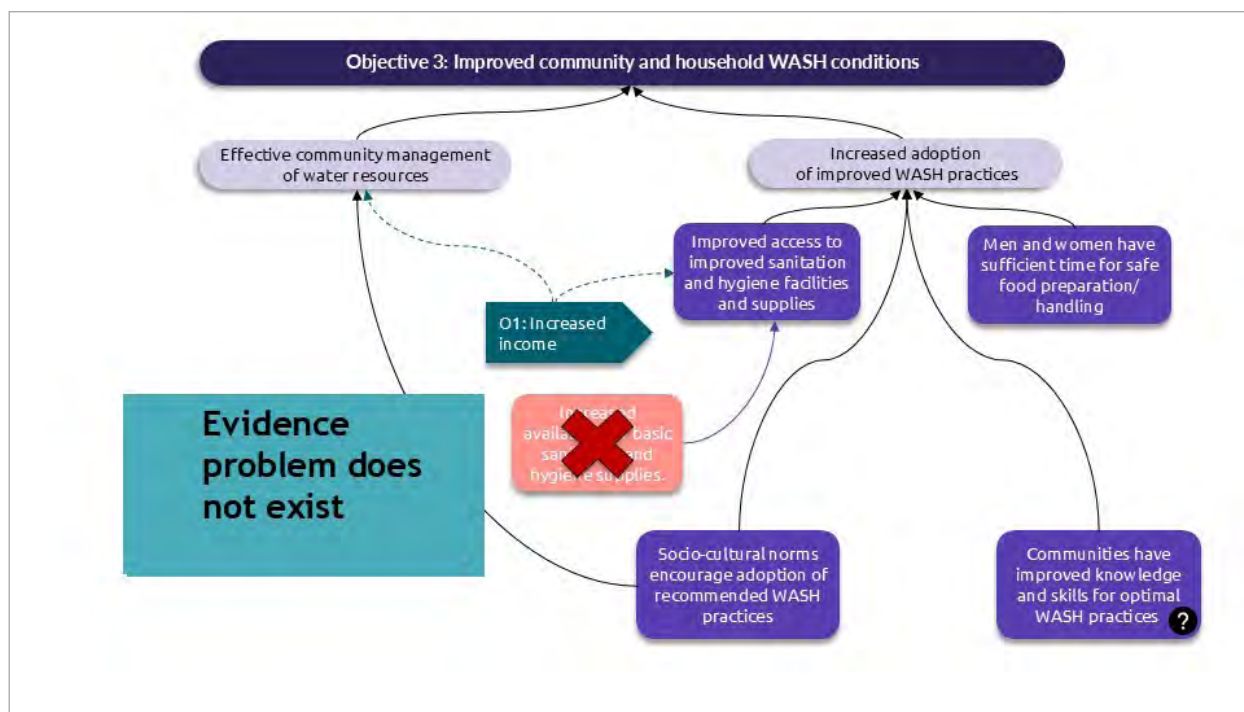
If the team agrees that the gap is more appropriate for a learning plan, mark the outcome with a question mark.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 26:



EXERCISE: Adding New Preconditions

OBJECTIVE: To practice using cross-check questions to determine whether an additional precondition should be added to the TOC.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Display slide 26. Animation will help you tell the story.

SCRIPT: Let's explore a sample scenario. During a team review, a team member asserts that to increase people's access to basic sanitation and hygiene supplies, in addition to increasing people's ability to afford these items, we need to increase the availability of the supplies in the local market through small business enterprise and home soap production.



New precondition appears



ASK & DISCUSS: Do we think this precondition is absolutely necessary? Why or why not?

Answer: Yes, improving households' ability to pay for products will do no good if the products are not available for purchase.



Decision criteria appear



Answer: Do we have evidence that basic sanitation and hygiene supplies are not available for purchase in local markets?

Answer: Because we have evidence that this problem does not exist, this outcome is not necessary. We will not add it to the TOC diagram.

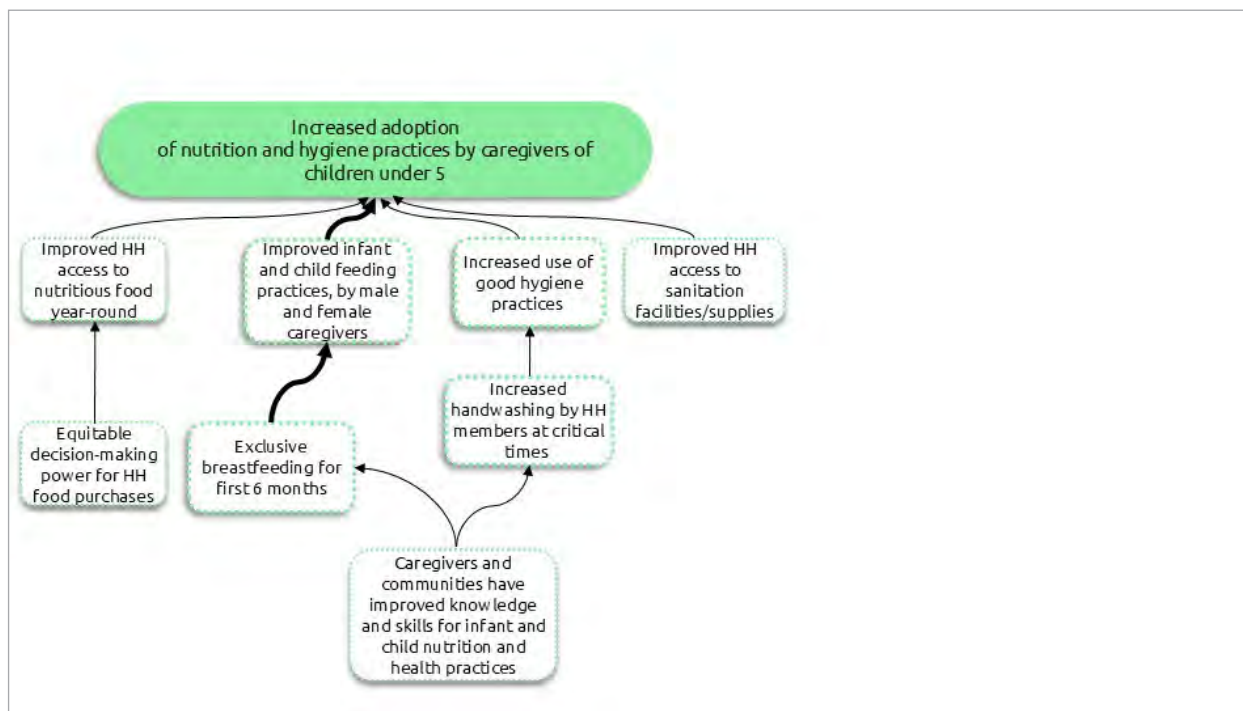
- Because we have determined that the existing precondition is necessary to achieve improved access, we may choose to add an assumption about continued availability that we will monitor over the life of the project. We'll discuss how to do this shortly.

[illegible]



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 27:



In the early stages of TOC development, it is common to find outcomes that have a definitional relationship versus a causal relationship. An outcome has a definitional relationship to another outcome if it simply describes or adds detail to that outcome, as opposed to being a precondition, or in other words, contributing to the achievement of that outcome. Definitional relationships between outcomes end up making our TOC very cluttered. As we go through a methodical logic check, we can usually catch and eliminate the definitional relationships.

There are a few examples on this slide.

Let's practice with the bolded portion of this pathway.

IF there is **exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months**, THEN we expect to see **increased adoption of nutrition and improved infant and child feeding practices by male and female caregivers**.



Are there other definitional relationships in this diagram? Ask for volunteers to point out the flaws.

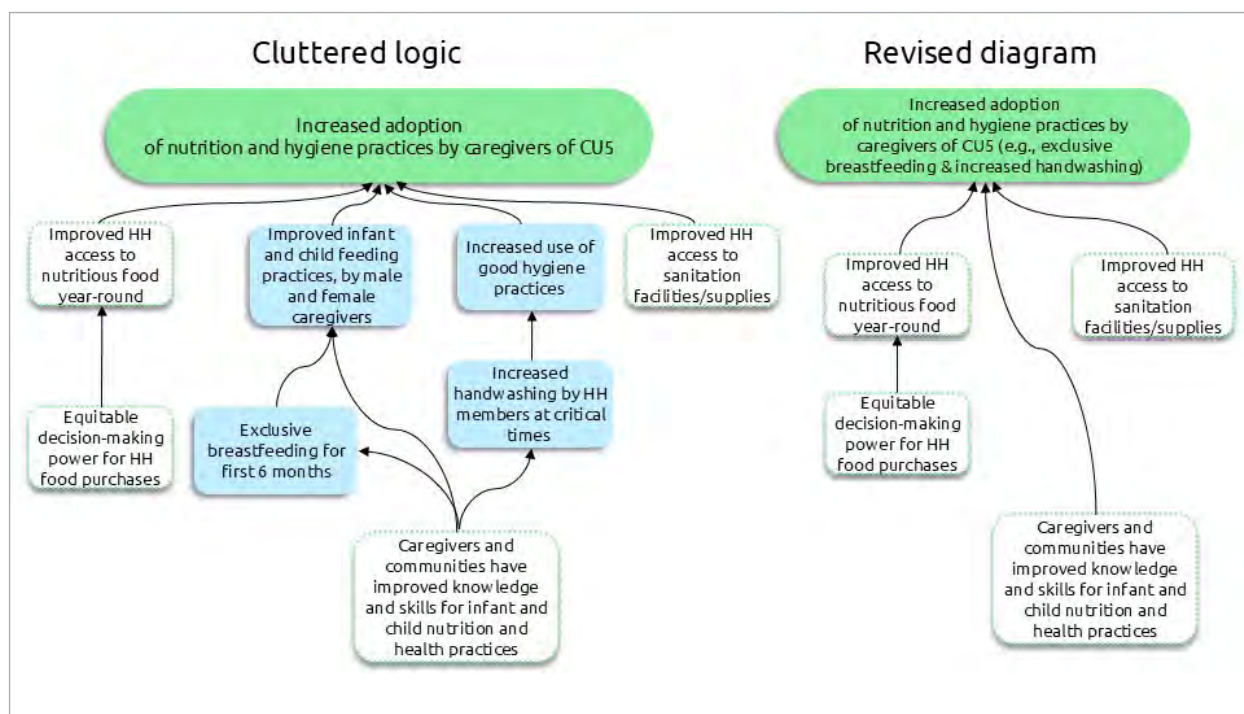
- *“Improved infant and child feeding practices by male and female caregivers” is not a precondition for “Improved adoption of nutrition and health practices by caregivers of children under 5”; it IS one of the desired nutrition and health practices we hope caregivers will adopt.*
- *Increased use of good hygiene practices is not a precondition for increased adoption of nutrition and health practices; it describes a nutrition and health practice.*
- *Increased handwashing at critical times is not a precondition for members to apply good hygiene practices; it describes a hygiene practice.*

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 28:



ASK & DISCUSS: The shaded boxes indicate definitional links. How can we improve the logic and make this part of the TOC less complicated?



After group input, click to display the revised diagram on the right side of the slide. Share any points below that were not mentioned by participants.

We can remove the definitional outcomes and linkages. Alternatively, if our evidence base shows that of all the hygiene practices that are not being applied, increasing handwashing and exclusive breastfeeding will make the biggest difference, we can eliminate the handwashing precondition AND add some detail to the increased adoption outcome.

Let's take "increased adoption of nutrition and hygiene practices by caregivers of children under 5 (e.g., handwashing, exclusive breastfeeding)" as an example. If we are concerned about using too many words on the TOC, we can simply emphasize handwashing and exclusive breastfeeding in our monitoring plan and in the indicators for the adoption outcome.

Once we have uncluttered a pathway, we need to revisit the logic to determine whether the streamlined preconditions for increased adoption are all necessary and whether, taken together, they will be sufficient to drive sustainable change.

PRO TIP

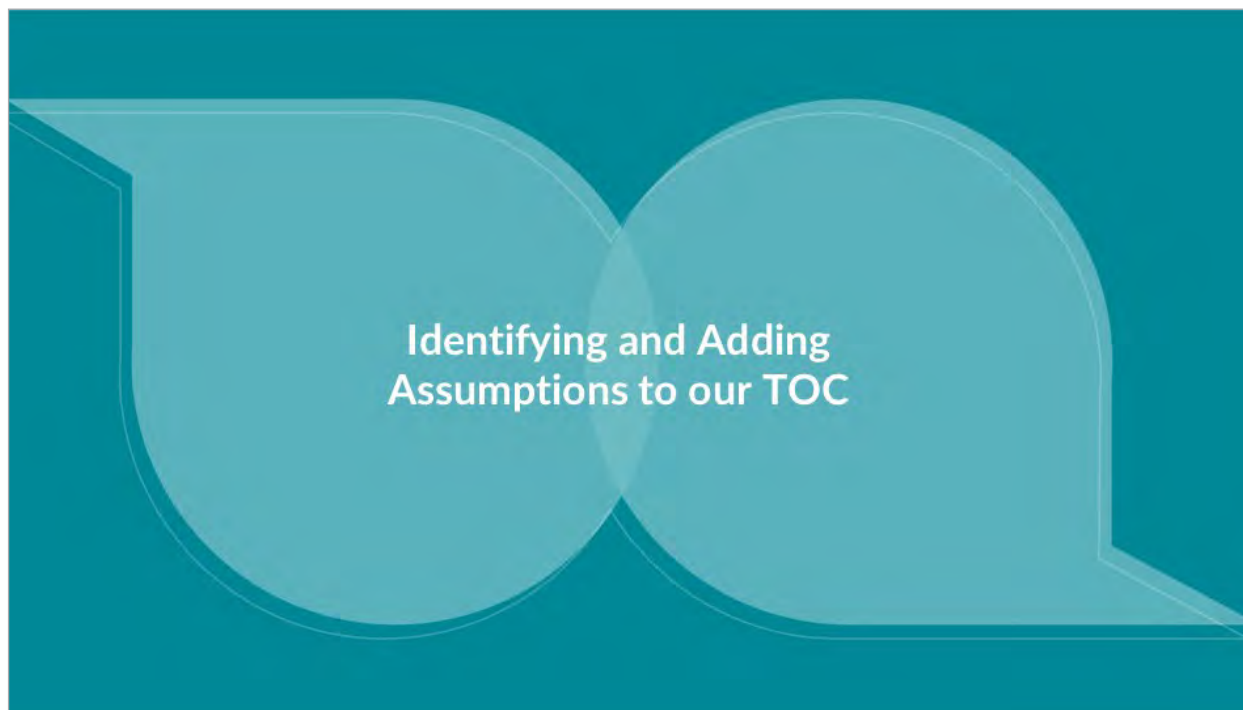
- **Keep the problem tree up to date. If we make any changes to our evolving TOC, we should make them in the problem tree. It is important that the two diagrams (evidence-based problem analysis and our action plan/TOC) mirror each other.**





Identifying and Adding Assumptions to Our TOC

SLIDE 29:



Assumptions should emerge during our causal logic check (especially when we ask, “Is this group of preconditions sufficient?”). They can fall into two categories: external or internal. Both types of assumptions represent conditions that are already in place, that we do not expect to change during the life of the project, and that have significant influence over the success of the TOC overall or some portion of it.

An external assumption is a condition that is beyond the control of our project. Internal assumptions are conditions that a project should be able to influence.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 30:

Mini-quiz

The type of assumption(s) that BHA wants shown in a TOC is:

- ☒ a) External
- b) Internal
- c) Either



EXERCISE: Adding New Preconditions

OBJECTIVE: To gain a common understanding of the type of assumption BHA would like to see in a TOC.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Display slide 30.
- Assign three corners of the room to each response a, b, and c. Alternatively, assign a body movement, such as a) standing with arms over head, b) sitting on the floor, c) flapping arms.
- Ask the group to move to the corner or make the body movement that represents their answer.
-  Display the correct answer on the slide.
- Ask a participant from Group A (correct answer) to explain why BHA wants to see external assumptions in the TOC rather than internal assumptions. Supplement with text below as needed.

External assumptions are outside the control of the project. If these critical assumptions do not hold (in other words, something in the context changes and the assumption is no longer valid), it can help explain why a project has not achieved various outcomes, despite effective efforts.

However, internal assumptions are within the control of the project. If the assumption fails at some point during the life of the project, it is expected that the project will use adaptive management skills to revise the implementation strategy and ensure outcome achievement.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 31:

Exercise – External vs. Internal Assumptions

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Annual flooding in project area will not exceed the 10-year flood level. | 6. Armed conflict will not destabilize the activity implementation area. |
| 2. Men and women are willing to take investment risk. | 7. Husbands will allow wives to attend VSLA meetings. |
| 3. Government agricultural extension worker turnover rate remains stable | 8. Income-earning potential is sufficient to sustain participants' engagement with value-chain actors. |
| 4. Economic conditions remain favorable for private sector investment. | 9. Local prices of soap and sanitation supplies remain constant relative to incomes. |
| 5. Men and women will be open to new practices. | 10. Community decision-making bodies will not prevent youth and women from actively participating. |

SLIDE 32:

Assumptions Exercise: Answer Key

EXTERNAL

1. Annual flooding in project area will not exceed the 10-year flood level.
3. Government agricultural extension worker turnover rate remains stable.
4. Economic conditions remain favorable for private sector investment.
6. Armed conflict will not destabilize the activity implementation area.
9. Local prices of soap and sanitation supplies remain constant relative to incomes.

INTERNAL

2. Men and women are willing to take investment risk.
5. Men and women will be open to new practices.
7. Husbands will allow wives to attend VSLA meetings.
8. Income-earning potential is sufficient to sustain participants' engagement with value-chain actors.
10. Community decision-making bodies will not prevent youth and women from actively participating.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)



EXERCISE: TOC Assumptions

OBJECTIVE: To distinguish between external and internal assumptions.

PREPARE: Place enough markers and blank sheets of paper on each table for the participants.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Ask participants to draw a line across their paper and write external on one side and internal on the other.
- Display slide 31.
- Ask participants to review the assumptions listed on slide 31 and categorize each as either an external or internal assumption by writing the number (e.g., 1, 2, 3) in the appropriate section of their paper.
- Display slide 32, the answer key, and supplement with text below as needed.

Left column: These are all external assumptions. They are all outside the control of any BHA-funded food security activity and most projects. Each can influence the achievement of the outcome and if the assumption does not hold, it could affect the overall success of a TOC pathway.

Right column: These are all internal implementation assumptions. We might assume that efforts to convince people of the value of a particular practice will be successful because they have been successful in the past and in similar contexts. However, BHA guidance asserts that the degree of openness or willingness depends on the success of the project's intervention. Because all the example conditions are within the project's control (via adaptive management), **we will not show these internal implementation assumptions in the TOC diagram.**

Although these assumptions will not appear in a TOC diagram for a BHA-funded food security activity, an essential part of good project management is to ensure that internal implementation assumptions hold. It is critical to monitor these implementation assumptions and if there is any indication that they are not holding, we need to review the design and implementation of the intervention and determine what needs to change so that we can rely on these assumptions.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 33:



Pro Tips: Identifying Assumptions

- What conditions that are already in place are **critical** to achieving this outcome?
- What evidence do we have to convince us that a condition will remain in place through the LOA?
- Is whether the condition remains in place completely outside the control of our project?
- Are we taking anything for granted related to the political, environmental, or social context?
- Are we taking anything for granted about other stakeholders and their capacities?

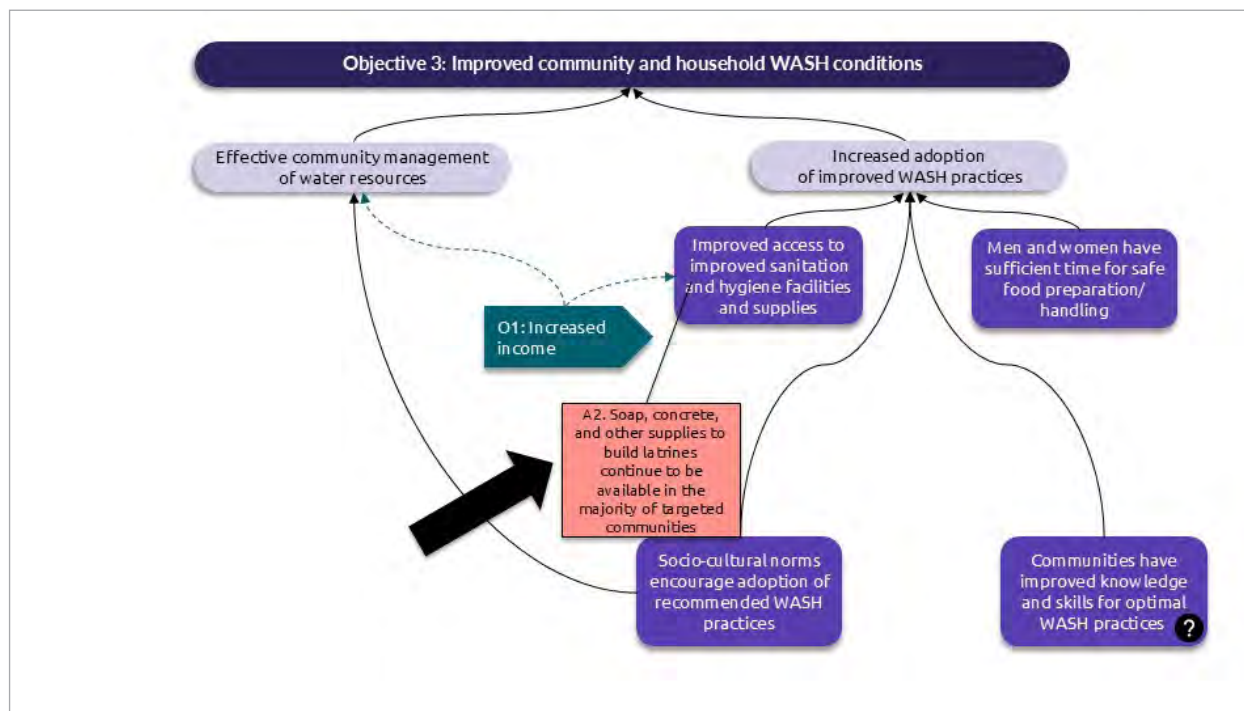
As we go through our logic check, we can use questions like these to help identify and support external assumptions.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 34:



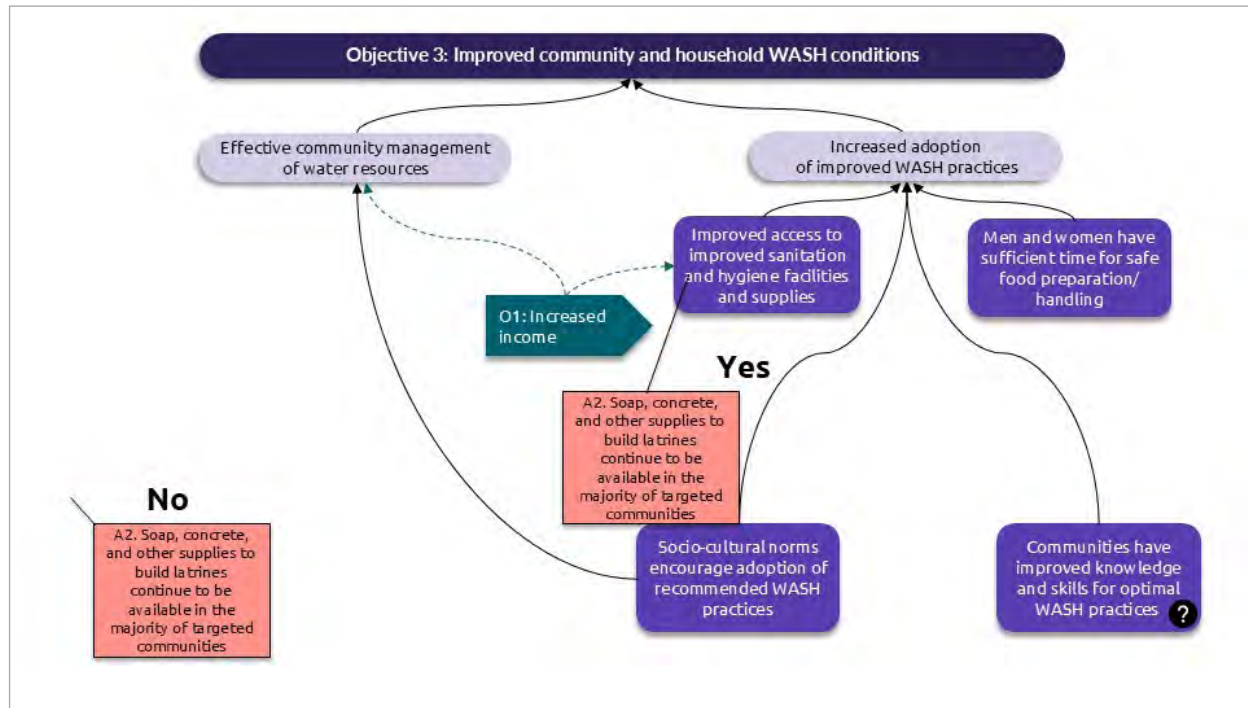
When we add assumptions to our TOC diagram, we will use a unique shape and color to highlight them.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 35:



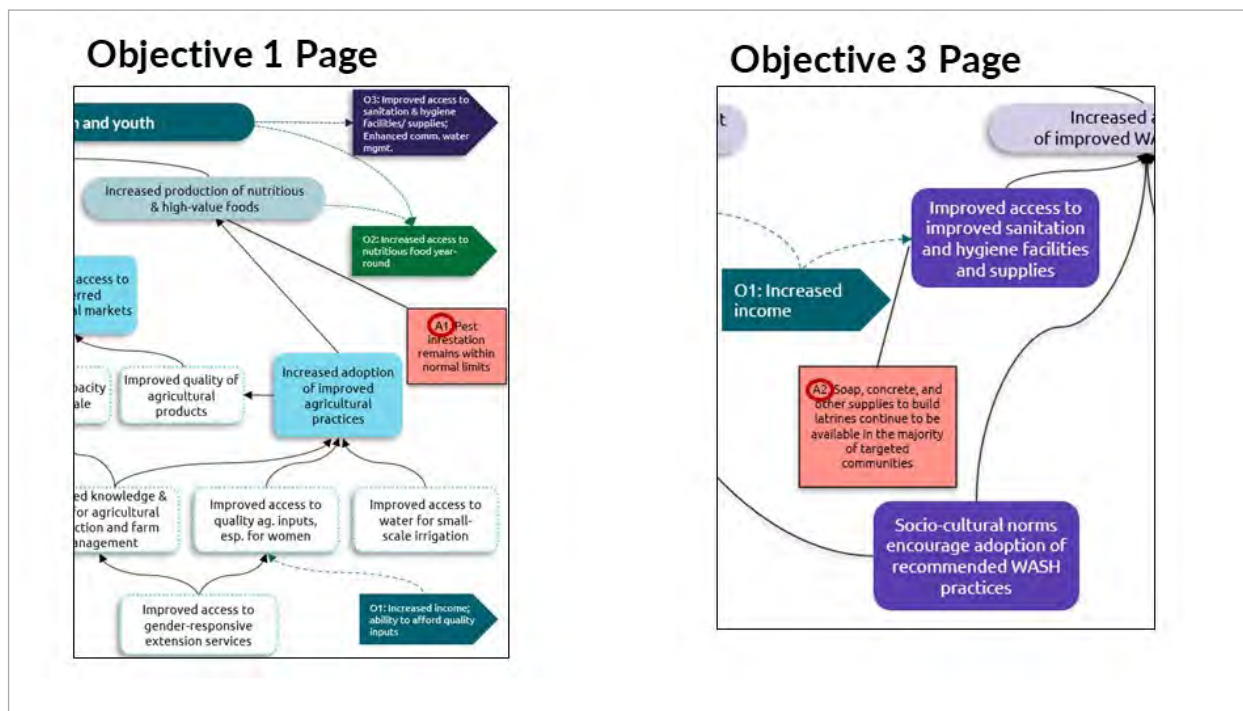
We will clearly link the assumptions to a TOC component (e.g., outcome, output, goal). We will not leave them floating in space.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 36:



We will write each assumption out in full at least once and assign a number to it.

