Translating political economy insights into conservation practice:

A six-step guide to using PEAs to design and test theories of change for interventions to protect and defend nature

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Introduction

This guide suggests six steps for bringing **political economy analysis (PEA)** findings into a **theory of change (ToC) for a project or program**. It aims to provide a practical means for conservationists to navigate political economy (PE) in contexts where they work. While a ToC explains the logic of a project,[1] a PEA, which looks at the influence of power, helps get to the heart of what needs to change for a project to work. But practitioners often find it challenging to use PEA in practice. The suggested steps are:

Step 1 **Select a PEA approach** that will best fit where you are in your projects, the resources available, the time available, the complexity of the context, and how much evidence exists.

Step 2 **Define or adapt a realistic impact statement** using PEA to figure out what ultimately needs to change and the key opportunities and constraints to that change.

Step 3 **Use PEA to unpack what drives that change** - What needs to change to realize the desired impact. This can help define project outcomes and the assumptions that must be tested and monitored.

Step 4 **Develop hypotheses** for how to enable those changes to occur. A PEA can provide signposts to viable entry points and aid in checking whether activities are on the path to achieving desired goals or not.

Step 5 **Bring this together into a robust ToC** based on an understanding of the evidence, drawn at least in part from the PEA. Alongside other sources, PEA helps to illuminate where assumptions have been made and the resulting risks that need to be monitored.

Step 6 **Set up to iterate** - Updating a PEA throughout a project creates opportunities to check in and assess whether the theory and its assumptions are holding up, and if not, why. Then course corrections can be made if needed.

[1] ToCs when done robustly and consultatively can create shared understanding of a core challenge, set a common direction and measures for success, identify interventions with the highest likelihood of working, generate local ownership, and improve project design (Salib 2022, pp 2-3).

A PEA can be useful for designing a new or testing existing ToCs by:

- ✓ Clarifying the desired impact of the activity
- ✓ Checking that the anticipated impact is realistic
- ✓ Figuring out what conditions need to change to achieve this impact
- ✓ Articulating and revisiting hypotheses about how that change will happen
- ✓ Identifying other things that need to happen for those hypotheses to hold true
- ✓ Spotting why things are not happening as anticipated
- ✓ Finding weak assumptions and evidence gaps that need ongoing testing and monitoring
- ✓ Identifying risks that have not been sufficiently considered
- ✓ Testing assumptions, risks, evidence, and hypotheses over time to enable adaptation
- ✓ Supporting evaluation for better learning

Key concepts

What is a theory of change?

A ToC does not have one common definition (see Annex B for a range of options). For our purposes, a ToC is most useful when it a) articulates a logical explanation for how a desired set of changes is expected to occur, b) reflects understanding of the assumptions upon which the theory is predicated, and c) serves as the basis for testing whether the theory is on track or needs adapting, and in what way(s) (Vogel 2012).

What does this have to do with a PEA?

PEA can be thought of as an analysis of power: for any desired change, PEA explores who holds power, how they use it, and for what purposes. As such, PEA is a tool for identifying basic hypotheses and/or teasing out assumptions that lie behind those hypotheses, and in so doing, it helps signal when assumptions may be invalid or may pose a risk to the objectives that otherwise might not have been identified.

What does this cumulatively mean? The aim of conservation is to safeguard people and nature. ToCs articulate what needs to change to deliver on that aim and contribute to impacts, along with the kinds of things that need to happen to get to that change – what needs to be different. A ToC and a related results framework also detail the activities that will be pursued to make those differences. Understanding more about who has power – to make change, to impede change – and how they get and use that power helps to clarify the conditions that need to change in order to achieve results. A ToC helps users explain the options for how change might occur, determine the level of change that is likely to be achievable, and identify pitfalls to look out for along the way.

Frequently used terms

Many of the concepts and terms used in this guidance have varying definitions, and/or use different terminology to convey common ideas. For our purposes, we have used the following terminology:

Theory of change: While there are various definitions, we can think of such theories as "how a given intervention, or set of interventions, is expected to lead to specific development change, drawing on a causal analysis based on available evidence" (UNDAF 2017). Combining various definitions, ToCs provide ideas for how change will occur and a process of identifying the assumptions that underpin that presumed change process.

Political economy analysis: "An approach to understanding why change does or does not happen" which "unpacks … who has power, what determines levels of power and how power is exercised" (Alexander and Williams 2020, pp. 5).

Output: Sometimes termed intermediate results, these are "The tangible and intangible products that result from project activities (Parsons, Gokey and Thornton 2013, pp. 6)."

Outcome: At times called objectives or strategic objectives, these are "the benefits that a project or intervention is designed to deliver" (Ibid) – the "likely or achieved short-term and medium-term change and effects of intervention outputs" (OECD 2023).

Impact: Sometimes called goals, … the "higher-level strategic goal" of a project or activity (Parsons, Gokey and Thornton 2013, pp. 6) – those "Positive and negative, primary and secondary, long-term effects produced by … interventions" (OECD 2023).

Results framework: "An articulation of the different levels, or chains, of results expected from a particular intervention" (Roberts and Khattri 2012, pp. 7).

