



CAUSAL
PATHWAYS

VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM 2023

DISCOVERING HOW, WHY, AND
WHEN OUR STRATEGIES MATTER

Causal Linking Monitoring:

Monitoring and evaluating complexity in causal pathways

Presented by Heather Britt
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Causal Link Monitoring



Heather Britt

Independent Evaluator



www.linkedin.com/heatherbritt



www.heatherbritt.com

Just one acronym today....

Causal Link Monitoring = CLM

Causal link monitoring is an approach to designing and implementing monitoring, evaluation and learning activities. It helps you decide what, when and how to monitor and evaluate.

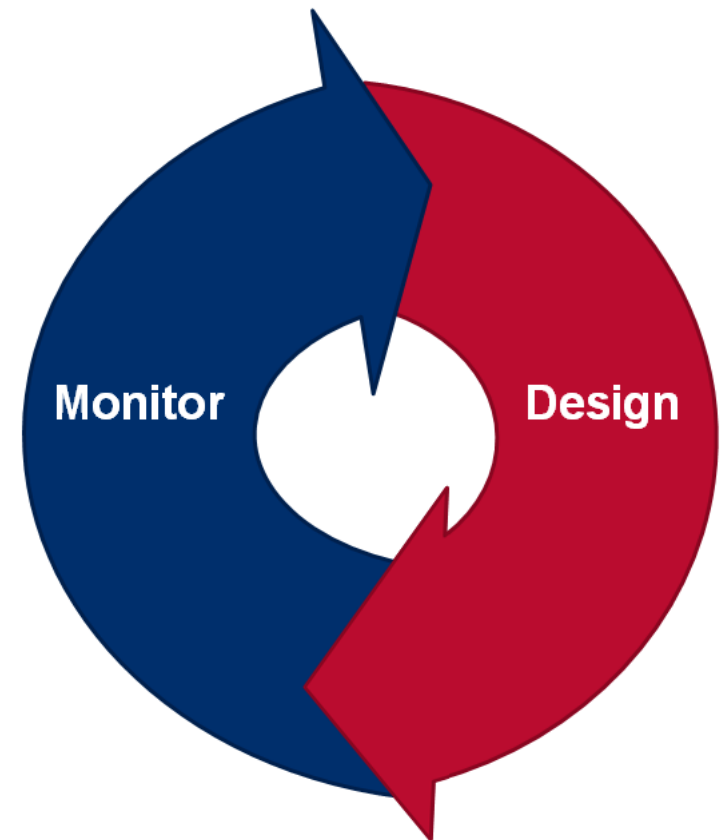
Causal Link Monitoring in practice

Build/enhance a theory of change
to identify where a project is most sensitive to complexity

Plan to monitor/evaluate to understand causal pathways and adapt to changes in dynamic contexts

Collect and use data to steer project

Update the theory of change to reflect new information and project adaptation



Poll: What is your experience with theories of change?

Do you use theories of change for **designing projects or strategies**?

1. I've not used theories of change
2. I've used theories of change a few times, but it's not a regular part of my practice.
3. I regularly use theories of change.
4. None of the above.

Poll: What is your experience with theories of change?

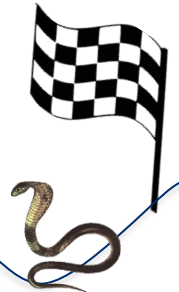
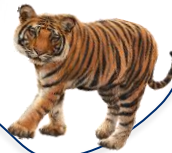
Do you use theories of change for **planning monitoring or evaluation activities?**

