

'Pasos' beneficiaries
at their organic agro-
project in Bolivia.



HANDBOOK 1

MODULE 6

Tools for Effective Project Planning in Community Development

Linking goals and interventions to measurable outputs – Theory of Change

Having identified what your desired objectives are in **Module 3** and what your project activities will look like in **Module 5**, it's now time to explore how you will implement your chosen activities to achieve your goals. In this module, we will introduce the 'Theory of Change' (or ToC), a method for planning your implementation strategies, identifying the key participants and developing methods of evaluation.

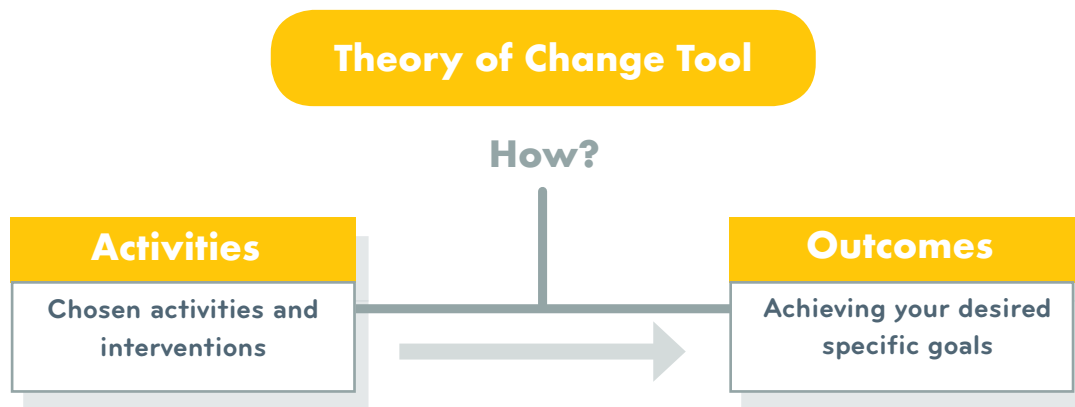


Download Resources

As you complete this module, refer to: **'Resource 15 – Theory of Change Framework'** which can be found as a download alongside this module on our website. Use this resource as a template when you are completing your own Theory of Change analysis.

How will your activities achieve your outcomes?

In the previous module, we explored how to transform your specific goals into actionable activities. In this module, we will use the Theory of Change tool to understand how your actionable activities can be used strategically to best achieve your desired outcomes.



The ToC-tool visually represents the change process of your project

- It highlights the way your organisation believes specific activities will have an impact, and why the chosen activities will result in a desired change.
- It shows how a group of early and intermediate actions will start the process of reaching long-term goals.
- It focuses on the gap between what a program does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to the desired goals being achieved, transforming your project into a series of actionable tasks.
- It's a reverse engineering tool: It identifies a chronological series of activities and interventions by back-tracking from the long-term change your organisation seeks to achieve

What does the theory of change achieve?

The Theory of Change creates a series of '**outcome pathways**', in which one activity leads to one small change, and then another change, and then another, ultimately leading to the achievement of the desired long-term change.

The Theory of Change helps to create a step-by-step series of outcomes that will each individually move you closer towards achieving your long-term change.

