

Evaluation of complex social problems: A simplified framework for monitoring and evaluating anti-trafficking interventions

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Funders, policy-makers and programme leads for anti-trafficking interventions usually agree on one point; there is an urgent need to identify what works to prevent human trafficking.

To date, considerable funding has been invested in interventions that draw on anecdotal evidence, organisational best-guesses and good intentions. Those working in the field of ‘modern slavery’ recognise that there is still very limited evidence to support well-informed action. Furthermore, the unintended consequences, or ‘collateral damage’, of some anti-trafficking interventions have been documented.¹ The field is ripe for more rigorous intervention evaluation research, and methodological advancements to produce implementation-oriented evidence.²

This brief aims to provide a simple framework for intervention monitoring and process evaluation. We hope this framework can help guide data collection to inform, adapt and strengthen anti-trafficking interventions and evaluations.

HOW TO IMPROVE MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF ANTI- TRAFFICKING INTERVENTIONS

In this brief, we propose some low-cost, systematic practices that can improve intervention implementation, delivery and evaluation. We anticipate these approaches will contribute to a stronger, more applied evidence-base for anti-trafficking interventions, and advance future methods for intervention research and evaluation.

From a research perspective, our guidance for intervention development, implementation and evaluation of interventions to promote safer labour migration include the following key principles:

- **Define the intervention aim and outcomes.** The implementing and evaluating teams will benefit from having a joint understanding of exactly what the intervention is trying to achieve.^{3,4} For example, if the aim is to ‘reduce human trafficking’, the intervention developers and evaluators will need to work on developing a definition that they can measure or assess in the course of the implementation. It is important to keep this aim realistic and in line with the intervention’s available resources.
- **Detail the intervention’s rationale.** Working together, implementers, local stakeholders, community members, service users and the evaluation team should develop an explicit and coherent theory of the intervention (theory of change and logic models are some recognised ways of doing this – see Box 1).⁵ The intervention theory should specify the mechanisms through which the intervention is expected to achieve impact. Sometimes it is more efficient to develop a theory of change by working backwards and forwards starting from the anticipated impact on the main drivers (e.g. of exploitation, trafficking) to the selected activities.
- **Base the intervention design on evidence.** When collecting, analysing or reviewing the evidence, think through carefully how you are going to achieve impact and among whom. Define who is the target group for your intervention, i.e. who are the populations at-risk who could benefit from the activities you propose. Carefully consider and co-

1. Collateral damage: the impact of anti-trafficking measures on human rights around the world. Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), 2007.

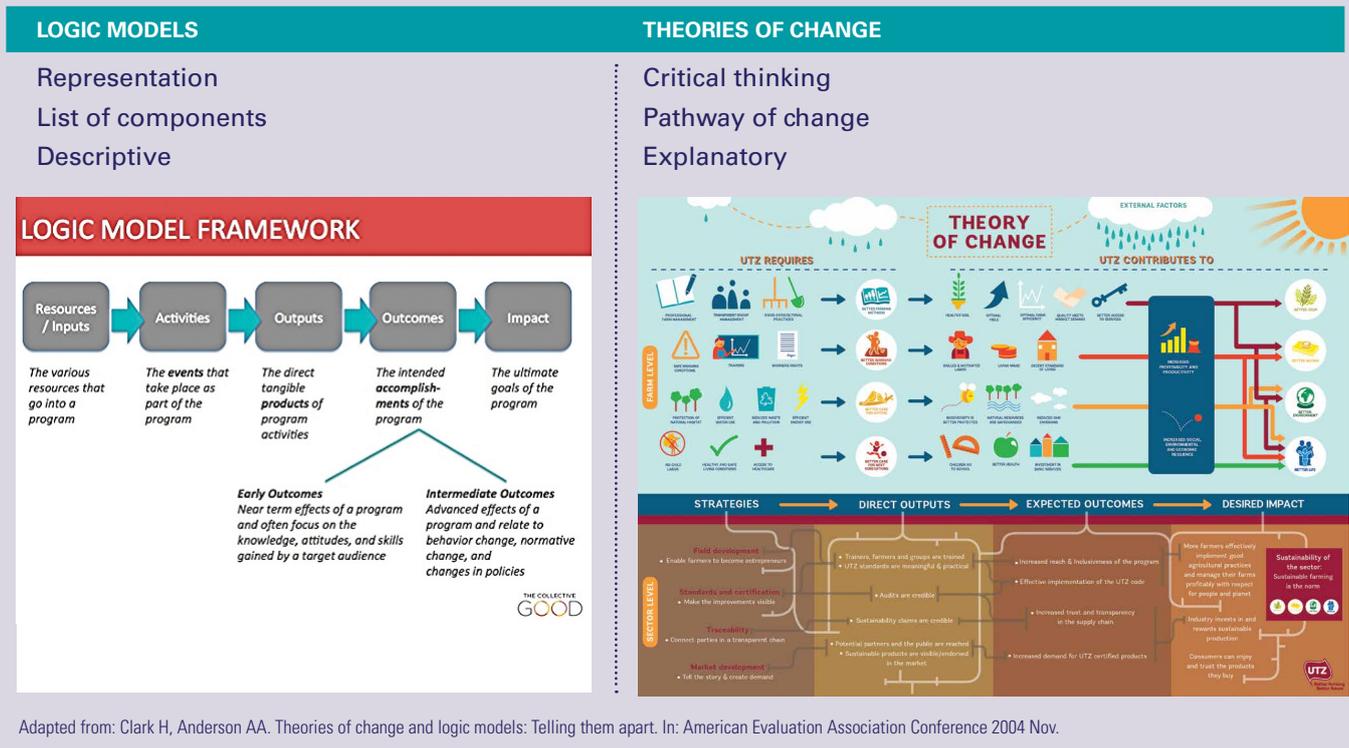
2. Davy D. Anti-Human Trafficking Interventions: How Do We Know if They Are Working? *American Journal of Evaluation*. 2016 Dec;37(4):486-504.

