

Stakeholder Consultation

Theories of Change in Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs)

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ABOUT IDEAL

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

PHOTO CREDIT

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DISCLAIMER

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CONTACT INFORMATION

IDEAL Activity

c/o Save the Children

899 North Capitol Street NE, Suite #900

Washington, DC 20002

www.fsnnetwork.org

info@fsnnetwork.org

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Abbreviations

BHA	USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
FGD	Focus group discussion
IDEAL	Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis, and Learning
IP	Implementing partner
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
RFSA	Resilience Food Security Activity
TOC	Theory of change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Background

The Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis, and Learning (IDEAL) Activity is funded by USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and works to support the United States Government’s goal of improving food and nutrition security among the world’s most vulnerable households and communities. An important part of IDEAL’s work is Stakeholder Consultations, which provide structured opportunities for implementing partners (IPs) and BHA to engage with each other on critical issues affecting food security programming and identify solutions together. Stakeholder Consultations are highly participatory, interactive exchanges between BHA and IPs that provide:

- An opportunity for BHA and IP peer-to-peer dialogue and mutual problem-solving;
- A venue for partner and BHA representatives to articulate challenges in a safe learning space and hear challenges faced by others with an open mind;
- An opportunity for “myth-busting” (clarifying partner misconceptions about BHA expectations and preferences and vice versa); and
- A space for BHA and IP staff to work together in crafting or refining new, improved approaches to emergency and non-emergency food security activities.

In the first [stakeholder consultation](#) conducted under IDEAL in 2021 on the topic of Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSAs) Request for Application (RFA) Design and Process, IPs highlighted their experience with Theories of Change (TOCs) both as a good tool for mapping pathways to change, but also a highly complex and often misunderstood one.

As a result, IDEAL elected to hold its second stakeholder consultation on the use of “Theories of Change (TOCs) in Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs).”

This second consultation aimed to provide space for BHA and IPs to engage with each other on the strengths and challenges of using TOCs in implementation and work together toward recommendations that may improve the overall effectiveness of using the TOC as an adaptive management tool throughout the RFSAs program cycle.



Figure 1: Pictures of TOCs provided by RFSAs: Graduating to Resilience, Maharo, Nobo Jatra, and SHOUHARDO III.

Pre-Consultation Qualitative Outreach and Analysis

In preparation for the stakeholder consultation event, IDEAL conducted qualitative outreach with IPs through focus group discussions (FGD) as well as with BHA staff through a qualitative survey. FGD questions were designed to gather partners’ perspectives on TOC use, value, and effectiveness in RFSAs implementation (see Annex A for the interview questions). The BHA survey data was used to validate the analysis of the IP feedback where relevant (see Annex B for the survey questions).

IDEAL and BHA designed the FGD interview questions together to elicit input around partner experiences using TOCs for adaptive management and program quality in implementation. These informative interviews explored interviewees’ roles and forms of engagement in the RFSAs TOC process, the details of the TOC review process in practice, how IPs are utilizing the TOC to inform programmatic adaptations, and the enablers and challenges that IPs face when utilizing TOCs in RFSAs implementation. IDEAL interviewed 36 IP staff representing six organizations and 15 RFSAs across eight FGDs. The BHA survey was sent to 40

mission and Washington-based staff with six responding. The IP FGD respondents included Chiefs of Party, senior Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) staff, Strategic Learning Advisors, and headquarters support staff and leadership. Most of the BHA respondents were BHA/Washington staff, with one BHA Regional Office and one Mission staff responding.

Once the interviews were complete and survey responses received, IDEAL analyzed the exhaustive notes, identified common themes, and sent a summary of that analysis to all participants one week prior to the event. From the pre-consultation interviews, four major themes emerged that were discussed further during the Stakeholder Consultation event:

- The TOC is a powerful visual tool, providing a dynamic, yet complex, picture of the activity;
- Socializing the TOC to all levels of the activity, from leadership to local partners, is a difficult but critical task;
- The interdependent relationship of the learning agenda, M&E system, and TOC provides a rich amount of data for adaptive management, but prioritizing what adaptations to make is still difficult; and
- Bringing people together for TOC review is valuable, but resource intensive and can feel ineffectual if proposed changes are not met with flexibility and timely approval.

To access the summary analysis [click here for English](#) and [click here for French](#).

Stakeholder Consultation Convening Sessions

IDEAL held its consultation entitled “Theories of Change (TOCs) in Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs)” virtually on Zoom through two half-day sessions (7:00 - 11:00 AM EDT) on March 23 and 24, 2022 (see Annex C for the agenda). Attendees included 13 representatives from BHA or USAID, and 16 representatives from 8 IPs.

The objectives of the consultation were to:

1. Develop a mutual understanding of the various benefits and challenges of using a Theory of Change in RFSAs implementation and
2. Develop and prioritize recommendations for both implementers and BHA to support improved theory of change use in RFSAs implementation.