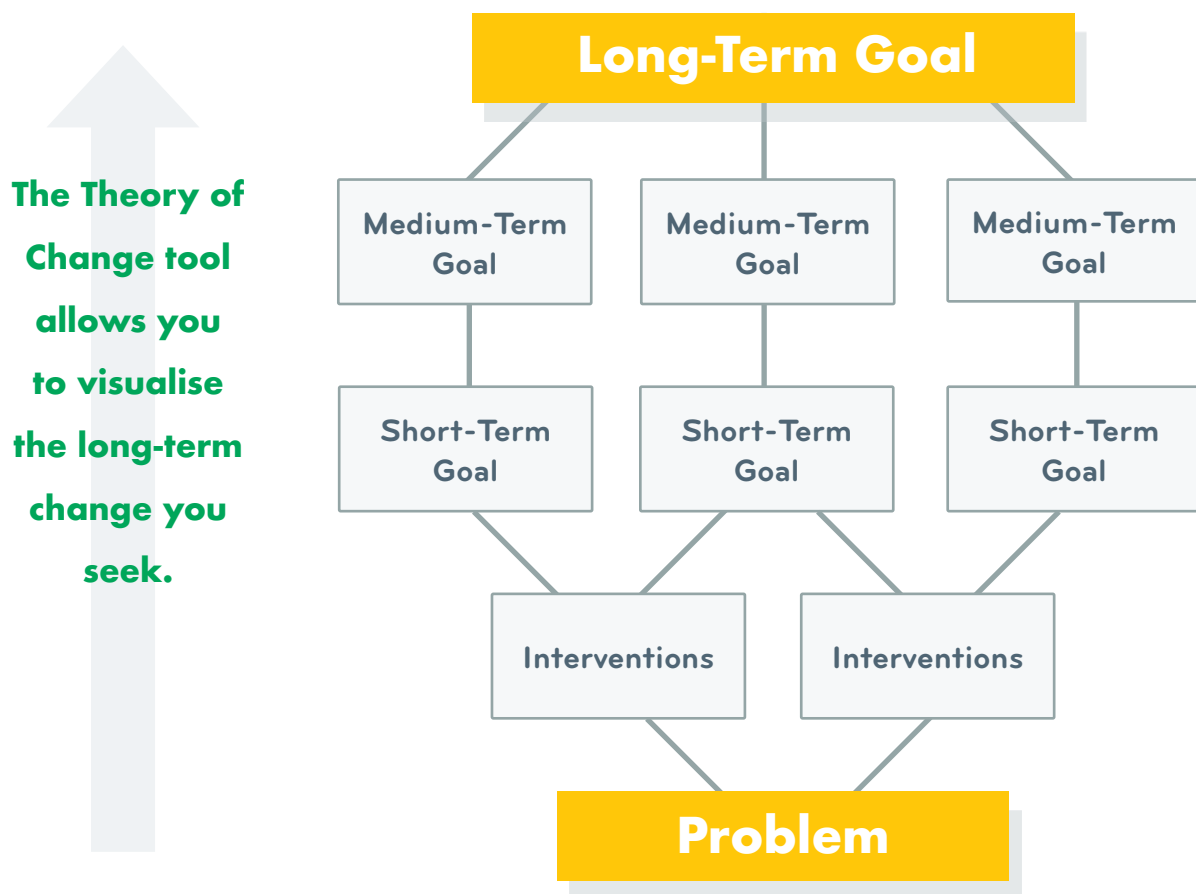
- It links specific activities to concrete outcomes.
- It does this by breaking your project into a series of manageable, chronological steps.
- It allows you to look at your interventions visually, translating your thinking into a diagram that provides an overview of the activities you need to implement.
- After completing your Theory of Change, you will be able to see a series of clearly defined and practically achievable steps needed to reach your goal.

When to use the Theory of Change tool?

Before starting to work with a Theory of Change, you should have gone through a series of steps of project planning. Make sure you have the following in place:

A checklist before undertaking your Theory of Change analysis:

- ☒ You have established the context of your work and are aware of the specific social, political and environmental conditions. **If not, see Module 2 Situational Analysis for more details.**
- ☒ You have set SMART goals for your project or activity. **If not, see Module 3 Realistic Goal Setting for more details.**
- ☒ You have identified other actors who are able to influence change. **If not, see Module 4 Stakeholder Analysis for more details.**
- ☒ You have an idea of the types of interventions at your disposal to help you achieve your goal. **If not, see Module 5 Choosing an Appropriate Intervention for more details.**



Steps to developing your Theory of Change



Helpful Hint

It is essential to think 'Big Picture' when you are using the Theory of Change tool. Try to look beyond the specific problem you are trying to solve in your community. This means that your organisation's project may not be central to the overall problem in your Theory of Change framework and you should not solely think about your own activities.