STEP 1
Determining the right approach

There is a wealth of information available on PEAs. The amount of guidance can be overwhelming, but approaches can be clustered into three "types." The first type consists of tools that do elements of PEAs - often at least getting to root causes. The second includes "light touch" but holistic PEAs, which can be done quickly but still offer ways to identify obstacles to and opportunities for change. Those in the third category - in-depth exercises – do this with greater rigor. An overview of some of the first two types, and links to suggested tools for the third, can be found in Annex A. The table below offers suggestions which PEA "type" might be suited to different circumstances.

Regardless of the tool used, an important risk to watch for is using PEAs to validate work you already want to do. To guard against this, you can:

» Bring in external observers or challenge views, including through participatory engagement e.g., with communities;

» Underpin the work with a literature review; and/ or

Case study: PEA highlights diverging views on approaches to investigate and prosecute illegal wildlife trade (IWT) cases

The Basel Institute of Governance used PEAs to identify key issues around inclusion that can affect efforts to strengthen the investigation and prosecution of illegal wildlife trade cases. Interviews were conducted with local stakeholders, which revealed that perspectives of people living near or in landscapes were often not being heard. These views highlighted the perception that IWT enforcement tended to focus upon low-level offenders and offenses and showed more clearly the importance of understanding how the political context may shape law enforcement efforts (Kassa, Costa, Stahl and Camargo 2022).

» Do further testing, including through primary qualitative data collection, where evidence gaps exist.

The steps that follow examine ways to bring findings from PEAs into ToCs. Suggestions often are focused on the project level. There is other guidance to explore if there is demand for scale or to mainstream thinking about power across sectors or teams (moving towards a Thinking and Working Politically approach).

Shorter, partial PEA exercise	Light touch but holistic PEAs	In-depth approaches
1. Defining a problem 2. Testing an existing project that is going well 3. Resources are limited (people, funding) 4. The project is short and/ or a PEA needs to be delivered quickly 5. In lower-risk interventions and contexts 6. Where there is a strong body of evidence	1. Figuring out why an existing project is not working 2. The project is mainstreaming PE dynamics in broader work 3. Resources are limited (people, funding) 4. The project is short and/or a PEA needs to be delivered quickly 5. With straightforward interventions 6. Where we have some evidence for our work but have gaps	1. Design of a new project 2. The project may seek to directly address PE dynamics 3. There is capacity and funding available to undertake an in-depth PEA 4. The project is long-term 5. The project works on complex problems / in a difficult context 6. Corruption risks are high in the operating environment 7. Evidence for the intervention is limited

| **Minimum time required:** 15 minutes |
| **To prepare:** Select a project you are designing or you are currently implementing. Review light-touch approaches provided in Annex A. Scan the table in Step 1 above. |
| **Now check:** |
| ☐ What are the strengths and weaknesses of the PEA options in Annex A to your project? |
| ☐ Which PEA approach do you think might best work to begin with, and why? |

STEP 2
Working to a clear, realistic impact

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An impact statement is based on two dimensions: what is the core problem, and how much realistically can change in the time available. PEAs provide insights for both.

Defining a clear problem or required change

A ToC sets out the combination of things that need to happen to start solving a problem. So it is important to be clear about the problem itself. PEA tools that break down why something is happening help define this foundational problem. This enables checking that the ToC does not conflate a solution or a symptom with a problem and its cause (see scenario below).[3]

Setting realistic ambitions

Most project ToCs are time-bound and so need to identify the progress that is likely within this period.

If a ToC isn't realistic in this regard, it is unlikely to be very useful. Some of the more holistic PEA tools - including rapid ones - can tease out barriers and opportunities, offering insights on how much progress is realistic in a project's time period.[4]

With a clear problem in mind and a view of what is realistic, it's possible to produce an informed impact statement. In the scenario provided below ("What is the impact?"), a simple PEA tool enables the team to shift activities toward the impact.

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[3] A very frequent practice is to conflate a solution with a problem. This is exemplified above in "Scenario: What is the impact?" where the problem was originally defined as the lack of the selected solution - in that case the lack of citizen engagement. Often, ToCs like this are symptomatic of projects that have pre-selected activities / solutions and so have not fully articulated the problem being addressed. Why is this an issue? As illustrated above, this practice binds projects to pre-identified solutions and constrains teams from identifying the real things that may need to change. This brief video on Selling Solutions vs Solving Problems from Harvard Kennedy School Building State Capability program offers a simple way to test if this error has occurred: if three plausible solutions to a problem can not be identified, then a solution and a problem have probably been conflated.

[4] Often projects assume "transformative impact": "positive change in the system over time". But as a PEA will likely show, that is often not aligned with the context of the problem. Sometimes the aim may simply be to prevent things from getting worse – a preventative impact. Further guidance is available on different types of impact (Reudy 2018).

Scenario: What is the impact?

The scenario. A ToC identifies a problem in a landscape: "a lack of citizen engagement in decisions around forested land conversion." The project produces an impact statement: "citizen voice is included in decisions around forest use management." When the project starts, more citizens do get involved, but conversion of forested land accelerates because high-level officials are getting kickbacks for granting concessions. The initiative inadvertently exposes citizen groups to new, unintended risks related to bribery and safety.

How can a PEA help? A fishbone diagram process (see Annex A) allows the team to see that exclusionary processes are one of a range of drivers of land conversion. The team uses this partial PEA exercise to adjust the impact statement to "slowing unsustainable conversion of forested land in this area." This frees the team to work on other facets of the problem and to modify how they address exclusion to mitigate risk to partners.

