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THEORIES AND INDICATORS OF CHANGE BRIEFING PAPER CONCEPTS AND PRIMERS FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATION

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DISCLAIMER

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

I. Overview: Working with Theories of Change

The most important thing to know about theories of change is that they are intended to be helpful and practical. They are not an academic exercise to make your work more difficult, but instead a tool to improve the design, implementation, and assessment of your programs.

This guide is to help you understand and use theories of change, and to provide you with resources and information that you can draw upon in that process. It distills insights from development policy and practice, as well as from the analysis of researchers, to give you the most up-to-date material to construct theories of change for development programming.

This Briefing Paper will cover the following:

1. Defining theories of change and how they are relevant (Section 1.1)
2. Constructing theories of change (Section 1.2)
3. Introducing and explaining how to use the Theories of Change Matrix and primers in defining your programmatic theories of change (Section 2.1)
4. Presenting the Theories of Change Matrix (Section 2.2)

I.1 DEFINING THEORIES OF CHANGE AND THEIR RELEVANCE

As a development practitioner, the programs you design are intended to improve the conditions (economic, political, social, environmental, etc.) in a given context. As such, they will hopefully *change* how institutions operate/are structured, and the way people think or act such that these improvements take place and are sustained. As a practitioner, you draw upon your experience, and that of others, to create ways to catalyze or facilitate such changes. In doing so, you are making explicit, or sometimes implicit, assumptions about how the change will come about, i.e., which activities will function in which ways to create the desired outcome.

“A theory of change explains why we think certain actions will produce desired change in a given context.”¹ It is intended to make all of our implicit assumptions more explicit, in order to (1) clarify which **drivers** of violent conflict we are addressing; (2) state clearly what the intended **outcome** of programs will be; and (3) fully articulate **how and why** the program will address the drivers of conflict and achieve its intended outcomes.

In its simplest form, a theory of change is expressed in the following form:

¹ CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Search for Common Ground and CARE International (Forthcoming) *Practical Approaches to Theories of Change in Conflict, Justice and Security Programmes* (Draft, June 2012), London: DFID (“DFID Theories of Change”).

“If we do X (action), then we will produce Y (change/shift towards peace, stability, security).”

or

“We believe that by doing X (action) successfully, Y will come about (movement towards a desired goal).”

Of course, not all situations call for such simple statements. A theory of change might be expressed as “If we do X, Y and Z, it will lead to W” or “If we do X, it will lead to Y, which will lead to Z, which might possibly lead to W.”

It is important to extend the statement a bit further to clarify underlying assumptions by adding the rationale or logic—how and why the change will come about—in a “because” phrase. This then produces the following:

“If we do X..., then Y..., because Z...”

For instance, one theory of change for a post-war program aimed at promoting employment for ex-combatant youth might be as follows:

“If we provide employment for ex-combatant youth, then we will reduce the likelihood of inter-communal violence, because unemployed youths are the most likely to be recruited into fighting; many still hold weapons and remain connected to their command structures. If they find employment, they will disengage from their command structures and will be less recruitable into fighting because they will have more to lose.”²

How does a theory of change relate to a conflict analysis?³

Conflict analysis and theories of change are related but distinct concepts used to inform conflict resolution interventions and their evaluation. Analysis that presents no avenues for change is not useful to development practitioners, while a theory of change not rooted in analysis is also unlikely to be effective.

Experience has shown that analysis of the conflict dynamics and context is an essential first step to any and all program design, monitoring, and evaluation in conflict-affected and fragile environments. At USAID, a formal conflict assessment process often serves as the starting point for programming-oriented analysis, although frequently it is necessary to conduct additional analysis specific to the project or activity in question.

Conflict analysis and assessment set the stage for design, monitoring, and evaluation of programs by identifying the factors or drivers that are most salient in affecting dynamics of peace, conflict, and fragility. By changing these factors or their inter-relationships, it is logical to infer that conflict dynamics should change as a result. **This is the juncture where**

Box 1—Embedding theory of change in context

A theory of change cannot stand alone. It needs to be embedded and considered within a specific context. Efforts that contribute to a desired change in one context may have a different effect in another.

² Modified from “DFID Theories of Change.”

³ Modified from USAID (2012) *Conflict Assessment Framework Version 2.0* (“CAF 2.0”), Washington, D.C.: USAID.

theory of change and conflict analysis meet. The theory of change provides the bridge between analysis and programming, helping practitioners to make sure that the programs are relevant and appropriate to the conflict.

In short, based upon the findings of the conflict analysis, a theory of change can be identified by asking the question, “What needs to change in this particular context to generate more peace and less violent conflict?” The theory of change will be an “if...then” statement about *how* that change will happen. It will specify the *type of change* (e.g., knowledge, attitudes, skills, policies, etc.) and the *target of change* (e.g., key individual, group, organization, process, etc.), ensuring that the theory of change is causally linked to the conflict diagnosis.

How can you use theories of change?

There are several ways in which theories of change are useful in conflict and development programming, some of which have already been mentioned:

1. To make assumptions explicit about what change we expect to take place, and how/why we expect this to happen.
2. To weed out unrealistic program ideas and clarify and refine ideas that are worthy of further consideration.⁴
3. To uncover gaps in our programming, when we find that there are steps in the logic of our theories (see (1) above) that turn out to be either incorrect or missing entirely.
4. To make sure everyone involved in designing and implementing the program has the same understanding of why a program is structured as it is, and how to implement it according to that structure.
5. To provide a basis for assessing relevance, effectiveness, and impact in monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and therefore to help identify reasons for success or failure.
6. To identify where adjustments or modifications in the program may be needed to achieve the desired outcome/result.
7. Based on (6), to contribute to knowledge about violence, peace, and development.⁵

Why is stating an explicit theory of change essential for effective monitoring and evaluation of conflict programs?⁶

When analysis, theory of change, and implementation come together effectively, the result should be a noticeable change in the conflict dynamics. Focusing on these outcomes—particularly in the context of evaluation—is critical for purposes of accountability and learning. If a project does not appear to affect the overall conflict dynamics, however, there are four broadly plausible explanations:

⁴ See CAF 2.0, p. 36.

