THEORIES OF CHANGE, EVALUATION DESIGN AND HEALTH INEQUITIES

Using theory to help with judgement about results

- **Theory-based approaches to evaluation use an *explicit theory of change* to *draw conclusions* about *whether* and *how an intervention contributed to observed results"***

  (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2012)

- **Focus on both Accountability and Learning**

Evaluation as Theory-testing

- **The idea of theory-based evaluation is very simple:**
  - evaluation seeks to discover whether programs work;
  - programs are theories.
- **Therefore it follows that:**
  - Evaluation is theory-testing.

- ***What does it mean to say that programs are theories?***

Thinking theoretically about programs and policies

- **"Interventions are always based on a hypothesis that postulates *'If we deliver a program in this way or we manage services like so, then this will bring about some improved outcome' … Interventions are always inserted into existing social systems that are thought to underpin and account for present problems.* Improvements in patterns of behavior, events or conditions are then generated, it is supposed, by bringing fresh inputs to that system in the hope of changing and re-balancing it"**
  - (Pawson et al., 2004, p.4).

Definition of a Theory of Change

- A theory of change describes the *relationships* between *activities*, outputs and short and long term *outcomes*

  (Kubisch et al, 2010; 1998)

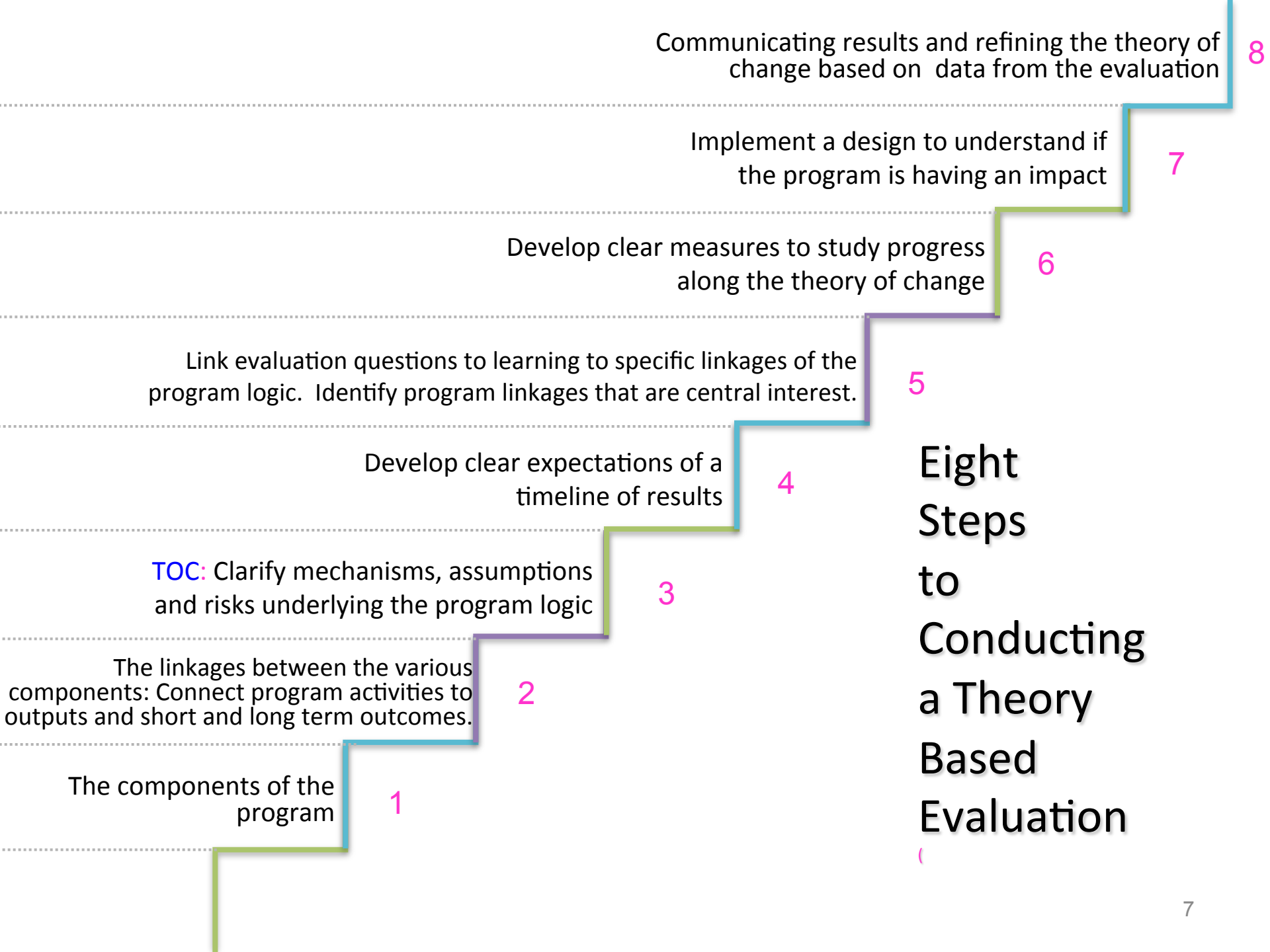
- ”the theory of change (TOC) goes further [than a logic model] by outlining the *mechanisms of change*, as well as the *assumptions*, *risks and context* that support or hinder the theory from being manifested as observed outcomes.”