Case study: Adapting impact to a changing context in Brazil

The administration of Jair Bolsonaro was supportive of and even encouraged land grabbing in the Amazon. In this context, work of WWF Brazil focused on avoiding the approval of new legislation that would legalize public land invasions and on supporting Indigenous Peoples to monitor and report invasions, with the aim of preventing land grabbing and deforestation in the Amazon from getting worse.

With a new administration in place committed to preventing deforestation and land grabbing, WWF can collaborate with the government and accelerate the creation of protected areas on non-designated public land. Monitoring by Indigenous groups helped to prevent some instances of deforestation, and that information and capability is now enabling these groups to better negotiate with public authorities responsible for protecting their territories. The team now is able to work toward a more transformative impact than was previously possible.

Step 2 Exercise

Minimum time required: 30 minutes

Select a project - this can be from Step 1 or a different one. Look specifically at the project's impact - the big picture issue you believe it seeks to achieve. With this in mind, conduct a "five whys" exercise (refer to Annex A).

Now check:

- [ ] What does the analysis suggest should be the core change(s) to address?
- [ ] Is this different from what the current impact statement describes?
- [ ] What do you think realistic progress will look like in your project period?

Identifying drivers of change

The next step is to develop some ideas about the range of **drivers of change** - those factors that support or impede impacts. Practically, in a ToC, a project's **outcomes** – the areas that the interventions will address - are derived at least in part by articulating expected progress toward realizing or addressing some of these drivers. Identifying drivers also helps identify **assumptions** – those things that must also occur or hold true for the theory to hold. Assumptions can be evidence-based - derived from research and analysis - but often may include implicit beliefs and expectations about how things normally work.

Before differentiating outcomes from assumptions, it is helpful to use elements of a PEA to take stock of the full picture of drivers. Once a clear idea of these drivers emerges, working through findings from the PEA against the following questions can help clarify what the project should focus on achieving, versus what it needs to assume (and monitor for whether those assumptions are correct):

» How important is this driver for the impact statement?

» Is this something the project has a comparative advantage in addressing?

» What are the risks associated with focusing on this driver?

» What, realistically, would it look like for this driver to contribute towards the impact statement?

» What will happen if the project does not directly work on this driver?

» What assumptions are necessary?

» Where the project cannot work to address a driver, is there a more indirect route to shape this dimension?

Case study: Finding project outcomes to improve fishery governance in Peru

In Peru, WWF identified "reduction of threats to fisheries governance and marine ecosystems" as a project's desired impact. The initiative identified a range of drivers and focused on two outcomes: (1) reducing overall corruption levels and risks of bribes within the General Directorate of Captaincies and Coastguards (DICAPI, the Naval branch in charge of safety at sea), and (2) increasing the amount of information from certifications, helping DICAPI to prevent accidents and rescue lost fishing vessels. These drivers were considered necessary contributions for achieving their higher-level impact statement and reflected areas where their activities sought to cumulatively make progress.

WWF Peru. "Reducing Corruption in Small Scale Fisheries Through Digital Services" project

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Case study: Recognizing assumptions in work to counter wildlife corruption in Madagascar

In Madagascar, a WWF project sought to "reduce corruption in natural resources" by strengthening national and local anti-corruption efforts, building the capacity of judicial and law enforcement agencies, and improving coordination of civil society to engage in forums around crime convergence. In developing the ToC, the team articulated assumptions that were critical for success as part of the process of unpacking drivers of corruption in natural resources. These included: that there were other forms of livelihoods available to reduce pressures on natural resources, that all stakeholders are effectively engaged and are willing to be involved, that government remains supportive, and that coordination leads to improvements in efficiency.

WWF Madagascar. "Anti-Corruption and Combating Wildlife Trafficking Activity - Madagascar" project

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Step 3 Exercise

Minimum time required: 30 minutes

To prepare: Using the problem identified in the step 2 exercise, or a clear problem from another project, work through a "fishbone diagram". A free template for this model can be found here, or you can find a blank template in Annex A. Try to come up with all the things you think are driving your core problem. Now group similar or related issues together.

Now check:

☐ What do you think are the drivers of your desired change?

☐ With this in mind, what outcomes (that is, what progress toward realizing or addressing these drivers) need to happen for this impact to occur?

☐ Using the list of questions above under Step 3, which of these drivers are you going to focus on?

☐ What do you need to assume about the other drivers you've found in your PEA?

How change happens: Hypotheses for intervention

assumptions onto an existing ToC can help when progress is not going as planned, and it's not clear why (see Step 6).

Why build a hypothesis?

A common risk in ToC development is that it is too often "set and forget": desired impact and outcomes are identified, but at the close of the project it may become clear that although activities and outputs were delivered, they had little bearing on outcomes or impact. This can often be the result of (a) selecting and committing to specific outputs without building a logic for how they will deliver conditions for change, and/or (b) making assumptions about the existence of other necessary conditions that don't end up being true. When this happens, it can be hard to effectively monitor progress or know what isn't working and what needs to change. For these reasons, it's important to explain the logic of change that is often implicit in projects but doesn't always get spelled out and critically examined.