Participants in the consultation discussed each of the above themes identified from the qualitative outreach in breakout sessions and identified recommendations for improving the use of TOCs in RFSAs implementation. Key recommendations from the consultation included: 1) increasing training and access to tools to facilitate the use of TOCs, 2) improving BHA facilitation of TOC amendment approvals, and 3) improving ownership and socialization of the TOC within RFSAs.

To access the slides from the Stakeholder Consultation, [click here](#).

Day 1

At the start of Day 1, Karen Romano (IDEAL Activity Director) welcomed participants and provided a brief introduction to IDEAL, the purpose of Stakeholder Consultations, and the objectives of the event. Dan Houston (Strategic Planning and Activity Design Team Leader, USAID/BHA) also provided opening remarks for the event. Arif Rashid (Division Chief for BHA’s Design, M&E, and Applied Learning Division) set the tone for the event by summarizing how stakeholder consultations under IDEAL and its predecessor project, the Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Program, have led to important changes in how RFSAs are designed and implemented. Mr. Rashid mentioned that stakeholder consultations are an

opportunity for BHA and implementers to come together for peer-to-peer dialogue, discuss issues, and address problems together in a safe learning space with the ultimate goal of improving program quality.

“Our common goal is to design a more effective project and to use adaptive management to continue to make the interventions relevant and effective using the learning along the way.”
–Arif Rashid

Following the opening from IDEAL and BHA, a brief panel discussion was held with Jenny Haddle (IDEAL Senior Advisor for Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA)) acting as moderator and Alex Bekunda (Chief of Party, World Vision’s Nobo Jatra Activity in Bangladesh), Gregory Makabila (Deputy Chief of Party, Catholic Relief Services (CRS)’s Ifaa Activity in Ethiopia), and John Paul Nyeko (Senior M&E Advisor, AVSI’s Graduating to Resilience Activity in Uganda) serving as panelists. Panelists were asked how they prepared for TOC reviews, how they shared and reviewed the TOC with local partners and stakeholders, and how TOC reviews prompted adaptations to their interventions. Although each panelist shared different approaches for socializing and

reviewing the TOC, the panel highlighted a wealth of successful TOC use stories and practical tools created and utilized by implementers to organize the TOC review process. Following the panel discussion, the consultation participants were invited into breakout groups to introduce themselves and share what resonated with them from the panel discussion.

Next, Suzanne Ammari (IDEAL Deputy Activity Director) reviewed the major themes from the pre-consultation qualitative outreach and analysis. Participants were then divided into four breakout groups (including one Francophone) to discuss the first and second themes: *The TOC is a powerful visual tool, providing a dynamic, yet complex, picture of the activity* and *Socializing the TOC to all levels of the Activity, from leadership to local partners, is a difficult but critical task*. Each group had an IDEAL facilitator and note-taker as well as a visual workspace for the discussion that was pre-populated with feedback and recommendations from the qualitative analysis. All groups had a facilitated discussion to answer the following questions:

- What feedback resonated with you? Is there anything that surprises you?
- Are the recommendations clear and actionable?
- Are there any underlying issues that these recommendations are not addressing?

The groups were then tasked with reviewing recommendations from the pre-consultation qualitative outreach analysis and identifying additional recommendations under the given theme.

THEME 1: THE TOC IS A POWERFUL VISUAL TOOL, PROVIDING A DYNAMIC, YET COMPLEX, PICTURE OF THE ACTIVITY

Feedback from Qualitative Outreach

In every FGD that IDEAL conducted, the TOC was acknowledged as a good visual tool for staff to understand the activity design. Most IP respondents noted that they have printouts of the TOC on their office walls while a few activities have moved to using Miro for their TOC. While the TOC provides a pictorial view of the interventions, outputs, pathways, and outcomes that other tools cannot, every RFSAs raised that the complexity of the picture is a challenge. Since it is a big picture, with so many relationships and assumptions, it can be challenging to understand the TOC on a deep level. Those staff who spend the most time and become the most familiar with the TOC are better able to understand and articulate its complexity. As one IP respondent noted, "It is easier if you are more involved in the TOC to see it, like going to a gallery and the artist can understand it all the best, it is same with our TOC."

Food security is a complex issue and the "TOC is a fantastic tool to look at the complexity that leads to food insecurity and poor nutrition outcomes and looking at the root causes and making connections

between different challenges and constraints,” but implementers often find themselves lost in that complexity and struggle to prioritize what outcomes and outputs to focus on. Even so, being able to see all the pieces of the activity in one place can help staff understand how their individual contributions lead to the highest-level outcomes.