⁵ See OECD DAC (2012) *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results*. Paris: OECD DAC. This Guidance emphasizes that “[d]eveloping better founded, more clearly stated theories about how peacebuilding and statebuilding can be achieved and supported is a key message from this guidance for decision makers, managers, and programme staff.” *Id.* at 9 (Executive Summary).

⁶ *Ibid.*

1. *The underlying analysis was incorrect.* Perhaps the project *did* affect identified conflict factors, but these factors were not related to the overall conflict dynamics in the manner previously understood; for example, the project addressed the *symptoms* of conflict, instead of its sources.
2. *The theory of change was unfounded or invalid.* The expected changes did not take place because the project made incorrect assumptions about how change would occur in this context. Or perhaps the project did affect the targets of its change as intended, but the expected changes from this particular set of actions did not address drivers of conflict or had unintended negative consequences; for example, the project brought together leaders from opposing sides to pursue common goals unrelated to the peace process, and although relationships improved, attitudes about the other and about the peace process did not.
3. *The project was not implemented properly.* Perhaps the project *did* have a valid theory of change for affecting the conflict dynamics and the proposed actions *would* have yielded the desired outcomes, but the project did not go off as planned; for example, the project faced logistical challenges or malfeasance.
4. *The theory of change was valid but insufficient.* The project's theory of change was valid and did affect the identified conflict factors, but it was insufficient to affect overall dynamics of peace and conflict. This, for example, could be due to the influence of other conflict factors that were not considered or addressed, or to the absence of linkages with other programs.

Box 2—Identifying program gaps using theories of change: Liberia

In the wake of the 14-year civil war in **Liberia**, a large international NGO received donor funding to develop Community Peace Councils (CPCs), a community-based mechanism for resolving a range of disputes, with an explicitly inter-ethnic approach. One of the program's theories of change was: if a new community-level mechanism for handling a range of dispute types was established, then it would help maintain peace in the community and avoid incidents that have the potential for escalating into serious violence. An evaluation team found that while the CPCs successfully handled many conflicts at the local level, they were, for the most part, **not** handling the most serious and volatile disputes relating to land issues. The team then explored whether this was due to a failure in program implementation or, alternatively, to a theory of change that was incomplete or inaccurate. The main conclusion was that, while the CPCs were set up and trained well, the CPCs mostly were excluded from handling land issues as communities were repopulated and traditional leadership patterns re-established. The program had made incorrect assumptions about how it would contribute to stopping key drivers of the conflict in Liberia, and subsequently adjusted its strategy.

Theories of change, it should be added, may also benefit project managers in terms of maintaining accountability. In some cases, expectations for peace and security programs exceed what is plausible or realistic. By rooting projects in realistic and logical analysis and theories of change, project managers can ensure that the project's expectations are realistic and better respond to critiques, i.e., "Perhaps the project did not bring about an end to the war, but there is credible evidence that it changed the dynamics in a positive way, based on the analysis and theory of change." A well thought-out theory of change will help to identify and assess the

nature of the contribution to the broader peace, rather than make inappropriate claims to have *single-handedly created* that peace.

I.2 STEPS IN CONSTRUCTING A THEORY OF CHANGE

The theory of change is best articulated at the beginning of a planning process and reviewed and checked throughout the program cycle. However, it is also possible to develop or amend a theory of change at a later stage. Conflict situations tend to be volatile and dynamic in nature. A project must sometimes shift its focus or strategy to remain relevant to the situation on the ground. Or a project team might discover that the theory of change was insufficient or inadequate as the team learns more about the situation and the program's effects on it during implementation. In that case, it will be important to adopt a revised theory or theories of change as well. Unfortunately, this ideal is not always reflected in practice. Many efforts fail to develop theories of change at the beginning of the project cycle, if at all, and many others neglect the on-going process of adaptation. However, it is ***never too late to develop a theory of change***; it can be useful during all stages of the programming cycle.

Articulating the theory(ies) of change is a helpful way of generating good logical frameworks. The logical or results framework establishes a hierarchy of objectives or results statements to show how a program believes change will come about. Essentially, a good and robust logical framework should represent “a theory about how intended change will occur.”⁷ Once the theory of change is developed, you can use it to identify what the project goal, purposes or intermediate results (IRs), and outputs for the logical framework are, and what you think needs to happen to achieve them.

The theory(ies) of change, which may not be fully written into the results framework or logical framework, are important because they clarify what is behind the arrows or links between different levels of objectives. They explain *how* and *why* achieving lower level results will lead to the higher level objectives and to the Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) goal, and thus help program planners identify and test critical assumptions and expectations about how the program will work.⁸

Step 1: Conduct a conflict analysis

As with constructing any intervention, the first step is to conduct a conflict analysis to determine the significant drivers of violent conflict and sources of resilience in a given community, region, or country. The conflict analysis should help focus attention for strategy and programming based on conflict drivers and mitigating factors, urgency, opportunity, and your needs. The revised USAID Conflict Assessment Framework (CAF 2.0) provides a template for conducting a conflict analysis. However, it is also possible to draw upon assessments done by other groups, such as the International Crisis Group, the United Nations, other donors or practitioners, or USAID's own partners in the country concerned.

⁷ USAID (2010) *Performance Monitoring and Evaluation TIPS No. 13: Building a Results Framework*, 2nd Draft, Washington, DC: USAID. Available at pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadw113.pdf.

⁸ See Levine, C. (2007) *Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) Guidance for Developing Logical and Results Frameworks*, Baltimore, MD: CRS. Available at <http://dmeformpeace.org/learn/catholic-relief-services-guidance-developing-logical-and-results-frameworks>.

Step 2: Identify the conflict/resilience drivers the program will address

Once the significant causes of violent conflict and the sources of resilience are identified and prioritized in terms of their relative importance, the second step is for you to decide which of the priority conflict drivers you will try to address, and which sources of resilience you will incorporate and build upon. This may be a function of mandate, expertise, staffing capacity, alignment with country strategy, or availability of funding.

