

*Gender
and*
THEORIES
OF CHANGE

4th E-discussion June 2014
END NOTE

Foreword Hivos: Emergent interest in Theory of Change and Gender

In recent years there has been an increased interest in applying Theory of Change (ToC) thinking as a way to operate more strategically and effectively in complex change processes. ToC refers to the understanding that an organisation, project, network or group of stakeholders has about how political, social, economic and/or cultural change happens. A ToC analysis in particular explores and specifies how and why this organisation, project or group of stakeholders thinks that their actions will contribute to such a change process. It helps to formulate the assumptions underlying their thinking and strategic choices.

Hivos sees ToC as a systematic approach to programme design, monitoring, evaluation and learning. ToC thinking and practice allows for positioning change more strongly in context, trends and power issues, and implies a multistakeholder perspective. The outcomes of a ToC process are used to track and reflect continuously on the evolving change process in ways that allow for adaptation of strategies, for checking of assumptions, and for learning. If used well, ToC facilitates continuous critical and reflexive practice in programmes and organisations.

Hivos engaged in a learning process to enhance the quality of the emergent ToC practice of Hivos and its partners. Hivos' ToC learning team, which consists of Hivos staff and external experts, has produced various ToC related material, including synthesis papers of E-Dialogues on ToC related topics. This material and other publications Hivos considers relevant for its ToC practice are available at its ToC Resource Portal: www.hivos.net/toc. The topic identified for this E-Dialogue is how ToC thinking and practice can contribute to the full and effective integration of gender equality goals and concerns in programming for social justice.

Hivos has a long standing interest and reputation for addressing gender inequalities in its projects and programmes. Over time, Hivos and its partners have applied different approaches to achieve gender equality results. Hivos also has extensive experience in gender mainstreaming, for instance with the bi-annual application of Gender Performance Measurement, and is continuously looking for ways to strengthen the integration of gender equality concerns in other programmes and designs. In this E-Dialogue, Hivos wishes to explore what potential theory of change approaches have for mainstreaming gender into programming, M&E and learning.

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Introduction

Gender inequality manifests itself through a complex web of forces, socially, culturally and historically entrenched in societies and relationships and cannot be changed by isolated interventions. Gender mainstreaming implies political change and redistribution of power and resources. ToC thinking might be a helpful framework to include gender analysis and gender equality objectives in programme design in a more consistent way and from the very start of an intervention. In all stages of the process, such as the formulation of the actor and power analysis, the desired change (for whom?), the articulation of assumptions and the strategic thinking, gender (in)equality can and should be a core component of - and lens for questioning and reflection.

We start this Gender and ToC End Note with a few lessons on gender mainstreaming and a quick look at current gender and ToC practices. This is followed by a summary of the E-Dialogue, in which the contributions are organised around some key emerging insights. These also form the basis for the conclusions at the end.

LESSONS ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Work aiming for gender equality and women's rights builds on a long and rich history of grassroots level practice and engagement, transnational advocacy, and conceptual reflection and theorising. Over time, the original concepts of WID (Women in Development) and women's practical needs evolved into more relational and structural understandings of GAD (Gender and Development) and women's strategic gender interests. By understanding women's marginalised position in structural terms, change towards gender equality became a transformational process of institutional change. Empowerment of women and the realisation of women's rights implies fundamental transformation and encompasses different dimensions: laws and policy-making, distribution of resources at societal and household levels, intangible aspects such as self-esteem and dignity, and societal norms and values.

The realisation that gender bias and exclusion are deeply entrenched in institutions and policy-making laid the basis for the recognition that gender equality concerns need to be integrated, or mainstreamed, in policy-making processes. Despite the high expectations of mainstreaming gender equality, actual practices have often been disappointing and have exposed how deep gender bias and inequalities are embedded in institutional practices and priorities. Gender equality objectives have often evaporated and lost their transformative edge in the process of mainstreaming. Lack of quality gender expertise, exclusion of women's voices in policy making and implementation, and insufficient resources for gender equality objectives and strategies have undermined organisations' capacity to make a transformatory and sustainable impact on women's lives.

Gender risks to become a fuzzy concept, and has come to carry multiple meanings, which often fail to acknowledge gender as relational and structural. Result-based management and the subsequent orientation on measurable change have contributed to weak understandings of gender equality and transformational change, and to gender concepts becoming devoid of context. Myths about empowerment have surfaced, suggesting magic bullet solutions can empower women, who then in turn can enable economic growth, peace and security, and sustainability. We now realise that transformational change cannot be expected from only legal or policy reform, or from only providing girls with access to education or health, or from merely integrating women into the economy.