Small Group Discussion Overview

During the consultation, all of the small groups acknowledged the complexity of TOCs, though in one group, there was debate about whether TOCs as a tool are complex or whether they are inherently complex because RFSAs are complex. Participants shared the ways in which they visualize the TOC, with many participants referencing Excel and PowerPoint as the main tools for mapping out the TOC, while a couple of participants said that they have used Miro. Participants shared experiences which helped reduce the perceived complexity of the TOC. For some, sensitizing staff on how their role can be seen in the TOC was helpful in reducing complexity. Most participants considered formal training on the TOC to be important, but limited as participation in training was not universal, and a formal training on TOC has not been offered in several years. Regular reference to and use of the TOC with implementation staff was also noted as key to reducing complexity as the more familiar one is with the TOC the less complex it may seem. The need to simplify the TOC was discussed in almost all groups. Participants considered how this simplification could come through the design phase in co-creation or through BHA providing the high-level outcomes of the activity when releasing the RFSAs. Simplification could also be done by breaking up the complex puzzle of the TOC into simpler and more manageable pieces.

Initial Recommendations

Across the four breakout groups, 40 recommendations were made (including some from the pre-consultation analysis). These recommendations were put onto a Google Slide (see Figure 2) and participants were asked to choose three recommendations that they would like to prioritize. The top five prioritized recommendations were:

- Don't wait until culmination to simplify; [engage in] co-creation at proposal phase; TOC from the start of the project should already be simplified and clear
- Establish TOC champions and gain complete buy-in from Activity leadership and Mission staff to help the TOC become a part of the culture (also under Theme 2)
- Print low-cost versions [of the TOC] throughout the year/more frequently – don't wait for final version
- Train staff at all levels of the Activity on TOC
- Have BHA identify high-level outcomes [of the TOC] at RFA stage

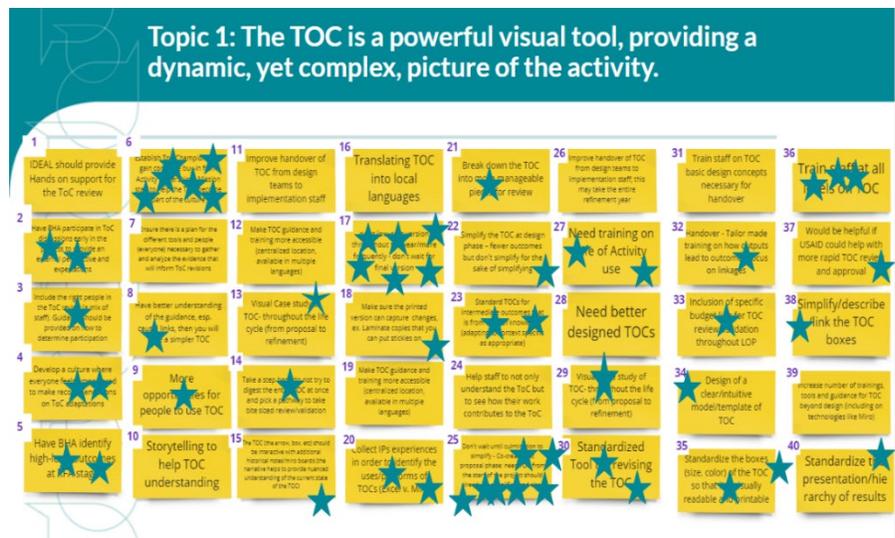


Figure 2: Theme 1 Recommendations

THEME 2: SOCIALIZING THE TOC TO ALL LEVELS OF THE ACTIVITY, FROM LEADERSHIP TO LOCAL PARTNERS, IS A DIFFICULT BUT CRITICAL TASK

Feedback from Qualitative Outreach

Most IP and BHA respondents noted that not all staff have an equal understanding of the TOC; often, it is the M&E or learning teams with the strongest understanding, followed by senior technical staff and activity

leadership. For both IP and BHA respondents, activity staff having specific skills in TOC is beneficial to the RFSAs. In a third of the FGDs, having Activity leadership that champions the TOC was noted as a strong enabler of the use of TOCs in RFSAs implementation. Good orientation to the TOC helps staff at all levels understand how their piece of work on the activity contributes to the overall goal.

Most of the IP respondents mentioned that socialization of the TOC to activity staff who have limited familiarity with the tool was difficult, which could be exacerbated by staff transitions during the life of the RFSAs. One IP respondent noted “A lot of staff... feel they don’t have the keys to interact with the TOC.” Compounding the issue is that there has not been any formal training offered on TOC in more than two years and one noted they were often unsure where to look for guidance and tools given the disparate places where TOC information is stored. The purpose of the TOC is “to make [activity staff’s] lives easier, not more challenging. But having a lack of capacity, knowledge, and understanding of TOC [makes activity staff think the TOC] is something very challenging and complicated.” The issue of socialization of the TOC resonated with BHA survey respondents as well, with one respondent stating, “I feel like the staff in the capital city have the TOC up on the wall, but it isn’t really socialized or used well on the ground.”

