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# Using Mid Range Theory to Enhance Transferability of Study Findings



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# Definition and rationale

Theory of change: How programme inputs and activities get converted to intended outputs and outcomes

A theory of change is drawn for a specific intervention

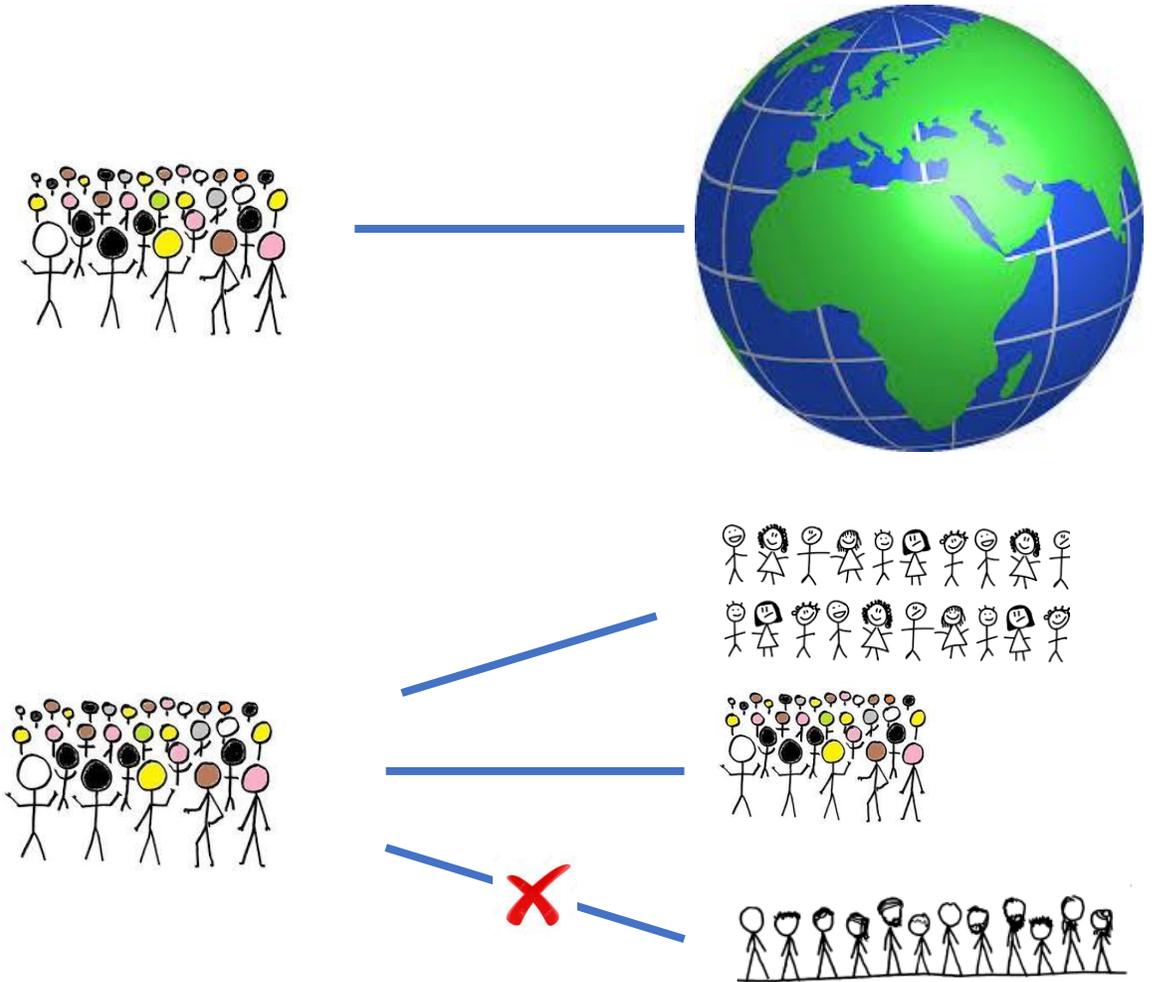
Mid Range Theory is stated at a sufficient general a level as to apply to a range of specific interventions in different settings

Allows systematic approach to assessing transferability. That is answering the question: will a study finding from one setting transfer to another setting?

# Generalizability versus transferability

Generalizable finding is universal, applies always and everywhere (e.g., for practical purposes, gravity and vaccines)

Transferable finding applies in other settings, but not always and everywhere



# MRT: An example of a mid-range causal principle

Providing people information about the benefits of a certain behaviour (or the harms of not adopting the behaviour) increases the likelihood of the behaviour being adopted

Specific ToC would be applied to agricultural extension, road safety campaigns, anti-smoking etc.