Assumptions are critical preconditions, and it makes it much easier for users to read the TOC logic if they do not have to go to a separate document to figure out what the assumption is.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 37:

Supporting Assumptions in the TOC Complementary Documentation			
Assumption	Likelihood assumption will hold through the LOA and evidence base	Risk to activity if assumption does not hold; if risk is high, what contingency measures will be taken?	How will activity monitor assumption?
Example A2: Soap, concrete, and other supplies to build latrines continue to be available in the majority of targeted communities	Example: The likelihood of this assumption holding through the LOA is HIGH. Market assessments from past 5 years show a steady supply of all necessary materials in local markets. http://insert link to source / evidence	Example: High risk: If supplies are no longer available in markets, households will be unable to purchase them even if they are motivated to do so and income gains allow them to do so. Latrine building would be delayed. Desired hygiene behaviors would be affected. If assumption fails, activity will prioritize efforts to link communities to suppliers.	Routine market monitoring



PREPARE: You may wish to replace this image with your organization's preferred template for complementary documentation.

Our final step will be to record the full assumption and the evidence supporting it in the complementary documentation.

For assumptions, this type of information could include:

- our expectation of whether the assumption will hold throughout the LOA;
- evidence to show why we believe the assumption will hold throughout the LOA;
- a brief discussion of the risks to a pathway if the assumption fails;
- a brief description of the contingency plan our project will implement if the assumption fails; and
- a brief description of the monitoring strategies we will use to determine whether an assumption is holding or has failed to hold.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

PRO TIP



- One way to efficiently support assumptions is to create a matrix with columns for the key categories of information requested. A sample template is available in the [collection of TOC complementary documentation templates](#). Feel free to adapt it to meet your organization's needs. BHA has no preference as to whether complementary documentation on assumptions is presented in matrix or narrative form.



BHA GUIDANCE

"In addition to a TOC diagram, BHA requires applicants to provide complementary documentation as part of every application. The complementary documentation narrative or table outlines the evidence base, clarifies rationales, assumptions, and associated risks. **The TOC complementary documentation should not summarize or reiterate what is obvious from the TOC diagrams.** Rather, it should add supplemental information that is not easily communicated graphically or expressed in a few words on a diagram. It should refer to evidence used to develop the TOC and help an external reader understand the degree of certainty that the pathways portrayed in the diagrams will occur."

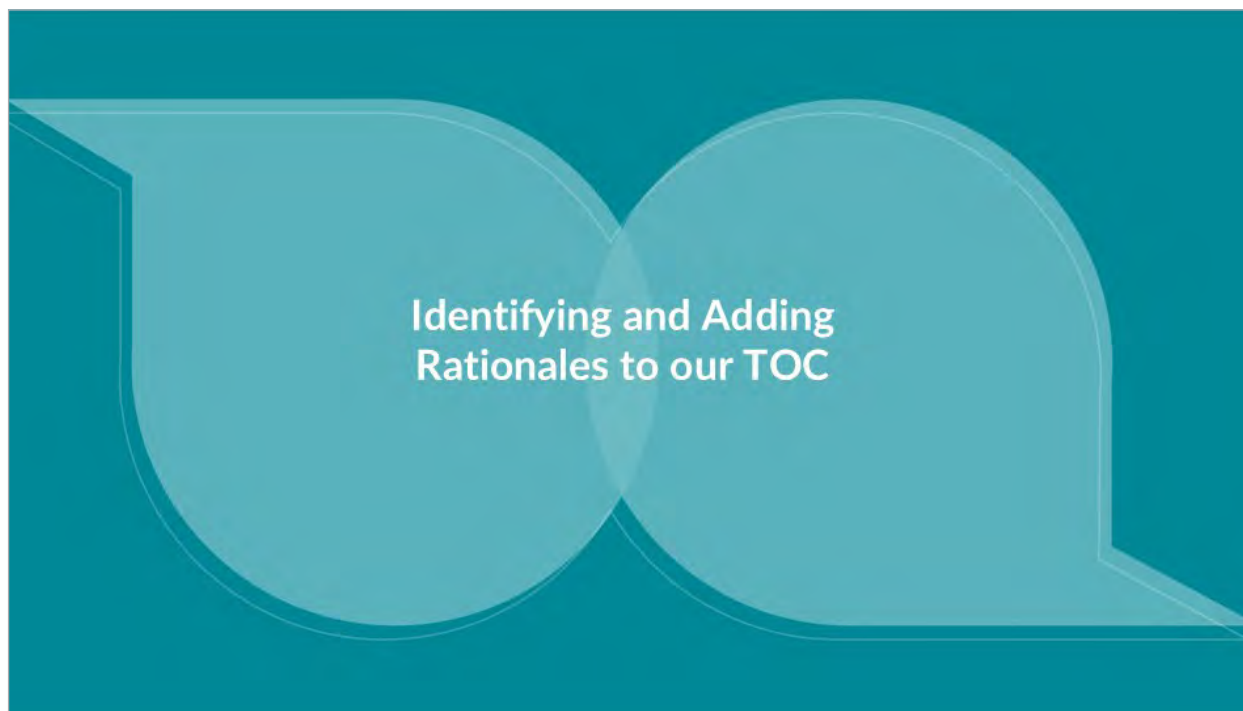
NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

Identifying and Adding Rationales to Our TOC

SLIDE 38:



EXERCISE: TOC Rationales

OBJECTIVE: To reach a common understanding of when we will use rationales to explain the logic in our TOC.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Remind the group that rationales were discussed in the overview session. It's time for a quick refresher and a stretch.
 - Display slides 39-44 one at a time.
 - Assign three corners of the room to each response a, b, and c. Alternatively, assign a body movement, such as a) standing with arms over head; b) sitting on the floor, c) flapping arms.
 - Ask the group to move to the corner or make the body movement that represents their answer.
-  Click to display the correct answer on each slide.
- Ask a participant from the group with the correct answer to explain why each statement is true or false. Supplement with answers below as needed.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 39:

Mini-quiz: Is the following statement true or false?

Rationales are the same as assumptions.

a) True

☒ False

c) Unsure

Rationales are the same as assumptions.

Answer:

FALSE: *Rationales are NOT the same as assumptions. Rationales help explain the underlying logic and provide evidence for why outcomes are necessary preconditions for the outcomes above them in the pathway.*

Assumptions are preconditions that are critical to achieving the outcome.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 40:

Mini-quiz: Is the following statement true or false?

A rationale must be provided for each connection in a pathway.

- a) True
- ☒ b) False
- c) Unsure

A rationale must be provided for each connection in a TOC pathway.

Answer:

FALSE: We do NOT need a rationale for every connection in the pathway, only for those where the causal logic may not be obvious to all users.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 41:

Mini-quiz: Is the following statement true or false?

Evidence for rationales can come from a variety of quantitative or qualitative sources, including academic, activity-specific, or community-based research.

- ☒ True
- b) False
- c) Unsure

Evidence for rationales can come from a variety of quantitative or qualitative sources, including academic, project-specific, or community-based research.

Answer:

TRUE: For example, a rationale might be based on studies showing that a child is more likely to receive a more nutritious diet if both parents are involved in decisions about their diet, rather than just one parent.

Here is another example: A rationale might refer to literature or other evidence showing that infants in high mental stimulation environments have better growth outcomes than those in low stimulation environments.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 42:

Mini-quiz: Is the following statement true or false?

The identification of rationales should be a separate activity from the TOC logic check.

a) True

☒ False

c) Unsure

The identification of rationales should be a separate project from the TOC logic check.

Answer:

FALSE: In today's session, we introduced the concept of rationales separately from the logic check simply to avoid presenting too much information at once. In practice, we will not make the identification of rationales a separate project from the TOC logic check. Recognizing where a rationale might help explain our logic should come up during the causal logic check—especially when we ask the following questions:

- What evidence shows that this precondition is necessary? What evidence shows that this set of preconditions, when combined, is sufficient?

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 43:

Mini-quiz: Is the following statement true or false?

Full explanations of rationales are usually included in the TOC complementary documents.

- ☒ True
- b) False
- c) Unsure

Full explanations of rationales are usually included in the TOC complementary documents.

Answer:

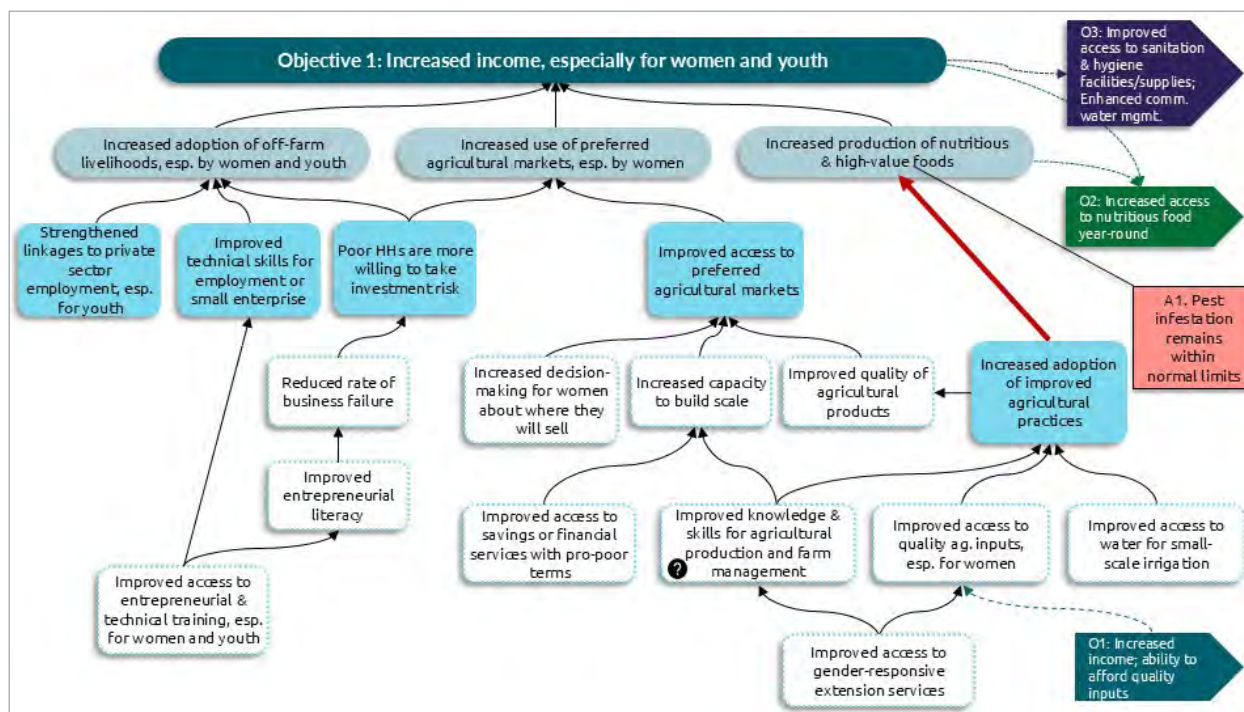
TRUE: *The complementary documentation is where we can share the evidence that supports our rationale and provide citations or links to the source.*

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 44:



Rationales can be used to explain the logic between outcome-to-outcome linkages and between outputs and outcomes. Since we have not yet discussed TOC outputs, for now we will focus on how rationales can be used for outcome-to-outcome linkages and revisit this topic when we discuss outputs.

Sometimes linkages between outcomes are well established and accepted in the development community, as in this example:

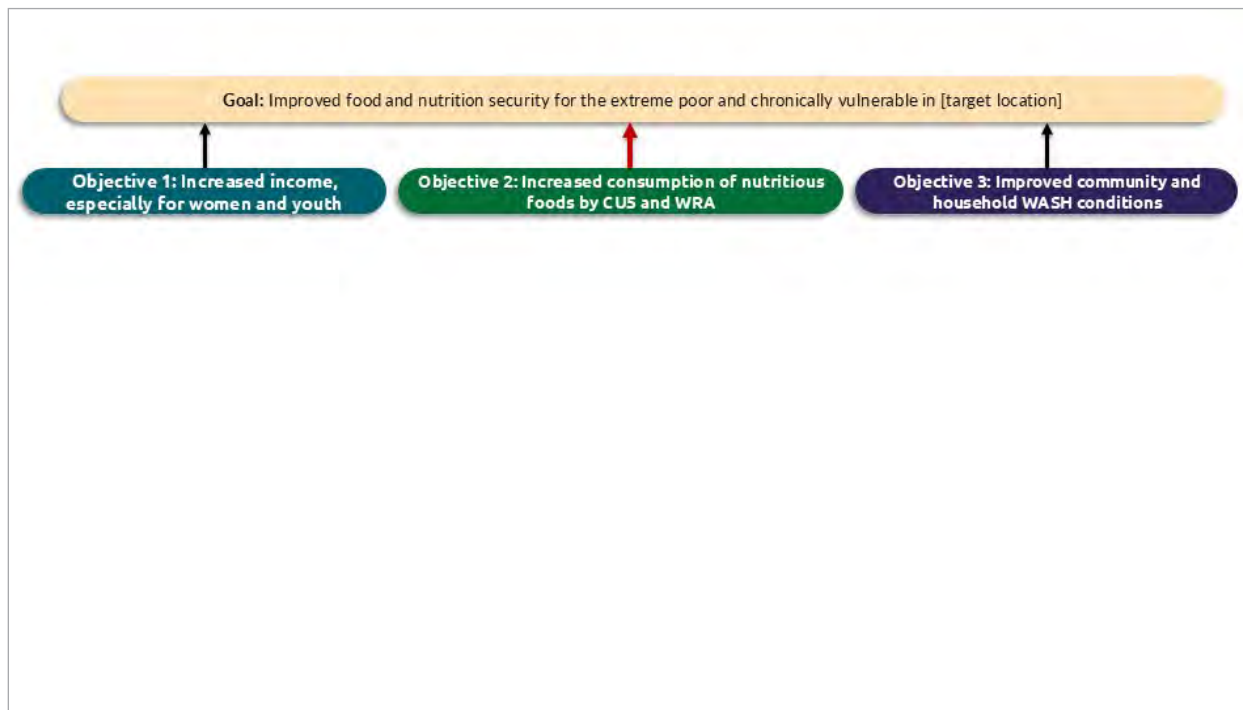
Adoption of recommended improved agricultural practices contributes to increased production.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 45:



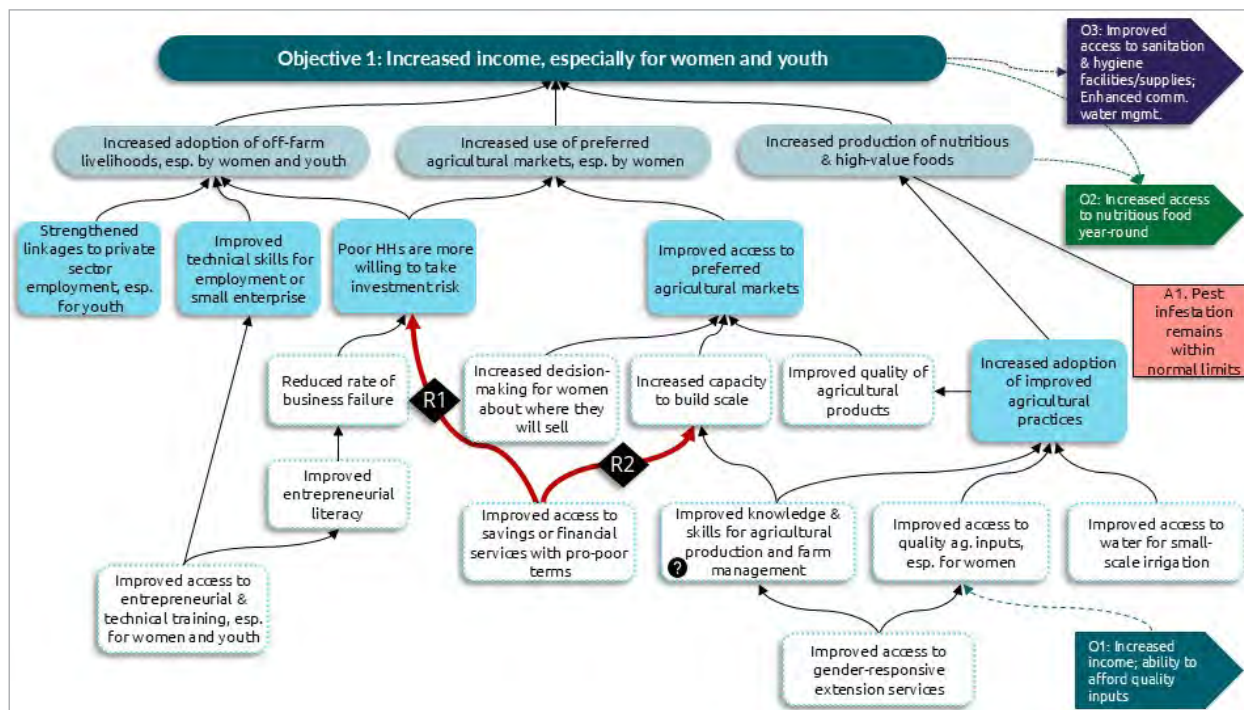
And in this example: Increased consumption of nutrient-rich food contributes to improved nutrition. In both cases, no rationale is needed.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 46:



At other times, the plausibility of a linkage may not be as well established.

For example: *Increased access to financial services contributes to increased willingness to invest in small-business enterprise or increased capacity to scale up production.*

There are many examples of credit being used for weddings, dowries, and other non-productive purposes.



ASK & DISCUSS: What kind of evidence would strengthen the plausibility of these linkages?



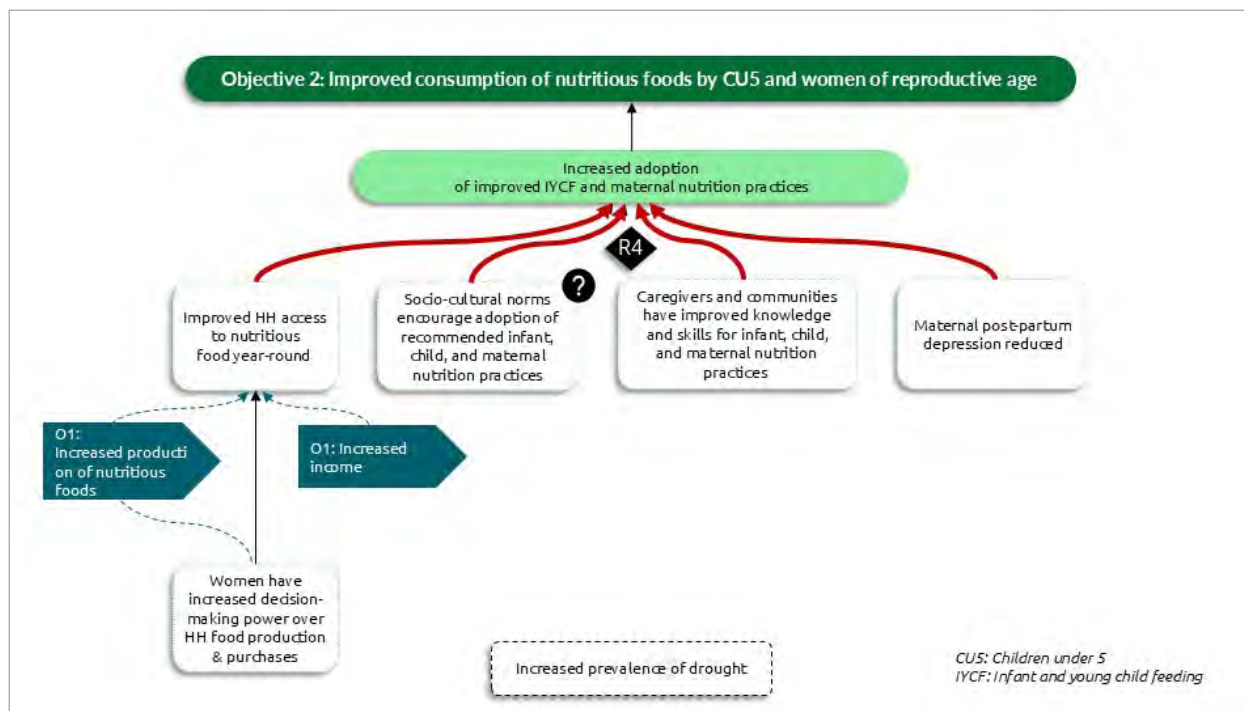
To include a rationale in the TOC, we'll make a small note in the diagram and provide the full explanation and evidence in the complementary documentation.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 47:



Here is another example where the plausibility of a linkage is not as well established:

Increased access to nutrient-rich food, combined with improved knowledge about what to eat or feed children, and social encouragement to consume nutritious foods leads to adoption of recommended nutrition practices.

There are numerous examples of nutritious food being sold and not consumed, even when complementary conditions are in place.

ASK & DISCUSS: What kind of evidence would strengthen the plausibility of this linkage?

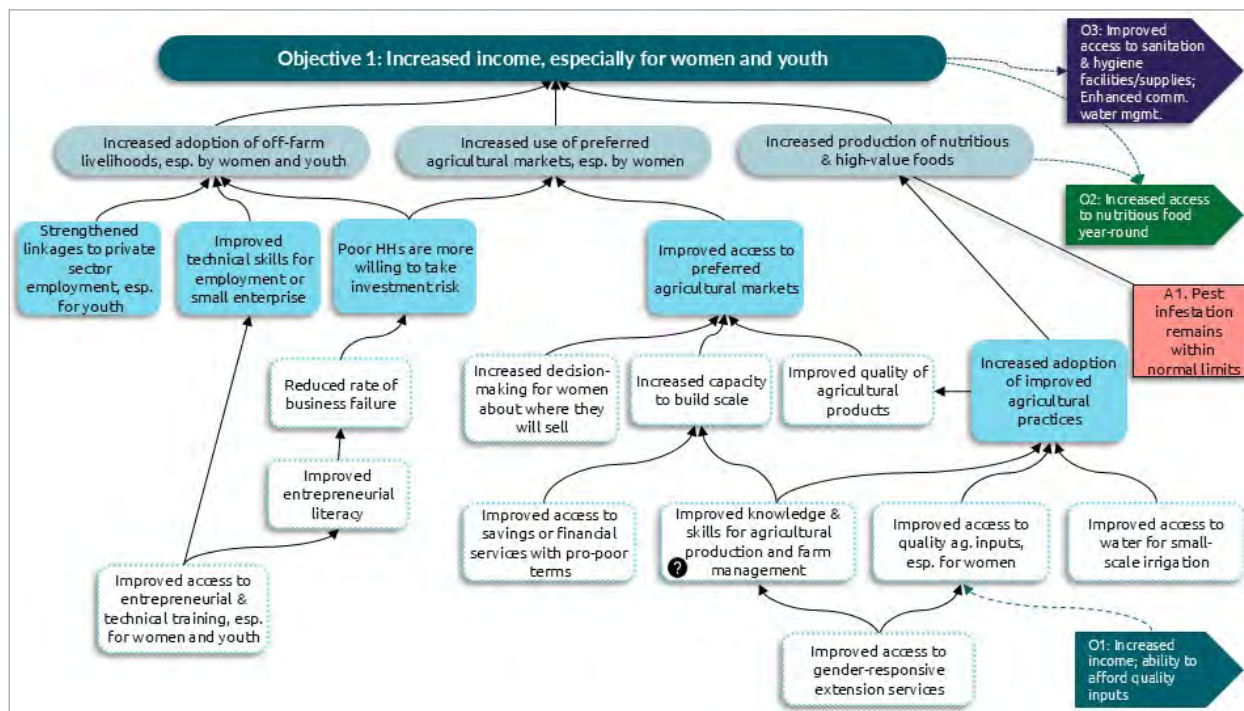
 To include a rationale in the TOC diagram, we'll make a small note in the diagram and provide the full explanation and evidence in the complementary documentation.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 48:



Finally, sometimes using a rationale can help us simplify our TOC pathways and our monitoring system.

In this example, instead of including the separate outcome of “Reduced rate of business failure,” we might include evidence that shows that when entrepreneurial literacy improves, the number of business failures decreases, and when the number of business failures in a community decreases, households are less afraid to take investment risks.



We replace the outcome “Reduced rate of business failure” with a small note in the diagram and provide the full explanation and evidence in the complementary documentation.

If appropriate, we might also decide to use “Reduced rate of business failure” as an indicator of improved entrepreneurial literacy.

NOTES:



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 49:

Questions to Help Determine if a Rationale is Needed

- Is the link between precondition and outcome well-established in the development community in your implementation context?
- AND
- Is the linkage common knowledge for a wide variety of practitioners (i.e., it is not just common knowledge for a very specific group of sectoral specialists)?

IF YES TO BOTH, **no rationale is needed.**

IF NO to either, a rationale will strengthen the plausibility of the causal logic.

SLIDE 50:

Questions to Help Determine if We Can Replace an Outcome With a Rationale

Can we explain the incremental logic with evidence instead of inserting a separate outcome?

Could we use this outcome as a metric for another outcome?

IF **YES** to either, a rationale can help make our TOC diagram less complicated.

Remember that rationales are used to explain the logic in our TOC pathways and/or to simplify the TOC pathways and align them with our monitoring system.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

SLIDE 51:

Sample Rationale Matrices for Complementary Documentation

Example 1

Reference #	Narrative summary	Citation	Source
R1	We expect increased women's decision-making power will increase health seeking behaviors.	Women's empowerment has a significant and positive impact on receiving regular antenatal care.	<i>[insert link to evidence]</i>

Example 2

Reference #	Explanation to support linkage
R1	Focus groups conducted for previous project gender analysis in <i>[country of focus]</i> demonstrate that women will make the time to attend maternal and child health (MCH) services if they have autonomy in healthcare-seeking decisions and make joint decisions with their partners on whether income is allocated to health care expenditures <i>[insert citation and source link, if available, to gender analysis]</i>



PREPARE: You may wish to replace this image with your organization's preferred template for complementary documentation.

PRO TIP



- One way to ensure that the links between the references in the TOC diagram(s) and the details in the complementary documentation are easy to follow is to create a matrix that provides the rationale reference number and column(s) for the evidence.

Feel free to adapt these two sample matrices to meet your organization's needs. Although this guide encourages the use of matrices, BHA has no preference as to whether activities provide complementary documentation in matrix or narrative form.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

Wrap-up



ASK & DISCUSS: What are the key takeaways from this session?

Supplement with the points below.

- A full TOC pathway illustrates the series of incremental changes that, as a set, are sufficient to achieve a goal.
- Logic needs to be methodically re-checked after the flipping the problem tree.
- Since the analysis is modified and refined in the solution tree/TOC, the problem tree should also be modified.
- External assumptions highlight conditions that are important to the success of a TOC or some part of it but are outside a project's control.
- Rationales help explain the underlying logic for linkages that may not be obvious to all users. They provide evidence for why outcomes in a less obvious TOC pathway are necessary preconditions for the outcomes above them.
- You do not need an assumption or a rationale for each causal linkage.
- Support assumptions and rationales in the TOC complementary documentation. A rigorous and comprehensive TOC process is the key to developing a quality TOC product.

