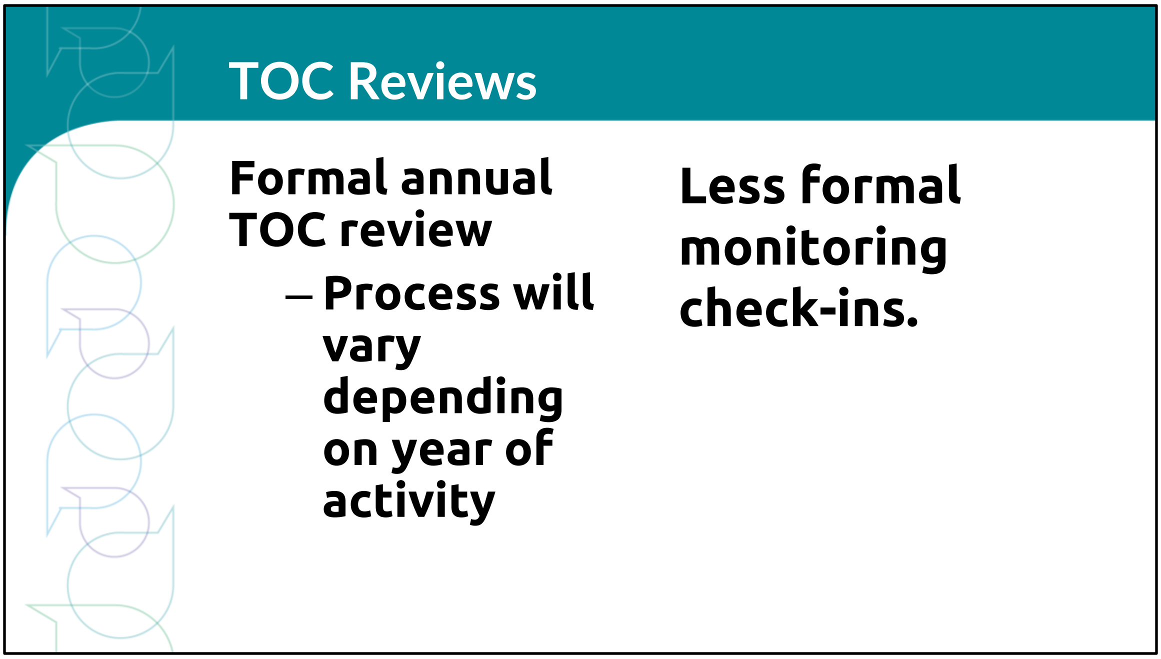
Theory of Change Reviews Throughout the DFSA Cycle

September 26th, 2019

How do we make sure that creating a ToC isn't just an exercise to satisfy the donor….but rather a process that engages staff and encourages them to continue to use the diagram throughout the activity cycle as a tool for learning, reflecting, and adapting.



FORMAL: Year 1 - spend more time identifying and filling evidence gaps; modifying logic based on formative research findings, ensuring we have the right indicators to measure change. Reviewing assumptions.
Year 2 – More logic refinement. Checking in on output achievement.
Year 3 & 4 – Continue to integrate new contextual information; but also begin to heavily focus on whether or not change is unfolding the way we expected it to. Identify enablers and barriers to hypothesized change.

INFORMAL: Use the TOC throughout the activity cycle as a tool for learning, reflecting, and adapting.
Make monitoring an ongoing process.
Wall-sized version of TOC on wall of field offices = Motivation!
Reference TOC at monthly staff check-ins.

- Talk about what progress is / is not observed
- Identify enablers and barriers to hypothesized change
- Don't need to review the entire diagram, but keep staff in touch with how their efforts link to the pathways
  - Photos or names near each output = ownership

Year 1

Year 1 timeline – all things TOC

Year 1	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N
Sensitize new staff to TOC													
Gender & Youth Consultation with FFP													
Inception workshop with FFP: mutual understanding of how change is expected to occur. Identification of knowledge and evidence gaps.													
Basic integration of TOC with ME/CLA plans													
Refine the TOC based on study key findings													
Culmination workshop with FFP: review findings from IP research and stakeholder engagement and agree on implications to TOCs and implementation plans.													