How to use a PEA to build hypotheses of change

The **onset of a project, strategy, or planning process** is an ideal opportunity to use PEA to develop hypotheses for a ToC. Your PEA will have helped you find drivers of change, but will also offer insights into which stakeholders and processes offer entry-points for change, and which create constraints. These can be used to articulate how and under what circumstances (assumptions), planned interventions will lead to change, as well as identify the main risks to this theory holding true.

Though PEA may be most useful when initiating a project, strategy or plan, it can still be helpful **to use and deploy PEA to inform on-going work**. Often, using a PEA to transpose hypotheses and

Scenario: What is the hypothesis?

The scenario: A ToC posits *"if we build the capacity of rangers to detect poachers"* and *"increase prosecution of poachers… [then] poaching of rhinos in our landscape will be reduced."* After several years, poaching levels are higher than anticipated, and something entirely unexpected occurs: there is more poaching in a nearby landscape. With this ToC, the team is not able to understand what has gone wrong and how to address it, as there was no causal explanation of how or why the activities were expected to affect the impact or what other conditions were assumed.

A complete ToC might have said something like: *"if we build the capacity of rangers to detect poachers and increase prosecution of poachers, this will deter poaching because rangers will stop more poaching from occurring, making it more dangerous for poachers, who will also face the increased risk of penalty or imprisonment if caught."* This ToC might go on to explain its assumptions that *"tensions between local communities and wildlife management agencies are being adequately addressed and those grievances do not factor into poaching"* and that *"targeting of low-level offenders will be a sufficient deterrent for poaching."*

How can a PEA help? A PEA exercise could have been useful in a few ways. First, at the onset, it might have suggested that some of the assumptions were weak. For instance, it might have flagged that high-level offenders were a more acute driver of IWT than low-level offenders. Later in the project, a PEA can also be brought in to figure out why something isn't working and test outcomes and assumptions, putting the team in a better position to change course. Here for instance, a PEA might find that grievances toward wildlife enforcement agencies is perpetuating poaching.

Case study: Using PEA in Ukraine to identify plausible entry points

In Ukraine, a recent PEA explored risks that post-war reconstruction could be environmentally unsustainable. The PEA identified that oligarchs involved in energy and construction may impede sustainable reconstruction, enabled by a weak judiciary, collusion with politicians, and gaps in independent oversight bodies capable of checking corruption. It observed that civil society is strong in Ukraine and has a powerful voice, however. Approaches could include working with civil society to champion completion of judicial reform, promoting reforms to limit the role of private money in politics, or supporting the capacity of anti-corruption bodies. Taking stock of this picture, a project might recognize the presence of a strong, influential civic movement and so might focus on improving knowledge on corruption risks related to environmental sustainability within this movement, rather than engage in direct advocacy. This approach would assume that capacity gaps are not a major constraint or are being supported elsewhere, and that domestic pressures would be sufficient to actuate change.

Step 4 Exercise

Minimum time required: 30 minutes

To prepare: Look at the drivers you have selected to focus on in Exercise 3, or alternatively, look at an outcome from a different ToC.

Now check:

☐ Which stakeholders (see Annex C for a list of common ones) have influence on or power in achieving the outcome(s)?

☐ What institutions and/or "rules of the game" give them that influence and/or power? (Rules of the game are the formal and informal way things get done).

☐ What might motivate or cause them to use influence positively? Rate your confidence in each suggestion.

Bonus:

☐ *Within this, what can you comfortably work on?*

☐ *What gaps remain after those activities are identified?*

STEP 5

Mapping PEA findings onto a theory of change

The process outlined in the steps above can generate the main elements needed to bring PEA into a ToC. There is no set model for doing so. Some options can be narrative, for example "if – then" statements. Others may prefer a diagram that illustrates causal pathways (see Annex D for a sample). The main components to map are:

1. A clarified, realistic **impact** statement.

2. Which drivers of this impact the project is contributing to – **outcome(s)**.

3. A description or visual of the hypothesis about how to achieve those outcomes (**outputs or interventions**). Be sure to explain or show how, not just what.

4. What assumptions underlie the hypothesis.

5. At each level, the strength of the **evidence**. For complex problems and contexts, it may be useful for the PEA to dig deeper on areas where gaps in evidence exist.[5]

6. Particularly where there are evidence gaps, identify the **risks** to the ToC. These need to be regularly assessed against updated PEA, particularly in fluid political environments.

All these components together are necessary for a clear articulation of what will make change and what this depends upon, and to be absolutely explicit about where we are unsure.

Scenario: Where is the faulty assumption?

The scenario: A project focused on improving community forest management assumes that an uptick in illegal deforestation is being effectively managed and not doing substantial harm to its aims, and that those managing the forest have sufficient incentives to pursue sustainability. Evidence emerges about illegal exports of timber, and knowledge "on the ground" suggests this increase in illegal exporting may affect the assumed incentives for sustainable management.

How can a PEA help? Via a PEA, the team finds that timber is being illegally exploited in collusion with community forest governance entities. This might undermine the ToC - there are now strong incentives for unsustainable development. With this in mind, the project can work through the implications of this risk and use the PEA to find new entry points and mitigations.

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[5] Homing in on evidence gaps might entail a more complete PEA exercise that includes a literature review, conducting primary research, and considering participatory approaches to the PEA.