A key problem in many mainstreaming approaches

is that they tend to by-pass programmatic and institutional priorities. Many focus on changing thinking and practice of individual staff through, for instance, gender indicators monitored at project level or by emphasising the provision of training. This creates a catch-22 situation in which project staff are expected to realise gender objectives within a organisational and programmatic setting that has not reconsidered its priorities. Put differently, the priorities and strategic objectives at programme level are not gender-sensitive and hence do not create an enabling environment for staff to contribute to gender equality.

MEETING POINTS BETWEEN GENDER AND TOC PRACTICE

With its emphasis on in-depth critical reflection on assumptions of change, and by explicit positioning change within a particular context, ToC practice has the potential to circumvent some of the challenges that gender mainstreaming has encountered. It allows for articulating and questioning gender myths, as we will see later in this Note.

It has to be acknowledged that a lot of practice already interrogates change and how it happens, even if it is not explicitly called ToC practice. A ToC facilitator can build on this practice. ToC thinking and practice can assist organisations and programmes to decide on programmatic priorities and strategic choices. The opportunity of tracking outcomes as identified in the ToC and reflect upon evolving change processes can be an asset for the integration of well-grounded gender strategies. This will also help monitoring practice to generate more meaningful data and understanding, by moving from only quantitative data on numbers of women/men and girls/boys towards assessing and understanding gender changes as articulated by the assumptions in the ToC.¹

ToC processes may also reveal new challenges. One of those challenges manifests itself when multi-stakeholder processes in ToC practice bring together a range of actors, who operate in their own frames of reference and act according to their own interests. Addressing gender inequalities and rights violations then implies the negotiation and discussion of gender concerns and interpretations in an early stage of programme development, which might create opportunities as well as challenges and resistance to strategising and acting for gender equality and women's rights.²

Similarly, former gender equality strategies tended to focus on the state as a key player for the promotion of women's rights. Due to globalisation of the economy, due to governance processes becoming more

¹ For understanding assumptions, please visit www.hivos.net/toc
Resource 3: ToC Note Working with Assumptions. Practical assistance for ToC facilitation and ToC visualisation is provided in Resource 9. Resource 5 gives ToC examples

multi-level and multi-polar (e.g. devolution of power to local governments; or devolution of powerful nations from the North to some of the Global South and East), and due to the growing role and power of private sector actors, the nation state seems to have become a less central and less powerful player. These shifts also have implications for the workings of power through visible, hidden and invisible mechanisms.³ International public goods and challenges such as climate change, food security, water management or migration also call for integrated and coordinated transnational responses from a range of different actors. These complex problems are often taken up in ToC processes, involving also a range of different actors in the process of programme design and strategic decision-making.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE E-DIALOGUE

Added value: ToC and gender thinking can enrich each other

Contributions to the E-Dialogue argued that ToC and gender approaches can enrich each other. The potential added value combining gender and ToC thinking is that both engage with transformational change, and that both seek to articulate how change happens. Both engage with context, both seek connection between individual, personal change, and organisational, and also institutional and structural change. Gender theory and practice can be of added value to ToC, and the other way around, ToC can be of added value to gender equality and women's rights work.

Because change towards gender equality implies fundamental transformation, gender theory and practice can be a rich resource for ToC thinking and practice. A key lesson learned in gender the-

ory and practice is that changing power relations is not so much about 'power over', but that equality and empowerment are very much about 'power to'. That process of empowerment is inherently linked to 'power with' (e.g. collective agency and the relevance of numbers, organisations, constituency) and 'empowerment within' (individual agency, self-esteem, dignity and self confidence). Reflections on gender work have also highlighted that expecting fundamental societal change to originate from and be geared by policy processes and institutions might be an invalid assumption. The often disappointing experiences with gender mainstreaming to bring about women's empowerment and contribute to women realising their rights have called for a reconsideration of what can be expected from policies and bureaucracies. This resonates with how ToC thinking and practice put interventions in context, and interrogate what they can bring about.

In this light, Srilatha Batliwala points to recent AWID publications (see Box 1) that have developed and articulated "a sort of meta ToC on gender equality and women's rights":

"The ToC is articulated as a set of propositions, built from the experience not just of AWID, but many of our thousands of members. Key to this is a departure from gender mainstreaming constructs and frameworks, and an emphasis on the rationale for building women's collective power to achieve social transformation, and on addressing the informal domains of individual consciousness and internalised gender roles and values, as well as socio-cultural norms that sanction and perpetuate gender-based discrimination."