Gender, Youth consultation: review the TOC from a gender perspective with the aim of with the key aim of identifying issues of relevance to inform the design and development of the scope of work for partners gender analysis

Pre-inception workshop

Staff sensitization to TOC

- Review TOC terminology and checklist with new staff
    - Ensure basic understanding of TOC elements
- Demonstrate how to tell the story of change, including cross purpose linkages
- Conduct a basic logic check- does the logic make sense for the specific operation context? Why or why not?
- Demonstrate basic sustainability check

Pre-inception workshop

Staff sensitization to TOC

- Discuss big picture connections to TOC (DIP, M&E plan, logframe, IPTT, Learning Agenda)
- Begin to identify and document evidence gaps
- Explain the Year 1 TOC timeline
    - E.g., Expectations of inception and culmination workshops

The TOC process requires that project management systems accommodate uncertainty and flexibility. Think of the TOC as your evolving guide for implementation, rather than an indelible prescription.

Gender and Youth Consultation

- Discuss how gender/ age issues could affect pathway progress
- Identify information gaps that inform the design and development of the scope of work for the gender analysis

Gender, Youth consultation: review the TOC from a gender perspective with the aim of with the key aim of identifying issues of relevance to inform the design and development of the scope of work for partners gender analysis
Stemming from a concern that gender analyses were not adequately tailored to the local context in which they provided services to beneficiaries, and that instead these analyses identified superficial issues without the necessary depth of understanding to guide the process of revising the theory of change and implementation
to better integrate and address gender issues identified in the local context.

Illness in children under two, adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women reduced

•Mother's availability of time and resources to feed/care for children
•Household decision-making related to health and nutrition
•Engagement of men and mothers -in-law
•Access to and control over resources including time
and money to treat illness
•Family support
•Women's time to collect and treat water

Inception workshop with FFP

Objective: Gain a mutual understanding with FFP and regional non-FFP partners about how change is expected to occur

- Ensure target groups stand out in pathways
- Incorporate findings from final evaluations of past FFP-funded activities

The objective of the inception workshop is not to completely reshuffle causal logic

Inception workshop with FFP

Objective: Identify knowledge and evidence gaps for year 1 research

- pathways with unproven hypotheses
- pathways requiring enhanced regional contextualization
- challenges to pathway sustainability
- validity of external and internal assumptions

Heavy focus on output to outcome linkages.

Pre-ME workshop
Integrate TOC with ME/ CLA plans

Ensure there are sufficient means for annually monitoring whether change is occurring as you expect it to for all critical outcomes.

- Appropriate/ sufficient indicators
- Information to capture change in the middle and upper tiers of TOC BEFORE endline
- Assumptions monitoring
- External actor monitoring
- Staff observations about changes that may not be formally monitored (e.g., unintended consequences)

The TOC should be an integral part of our M&E system. Similar to other logic models, a TOC provides a blueprint for monitoring that identifies measurable indicators of success. We need to conduct a thorough review of all proposed indicators with new ME staff, and operationalize the indicators we defined during TOC design. If new indicators are proposed, it should be very clear how they relate to the TOC. What will they tell us that will inform future adaptive programming decisions?

We may need to measure indicators annually or more frequently, depending on the type. Similarly, we will likely need differing data collection systems for the various indicators.

Conduct indicator sticky dot exercise with full ME/ CLA / technical team.

Pre-culmination workshop

- Refine the TOC based on study key findings.
- Emphasis on:
  - What did we learn that we did not know?
  - What are the implications of findings on sustainability planning?
  - What are the implications related to gender and youth engagement?
  - What interventions must be prioritized and which can be eliminated? Why?

Clarify any necessary non-FFP partner collaboration in order to make prioritization decisions related to interventions.

Culmination workshop

Share study findings and explain proposed adaptations to the activity design and implementation plans with FFP.

Similar focus:

- What did we learn that we did not know?
- What are the implications of findings on:
  - sustainability planning?
  - gender and youth engagement?
  - interventions to be prioritized and eliminated?

Prioritize evidence gaps

What do you notice about these questions?

- What are the causes, sources, impact and consequences, and overall projected impact of the conflict?
- What are key determining factors that can be addressed through DFSA strategies, and where are there entry points in the conflict that may be addressed through the DFSA? The modalities through which existing conflicts can best be managed?
- What are potential factors that may be able to mitigate the further resilience to outbreak or escalation of violent conflict, and ability to de-escalate violent conflict?
- What are the appropriate mitigation measures?

Many questions say the same thing in different ways.