Step 3: Identify the program's goals (the WHAT and the WHO)

Once a priority program area has been chosen, you must again consult the conflict assessment data to determine what type of change is desirable in this context. Here is where it is important to decide: (a) what the preferred outcome will be, once the change process is completed; and (b) whether the change process needs to be targeting political leaders, institutions, civil society leaders, and/or public opinion more generally.

Box 3—Tips on formulating robust goals

Goals are often expressed in broad and vague terms, such as “reconciliation,” “tolerance,” “empowerment,” or in overly specific terms of activities. This can make it difficult to develop a good theory of change. Goals should be articulated concretely as **desired changes** in the key drivers of the situation—observable changes in behavior, interactions, institutional performance, intergroup relations, norms, etc. For example, goals that “women are raising issues of concern to them with local authorities, leading to changes in government policies” or that “women are consulted and included in the peace process” are more specific goals than “women are empowered to participate in the peace process.” Those goals would also be a good reformulation of activity-based goals, such as “1500 women will be trained in peacebuilding and advocacy.”

Step 4: Develop the approach (the HOW)

When you decide upon the outcome(s) and target audience for the change process, consider various approaches that could be employed to create the desired outcome. For example, if you identify that reducing hostility among youth is your goal (e.g., because youth interactions have been a significant trigger for conflict), you will want to consider a number of different approaches to achieving that goal, such as: cross-group sports and drama, cooperation on issues of common concern, media programming, tolerance education in schools, joint rewriting of history textbooks, youth camps, etc. Based on the conflict analysis, you then choose the most appropriate approach to use to achieve the change.

NOTE: Individual projects are usually part of a continuum or chain of intended outcomes, which starts with current conditions and extends to the overall intention/vision of “Peace Writ Large.”⁹ Project or program goals are incremental or intermediate outcomes along the way to this larger vision.

⁹ “Peace Writ Large” is the term coined by the CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, in their study of peacebuilding activities. It refers to the ultimate goal of achieving sustainable peace in a community/ country/geographic region. The problem CDA found when it looked at most peacebuilding activities was that few of them had thought about how their programs would/could

Here is where it might be especially helpful to consult the Theories and Indicators of Change (THINC) Matrix (see Table 3: Theories of Change). The THINC Matrix can be a tool to help you brainstorm or focus. You may also want to review the Primers for other ideas about how to best achieve your goal. They provide an overview of various approaches, as identified in practice and through comparative and case study research, and the intended outcomes when using each one. This will give you a general idea or set of ideas that you should adapt to your context.

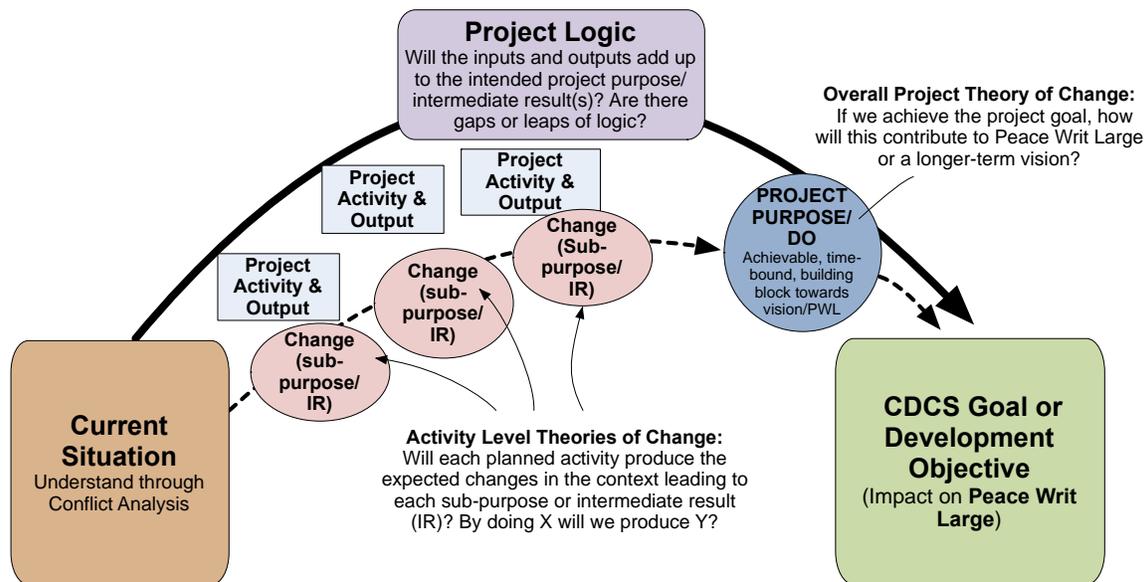


Figure 1: Continuum of Theories of Change

Step 5: Articulate the theory(ies) of change

Write up the completed “theory of change” to be employed, taking care to specify in detail what your assumptions are about and how your approach will result in your expected outcome *in this specific context*. Referring to the diagram (Figure 1), the “Project Logic” should be spelled out clearly in order to articulate how achieving the goal or outcome the program is aiming for will ultimately lead to a Development Objective (DO) that is tied to an over-arching development or peacebuilding goal like Peace Writ Large. In addition, you should articulate the “overall” theory of change—how achieving the goal or Development Objective will contribute to addressing the drivers of conflict or sources of resilience

For example, suppose the desired outcome is less violence between children of differing religious groups in a local school. The overall theory of change might be articulated by considering how, if your program is successful, it will contribute to mitigating or transforming the drivers of conflict, or strengthening sources of resilience you have identified in the conflict analysis. The programmatic theory of change (or program logic) might be constructed by developing a continuum of results (a hierarchy or sequence of changes sought through the

eventually lead to this ultimate goal. Anderson, M., and L. Olson (2003) *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

program logic) by: identifying all the activities and changes resulting from them, from outputs to outcomes and impacts; organizing them in a logical sequence; and identifying the theories of change associated with each one.