(Srilatha Batliwala, India)

BOX 1: AWID's eight propositions of change for gender equality and women's rights⁴

- 1 Gender power structures are best transformed through interventions in four key domains: (1) internalised beliefs and attitudes, (2) social and cultural norms, (3) formal laws, policies, structures and resource allocations, and (4) access to material and knowledge resources, as well as rights and opportunities;
- 2 Deep, sustainable change for women's rights requires women's collective action and power;
- 3 Truly transformative change in women's lives will result in giving them access to the full body of internationally enshrined human rights;
- 4 Women's rights and gender equality cannot be left to or brought about by market forces;
- 5 Even if states and multilateral actors carry primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of women's rights, newer actors in development, especially the private sector, influence and shape women's access to rights in ways that cannot be ignored;
- 6 The fruits of transformative change cannot be taken for granted, but must be defended, preserved and sustained;
- 7 Collective change processes for long-term social transformation in favour of gender equality cannot be built without resources;
- 8 Mobilizing more resources for women's rights organizing and the longer-term struggle for gender equality is a collective responsibility.

Gender blind does not mean 'gender neutral'

Neither the E-Dialogue, nor a quick scan for other resources on gender and ToC, provided a large number of examples in which gender is strongly integrated in ToC practice. The potential of ToC for gender equality work is not realised automatically. One of the contributors to the E-Dialogue suggested that most ToC practice has been gender blind, in the sense of not explicitly engaging with gender issues and assumptions about gender change. It is often argued that there is no need to look at gender, because an issue is assumed to be 'gender neutral'. Hivos takes the position that social change processes always involve and affect people, women and men, so 'gender neutral' does not exist. ToC processes risk to be gender-blind when no deliberate action is taken to bring in gender equality concerns and expertise. This implies that ToC processes risk to reproduce gender patterns and gender bias in process and results. It is important to reveal and analyse gender assumptions that are underlying the ToC.

"The identification and prioritization of assumptions are not neutral; our context and history are gender-biased. When discussing power issues and assumptions, gender power issues remain hidden, so it is important to pay specific attention to them. ... Structural transformation is not 'automatically' linked to and related to gender transformations. ... Gender is a key approach for transformation, and a gender strategy must accompany a more general strategy towards transformation... It is important to reveal and analyze gender assumptions that are underlying in the ToC theoretical, conceptual and methodological production, and what this implies for implementation."

(Silvia Salinas, Bolivia)

Contributors propose gender to be considered a quality criterion of a ToC process. This calls for explicitly and deliberately addressing gender in ToC processes.

The meanings of gender: interrogating assumptions

One of the promises of bringing together ToC practice and gender work is that ToC thinking and practice can assist in analysing gender approaches and addressing power issues. Several interpretations and even contradictory positions underlie "gender approaches". However, such differences are seldom addressed and mostly remain uncovered, because it is commonly assumed that there is a shared and somehow common sense understanding of what is a "gender approach".

Analysing gender approaches with a ToC lense showed that gender approaches are frequently centered on gender roles and less on gender power relations. Silvia

Salinas argues that "when addressing women's issues, for instance sex work as a mainly female issue, power issues and particularly gender power issues can remain 'hidden' and untouched". Srilatha Batliwala pointed to many assumptions about gender relations that essentialise women. Such gender myths⁵ for instance concern "the idea of women as innate peace-builders and men as innate war-makers" that neglect "women's roles as combatants, their complicity in conflicts based on for instance ethnic or religious identity, and their mobilisation around conflict-based agendas". Another example she raised concerns how women's likelihood to repay loans and use income for household well-being is essentialized in so-called economic empowerment initiatives, neglecting both women's limited access to other credit sources, as well as how gendered power relations in households might result in women taking and repaying loans that are used by male partners.

Batliwala points also to another persistent set of gender assumptions; those around male-female binary, despite more than twenty years of activism and theorising on sexuality that have broken the binary and placed gender identities along a much broader spectrum. Feminist activism and theories have emphasised the differences among women and men, not only between women and men. And they have interrogated how power operates in the intersections between gender with other markers of difference, including ethnicity, race, religion, sexuality, age, class, and disability. Silvia Salinas also argues strongly that gender should be linked and articulated to a wide approach of diversities and inter-sector approaches. The interesting thing about ToC approaches is that they can be used purposefully to articulate and interrogate those meanings of gender. This articulation and interrogating of gender ideas and meanings goes to the core of strategies that seek to integrate gender equality objectives into development programming, planning and implementation.