Once we develop a list of questions related to knowledge and evidence gaps, it is common for many of the questions in the list say the same thing in different ways. The first basic step to consolidate and prioritize our knowledge gaps is to ask:
Are any questions saying the same thing in different ways?

What do you notice about these questions?

- What are the most important shocks and stressors that households and communities are facing?
- What actions or combination of actions are households (and communities) taking to cope and adapt, or to transform their systems and structures, to respond to shocks and stressors and with what outcomes?
- How diversified are people's livelihoods?

They will be answered by the baseline.
Is there a benefit to gathering this information before the baseline is complete? If so, clearly define why the information is needed before baseline and pursue via formative research, if not, simplify study design.

Finally, qualitative studies that pursue the WHY versus the WHAT might be a much better use of formative research efforts. For example, why do some households diversify and others do not? Why do people choose some shock response strategies over others?

Application of knowledge

Why do we care?

If an evidence gap is essential, it should be very clear how the knowledge gained will be applied.

- What do we need to know versus what might be nice to know?
- What do we need to know NOW versus as the activity unfolds?
- What information has the most potential for influencing decisions related to activity design and implementation plans?

Our team should identify why we care about this question. Put on a need to know versus nice to know lens. Whittling down the number of evidence gaps requires thinking carefully about what type of information has the most potential for influencing decisions related to implementation and program design?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS TO HELP PRIORITIZE KNOWLEDGE AND EVIDENCE GAPS
Is this knowledge essential to whittling down DFSA efforts to the most effective suite of interventions? To selecting the most appropriate interventions for distinct populations and other distinguishing local context factors? To identifying the best timing for an intervention?
Is this knowledge essential to the development of contextualized training materials / guidance? To identifying the most effective practices / ideas to promote in training?
Is this knowledge essential to identifying the most promising target populations for various interventions? (distinct from the impact population of any particular outcome)
Is this knowledge essential to identifying strategic stakeholders to engage for long-term sustainability of service provision?

TOC Zombies

TOC Zombies: Key areas that hinder effective TOC monitoring and review

Poor causal logic (inverted, big leaps, illogical linkages, etc.)

Insufficient information available to monitor pathway progress

Insufficient information available to determine necessary additions/deletions due to contextual changes

Check for and remedy these three common weaknesses at activity start up.

Insufficient information available to monitor pathways

- Indicators that are inappropriate/ insufficient measures
- Insufficient information about change in the middle and upper tiers of TOC
  - Underutilized data
- Limited to no monitoring of assumptions
- Limited to no monitoring of external actor efforts

Year 2/3

Why is it important to monitor and review the TOC ?

LEARNING and ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

To understand if change is occurring as we expected it to

To revise our hypotheses based on changes in the context

To inform adaptive management decisions

At start up we made multiple hypotheses about what needs to happen to reach our goal. We vetted this theory with other stakeholders.
The TOC process requires that performance management systems accommodate uncertainty and flexibility. Think of the TOC as our evolving guide for implementation and M&E, rather than an indelible prescription.

We want to monitor if we are staying on course, or whether it is time for a new course. TOC is more than a roadmap, it is a compass---compasses need calibration.
CONTEXT: We made a set of hypotheses based on what we knew at activity start up- we have a lot more information now. Many things change over the course of 5 years. Context is far from static and needs to be integrated.

Keep a large copy of the TOC available for staff to provide a visual representation of what is changing and what is not yet changing. This allows a team to see why a project may be having problems achieving higher-level outcomes.


“Continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection”

Brainstorm:

Your DFSA plans to carry out a post-MTE TOC review 3 months from now

What information does the team need to pull together to conduct the review?

Thinking about all the components that contribute to our TOC pathways - what type of information do you think will be necessary in order to understand if change is occurring as we expected it to. What will we need to know to validate or revise our hypotheses?

What type of information guides a TOC review?

Outputs:

- **Progress:** Documentation of intervention status (% of target achieved; DIP, progress reports, etc.)
- **Additions or deletions:** formative and other research (including secondary lit), annual monitoring, MTE recommendations, etc.

Outcomes:

- **Progress:** IPTT % of target achieved from annual & routine monitoring; qualitative research; field staff observations; mid-term findings; annual reports
- **Additions/ deletions/ new linkages between outcomes:** formative and other research, annual monitoring, midterm recommendations; secondary literature, staff observations

Staff observations about changes that may not be formally monitored (e.g., unintended consequences)

What type of information guides a TOC review?