Next Steps



CONSIDER: Share the most immediate next steps. Adapt to your organization's timeline and assignment of responsibilities.

STEPS	TEAM MEMBERS	DATES
Flip problem tree into a solution tree	1-3 people; M&E lens to ensure measurable results statements	
<i>Check and agree on causal logic, including adding assumptions and rationales</i>	6-12 people representing different perspectives (e.g., tech leads, M&E, strategic learning advisors (SLA), new business development, country office staff)	
Prioritize information gaps that need to be filled prior to proposal submission and those that can be filled in the refinement period	Technical leads, M&E, SLA	
Update problem tree if TOC is modified	1–2-person team	
<i>Document supporting evidence for rationales and assumptions in complementary documentation</i>	2-person team to compile; support from full team to provide evidence	



TEAM WORKING SESSION 3A:

TOC Pathway Development

ESTIMATED SESSION LENGTH:

3-7 days

WHEN:

As soon as possible after the TOC Pathway Development learning session.

WHO:

Pre-working session: 1-3 people. It will be helpful if at least one person has an M&E lens to ensure measurable results statements.

Main working session: 6-12 people representing different perspectives (e.g., country office staff, technical leads and advisors, M&E and learning advisors, new business development, etc.). If more staff are involved, add additional days to the process as it will take more time to reach consensus.

Post-working session: 1-2 people with some graphic design skills.

WHY:

In these sessions, team members will:

- reframe problem statements into measurable results statements;
- check causal logic;
- distill TOC pathways into essential outcomes;
- add assumptions and rationales, as needed;
- begin to compile complementary documentation; and
- prioritize information gaps that must be filled prior to proposal submission and those that can be filled in a refinement/contextualization period.

SESSION RESOURCES:

Pre-session

- IDEAL Process Quality Check Booklet: #4 Problem Tree Flip
- IDEAL Slide Deck #3: TOC Pathway Development for reference

Main Session

- IDEAL Process Quality Check Booklet: #5 Theory of Change Pathways

PARTICIPANT PREPARATION:

Main session

- Review the evolving TOC (i.e., “flipped” problem tree).
- Note areas of confusion or concern.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION:

Main session materials

- ☐ Wall-size printout of each objective pathway, large enough for 4-5 people to work on at a time
- ☐ Sticky notes or index cards (variety of colors and sizes)
- ☐ Colored markers
- ☐ Sticky dots





TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

Sample Agenda

MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS
PRE-WORKING SESSION: Flip Problem Tree into a Solution Tree		
2–3-person team	Start with the electronic version of the team's problem tree.	Save a new shared document as "TOC" to keep the original problem tree intact.
	Flip all problem statements from the goal to the lowest level problem to solutions.	The solution statement should clearly identify groups that are disproportionately affected by the problem (e.g., youth, women, pastoralists). Highlight gender inclusiveness in the solution statements, where relevant. Highlight other cross-cutting themes that are important to the specific RFA we are responding to.
	Check that all cross-purpose linkages appear on both pages of the TOC.	 PPT 3 Slide 20: TOC Pathway Development
	Confirm that all statements communicate measurable results, not processes.	 PPT 3 Slides 12-14: TOC Pathway Development
	Share with the main group for review at least 2-3 days before the main working session.	
MAIN WORKING SESSION: Refine TOC Pathways		
Plenary	Objectives	
	Overview of working session	
Agree on draft results statements		
Small groups	Divide participants into groups by objective. Discuss any proposed changes to the results statements.	If the group cannot reach consensus, flag the statement in question, note areas of concern for a smaller group of decision makers to resolve later.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS
Check causal logic		
Small groups	Divide the team evenly across the objectives. Check causal logic moving upstream (bottom to top), e.g., "If outcome X and Y and Z are achieved and assumption #1 holds." THEN outcome A will be achieved. Check causal logic moving downstream (top to bottom) using statements such as "We can achieve 'Outcome A, IF we achieve outcomes Y & Z, and assumption #1 holds." Flag weaknesses in the logic with descriptive sticky notes. Methodically check all items below.	The goal is to have cross-sectoral representation in each small group versus siloed groups. Everyone will have a chance to contribute to the logic check for each objective.
	Are there any preconditions that may not be necessary to stimulate change for the next outcome in the pathway?	Flag them for removal.
	Are there any sets of preconditions that do not seem sufficient to drive sustainable change for the next outcome in the pathway?	If team members propose new preconditions for which there is no evidence yet, clearly mark them as information gaps/learning priorities. Include team members' initials on the sticky note for later reference when the information gap matrix is compiled.
	Is behavior change adequately represented in the pathway?	If new preconditions are proposed that already exist in another objective pathway, add a shape for a cross-sectoral linkage.
	Propose assumptions and rationales, as needed.	Write the full assumption and rationale on a sticky note for others to review. Include team members' initials on the note for later reference when the complementary documentation is compiled.
	Are there any definitional relationships between outcomes?	Mark outcomes that should be deleted. Revise remaining outcomes as appropriate.
Small groups	Rotate groups to the next objective. Repeat until all objectives have been addressed by the entire team. Review and comment on existing recommendations.	Use different colored sticky dots to flag: Agreement Disagreement: Add a sticky note to explain the area of concern. Questions: Add a sticky note with a specific question.
Plenary	Rotate through each objective. Discuss areas flagged as questions. Once clarified, try to categorize each as either general agreement or disagreement. Discuss areas flagged as disagreement. Try to reach consensus.	If the group cannot reach consensus, flag the statement in question for resolution later by a smaller group of decision makers.



TOC Pathway Development (cont.)

MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS
Compile complementary documentation		
2–3-person team with periodic input from others	Assign 2-3 team members to document each agreed-upon assumption and rationale in complementary documentation.	Those doing the documenting should reach out to the team members who originally contributed the assumptions or rationales for assistance in articulating the supporting evidence. It is common for this step to extend beyond the group working session.
Compile information gaps		
1–2-person team with periodic input from others	Assign 1-2 team members to document in the learning matrix each agreed-upon information gap and whether the information must be obtained prior to proposal submission or can be obtained post-award as part of the learning plan.	Those documenting should reach out to the team member who originally contributed the information gap. It is common for this step to extend beyond the group working session. Remind the team: Do we NEED to know, or do we WANT to know? If we NEED to know, do we NEED to know now, or can we learn about this area during the refinement or contextualization phase?
POST-WORKING SESSION: Revise electronic version of TOC		
1–2-person team	Transfer changes from the marked-up version of the TOC on the wall to the electronic version of the TOC. This includes inserting assumptions and rationales into the diagram using a different shape or color.	Keep the problem tree up to date. If the logic shifts in the TOC, it must also shift in the problem tree. One effective way to do this is to have one person make changes to the TOC and project the image on a screen while the other person makes the same change to the problem tree.
	Confirm that all assumptions and rationales are numbered.	Coordinate with the team members who are developing the complementary documentation to ensure that the numbering on the diagram matches the numbering on the documentation.
	Confirm that all cross-sectoral linkages appear on both objective pages.	
	Share with the main group to review and confirm that changes have been incorporated correctly.	



TEAM LEARNING SESSION 4:

Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How

ESTIMATED SESSION LENGTH:

120 minutes

WHEN:

Once team members have agreed on TOC pathways and the electronic version of the TOC has been updated.

WHO:

4-10 people, especially technical leads and team members who have mapped and analyzed other stakeholders' efforts.

WHY:

To agree on:

- the criteria we'll use to determine which outcomes our project can address;
- the process we'll use to identify outcomes that can be addressed by external actors;
- how we'll present the efforts of external actors in our TOC and complementary documentation;
- criteria for prioritizing intervention outputs; and
- how we'll present intervention outputs in our TOC.

SESSION RESOURCES:

- IDEAL PPT 4: Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How
- IDEAL Process Quality Check Booklet:
 - #6a External Actor Outcomes
 - #6b Interventions/Sustainability

PARTICIPANT PREPARATION:

- Thoroughly review electronic version of TOC and stakeholder mapping matrices.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION:

Optional slide modification:

- ☐ 3-4: Modify team timelines and assigned responsibilities.
- ☐ 5: Modify to share criteria developed by your design team.
- ☐ 6: Replace image with stakeholder mapping results.
- ☐ 15, 35, 38: Modify to reflect your organization's preferred method of sharing complementary documentation.
- ☐ 18-end: If you are developing a TOC in response to a BHA RFA, determine if your team will use the TOC process to prioritize interventions at the application stage.

Optional content refresher:

- ☐ [IDEAL TOC Development e-course: Module 4](#)

Introduction

We've identified the conditions that need to be in place to achieve our overarching goal. In this session, we will identify the outcomes that external actors will address or are addressing, and then prioritize the outcomes that our project will address. Remember that a TOC is not limited to the changes that one project will bring about. Typically, many stakeholders contribute to the changes needed to achieve a common overarching goal. It is important to demonstrate the layering and integration of our project with the work of others.

Once we have determined who will be responsible for which outcomes, we will explore how our project will drive sustainable change for the outcomes we will address. This will involve prioritizing a set of interventions. We will continue to think about what is necessary and what, in combination with other interventions, will be sufficient to drive change. As we select and design our interventions, sustainability will be a key factor in our planning process. We want to carefully consider the behaviors, services, and inputs that will need to continue beyond the life of our project to sustain key outcomes.

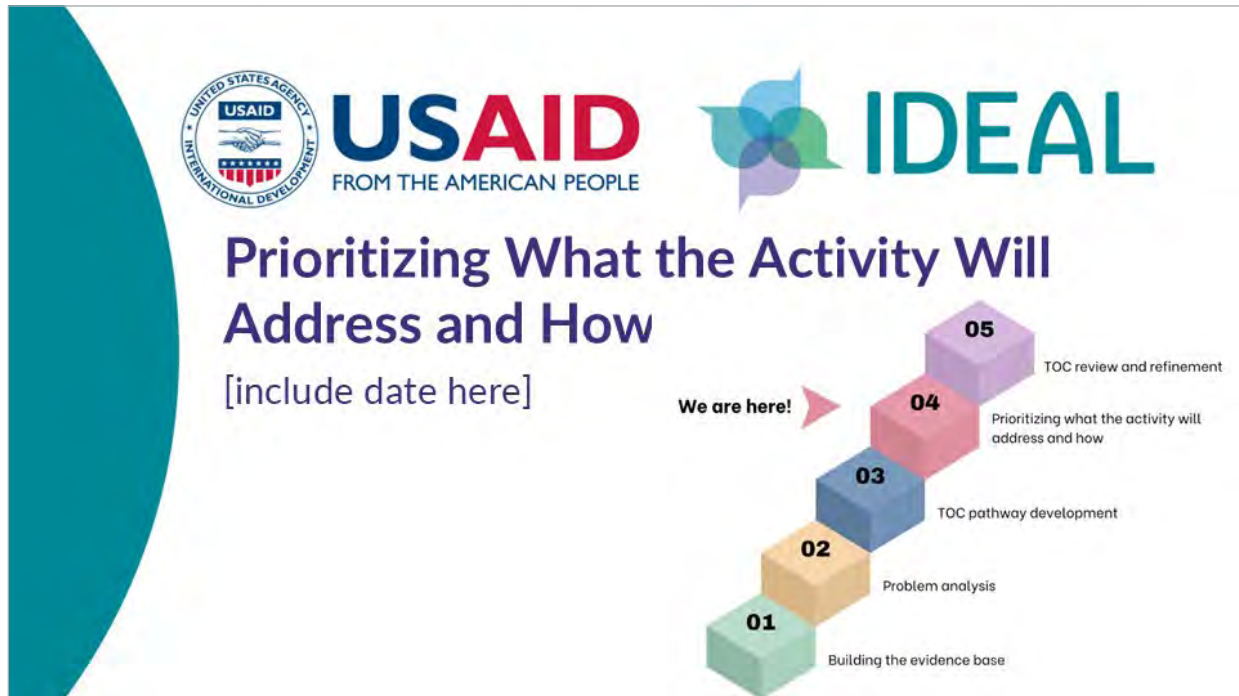




Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

Overview and Timeline

SLIDE 1:



SLIDE 2:

Objectives

To agree on:

- Criteria and processes for determining what our project will address and how
- Methods for presenting our efforts and those of other actors in the Theory of Change and complementary documentation



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 3:

Step 4 Prioritizing What the Activity Will Address and How																							
	Month 1				Month 2				Month 3					Month 4				Month 5				Month 6	
WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Building the evidence base																							
Problem analysis																							
TOC pathway development (and compilation of complementary documentation)																							
Prioritizing what the activity will address and how																							
TOC review and refinement																							



PREPARE: Modify the slides to fit your organization's timeline and workplan. Provide an overview of deadlines and who will be involved. Revisit this at the end of the session for questions.

We've identified the conditions that must be in place to achieve our overarching goal and drafted our TOC pathways. Now it's time to identify the outcomes that external actors will address or are addressing, and then prioritize the outcomes that our project will address and determine how we will address them.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 4:

Workplan: Prioritizing What the Activity Will Address and How

WHAT	WHO (examples only)	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week
Agree on outcomes the project will address and those that will be addressed by external actors	4-10 staff representing diverse perspectives					
Document supporting evidence for external actors in complementary documentation	2-person team to document; support from full team to provide evidence					
Prioritize project interventions	Technical leads					
Graphically refine the TOC diagram to reflect external actor efforts, prioritized outputs, new rationales and assumptions	Graphic lead					

We'll begin by discussing criteria that can help us choose which outcomes we will address and which are more appropriate for others to address. We'll also provide tips for sharing information about external actor contributions in the complementary documentation.

Once we've narrowed the focus of our project, we'll practice identifying the most appropriate interventions to promote sustainable improvements.

Remember the logic checks we did when we developed our TOC pathways? We'll repeat this exercise, making sure that each output we include is necessary (prioritization) and that these outputs, when combined, are sufficient to drive sustainable change.

As we refine our pathways, we may need to add additional assumptions and/or rationales to support the logic.

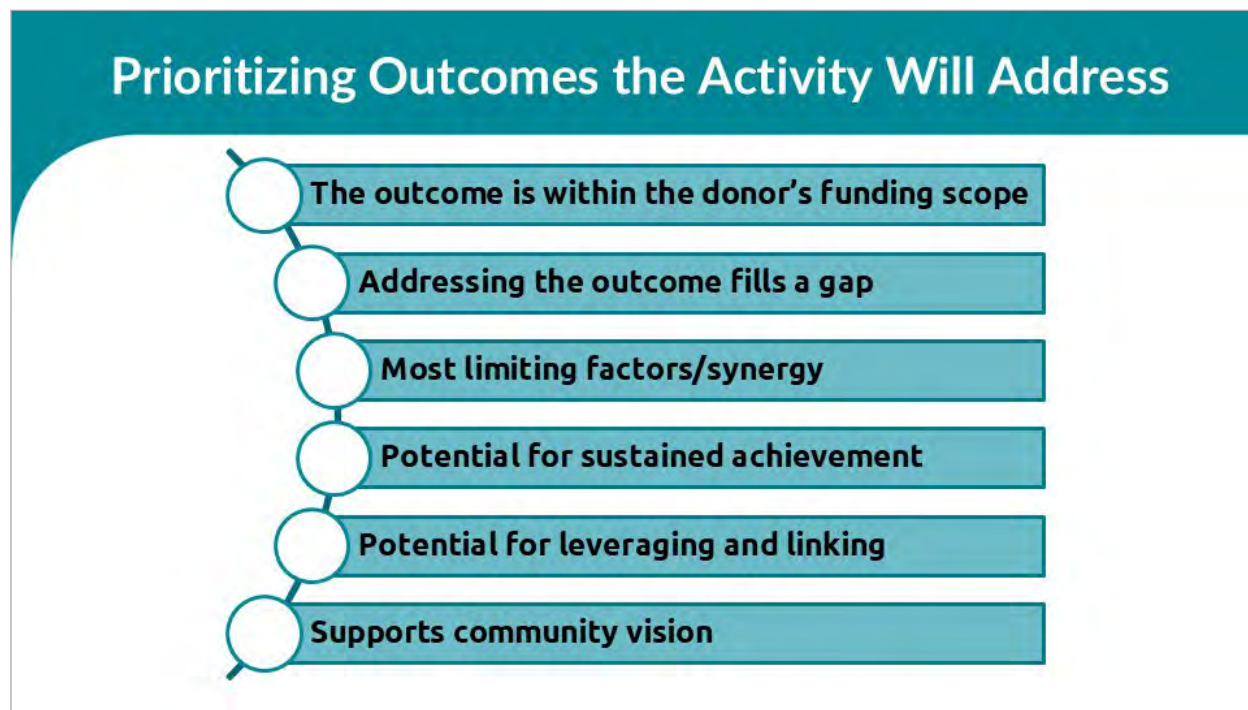
Finally, we'll demonstrate effective ways to add external actor efforts and project outputs to the TOC diagram.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

Prioritizing Outcomes and Identifying External Actors

SLIDE 5:



PREPARE: Modify the content to share the criteria developed by your design team.

Remember that a TOC should show all the steps that lead to a change for a community or population as a result of the efforts of many stakeholders working within the same geographic area toward a similar goal. Although our initial analysis may suggest that many outcomes are necessary, as we conduct prioritization exercises, we will likely find that we will not or cannot directly address all of them.

Our design team has established criteria to determine which outcomes our project will address. Here are some basic **criteria for selecting outcomes**.

- **The outcome is within the donor's funding scope:** For example, BHA funds RFSAs for agriculture, economic recovery and market systems, food assistance, nutrition, and risk reduction, among others, but BHA does not currently provide funding for early childhood education.
- **Addressing the outcome fills a gap:** Comprehensive stakeholder mapping can help us determine if other agencies are not currently focused on this outcome.
- **Most limiting factors/synergy:** When we review an outcome that has multiple preconditions, we want to reassess which of the preconditions are most limiting, based on all available evidence. This can get a bit complicated because at the same time we want to think about the synergy of all the preconditions combined. By synergy, we mean that sometimes the combined impact of addressing two or more preconditions will be substantially greater than the sum of our project and other actors addressing the preconditions individually.



- If all these criteria are met, an additional consideration might be: Addressing the outcome will maximize our organization's comparative advantage. **Comparative advantage** refers to an organization's ability, skills, and experience in addressing a problem relative to other organizations.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 6:

Stakeholder Mapping								
Technical Area	Name of agency/ contact info	Type of agency	Scope of assistance (time)	Scope of assistance (geographic)	Scope of assistance (beneficiaries)	Successful interventions / & why	Unsuccessful interventions/ & why	Relationship with other stakeholders
Component: Health and nutrition								
WASH								
Prevention & treatment of childhood illnesses								
Nutrition services								
Component: Agriculture and livelihoods								
Post-harvest loss								
Natural resource management								
Seed distribution								
Market linkages								



PREPARE: Replace image with results of stakeholder mapping and analysis (Step 1: Building the Evidence Base).

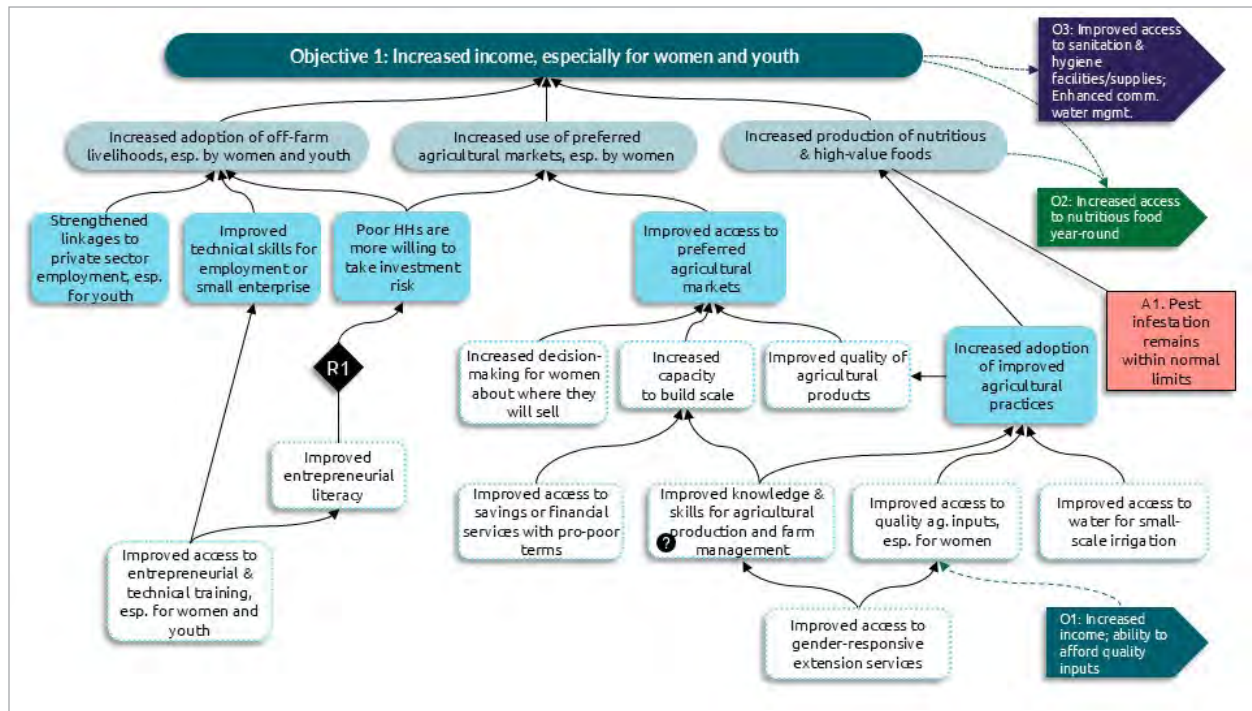
The results of our stakeholder analysis will help us identify where there are gaps in existing programming. They will help us explore how we can layer and integrate our efforts with those of other actors.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 7:



Once we've used our criteria to decide what our project will and will not address, we'll modify our TOC diagram to reflect these initial decisions.

Let's practice with an example scenario.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)



EXERCISE: External Actor Outcomes, Scenario 1

OBJECTIVE: To practice prioritizing what our project will and will not address.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Display slide 7.
- Share the following scenario (alternatively, place this text on the slide so the team can visually refer to it as they listen).

Our stakeholder analysis reveals that NGO X is operating a project that helps farmers purchase, run, and maintain small-scale irrigation operations. NGO Y's project encourages women and youth to start saving, either through informal savings groups, village savings and loan associations, or by linking participants to formal financial service providers.

Both efforts have shown positive results over the past three years and are expected to continue into Year 4 of our five-year project.

- Ask for volunteers to identify outcomes that our project should not address and explain why.

ANSWER:

Outcomes that our project should not address:

- *Improved access to water for irrigation*
- *Improved access to savings and other financial services with pro-poor terms*

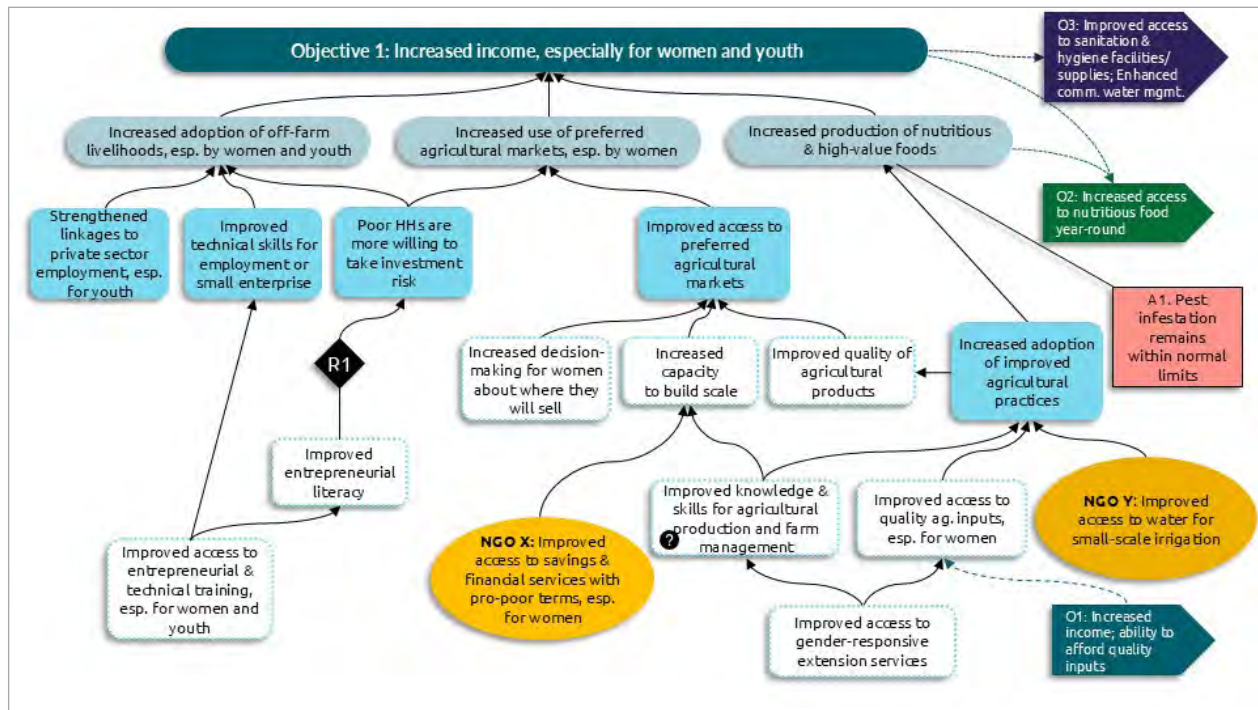
EXPLANATION: In this example, our stakeholder analysis revealed that two NGOs are already implementing promising interventions in our areas of operation. NGO X is improving access to water for small-scale irrigation, and NGO Y is improving access to savings and financial services. Both efforts are expected to continue for most of our five-year project's life.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 8:



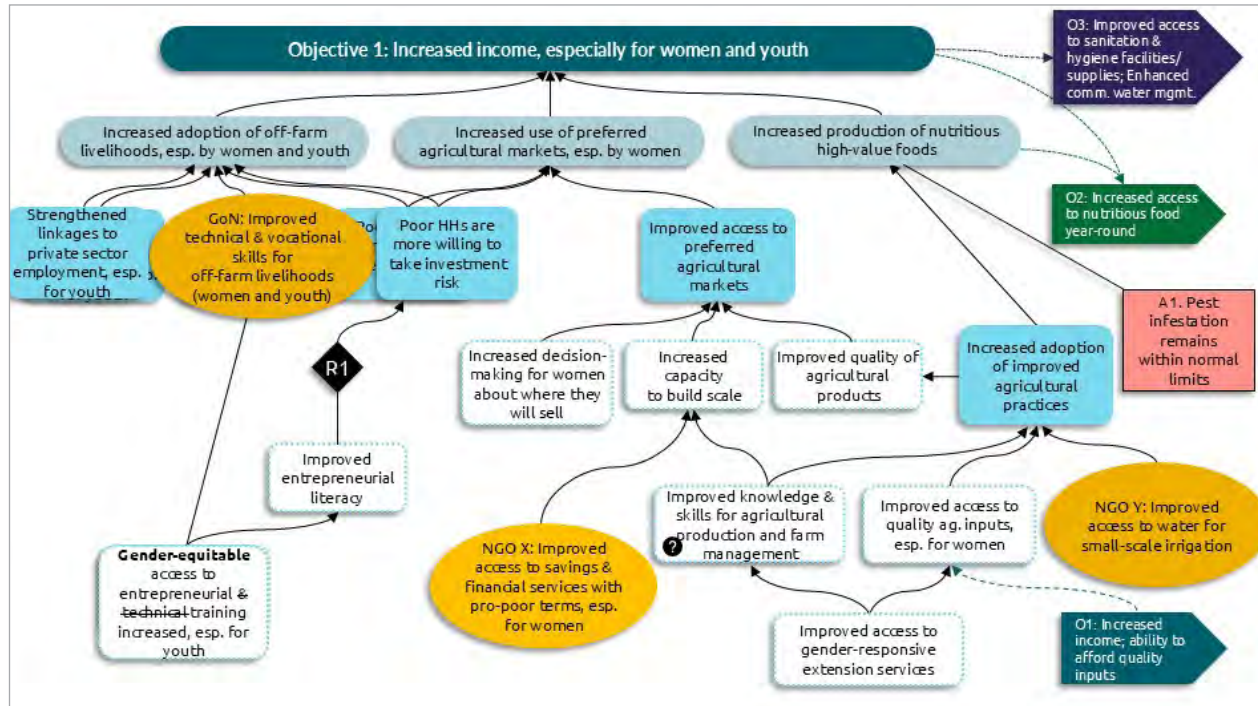
In our TOC, we will select a new shape and color for these outcomes to clearly distinguish them from the outcomes we plan to address. For all external actor outcomes, we'll also include the name of the responsible party in the outcome to help users understand who is providing what kind of assistance.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 9:



Let's look at another scenario.