3. Zimmerman, C.; Michau, L.; Hossain, M.; Kiss, L.; Borland, R.; Watts, C.; Rigged or rigorous? Partnerships for research and evaluation of complex social problems: Lessons from the field of violence against women and girls. *J Public Health Policy* (2016) 37(Suppl 1):95-109; DOI: 10.1057/s41271-016-0006-3; PMID: 27761013.

4. Zimmerman C, McAlpine A, Kiss L. Safer labour migration and community-based prevention of exploitation: The state of the evidence for programming. London: Freedom Fund, 2015.

5. De Silva, MJ, Breuer E, Lee L, Asher L, Chowdhary N, Lund C and V Patel. Theory of Change: a theory-driven approach to enhance the Medical Research Council’s framework for complex interventions. *Trials*. 2014; 15:267. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1745-6215-15-267>.

BOX 1: Difference between logic models and theories of change



develop with key stakeholders, ways to recruit these people into your intervention’s activities and the best strategies for them to remain engaged.

- **Adapt to the context.** Note that in some places, people may be unwilling to disclose their plans, contacts, past experiences or current situations. It is crucial to understand the context and have the participation of local stakeholders to develop effective strategies for outreach, and recruitment of participants. It is also essential that you tailor the content of the intervention, your messages and proposed resources to the reality of your target groups.
- **Learn before implementation.** Formative research may seem like a difficult extra cost for small organisations or interventions with few resources. But this foundational work can make the difference between success and failure for an intervention. Participatory research and desk based review of the literature can answer some key questions at this stage, for example:
 - Does the available evidence support the intervention’s theory?
 - Who are the target groups (at-risk groups) for the intervention?
 - Are these people interested in the activities proposed by the intervention?
 - When is the best time, place and mode of delivery for the activities?
 - Are the content or messages meaningful for the target groups?
 - Are the proposed actions feasible for them?
 - How can proposed messages and actions be

adapted and tailored to achieve maximum impact among the target groups?

- What may be unintended outcomes of the intervention?
- How to prevent those from occurring?

Box 2 is an example of a monitoring framework to be adapted for regional and local interventions. It summarises key dimensions that a monitoring and evaluation system should assess. This framework proposes a limited range of indicators and methods and should not be considered an exhaustive list. The framework can be a first step to address the significant gaps in the evidence-base in the anti-trafficking field and work for a large number of organisations that do not have the resources, time or ability to conduct costly evaluations such as large cohort studies, ethnographies or randomised controlled trials.

Why are these useful tools for both interventions and evaluations? Let’s consider the counterfactual. When a field is a nascent area of study – especially a problem as compelling and urgent as ‘modern slavery’, It is not uncommon for programme leads and donors to want to invest directly in interventions that aim to see rapid results for affected populations. But, while these intentions are sound and generous, past experience also tells us that this can mean that substantial time, effort and money are invested (for long periods) in actions that either don’t work, work less well than other strategies would, that cost too much or that perhaps cause harm in unexpected ways. The first generation of investment in interventions to combat human trafficking and modern slavery has often included well-intentioned, but poorly grounded actions. Now is the time to consider the practical and financial reasons to invest in research

and evaluation – even when it seems to ‘divert’ funding and effort from the population in need. In the longer-term, populations will benefit from interventions that are informed by research questions such as: 1) what are modifiable drivers of human trafficking; 2) what are the strategies to address specific populations in their

context; 3) what works for whom in which contexts; and 4) how to detect and prevent collateral damage. To ensure future investments foster potentially replicable, scalable and cost-effective strategies to prevent exploitation, it is time to invest in seeking answers to these types of programming questions.