Facilitating ToC and gender in organisations

Interrogating and articulating assumptions about gender and change takes a different shape in different types of organisations. Paola Rozo shared her experiences with facilitating ToC and gender work in two types of organisations. A first type of organisations are those with a strong discourse and practice of women's rights based approach. A second category contains a wide variety of organisations struggling to learn how to 'deal with' gender, which is either seen as a genuine institutional concern or as a donor requirement. We start with the latter and pull out lessons on integrating gender there. We then turn to women's rights organisations, and their use of ToC.

Paola states that the case of working with gender meanings in mainstream organisations, the application of ToC is a trigger that allows to make the implicit

² See: AWID (2014). 'New Actors, New Money, New Conversations'.

³ For notions of visible, invisible and hidden power, see: Lisa Veneklasen, with Valerie Miller (2002). *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. Oklahoma City: World Neighbours.

⁴ In the following AWID publications: 'Watering the leaves, Starving the roots'; 2013, and also in 'Women moving Mountains'; 2013, and 'New Actors, New Money, New Conversations'; 2014.

⁴ In the following AWID publications: 'Watering the leaves, Starving the roots'; 2013, and also in 'Women moving Mountains'; 2013, and 'New Actors, New Money, New Conversations'; 2014.

⁵ For the notion of gender myths, see: Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison & Ann Whitehead (2007). 'Gender Myths and Feminist Fables: the Struggle for Interpretative Power in Gender and Development'. *Development and Change*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 1-20. See also Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison & Ann Whitehead (eds.) (2007). *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges*. London, New York: Zed Books, and the IDS Bulletin (2004), vol. 35, no. 4.

explicit. It was essential for her to come in and start with an open message and practice of reflection and analysis. Avoiding as much as possible moments of transferring the 'basic guide for the incorporation of gender'. The use of ToC contributed to make explicit a tacit sensitivity, knowledge and practice in terms of gender and equity. This contributed greatly to more engagement of staff with the process and their commitment to improvements in the immediate future and in the long run. This type of gradual strategy allows for recognising and building on existing ideas and practices, and for dealing with possible resistance or doubts of team members to apply a gender and equity approach. Their remarks and critical positions can be transformed into starting points for assumptions, formulated either negatively or positively. In doing so, these become an important and intrinsic part of the ToC process. By making them explicit as an assumption, and by accepting them as part of the collective construction, there is an agreement that forces the team to discuss them and to generate evidence and arguments. In time, and as part of the process itself, the less open people discover for themselves the need to adjust their mindsets and re-think their actions. Paola experienced that this strategy can provide effective learning processes on the relevance, meanings and implications of gender for mainstream organisations and open up an opportunity to achieve greater consistency and effectiveness in their actions. They may gradually incorporate gender perspectives as a complementary category to others for which they feel better prepared.

With respect to working with women's rights organisations, the other category referred to above, it is usually assumed that there is clarity and consistency on what gender means. Organisations of women, feminists, activists for women's or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi- and transsexual) rights are 'gender experts', and it is assumed that staff understands the implementation strategy and acts accordingly. Yet, for these type of organisations it is both important and necessary to review their gender ideas and assumptions about transformative change strategies aimed at gender equality and women's empowerment. ToC thinking can help in this process. The use of a ToC approach and its participatory principles has sometimes reviewed gender thinking and new strategies were designed to overcome the 'automatic-pilot' that was not effective. ToC can help to overcome binary thinking such as male-female and perpetrator-victim.

Strengths and weaknesses of applying ToC for gender changes

ToC can be of value for monitoring, evaluation, impact assessment and learning around gender equality and women's rights works. The strengths and weaknesses of ToC approaches for monitoring and

evaluation of gender equality and women's rights work have been identified by Batliwala and Pittman.⁶ The strengths include:

- That fundamental assumptions about why a program should work are made explicit, and that their relevance in specific contexts can be tested and interrogated;
- That the collective and shared understanding of interventions can be strengthened when preconditions for achieving change are mapped with constituents;
- Sensitiveness to context and to power dynamics;
- Attentiveness to alternative or unexpected outcomes;
- The collective mapping process required by the ToC approach strengthens accountability and transparency across stakeholder groups, including with the staff and in reporting to donors.