Small Group Discussion Overview

In all four breakout groups that discussed Theme 2 on Day 1 of the consultation, participants acknowledged the inconsistency of understanding of the TOC across activity staff. Many shared that the challenge of socializing the TOC was not at the leadership level, but rather at the implementation staff level. Champions at the leadership level were seen as critical for cascading the TOC down to other activity staff. Participants shared ways in which that had been done both formally through TOC training and informally through Pause & Reflect and other internal orientations. Language came up as a barrier for socialization in two different ways: first, that most TOCs are not translated into the local language so staff may not even be able to read the TOC; and second, that the technical language and jargon often dominant in TOCs may not reflect how local actors consider the challenges and assumptions.

Initial Recommendations

Across the four breakout groups, 35 recommendations were presented to the plenary (including some which were part of the pre-consultation analysis). Again, these recommendations were put onto a Google Slide and participants were asked to choose three recommendations that they would like to prioritize. The top five prioritized recommendations were:

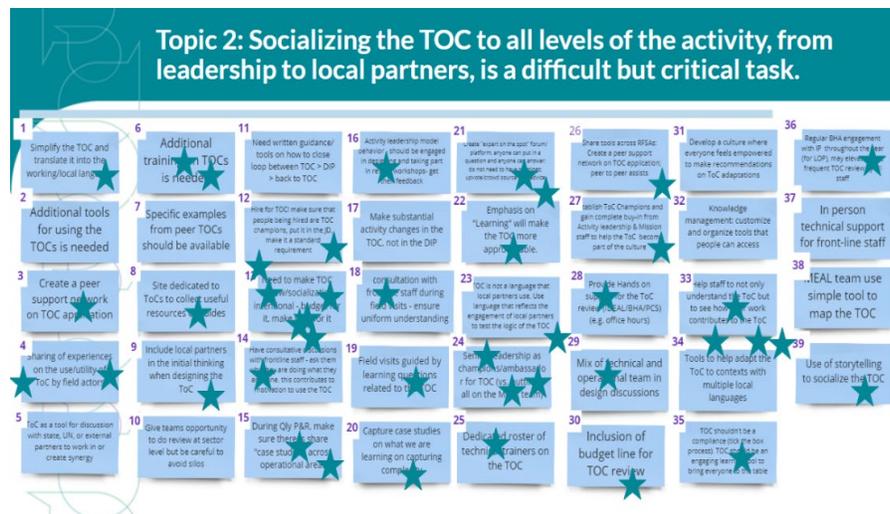


Figure 3: Theme 2 Recommendations

- Make the TOC review/socialization intentional – budget for it, make time for it
- Help staff to not only understand the TOC but to see how their work contributes to the TOC
- Establish TOC champions within Activity leadership and Mission staff to promote TOC as a crucial component of the culture (also under Theme 1)
- During quarterly Pause & Reflect, make sure there are sharable “case studies” across operational areas
- Increase sharing of experiences on the use/utility of TOC by field actors

Day 2

The second day of the Stakeholder Consultation followed much of the same format as the first day. However, IDEAL facilitators added 10 more minutes to the breakout sessions to allow more time for the small groups to analyze, clarify, and conduct an initial prioritization of recommendations before all of the recommendations were combined for a final vote in plenary. This adjustment was in response to the Day 1 survey results in which participants said that more critical review of the recommendations was needed.

As on Day 1, participants were divided into small groups to discuss the two remaining themes: 3) *The interdependent relationship of the learning agenda, M&E system, and TOC provides a rich amount of data for adaptive management, but prioritizing what adaptations to make is still difficult* and 4) *Bringing people together for TOC review is valuable, but resource intensive and can feel ineffectual if proposed changes are not met with flexibility and timely approval*. Because of the make-up of participants on Day 2, there were only three breakout groups and no dedicated Francophone group.

THEME 3: THE INTERDEPENDENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LEARNING AGENDA, M&E SYSTEM, AND TOC PROVIDES A RICH AMOUNT OF DATA TO INFORM ADAPTATIONS BUT ANALYZING DATA AND PRIORITIZING ADAPTATIONS IS STILL DIFFICULT

Feedback from Qualitative Outreach

Most IP respondents noted that a mix of quantitative and qualitative data is needed to make programmatic decisions and adaptively manage a RFSA and that the M&E system is crucial in mapping out activity performance in terms of outputs during the annual review process. However, no BHA respondents observed RFSA making meaningful connections to the TOC through the M&E system.