External actor efforts

- **Progress:** EA monitoring (websites, meetings, shared reports, working groups, etc.)
- **Additions/ deletions:** same as above; staff observation

Assumptions

- **Progress:** Evidence to support the claim that assumptions are still expected to hold through LOA.
- **Additions/ deletions:** formative and other research (including secondary lit)

Are new actors in the area providing necessary outputs or producing necessary outcomes for your pathways? Are any actors in the TOC no longer relevant?

Assumptions Progress: are they still expected to hold through LOA? What evidence supports your claim?

What needs to be in place before the annual review?

- Actual values entered in IPTT for relevant indicators
- Documentation of intervention status (DIP, progress reports)
- Synthesis of relevant findings from MTE, formative research and other studies
- Stakeholder mapping update
- Documentation of whether assumptions are holding
- Documented status of external actor efforts
- Synthesis of field staff observations

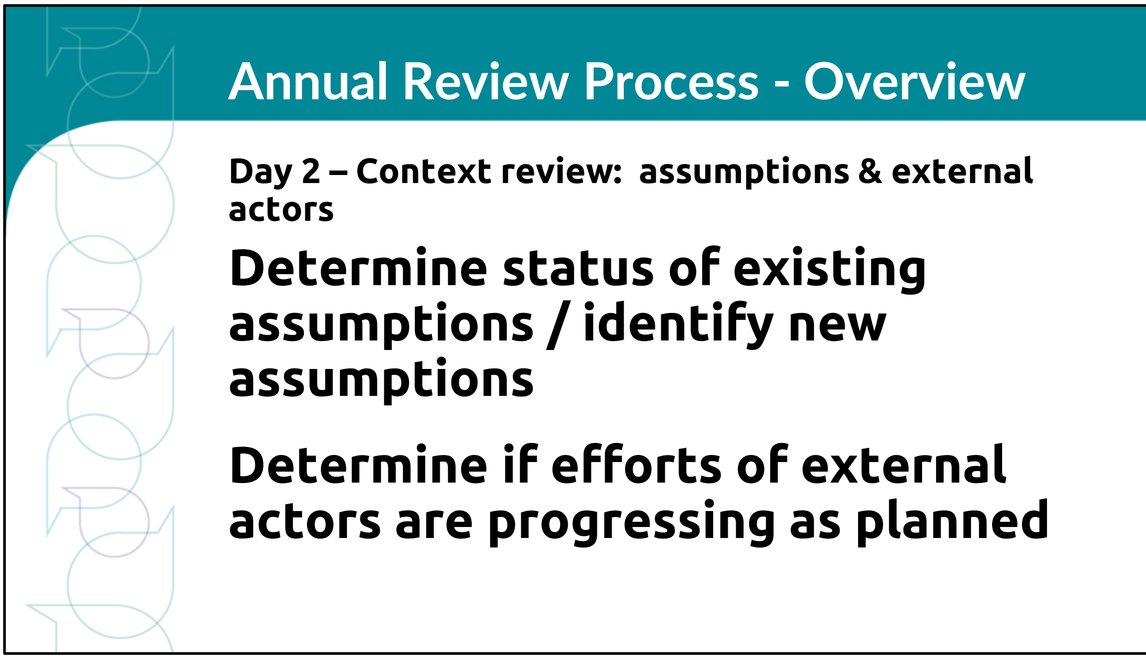
Start compiling information 2-3 months in advance. It typically takes longer than anticipated.

Annual Review Process - Overview

Context Review/ MTE findings - Day 1

Discuss observed changes that may not be monitored (e.g., unintended consequences)

Integrate contextual information and new findings from activity research & MTE



Determine status of existing assumptions / identify new assumptions

Are existing assumptions holding?

> Yes? How do we know? document evidence in TOC narrative. Determine how to obtain this information if we do not know the status.
>
> No, remove from diagram. What are the implications for the TOC pathways? Document for ARR.
>
> Agree on system to mark achievement on wall diagram. We'll need this later when we start mapping pathway progress.

For assumptions that remain, what is the risk to pathway if the assumption does not hold?

> If risk is high, what contingency measures will be taken by activity?

How will we continue to monitor the assumption ?