ToC practitioners are often committed to a broader reflective approach to development practice, rather than to any specific tool. In this respect it may be worth anchoring ToC approaches in other useful concepts and practices, such as problem-driven iterative adaptation or double loop learning.⁷

Weaknesses include that theories of change do not always explicitly pay attention to (possible) reversals in gains made, whereas backlash to change is a critical concern for gender equality work. Moreover, even though ToC pays attention to context and stakeholder input, in practice it tends to remain focused on programming and interventions, and hence be somehow constrained in accounting for the complex and unexpected nature of social change.

CONCLUSIONS

The meeting points between ToC and gender thinking and practice lies in their focus on transformational change and in the articulation and interrogation of assumptions.⁸ In this Note, different types of assumptions have been highlighted. Important assumptions related to gender concerns are the ideas and norms people have about gender roles, behaviour and identities. Other assumptions relate to ideas one might have about how change happens, and in particular, how gender equality and women's empowerment can take shape. A third type of assumptions concerns the extent to which gender issues and relations are considered integral dimensions of social change, development and transformation.

1. **ToC provides an opportunity but it is not a panacea**
Applying ToC thinking in an organisation or network can help to surface gender ideas and assumptions that remain otherwise hidden. Organisational and network

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change and learning processes operate in the context of societal norms and standards and intentional change processes need to engage with these social norms and values. Gender transformative work implies questioning assumptions behind gender roles and relations, and also those behind the ToC itself. Identifying and prioritising assumptions is not neutral. Whereas a ToC approach offers the potential to address gender power issues, in current ToC processes they often remain hidden and untouched.

2. **Gender quality is a criterion for good ToC practice**

ToC practice is often gender blind, but never gender neutral, as the neglect of explicitly engaging with gender assumptions has reproduced gender patterns and bias in process and results. The vast body of knowledge and rich history of practice of gender transformative and women's rights work suggest that there is much to learn from when seeking to strengthen gender transformative analysis in ToC processes. The E-Dialogue has confirmed that gender should therefore be considered a quality criterion of a ToC process. A power and stakeholder analysis that does not address gender dimensions is of little value, as it is incomplete and biased. This implies that a ToC process needs to explicitly address gender: engaging with gendered assumptions does not happen automatically.

3. **Design a ToC facilitation process according to gender experiences and interests**

It is important to differentiate between different types of organisations in terms of readiness to address gen-

der mainstreaming and design ToC processes accordingly. For mainstream organisations it is important to start with an open message and articulation and reflection on tacit ideas around gender and gender work. For organisations working on women's rights it is both important and necessary to review their gender ideas and assumptions about transformative change strategies aimed at gender equality and women's empowerment.

4. **ToC can contribute to stronger gender reflection**

The process of articulating theories of change and gender assumptions allows for the exposure and revision of multiple ideas of gender and gender changes and should be part of multi-stakeholder change processes. If actors are committed to a broad reflective approach to development practice, it may be worth anchoring ToC in the concepts and practices they already use to strengthen gender and change reflection.

⁶ Batliwala and Pittman (2010): 'Capturing Change in Women's Realities', (p. 26-27)

⁷ Valters: ToC in International Development: Communication, Learning, or Accountability? JRSP paper 17, 2014

⁸ See also ToC Note 3 on Assumptions, available at www.hivos.net/toc (resource 3)

Colophon

This Note has been made for the 4th E Dialogue on ToC. It is one of the outcomes of the Hivos Theory of Change Programme (www.hivos.net/toc). We thank everyone that has contributed to the discussion.

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Authors: Anouka van Eerdewijk (a.v.eerdewijk@kit.nl) and Jan Brouwers (jan.brouwers@wur.nl)

Contact ToC team:

**Humanist Institute for Cooperation
with Developing Countries (Hivos)**
Raamweg 16, P.O. Box 85565, NL-2508 CG
The Hague, The Netherlands
T +31-70 376 55 00 | F +31-70 362 46 00
info@hivos.net | www.hivos.net

Centre for Development Innovation
Wageningen University & Research Centre
Postbus 88, 6700 AB
Wageningen, The Netherlands
T +31 (0)317 486800 | F +31 (0)317 486801
info.cdi@wur.nl | <http://www.cdi.wur.nl/UK/>

Learning by Design
Irene Guijt
iguijt@learningbydesign.org

Iñigo Retolaza Eguren
T +591 73259724 | iretolaza@hotmail.com