Minimum time required: 1 hour
To prepare: In the previous exercises you'll have developed a clear, realistic impact statement. You will have generated outcomes, and assumptions underlying those outcomes, by unpacking drivers of change and how to progress them (outcomes). You will have developed hypotheses for how to address those drivers, creating from these your outputs. Make sure you've got these available, using the exercises above, or use another ToC that includes these elements. Review the PEA work you have done so far and make note of areas where you were uncertain.

Questions:

- ☐ What would a visual diagram tying this together look like? Refer to Annex D for an example.
- ☐ How strong is your evidence? Go through your diagram and flag where there are gaps.
- ☐ What risks should you be aware of? Make sure these are highlighted in your diagram.
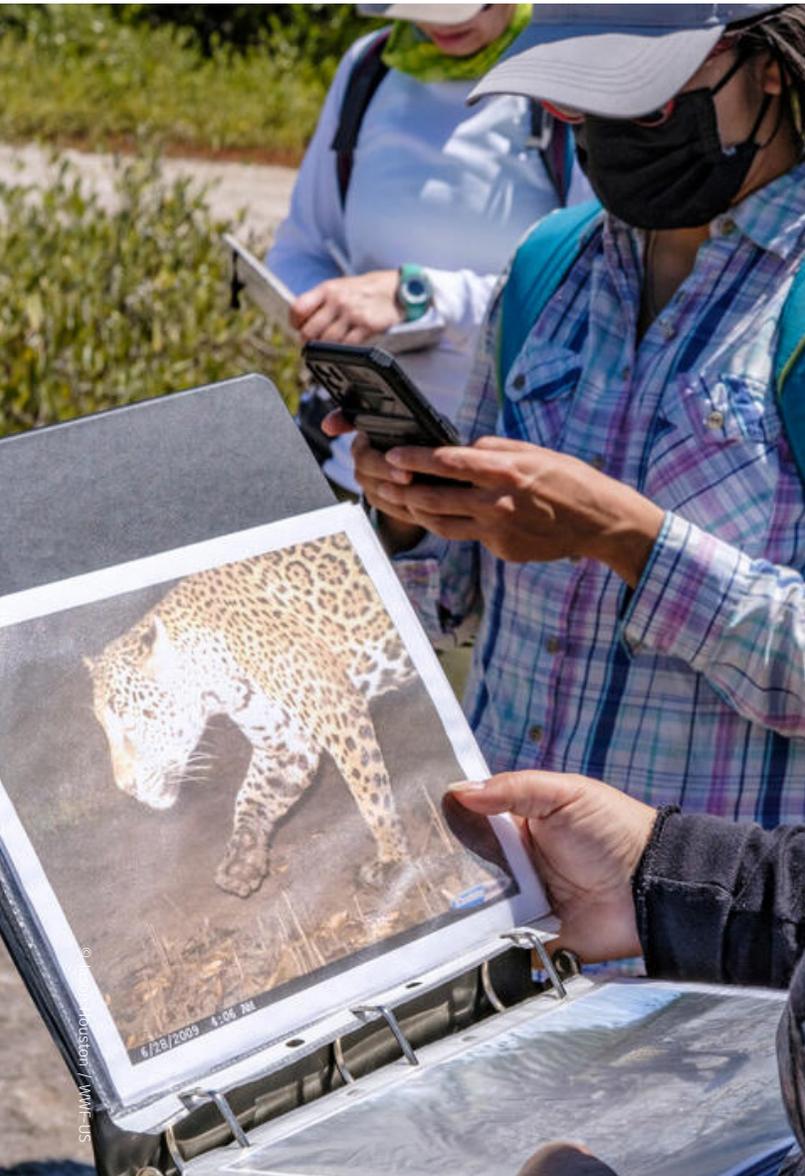
STEP 6
Iteration and adaptation

Conservation and natural resource management are complex issues, and conservationists work in challenging operating environments, all of which are shaped by power dynamics. As a result, ToCs may be based on limited evidence, requiring decisions about activities and objectives in the absence of certainty that these approaches will work. So it is key to build in time to regularly pause, refresh analysis, and consider whether new evidence suggests a different direction.

Often, adaptive projects – projects that have the flexibility to shift approaches in response to ongoing assessments – will build tests of this kind into regular project monitoring. This has operational implications for managing resources, contracting and procurement, and monitoring. Some practitioners have developed concrete guidance for such adaptive management. Moving away from output-oriented results frameworks toward problem-driven models – like the "SearchFrame" – also can encourage iteration and offer check-

in points to modify work based on a review of assumptions and reflections on performance.

Doing PEA and other situational analysis on a rolling basis is a key to knowing what has changed, where new opportunities to effect change materialize, and where old ones are no longer viable. PEAs may also be used for evaluative purposes particularly when appraising complex challenges. For instance, these tools can be particularly helpful for approaches like outcome harvesting, which looks at what changes have occurred – good or bad – and retroactively aims to identify how interventions contributed to those changes.

Case study: PEA to better understand jaguar trafficking in Mexico

In 2022, a WWF-commissioned PEA explored why jaguar trafficking persisted in Selva Maya region of Mexico, observing that existing IWT efforts were not effectively countering the jaguar trade. The PEA identified an increase in human-jaguar conflict related to changes in land use that was exacerbating the domestic illegal trade of jaguar body parts. Among other things, this new analytical lens recommended a focus on addressing drivers of human-wildlife conflict, including links to poverty, and to include a greater focus on the domestic marketplace in its conservation strategy.