# What are the underlying assumptions?

Assumption 1 Behaviour not already adopted

Impact evaluation of agricultural extension in Kenya found no impact because farmers already using the practices being promoted

## Agricultural Extension The Kenya Experience

An Impact Evaluation





## Underlying assumption 2

Possible to adopt the intervention

An impact evaluation of training farmers in irrigated agriculture found no impact... as the irrigation infrastructure had not yet been built

# Underlying assumption 3

Beneficial to adopt the intervention

Study of productive activities proposed to SHGs in Andhra Pradesh found they were inherently loss-making



# Underlying assumption 4

Communication is conducted in appropriate way and through appropriate channels/media

Systematic review of farmer field schools found that extension workers often don't speak local language (around 2,000 languages spoken across Africa with over 400 in Nigeria alone)



And...

Do community workers speak the same language as the communities in which they are working?

Are female community workers available to work with female beneficiaries?

*These are the foundations for evidence-based guidance on designing community programmes*

# Examples illustrate how specific evaluation findings link to general principles for transferability for relevant lessons for programme design

Farmers already practicing approaches being promoted



Are the behaviours being promoted largely absent in the target population

Productive activities proposed to SHGs inherently unprofitable



Do the benefits of participation for an intended beneficiary outweigh their transaction costs from participation?

PS for programme designs: formative research on barriers to adoption is very useful here

# Formalizing the approach

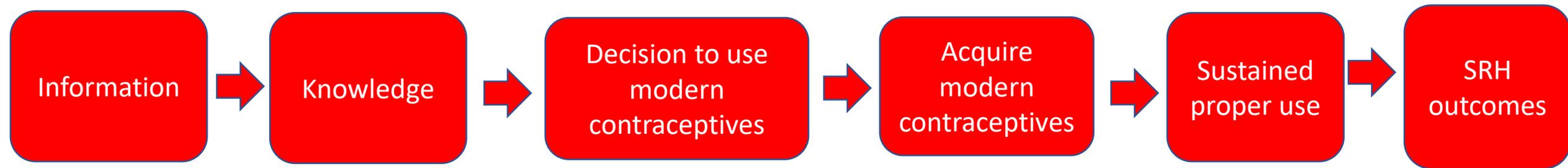
From Cartwright et al.  
forthcoming CEDIL  
paper

1. Specify the overall programme theory
2. Produce a step-by-step diagram
3. Describe the causal principles at work at each step
4. Identify support factors
5. Identify derailers
6. Identify how to support supporters, and safeguard against the derailers
7. Allow for causal loops
8. Specify expected range of application

Step 1: The general programme theory for providing information to increase use of modern contraceptives

Providing people information about modern contraceptives and shortcomings of traditional methods increases the use of modern contraceptives

# Step 2: Theory of change diagram



## Step 3: Causal principles

- Providing information to people about modern contraceptives increases their knowledge about the benefits of modern contraceptives and how to acquire and use them
- Knowledge of the benefits and how to acquire leads to greater use of modern contraceptives
- Modern contraceptives are properly used
- Modern contraceptives work



# Steps 4 and 5: Identify support factors and derailers

- Women in target group are not already using modern contraceptives
- Appropriate media and communications approaches exist for reaching the target group
- Women have the right to chose (which is a function of legislation and social norms)
- Contraceptives are available and accessible
- Contraceptives are properly used

## Step 6: Supporting supporters and safe-guarding against derailers (programme design)

<b>Supporter/derailer</b>	<b>Programme design feature</b>
Women have right to chose	Interventions to encourage progressive legislation and social norms
Appropriate media and communications approach	Formative testing of approaches aligned to target group norms and knowledge
Target group not using modern contraceptives	Adequate targeting mechanism
Contraceptives available and accessible	Ensure adequate supply through public and private channels
Contraceptives properly used	Communicate how to use not just what to use

# Using assumptions for evaluation questions

## Supporter/derailer

## Programme design feature

Women have right to chose

What are the barriers to women who want to use contraceptives doing so?

Appropriate media and communications approach

Qualitative assessment of communication approaches  
Women's knowledge of modern contraceptives (compared to comparison group)

Target group not using modern contraceptives

Baseline measure of contraceptive use

Contraceptives available and accessible

How can women procure contraceptives? What are the costs of doing so?

Contraceptives properly used

Measure how used (and knowledge on proper use), and how frequently used, not just if used

# Using assumptions for indicators

## Supporter/derailer

## Indicator

Women have right to chose

Women's agency, possibly using vignettes (moderator)

Appropriate media and communications approach

Women's knowledge of modern contraceptives (compared to comparison group) (link in causal chain)

Target group not using modern contraceptives

Baseline measure of contraceptive use (moderator)

Contraceptives available and accessible

Survey of health facility contraceptive availability (moderator)  
Market survey of contraceptive availability and prices (moderator)

