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STEP 8: DEVELOP THEORIES OF CHANGE

At least four steps are involved in developing a theory of change:

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Step 8: Develop theories of change

Once you have identified several promising early actions, it is time to operationalize them and test the logic behind those ideas using theories of change. A theory of change (ToC) is a comprehensive illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It means describing step-by-step how and why the desired outcome (in our case reduced humanitarian impact) will be attained by implementing the selected early actions. It will help you to visualize, and eventually test whether your early actions are likely to reduce the prioritized impact. Your ToC should also encompass prepositioning and readiness activities that make the early actions possible upon activation. Depending on the anticipatory action approach, this may include readiness measures such as training volunteers, establish or support coordination mechanisms with government actors, or sustain community-based implementation structures. See [chapter 4](#) for more on readiness and prepositioning,

A ToC is often created as a series of “if... then...” statements and then put into a visual representation, like a flowchart (see example below). It helps to think of a ToC as a map on which you mark the spot where you want to go: the desired result or problem solution. Then you draw a route on the map that you think is best to get you from A to B. This is a description of the expected chain of results, from action to solution. Along this route, you will make assumptions. For example, you may have to assume that a particular bridge is passable or that you can cover a certain distance per day. You also note down landmarks you expect to see on your way (intermediate results or milestones). It is important to use all available evidence when building a theory of change, so that every “if... then...” relationship is built on information and evidence rather than conjecture.

A ToC can also be used as a basis for a log frame and monitoring and evaluation framework. When developing an s/EAP, your team should therefore develop a detailed ToC for each early action being considered for inclusion in the protocol. For other anticipatory action approaches, theories of change can similarly help clarify the logic of early actions and support planning, monitoring, and learning. The choice of how many ToCs to develop at this stage will depend upon your team’s needs and your process for narrowing and testing your early actions. At the end of this process, your team should have a sound understanding of how and why each action will contribute to your desired results. ToCs for each early action you include in your protocol need to be included in the EAP submitted to the IFRC-DREF.

The ToC process is a crucial step in your identification of actions, make sure to follow this guidance on steps to take.

At least four steps are involved in developing a theory of change:

Step 1

- Start from a specific goal, meaning the positive change the anticipatory action initiative seeks to induce to address a problem that has been identified.

Example: “Reduce the incidence of diarrheal diseases in vulnerable communities when there is flooding in Exemlandia”.

Step 2

- Map out the process of change, working backwards from the specific goal. Ask: “What is required to bring about this change?” It is useful to do this as a team and consulting relevant and knowledgeable stakeholders.

Tip: Note down process steps on post-it notes and put them on a flip chart (see example below). Visualizing a ToC helps team members to understand it more easily and question its logic.

Example: Visual representation of a ToC for Exemlandia (see below).

Step 3

- Write a narrative summary expressed as a sequence of logically linked events (“if... then...” statements) and support them with available evidence.

Example 1: “If all households in flood-affected communities have 30-days’ worth of water purification tablets and receive information how to use them, then they will purify their drinking water. If they purify all their drinking water, the incidence of diarrheal diseases will decrease.”

Example 2: “The ability to deliver water purification tablets is dependent on the assumption that the national society has procured and pre-positioned the necessary supplies and has them ready to be moved and distributed to the population immediately upon activation.”

Step 4

- Make implicit assumptions about how changes happen explicit and reference supporting evidence.

Tip: Note assumptions on post-it notes in a different color and add them in between the process steps.

Example: “The ability to deliver water purification tablets is dependent on the assumption that the National Society has procured and pre-positioned the necessary supplies and has them ready to be moved and distributed to the population immediately upon

activation.”