Table 1: Hierarchy of Results in a Theory of Change

Project Goal	Inter-religious violence at X number of schools in Y community is reduced.
Overall Theory of Change (How the goal will contribute to Peace Writ Large?)	If inter-religious violence at schools is reduced, then cooperation and coexistence among youth of different religions will increase, and they will be less susceptible to manipulation into inter-religious violence overall, because their new skills for resolving differences and controlling their emotions peacefully and their new relationships will make them less willing to fight.
Continuum of Results	Incremental Theories of Change
Children use skills and knowledge to deal with differences at school without violence.	If children employ skills of non-violent conflict resolution to resolve differences at school, then inter-religious violence at schools will decrease.
Children gain knowledge, awareness and skills from trainings to resolve differences non-violently.	If children are trained in non-violent methods of conflict resolution, they will resolve differences at school peacefully.
Children will act out or act aggressively less frequently.	If children are able to control their emotions and feel less fearful, they will be able to master skills of non-violent conflict resolution.
Children are able to manage emotions and will feel less vulnerable at school.	If children in school X are given individual treatment for trauma recovery, they will begin to heal from the psychological wounds of war. This will allow them to control their emotions and to feel less vulnerable at school.

Put together as a narrative, the theory of change of this program might read as follows:

*This activity will treat children at school for trauma recovery and train them in skills for non-violent conflict resolution. It is based upon the premise that **if** children in this school are given individual treatment for trauma recovery, **then** they will develop increased ability to control their emotions and not act out against others, especially those who are different from them. This is **because** the activities will have helped them begin to heal from the psychological wounds of war and reduce their overall fear and sense of vulnerability at school. Under these conditions, **if** we introduce inter-group skills (negotiation, mediation, problem-solving) to children of different religious groups together, **then** they will be able to learn them and use them to resolve disputes at school, including those that may arise between religious groups. Reduction of violence in*

*schools will contribute to reduction of inter-religious violence overall **because** youth are recruited by extremist groups who are significant perpetrators of inter-religious violence, and because schools are a significant place for violence in this region. The children will also be more likely to use the skills outside of school, and will be less recruitable by such extremist groups.*

Step 6: Assess the theory(ies) of change

When the complete theory has been developed in a hierarchy of results and/or narrative story, the team must assess whether there are: (a) gaps in the logic of how the steps in the process follow from each other; (b) assumptions that cannot be supported; or (c) steps in the chain that cannot be carried out for any reasons. If any of these make the desired outcome no longer feasible, the team must go back to Step 3 to begin the theory of change analysis with another possible target audience or approach. For instance, in the example above, you might test how realistic the assumption is that children will be able to use the new skills outside of school and whether the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully will be enough to lead them to resist recruitment to violence (i.e., are there other factors?). Similarly, the assumption that children are “acting out” only because of the trauma they experienced might also be tested.

A number of frameworks exist for assessing the theory of change. Table 2 below describes the qualities of a good theory of change and some practical tips for developing them in the context of a specific program.

Table 2: Qualities of a Good Theory of Change

Criteria	Practical Notes
<p>Clear conceptualization of impact and pathways to it: It makes explicit the intended changes from the effort. The “road map” to change is clear and understandable. For peacebuilding interventions, it makes a clear connection to key drivers of conflict or resilience.</p>	<p>State the theory or theories of change in the CDCS and/or project appraisal document, as well as project Scope of Work (SOW) as feasible.</p>
<p>Coherence: It demonstrates logic and common sense and/or reflects research results. It shows how the effort will lead to the desired results without leaps or gaps.</p>	<p>Share your draft theory of change with colleagues, especially those with knowledge of or experience in the context in which the project will be implemented. Review scholarly literature or evaluations for evidence of plausibility.</p> <p>Contact DCHA/CMM or PPL/LER for additional guidance on learning and evidence.</p> <p>Be sure to share your evaluation reports with DCHA/CMM and PPL/LER to ensure continued learning.</p>
<p>Plausibility: Beliefs and assumptions about how one change will influence another have been explored and articulated, and there has been some challenge of “comfort zones” in thinking them through.</p>	<p>State assumptions in the results framework and in the project appraisal document.</p> <p>Consider undertaking a systems analysis or generating a systems map; See <i>Systems Thinking in Conflict Assessment: Application and Concepts</i> (2012) from CMM.</p>
<p>Grounded in context: It takes context as the starting point and reflects the reality of change processes in that</p>	<p>Review any recent conflict assessments, DRG assessments, political economy analysis, gender analysis, or related CDCS background information.</p>

setting.	DCHA/CMM can provide recommendations on sources for high-quality conflict analysis.
Testable: It is specific enough to be tested for validity over time.	Ask, “What would show this theory is not right or this program is not working? What would <i>falsify</i> it?” Build this into the evaluation design and the project appraisal document. For guidance on evaluation design and management, contact DCHA/CMM or PPL/LER. Include processes for monitoring validity of theories of change in M&E plan.
Dynamic: Uncertainties, risks, and knock-on effects are captured, including unintended negative and positive effects, and a process is in place for reviewing and revising the theory.	Document uncertainties and risks in the SOW; include scope for flexibility, such as a “crisis modifier.” Build a process for strategic theory review and revision into the SOW and/or annual work plan.

Box 4—Important Note

Context matters! Not all theories of change will be effective or even possible to use under all circumstances. Therefore, **EVALUATING OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS IS CRUCIAL**, so that assumptions are continuously examined and programs can be adjusted accordingly.

What about when a theory of change needs to be evaluated against a larger objective (contribution to the larger societal peace) or against other theories of change, such as in the context of a country strategy (i.e., CDCS)? The CAF 2.0 suggests using the **RPP (Reflecting on Peace Practice) Matrix** as a way to identify gaps in the theory of change as well as potential linkages with other programs that can enhance the effectiveness of USAID programming.¹⁰ The RPP Matrix can help in assessing and strengthening both the coherence and plausibility of a theory of change in context. The RPP Matrix emerged from research by the Reflecting on Peace Practice Program (RPP) of CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. It summarizes the major findings of RPP, illustrating that *effective* peacebuilding efforts link change at the individual/personal level (e.g., attitudes, skills, relationships) to change at the socio-political level. They also link change in “key people” or mobilizers to change in “more people” or society at large.¹¹

In brief, if a program works primarily at the individual/personal level—on attitudes, skills, and relationships—and merely “hopes” that the outcomes at that level will lead to changes in the socio-political realm, then a review or revision of Steps 3 and 4 might be needed to fill in gaps or to identify linkages with other efforts that might strengthen the program’s effectiveness. Similarly, if a program working with “more people” does not link to “key people” or mobilizers in some way (and vice versa), then a gap exists and should be addressed.