You need to think about the broader problem (e.g. gender inequality, economic inequality or poor access to education) and how your project might function as a small step towards achieving a solution to this big problem. Think about where your interventions fit into the wider picture. Don't be afraid to think critically and try to be objective.



First, you need to identify the long-term change you are seeking.

- What is the problem you have identified in your community?
- Who are the people you are trying to help?
- What impact do you want to have on their lives?

This should be a single statement that represents the specific, long-term change that you believe your project can help achieve. Remember, this is NOT the specific goal of your project. You should have an idea of your long-term change from **module 2**.

Example for a long-term change:

Reducing the number of women dying during childbirth in Cuenca, Ecuador.

Example of what would NOT be a long-term change: Improving women's understanding of the risks of unassisted childbirth at home through education workshops in vulnerable neighbourhoods of Cuenca.

This is a specific project goal; a great project that would certainly help reduce maternal mortality, but it is not the ultimate long-term goal. It is one step towards achieving the long-term change.



Next, you need to establish the pre-conditions necessary so that this long-term change can occur.

- What individual actions are required to achieve the long-term change you identified in step 1?
- The key here is reverse-engineering! Start by mapping the route backwards from your long-term goal and outline the processes or sequence of events that you anticipate will lead to long-term change.
- Start with over-arching long-term goals, then work through the intermediate or medium-term changes and then, finally, detail the immediate, short-term activities you need to put in place.



Example: Ecuadorian Maternal Health project

Long-term change:

Reducing the number of women dying during childbirth in Cuenca, Ecuador.

Medium-Term pre-conditions:

- Improving women's understanding of the risks of unassisted childbirth
- Ensuring that women get to hospital quickly if an emergency occurs during childbirth
- Improving the quality of maternal healthcare available at the local hospital
- Ensuring that the local hospital has the specific tools required to help prevent a mother's death during childbirth

Short-Term pre-conditions:

- Lobby for funding from local government to have a permanent obstetrician at the local hospital
- Create a campaign to promote blood donations so that blood is available for women who are at the local hospital during an emergency
- Create an ambulance service to transport women suffering an emergency during childbirth, or, if one already exists, provide specific training to paramedics to help them manage this condition
- Provide workshops for local women of childbearing age to promote safe childbirth practices



Now that you have a series of 'changes', you should be able to see the 'outcome pathways'

These are the causal linkages between the various 'changes' and are used to map the identified changes and show each outcome in both a logical relationship to all the others, as well as in a chronological flow.



Example: Ecuadorian Maternal Health project

The short-term pre-condition related to the 'lack of emergency transport' will be broken down into an outcome pathway that represents a series of individual goals that will help solve this component of the long-term problem. The key is to work backwards from the long-term goal, reverse engineering the outcome pathway.

1. **Long-term Change** = Preventing women from dying during childbirth
2. For this to occur, you have to ensure that there are ways for women to be transported to hospital quickly if an emergency occurs during childbirth.
3. A) Ensuring that women can be transported to hospital quickly means that a 24/7 ambulance service must be available in the community.
B) A second element to ensuring women can be transported to hospital quickly is making sure that the community actually utilises this ambulance resource.

This leads to your outcome pathway splitting into two parts!

4. A) To make an ambulance available 24/7 in the community you will need to obtain an ambulance, train paramedics and build an ambulance station.
B) i) To ensure the community utilises your ambulance you will need to educate them as to why an ambulance is important, particularly husbands who are the primary decision makers.
B) ii) However, a second element to ensuring the community utilises your ambulance is to ensure it is affordable.

This leads to your outcome pathway splitting into two parts again!

See the next page for a graphical presentation of the example given here where you will find A), B), B) i) and B) ii) clearly marked in reference.



