# Theory of Change Checklist

For detailed information on each of the requirements listed below please visit the [FFP Policy and Guidance document for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting for DFSAs, December 2016,](https://www.fsnnetwork.org/usaid-ffp-policy-and-guidance-monitoring-evaluation-and-reporting-development-food-security) and the [TOPS Theory of Change Curriculum.](https://www.fsnnetwork.org/theory-change-training-curriculum)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **A Theory of Change (TOC) must include the following elements or meet the following conditions:** | **Yes** | **No** | **Note further actions needed** |
| **Diagram Elements[[1]](#footnote-1)** |
| **General** |
| 1. An overall **goal**, stated as a completed condition or state.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. **All pre-conditions** needed to achieve the goal are depicted in the diagram, including:
 |  |  |  |
| 1. **Outcomes**:Purposes; Sub-purposes; intermediate outcomes
 |  |  |
| 1. **Outputs**: include key outputs from interventions promised in the Award document
 |  |  |
| 1. **Assumptions:** Contextualconditions, outside the activity’s scope of influence that are backed by sufficient evidence. See 20-23 for more detail. (There should be no assumptions about participant motivation, openness, willingness, etc. These should be addressed by interventions.)
 |  |  |
| 1. **Outputs and outcomes produced by other actors.**

Critical preconditions to pathway achievement that will not be directly realized by the activity. |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| 1. **Rationales** that support the likelihood of connections/changes along a pathway (*required* when reason for expected change is not clear to readers)
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Integration of **cross-cutting areas** (i.e., gender, environment, community participation, sustainability, and conflict-sensitivity)
 |  |  |  |
| 1. As a cross-cutting purpose diagram; or
 |  |  |
| 1. As represented in the wording of the outcomes and outputs in the diagrams (e.g., “gender-equitable”, “climate change sensitive”, “inclusive”, “conflict-sensitive”); or
 |  |  |
| 1. Other representation in diagram
 |  |  |
| **Pathways** |
| 1. All elements are portrayed in logical sequence, using directional arrows, showing the causal pathways that follow through from outputs, to outcomes, to the goal.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. The relation between two levels of outcome must be causal and not definitional. (For example, “Household members wash their hands at critical times” should *not be* represented as a precondition for the outcome “All household members apply good health practices”.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. All causal pathways start from an activity output *or* a condition that is outside the influence of the activity (i.e., an assumed condition, including outcomes produced by external actors) and connect to the goal.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Assumptions are clearly linked to a TOC element or the part of the TOC diagram to which they are critical.
 |  |  |  |
| **Format** |
| 1. All elements are stated as completed, measurable states of being or results, not processes.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Different shapes, colors, shading, borders, numbers, or font size distinguish the different elements of the TOC.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Outputs, intermediate outcomes (which include all outcomes below the sub-purpose level), purposes, sub-purposes, assumptions, and rationales are clearly distinguishable
 |  |  |
| 1. Elements outside the control of the activity (e.g., outcomes produced by other actors) are clearly distinguishable from those affected by the activity and from other types of assumptions.
 |  |  |
| 1. Elements that are repeated from another page of the TOC and connectors that show causal pathways that flow between the diagrams are easily recognized.
 |  |  |
| 1. A key that explains the significance of different shapes, colors, borders, shading, or font sizes appears on every page of the TOC diagram.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. The TOC includes a single-page, summary diagram in addition to pages for purpose or sub-purpose level detailed diagrams. The summary page contains at minimum, the goal, the purposes, the sub-purposes, and the primary intervention outputs that are expected to catalyze change.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Causal pathways that flow between TOC diagrams are easy to follow and understand, with consistent use of associated shapes, colors, fonts, etc. across diagrams.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. The elements at either end of cross-purpose linkages across pages are shown clearly on both pages, and the common/repeated element is highlighted (See 5, above).
 |  |  |  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Complementary Documentation (formerly referred to as the TOC Narrative)[[2]](#footnote-2)** |
| **General** |
| 1. Does not repeat anything that is already clearly presented in the TOC diagrams. (It does not begin with a summary of the TOC.)
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Does not present the problem analysis. (This should be presented in the proposal or other activity documents).
 |  |  |  |
| 1. The links between references in the TOC diagram(s) and the details in the complementary documentation2 are easy to follow. The detail of the assumptions or rationales from the diagrams can be quickly and easily located in the complementary documentation. 2