  (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2012)

Results-based thinking: Questions to assist with a common-sense perspective

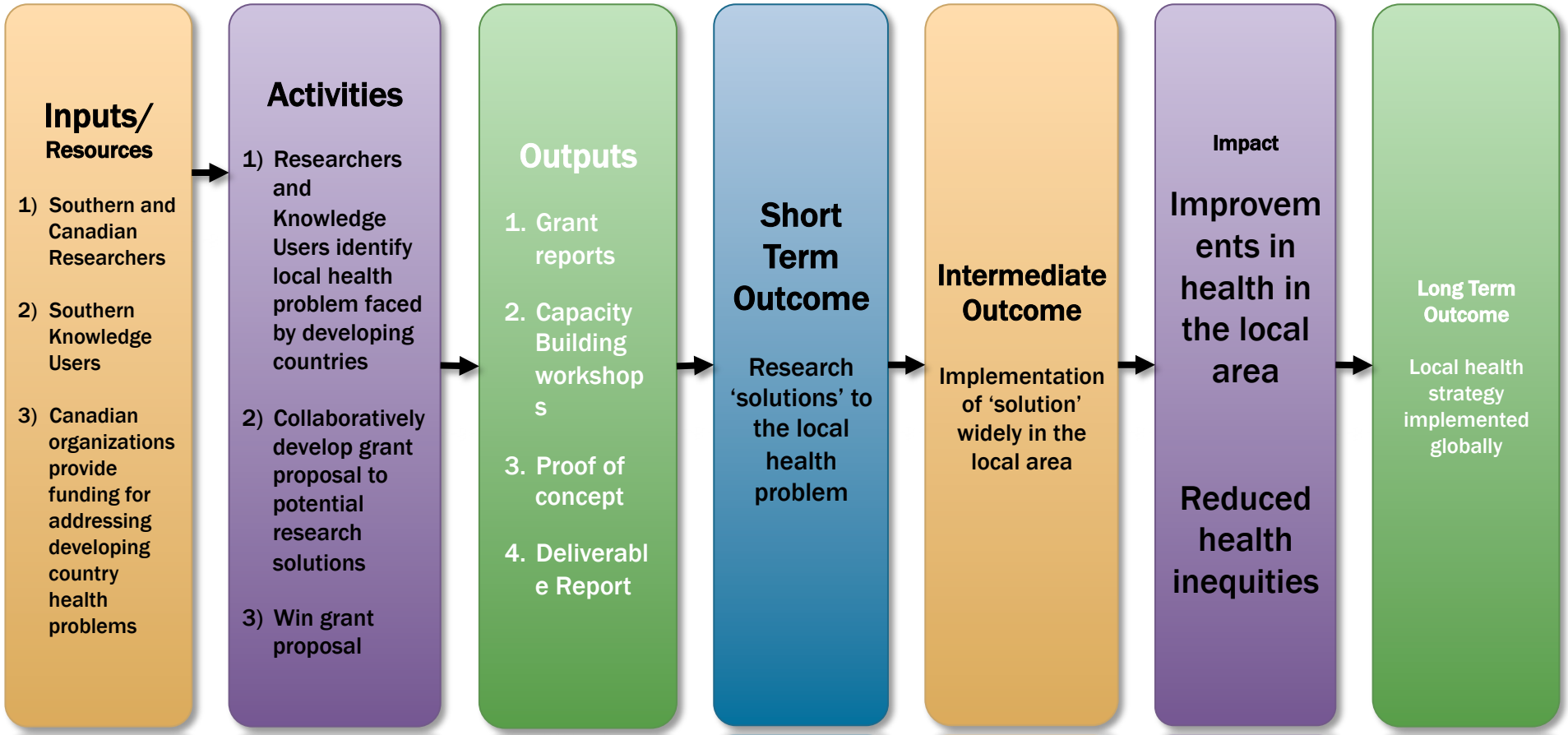
- What is the program?
- What are the outcomes/equity outcomes? How will the program impact outcomes/equity outcomes?
- What are the key assumptions made by the program?
- What is it about the program that brings about the change in outcomes/equity?
- How long will it take for the program to impact outcomes?
- How will the process and outcomes be measured?
- How will the results data be collected? Who will be collecting the results data?
- How will the data be analyzed? Who will be analyzing the data?
- How will you know the program is having an impact?