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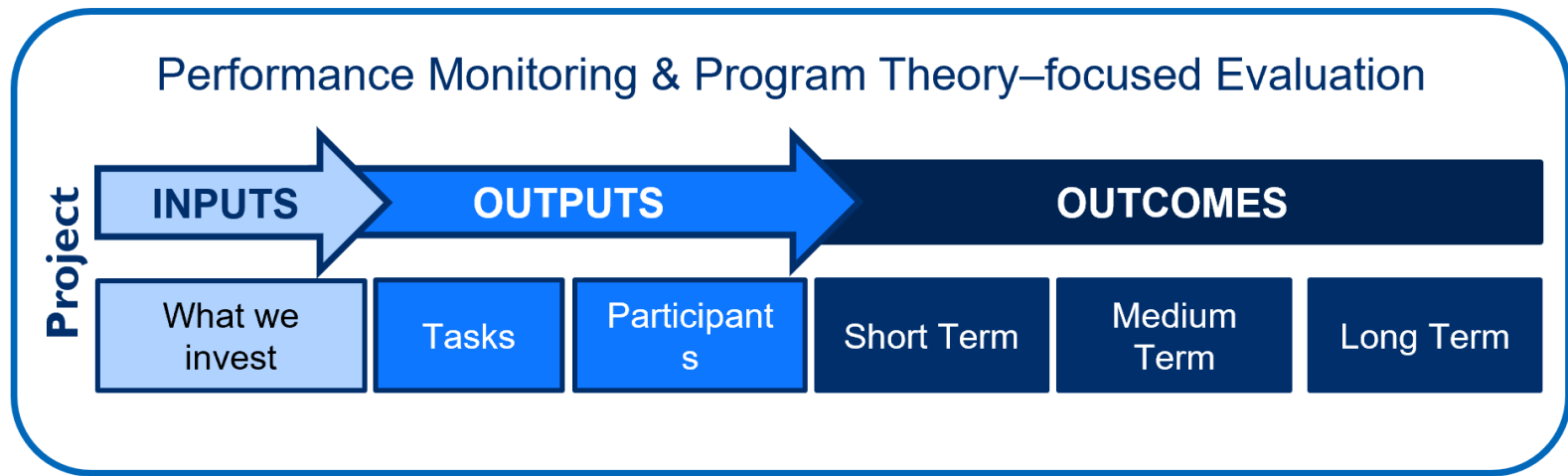
Your Plan