Determine if efforts of external actors are progressing as planned

For existing external outputs and outcomes, determine the extent to which they are being achieved.
Complete the external actor matrix with as much information about these actors as you can.
Add to the TOC diagram and complementary documentation, any additional actors that that are essential to pathway achievement
What additional information should be gathered in coming year to facilitate the next review?

Annual Review Process - Overview

Day 2-3 Map progress and critical analysis

- Determine which outputs and outcomes are trending in a positive direction
- Analyze reasons for change or no change

Start at the bottom of all pathways. Verify the extent to which outputs have been achieved. Don’t forget cross-purpose linkages

Agree on a system to mark level of achievement.

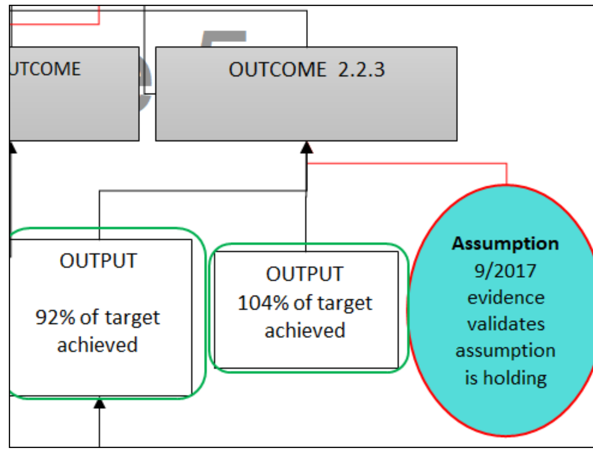
Once the level of output achievement is verified, use annual monitoring data (qualitative and/ or quantitative) to determine the level of achievement for outcome targets, including linkages from other purposes. Don’t forget cross-purpose linkages. Mark the extent of achievement directly on the TOC diagram with pencil, sticky note, or other means.

Use color to highlight where the project is on and off track.

Analyzing level of change: Case study

You determine that all outputs necessary to achieve outcome 2.2.3 are achieved (or trending in a positive direction) and the assumption holds.

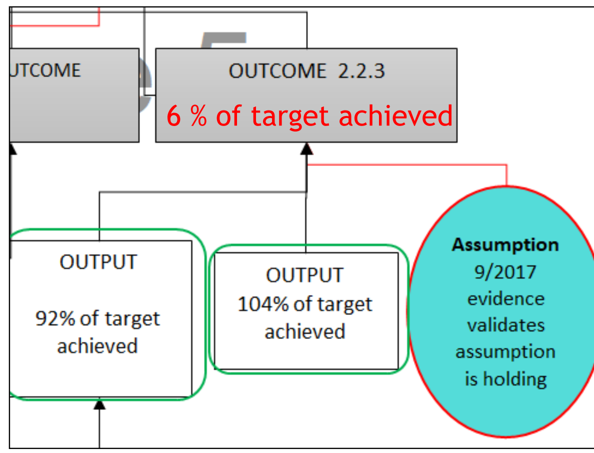
Based on your hypothesis, you should expect to start seeing results for outcome 2.2.3



Analyzing level of change: Case study

However, annual monitoring data shows little to no movement for Outcome 2.2.3 indicators.

What do we need to consider?



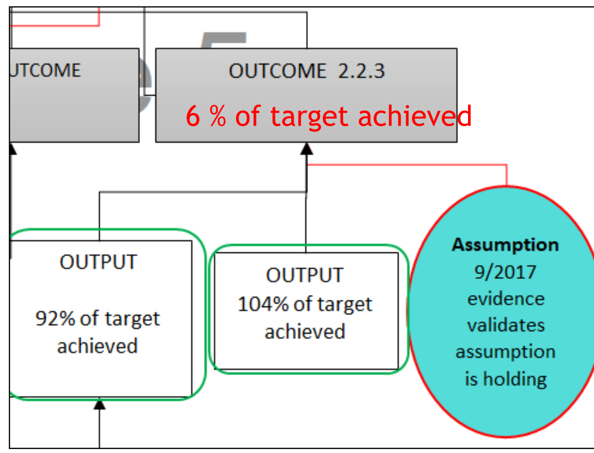
This assumes that data quality measures are in place and there is no reason to believe that data are flawed. That should be the first check of the ME team when unexpected results present themselves.

Analyzing level of change: Case study

Is it too soon to see change?

Are the output targets sufficient to stimulate change in outcome 2.2.3?