Case study: Political economy interests in the illegal trade of South African Abalone

Despite long-standing efforts to halt the illegal trade and over-exploitation of the South African species of abalone (perlemoen), including its addition to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) database, recent investigation points to the highest rate of illegal trade ever, dwarfing legal trade. Analysis of interests highlights demand from Asia, combined with domestic vulnerabilities like inequality and poverty, lack of government capacity and political will, and profits derived from criminalization of the trade. Given this context, where the drivers of harm have outstripped the current scope and capacities of local law enforcement, some analysts have suggested a radically different approach centered on alternatives to the traditional focus on containing illegal local harvesting. In this change hypothesis, law enforcement efforts would emphasize actors involved in and enabling international trade, and new strategies might include delisting the species to make it less appealing to criminal enterprise, giving more attention to providing other livelihood sources for communities, and broadly improving the capability and credibility of state institutions.

Case study: PEA insights to improve investigation and prosecution of illegal wildlife trade (IWT) cases

Corruption risks in law enforcement agencies can undermine efforts against IWT. Mapping and mitigating risks is critical. A vital component of this is understanding why these risks emerge in the first place. Targeted sector-level PEAs conducted by the Basel Institute on Governance delved into drivers of corruption risks in three countries. The analysis highlighted how prevailing formal and informal political arrangements and power dynamics shaped the law enforcement chain. A key point was that informal political agendas can undermine the work of law enforcement agencies. These insights helped explain why implementation gaps emerged and proved critical for the design of feasible corruption mitigation measures.

Kassa, Costa, Stahl and Camargo 2022 and Medina, Grossman, Suryandari and Guy 2022

Minimum time required: 1 hour

To prepare: If the exercises above have been done on an existing or old project, use the ToC you've developed through this guidance. If not, take a ToC from a project that you've completed or is currently being implemented. Check that your impact statement is clear and realistic (refer to Step 1 Exercise if needed). The questions below have been adapted from the Everyday Political Analysis approach (see Annex A).

Now check:

☐ Which actors or groups currently are involved in the issue you are trying to change?

☐ What motivates these actors?

☐ How do they wield influence, what power do they have?

☐ Do your hypotheses reflect these actors and their motivations?

☐ To what extent have the assumptions in your ToC held up?

☐ What practically can you do to make changes?

Conclusion

PEA and similar forms of situational analysis are helpful tools for developing, testing, and adapting sound theories of change. They are not a magic bullet; they have limitations and require complements as well as a willingness to challenge pre-existing ideas, question assumptions, and at times make difficult choices. They do offer, however, a useful framework for figuring out what we are trying to achieve, assessing what is preventing that from occurring, describing how we think change can occur, and identifying the assumptions that underpin the interventions we take on.

Annex A. PEA approaches

This guidance is not a "how-to" for doing PEA per se. Still, a few tools in particular are highlighted below to offer options for quicker assessments on facets of political economy. These can be deployed where a lighter touch is needed or where there is an interest in initially exploring political economy dynamics before considering a more in-depth approach. For more in-depth approaches to using PEA in conservation, there is guidance available on situational analysis and a framework on PEA for conservation impact (the "PEACI" Framework). More information is provided below.

Shorter, partial PEA exercises

1. One simple but useful tool is the **"five whys" exercise**. Used beyond PEA in other fields trying to understand adverse outcomes, this begins by articulating a problem. It then asks why that is happening, and then why again, five times over. As participants get closer to the root cause, the problem begins to broaden. A hypothesis may also emerge before five steps are completed.

2. A helpful complement to deepen the five whys can be a **fishbone diagram**. While the five whys may suggest a hierarchy of causes, the fishbone provides a more open space to identify multiple drivers, group them, and unpack their causes (ODI 2023). This tool also begins with a problem. Teams are then asked to identify the various drivers of that problem, to group them, and then to think about the myriad things that underpin those drivers.

"Five whys" exercise Addressing water contamination in a protected area	
Problem	Poor quality of water in protected areas
Why is this happening?	Hydropower projects built inside protected areas
Why is that?	Government actors gave access rights to hydropower companies
Why is that?	Officials get kickbacks from companies for concessions
Why is that?	Little regulatory and enforcement capacity, limited legislation around conflict of interest
Why is that?	Vested interests of powerful political actors