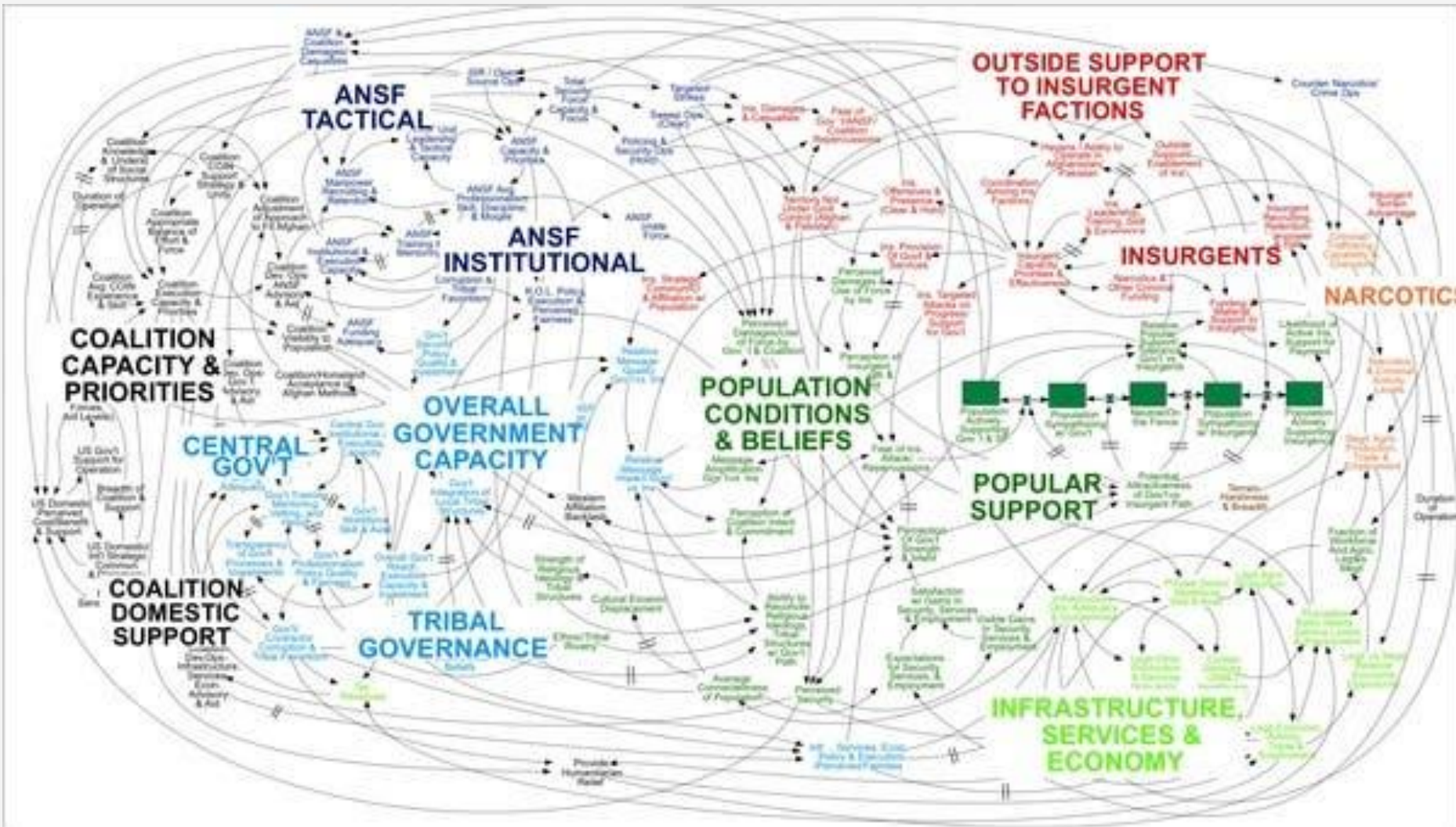
Reality



Causal pathways may be too simplistic

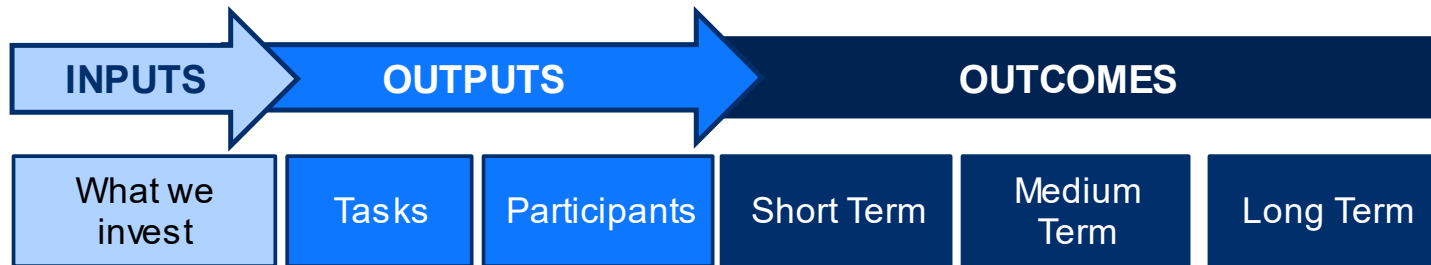


Causal pathways may be too comprehensive



CLM helps determine what, when and how to monitor and evaluate

Project monitors and evaluates the theory of change



Project conducts little or no tracking of the context

Complexity influences projects in different ways

- **Contextual factors** influence the project.
- Stakeholders bring **diverse perspectives**; goals and strategies are contested; consensus is impractical
- **Uncertain and unpredictable** cause and effect relationships in the project logic model
- Project is likely to contribute to **emergent** (unpredictable) outcomes
- Pace of change is **dynamic**; changes can lead to new opportunities and/or needs
- Adaptive management is necessary to steer effectively



CLM addresses different levels of predictability across a project's casual pathways.