¹⁰ CAF 2.0, Section 4.1.

¹¹ Anderson, M., and L. Olson (2003) *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. See also CAF 2.0, Section 4.1.

2. Common Theories of Change in Conflict Management and Mitigation: Matrix and Primers

2.1 INTRODUCING THE MATRIX AND PRIMERS

This section provides you with resources for developing your theories of change. It describes the most commonly used theories of change in conflict management and mitigation, and it supplies you with supporting information and references to understand the state-of-the-art research supporting (or raising questions about) each theory.

What is the THINC Matrix?

The Theories and Indicators of Change (THINC) Matrix summarizes and organizes the major theories of change in the practice of conflict management and mitigation, including conflict resolution. It was developed by DCHA/CMM and its partners based upon extensive literature review and consultation with experts and practitioners. The THINC Matrix is one way of organizing the many theories of change that have informed peacebuilding projects, programs and strategies.

The families and individual theories in the Matrix have been categorized based on their shared assumptions and qualities to provide a comprehensive, but manageable, list that is useful to program planners and managers. However, the list should not be considered exhaustive. Many initiatives have their own theory of change, multiple theories of change, or combine aspects of different theories. And most initiatives in complex and fragile environments need and have more complex theories than simple “if...then...because” statements, for example, “if we do x, y and z, then this will lead to A, which will promote B and possibly lead to C, because...”. What is important is to be able to articulate the thinking about how change happens. It need not fit into any of the above theories.

How can you use the THINC Matrix?

The THINC Matrix and Primers are designed to be used at all stages of the program cycle: analysis, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. However, the Matrix and Primers will be most useful in the design, monitoring and evaluation phases, since these are the points when you first attempt to articulate a clear, coherent, and grounded theory of change, and later seek to assess progress against that theory.

In other words, although potentially of use throughout these steps and the program cycle, the THINC Matrix and Primers can be particularly useful in informing steps #4, #5, and #6 in the sequence for constructing and using a theory of change. It can also be used as way of testing

whether the goals you have developed in step #3 are appropriate for and likely to address the drivers of conflict and resilience:

1. Conduct a conflict analysis.
2. Identify the conflict/resilience drivers the program will address.
3. Identify the goals of the program.
4. Develop the approach.
5. Articulate the theory(ies) of change.
6. Assess the theory(ies) of change.

You can use the THINC Matrix and Primers to:

- *Generate new program ideas*—read through the materials to inform brainstorming about what theories and kinds of programs would be appropriate and effective in the particular context. (It should, however, only be a starting point—the ideas and the theories behind them need to be developed and thought through in context.)
- *Express ideas*—find language and information to help you express a difficult or new idea, i.e. articulate the theory of change underlying your program, or when you are trying to infer a theory of change from a project already under way where the theory of change was not clearly expressed at the beginning.
- *Clarify and seek consensus on program logic*—identify, choose and develop consensus on what changes particular activities or approaches you may be pursuing will catalyze, and why and how those changes may come about, especially when activities can fit into many different theories of change.
- *Refine and test ideas*—use the process of articulating the theory of change, or the underlying research in the primers, to critically examine your idea and the assumptions underlying it in light of scholarship.
- *Compare ideas*—understand how different theories of change relate to one another and to the underlying changes they seek to make.

The Matrix gives a brief description of each theory, the target audience(s) for each, and the basic assumptions that underlie the theory. This should give you a good idea of which ones may fit your program needs. There will most probably be a few choices, and the primers will then be helpful in discerning whether and how a given theory may be valid or need to be adapted for a specific circumstance.

How should you NOT use the THINC Matrix and Primers?

The THINC Matrix is:

- *Not a stamp of approval*—While the theories presented in the Matrix are common in practice or research, their validity has not necessarily been proven or supported by evidence, nor are they necessarily endorsed by USAID or the authors of this report. The Primers do provide examples of how the theory has been used in practice and summarize the debates about when and under what circumstances various theories may be valid. However, research is constantly evolving, and you will need to test and

- monitor whether the theory of change underlying your program is appropriate and valid in the context you are working.
- *Not a checklist or menu*—While the theories and information in the Matrix and Primers can help you brainstorm program ideas, they should not be used as a checklist or menu to pick from. The Matrix and Primers should not be a substitute for thinking through what theory or theories of change are appropriate for your program.
 - *Not exhaustive*—Just because an idea or theory is not in the list does not mean it is not credible; analysis may lead you to develop a new theory, but it should exhibit all of the qualities of a good theory of change outlined in the first section and in particular Table 2.
 - *Not static*—USAID anticipates updating this Matrix as new evidence emerges on the theories or as new policy and program guidelines are developed related to theories of change and project design/evaluation. Learning emerging from experience with and evaluations of the theories of change in your programs will add to the evidence that will be incorporated in the THINC Matrix.
 - *Not the only aspect of effective project design*—Formulating a theory of change is essential to effective conflict mitigation and development, but there are many other aspects that are important as well related to management, logistics, contracting/grants, finances, and personnel. Notably, projects and activities in conflict-affected and fragile environments need to adhere to principles of good engagement by ensuring activities do no harm, are not discriminatory, are flexible to shifting circumstances, and so on.¹²

How can you build on the THINC Matrix?

The THINC Matrix represents an attempt to rationalize (and simplify) the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding to facilitate better knowledge management by USAID and its partners. Building upon this knowledge management architecture through additional research, targeted information, and sharing of results and ideas organized in terms of this framework will lead to better outcomes for everyone.

Practitioners can:

- Share information about appropriate indicators and evaluation techniques corresponding to specific theories or theory families;
- Share best practices and lessons learned by theory; and
- Provide guidance on legal or operational dimensions for different theories (for example, which types of actors are most appropriate to which activities implied within the theory(ies)?).

¹² See OECD DAC (2007) “Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations.” Paris: OECD DAC. www.oecd.org/dac/incaf.