Fishbone diagram template
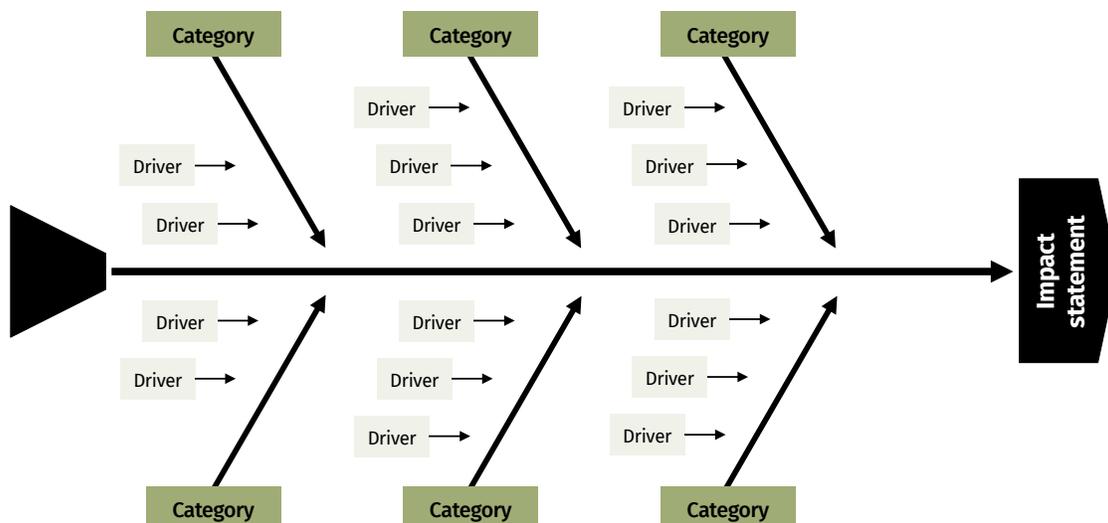
Light touch, holistic PEAs

3. For those short on time, the Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) Research Programme developed options for doing a **one-hour PEA** with options for expanding that into a full-day or longer-term exercise. This framework suggests setting aside a short amount of time as a team to workshop through a series of simple questions. While options are available for country-level, problem-level, or sector-based analysis, the problem-driven (project) level questions may prove most useful as a starting point.

   » Has this type of intervention been tried before?

   » Is there demand for the interventions? From whom?

   » Can we work with those actors opposed to or lukewarm about change?

   » Are there any structural or institutional constraints for change?

   » What would be a reasonable expectation for this intervention?

4. Finally, **Everyday Political Analysis (EPA)** (Hudson, Marquette and Waldock 2016) is a condensed framework that guides users through a series of questions to help articulate the interests at play and opportunities for change in a given situation. Other organizations have applied this tool to their sector. Annex C offers an aggregated list of the types of typical stakeholders in the forests, wildlife, and fisheries sectors. Considering these stakeholders, EPA can help to answer some basic questions:

   » Which of these actors is involved in the issue you're trying to change? This may be proximate actors, or more "hidden" actors that influence those you interface with.

   » What motivates them?

   » What influence do they have?

   » What might get them to change?

In-depth approaches

For more in-depth processes of deriving PEAs in conservation, the Targeting Natural Resource Corruption project has developed guidance on situational analysis and the WWF International Governance Practice has developed a useful framework on PEA for conservation impact (the "PEACI" Framework). The building blocks of the PEACI Framework are provided below. Even with these models, there is a range in how rigorous the approach can be.
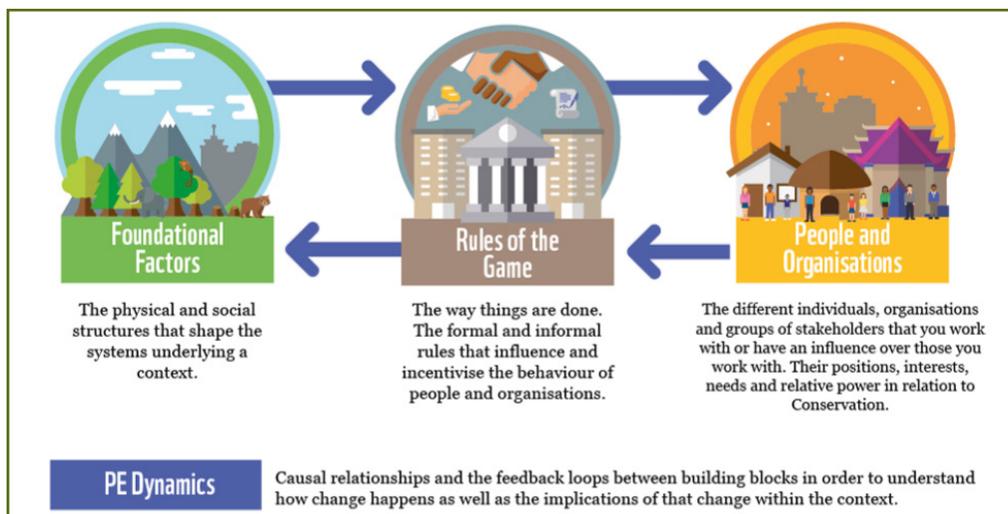
Alexander and Williams, 2020.

Annex B. Some definitions of theory of change

How we "theorize" change will happen under a program.

Salib, 2022

The description of a sequence of events that is expected to lead to a particular desired outcome.

Davies in Vogel, 2012

...articulating [these] many underlying assumptions about how change will happen in a programme.

Rogers in Vogel, 2012

...how you think...the strategy will help you achieve both intermediate results and longer-term conservation and human well-being

Conservation Standards, 2020

A comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.

Center for Theory of Change

The casual pathways from the planned intervention to the intended outcomes.

Roberts, 2012

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Annex C. Common stakeholders

Below is a non-exhaustive list of the types of stakeholders that we may want to consider when we look at political economy dynamics. When we do so, here are some simple questions to consider:

1. Which of these, or others, are the main actors we visibly know are engaged on the issue, landscape we are concerned with?

2. Look beyond the immediate actors we know and work with - which stakeholders, to the extent we are aware, influence those we interface with?

