UNDERSTANDING â??THEORY OF CHANGE IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A REVIEW OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Description

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THIS PUBLICATION IS AN OUTPUT FROM A COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE ASIA FOUNDATION AND THE [LSE] JUSTICE AND SECURITY RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Summary

This is a review of the concepts and common debates within â??Theory of Changeâ?? (ToC) material, resulting from a search and detailed analysis of available donor, agency and expert guidance documents. The review was undertaken as part of a Justice and Security Research Program

(TAF) collaborative project, and focuses on the field of international development. The project will explore the use of Theories of Change (ToCs) in international development programming, with field research commencing in August 2012. While this document will specifically underpin the research of this collaboration, we also hope it will be of interest to a wider audience of those attempting to come to grips with ToC and its associated literature.

From the literature, we find that there is no consensus on how to define ToC, although it is commonly understood as an articulation of how and why a given intervention will lead to specific change. We identify four main purposes of ToC â?? strategic planning, description, monitoring and evaluation and learning â?? although these inevitably overlap. For this reason, we have adopted the term â??ToC approachesâ?? to identify the range of applications associated with this term. Additionally, we identify some confusion in the terminology associated with ToC. Of particular note is the lack of clarity surrounding the use of the terms â??assumptionâ?? and â??evidenceâ??. Finally, we have also drawn out information on what authors feel makes for ToC â??best practiceâ?? in terms of both content and process, alongside an exploration of the remaining gaps where more clarity is needed.

A number of â??key issuesâ?? are highlighted throughout this review. These points are an attempt to frame the literature reviewed analytically, as informed by the specific focus of the JSRP-TAF collaboration. These issues are varied and include the confusion surrounding ToC definitions and use, the need to â??sellâ?? a ToC to a funder, how one can know which â??levelâ?? a ToC should operate on, the relationship between ToC and evidence-based policy, and the potential for accuracy, honesty and transparency in the use of ToC approaches.

This paper does not aim to give definitive answers on ToC; indeed there are many remaining important issues that lie beyond the scope of this review. However, in highlighting a number of key issues surrounding current understandings of ToC approaches, this review hopes to pave the way for more constructive and critical discussion of both the concept and practical application of ToCs.

Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

1. Theory of Change

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