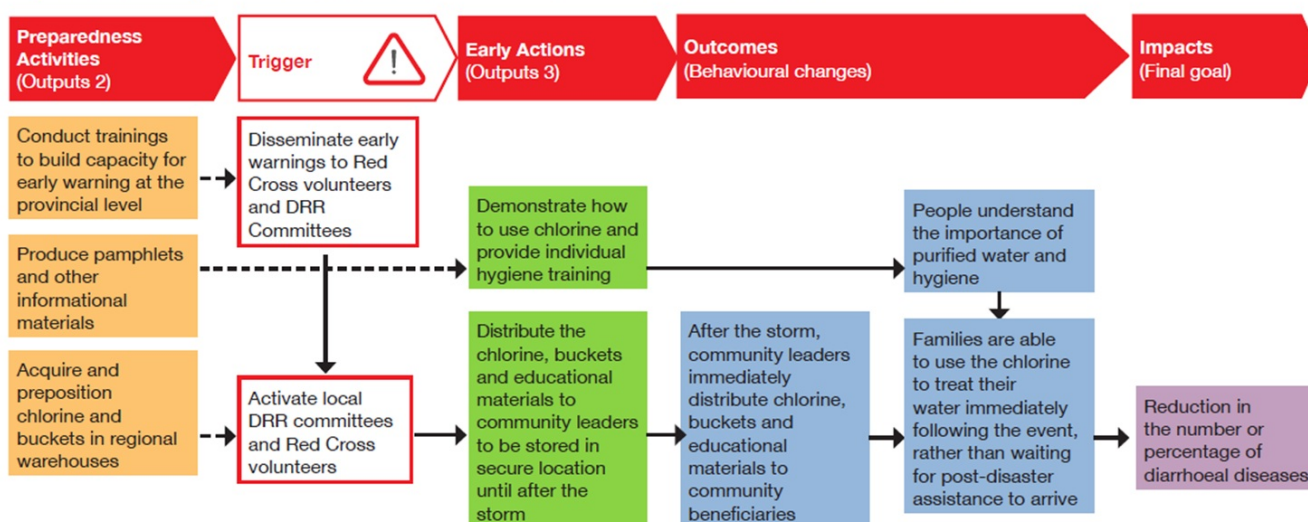
In the previous example, many assumptions are made that would need to be confirmed by evidence. For example, it is assumed that households understand and appreciate the information they have received about the importance of water purification or that they already have the knowledge and awareness to use purification tablets. But what if pre-existing knowledge about water purification is low?

What if written information materials are given to a household whose members cannot read? What if there are community members who speak a different language? What if there are reservations against using blue pills or tablets based on previous bad experiences or rumors? What if households purify their drinking water but they do not purify the water used for washing food items? What if safe hygiene practices are relatively unknown and household members do not wash their hands with soap and water before preparing food and before eating?

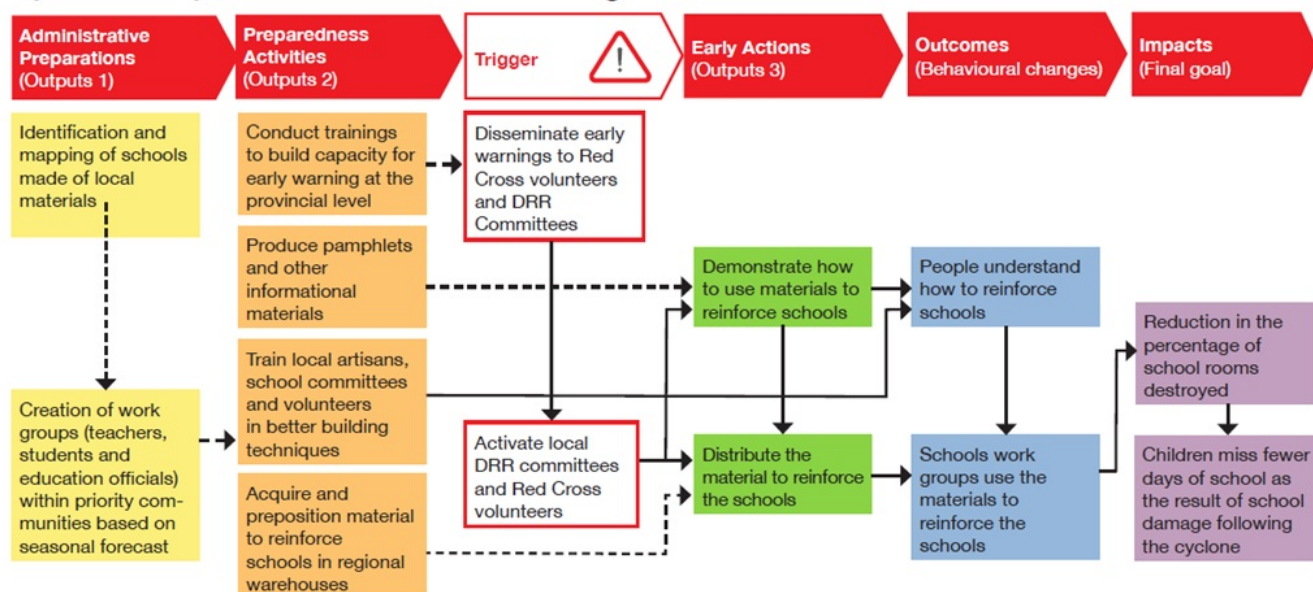
All assumptions, as trivial as they may seem, should be made explicit and checked against evidence to see whether they are reasonable or need to be addressed as part of the early action protocol or anticipatory action initiative.

For more detailed guidance on how to develop a ToC, see the ToC presentation in the [toolbox](#).

Cyclone Early action Protocol: Distribution of Chlorine and Buckets



Cyclone Early action Protocol: Reinforcing Schools



Cyclone Early action Protocol: Reinforcing Houses