The data collected during research and pilot studies outlined in the learning agenda are critical for understanding context and can inform achievement of higher-level outcomes or impact later in an activity's lifecycle. However, several IP respondents mentioned struggling with the overwhelming amounts of data gathered via formal research and pilot studies during the Refine and Implement (R&I) period. Another IP respondent highlighted that context monitoring played a central role in informing adaptations to the TOC, which highlights a challenge raised in several FGDs around the need to constantly update the TOC in response to unexpected shocks. A few IP respondents noted that prioritizing adaptations was a difficult endeavor without any clear guidance or methodology to help with the process.

Most IP respondents cited that the development and use of tools to organize quantitative and qualitative evidence from research, pilot studies, annual surveys, mid-term evaluations, context monitoring, and routine monitoring systems is helpful during the TOC review process. The tools link evidence to changes in pathways and help map those out.

Small Group Discussion Overview

All three discussion groups resonated with the idea that there is an overwhelming amount of data to sort through, and that there never seems to be "enough time or people to really dig into it because there's also an expectation and a need to keep moving." Participants also noted that data becomes outdated fast – especially when there are major shocks such as natural disasters. Participants in two groups had some success with narrowing the scope of and being intentional about what studies and assessments to conduct, when they are conducted, and what data really need to be captured, making it easier to digest the data they collected. Participants noted that it would be helpful to have more guidance from BHA on how to use qualitative surveys and data.

While one group agreed with the FGD participants that the TOC was meaningfully integrated with their M&E system, the other two groups did not. One participant mentioned that viewing M&E data in a linear fashion, such as a Logical Framework (logframe), was easier and that a logframe could be updated much more quickly and cleanly than a TOC. One participant noted that it can be a challenge to measure

achievement against TOC pathways given that the number of BHA required indicators make it difficult to create a lot of custom indicators.

Initial Recommendations

Across the three breakout groups, 15 recommendations were made (including some from the pre-consultation analysis). These recommendations were put onto a Google slide (see *Figure 4*) and participants were asked to choose three recommendations that they would like to prioritize. The top six prioritized recommendations were:

- Conduct external desk review on tools that exist (e.g. from DFID) for managing and using large volumes of data (and determine how guidance/tools can be adapted)
- Differentiate processes for revision and approvals for simple vs. structural changes, streamline and accelerate technical review and approval time
- Identify, create, collect, and share tools to filter information from the range of systems and prioritize adaptations considering potential impact and feasibility in terms of budget, human resources, time commitment, and other factors
- Cluster the learning questions, identify those that can be addressed by the M&E system and ensure that the M&E system is refined to address the learning questions, including collecting qualitative data on a regular basis
- Document adaptations, use TOC & M&E system to reflect on results of adaptations, share widely within team to motivate learning efforts
- Emergency response TOC version should be ready to use and pre-approved [so that the activity can] transition quickly

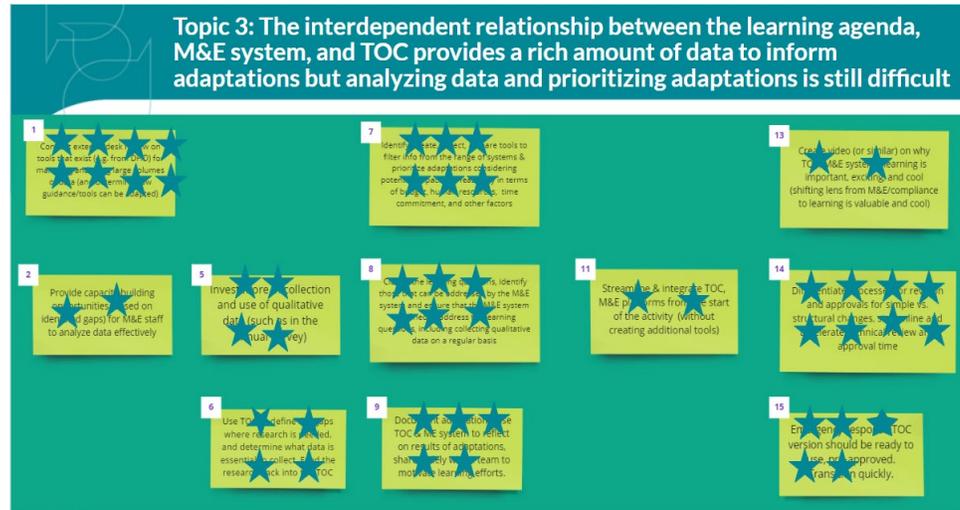


Figure 4: Theme 3 Recommendations

THEME 4: BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER FOR TOC REVIEW IS VALUABLE, BUT RESOURCE AND TIME INTENSIVE AND CAN FEEL INEFFECTUAL IF PROPOSED CHANGES ARE NOT MET WITH FLEXIBILITY AND TIMELY APPROVAL

Feedback from Qualitative Outreach

Most IP respondents conducted inclusive TOC reviews, which include staff at all roles and levels, but noted that including staff with varying levels of familiarity with TOCs was sometimes challenging. One IP respondent noted, “going through the TOC with other teams and having them explain their [interventions] in the TOC leads to better understanding of how [interventions] implemented by other teams are inter-related.”