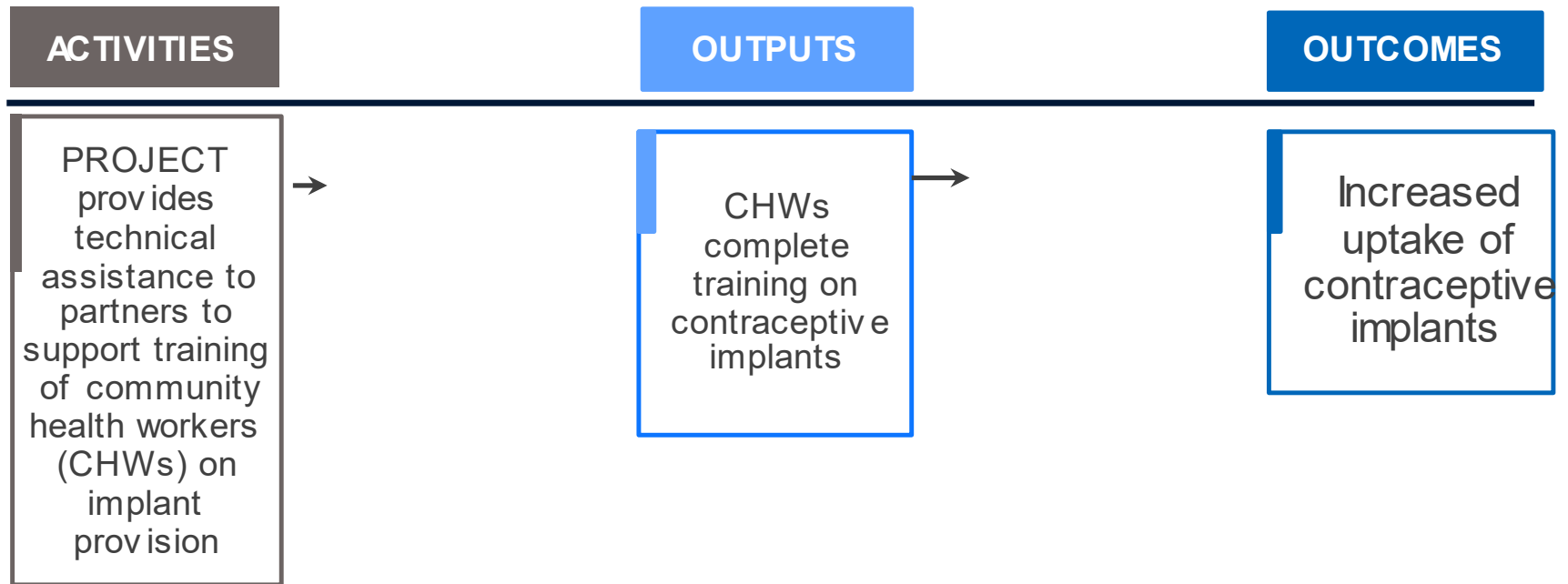


Sample Project: Building the capacity of local partners to increase uptake of contraceptive implants