Researchers can:

- Share research pertaining to theories or their underlying premises, leading over time to some theories on the Matrix being revised, supported, or abandoned;
- Investigate how different theories are related to one another (such as when one theory is strongly implied within another); and
- Critically examine or expose acknowledged or unspoken assumptions within each theory.

USAID’s Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (DCHA/CMM) welcomes input on these or related efforts. Please send your feedback or supporting information to conflict@usaid.gov.

Construction of the Theories and Indicators of Change (THINC) Matrix

The THINC Matrix summarizes the major theories of change animating non-coercive conflict resolution practice—although it does *not* purport to include all possible theories. The theories have been grouped into *families*, according to the type of change that is being sought (i.e., the WHAT and the WHO in Section 1.2.3 above). There are three such groupings, or families:

- theories that seek change in attitudes;
- theories that seek change in behaviors; and
- theories that seek change in institutions.

The Families are not mutually exclusive; it is often possible and desirable to combine more than one theory of change in a program; i.e., to target attitudes and behaviors, or behaviors and institutions, or all three.

Family #1—Attitudes

Theories in this family are structured to change attitudes of individuals and groups. There are various attitudes that are correlated with politically violent behaviors, and the underlying premise of the theories in this family is that by changing such attitudes, violent behavior will be prevented or mitigated because the thoughts/feelings that lead to such behavior will be changed or mitigated. A further assumption is that this creates more stable constructive change in the society over the medium to long term because attitudes are more resilient than behaviors.

This Theory of Change Family is broken down into three sub-families, reflecting different kinds of attitude change:

- *Intra-personal attitudes*—change within individuals concerning their experience of the conflict and their attitudes about the effects of conflict. Theories 1.1 (trauma healing) and 1.2 (key people/“mobilizers” attitudes toward conflict) focus on such individual-level change.
- *Inter-group relationships and attitudes*—group-level change in attitudes about the “other” and changes in relationships between conflicting groups. Theories 1.3 (Social/Cultural Contact), 1.4 (Cooperation and Mutual Interest), and 1.5 (Problem Solving Dialogue) describe different theories for decreasing negative attitudes about the “other” and building cross-conflict relationships. They describe individual-level change that is hoped

to lead to change in group attitudes, as individuals undergo a change of perception or attitude, as a result of encounters with the other, and then, in turn, begin to change the norms of their group or of other individuals. This, in turn, creates other individual level change within the group.

- *Public opinion and social norms*—cultural change, or changes in mass attitudes about the “other”, about peace, and about values and norms such as tolerance, diversity, etc. Theories 1.6 (Mass Attitudes About Conflict) and 1.7 (Culture of Peace) focus on changing societal attitudes about the specific conflict or about ways of dealing with difference.

Within each sub-family, theories of change can focus on promoting change in “key” people (“mobilizers”),¹³ whether officials or not, or on broadening change to reach “more” people in the citizenry and communities to enhance their willingness and capacity to support peace.

Family #2—Behaviors

Theories in this family share the assumption that behaviors can be changed directly, without requiring attitude change. The further assumption is that this creates change more quickly because it bypasses having to allow for the longer process of a shift in attitudes. Direct behavior change is accomplished by withholding or diminishing the resources key actors or mobilizers have to perpetrate violence (Theory 2.1) or changing the incentives for actors in the conflict, making the actions that lead to violence more costly and those that lead to non-violent problem-solving more appealing (Theory 2.2). Behavior change can also be facilitated through building of skills and capacities that actors lack to engage in more productive processes of peacemaking, peacebuilding, and cooperation (Theory 2.3).

Programs developed based on these theories often also incorporate activities and processes that are designed to change attitudes, or may follow on work that is focused on attitude change and relationship building. Yet while many programs based on these theories also believe that attitude change is important and useful for influencing conflict-related decisions and behaviors of actors, and may indeed be one step in a strategy for producing behavior change, they do not assume that attitude change will automatically produce behavior change. Rather, changing behavior and decisions requires additional effort and approaches.

Family #3—Institutions

This Theory of Change Family is fundamentally about *structural* change, as opposed to change at a group or individual level. Political and economic theory has long recognized that societies and groups have institutions, or rules, governing who has power and how that power may be used. The institutions of society are often themselves systems for resolving conflict, such as through the rule of law or social norms, but when they do not work as planned or when different sets of institutions clash, violence can escalate. The Institutions Theory of Change Family describes ways to change the capabilities and functioning of the institutions of a society, as well as how they are perceived by the public, in order to promote sustainable peace.

¹³ See USAID, CAF 2.0, Section 3.1.

The core hypothesis for institutional theories of change is if institutions in a society are effective and legitimate, then they create options for addressing grievances peacefully rather than through violent means. As evoked in this hypothesis, there are two major underlying qualities of institutions that are believed to promote peacebuilding: effectiveness and legitimacy.

THINC Primers

The THINC primers (published separately) provide program planners and managers with a detailed summary of the theories of change developed through the THINC initiative and the three families into which they have been grouped. They are meant to provide a brief introduction to the current practice and research underpinning each theory and its family, and to point the reader to resources that can be accessed in order to learn more about each given theory.

The primers are organized according to the families of Theories of Change listed in the CMM Theories of Change: Attitudes, Behaviors, and Institutions. Each primer includes:

1. An overview presenting the entire family and its core assumptions.
2. Summaries of each theory of change within the family describing each theory and its core change logic
3. Examples of programs that are grounded in each theory of change. The examples provided in the Primers are NOT meant to be endorsements for any particular theory, but rather illustrations of how various theories have been implemented. When data is available to indicate whether, or under what circumstances, a particular theory of change has been successful, that will be indicated. However, such data is not available for all theories of change.
4. Overviews of debates and critiques concerning the validity and application of each theory, based on academic research and practitioner and policy experience.
5. Resources to offer practitioners additional material on the theories of change, their application and their validity in different contexts.

Using Multiple Theories of Change to Address Conflict Issues

Many theories of change are relevant and can be used, together or in the alternative, to address important issues that USAID supports, such as: dealing with the past, support for peace processes, reconciliation, or people to people programming. Reconciliation, for example, can be pursued through trauma healing (Theory 1.1), any of the inter-group dialogue theories, and institution-building theories. Similarly, people to people programming can focus on social contact, problem-solving, psychological aspects of conflict (e.g., trauma), or skill building.