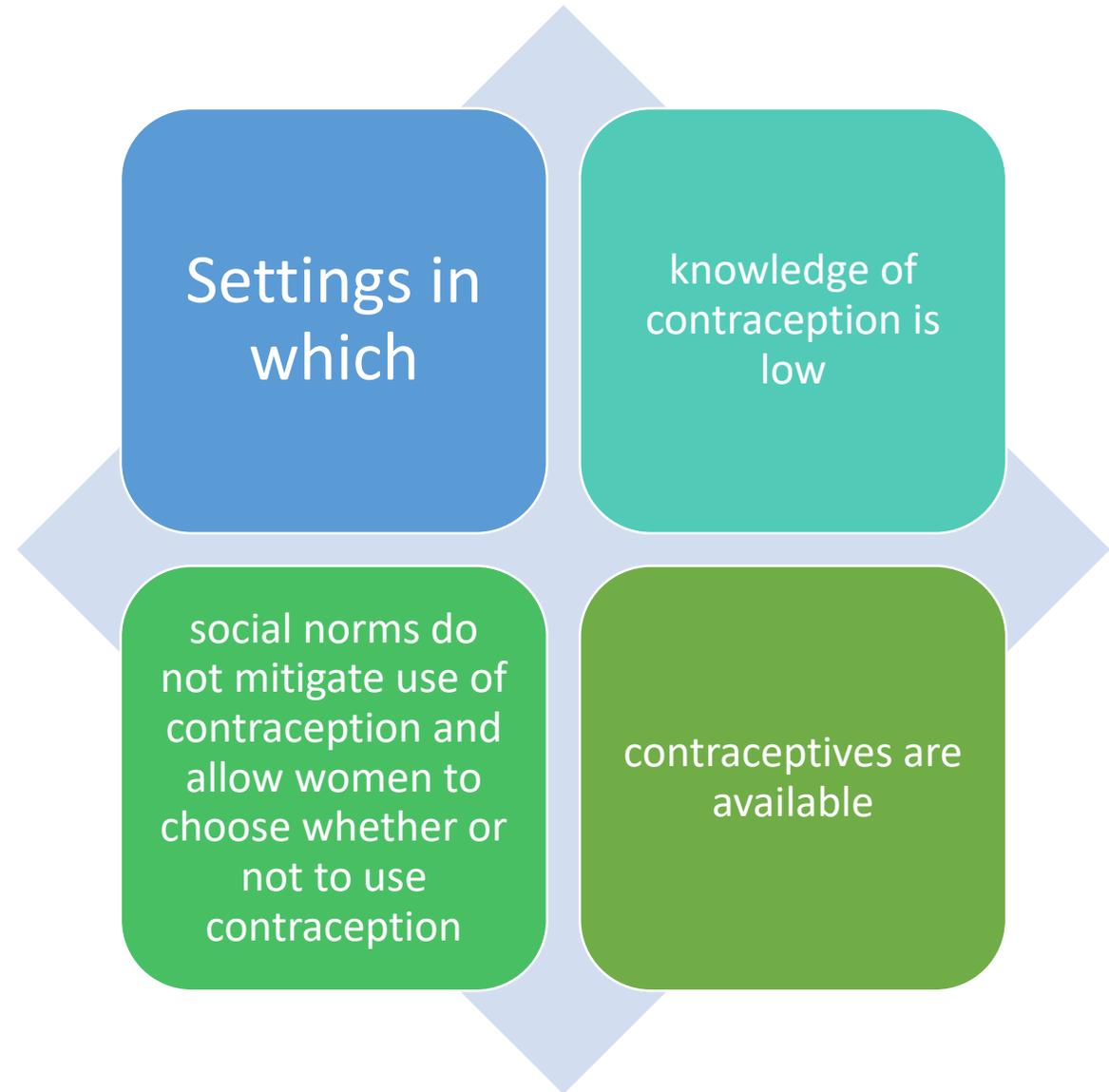
Contraceptives properly used

Knowledge on proper use (link in causal chain)  
Frequency of use (link in causal chain)

## Step 7: Feedback loops

- Word of mouth spillover effects
- Social norms get established through changed practice
- Better choices by women can be empowering leading to stronger rights

## Step 8: Expected range of application



# What do we want CEDIL teams to do? Systematic reviews



## Systematic reviews



For 'how is the intervention expected to work' use a mid-range theory approach



Identify review questions across the causal chain (mixed methods review). Questions relate to causal processes and assumptions



Include relevant moderators and causal linkage indicators in your coding form



Present specific review findings. And in implications of review findings discuss transferable findings and applicable range of settings

# What do we want CEDIL teams to do? Primary studies

Embed	Embed the programme theory of change in a mid-range theory approach
Identify	Explicitly identify causal linkages, supporters, derailers and supporters
Address	Address evaluation questions across the causal chain
Include	Include an explicit discussion of transferability of study findings drawing on the MRT approach

# Follow up



CARTWRIGHT ET AL.  
PAPER (FORTHCOMING)



CEDIL MRT WORKSHOP  
NOVEMBER 2020



CEDIL PAPER COMPARING  
PLANNED USE OF MRT IN  
CEDIL FUNDED STUDIES



CEDIL LESSON-LEARNING  
PAPER ON USE OF MRT



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