We learned that the government has a seven-year program to help women and youth gain technical and vocational skills in areas such as carpentry, masonry, woodworking, auto mechanics, service industries, and more. The program is in its second year and, so far, appears to be successful. However, the program does not provide entrepreneurial training for small businesses.

We change the shape and color of the outcome box and add GoN (an acronym for the government) to indicate the responsible party.



Next, because we do not need to show lower-level pathways for outcomes that other stakeholders will produce, we remove the arrow between access and improved skills.



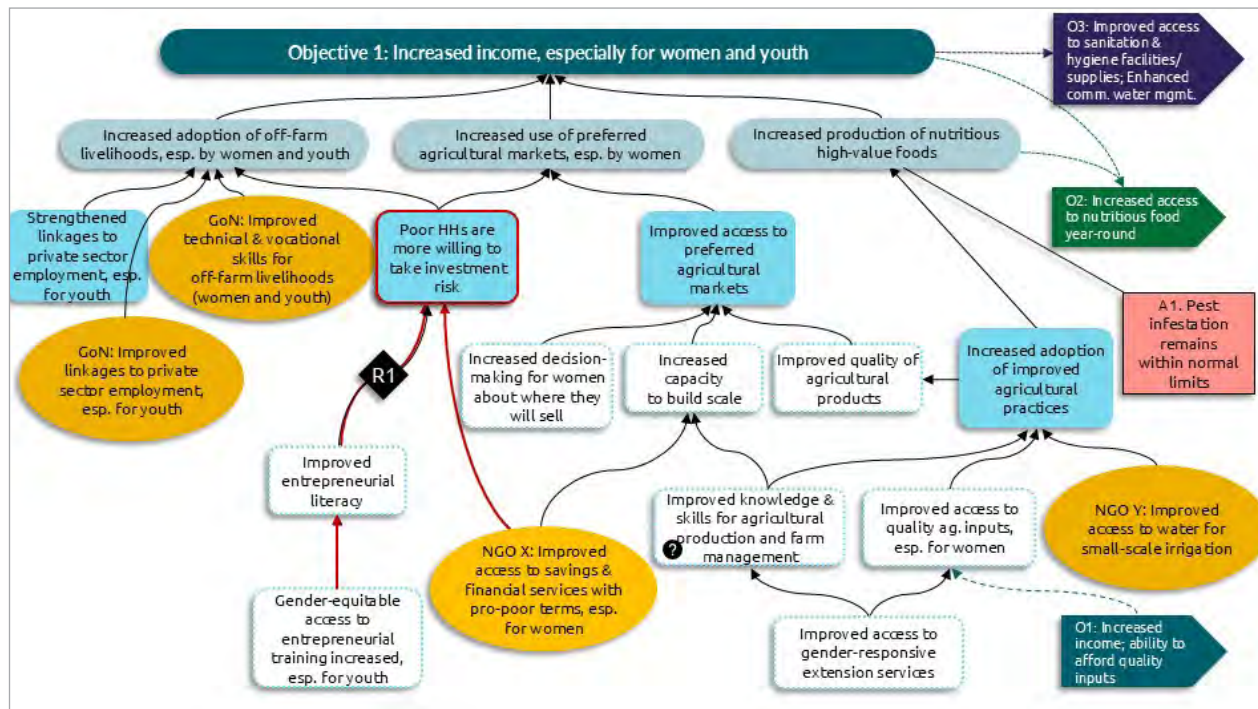
Then we change the language in the lower-level outcome “access” to indicate that we are now only concerned with improving access to entrepreneurial training (which the government does not provide). We also highlight our intention to have a strong gender focus for this outcome.





Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 10:



Our revised income pathway diagram now looks like this.

Let's continue with our EXAMPLE scenario. Let's imagine that our stakeholder analysis shows that the government program also helps raise awareness of private sector opportunities and helps connect youth to employment.



Notice that we changed the shape and color of this outcome.



We do a quick logic check of the pathway for the "increased adoption of off-farm livelihoods" outcome. We need to go all the way to the bottom of the pathway to start our story of change.



IF our project improves access to entrepreneurial training, THEN we should see improved entrepreneurial literacy.



IF our project improves entrepreneurial literacy, THEN we expect poor households to be more willing to take an investment risk.

At this point, we realize that while improved entrepreneurial literacy may be necessary for people to feel more comfortable investing, it alone is not sufficient.

We improve our logic by linking to the existing outcome "improved access to savings and financial services" that we expect NGO X to achieve.

So, the outcome of "poor households are more willing to take investment risk" depends partly on our project and partly on another NGO.



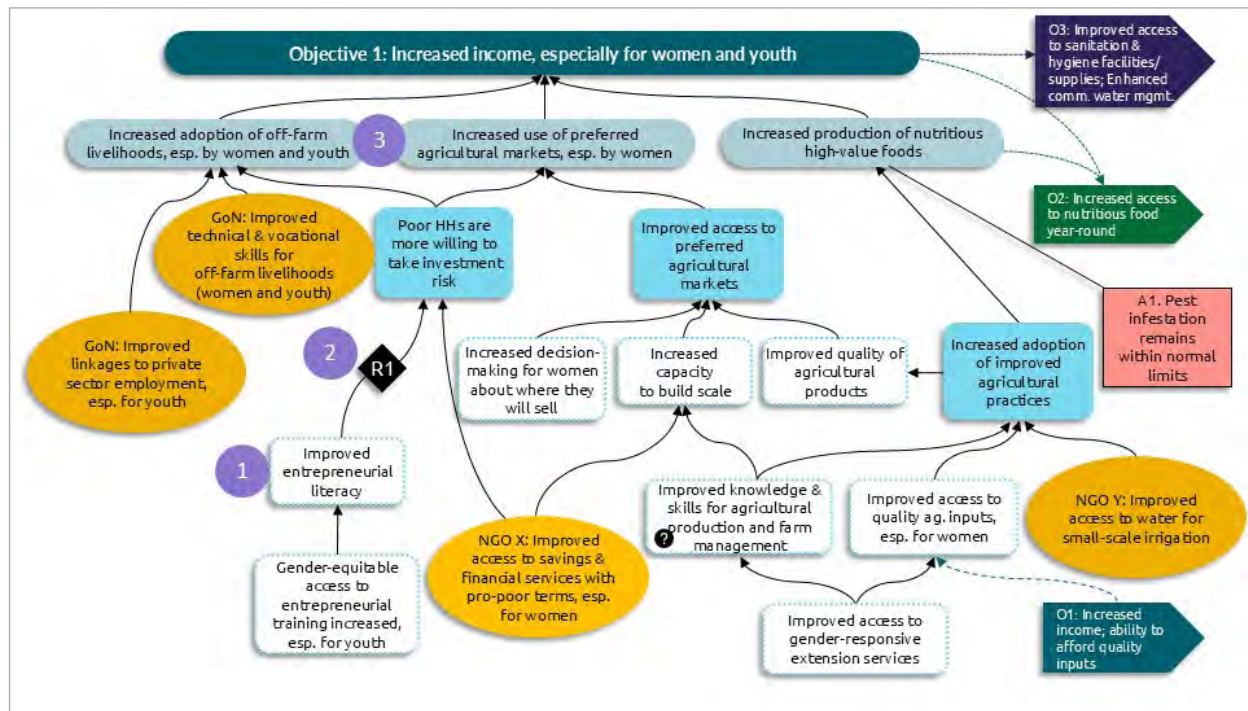
ASK & DISCUSS: How comfortable are we with taking responsibility for the "willingness to invest outcome"? Is one of these two preconditions more limiting than the other?

Feedback shared on next slide.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 11:



Let's say we feel strongly that improving entrepreneurial literacy is a worthwhile endeavor that:

1. can be sustained if achieved, and
2. our rationale provides evidence that as entrepreneurial literacy improves, people are better able to weigh the pros and cons of different investments and are therefore more willing to take informed investment risks.

We also note that:

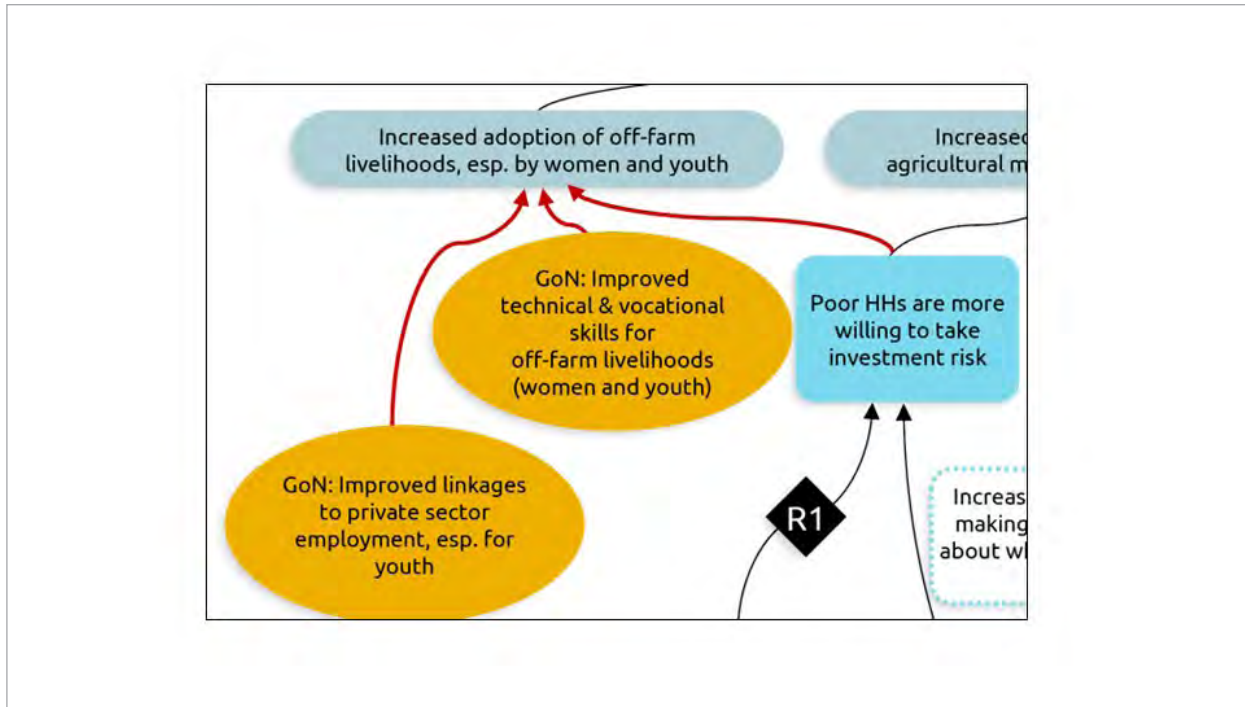
3. the **"willingness to invest" outcome has synergy**: It can potentially influence "adoption of off-farm livelihoods" AND "increased use of preferred markets."

At this point, our team might agree that these three reasons are enough for us to take full responsibility in our logframe for the outcome "Poor households are more willing to take investment risk," even though partial success depends on another NGO's achievement of "improved access to savings and financial services."



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 12:



We continue with our logic check.

IF the government improves technical and vocational skills for off-farm livelihoods **AND** the government improves youth linkages to private sector employment **AND** our project's efforts result in poor households being more willing to take an investment risk, **THEN** we should see increased adoption of off-farm livelihoods.



ASK & DISCUSS: Think about who is responsible for these three preconditions and to what extent our NGO can be confident in taking responsibility for the outcome “increased adoption of off-farm livelihoods” if our only contribution is to increase motivation and willingness to invest in small businesses.

What are the pros and cons of our project taking responsibility for this higher-level outcome?

FEEDBACK: Let's say that in our efforts to prioritize, we determine that the most limiting factors to the adoption of off-farm livelihoods are the lack of technical/vocational skills or employment connections (both of which are outcomes we expect the government to produce). Willingness to take an investment risk is necessary for those who dream of starting a small business, but we've learned that most women and youth in our targeted communities envision themselves with a vocation or permanent employment rather than owning a small business. In contrast, willingness to invest stands out as one of the most limiting factors for poor farming households who want to engage in preferred agricultural markets.

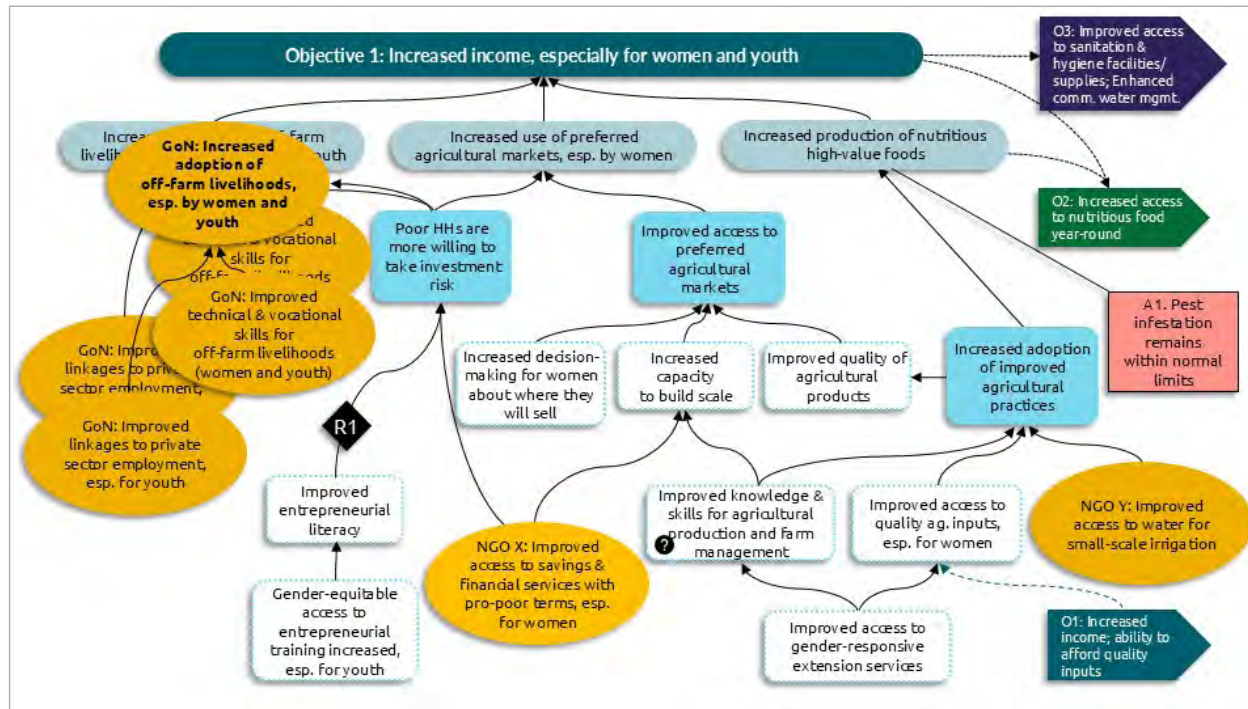
After our prioritization exercise, we decide that we will not take responsibility for achieving “increased adoption of off-farm livelihoods,” even though we will take responsibility for positively shifting households' willingness or motivation to take an informed investment risk.

Let's see what our new diagram looks like...



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 13:



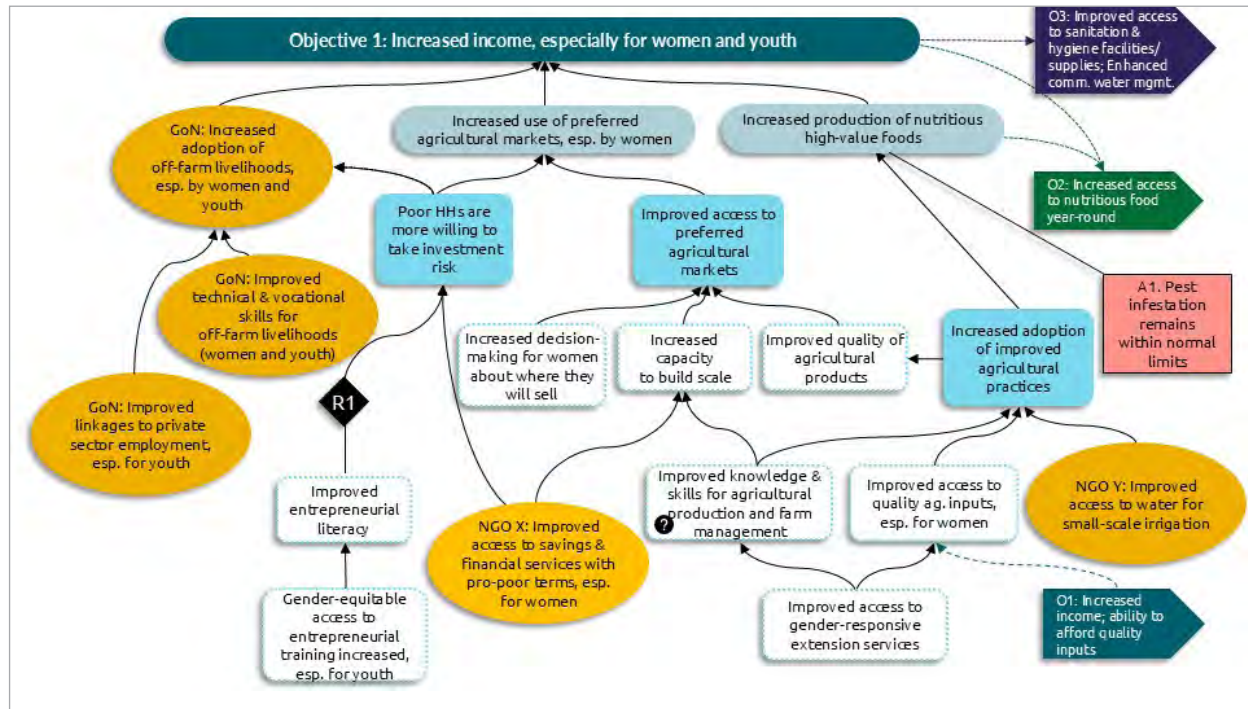
The first change we'll make is to revise the shape and color of the "increased adoption of off-farm livelihoods" outcome. We also name the government as the responsible party for this outcome.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 14:



Next we remove the two external actor preconditions. 



ASK & DISCUSS: Do you remember why we should do this?

FEEDBACK: Because we do not need to demonstrate the lower-level pathways for the external actor outcomes, the details of how the government will increase the adoption of off-farm livelihoods will be explained in the complementary documentation.

Finally, we may choose to leave the linkage from investment risk to the government's off-farm livelihood outcome to show that our efforts are expected to contribute to the achievement, even though we are no longer responsible for achieving the broader effort. 

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 15:

Sample External Actor Matrix for Complementary Documentation						
Outcome or output	Actor	Scale relative to activity coverage	Timing of when outcome is necessary/ expected	Likelihood of achievement	Risk to activity if outcome is not realized in time	Monitoring plan
Increased adoption of off-farm livelihoods, esp. by women and youth	Government of N, Ministry of Employment and Labor	All 4 districts	Necessary by end of activity-- in sync with market use and increased production. 2028 expected.	High. TVET program has been running in 2 districts for past 2 years. Plans to expand all over the country as a priority activity for the next 5 years. TVET is complemented with efforts to link graduates to private sector employment. Results from first two years show high enrollment for M&F youth especially, w/ low attrition. 58% of year 1 graduates attained employment within 6 months of graduation. Report of Ministry of Labor and Employment of Country X http://[insert link]	Moderate to high: enhanced HH risk profile relies on income diversification. Increased income from production only (Project Objective) may not be sufficient in context of chronic drought.	NGO forum for coordination monitoring; (Quarterly) Annual Report of Ministry of Labor and Employment of Country X http://[insert link]



PREPARE: An external actor matrix like the one in the sample slide can help convey additional information and details. BHA has no preference as to whether complementary documentation is presented in matrix or narrative form. The important thing is to provide BHA with the requested information.

You can download a [sample external actor matrix from the FSN Network](#) and modify it as you see fit.



While additional information about **when an outcome is expected to be achieved** is often available through conversations with NGO actors or their documentation, practitioners sometimes struggle to determine when an outcome is necessary. Let's explore some tips that may be helpful if we find this to be a challenge.



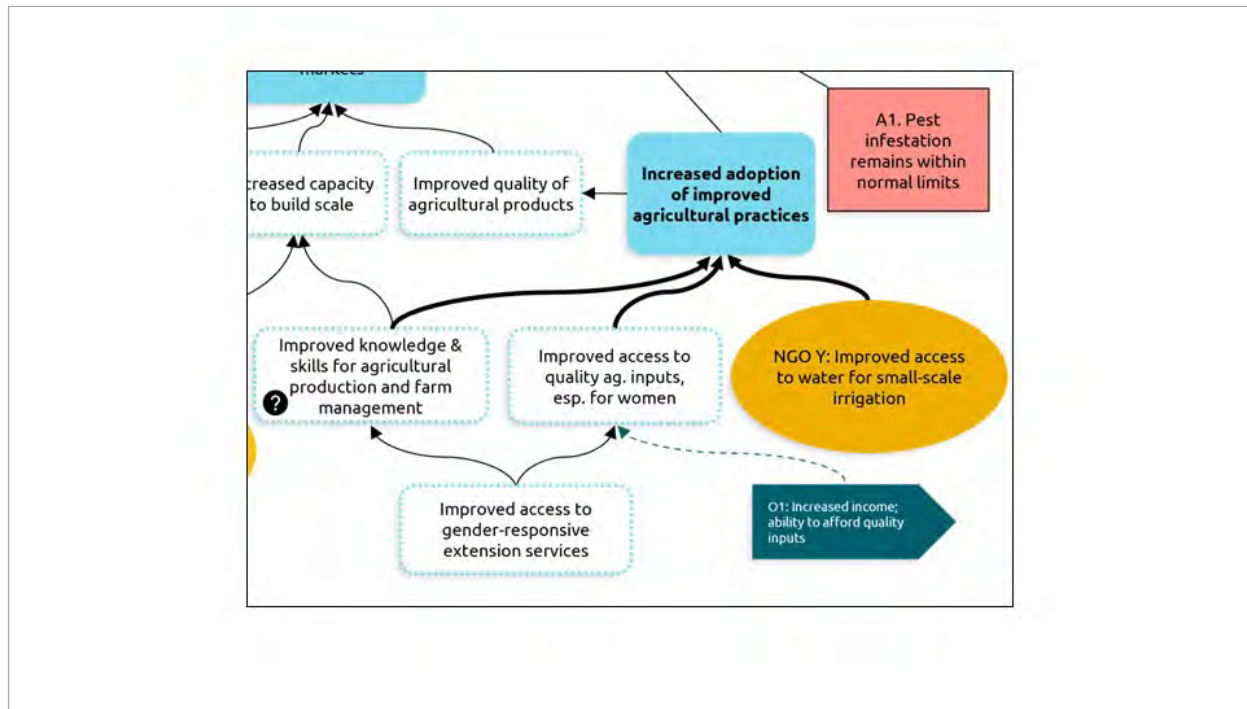
BHA GUIDANCE

Supplemental information that can help external readers understand the role of external actors in achieving TOC pathways includes: “the scale of their intervention relative to the activity’s coverage; the likelihood that the preconditions will be achieved by the time they are necessary for the TOC; and the risks if they are not. It may also describe anticipated collaboration with each actor, how that collaboration will better ensure the preconditions, and how Outputs and Outcomes will be monitored.”



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 16:



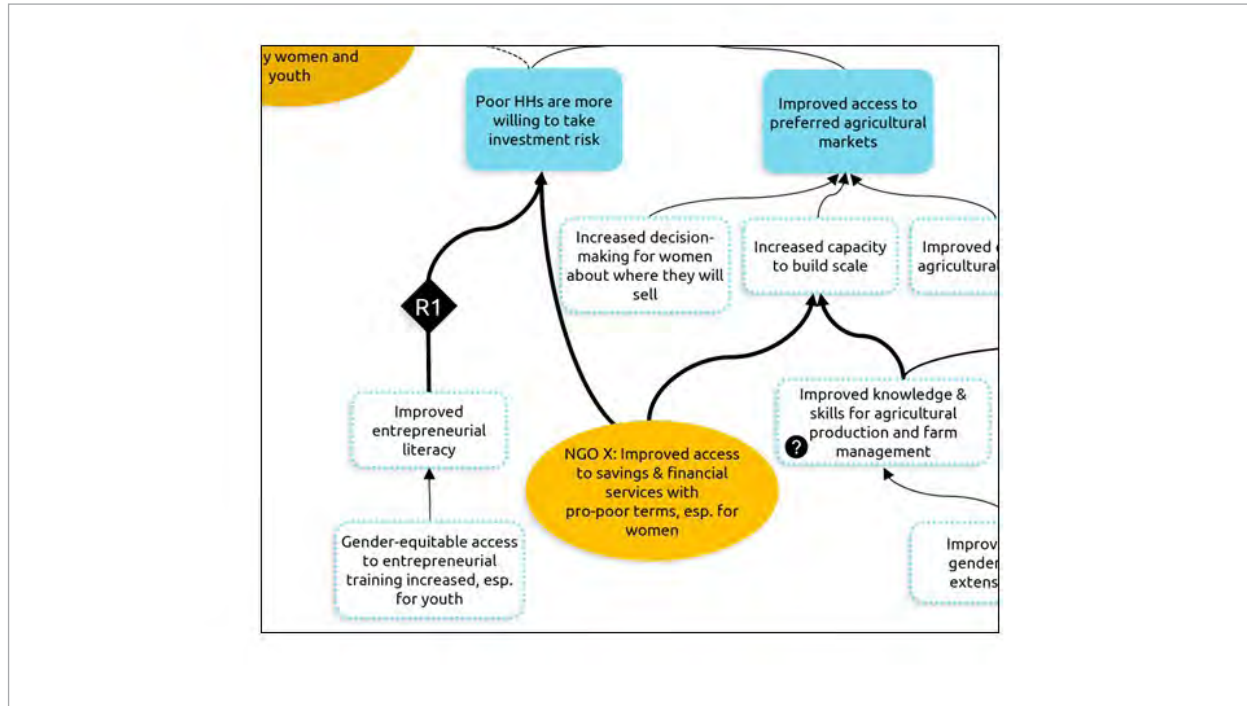
We can use the sequencing in a TOC pathway to help determine when an external outcome is necessary.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 17:



Let's practice with another scenario.



