

LESSON PLAN 1

BUILD YOUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Module 5: Social Entrepreneurship Strategies & Management

Making the logic of your initiative visible: from what you do to the change you want to see

Activity Focus and Goals:

- turn an idea or a running initiative into a clear chain of cause and effect
- distinguish activities, outputs, outcomes and impact
- make hidden assumptions visible and decide which one to test first
- create one simple story of the initiative to share with partners, funders and participants
- keep strategy connected to the real needs of the women and communities served

Materials Needed:

- Theory of Change Worksheet (below)
- notes from Slides 9–10 (Theory of Change; Theory of Change in 6 Boxes)
- sticky notes and a large sheet of paper (optional)
- pen and paper or digital notes

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

- describe the long-term change their initiative wants to contribute to
- distinguish outputs (what we deliver) from outcomes (what changes for people)
- build a 6-box theory of change for their own initiative
- express it as one “If... then... so that...” sentence
- identify their riskiest assumption and one low-cost way to test it

Structure and timing of the activity: In groups (3 – 5 people) or individually:

Step 1 (10 min): Start from the end

Write the impact you want to see in 5 years in one sentence. It should be about people or the community, not about your organisation.
 Prompt: “If my initiative succeeds, what will be different for the people I work with?”

Step 2 (15 min): Work backwards

Fill in the worksheet from right to left:

- **Outcomes:** 2–3 changes for people that lead to the impact
- **Outputs:** what you deliver and can count (sessions, participants, materials)
- **Activities:** what you do regularly
- **Problem and target group:** the root cause and who exactly is affected

Step 3 (10 min): Check the chain

Read the chain aloud as one sentence: “If we do [activities], we deliver [outputs], so that [outcomes] change, contributing to [impact].”
 In pairs, the partner asks “Why would this lead to that?” at every step. Mark the weakest link.

Step 4 (10 min): Name your riskiest assumption

Choose the link most likely to break and plan one low-cost test within a month, for example 10 conversations (Slide 12), a short survey (Slide 11) or a 2-week pilot (Slide 18).

(Self) assessment:

- ✓ Is my impact one sentence about people, not about my organisation?
- ✓ Do my outcomes describe a change for people, not an activity?
- ✓ Could someone else follow my chain from activity to impact without my explanation?
- ✓ Have I named my riskiest assumption and one way to test it?

Resources and useful materials:

- Slides 9–10 of the module (Theory of Change; Theory of Change in 6 Boxes)
- Slides 11, 12 and 18 for testing assumptions (€0 market research, interview script, 2-week test)
- DUG Freiburg case study (Slide 8): four activities serving one outcome
- Nesta DIY Toolkit, Theory of Change template: diytoolkit.org

Notes, comments, recommendations for users (trainers/ learners):

- A theory of change is a living draft, not a contract. Revisit it every few months as you learn.
- Trauma-informed tip: participants choose which initiative to work on and how much personal context to share. Describe gaps as “what we still need to learn”, never as weaknesses.
- Self-learners: complete the worksheet alone, then explain your chain to a friend or mentor in under two minutes.
- Keep it to one page. The same worksheet can be reused in funding applications and partner meetings.

WORKSHEET

THEORY OF CHANGE

Box	Guiding question	My answer
Problem	What root cause will I address, not only the symptom?	
Target group	Who exactly should experience the change?	
Activities	What will I do, regularly?	
Outputs	What will I deliver that I can count?	
Outcomes	What will change for people (skills, confidence, income, connections)?	
Impact	What long-term change in the community do I contribute to?	
My chain in one sentence	If we ... then ... so that ...	
Riskiest assumption	Which link could break? How will I test it within one month?	