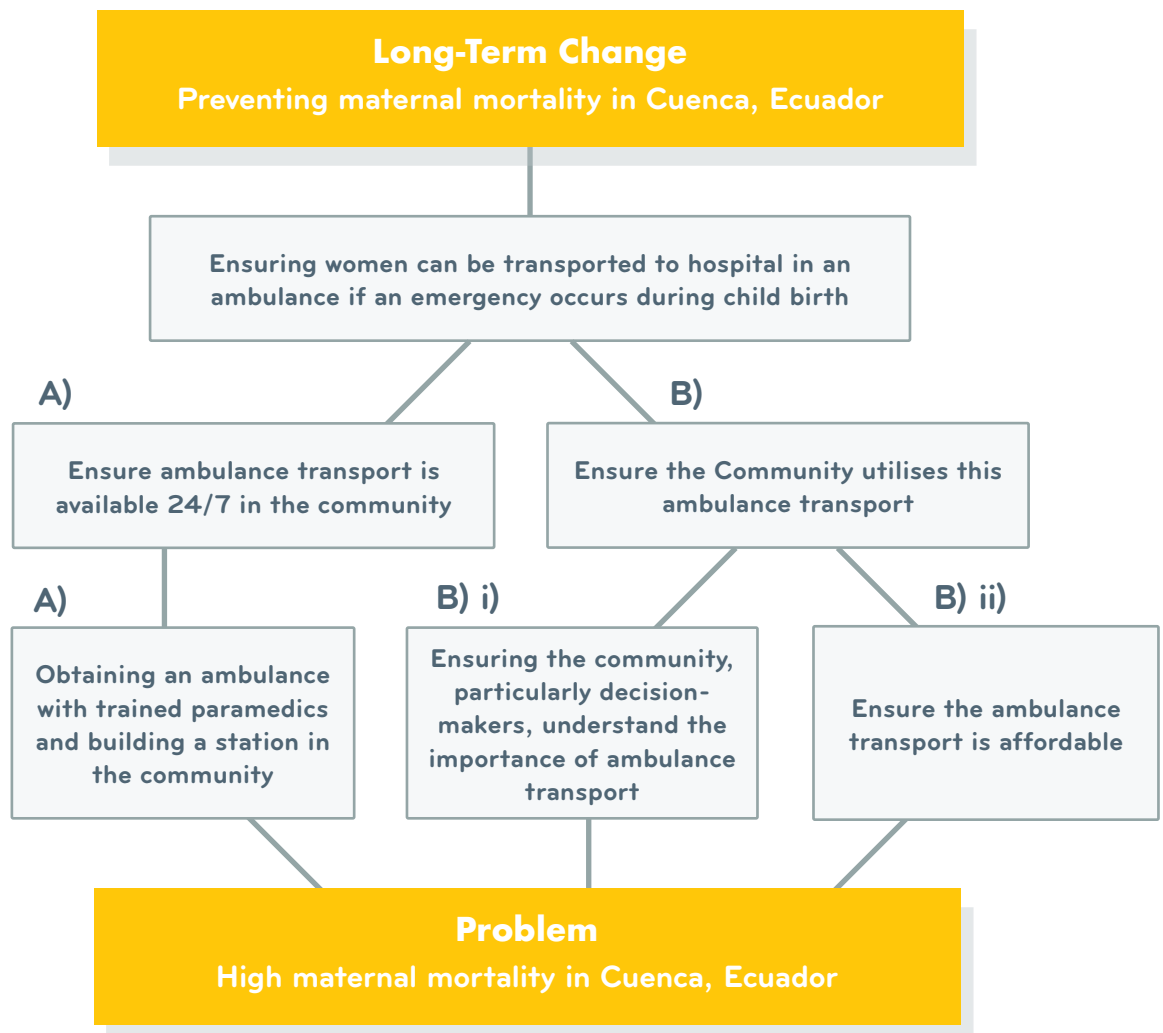
Example: Ecuadorian Maternal Health project

Long-term Goal

Medium-term Goals

Short-term Goals

Immediate Problem



Now this outcome pathway is completed. If you read from the bottom up, you will be able to see clearly the series of small steps required in this pathway. These will, one by one, help to ensure that women can get to hospital quickly if an emergency occurs during childbirth.

Remember, this is just one outcome pathway related to only one of the medium-term pre-conditions that were identified earlier. If you were to complete this process for all the medium-term pre-conditions - which is advisable - you will end up with a very large, and thorough, series of small, achievable goals



Now that you have a series of specific goals, it's time to turn them into intervention strategies.