Example: Dealing with the past

Many of the theories of change that relate to attitudes can be used to address the past, often in multi-prong programs. The importance of creating mechanisms for dealing with the past is well documented, especially in situations where peace agreements do not address the key grievances of certain groups or negotiated commitments are not implemented in the post-conflict environment. In cases where one party defeats the other through force and when “groups remain intermixed after violence occurs, renewed violence is probably an even greater

danger.”¹⁴ Programs for dealing with the past can be based on a number of different theories, which might be adapted for the particular context and goals of the activities, for example:

- *Trauma Healing* (Theory 1.1): If people address the trauma caused by their experience of violence, they will not have a desire for revenge, will be able to focus on the future, and will have capacity to form relationships with former “enemies.” Sample activity: psychosocial counseling.
- *Inter-group Relationship-Building* (Theories 1.3–1.5): If people are able to engage in structured inter-group dialogue, their pain and suffering will be heard and acknowledged. As a result, they will be able to acknowledge their own group’s harmful actions.”¹⁵ This exchange will allow them to feel closure and move on, breaking cycles of violence. Sample activity: dialogue workshops with community leaders and ex-combatants.
- *Public Opinion and Social Norms* (Theory 1.7): If traumatic events of the past are commemorated, memorialized, and acknowledged on a broad, public level within a society, then the norms governing intergroup relations will be more tolerant and people in such societies will be encouraged and supported to coexist peacefully. Sample activities: collective rituals; community reconciliation ceremony; reconciliation-focused radio program.

To create a holistic and comprehensive approach to programming that effectively helps communities deal with the past, many programs have elements of all three of these theories of change. For example, one program in Rwanda worked with a range of actors in society, from members of the population who were affected in deeply personal ways by the conflict, to national leaders who shape policies, practices, and institutions. The program’s “interventions” have included training of the staff of NGOs that work with groups in the community; seminars/workshops with community leaders, journalists, and national leaders (government ministers, heads of commissions, members of the supreme court, and advisors to the President); and the development of nationally broadcast radio programs that, according to surveys conducted in the summer of 2005, reached 90% of the radio listening population.

2.2 CMM THEORIES OF CHANGE MATRIX

The matrix is intended to be a summary of the key Theories of Change outlined in the Section above. You can use this matrix as a quick reference as you are reflecting on your proposed approach, asking important questions, such as “Is the theory appropriate for the goal?”; “Is the theory consistent with my underlying analysis?”; and “Is the logic sound?”

¹⁴ Staub, E. (2006) “Reconciliation after Genocide, Mass Killing, or Intractable Conflict: Understanding the Roots of Violence, Psychological Recovery and Steps Towards a General Theory,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 27, No. 6, p 868.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.887.

Table 3: Theories of Change

	Theory of Change Statement	Constituency Engaged	Description
Theory of Change Family I: Shifts in Attitudes			
Theories in this family seek to influence the attitudes and psychological drivers and effects of mass mobilization by key actors in an armed conflict.			
Theory 1.1: Trauma Healing	If individuals who have been traumatized by violence are given opportunities and support, then their desire for revenge will be reduced.	More People	Theories of change related to psychosocial trauma healing emphasize processes that assist traumatized individuals to develop effective strategies for coping with the emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual effects of trauma. They assume that the psychological impact of violence on victims, perpetrators, and bystanders is a significant barrier to the re-establishment of relationships with former enemies.
Theory 1.2: Key Actor/Key People Attitudes about Conflict	If key actors' perceptions of the costs of violence or benefits of peace are changed, then they will withdraw support (and mobilization) for violence.	Key People	This theory presumes that if key people in the conflict change their attitudes about the costs of continuing conflict or the benefits of alternative means of addressing conflict, then they will pursue peaceful means of resolving or transforming conflict (e.g., peace agreements), and they will influence societal attitudes in favor of peaceful resolution of the conflict.
Theory 1.3: Social/Cultural Contact	If groups from conflicting societies participate in joint activities, then this contact will lead to increased understanding of the other, and will reduce inter-group conflict.	More People	This theory is based on the assumption that contact based on cultural, social, and recreational activities will promote increased understanding. Programs may include peace camps for youth, cultural exchanges, and inter-ethnic sports games. The theory is that hostility between groups is perpetuated by unfamiliarity and separation, and that inter-group contact can challenge negative stereotypes and generate more positive inter-group attitudes and relationships.
Theory 1.4: Cooperation and Mutual Interest	If groups from similar sectors of conflicting societies work together on issues of mutual interest, then they will learn to cooperate, and through cooperation	More People	This theory is based on the assumption that if contact among people across conflict lines occurs in activities based on mutual interests, understanding will increase, prejudice will be reduced, and a "safe space within the conflict for healthy

	Theory of Change Statement	Constituency Engaged	Description
	develop increased trust and positive relations.		relationships to develop” will be created.
Theory 1.5: Problem Solving and Dialogue	If people from both sides of a conflict engage in unofficial dialogue at the Track 2 and 3 levels, then these efforts will ultimately strengthen official negotiation processes.	Key and More People	Unofficial, yet structured, interactions and sustained dialogue are expected to make possible a quality and depth of communication that is not possible in more official processes, and thereby generate new understandings of the conflict and the parties that facilitates resolution of conflict issues.
Theory 1.6. Mass Attitudes about Conflict	If enough people in society change their attitudes to favor peace, then they will prefer that key actors seek peaceful solutions to conflicts and will resist mobilization to violence.	More people	If key actors’ attitudes change but the general population does not believe in peace, it can be difficult for key actors to create and maintain peace. In some contexts, such attitude changes can prepare the sides to accept an official peace. In others, it can be the basis for the creation of social movements at the grassroots levels of society to call for an end to violence.
Theory 1.7: “Culture of Peace”	If societies focus resources on changing people’s attitudes to support peaceful resolution of conflicts, then a culture of peace will emerge that promotes coexistence.	More People	This theory focuses on fostering a cultural shift from violent (“culture of war”) to peaceful approaches (“culture of peace”) to handling conflict as a long-term process of transforming the attitudes and social norms that supported violent conflict in the past.
Theory of Change Family 2: Changes in Behavior			
Theories in this family share the assumption that behaviors can be changed directly, without requiring attitude change.			
Theory 2.1: Changing Elite Means	If the means or resources that key actors have to pursue violence are reduced, then they will be less able to pursue violence and more amenable to negotiation and peaceful means of resolving conflict.	Key People	This theory grows out of groundbreaking work by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler on the economic causes of war. They suggested that rebellions start not because of grievances, but because of the “greed” of leaders seeking greater access to financial resources. In other words, whether or not “greed” or economic motivation is a factor, government leaders and rebel groups cannot wage war without access to the means to do so.
Theory 2.2: Changing Choices about Violence	If motivations or incentives for violence are changed so that violence	Key People	This theory sees decision making as a matter of rational choice, and focuses on changing behavior by changing the