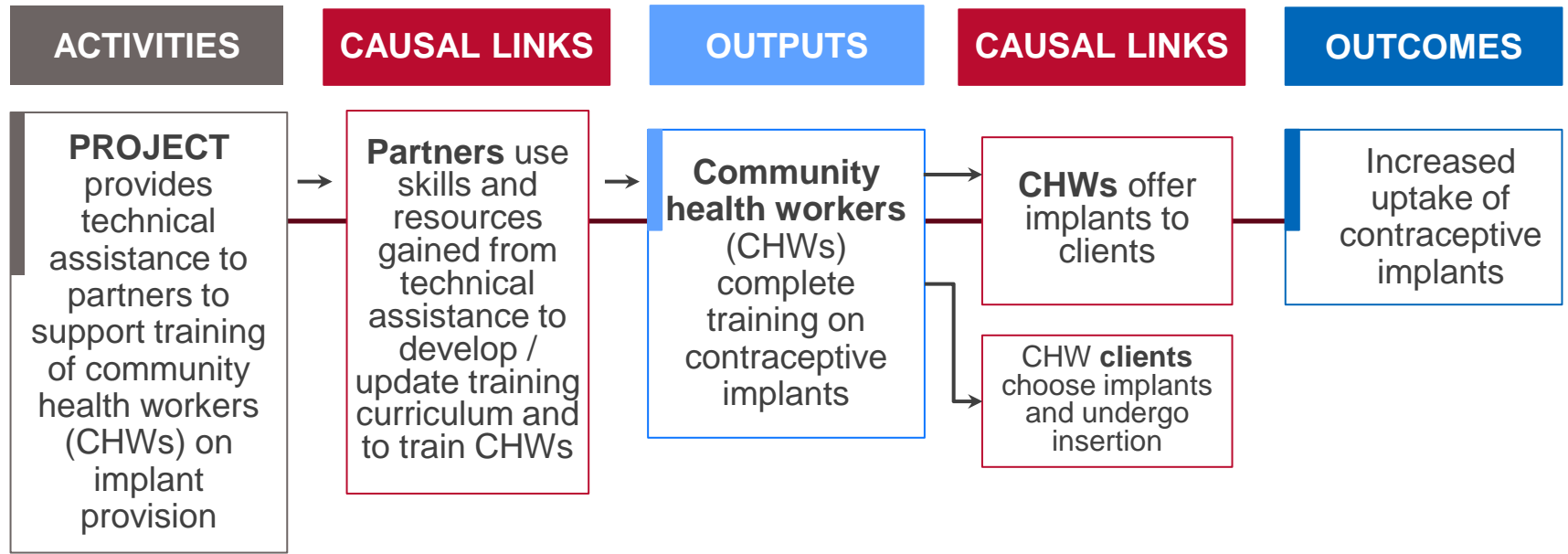


Please credit [SPRING](#) for the adaptation and use of this image ([Counseling - Breastfeeding counseling - 00 - India](#)) accessed from the USAID Advancing Nutrition-UNICEF IYCF Digital Image Bank (iycf.advancingnutrition.org). Commercial use, redistribution, or selling of these images and materials is prohibited.

Building the capacity of local partners to increase uptake of contraceptive implants



Building the capacity of local partners to increase uptake of contraceptive implants



Theory of change enhanced with:

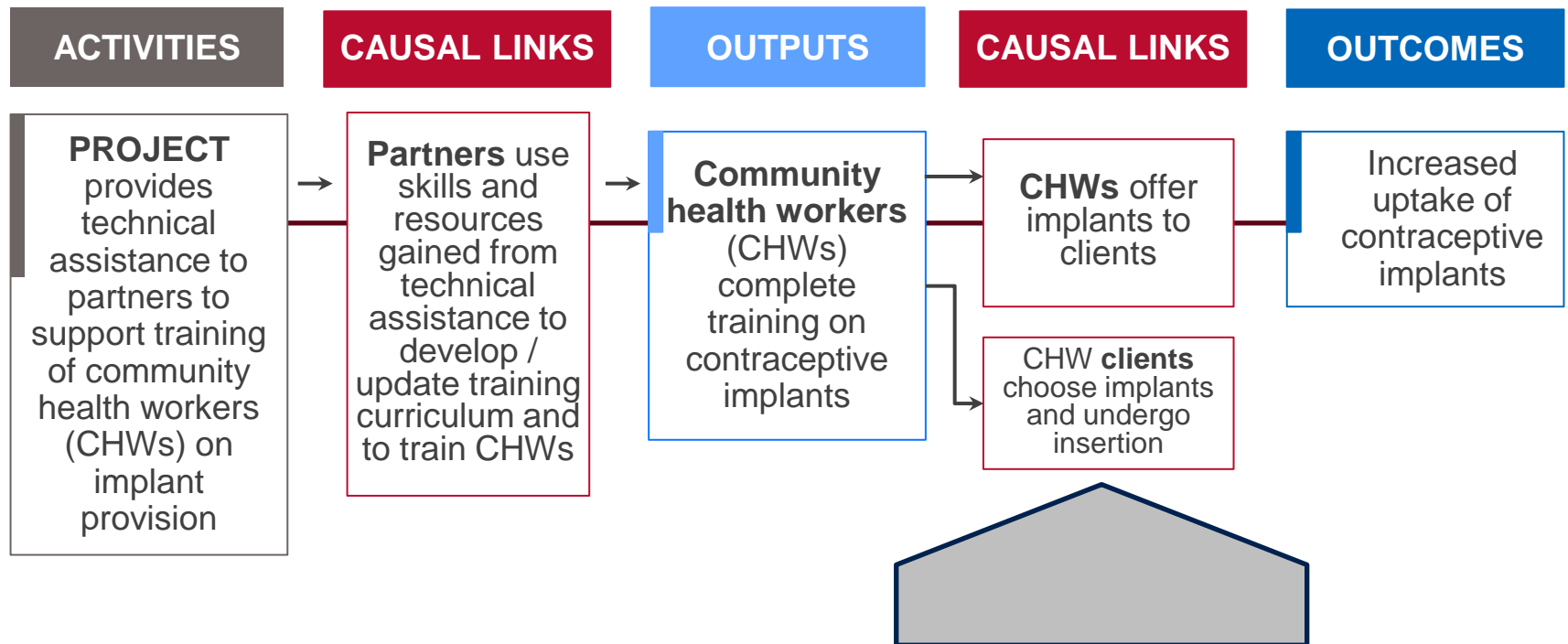
- Uncertain causal links (assumptions)