Because you have now turned your complex, long-term change into a series of smaller, more easily achievable goals, the process of developing specific, manageable interventions as part of a broader strategy should be much easier.



Example: Ecuadorian Maternal Health project

Let's look at Pathway A) first:

- To provide a 24/7 ambulance within the community you will need to build an ambulance station and train paramedics. Because your organisation has neither builders or paramedic in the team, you will need to contract these functions out. To afford this, you will need to fundraise.
- You will also need to obtain a registered ambulance. The best way to do this would be to lobby the local government to give your community a reserve ambulance that is currently sitting idle in the nearest city, over 100kms away.

Now let's look at pathway B) i):

- To educate the community as to why ambulances are important, you could provide community workshops, specifically focussed at decision-makers (often husbands and mother-in-laws).
- In order to provide an effective workshop, you will need to develop a curriculum to ensure that they run smoothly and thoroughly explain why ambulance transport is so important.

Finally, let's look at Pathway B) ii):

- To ensure ambulance are affordable for everyone, you will need to provide subsidies for ambulance transport specifically for women suffering an emergency during childbirth.
- In order to provide these subsidies, you will need to fundraise. It might be best to target the poorest members of the community in the initial stages of your project whilst you have only limited funds.

See the next page for a graphical presentation of the example given here where you will find A), B), B) i) and B) ii) clearly marked in reference.



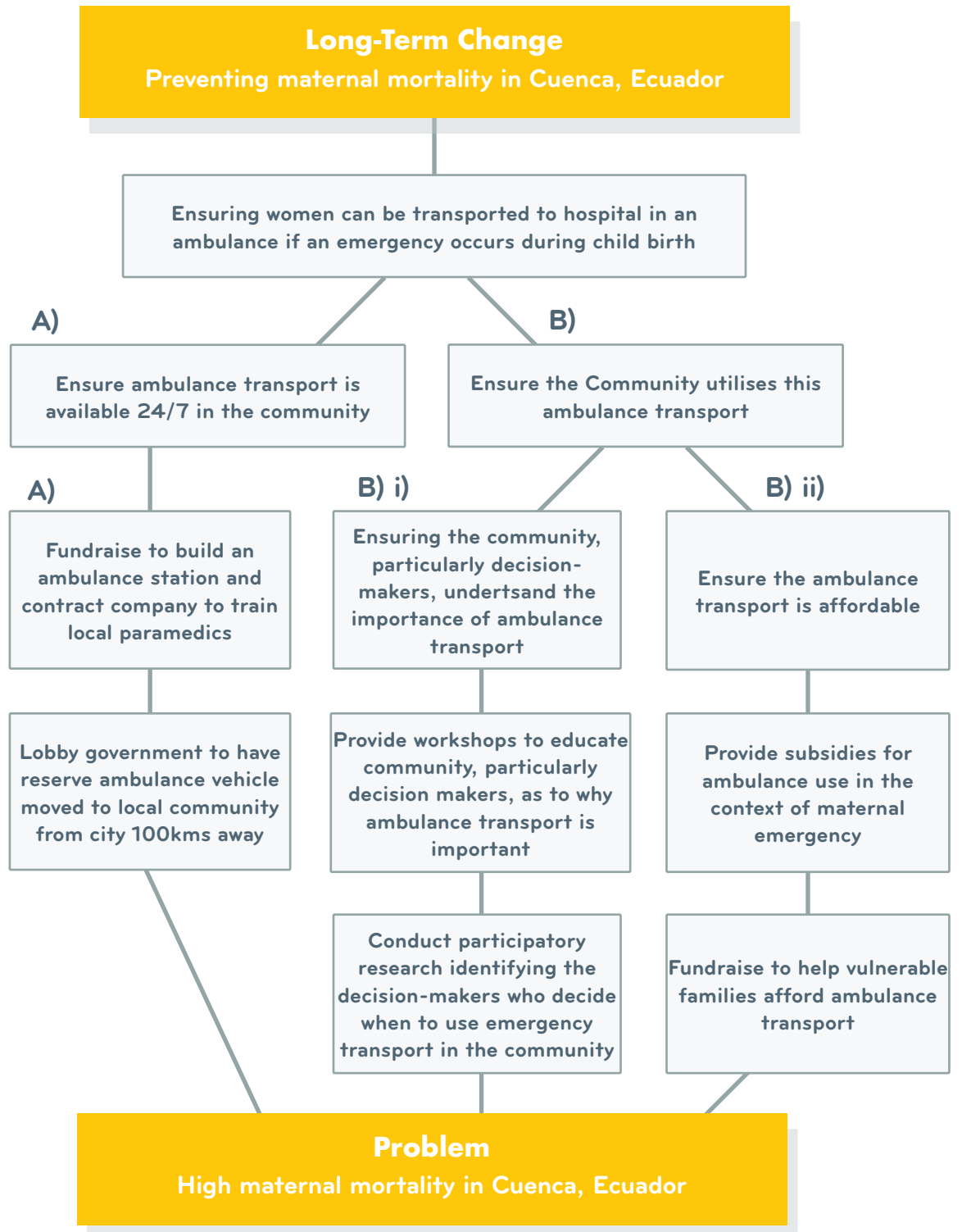
Example: Ecuadorian Maternal Health project