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Discussion of how the activity addresses **cross-cutting areas** (i.e., gender, environment, community participation, sustainability, and conflict-sensitivity) is included throughout the complementary documentation, 2 as needed. See 23-26 for more detail.
 |  |  |  |
| **Rationales** |
| 1. Includes full explanations of the rationales that support the connections between pre-conditions and outcomes that are not obvious to the average reader and not fully presented in the diagram.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Provides text, web links, or other references to research and literature that supports the rationales.
 |  |  |  |
| **Assumptions/preconditions outside of the activity’s control** |
| 1. Adds necessary detail and evidence to support assumptions. This includes
2. Discusses the likelihood that the assumptions will remain true through the activity’s lifetime, supported by evidence. *(Do not list as an assumption if the probability of failure is high.)*
3. Highlights portions of Purpose pathways that are at greater or lesser risk if an assumption fails.
4. Briefly describes how the activity will monitor the assumption.
5. In cases of **high risk** to portions of Purpose pathways, describes how the activity will mitigate risk should the assumption fail.
 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| **External actor efforts**  |
| 1. Describes how outcomes/outputs of actors outside the activity will be realized, including:
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Identity of the actors
 |  |  |
| 1. The scale of the external intervention relative to activity’s coverage
 |  |  |
| 1. The expected level of activity collaboration with external actors
 |  |  |
| 1. The approximate timing when the external outcome/output is anticipated and will be required
 |  |  |
| 1. How the outcomes/outputs of other actors will be monitored
 |  |  |
| 1. The likelihood other actors will achieve designated outcomes
 |  |  |
| 1. The risks to the activity if external outcomes/outputs are not realized in time
 |  |  |
| 1. Clarifies how targeting a limited number of direct participants will result in sustained population-level changes, if necessary.
 |  |  |  |
| **Integration of Cross-Cutting Themes:** All areas (i.e., gender, environment, community participation, sustainability, and conflict-sensitivity) are evident across the TOC (in the diagrams or in the complementary documentation2). |
| 1. The TOC addresses **gender**-equity and considerations to act in gender-responsive ways. Wherever the activity intends to incorporate gender-sensitivity in implementation:
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Do TOC statements reflect how the activity intends to address various genders differently? or;
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Does the TOC diagram use a visually distinguishable color/shape/font to show that the gender of the participants/beneficiaries will be considered separately?
 |  |  |  |
| 1. The TOC shows intent to protect or enhance the natural **environment.** After the award, all assumptions and issues uncovered by the Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) are incorporated and addressed in the TOC.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. The TOC demonstrates where and how the **participation** of members from the communities and sub-groups within the communities (e.g., age, livelihood group, geographic location) is critical to the TOC.
 |  |  |  |
| 1. The TOC diagrams and/or complementary documentation 2  demonstrate how the outcomes will be **sustained** beyond the life of the activity (not just achieved by activity end). Does the TOC reflect the activities’ approach to ensuring conditions are in place to sustain outcomes, including:
 |  |  |  |
| 1. Necessary resources?
 |  |  |
| 1. Access to capacity building?
 |  |  |
| 1. Continued motivation of beneficiaries and service providers?
 |  |  |
| 1. Established linkages between critical actors to maintain resources and services?
 |  |  |

The theory of change checklist is a living document. Please check back regularly on the FSN for the latest version. Input from partners and FFP staff continually help to ensure that requirements are stated as clearly as possible and accurately reflect expectations highlighted in the [FFP Policy and Guidance document for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting for DFSAs.](https://www.fsnnetwork.org/usaid-ffp-policy-and-guidance-monitoring-evaluation-and-reporting-development-food-security)

The TOPS Program was made possible by the generous support and contribution of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

1. Elements include all components of the TOC diagram (i.e., outputs, outcomes, sub-purposes, purposes, goal, assumptions, rationales, directional arrows). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The 2018 DFSA RFAs and the FFP Policy and Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting for DFSAs both use the term “TOC Narrative” instead of “complementary documentation” to reference all additional information that is not easily displayed in the TOC diagrams. Moving forward, FFP will be adopting the term “complementary documentation” to reference this body of evidence and supporting information. The change is in response to a substantial body of feedback highlighting that the term “TOC narrative” was misleading-- a narration of the TOC logic is not required or desired by FFP. The TOC checklist is the first document to use the new term **“complementary documentation”** in order to better describe required content. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)