

## ANNEX B – THEORY OF CHANGE

With Horizon Europe the EC aims to create significant societal and environmental impact. The research conducted in this call for proposals should therefore have relevance and potential for impact beyond the academic world, such as in societal, technical, economical or cultural realms. This is why consortia should consider how relevant stakeholders can be involved in, and/or benefit from, the design and realisation of the proposed research project.

To further enhance the potential for impact of the proposed research, the application should state how approaches for achieving impact are integrated in the research design and conducted by the consortium in engagement with end users, such as practitioners, policymakers, and industry. To this end, applicants are asked to include a plan that sets out the potential for impact of the proposed research.

One way to make such a plan is to use a Theory of Change. This is a logical framework that can be used as a tool to write a good research proposal that is aimed at societal impact. Below you can find a summary, for more information you can visit a workshop the Dutch Research Council (NWO) has developed for their applicants, but can be freely used by anyone: <https://impact.nwo.nl/en/working-with-an-impact-plan>

A **Theory of Change** (see box 1 for a schematic overview) describes how the research process can contribute to societal/economic/environmental change, taking into account the context, actors involved and describing the sequence of logically-linked consequential relations.

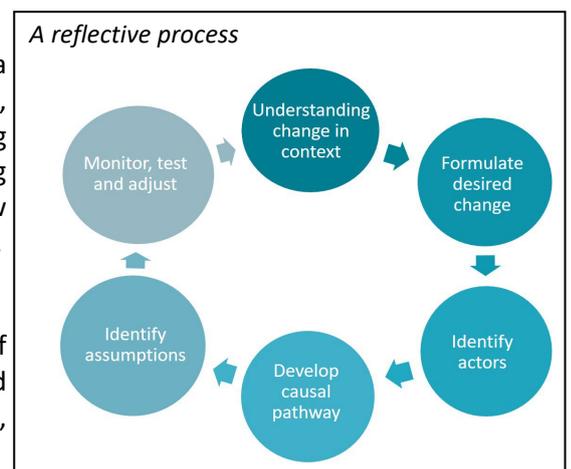
There are two parts:

The **Problem Analysis** where a joint effort with research partners as well as stakeholders allows for making explicit which (and whose) problem is being tackled and how the desired change is perceived to happen through research efforts. You start by clearly defining the societal problem and the desired impact. Next the causes are discussed and the knowledge gaps identified. This part should form a logical chain to the project, hypotheses, methodology and workplan.

The **Impact Pathway** is the visualisation of the change process following from research execution as described in the Theory of Change. It makes explicit how the research activities will lead to results (**output**) and how exchange of knowledge and the uptake of research output will contribute to desired *changes in behaviour*, relationships, actions and activities of partners and stakeholders (**outcome**) that are considered essential to achieving the desired impact.

Any projections on expected change will of course be based on a myriad of **assumptions**, which can differ from person to person, between organizations or groups and even over time. Making assumptions explicit helps to create a shared vision and documenting these assumptions allows for reflection on whether and how expected pathways to impact remain adequate or need adjustment.

**A Theory of Change is not fixed**, but rather reflected on and, if needed, updated continuously throughout the research process and beyond. For this reason, it is also used as part of the monitoring, evaluation and learning trajectory



An important element are **productive interactions**: Exchanges between researchers and stakeholders in which knowledge is produced and valued that is both scientifically robust and socially relevant. No change can be made without exchanging information AND people acting on that information. Interactions can be direct/personal, indirect or financial. The quantity as well as quality of the productive interactions forms an indicator for the potential for societal impact. Examples of productive interactions are:

- **Co-design**: formulation of research questions and approaches jointly with potential end-users;

- **Co-creation:** joint execution of research projects with stakeholders and interactive dialogue on research results.

A **Strategic Activity Planning** spells out how the proposed productive interactions contribute to achieving outcomes. Outputs do not automatically lead to outcomes, thus strategies are needed of the research consortium to plan and monitor how their efforts will enhance the potential for outcomes. This planning should include specific activities for:

*Stakeholder engagement:* Who are the relevant stakeholders to engage with according to context analysis, how are the productive interactions organised and when?;

*Communication strategy:* How are engagement dialogues organised and results exchanged and translated, and whose responsibility is it?;

*Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning:* How are results of activities monitored and evaluated, such that assumptions can be tested and activities adjusted accordingly and whose responsibility is it?;

*Capacity strengthening:* How are required capacities (of consortium partners and stakeholders) strengthened in order to achieve the outcomes, how is this organised and whose responsibility is it?

A *Risk assessment* entails a description of potential risks for the successful execution of your project and options for handling or mitigating these risks.

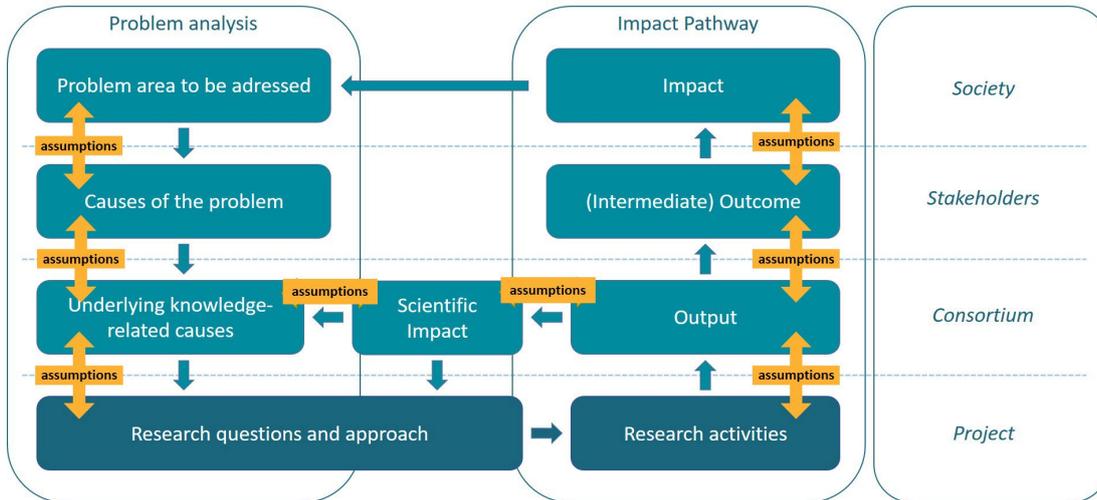
**Box 1: Defining Output, outcome and impact**

**Research outputs** relate to the direct and immediate insights obtained by a research project or programme.

**Research outcomes** relate to the changes in behaviour, relationships, actions, or activities of stakeholders as a result of sharing and uptake of research. This starts during the project but continues after the end of the project.

**Research impact** is defined as changes in economic, environmental and social conditions that a project or programme is aiming at. The actual impact is often long after the project ends.

**Theory of Change**



**Circles of influence**