Use CLM's enhanced theory of change to learn about complex causal pathways



- TOCs for causal learning pinpoint where the TOC cannot predict accurately.
- Anticipate where to monitor, evaluate and learn during implementation
- Improve understanding of complex causal pathways

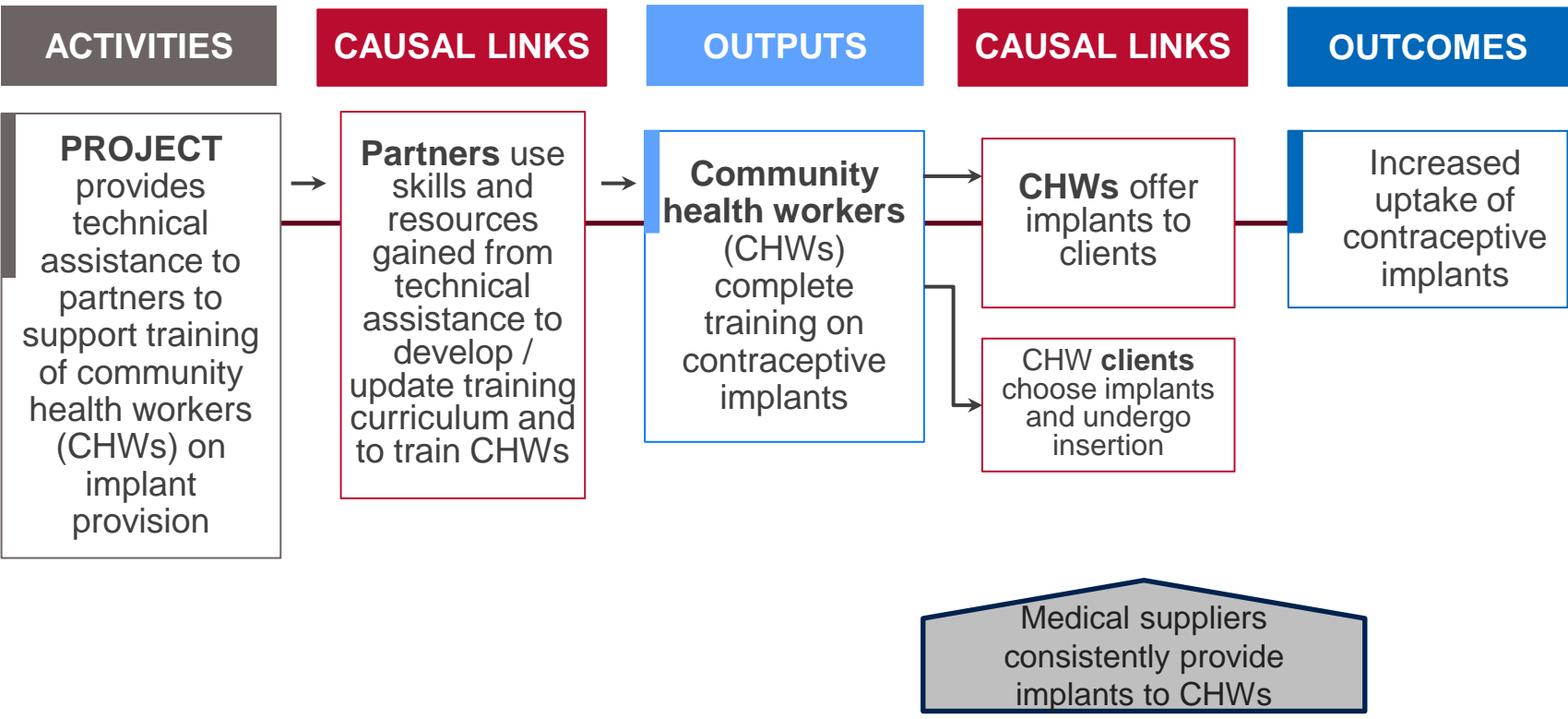
Building the capacity of local partners to increase uptake of contraceptive implants



Which of the following are contextual factors?

- Local partners use skills gained from technical assistance to develop training curriculum and to train CHWs.
- Medical supply chain suffers from disruptions; medical suppliers cannot consistently provide implants.
- Government diverts family planning funds to other public health issues.