Several IP respondents pointed out that planning for and holding the annual review process is time and resource intensive. Another challenge, as pointed out by one IP respondent, is that “we are constantly questioning what we are doing, and sometimes not focusing on the essentials,” which may detract from making progress towards the goal of the RFSAs.

In addition, one IP respondent reflected that teams feel unsure about the level of flexibility available to them to update and change the logic of the TOC and make adaptations to activity interventions in turn. Two respondents specifically noted that the BHA approval process for proposed adaptations is time-consuming, which can be demotivating, delay implementation, and ultimately impact activity progress towards its goals.

Small Group Discussion Overview

All three groups agreed that TOC reviews were an important tool to increase collaboration across sectors and that it was important for staff at all levels (such as community-level, technical, and senior leadership) to be involved. Two groups discussed that reviews should be done more frequently than annually, even quarterly, and to integrate reviews into other Activity events such as Pause and Reflect. However, the need for striking a balance between reviewing the TOC frequently and implementing interventions was noted by all three groups – TOC reviews were described as sometimes monopolizing already-stretched staff time.

While IPs recognized the value of reviewing TOCs, all three groups noted that lengthy reviews of proposed TOC revisions made it difficult for them to manage adaptively and flexibly. One noted “we spend a lot of time working with data but then there is no guarantee that proposed adaptations will be accepted or approved.” TOC changes can take some time to be approved, and, by the time the project is formally modified, the opportunity to implement – or not implement – its proposed changes has passed. Participants agreed that it would be helpful to have more opportunities for quick TOC adaptations, particularly when there is a shock. In particular, one group noted that issues letters could be very detailed and could feel overwhelming to IPs and that the staff hours required to respond to issues letters were often high to the point of distracting from quality implementation. Several participants noted that they had found engaging BHA on an ongoing, collaborative basis could help to expedite TOC reviews, especially since BHA then has the appropriate background and context on proposed changes.

Another major challenge with TOC reviews highlighted was that TOCs are highly specialized and can be difficult to understand for those that are not experts. This not only can make it challenging to meaningfully engage staff who are new to TOCs but also create a dynamic where Western expertise is valued over local leadership and ownership of development activities. One participant challenged “When it's so complicated that only a few people can understand it, is it the right tool?”

Initial Recommendations

Across the three breakout groups, 15 recommendations were made (including some from the pre-consultation analysis). These recommendations were put onto a Google Slide (see *Figure 5*) and participants were asked to choose three recommendations that they would like to prioritize. The top five prioritized recommendations were:

- Plan, budget, and anticipate for potential shocks (e.g. through scenario planning) to enable activity to adapt to reach TOC outcomes
- Engage BHA in discussions and workshops to review the TOC (both to gain their insights and to provide them with additional contextual information for revised TOC changes)
- BHA reflect on streamlining/ making consistent feedback and approvals processes

- Identify, collect, create, and share guidance and tools for reviewing TOCs, for different contexts, including who to involve
- Share BHA guidance on the steps and roles and responsibilities regarding the ToC approval and adaptation process and facilitate regular and open communication between IPs and BHA on when and how this guidance may be flexible



Figure 5: Theme 4 Recommendations

Final Prioritized Recommendations and Next Steps

IDEAL migrated all of the prioritized recommendations from the two days to a single slide (see *Figure 6*). Participants read through all 20 recommendations and then tried to group the recommendations into categories. However, this grouping exercise was not completed and IDEAL was recommended to do the categorization post-event. After reviewing the recommendations again, IDEAL has categorized recommendations by whom the recommendation is directed towards: IPs, IDEAL, or BHA. Most of the recommendations directed towards IPs are promising practices for them to consider, the recommendations directed towards IDEAL are mostly related to capacity building and tool development or collation, while the recommendations directed towards BHA are mostly related to approval process and engagement with IPs.

Recommendations for IP Consideration:

- Train staff at all levels of the activity on the TOC and its use as a tool for adaptive management¹
- Engage BHA in discussions and workshops to review the TOC both to gain their insights and to provide them with additional contextual information for revised TOC changes
- Make the TOC review/socialization intentional – budget for it, make time for it
- Establish TOC champions within Activity leadership and Mission staff to promote TOC as a crucial component of the culture
- Plan, budget and anticipate for potential shocks (e.g. through scenario planning) to enable activity to adapt to reach TOC outcomes²
- Document adaptations, use TOC and M&E systems to reflect on results of adaptations, share widely within team to motivate learning efforts³
- Print low-cost versions of the TOC that can capture changes (i.e. laminate) on a more frequent basis
- During quarterly Pause & Reflect, make sure there are sharable “case studies” across operational areas
- Increase sharing of experiences on the use/utility of TOC by field actors

¹ The [TOC Training Curriculum](#) developed under TOPS can be found on the FSN Network website. The page has been revised since the consultation to be more user-friendly.