ASK & DISCUSS: When must NGO X achieve the outcome “Improved access to financial services with pro-poor terms?”

FEEDBACK: It is necessary for NGO X to achieve the outcome “Improved access to financial services with pro-poor terms” around the same time as our project achieves “Improved production and farm management knowledge and skills.” If farmers have the skills and knowledge, but do not have access to finances, they will not have sufficient resources to build scale and access preferred markets. If limited access to finances persists for too long, farmers may lose confidence in the process and become unmotivated to build scale.

In addition, we hope that NGO X can improve access to financial services around the same time or perhaps after our project improves entrepreneurial literacy. Access to finances with literacy limitations could result in unprofitable investments.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

Prioritizing Interventions

SLIDE 18:



PREPARE: Determine in advance whether your team will include intervention outputs in the TOC you submit with your proposal.

Outputs are required in the technical narrative of a proposal, but not all funders require them to be included in the TOC diagram itself until after the contextualization or refinement period.

Because design teams must go through the process of prioritizing proposed outputs for the technical narrative, and because it is simply good practice for designing a results-oriented project, design teams may still choose to include intervention outputs in their TOC.

The pro tip below provides several reasons why a team may choose to include intervention outputs in their internal working version of the TOC, even if they are submitting an abridged version to meet donor requirements.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

PRO TIP



Including intervention outputs as part of the TOC development process can help design teams:

1. think through sustainability planning, for example:
 - prioritize behaviors needed to drive sustainable change, and
 - identify areas where local service and input providers will be needed to sustain outcomes;
2. review the logic of the interventions proposed in the technical narrative and how they are expected to drive change;
3. prioritize the interventions proposed in the technical narrative (e.g., those expected to address the most limiting factors); and
4. identify critical learning priorities for the refinement or contextualization period.
 - *Applicants following BHA's 2024 TOC guidance: If your team chooses to add outputs to the TOC during the proposal phase for any of the reasons listed above, they will be for internal use only. Remember to save an abridged version of the TOC to submit with the application.*



BHA GUIDANCE

BHA's expectations for when to include outputs on a TOC diagram have changed over the years. According to the most recent guidance, applicants are only required to submit an abridged TOC diagram and complementary documentation with the application.

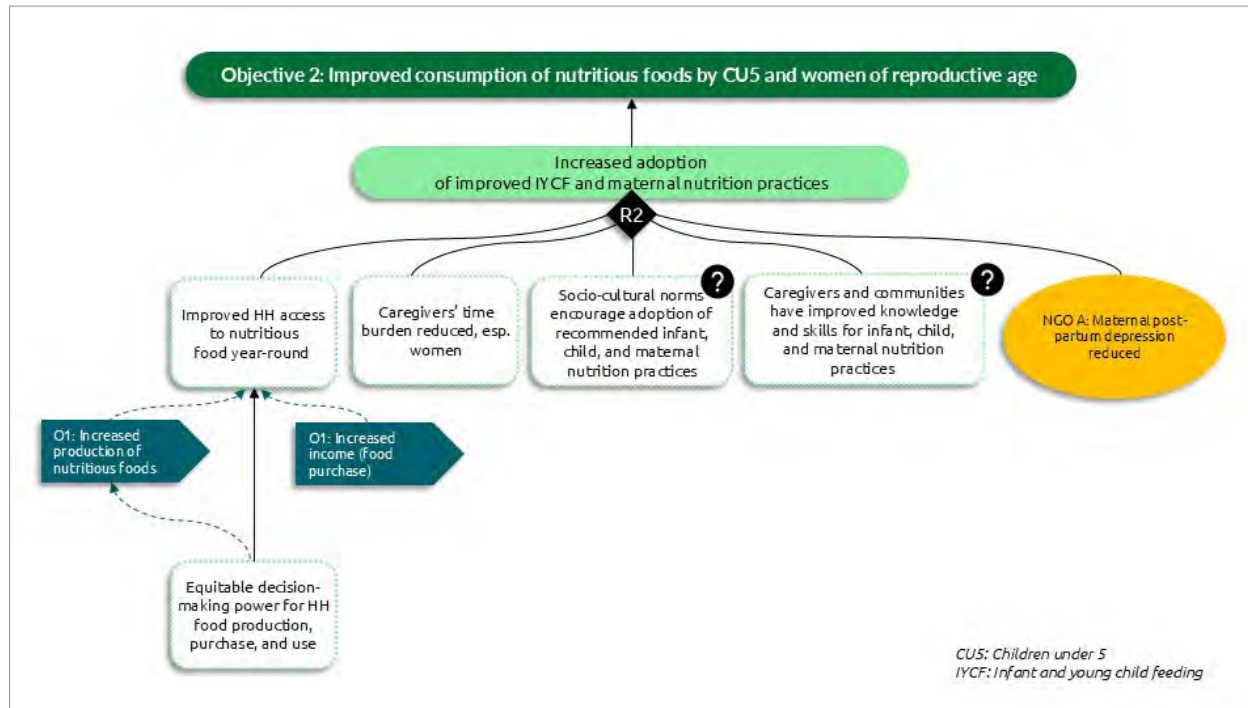
*"The **abridged TOC** should display the incremental, causal linkages from the Goal, Purpose, Sub-purpose, and Intermediate outcomes that contribute directly to the sub-purposes. The TOC should reflect all relevant higher-level outcomes in the TOC regardless of which entities (i.e., the BHA recipient, another NGO, or local government) are implementing them."*

*"During the refinement period, awardees will use additional evidence and improved knowledge to refine and develop a **complete TOC**. The complete TOC will include a full TOC Diagram, including the full causal pathway from output to Goal, and TOC narrative or table."*



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 19:



Once we have determined which outcomes and objectives our project will be responsible for achieving, we can begin to identify specific outputs of project interventions that will set the wheels of change in motion.

Not every outcome in the TOC requires an intervention. Some outcomes are “actionable” and therefore require an intervention; others are simply the result of achieving the preconditions that lead to them.



ASK & DISCUSS: Which outcomes do you think require interventions in this nutrition pathway?

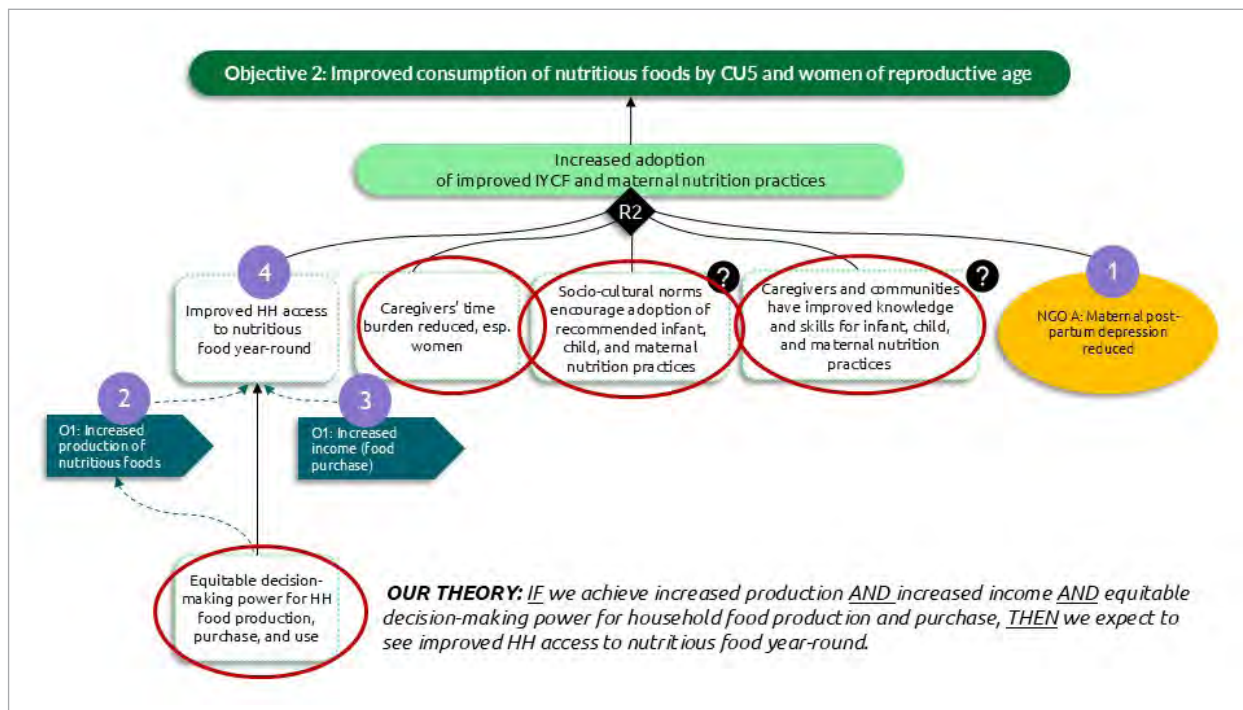
FEEDBACK: Next slide.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

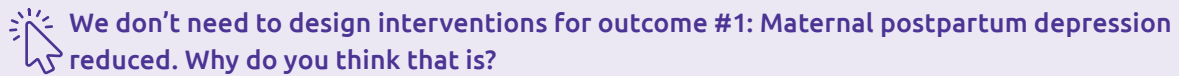
SLIDE 20:



In this example, the circled outcomes are ones that will require an intervention to set the wheels of change in motion. However, we need to pause before designing interventions for the two outcomes with a question mark.

Remember, these are our learning priorities. They were the two outcomes our team felt strongly about including based on past experience. However, we need more information to confirm that the corresponding problems exist. (Do caregivers and communities have limited knowledge and skills? Are socio-cultural norms discouraging adoption?)

AND if we confirm that the problems exist, we need much more contextual information about the specific norms and skills that are hindering adoption before designing a specific intervention. We may want to include a broad strategy such as **care groups** at this point, but we will need to fine-tune the content of care group discussions during the refinement or contextualization period.



 Why do you think we don't need to include interventions for outcomes #2 & 3 in this nutrition pathway?

 Finally, why don't we need to include interventions for outcome #4?

At this stage, we typically find actionable outcomes in the lowest tiers of the TOC diagram—they are the tails of the pathways. In other words, they have no preconditions (indicated by arrows) leading to them.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 21:



Choosing the best intervention for a given cause requires a thoughtful list of options. Ideas for interventions can come from many places. While innovation is important, options should also be based on evidence and experience.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 22:

First selection criterion:
The intervention must have a clear and logical link to at least one outcome presented in the TOC diagram.

The image shows three people, each with a speech bubble. From left to right: a woman in a black blazer and red top says, "I believe in this intervention. I've seen it work every time"; a woman in a red dress says, "We always add this intervention! It's our calling card!"; and a man in a light blue shirt and dark pants says, "We must add this! Look what it says in the RFA." This illustrates common but incorrect reasons for including interventions.

Our menu of potential interventions will now be significantly reduced, because the first selection criterion is that the intervention must have a clear and logical link to at least one outcome presented in the TOC diagram.

We know that in the flurry of activity in the design phase, it becomes very difficult to prioritize interventions. Design dynamics get complicated when, despite there being no evidence of a corresponding challenge:



team members want to include interventions they are personally passionate about;

- our organization has an intervention that we consider standard practice (our “calling card”) and we include that intervention in every application; or
- team members insist that a particular intervention be included because it was alluded to in the RFA.
- However, our first rule of prioritization is that each proposed **intervention must have a clear and logical link to at least one of the outcomes presented in the TOC diagram**. If we can't logically link it to an agreed-upon outcome, we won't add it.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 23:

Base Decisions on Key Selection Criteria

-  Potential to drive sustainable change
-  Community support, social acceptability, political sensitivity
-  Extent to which intervention builds on existing capacities and opportunities
-  Technical feasibility
-  Evidence-based: the intervention produces the expected results in the given context

Once we have proposed a list of intervention options, the next step is to review and select those that make the most sense in the given context. This is not an exhaustive list of criteria for prioritizing interventions; it is a starting point.



ASK & DISCUSS: What other criteria should we use to select interventions?

Possible responses. Share if not raised by group.

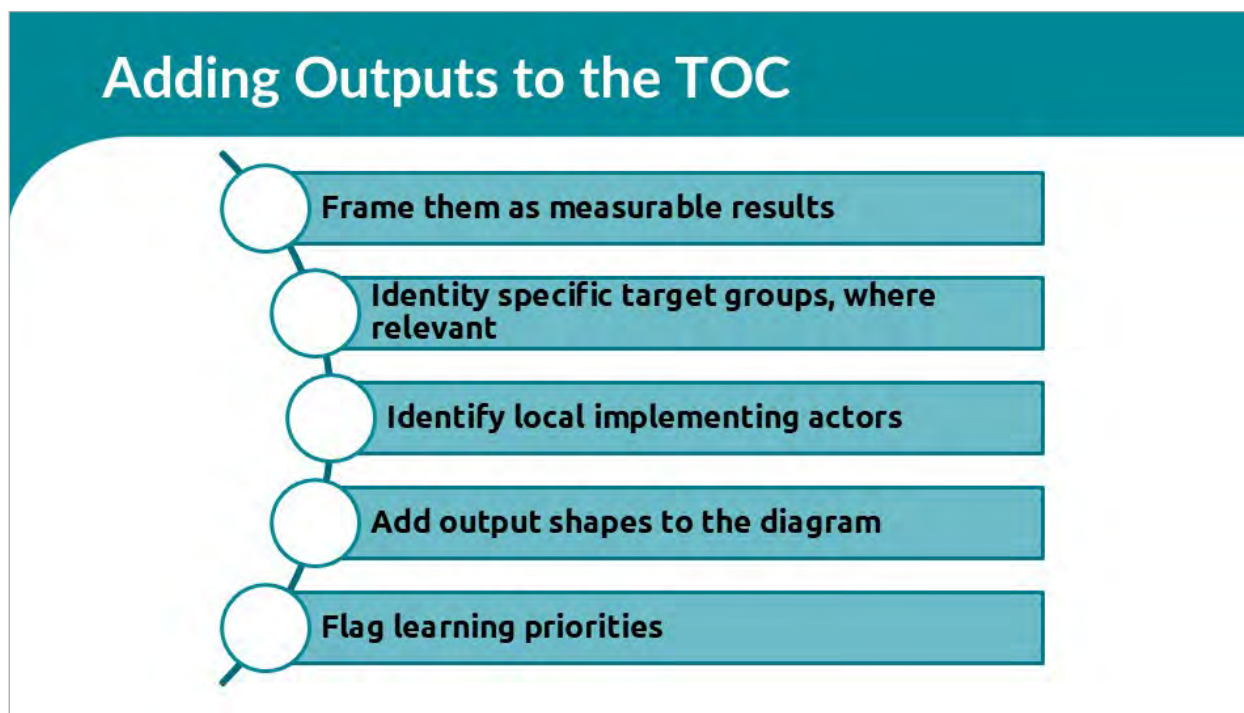
- Integration across technical sectors (potential for layering, synergy)
- Associated risk (do-no-harm approach)
- Required management support
- Institutional capacity
- Potential for partnering
- Cost-effectiveness



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

Adding Intervention Outputs to the TOC Diagram

SLIDE 24:



After selecting the most appropriate interventions for the outcomes requiring intervention, we will take the following steps, which can be completed in any order that makes sense for us.

- Frame them as measurable results.
- Where relevant, identify specific target groups in the result statement.
- If possible, identify the local actor we expect to implement the intervention (as this demonstrates early sustainability planning).
- Add a new shape to the TOC diagram, linking directly to the immediate product of the intervention (outcome) and insert our succinct results statements.
- Flag learning priorities.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 25:

Frame as Measurable Results

Which statements are strong outputs (framed as a measurable result), and which are weaker outputs (framed as an action/less measurable)?

1. Health workers and volunteers trained on home gardening.	7. Organize savings groups.
2. Savings club members linked to financial service providers.	8. Most vulnerable households provided with livelihood transfers.
3. Promote improved hygiene practices.	9. Caregivers and heads-of-household sensitized on ways to improve dietary diversity for CU5 and WRA.
4. Water infrastructure developed in targeted communities.	10. Labor saving approaches and technologies that will benefit female participants piloted and promoted.
5. Train women and youth in good business skills.	11. Give grants to youth to start-up businesses.
6. Provide training to farmers on post-harvest management.	

SLIDE 26:

Answers

Stronger Outputs	Weaker Outputs
1. Health workers and volunteers trained on home gardening.	3. Promote improved hygiene practices.
2. Savings club members linked to financial service providers.	5. Train women and youth in good business skills.
4. Water infrastructure developed in targeted communities.	6. Provide training to farmers on post-harvest management.
8. Most vulnerable households provided with livelihood transfers.	7. Organize savings groups.
9. Caregivers and heads-of-household sensitized on ways to improve dietary diversity for CU5 and WRA.	11. Give grants to youth to start-up businesses.
10. Labor saving approaches and technologies that will benefit female participants piloted and promoted.	



INSTRUCTIONS:

- Ask participants to pair up.
- Display slide 25.
- Each pair will write down the number of stronger output statements (e.g., those that are framed as measurable results).
- Ask for volunteers to share their observations before revealing the answers on slide 26.

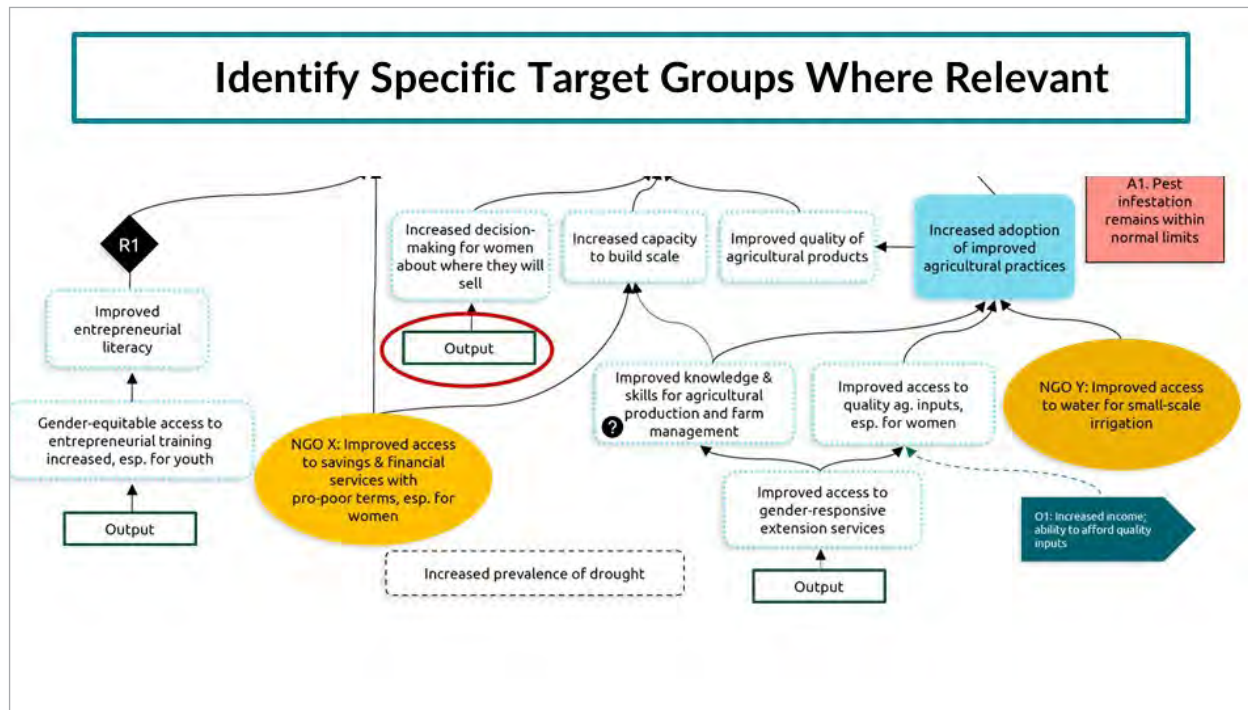
NOTES:

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 27:



Similar to identifying different target or impact groups in our outcome statements, we should identify specific target groups (where relevant) in our output statements.

This can be particularly helpful when the group of people we need to engage **to produce** a desired change is different from the group **affected by** the change.

For example, interventions must target caregivers of young children for outcomes related to improved childhood nutrition.

Identifying specific target groups in the intervention output statements helps to support our TOC logic and later to fine-tune our M&E system.



ASK & DISCUSS: For which of the three outputs in the diagram might we have a target group that is different from the outcome's impact group? And why?

ANSWER: The circled one. Why? Because to address issues related to more equitable decision making, men must be part of the intervention target group.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 28:

Identify Local Implementing Actors



Photo Credit: SamWor / Save the Children

Examples:

Gender dialogue sessions for couples and communities **conducted by trained community members.**

Shared decision making and men's involvement in HH chores **promoted by male champions.**

The time to start thinking about potential local service providers is in the design phase. We want to be intentional about listing providers outside of our project staff when we add our outputs to the TOC.

While it's true that our intervention strategy should include training of trainers (TOT) for community members before they are equipped to conduct the gender dialogue sessions, it's not essential to include this information in our TOC output boxes. We can list TOT in our detailed implementation plan, along with other incremental steps that will be required before effective gender dialogue sessions can be held.

The sustainability logic in our TOC pathways will be much stronger if our main intervention output statement describes the intervention at the level of local implementation.

We won't have all the information we need during the design phase, but we will have time to refine our implementation strategy as we learn more about the local context and available providers during the refinement period.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)



BHA SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

An industry-wide issue

RFSA outcomes (behavioral and infrastructure) rarely continue after an activity ends. One theory about why this happens is that we often set up parallel systems. They work well when our project is on the ground, but the outcomes and impacts are not sustained or expanded once our activities withdraw resources.

Specific outcomes that we hope will continue beyond our project include:

- practices/behaviors we promote (e.g., agriculture, IYCF, WASH, and health practices);
- maintenance of infrastructure we build or repair (e.g., boreholes, irrigation, water distribution, roads, culverts, and markets); and
- continued and increased access to inputs we facilitate (e.g., tools, high quality seeds, fertilizers, and vaccines).

BHA's sustainability approach asserts that for these outcomes to continue, the services and inputs must be provided by local actors such as:

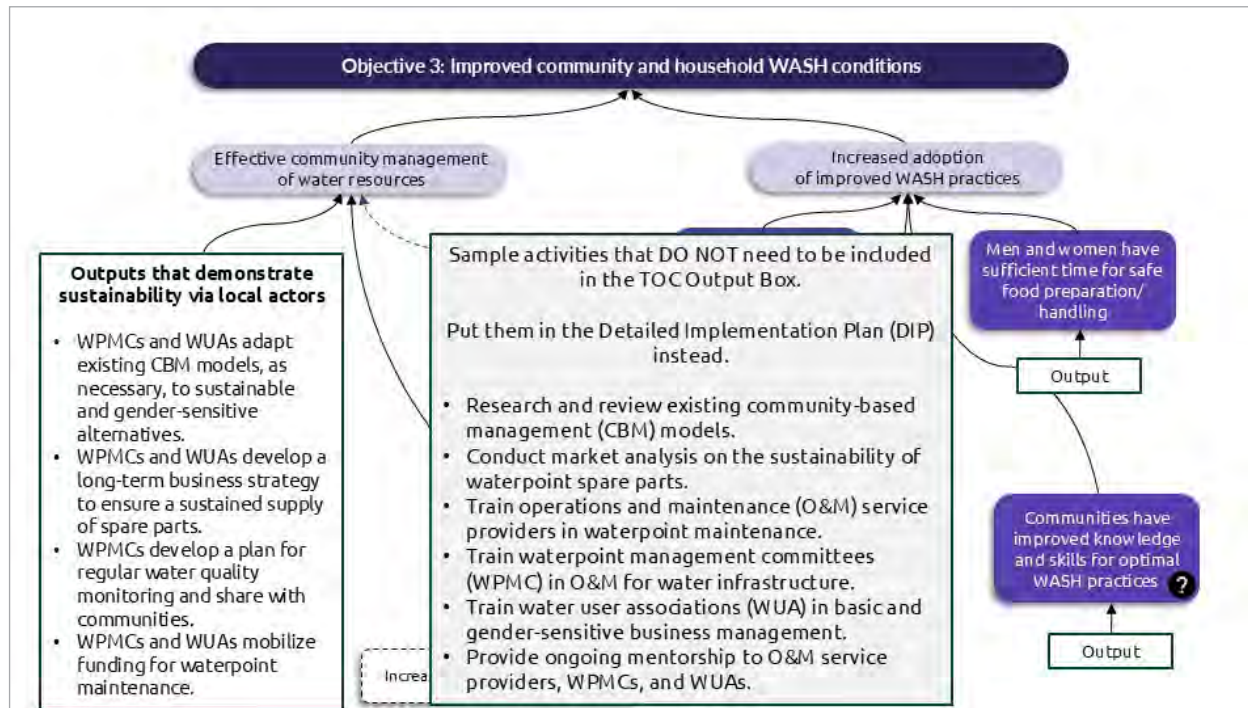
- local government staff (paid staff who can provide community-level support to the poorest households);
- local private service providers (who are willing to take up the service as a business); and
- community-based organizations (who have incentives to provide these services).

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 29:



The sustainability logic in our TOC pathways will be much stronger if our main intervention output statement describes the intervention at the level of local implementation.

In this example, while it's true that our intervention strategy may need to include the items in the box on the right, it's not essential to include this information in our TOC output boxes.

PRO TIP

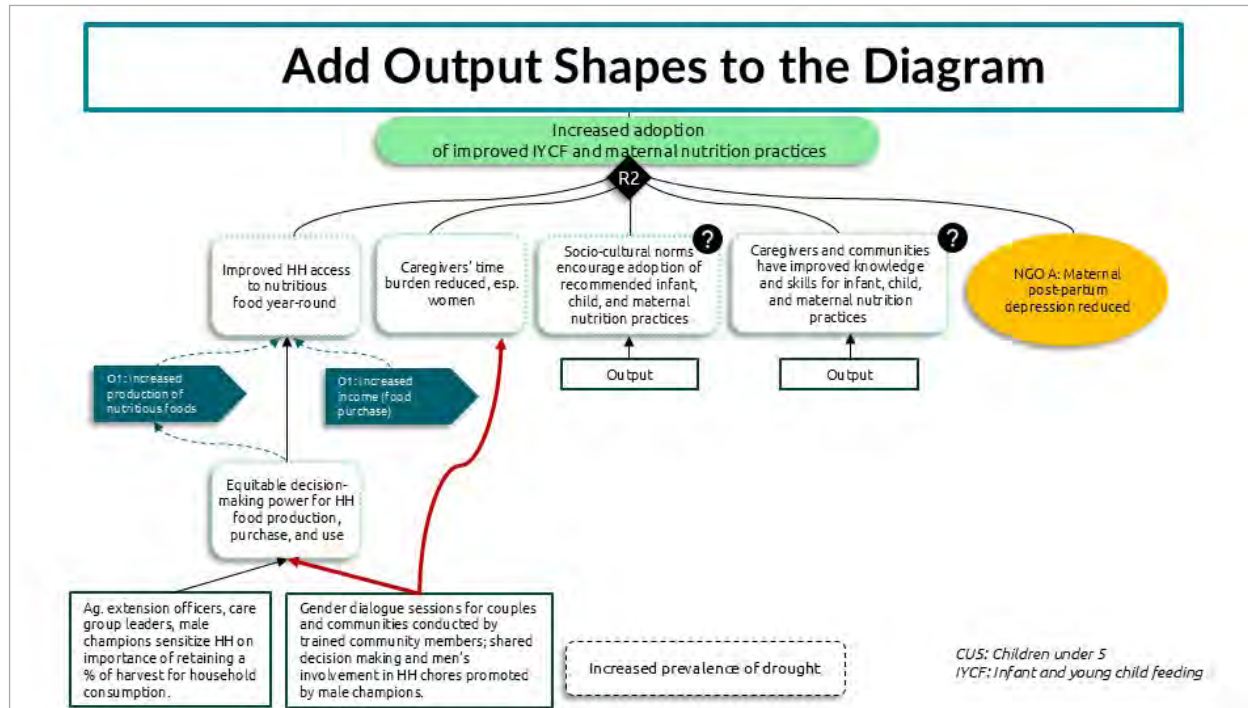


- Preferences vary from organization to organization. Many organizations would list "TOT for community members" in their detailed implementation plan rather than in the TOC, along with other incremental steps that are required before local actors can conduct effective gender dialogue sessions. Other implementers may choose to list some of the key activities that make up the intervention that eventually lead to community members conducting the gender dialogue sessions.
- This is an organizational decision. There is no right or wrong answer; however, when deciding what to put where, keep in mind that TOCs can become crowded and overwhelming for practitioners and external readers if we include too much operational detail.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 30:



We will use a different color, shape, text, or other method to distinguish intervention outputs from outcomes.