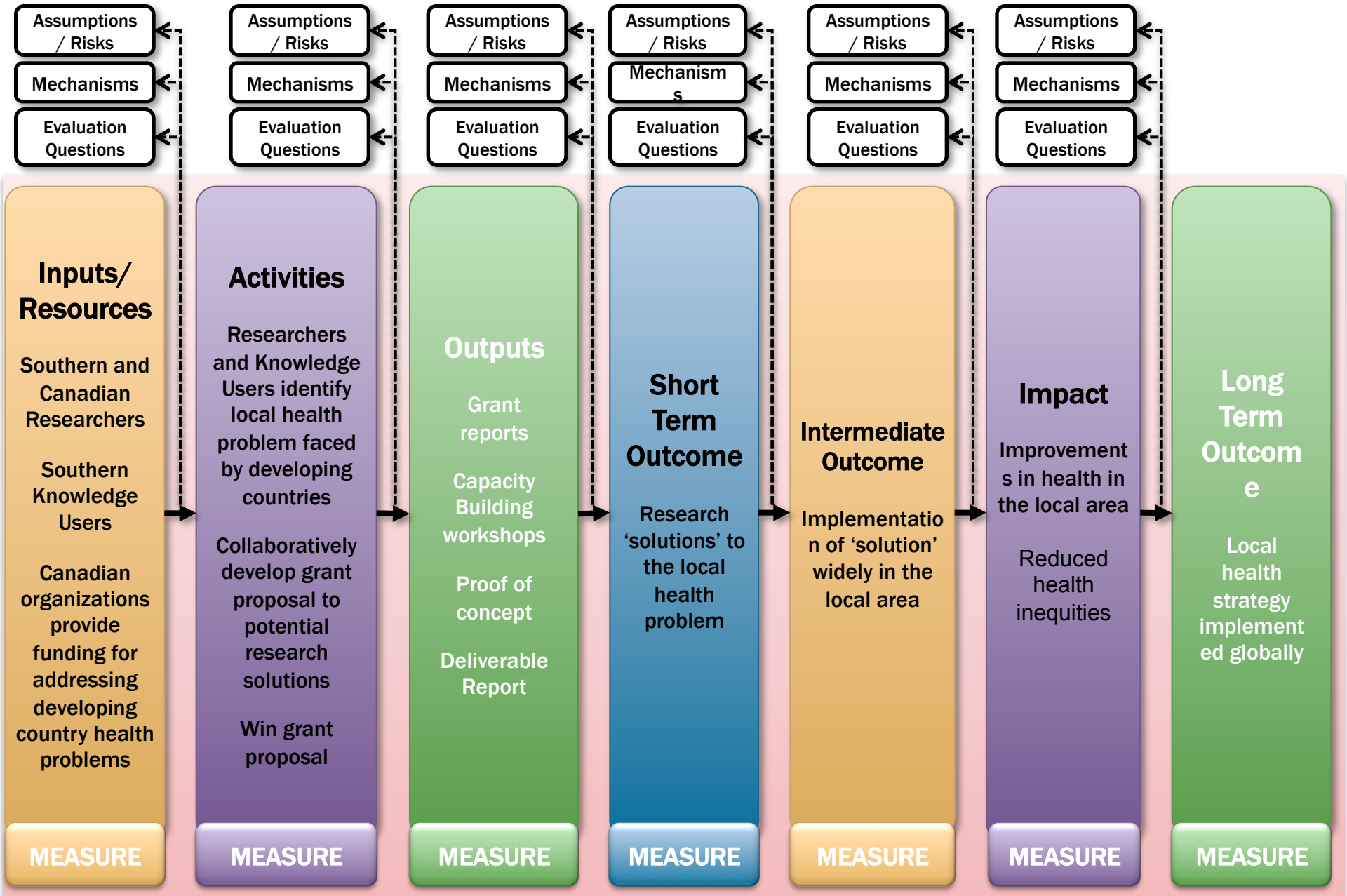
Eight Steps to Conducting a Theory Based Evaluation