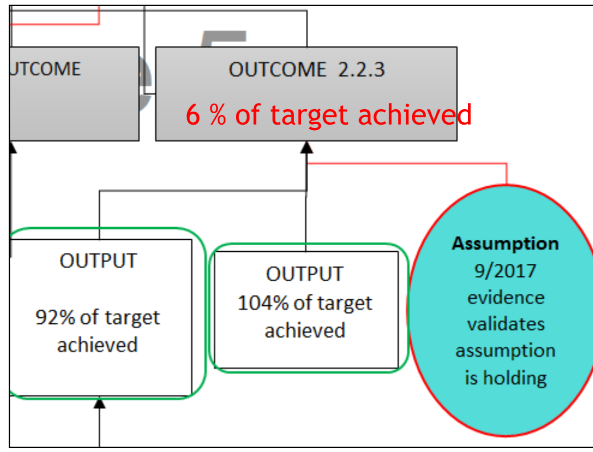
Do we have the right indicators to measure change for 2.2.3 ? For both outputs?



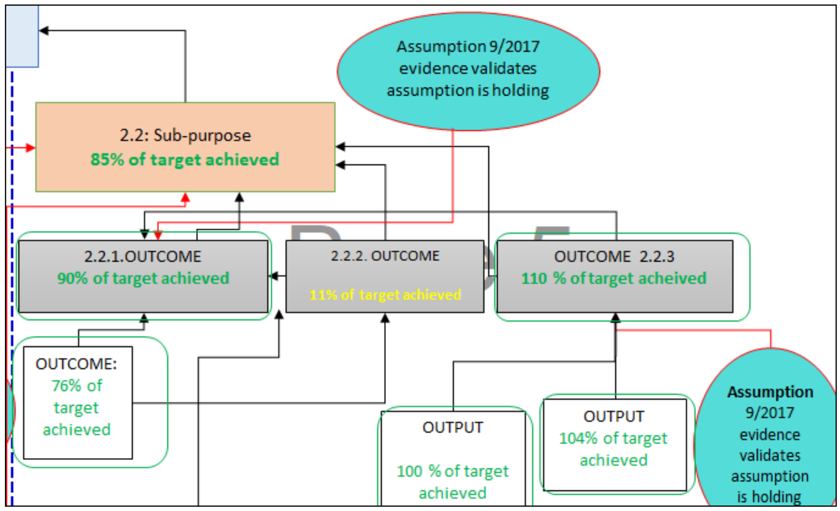
Analyzing level of change: Case study

Are there necessary preconditions we have not considered?

Are the internal assumptions holding? (e.g., assumptions that are within project control, such as participants are motivated to use new skills)



Analyzing level of change: Case study 2



Alternatively, what if annual monitoring data show substantial achievement for Sub-purpose 2.2, despite some preconditions not showing achievement (2.2.2).
What do we need to consider?

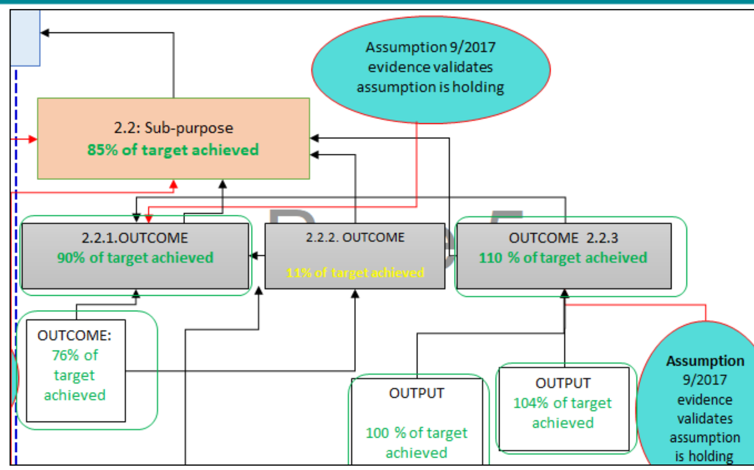
Analyzing level of change: Case study 2

Are all preconditions necessary?

Are the targets for 2.2 too low?

Is something external to the DFSA stimulating change?

What else?



Annual Review Process - Overview

Day 4-5 Critical analysis and adaptation

- Plan for the ARR and PREP
  - Explain inhibitors of change and promoters of documented changes
  - What are implications to: implementation plans, M&E system, budget?

Questions?

Thank you!

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