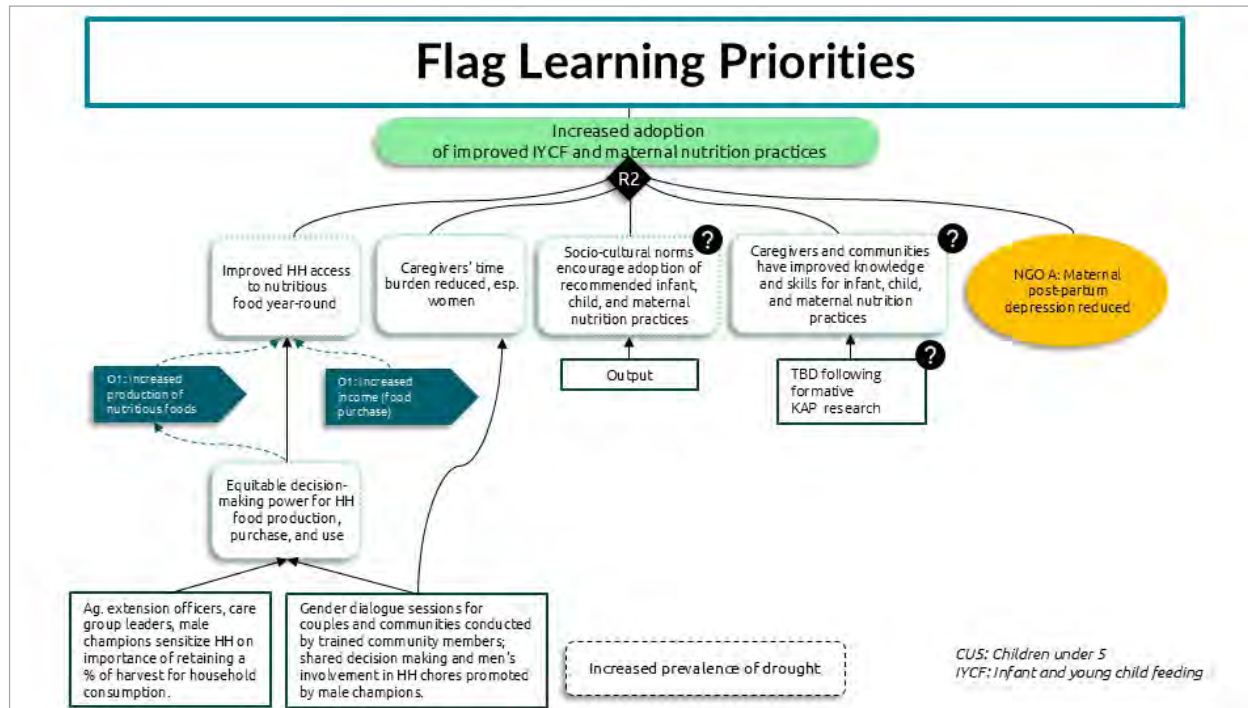
It is not uncommon for a set of interventions to produce multiple outcomes, as shown in this diagram. When this occurs, simply list the outcomes once and draw two arrows to the corresponding outcomes.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 31:



What if we don't have enough information to include target groups or local actors in the output statement?

We won't have all the information we need during the design phase, but we will have time to refine our implementation strategy as we learn more about the local context and available providers during the refinement period. Remember how we used a question mark icon to indicate learning priorities in our outcome statements? We can do the same for critical questions about our implementation strategy.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

Logic, Evidence, and Sustainability Check

SLIDE 32:



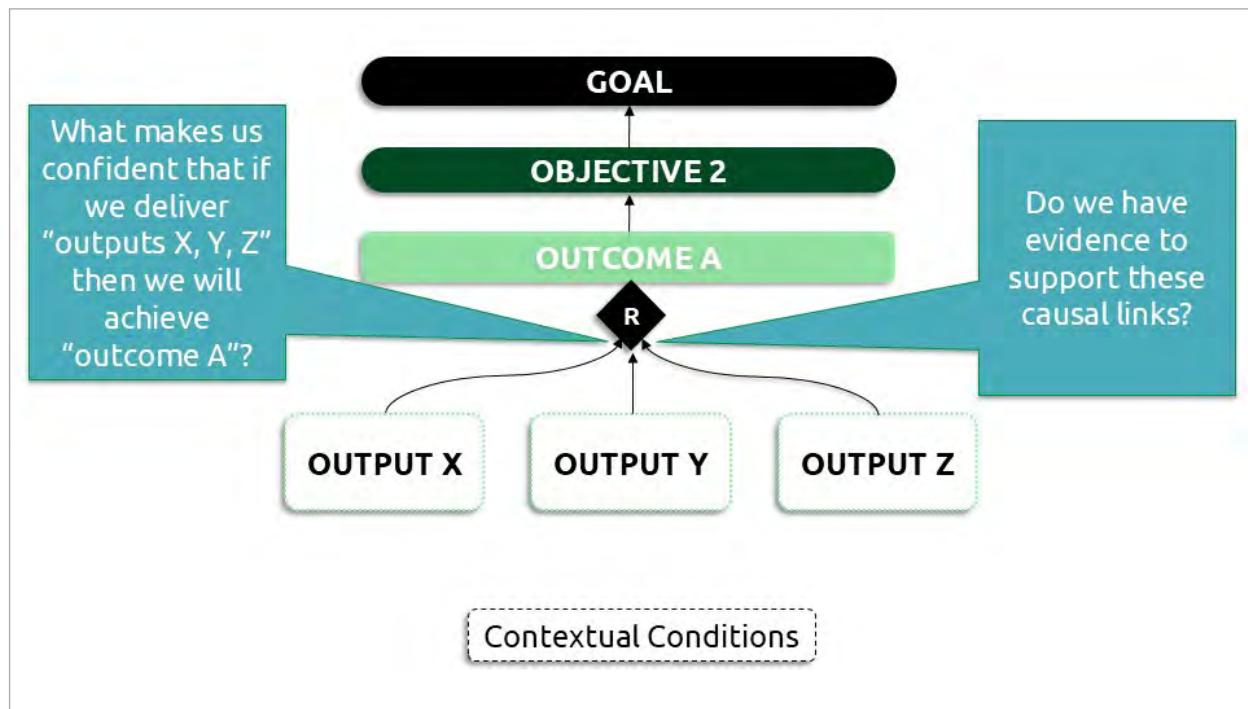
Once we've prioritized interventions, we'll examine the causal logic between outputs and outcomes, including the likelihood that the proposed interventions will lead to sustainable results. Let's start by exploring how rationales and assumptions between our outputs and outcomes can help explain why we believe an intervention will produce an expected result.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 33:



Rationales between outputs and outcomes can strengthen our logic.

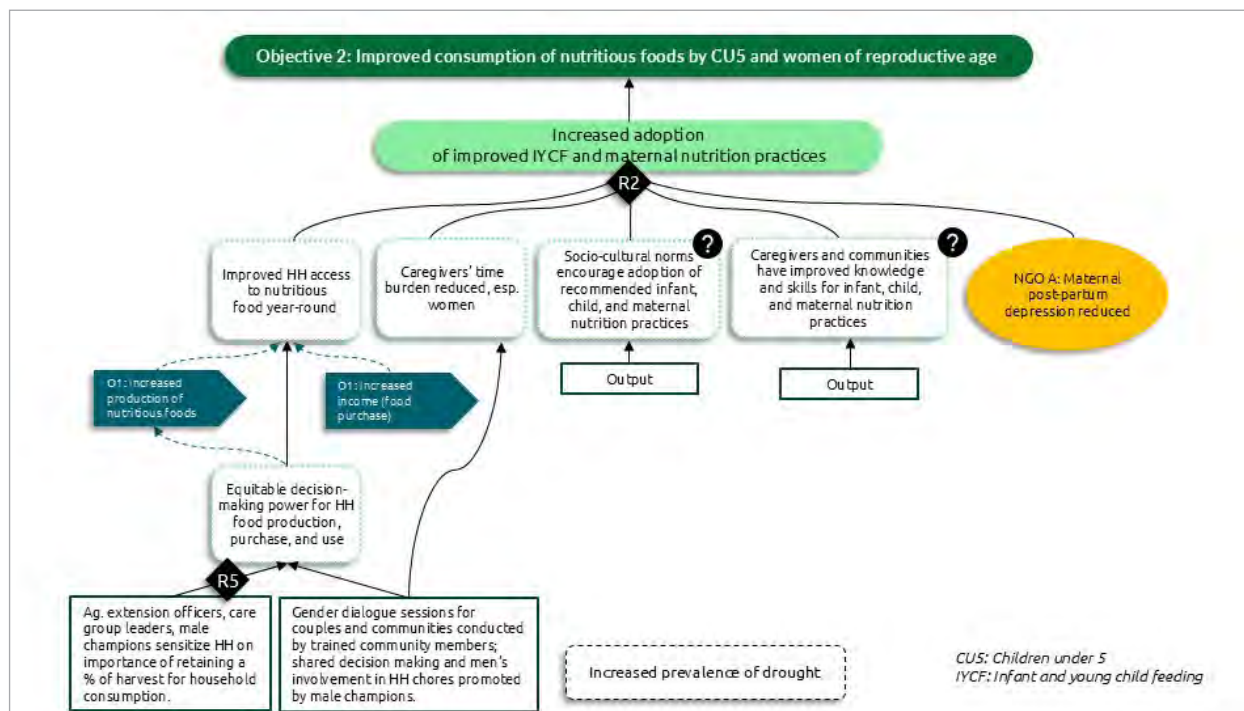
During our logic and sustainability check, we can ask: What makes us confident that if we deliver “outputs X, Y, Z,” we will achieve “outcome A?” Do we have evidence to support this causal link? If we have evidence from project reports or research, we can strengthen our TOC logic by adding a “rationale” to the diagram and providing details about the evidence in the complementary documentation.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 34:



In this sample scenario, multiple past project reports from the same operating context show that by layering household sensitization about the importance of retaining a portion of harvest for household consumption using multiple local actors as advocates, husbands were more likely to agree with wives who advocated that not all harvest be sold.



We'll insert the rationale between the output and the outcome. And...

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 35:

SAMPLE RATIONALE MATRIX			
Reference #	Narrative summary	Citation	Source
R1	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxxxxxxxxxxx	Link to source or formal citation
R2	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxxxxxxxxxxx	Link to source or formal citation
R3	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxxxxxxxxxxx	Link to source or formal citation
R4	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxxxxxxxxxxx	Link to source or formal citation
R5	Ag. extension officers, care group leaders, male champions sensitizing HH on importance of retaining a % of harvest for household consumption will contribute to improved HH access to nutritious food.	When efforts to sensitize households about the importance of retaining a portion of harvest for consumption are layered by multiple local actors, husbands are more likely to agree with wives who advocate that not all harvest be sold.	Links to project reports

...we support the new rationale in the TOC complementary documentation, using the same format we used for outcome-to-outcome rationales.



PREPARE: [Two sample rationale matrix templates](#) are available on the FSN Network. Feel free to adapt them to your organization's preferences.

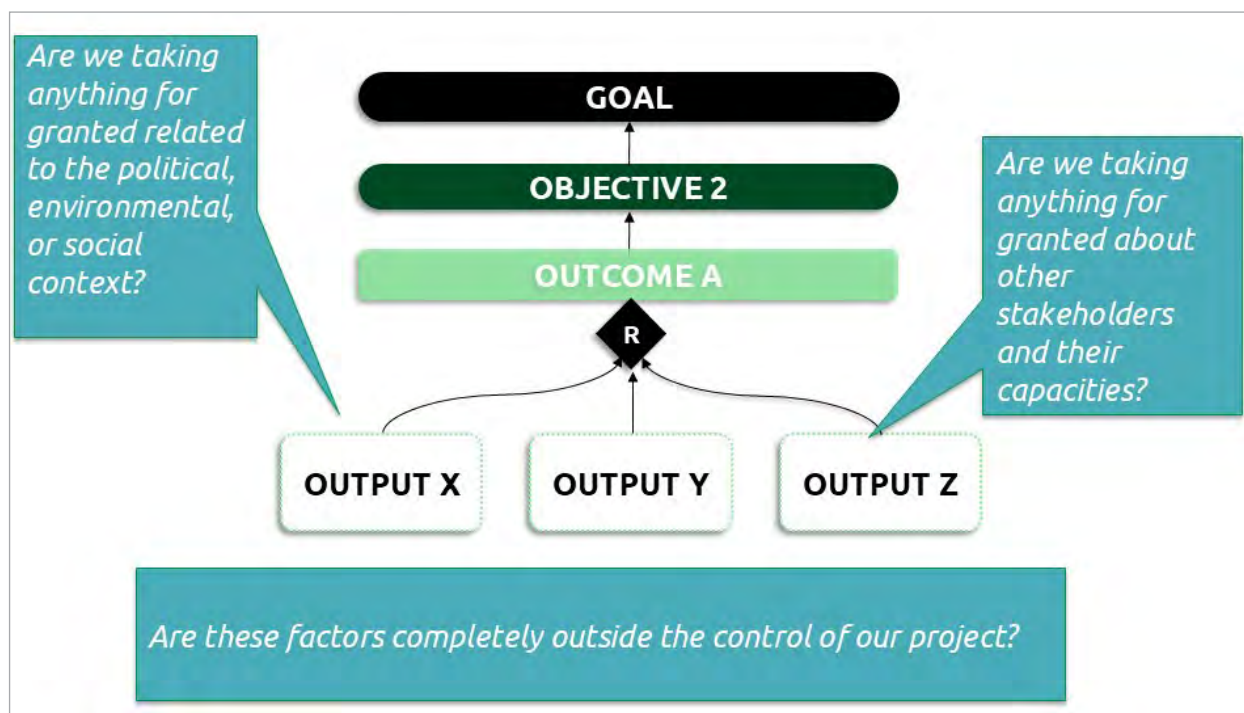
Although this guide provides sample matrices, BHA has no preference as to whether RFSAs provide complementary documentation in matrix or narrative form.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 36:



Assumptions between outputs and outcomes can also strengthen our logic.

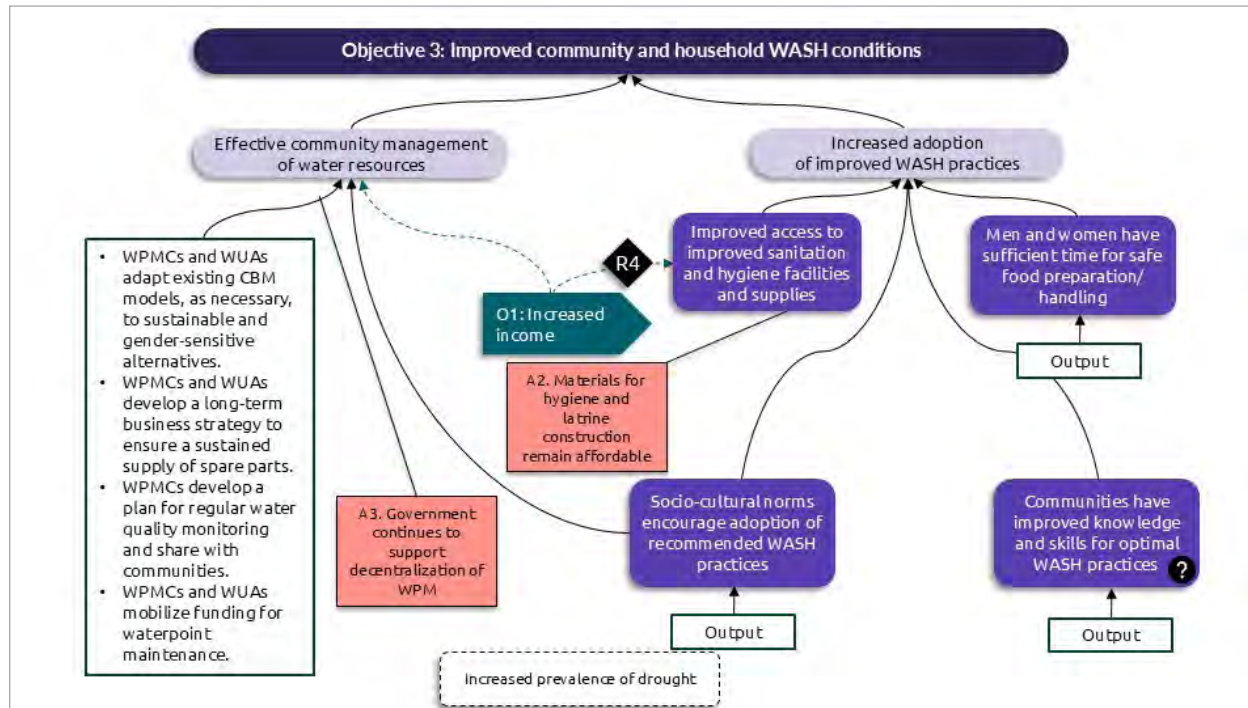
Similar to the process we used for outcome-to-outcome assumptions, these questions will help us identify external output-to-outcome assumptions that should be added to the TOC diagram and supported in the complementary documentation.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 37:



In this example, when we explored what made us confident that the four outputs would be sufficient to promote effective community management of water resources, we determined that a recent shift on the part of the national government to support decentralized water management was critical to achieving our outcome. Whether this policy remains in place is beyond our control.



We decide to add an assumption to our output-to-outcome logic.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 38:

SAMPLE ASSUMPTIONS MATRIX			
Assumptions:	Likelihood that assumption will hold through the LOA, and evidence base	Risk to the activity if assumption does not hold. If risk is high, what contingency measures will be taken?	How will the activity monitor assumption?
A1: Pest infestation remains within normal limits	High		
A2: Materials for hygiene and latrine construction remain affordable	Medium		
A3: <u>Government continues to support decentralization of WPM</u>	High, support with evidence	High, explain contingency measures	Explain monitoring plan

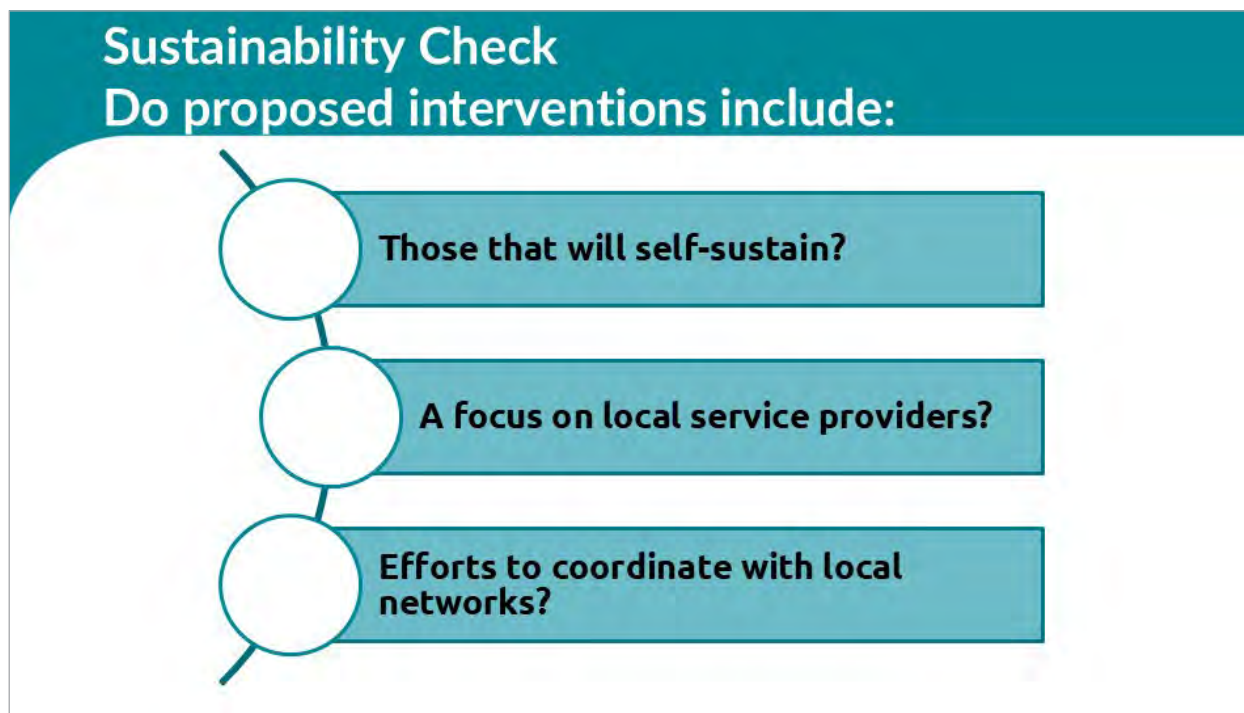
As we did with the rationales, we will support new assumptions in the TOC complementary documentation.

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

SLIDE 39:



Finally, as part of early sustainability planning, we will review whether our proposed interventions include:

- Those that will be self-sustaining
- A focus on local service providers, including linkages to institutions so that local service providers can access resources after the project ends
- Efforts to strengthen and coordinate with local networks

NOTES:



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

Wrap-up



ASK & DISCUSS: What are the key takeaways from this session?

Supplement with the following points.

- Before determining which interventions will set the TOC pathways in motion, it is critical to prioritize which outcomes our project will address, and which can be addressed by external actors.
- The efforts of external actors should be clearly identified in your TOC to demonstrate layering and integration.
- The complementary documentation can help explain how the efforts of external actors influence the achievement of the TOC.
- Not every outcome we will produce requires an intervention. Some outcomes are “actionable” and thus require an intervention; others are simply the result of achieving the preconditions that lead to them.
- The sustainability logic in our TOC pathways will be much stronger if our main intervention output statement describes the intervention at the level of local implementation.

Next Steps



CONSIDER: Share the most immediate next steps. Adapt to your organization’s timeline and assignment of responsibilities.

STEPS	TEAM MEMBERS	DATES
Agree on outcomes the project will address and those that will be addressed by external actors	4-10 staff representing different perspectives	
Document supporting evidence for external actors in complementary documentation	2-person team to document; support from full team to provide evidence	
Prioritize project interventions	Technical leads	
Graphically refine the TOC diagram to reflect external actor efforts & prioritized outputs	Graphic design lead	
Logic and sustainability check	4-10 staff representing different perspectives	
Graphically refine the TOC diagram to reflect new rationales and assumptions	Graphic design lead	



TEAM WORKING SESSION 4A:

Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How

ESTIMATED SESSION LENGTH:

2-3 weeks

WHEN:

As soon as possible after final agreement on TOC pathways.

WHO:

External actor session: 4-10 people representing different perspectives, especially team members with deep knowledge of the stakeholder analysis.

Independent sessions: Technical leads.

Project intervention session: Technical leads and 4-6 additional people representing different perspectives.

Post-working sessions: 1-2 people with graphic design skills.

WHY:

In these sessions, team members will:

- determine which TOC outcomes will be addressed by the project, and which will be addressed by other actors;
- prioritize project interventions;
- perform a logic and sustainability check;
- graphically refine the TOC diagram to reflect external actor efforts, project outputs, and new rationales and assumptions; and
- document supporting evidence for external actors, rationales, and assumptions in complementary documentation.