Long-term Goal

Medium-term Goals

Short-term Goals

Immediate Problem



Now, you can see a series of clear interventions that will help you achieve your short-term goals which, in turn, will lead to your desired medium and long-term changes.



Finally, you now need to develop indicators to assess the performance of your interventions

Indicators do not need to be exact at this stage. At this stage, it is ok to identify ideas for indicators and rough targets. We will be exploring Monitoring and Evaluation strategies in more detail, including identifying specific indicators, in our next module, **Module 7**.

- Each outcome should have its own specific set of indicators.
- Being able to highlight immediate results and outcomes will enable you to show others how your work is making an impact.



Example: Ecuadorian Maternal Health project

Possible indicators might include:

- An indicator to assess the availability of ambulance transport would be that at least 1 ambulance is available in the community 24/7.
- An indicator for the efficacy of your education program might be ensuring that 100% of decision-makers are aware of the ambulance service and understand why it is important
- An indicator for the subsidy program might be to ensure that ambulances transport is subsidised so that emergency transport costs no more than 50% of the weekly income of each family they attend.

Now you should have a series of small, achievable projects arranged in chronological order by intervention type. By looking from the bottom up, you should now be able to clearly see the short-term goals that need to be completed in order to achieve the long-term goal. As you follow up your theory of change one at a time, you should be on a path to achieving your organisations long-term goal.



Helpful Hint

If your organisation intends to run more than one activity, which we anticipate most would, try to choose short-term interventions that are either from the same outcome pathway or are directly complimentary to one another. This way, you'll be able to focus your activities upon one element of the over-arching problem, likely achieving more noticeable change towards your long-term goal.

Three final things to consider when completing your ToC analysis

- 1) A ToC is the ideal place to facilitate discussion and critical thinking around both project implementation and evaluation – get your team together and start visualising (use big paper and coloured markers to help the mapping process).
- 2) Don't be shy, ask other organisations or browse the internet for ideas on what to include and how.
- 3) Some donors may want to see a specific representation of your ToC, be sure to check their official resources before finalising your approach.

Finishing up

Now that you have identified your interventions and how they will work together to lead to your long-term change, it's time to develop a thorough monitoring and evaluation strategy to make sure your stay on track. We'll be creating this in **Module 7**.



Helpful Hint

Don't forget to consider your inbuilt assumptions and how these may prevent you from thinking outside the box. Evaluate your groups' key assumptions about how change may occur. This will enable you to develop more appropriate strategies.

This resource was produced by Grassroots Collective.

This is Module 6 of our 9-part handbook for project planning. Find the full handbook at: www.thegrassrootscollective.org/grassroots-hub

Have a question about project planning for community development or want to learn about how we can support your organisation on its mission? Contact us at: info@thegrassrootscollective.org

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