THINKING ABOUT EQUITIES THROUGH REAL EXAMPLES

Example 1: Improving health in developing countries




Assumptions / Risks
Mechanisms
Evaluation Questions
Assumptions / Risks
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Evaluation Questions
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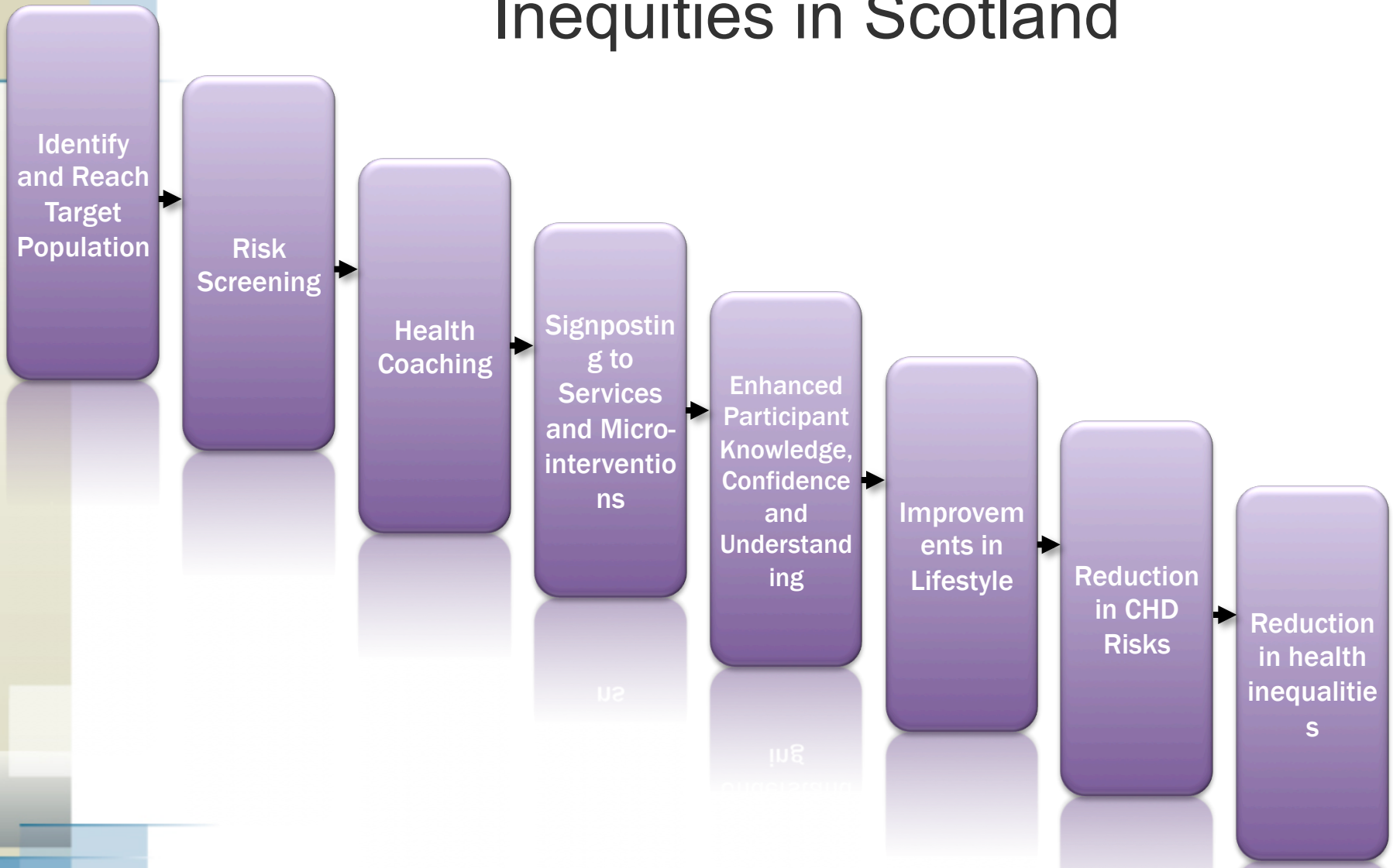
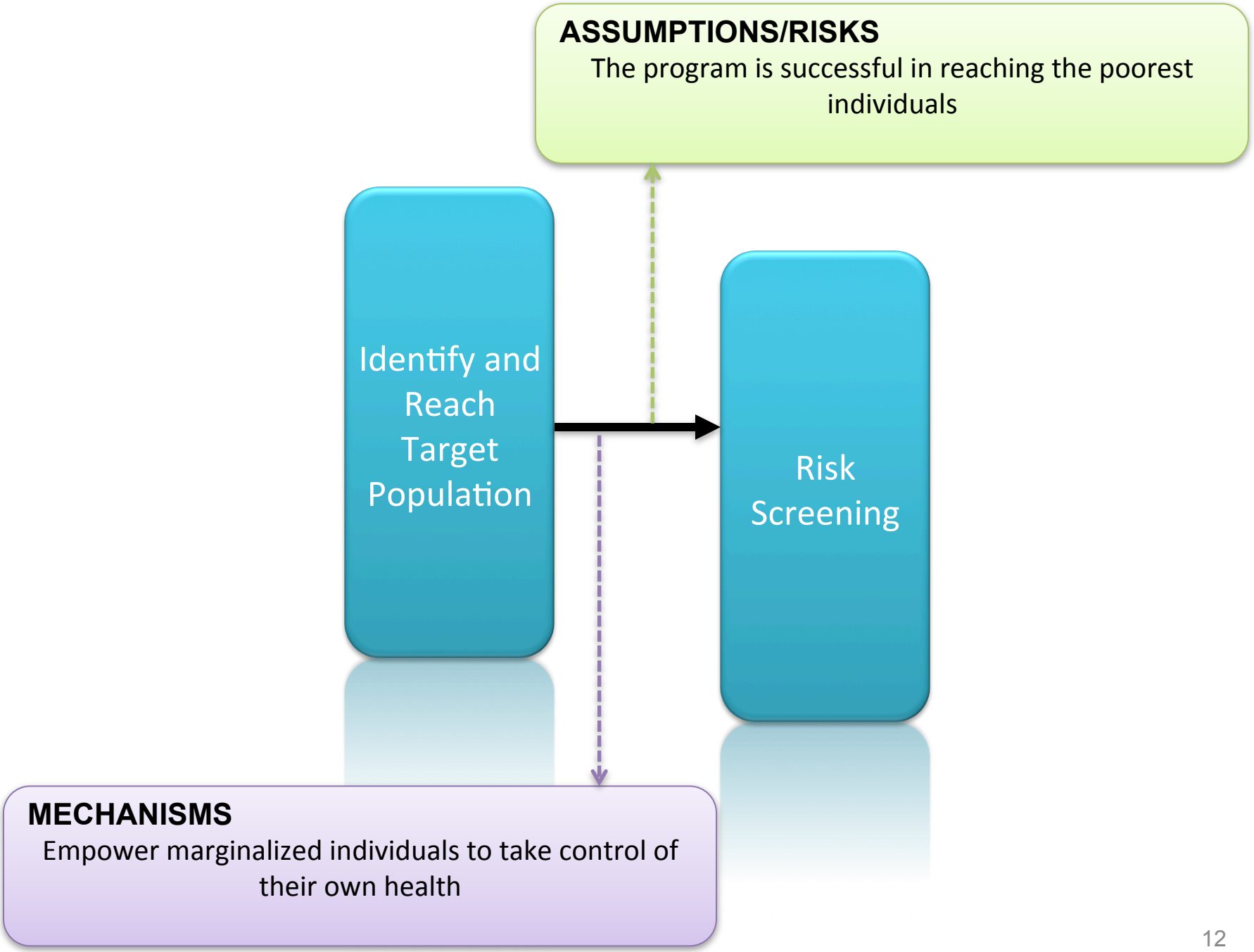
Assumptions / Risks
Mechanisms
Evaluation Questions
Assumptions / Risks
Mechanisms
Evaluation Questions
Inputs/ Resources
Southern and Canadian Researchers
Southern Knowledge Users
Canadian organizations provide funding for addressing developing country health problems
Activities
Researchers and Knowledge Users identify local health problem faced by developing countries
Collaboratively develop grant proposal to potential research solutions
Win grant proposal
Outputs
Grant reports
Capacity Building workshops
Proof of concept
Deliverable Report
Short Term Outcome
Research 'solutions' to the local health problem
Intermediate Outcome
Implementation of 'solution' widely in the local area
Impact
Improvements in health in the local area
Reduced health inequities
Long Term Outcome
Local health strategy implemented globally
MEASURE
MEASURE
MEASURE
MEASURE
MEASURE
MEASURE
MEASURE
10
Timeline of Impact

