

Effective Research for Development

Using theory-based approaches to assess the effectiveness of knowledge programs

Introduction

Why is effectiveness of knowledge-based interventions a priority now?

- Increasing attention to results / lack of guidance on how to show these
- Large investments from donors / unrealistic or inappropriate measures
- Links to international, multi-sector commitments / weak systems

Is understanding effectiveness of these interventions unique?

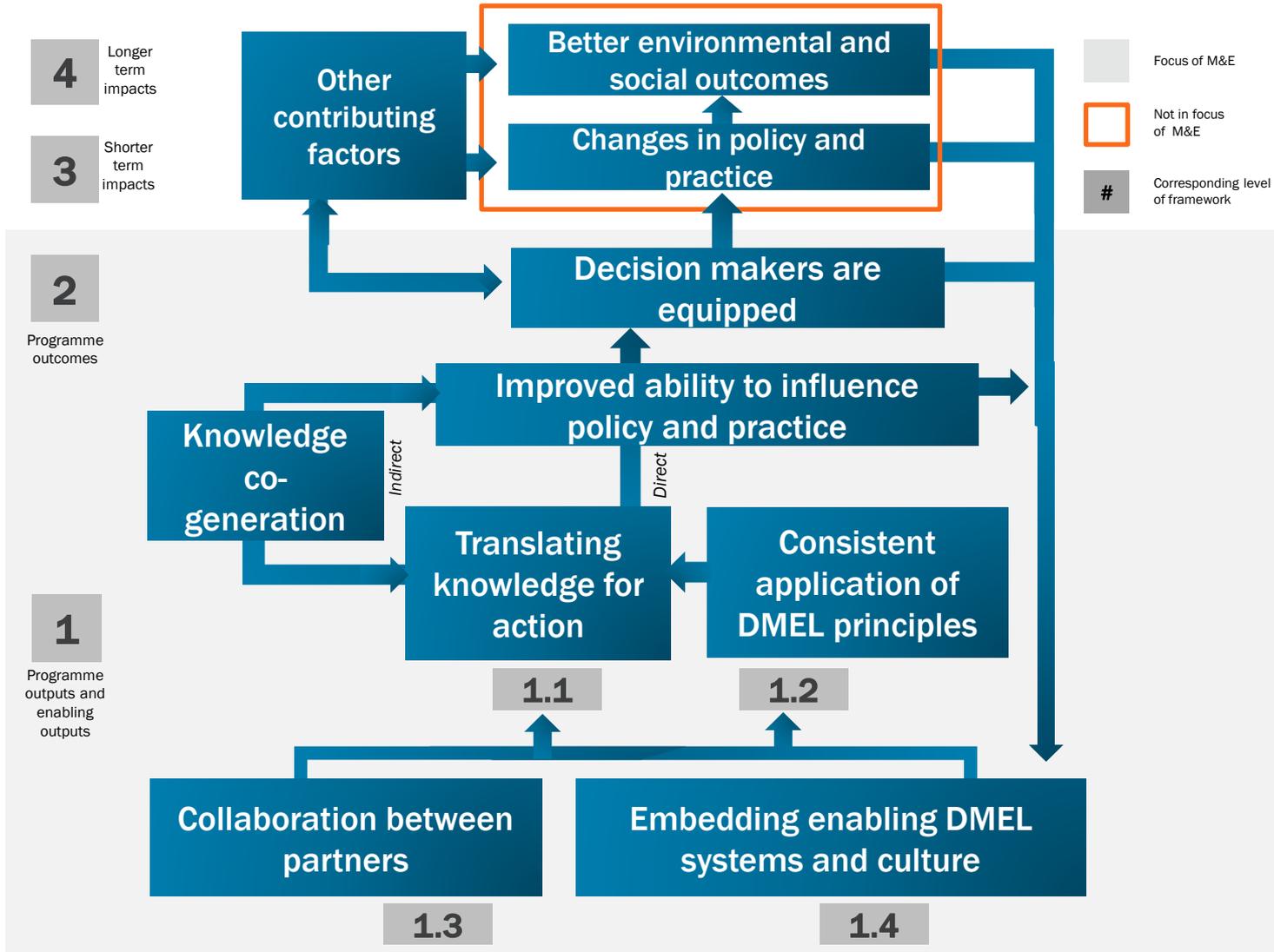
- Knowledge creation is unpredictable
- Involves long results chains, time-lags, complex systems, feed-back etc
- Traditionally subject to simplistic measures unrelated to results