BOX 2: Process evaluation areas and examples of questions, indicators and data sources⁶

ASPECTS	DEFINITION	EVALUATION QUESTIONS	INDICATORS	DATA SOURCES: EXAMPLES
1. Context	<p>Aspects of the social, political and economic environment that may influence the intervention implementation and outcomes or be a part of what the intervention aims to change.</p> <p>Enabling and impeding contextual influences on delivery and impact of the intervention.</p> <p>Examples: national policies, social norms, inequalities, rural exodus, institutions, social protection mechanisms, laws.</p>	<p>What aspects of the context does the intervention intend to change? What are key contextual factors that affect the intervention’s intended outcomes? What are there causal mechanisms at the context level that sustain the status quo or enhance effects (e.g. national policy, natural disaster, crisis, social protection mechanisms)?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions attempting to change the context: intervention designed to change social norms around female migration, raise collective awareness about trafficking. • Contextual factors that may affect interventions’ implementation and outcomes: gender norms that affects women’s participation in activities, caste or class system. • Contextual factors that may affect interventions’ development, implementation and outcomes: economic crisis, natural disasters, migration bans, new labour or migration policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of key elements of the implementation context • Changes in the social, political or economic context that may have altered individual participation and responses to activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of current evidence • Policy analysis • Interviews and group discussions with target groups members • Interviews with key stakeholders • Interviews with implementers
2. Fidelity	<p>Extent to which the intervention was implemented as planned.</p>	<p>To what extent was the interventions implemented consistently with its underlying theory?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitators knowledge and awareness of core intervention features match programme theory • Participants’ knowledge and understanding of core intervention features match programme’s intended aim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training curriculum and programme description • Interviews with programme implementers • Pre- and post-training surveys with participants.

6. For detailed information on Process Evaluation, see: Moore GF, Audrey S, Barker M, Bond L, Bonell C, Hardeman W, Moore L, O’Cathain A, Tinati T, Wight D, Baird J. Process evaluation of complex interventions: Medical Research Council guidance. A report prepared on behalf of the MRC Population Health Science Research Network.

ASPECTS	DEFINITION	EVALUATION QUESTIONS	INDICATORS	DATA SOURCES: EXAMPLES
3. Recruitment/ Reach	<p>Effectiveness of procedures used to approach and attract participants, including maintenance of participant involvement in the intervention.</p> <p>The proportion of intended target audience that participates in the intervention.</p>	<p>How did the intervention identify target group members and how were they invited to participate in the intervention?</p> <p>What is the proportion of the target population that actually received the intervention and how representative are they of the general population?</p> <p>Were there barriers to participation among individuals or groups of the priority population?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated proportion of priority population participating in the intervention • Estimated proportion of participants who were not members of the priority population (misclassification) • Barriers identified to participation in the activities • Perceived quality and effectiveness of recruitment process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme data • Interview with facilitators • Survey data
4. Modes of delivery, outreach, frequency	<p>How the intervention was delivered and the quantity and quality of what was delivered.</p>	<p>How was the intervention delivered? Among how many people? With which frequency?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type, number and frequency of activities implemented • (Estimated) number of participants in each activity 	<p>Programme data</p>
5. Adoption/ Response	<p>Response of participants to the programme messages.</p> <p>Extent of engagement of participants with the intervention.</p> <p>Variation in the effect of the intervention between subgroups.</p>	<p>How did participants react to the intervention? How did the intervention influence individual participants' decisions and behaviours?</p> <p>Which components were considered of most value in achieving the intended outcomes?</p> <p>What were participants' main concerns and how did the intervention address those?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in attitudes, decisions and behaviours that are attributed by participants to the intervention • Implementers' perception of intervention components that were more likely to be considered useful and to be adopted by participants • Changes in attitudes and behaviours that were sustained over time • Differences in responses to interventions among subgroup of participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with participants • Interviews with facilitators • pre- and post-training surveys • longitudinal interviews

ASPECTS	DEFINITION	EVALUATION QUESTIONS	INDICATORS	DATA SOURCES: EXAMPLES
6. Maintenance	How the intervention processes (recruitment, delivery and responses) are maintained or sustained over time.	What are the strategies to maintain critical processes of the intervention in place over time?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number/proportion of drop-offs and reason why they disengaged from the activities Implementers perception of sustainability of critical components (recruitment, delivery and participants' responses) over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews with facilitators Series of interviews with programme participants Programme data
6. Mechanisms	Causal pathways affecting intended change for different target groups.	<p>How does the intervention bring changes, for whom and under which circumstances? What are necessary and sufficient conditions for change?</p> <p>Can we draw any hypothesis about how and for whom the intervention seems to have worked?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data on causal pathways for change (e.g. adherence to the intervention in that particular social context has led to changes in intermediate outcomes that have resulted in the desired impact Decrease in incidence of human trafficking; raised awareness about risks of migration, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey data Longitudinal qualitative research
7. Unintended outcomes	Undesirable effects that were not predicted by the intervention	Did the intervention produce any unexpected effects or intended outcomes? Did the intervention unintentionally caused harm to participants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants reports of loss or harm as a result in changes (e.g. in attitudes or behaviours) caused by the intervention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews with women Follow up of participants ethnography survey