SESSION RESOURCES:

- IDEAL PPT 4, "Prioritizing What Our Activity Will Address and How" for reference
- IDEAL Process Quality Check Booklet:
 - #6a External Actor Outcomes
 - #6b Interventions/ Sustainability

PARTICIPANT PREPARATION:

- All participants thoroughly review the electronic version of the TOC and stakeholder mapping matrices.
- Technical leads develop criteria for determining which outcomes the project will address.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION:

Main session materials

- ☐ Wall-sized printout of each objective pathway, large enough for 4-5 people to work on at a time
- ☐ Sticky notes or index cards (variety of colors and sizes)
- ☐ Colored markers
- ☐ Sticky dots





Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

Sample Agenda

MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS
EXTERNAL ACTOR SESSION: Approximately 1 day		
Plenary	Technical leads or others from the design team refresh the team on the criteria for determining which outcomes the project will address.	 IDEAL PPT 4 Slide 5 provides a sample.
	Team members present key takeaways from the stakeholder analysis, highlighting key gaps in existing programming and key areas where other actors are already providing assistance.	Sample stakeholder mapping template on the FSN network
Small groups	Divide participants into groups by objective. Using the stakeholder analysis and the team's agreed-upon criteria for selecting outcomes. Flag outcomes that will be the responsibility of external actors on the wall diagrams.	
Small groups	Rotate groups to the next objective. Repeat until all objectives have been covered by the entire team. Review and comment on existing recommendations.	Use different colored sticky dots to flag: • Agreement • Disagreement: Add a sticky note to explain the area of concern. • Questions: Add a sticky note with a specific question.
Plenary	Rotate through each objective. Discuss areas flagged as questions. Once clarified, try to categorize each as either general agreement or disagreement. Discuss areas flagged as 'disagreement.' Try to reach consensus. On the wall diagram, place different (color/shape) sticky notes or cards over all outcomes that will be addressed by external actors.	If the group cannot reach consensus, flag the area for a smaller group of decision makers to resolve later. Include the name of the external actor on the note.
Small groups	Divide groups among the objectives. On the wall diagram, mark up any lower-level pathways that no longer need to be shown in the TOC.	We do not need to show lower-level pathways for outcomes that another stakeholder will produce.
	Determine whether our project is comfortable taking responsibility for outcomes that will depend partly on our project's efforts and partly on the efforts of another actor. Place additional sticky notes or cards over any outcomes for which the project will not be responsible. Include the name of the responsible actor on the note.	Consider: • Are any of the preconditions more limiting than the others? • Are we confident that the outcome our project will address can be sustained if it is achieved? • If we take responsibility for the upper-level outcome, can we expect synergy?  IDEAL PPT 4 Slides 11-12 provides a sample.
	Agree on all outcomes that require project intervention. Flag them with a different colored sticky note or card.	Reminder: Not every outcome in the TOC requires an intervention. Some outcomes are "actionable" and therefore require an intervention; others are simply the result of achieving the preconditions that lead to them.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS
Small groups	Divide the team evenly across the objectives. Check causal logic moving upstream (bottom to top), e.g., "If outcome X and Y and Z are achieved and assumption #1 holds, THEN outcome A will be achieved." Check causal logic moving downstream (top to bottom) using statements such as "We can achieve outcome A, IF we achieve outcomes Y & Z, and assumption #1 holds." Flag weaknesses in the logic with descriptive sticky notes. Methodically check all items below.	The goal is to have cross-sectoral representation in each small group versus siloed groups. Everyone will have a chance to contribute to the logic check for each objective.
Small groups	Groups rotate to the next objective. Repeat until all objectives have been covered by the entire team. Review and comment on existing recommendations.	Use different colored sticky dots to flag: • Agreement • Disagreement: Add a sticky note to explain the area of concern. • Questions: Add a sticky note with a specific question.
Plenary	Rotate through each objective. Discuss areas flagged as questions. Once clarified, try to categorize each as either general agreement or disagreement. Discuss areas flagged as 'disagreement.' Try to reach consensus.	If the group cannot reach agreement, flag the area for a smaller group of decision makers to resolve later.
Plenary	Technical leads lead discussion to reach agreement on key selection criteria for selecting interventions.	
Compile complementary documentation		
2-3-person team with periodic input from others	Assign 2-3 team members to document each agreed-upon external actor outcome in the complementary documentation.	Those doing the documenting should look to team members with knowledge of the efforts of external actors for help in articulating the supporting evidence. It is common for this step to extend beyond the group working session.
Individual working sessions to prioritize interventions 1-2 weeks		
Graphic lead	Use the marked-up wall diagrams to refine the electronic TOC diagram.	The final product should show all external actor efforts and blank boxes for outputs.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS
Technical leads	Start with a list of each outcome that requires an intervention. Using the agreed-upon selection criteria, suggest interventions. • Work with the M&E team to frame the interventions as measurable results. • Where relevant, identify specific target groups in the result statement.	Remember, the <u>first selection criterion</u> is that each intervention must have a clear and logical link to at least one outcome presented in the TOC diagram. Consider: Is the evidence supporting the use of this intervention valid for our operating context? If necessary, provide evidence that can be used to support a rationale. Are income-related interventions based on a participant financial analysis that identifies the most economically viable pathways for specific target groups? FY 23 Guidance - Participant Financial Analysis for Resilience Food Security Activities What will motivate participants to pay for services (if pay-for-services is one of the approaches)? Do the interventions we are proposing demonstrate how our project strengthens the capacity of individual beneficiaries to implement recommended practices or manage their resources? What will motivate participants to continue applying newly adopted practices after our project ends?
	If possible, identify the local actor we expect to implement the intervention (as this demonstrates early sustainability planning).	Does the involvement of local service providers demonstrate how individual beneficiaries will continue to have the resources necessary to adopt and apply new practices after the project ends? What will motivate service and input providers to continue providing quality services, and why?
	Note learning priorities (e.g., areas where we don't have enough information to include target groups or local actors, or to propose a contextualized intervention).	
	Share proposed interventions and the outcomes they contribute to with the team.	
Graphic lead	Enter interventions into the output boxes. Share with the team when complete.	Make sure that the interventions are directly linked to the relevant outcome.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS
GROUP SESSION: LOGIC CHECK: proposed interventions – approximately 1-2 days		
Small groups	Divide the group among the objectives. Check the logic by considering: • Are all the outputs we have listed NECESSARY preconditions for the outcome they link to? In other words, the outcome cannot be achieved without the intervention. • Does evidence suggest that the combined set of interventions is SUFFICIENT to promote the achievement of the outcome? • Do our proposed interventions take into account different needs and opportunities based on age, gender, ethnicity, livelihoods, exposure to shocks, and available assets? • Do our proposed interventions include: » those that are self-sustaining? » a focus on local service providers? » efforts to strengthen and coordinate with local networks?	Use different colored sticky dots to flag: • Agreement • Disagreement: Add a sticky note to explain the area of concern. • Questions: Add a sticky note with a specific question. Use sticky notes to flag: • areas where an assumption or rationale can strengthen the output-to-outcome logic, and • information gaps: areas where we need to learn more before proposing a contextualized intervention.
Plenary	Rotate through each objective. Discuss areas flagged as questions. Once clarified, try to categorize each as either general agreement or disagreement. Discuss areas flagged as 'disagreement.' Try to reach consensus.	If the group cannot reach consensus, flag the area for a smaller group of decision makers to resolve later.
Compile complementary documentation		
2–3-person team with periodic input from others	Assign 2-3 team members to document each agreed-upon assumption and rationale in the complementary documentation.	Those doing the documenting should look to the team members who originally contributed the assumptions or rationales for assistance in articulating the supporting evidence. It is common for this step to extend beyond the group working session.



Prioritizing What Our Project Will Address and How (cont.)

MODE	ACTIVITY	PRO TIPS
Compile learning priorities		
1-2-person team with periodic input from others	Assign 1-2 team members to document in the learning matrix, each agreed-upon information gap and whether the information must be captured prior to submitting the proposal or can be captured post-award as part of the learning plan.	Those doing the documenting should look to the team member who originally contributed the information gap. It is common for this step to extend beyond the group working session. Remind the team: Do we NEED to know, or do we WANT to know? If we NEED to know, do we NEED to know now, or can we learn about this area during the refinement or contextualization phase?
POST-SESSION: Revise the electronic version of the TOC		
1-2-person team	Transfer the changes from the marked-up version of the TOC on the wall to the electronic version of the TOC. This includes modifying interventions and inserting assumptions and rationales into the diagram using a different shape or color.	Keep the problem tree up to date. If the logic shifts in the TOC, it must also shift in the problem tree. An effective way to do this is to have one person make changes to the TOC and project the image on a screen while the other person makes the same change to the problem tree.
	Confirm that all assumptions and rationales are numbered.	Coordinate with the team members who are developing the complementary documentation to ensure that the numbering on the diagram matches the numbering in the documentation.
	<i>Share with the main group to review and confirm that changes have been incorporated correctly.</i>	



TEAM LEARNING SESSION 5:

TOC Review and Refinement

ESTIMATED SESSION LENGTH:

60 minutes

WHEN:

- Share content with graphic design leads once the team has created the problem tree.
- Host a group session once final outputs have been agreed upon and added to the TOC diagram.

WHO:

Graphic design leads and 1-2 other team members responsible for fine-tuning the final product.

WHY:

- To understand how to number the TOC to improve readability.
- To gain experience in determining the quality and completeness of a TOC diagram and complementary documentation, including BHA requirements, if applicable.

SESSION RESOURCES:

- IDEAL PPT 5: TOC Review and Refinement
- IDEAL Process Quality Check Booklet:
#7 Theory of Change Graphics

PARTICIPANT PREPARATION:

- None

FACILITATOR PREPARATION:

Optional slide modification:

- ☐ 3-4: Modify team timelines and assigned responsibilities.

Optional content refresher:

- ☐ [IDEAL Online TOC course: Module 5](#)

Introduction

Session 5 builds on everything the team has covered so far. It's time to make sure our TOC diagrams are easy to understand for users who aren't as close to the process as those who developed it. Although we've been iteratively reviewing our logic, we'll want to do a final comprehensive team review to ensure the quality and completeness of the TOC diagrams and complementary documentation.

For those developing a TOC for a BHA-funded food security activity, it's important to pay special attention to any relevant BHA requirements. Even if you are not designing a TOC for a BHA-funded food security activity, you may find the content of this module useful. Before finalizing your TOC, your team will also refine the graphics for optimal readability, clarity, and professionalism.





SLIDE 1:

[illegible]



Objectives

- Understand how to number the TOC for improved readability
- Gain experience determining the quality and completeness of a TOC diagram and complementary documentation, including BHA requirements, if relevant.

[illegible]



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 3:

Step 5 TOC Review and Refinement																							
	Month 1				Month 2				Month 3					Month 4				Month 5				Month 6	
WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Building the evidence base																							
Problem analysis																							
TOC pathway development (and compilation of complementary documentation)																							
Prioritizing what the activity will address and how																							
TOC review and refinement																							



PREPARE: Modify the slides to fit your organization's timeline and workplan. Provide an overview of deadlines and who will be involved. Revisit this at the end of the session for questions.

The step of refining the TOC graphics is typically an iterative process. As new components are added, our graphic design team will make adjustments and improvements.

Before we consider our TOC final, we should conduct a thorough review for completeness and quality. This includes not only reviewing and refining the TOC diagram, but also finalizing the complementary documentation.

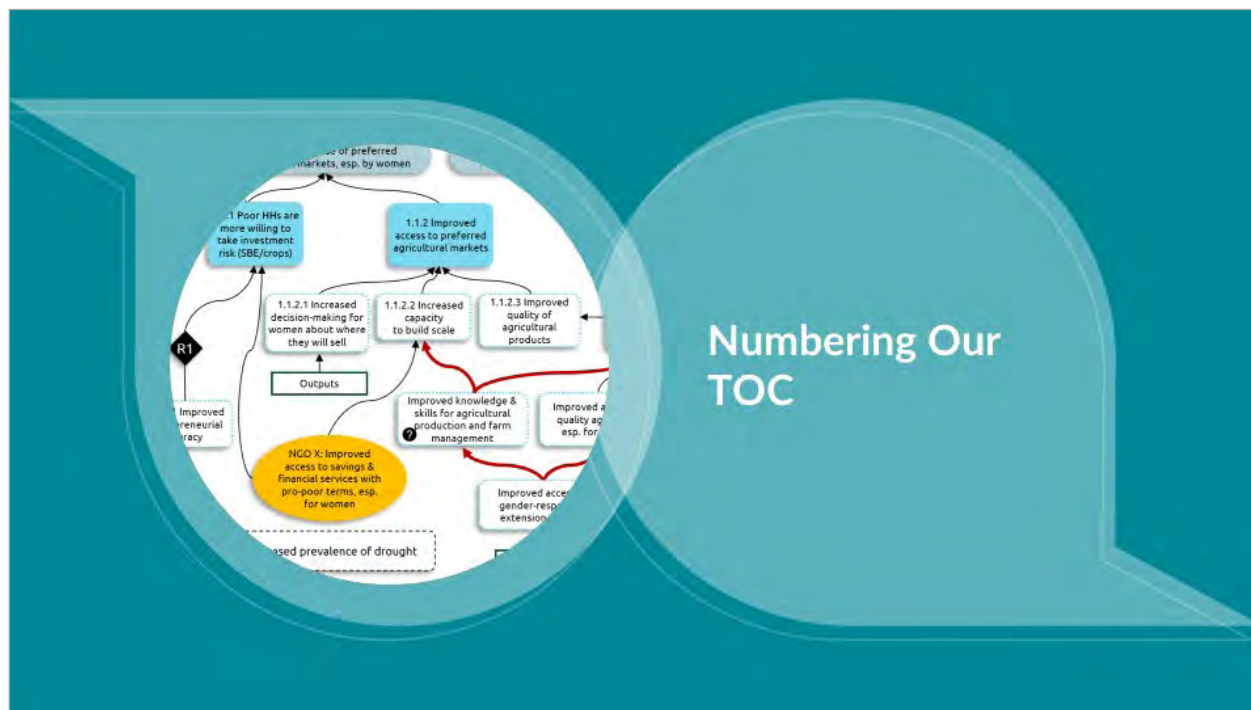
NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

Numbering Our TOC for Improved Readability

SLIDE 4:



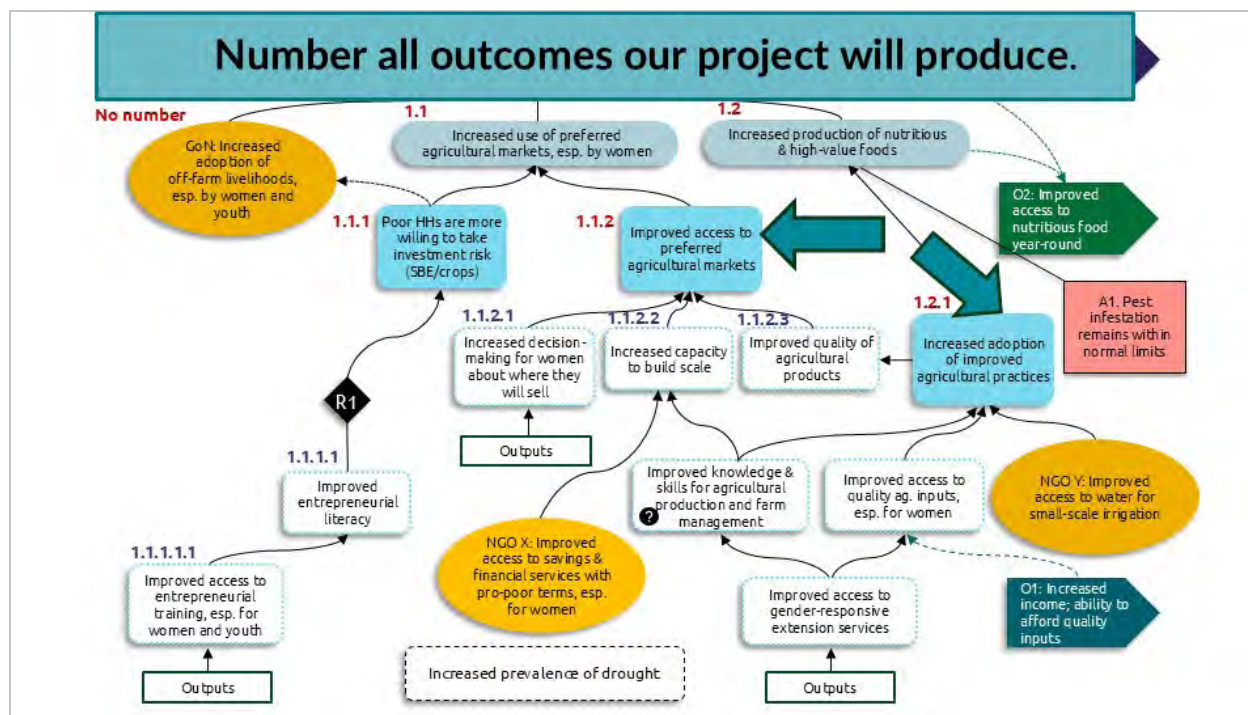
Numbering our TOC improves its readability. As an adaptive management tool, it will be referenced many times in group discussions with different stakeholders (e.g., donors, technical teams, field implementers). Creating clear reference points helps multiple users quickly navigate to a focus of discussion. Numbering the TOC also allows for a smooth transfer to the logical framework (logframe).

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 5:



Once the graphics for our TOC pathways have been refined, we can start numbering the TOC using a logframe format. The first thing we want to do is number all outcomes that the project will produce.

 Start with one objective and number only the outcomes that are preconditions for that objective (those directly connected by an arrow). Those outcomes become sub-purposes. 

We will not number outcomes that are produced by external actors.

Then number only the outcomes that are preconditions for one sub-purpose. Repeat the process for each sub-purpose. 

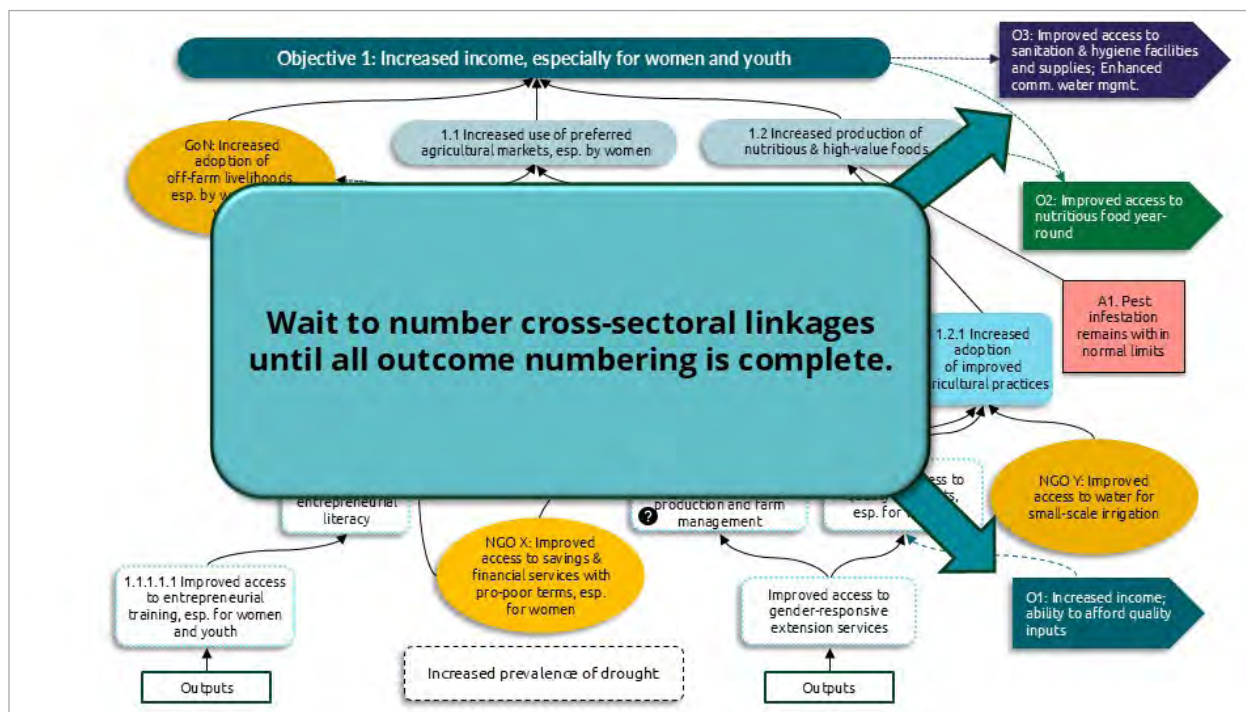
Because a TOC is not a linear model, do not be surprised if the levels do not line up horizontally as they would in a results framework. 

What is most important is the hierarchical order of the preconditions, not the physical space (high or low on the diagram) in which a TOC component is located.



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 6:



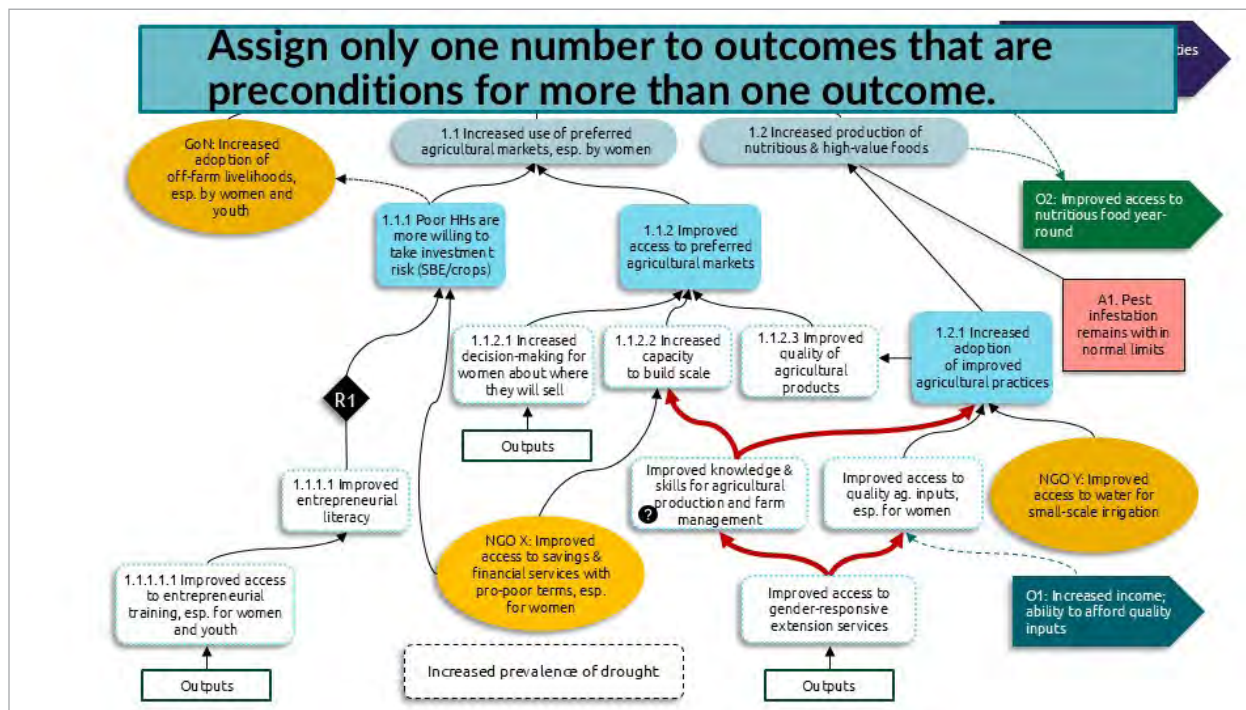
Wait to number cross-sectoral linkages until all outcome numbering is complete.

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 7:



One outcome is often a precondition for multiple outcomes. Numbering these ‘multiple pathway contributors’ using a logframe format can be confusing.

In our example, “Improved knowledge and skills for agricultural production and farm management” contributes to the 1.1.2.2 pathway and to the 1.2.1 pathway. In addition, “Improved access to gender-responsive extension services” contributes to both “Improved knowledge and skills...” and to “Improved access to quality agricultural inputs.”

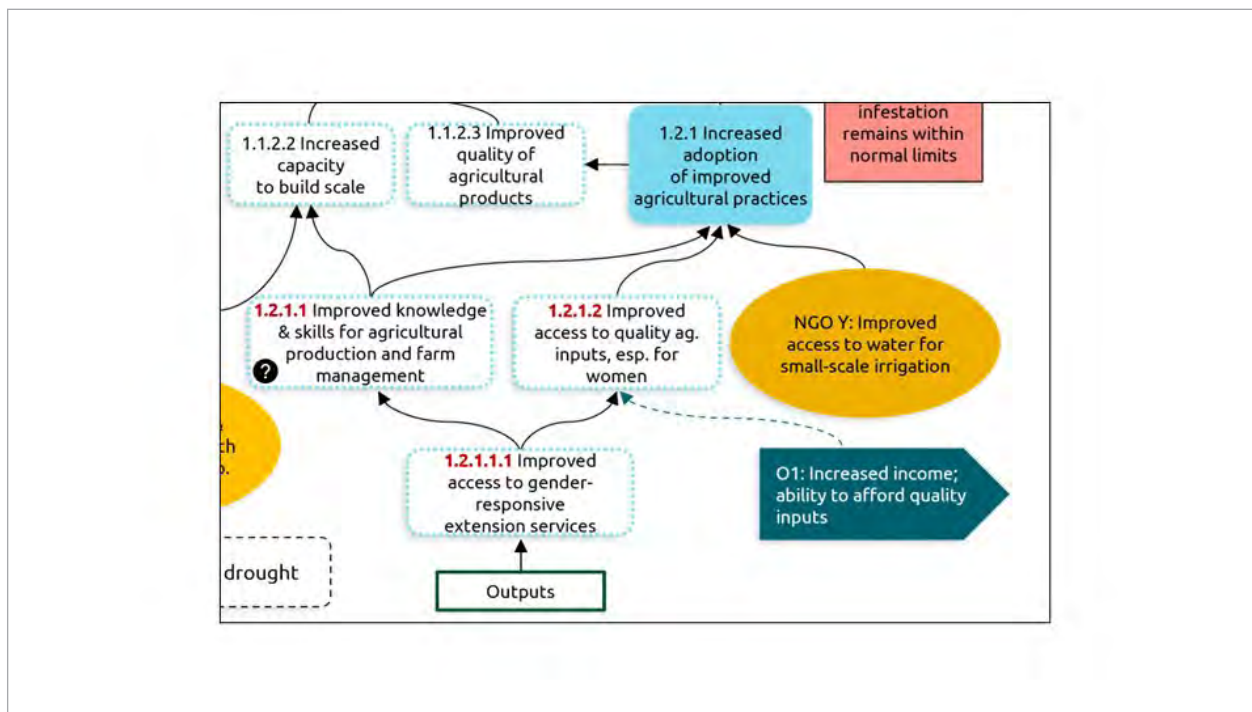
In cases like these, we will try to reach consensus about which outcome stream a ‘multiple pathway contributor’ primarily contributes to and number it accordingly. If all things are equal, just pick one pathway or the other. Our M&E team can note the contributions to multiple pathways in the logframe notes.

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 8:



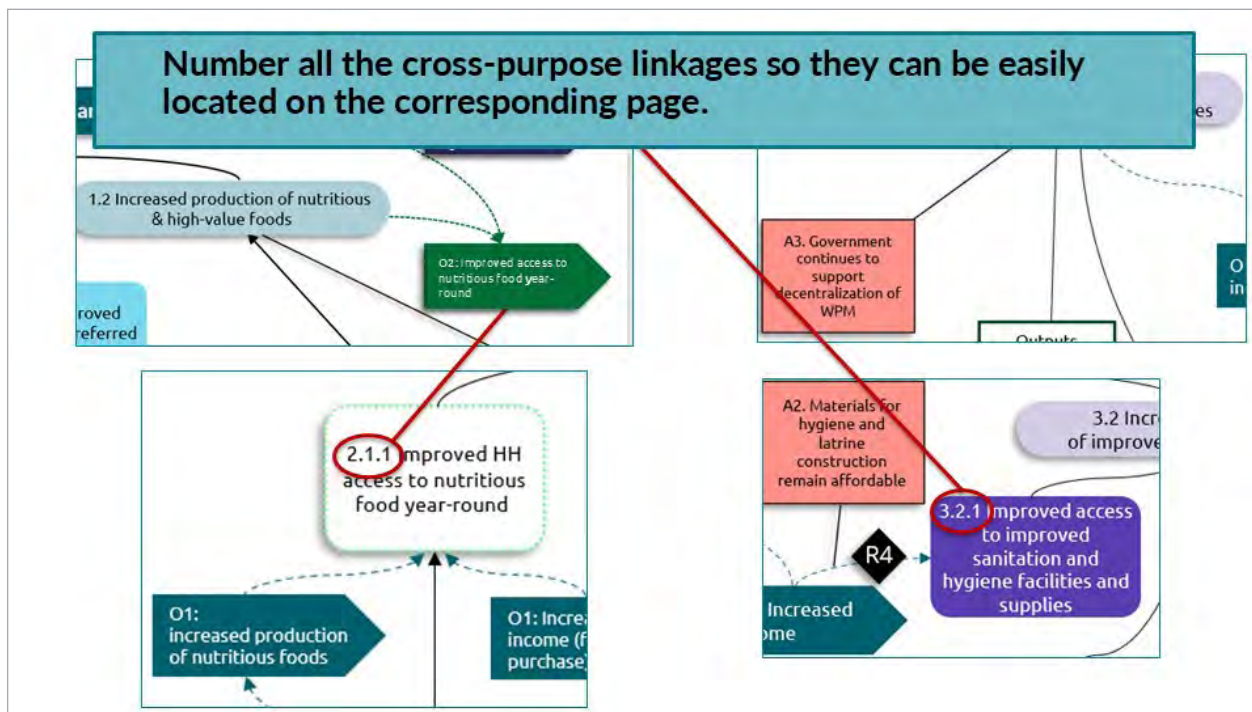
In our example, we decided to number the “Improved knowledge and skills” outcome as part of the 1.2.1 pathway, “Increased adoption of improved agricultural practices.” And we numbered “Improved access to gender-responsive extension services” as part of the 1.2.1.1 pathway, “Improved knowledge and skills.”