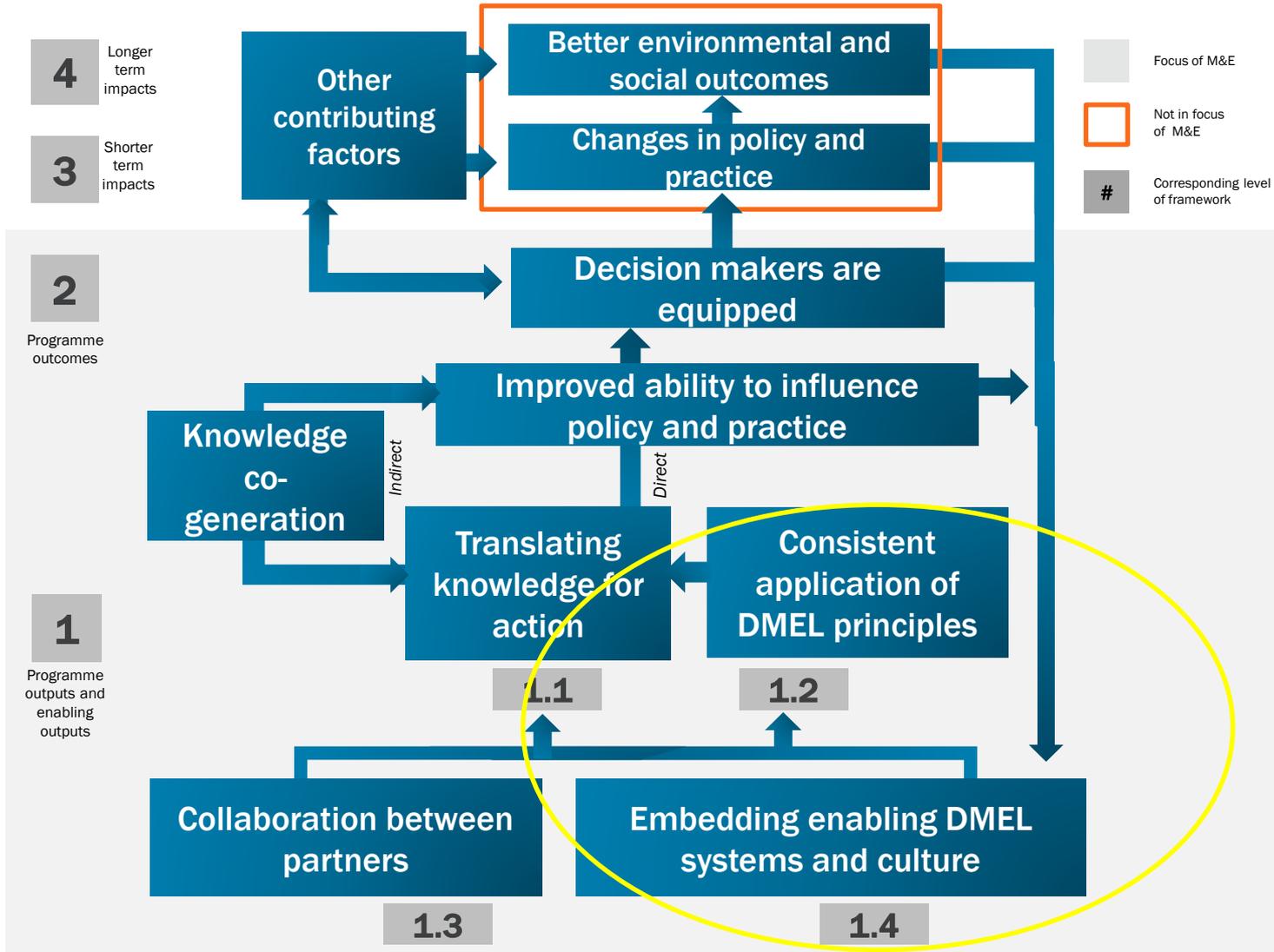
KNOWFOR is:



The idea is that...