	Theory of Change Statement	Constituency Engaged	Description
	seems more costly and non-violence more attractive, then key actors will pursue peace and reject violence.		choices facing decision makers, beyond withdrawing the means with which they can perpetrate violence. If people have the right incentives, motives or choices, so that they believe they are gaining more from non-violence than from war, then they will decide to end war and pursue peace.
Theory 2.3: Improving Skills and Processes	If parties have skills and good processes for resolving conflicts, then they will be more successful in negotiating peace and dealing effectively with underlying causes of conflict.	Key People	The implicit assumption is that lack of capacity or inadequate process is a significant obstacle in negotiation, peacebuilding, and consensus building. This theory suggests that if the parties have the proper skills and processes to handle the conflict differently, then agreements and cooperation are more likely.
Theory of Change Family 3: Institutions			
Theories in this family apply if you are working in a situation in which formal and informal institutions lack the capability to respond to the needs of the population and/or are considered to be unfair, abusive, or corrupt.			
Theory 3.1: Statebuilding Theory of Change	If formal and informal institutions can efficiently and effectively respond to the needs of society, then people will rely on these institutions rather than resorting to violence.	Key people and more people	This theory rests on the idea that members of society look to institutions, both formal and informal, to have sufficient capacity to efficiently and effectively provide goods and services to meet the range of needs in society. When these needs are not met, the likelihood of violence increases. The theory contends that people will be less likely to engage in destructive conflict against the government if it acts, and is seen to act, efficiently and effectively.
Theory 3.2: Liberal Peace Theory of Change	If institutions are democratic, then people will more likely feel included and able to address grievances non-violently, thereby promoting peace.	Key people and more people	Under the Liberal Peace Theory of Change, the legitimacy of a state's institutions is determined by their democratic nature. Only democratic processes and institutions allow the people of a society to express their will and exert control over those making decisions in governing institutions. Under such a structure, people will be less likely to either revolt against the government or address their grievances violently, thereby creating a more peaceful nation.

	Theory of Change Statement	Constituency Engaged	Description
Theory 3.3: Traditional Institutions Theory of Change	If institutions in a society are based on traditional structures (not externally-imposed structures), then people will feel more allegiance to those institutions, reducing the likelihood that they will use violence to change the institutions.	Key people and more people	The premise of this theory is that institutions should be based on traditional norms, customs, and models particular to that community or nation. Such institutions are familiar to, and reflect the values of, the people they govern. As such, people are more likely to feel ownership over them and to respect them as legitimate, and thus be less likely to resort to violent means to reject or replace such institutions.
Theory 3.4: Ad-hoc or Transitional Institutions Theory of Change	If support is provided to temporary institutions that assist in the transition from a violent and/or insecure society to a peaceful society, then the likelihood of violence re-emerging in the future will be reduced.	Key people and more people	Ad-hoc institutions provide a bridging function, which is both backwards and forwards looking. They are intended to help society deal with unresolved issues from the past, in order to move forward. The principle is that by facing the negative experiences of the past, those issues will not act as impediments to future progress.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

General resources on theories of change

Anderson, M., and L. Olson (2003) *Confronting War: Critical lessons for peace practitioners*, Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

Church, C., and M. Rogers (2006) *Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict Transformation Programming*, Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, Chapter 2. Available at http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilt/ilt_manualpage.html.

Funnell, S., and P. Rogers (2011) *Purposeful Program Theory: Effective Use of Theories of Change and Logic Models*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Nan, Susan Allen and Mary Mulvihill. "Theories of Change and Indicator Development in Conflict Management and Mitigation," USAID, (2010), available at http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADS460.pdf.

Shapiro, I. (2006) "Theories of practice and change in ethnic conflict interventions." In M. Fitzduff and C. Stout. (Eds.) *The Psychology of Resolving Global Conflicts*, New York: Praeger.

[Theoryofchange.org](http://theoryofchange.org), a collaborative project of the **Aspen Institute** and **ActKnowledge**, offers a wide array of resources, tools, tips, and examples of theories of change.

Vogel, I. (2012) *Review of the Use of 'Theory of Change' in International Development: Review Report*, London: DFID. Available at http://www.dfid.gov.uk/r4d/pdf/outputs/mis_spc/DFID_ToC_Review_VogelV7.pdf.

Tools and application guidance

CARE International UK (2012) *Guidance for Designing, Monitoring and Evaluating Peacebuilding Projects using Theories of Change*, London: CARE International UK. Available at <http://conflict.care2share.wikispaces.net/Theories+of+Change>.

CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (2009) *Participant Training Manual*, Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, pp. 9–17 (RPP Matrix), pp. 18–27 (constructing theories of change).

Keystone Accountability (2009) *Developing a theory of change as a framework for inclusive dialogue, learning and accountability for social impact and Interactive theory of change template*, London: Keystone Accountability. Available at <http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/resources/guides>.

Lederach, J.P., R. Neufeldt and H. Culbertson (2007) *Reflective Peacebuilding: A Planning, Monitoring and Learning Tool Kit*, Mindanao: The Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame and Catholic Relief Services Southeast, East Asia Regional Office. Available at <http://kroc.nd.edu/research/books/strategic-peacebuilding/391>

Levine, C. (2007) *Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) Guidance for Developing Logical and Results Frameworks*, Baltimore, MD: CRS.

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