Example 2: Addressing Health Inequities in Scotland




ASSUMPTIONS/RISKS
The program is successful in reaching the poorest individuals
Identify and Reach Target Population
Risk Screening
MECHANISMS
Empower marginalized individuals to take control of their own health

Outputs

- Grant reports
- Capacity Building workshops
- Proof of concept
- Deliverable Report

Assumption

Canadian partner understands the local context

Mechanism

Advanced science and understanding of local context can find innovative solutions

Risks

Academic culture can interfere with local problem-solving

External Factors

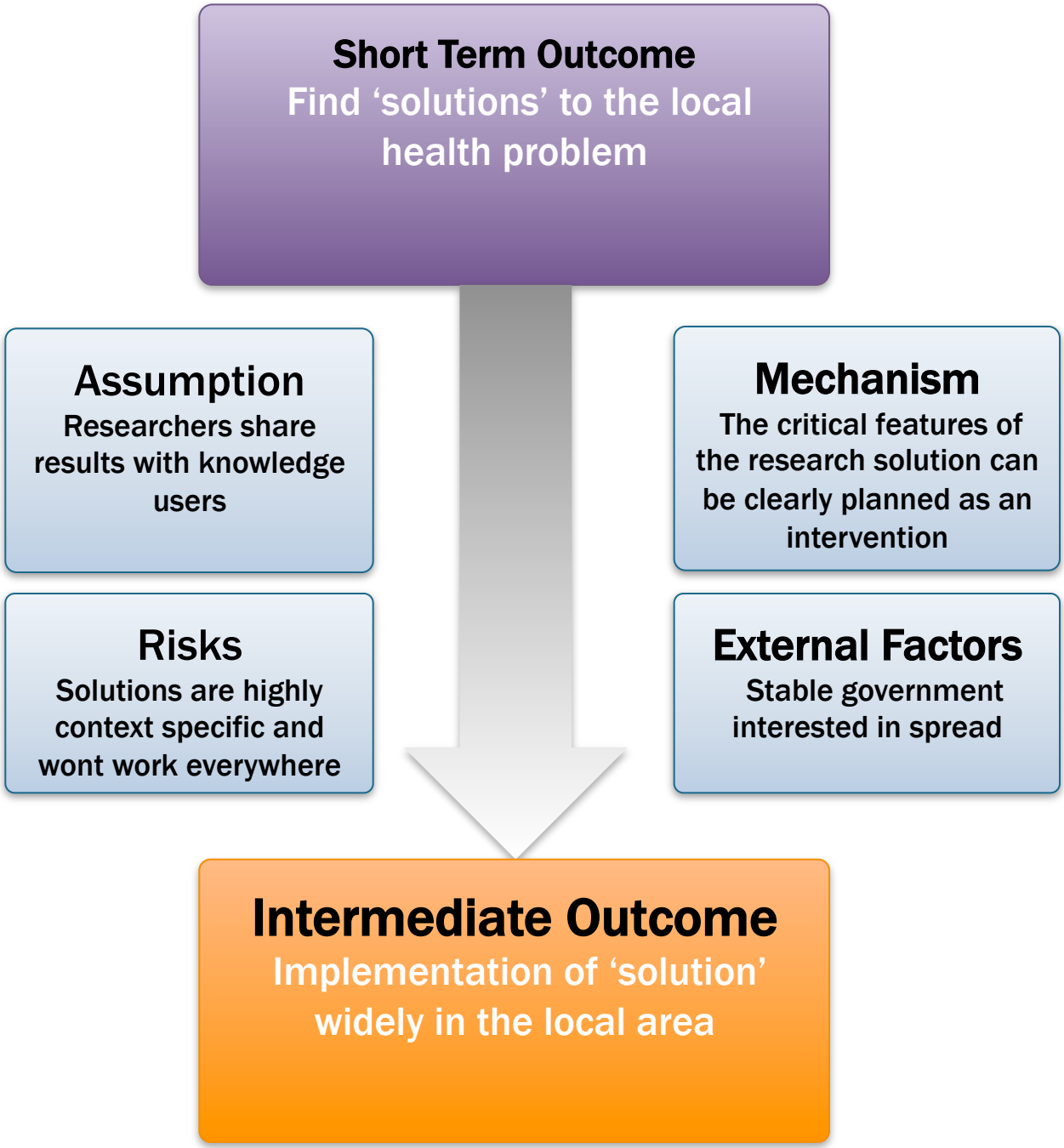
Country is stable

Short Term Outcome

Find 'solutions' to the local health problem

Evidence Needed

- Proof that the solution works in the local context;
- Proof that capacity exists to implement solution;
- Proof that the solution is sustainable



Evidence Needed

- Plan for scaling up;
- Resources allocated for scaling up

Data collection to support theory of change work.

- Interviews with planners in multiple funding organizations
- Formal analysis of final reports
- Formal analysis of proposals
- Surveys of grantees—separate surveys were conducted with Canadian researchers, Southern researchers and knowledge users
- Video interviews with grantees
- Brief case studies of three grantees including Skype interviews with Southern partners
- Bibliometrics analysis