$$1 + 1 + 1 = 5$$





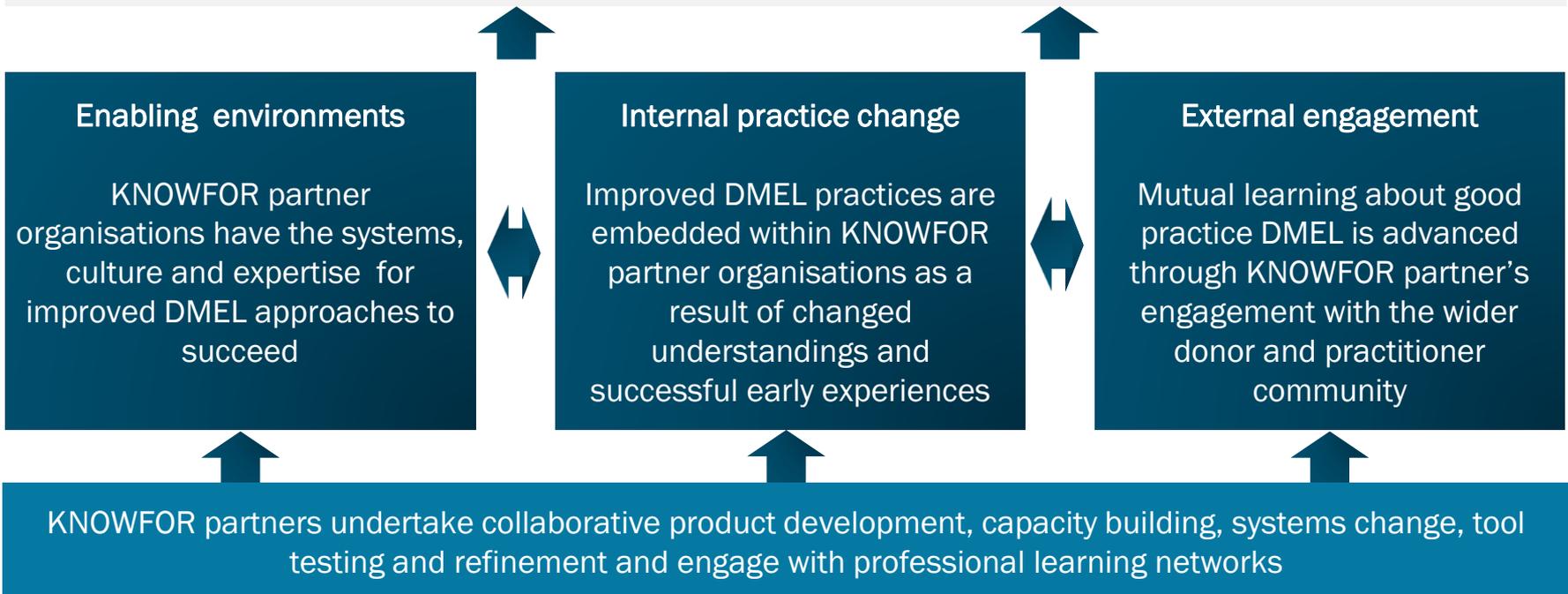
Method

To understand KNOWFOR's contribution to partners practice:

- Adopted a theory driven approach
 - developed a testable hypothesis about the use of the approaches
 - identified targets for change
 - collected evidence and assessed the strength of the causal relationships
- Involved partners as a learning-by-doing strategy, in order to:
 - embed learning about the approach
 - increase sharing of lessons between partners
 - engage them in theory building as well as theory testing and establishing performance standards

Partner Theory of Change

Knowledge programs are designed and implemented more effectively and are able to generate evidence-based lessons to share with the sector



Method



Findings

Applying this approach is contributing to more effective aid by:

- Challenging researchers to plan for strategic systematic engagement with user and knowledge networks at the design stage
- Increasing the interest in and effective application of learning focused monitoring and evaluation – including more meaningful and transparent measures of success
- Building an evidence base to inform future work and investments – addressing how and why results were achieved
- Facilitating further donor investment in knowledge-based interventions

Design

Progress so far:

- Strong uptake of theory of change as a design tool
- Interest in approaching design as a theory to be tested – assumptions as an entry point to M&E
- Enhanced the focus on the researchers “sphere of influence”
- Establishes a causal chain connecting research activities to the policy and practice changes that influence social and environmental impacts
- Driven improvements in how the translation of knowledge to policy and practice are understood and planned

Monitoring and Evaluation

Progress so far:

- Embracing monitoring and evaluation has been slower

Early indications are that that:

- Monitoring and evaluation are beginning to be seen as central to project design and organisational learning
- Increased confidence in rigour of theory-driven evaluation
- focuses on the
- examines contribution in nuanced but accessible ways

Learning

Contributions to internal and partner learning

- Communication among teams and with implementing partners
- Participatory reflection processes are increasing perceived value of collecting data

Contributions to donor learning

- Opportunity to dialogue with donors about what is reasonable
- Helps communicate results and report to donors – framework for recognising and valuing early results
- Bringing transparency to how investing in knowledge for development works and what results should

Constraints to effective DMEL

- a failure to adequately resource or incentivise systematic M&E approaches
- a real or perceived disjuncture between stated support for systematic M&E and actual resource allocation and performance management
- the combination of minimal investment in robust organisational approaches to M&E and conflicting demands and approaches of multiple donor
- limited published examples of applying theory-driven approaches in relevant programs and sectors and limited hard data on M&E as a critical impact delivery mechanism
- uncertainty about how to adaptively manage during the activity cycle of knowledge generation programs.

Enablers of effective DMEL

Commitment, organisation culture and relationships

- Organisational or systemic drivers and incentives
- Leadership endorsement
- Staff interest in learning and strong cross team relationships

Systems and processes

- Foundations of a quality DMEL system
- Appropriate internal and external technical support

Resources and skills

- Dedicated human resources
- Regular training and on-the-job capacity development
- Dedicated DMEL funding