² IDEAL’s [Introduction to Scenario Planning Course](#) and [Adaptive Management collection on Scenario Planning](#) can be useful resources for Activities undertaking scenario planning

³ IDEAL’s [Adaptive Management Collection](#) on the FSN Network includes some guidance on documenting adaptations under the Pause & Reflect and Institutional Memory sections.

- Help staff to not only understand the TOC but to see how their work contributes to the TOC
- Cluster the learning questions, identify those that can be addressed by the M&E system and ensure that the M&E system is refined to address the learning questions, including collecting qualitative data on a regular basis
- Emergency response TOC version should be ready to use (*for IP*) and pre-approved (*for BHA*) [so that the activity can] transition quickly

Recommendations for IDEAL Consideration:

- Identify, create, collect and share tools to filter information from the range of systems and prioritize adaptations considering potential impact and feasibility in terms of budget, human resources, time commitment and other factors
- Identify, collect, create and share guidance and tools for reviewing TOCs, for different contexts, including who to involve⁴
- Conduct external desk review on tools that exist (e.g. from DFID) for managing and using large volumes of data and determine how guidance/tools can be adapted



Figure 6: Final Prioritized Recommendations

Recommendations for BHA Consideration:

- Differentiate processes for revision and approvals for simple vs. structural changes, streamline and accelerate technical review and approval time
- Have BHA identify high-level outcomes for the TOC at RFA stage
- BHA reflect on streamlining/making consistent feedback and approvals processes
- Emergency response TOC version should be ready to use (*for IPs*) and pre-approved (*for BHA*) [so that the activity can] transition quickly
- Simplify the TOC at design phase through a co-creation process with the implementation team as opposed to waiting until the culmination event
- Share BHA guidance on the steps and roles and responsibilities regarding the TOC approval and adaptation process and facilitate regular and open communication between IPs ad BHA on when and how this guidance may be flexible

As Joan Whelan, BHA’s Applied Learning Team Lead, encouraged in her closing remark “think through what you have learned from one another and how you can work to improve processes at the activity level to support implementation through a Theory of Change.” Moving forward, IDEAL and BHA representatives will continue to discuss the prioritized recommendations. BHA will review all recommendations and, as feasible and allowable, recommendations may move forward. IDEAL will also explore the recommendations on identification, creation and sharing of tools and consider how to make these centralized and more widely accessible. In about six months’ time, IDEAL will do a review of what, if any, recommendations have moved forward and publish a follow-up report to the IP community.

⁴ In addition to guidance in the TOC Curriculum, under the TOPS Small Grant Program, ACDI/VOCA created a [TOC review guide](#). Nancy Peek and Laurie Starr also wrote [this blog](#) for USAID Learning Lab on TOC reviews.

Event Survey Feedback

PULSE CHECK

About half of participants (14 out of 29) responded to a survey after Day 1 of the Stakeholder Consultation. The main objective of this survey was to adapt to the needs of the event participants and make any necessary adjustment for the activities in Day 2.

13/14 respondents rated Day 1 as “excellent” or “good” with one rating it as “average.” No participants selected “poor.” Several respondents provided feedback about the Day 1 process for voting on recommendations, requesting that IDEAL allow some additional time in plenary to combine and clarify recommendations coming out of breakout groups. As a result, IDEAL amended the agenda for Day 2 to allow participants to make suggestions on how to revise recommendations before voting.

GENERAL EVALUATION

Eight participants completed a final evaluation after the event.

100% of respondents agreed that the consultation provided sufficient time and space to express opinions and ideas on TOCs in RFSAs implementation. 75% agreed that the consultation met its goal of making specific recommendations for improvement to TOC guidance and support; 63% agreed that it helped to develop ideas to improve the effectiveness of using TOC in RFSAs implementation; and 63% agreed that the consultation helped them share and understand from peers the strengths and challenges of using a TOC during project implementation. Six respondents noted that they planned to implement at least one suggestion they had heard in the consultation; while two did not respond to the question. Respondents especially appreciated the amount of time dedicated to participatory peer sharing and the opportunity to exchange ideas with peers who have rich experience and expertise.