3. Where these stakeholders are contributing to the problem we are seeking to address, why? What is driving their activity or behavior?

4. What scope is there to change based on that understanding?

🏛 Government / public officials

Customs agents
Wildlife service officials
Land authorities
Formal and informal officials at checkpoints
Officials in inspection and granting permits
Officials that provide hunting licenses
Officials that license of captive breeding
Fishing inspectors / officials
Zoning, concessions, permitting officials
Officials that provide fishing licenses
Port officials
Fisheries management compliance regulators
Financial regulators
Forest management officials and committees
Auditors
Health and safety officials
Revenue authorities
Anti-corruption bodies
Asset management offices

👤 Politicians

Elected officials

🏃 Criminal actors

Poachers, harvesters
Poaching groups
Traffickers
Black market sellers
Couriers

📊 Finance and private sector

Banks and financial institutions
Domestic and international corporations

🗺 Local groups and actors

Local communities
Community leaders
Local drivers
Veterinarians

⚖ Law enforcement / rule of law

Rangers
Wardens
Law enforcement overseeing stockpiles
Prosecutors
Investigators
Judges and magistrates
Defense lawyers
Court registrars and clerks
Prison and rehabilitation staff

🚚 Movement of goods

Buyers and dealers
Vessel owners
Transport and shipping companies
Traders
Captains and crew
Processing facilities

Annex D. TOC example

Below is a hypothetical example derived to illustrate some elements of a ToC aiming to deliver more equitable, sustainable use of community forests. It highlights where each of the six steps in this guidance might be used.
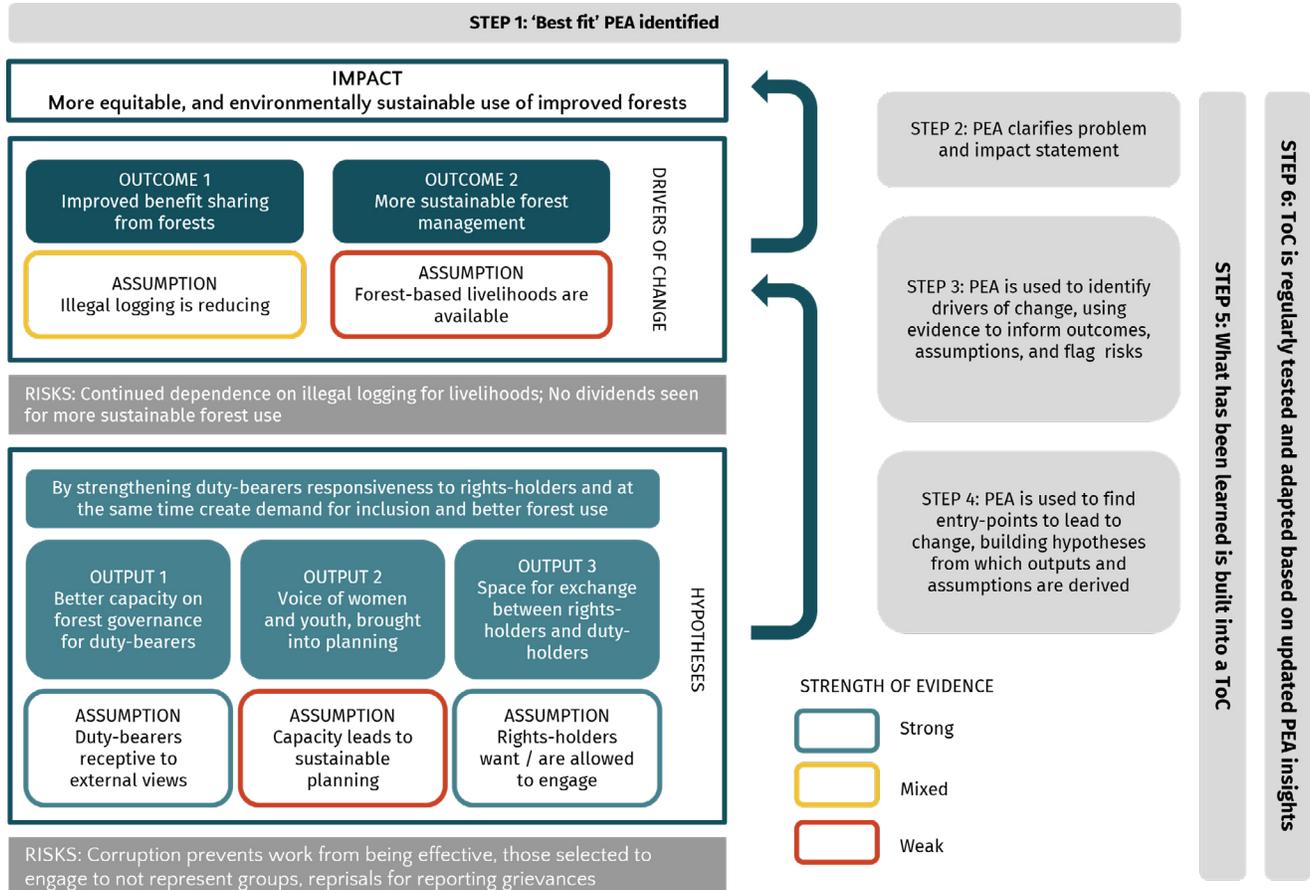
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Acknowledgments

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