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 9:



Once all levels of the TOC outcomes are numbered, methodically go through and renumber all the cross-sectoral linkages.



Earlier, we gave them a generic objective number (e.g., O2), but now we want to direct users to the specific outcome in O2 (e.g., 2.1.1). A two-person team is helpful for this effort.

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

Quality and Completeness

SLIDE 10:



Let's review some key considerations for determining the quality and completeness of a TOC diagram and complementary documentation.



CONSIDER: The next slides in this session contain BHA requirements, requests, and recommendations, as well as pro tips from our implementing community. With a few exceptions, we've discussed these considerations in previous modules, so much of this will serve as a refresher.

Even if you're not designing a TOC for a BHA-funded food security activity, you may find the following suggestions helpful. Incorporate those that you feel will improve the quality of your TOC diagram.



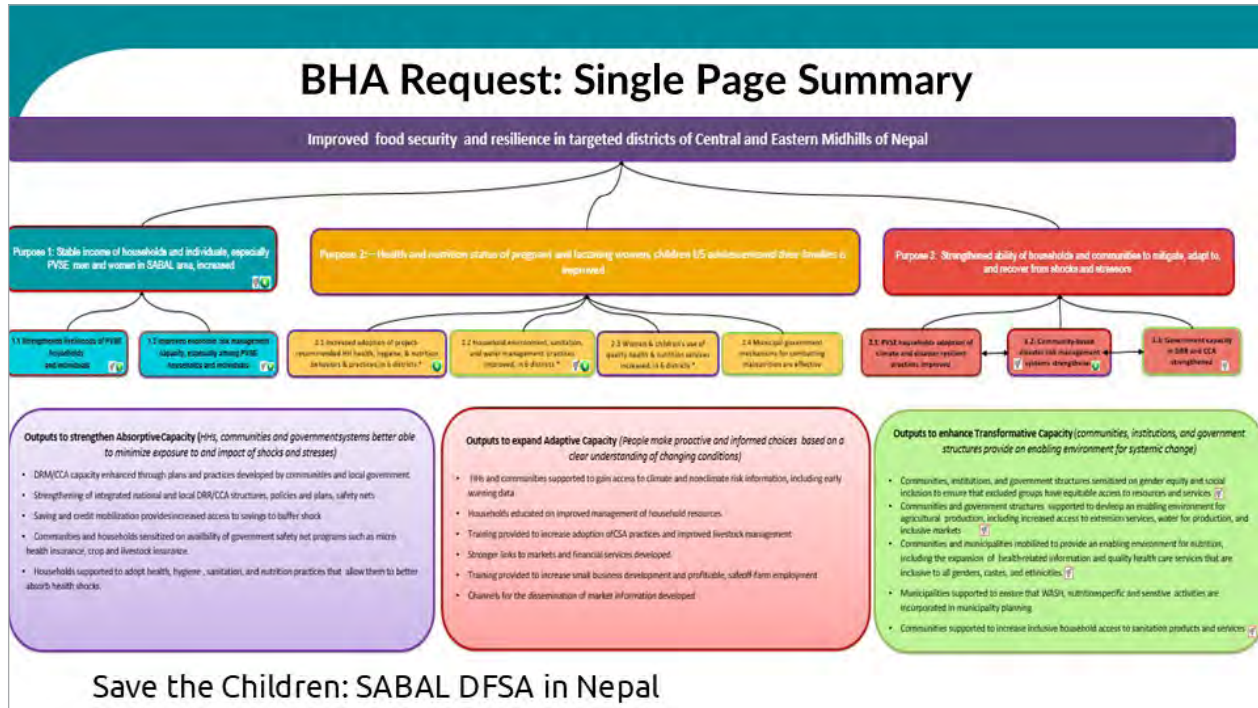
BHA GUIDANCE

Because this section is based on BHA guidance, we will switch from three terms used throughout the course (objective, sub-objective, and cross-sectoral) to BHA-specific terms that mean the same thing (purpose, sub-purpose, and cross-purpose).



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 11:



As we've moved through our TOC process, we developed each of our objectives/purposes in a separate diagram. This is not a BHA requirement, but it is a good strategy for keeping the diagrams reader-friendly while maintaining detail.

If implementers display each purpose on a separate page, BHA does request that the TOC diagrams include a **single-page summary diagram** in addition to the set of purpose-level diagrams. A common question is what does and does not belong on the single-page diagram? There is no requirement, but many implementers choose to include the goal, all purposes, all sub-purposes, and the primary intervention outputs that are expected to drive change. This allows users to gain a general understanding of the TOC before delving into the details.

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 12:

BHA Requirement: Include All Key Elements of the TOC's Causal Pathways In the Diagram

- ☐ An overall goal
- ☐ Outcomes
- ☐ Assumptions
- ☐ External actor outcomes
- ☐ Rationales
- ☐ Cross-sectoral linkages
- ☐ Intervention outputs



ASK & DISCUSS: What are the key elements we need to check for?

After discussion,  click to display key elements.

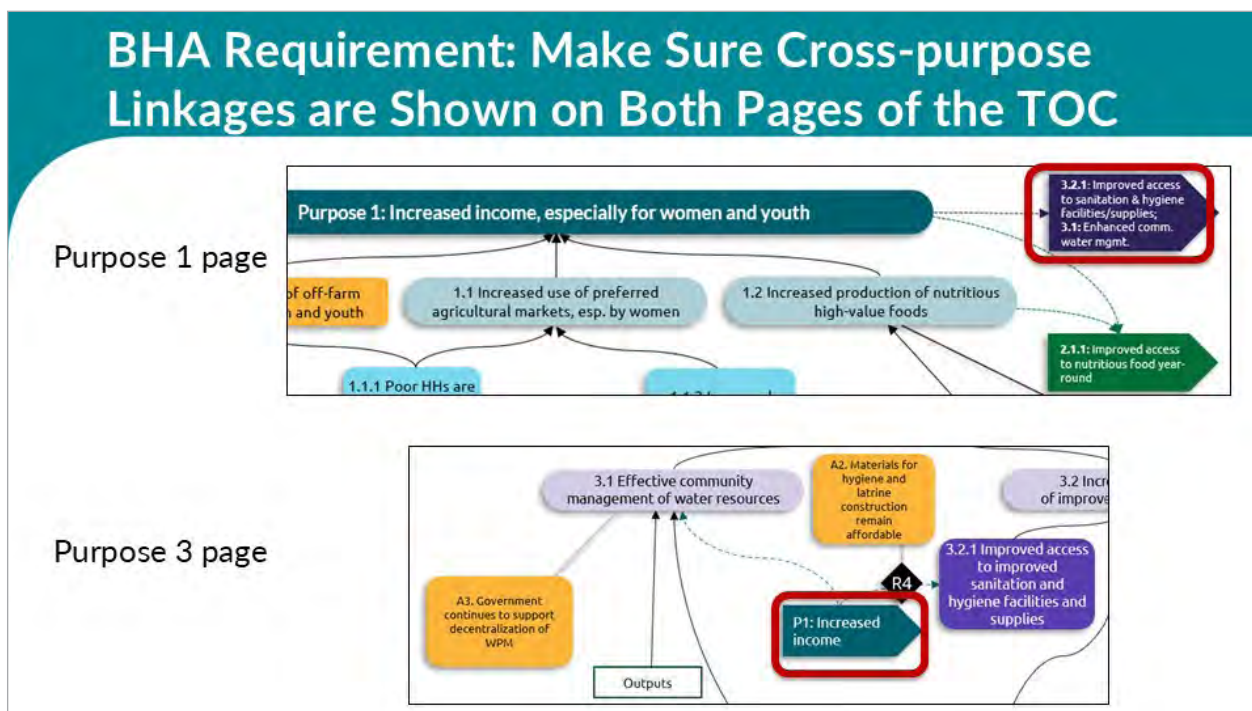
- ☐ An overall goal
- ☐ Outcomes
- ☐ Assumptions
- ☐ External actor outcomes
- ☐ Rationales
- ☐ Cross-sectoral linkages
- ☐ Intervention outputs

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 13:



BHA requires that cross-purpose linkages are shown on both pages of our TOC.

In the example, Purpose 1 (increased income) is a precondition for two outcomes on the Purpose 3 page. We show this on the Purpose 1 page with a Purpose 3 linkage shape AND we also include a Purpose 1 linkage shape on the Purpose 3 page and show how it contributes to the Purpose 3 outcomes.

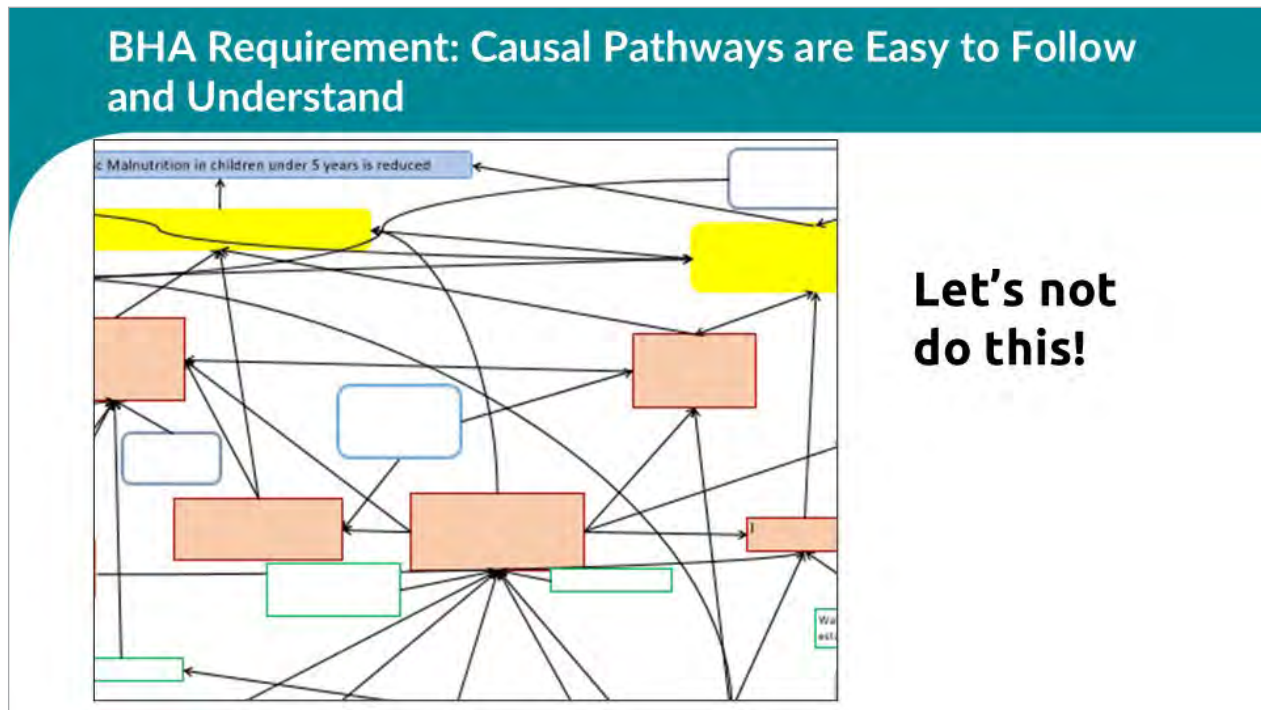
We'll number the cross-purpose linkages at the outcome level (as opposed to the purpose level) for ease of reference. We want users to be able to easily look across the different pages and follow the logic of these cross-purpose linkages. It may help to include the specific outcome number and write out enough of the specific outcome to which it links so that users can easily follow the logic to the corresponding page.

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 14:



BHA requires that causal pathways be easy to follow and understand.

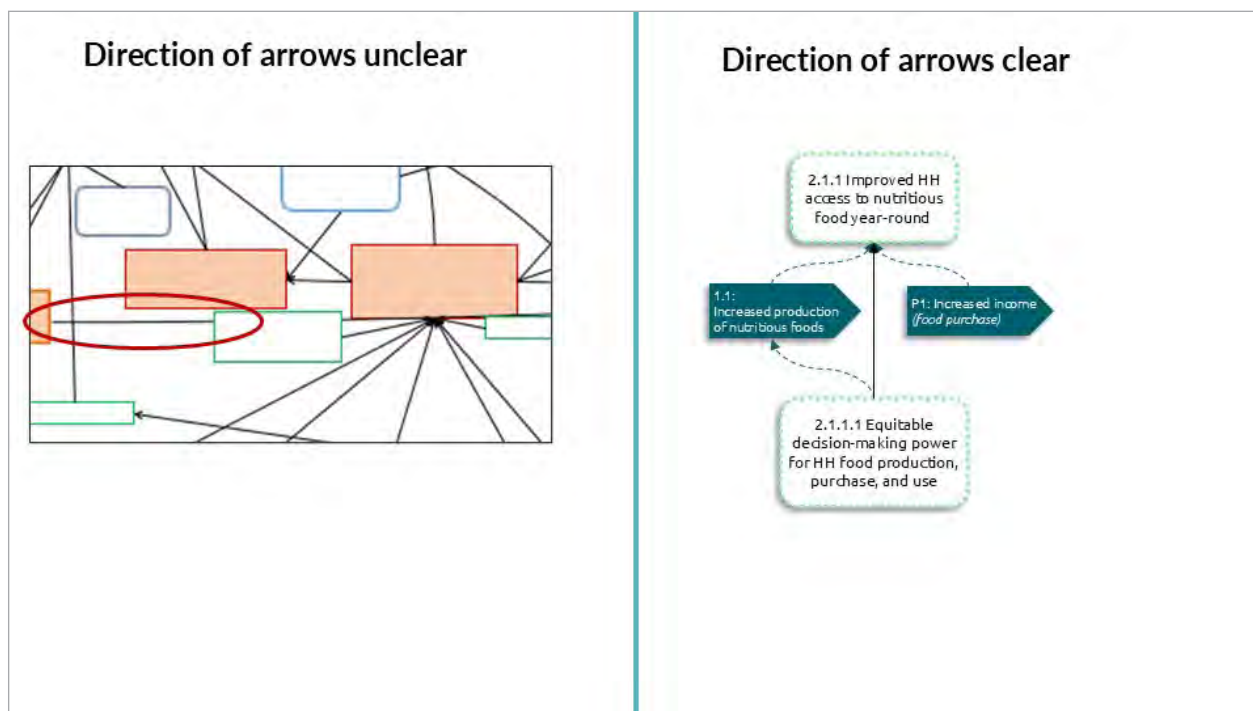
Let's review some pro tips on how to do this.

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 15:



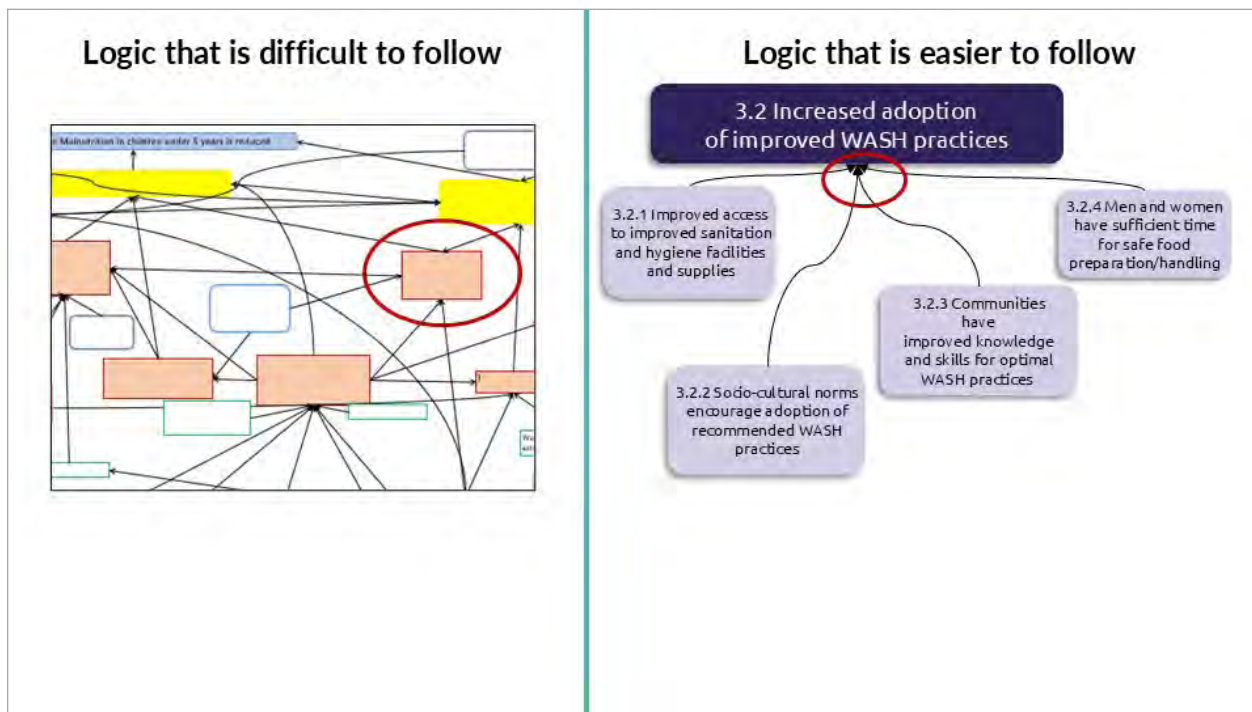
We should try to make the direction of all arrows clear. This can be accomplished by enlarging the arrow at the tip and making sure the arrow tips are not hidden behind an outcome box.

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 16:



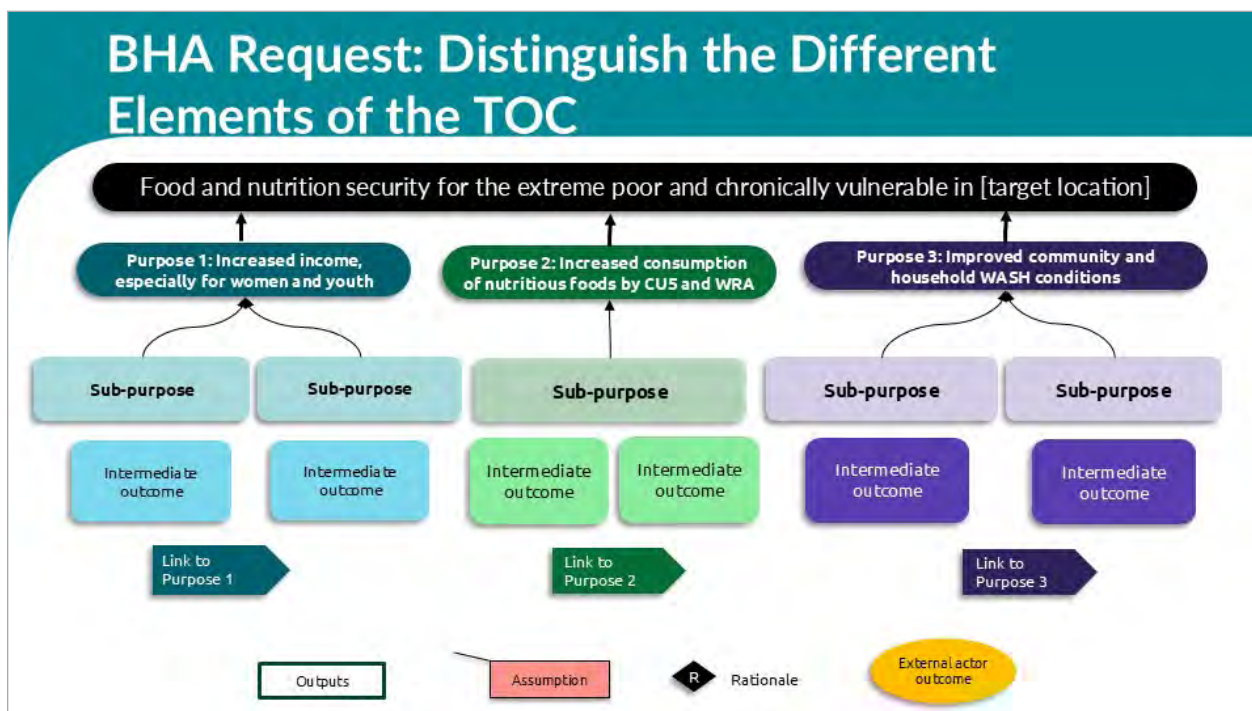
Let's avoid arrows that feed into an outcome from all directions. It is much easier to read causal logic if preconditions feed out of the top and into the bottom of the next outcome whenever possible.

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 17:



BHA requests that we consistently use different shapes, colors, shading, borders, icons, numbers, and/or font sizes to distinguish the different elements of the TOC.

It may be helpful to shade each outcome level a different color. In addition to aiding communication, shading by level makes it easier to transfer the TOC to a logframe.

NOTES:



BHA Requirement: Include a Key on Every Page of the TOC Diagram

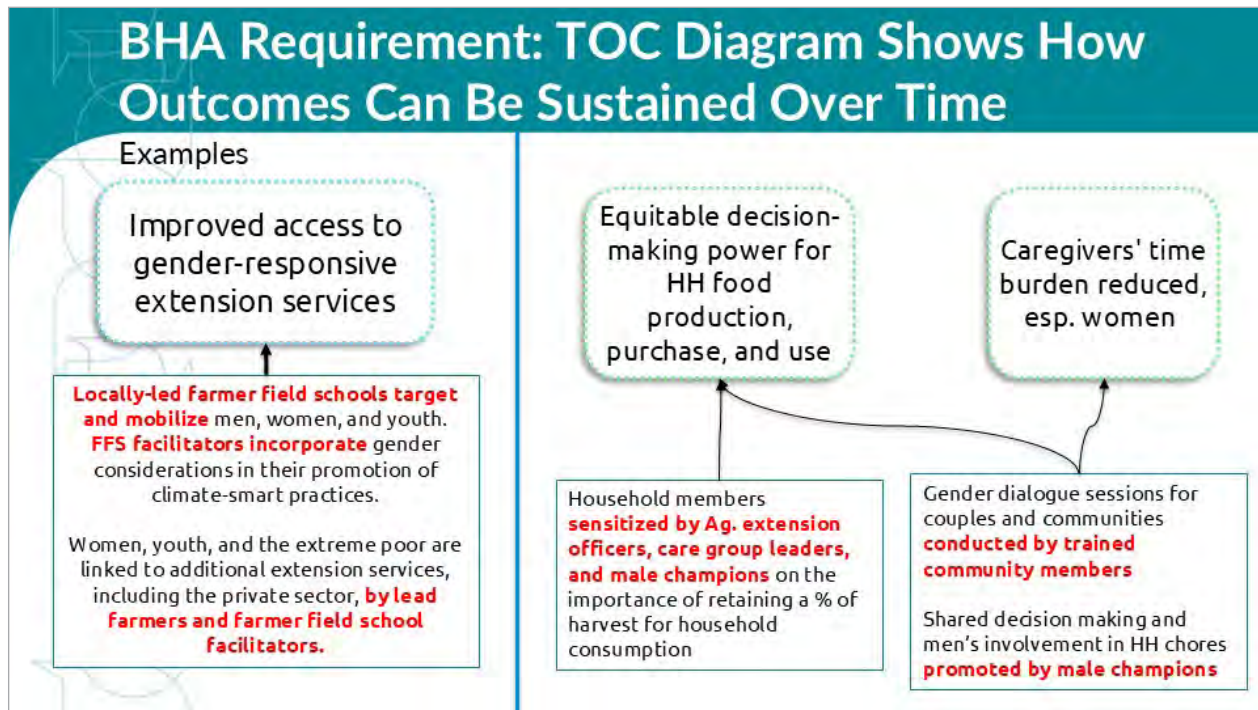
NOTES:

[illegible]



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 19:



BHA requires that the TOC diagram should show how outcomes can be sustained over time.

“For example, TOC diagrams that include provision of extension services to farmers by activity staff should demonstrate how other service providers will support farmers to continue implementing key agricultural practices beyond the life of the activity.” [BHA 2024 TOC Guidance](#)

This typically applies when outputs have been added to the diagram (i.e., not in an abridged TOC).

NOTES:



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 20:

BHA Requirement: Integrate Cross-cutting Themes

1.2.1.2 Improved access to quality ag. inputs, **esp. for women**

Key words only

1.2.1.2 Improved access to quality ag. inputs, esp. for women

Keywords and icons

♀♂ Gender focus
🌿 Environmental focus

Distinct borders, font, or colors
E.g., gender focus= yellow border; environmental focus=green text

BHA requests that the TOC diagram and complementary documentation clearly show how the activity has integrated cross-cutting areas (e.g., gender, environment, community participation, and conflict sensitivity). We can use various techniques to demonstrate integration, such as:

- keywords in outputs and outcomes;
- icons;
- different colors/shades, borders, fonts; and
- separate TOC diagrams (e.g., for a gender strategy) that link to all other TOC pages.

If we choose to use icons, borders, or new fonts for cross-cutting issues, we need to include them in our key.

PRO TIP



- **Don't try to show all the cross-cutting elements in the TOC. Diagrams will end up being very cluttered and difficult to follow.**
- **We need to prioritize what to highlight depending on the context assessment and the focus of the RFA.**



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

SLIDE 21:

BHA Requirement: TOC Complementary Documentation

- Information not easily communicated visually.
- Details related to external assumptions.
- Articulation of and supporting evidence for rationales.
- Details on the efforts of external actors.
- Explanation of how the activity addresses cross-cutting areas.

BHA requires complementary documentation to accompany the TOC. This includes:

- information that is not easily communicated visually;
- details related to external assumptions;
- articulation of and supporting evidence for rationales;
- details on the efforts of external actors;
- an explanation of how the activity addresses cross-cutting areas.

The complementary documentation is not a stand-alone document. It should not repeat anything that is already clearly presented in the TOC diagrams. In other words, it does not begin with a summary of the TOC, and it does not present the problem analysis. (This should be presented in the proposal or other project documents).

PRO TIP



- **Some partners who use Excel to develop their TOC diagram present the complementary documentation in the same Excel workbook, using a separate tab for each page. This makes it very easy to move back and forth between the TOC diagram and the supporting details.**



TOC Review and Refinement (cont.)

Wrap-up

Next Steps



CONSIDER: Share the most immediate next steps. Adapt to your organization’s timeline and assignment of responsibilities.

STEPS	TEAM MEMBERS	DATES
Number the TOC	1-2 person team	
Final check for all BHA requirements	1-2 person team	
Final refinement of graphics	Graphic design lead	



Conclusion: The Beginning, Not the End

While we have shared five concrete steps for developing a TOC, it's important to note that the TOC development process is iterative. It's normal for the process to be less linear—even a bit messy! Some steps may overlap. For instance, you may still be building your evidence base as you start your problem analysis. Certain tasks may occur at multiple steps in the process, such as preparing complementary documentation. And you may need to repeat some steps, especially if you go back to revise or refine the TOC after the completeness and quality check.

We must also remember that TOC development is both **a process** and **a product**. Although the first iteration of your project's TOC (the product) is finished, this is not the end. Now, the project starts the process of revisiting the TOC periodically throughout the program cycle, with ongoing reflection on whether, how, and why change is occurring as hypothesized. The TOC is intended to be a dynamic tool which you will use alongside the learning agenda and the M&E plan as key guides for adaptive management. The components of this powerful trio complement each other and can guide all levels of program staff through the critical reflection necessary for adaptive decision making throughout the program cycle. For resources and support on this process, check out post-award resources on [IDEAL's Theory of Change Facilitator's Guide homepage](#).