Annex A: Pre-Consultation Qualitative Outreach Focus Group Interview Questions

Table 1: Pre-Consultation Qualitative Outreach Focus Group Interview Questions

Role and Engagement in the RFSA TOC Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your title and current role?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe what you know about how TOCs are used in your RFSA(s) to guide implementation – starting from the refinement year, through implementation to close out.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What positions in your organization (HQ/field) and/or RFSA are involved in theories of change during implementation?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has been your role in using RFSA TOCs? Explain each one individually if you have been involved in multiple.
TOC Review Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BHA has technical guidance on reviewing TOCs. Are you aware of this guidance? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What do you know about this guidance? ○ What would make it more useful?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your RFSA(s) hold regular TOC reviews and adaptations per BHA recommendation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If so, how often do these reviews and adaptations take place? ○ Who is involved in the TOC review process? ○ How do these roles/teams collaborate? ○ What happens during a TOC review?
Utilizing the TOC to Inform Programmatic Adaptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe an example of when the review of a TOC has been used to inform program adaptation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe an example of when collected data have informed adaptations to the TOC.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do(es) your RFSA(s) prioritize adaptations within the TOC?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your team connect data collected through the M&E system to the TOC and measure progress along TOC pathways? If so, please describe.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the learning agenda and TOC connected, if at all?
Enablers and Challenges of Utilizing TOCs in RFSA Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on your experience, in what ways do you think the TOC approach improves the likelihood of achieving RFSA goals? In what ways do you think the TOC approach hinders the likelihood of achieving RFSA goals?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What enables/facilitates the use of TOCs in RFSA implementation? (along the lifecycle)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some challenges or barriers to the use of TOCs in RFSA implementation (along the lifecycle)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What support is needed to help address the challenges and barriers you have observed in using TOCs during RFSA implementation
Wrap-up
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What other factors should IDEAL consider as we plan this stakeholder consultation?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What other thoughts, if any, do you have on TOCs that have not yet been expressed?

Annex B: Pre-Consultation Qualitative Outreach BHA Survey Questions

- What USAID office are you working in? Multiple choice: USAID/BHA Washington, USAID/BHA Regional Office, USAID Mission, Other (please specify)
- Describe how you have observed TOCs used in RFSAs to guide implementation – starting from the refinement year, through implementation to close out.
- How have you observed RFSAs utilizing BHA’s technical guidance on reviewing TOCs? What would make the guidance more useful?
- How often and/or when do you think RFSAs should hold TOC reviews for adaptations? What does a good TOC review look like?
- Have you been directly involved in an IPs’ TOC review? If so, in what capacity?
- Please share an example of when the review of a TOC was used to inform program adaptation. What enabled this adaptation? How did the RFSAs prioritize adaptations within the TOC?
- How have you seen RFSAs connect data collected through the M&E system to the TOC and measure progress along TOC pathways and inform program adaptations?
- In what ways have you observed RFSAs connecting the learning agenda to the TOC?
- Based on your experience, how have you seen the TOC approach improve the likelihood of achieving RFSAs goals? What do you feel enables/facilitates the use of TOCs in RFSAs implementation (along the lifecycle)?
- In what ways have you seen the TOC approach hinder the likelihood of achieving RFSAs goals? (Long form response) What are some challenges or barriers to the use of TOCs in RFSAs implementation (along the lifecycle)?
- What support do you feel is needed to help implementing partners’ address these challenges and barriers you have observed in using TOCs during RFSAs implementation?
- What other factors should IDEAL consider as we plan this stakeholder consultation? What other thoughts, if any, do you have on TOCs that have not yet been expressed?

Annex C: Stakeholder Consultation Agenda

Table 2: Stakeholder Consultation Agenda

Day 1	
7:00 - 7:20 AM	Opening
7:20 - 7:50 AM	Intro Panel and Small Group Discussion
7:50 - 8:00 AM	Objectives, Themes Overview
8:00 - 8:05 AM	Break
8:05 - 9:20 AM	Breakout Groups <i>Theme #1: The TOC is a powerful visual tool, providing a dynamic, yet complex, picture of the activity</i>
9:20 - 9:35 AM	Break
9:30 - 10:50 AM	Breakout Groups <i>Theme #2: Socializing the TOC to all levels of the activity, from leadership to local partners, is a difficult but critical task</i>
10:50 - 11:00 AM	Closing
Day 2	
7:00 - 7:20 AM	Opening
7:20 - 8:30 AM	Breakout Groups <i>Theme #3: The interdependent relationship of the learning agenda, M&E system, and TOC provides a rich amount of data for adaptive management, but prioritizing what adaptations to make is still difficult</i>
8:35 - 8:50 AM	Break
8:50 - 10:00 AM	Breakout Groups <i>Theme #4: Bringing people together for TOC review is valuable, but resource intensive and can feel ineffectual if proposed changes are not met with flexibility and timely approval</i>
10:00 - 10:05 AM	Break
10:05 - 10:35 AM	Review of Prioritization All Topics
10:35 - 10:50 AM	Closing