



Theory of change as a tool for managing and evaluating multi-stakeholder projects

- Ecosystem services projects are *multi-stakeholder* and *embedded in coupled social-ecological systems* - hence requiring *participatory management*
- **Theory of change** is a useful tool not only for monitoring and assessment but also for *structuring* stakeholder communication and decision making
- Effective use of theory of change requires *reflexivity* and *flexibility*: two core elements of organisational learning

Problematising impact assessment

- Theory of change **encourages a structured approach to project evaluation** by creating a targeted project narrative and setting clear thresholds for implementation
- At the same time, they tend to prioritize the project logic ('metanarrative'), crowding out counter – narratives, endangering the project's participatory credentials



Pros:

- Establishing conceptual clarity
- Making implicit assumptions explicit
- Identifying short and long term objectives for different stakeholders
- Enabling more meaningful communication and evaluations

Cons:

- Limiting adaptability
- Oversimplifying social reality
- Underestimating external circumstances
- Overlooking externalities and spill-overs
- Endangering sustainability prospects
- Time and resource consuming

What is a Theory of Change?

An explanation of how a group of stakeholders expects to reach a commonly understood long-term goal

Why use it?

- A useful tool for strategic planning, monitoring and assessment
- In multi-stakeholder projects: a tool for structured communication throughout the project
- Fosters learning within and across stakeholder groups (i.e. local community members, development practitioners and academia)

Figure 2. Theory of change in use: pros and cons.

Case study experience: Huamantanga

- Applied retrospectively, theory of change allows us to reconstruct the stakeholders' perspectives on the project's purpose and objectives; enabling descriptive assessment
- The research revealed substantial discrepancies between the perspectives of different stakeholders regarding Mountain-EVO's *purpose* and *goal*
- We find *knowledge creation* to be recognised as a common goal by all three stakeholder groups
- Considering the nature of Mountain-EVO as a *pilot research project* (not purely development project) we recommend the following:
 1. Recognising *process* as *impact* – awareness, understanding, and experimentation are all stages of citizen participation in research
 2. Shifting from Linear Outcomes Logic (OLM) to Dynamic Models – allows for flexibility and adaptation that are the pillars of participatory management

Reference: Cieslik, K., Dewolf, A., Karpouzoglou, T. (forthcoming). Theorizing Change - Mapping Stakeholders' Perspectives on the Ecosystem Services Project in Huamantanga, Peru.

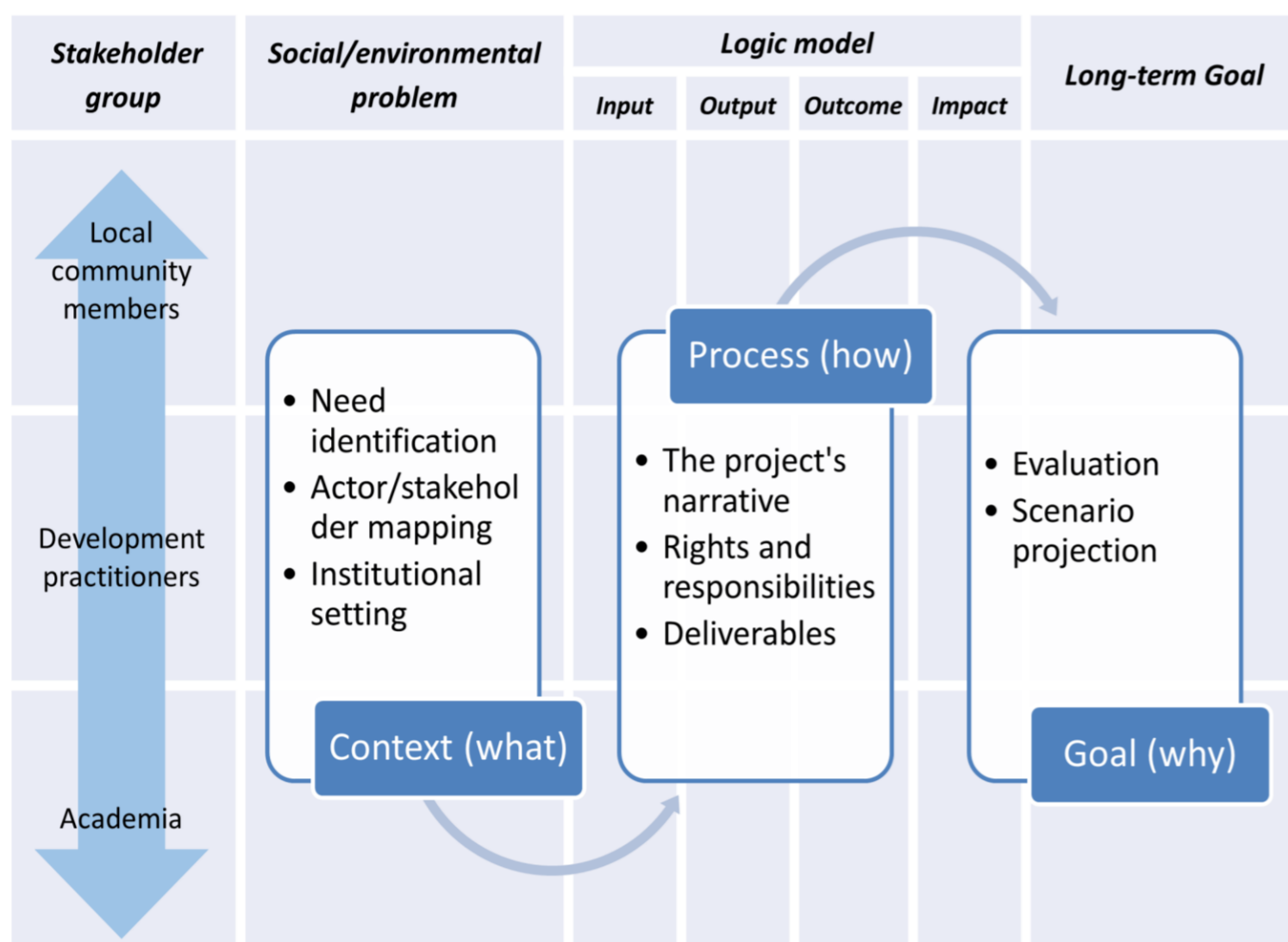


Figure 1. Theories of change: dynamic and stakeholder specific