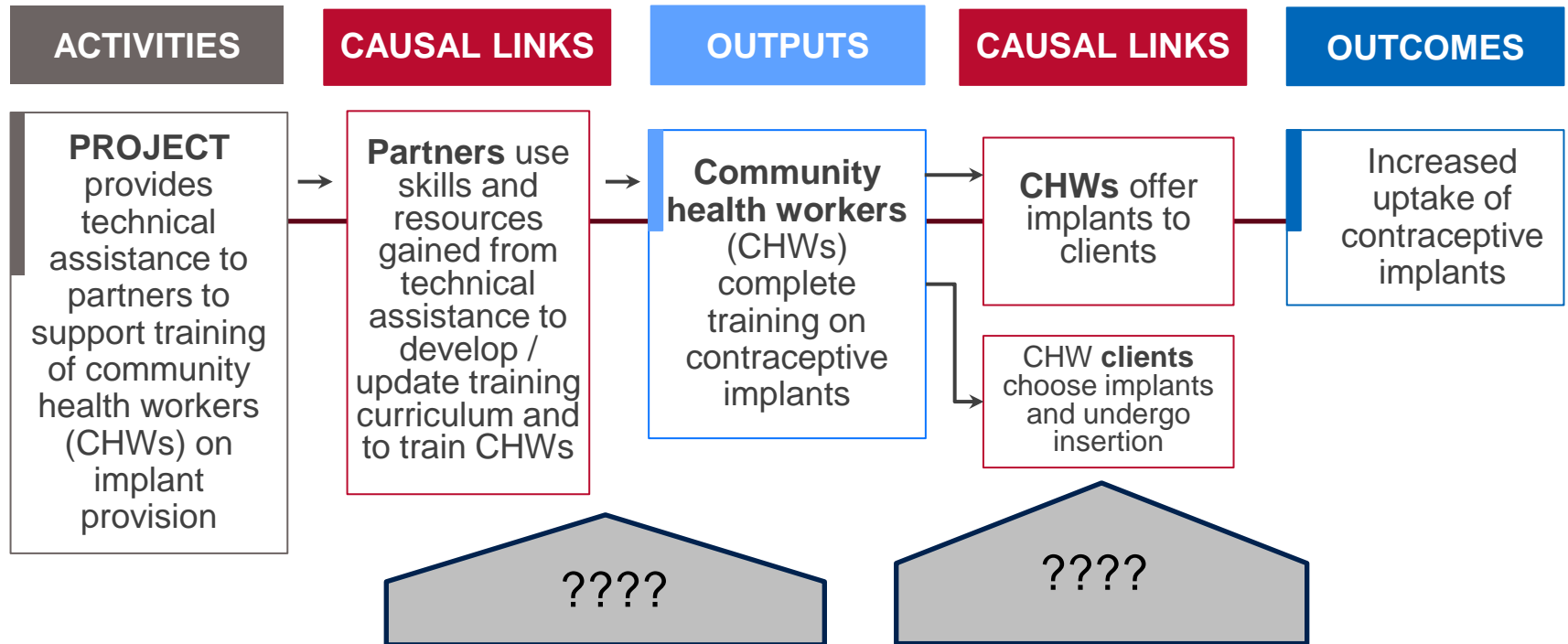
Building the capacity of local partners to increase uptake of contraceptive implants



Theory of change enhanced with:

- Uncertain causal links
- Contextual factors

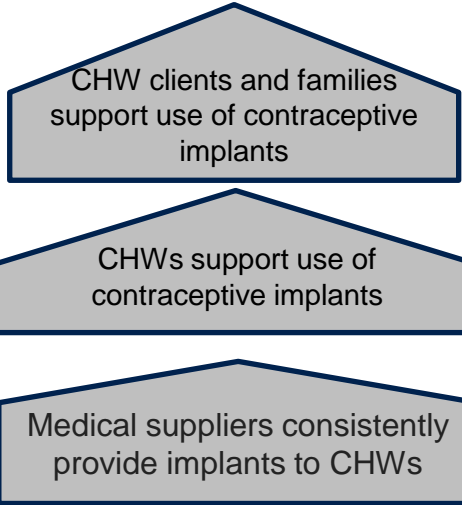
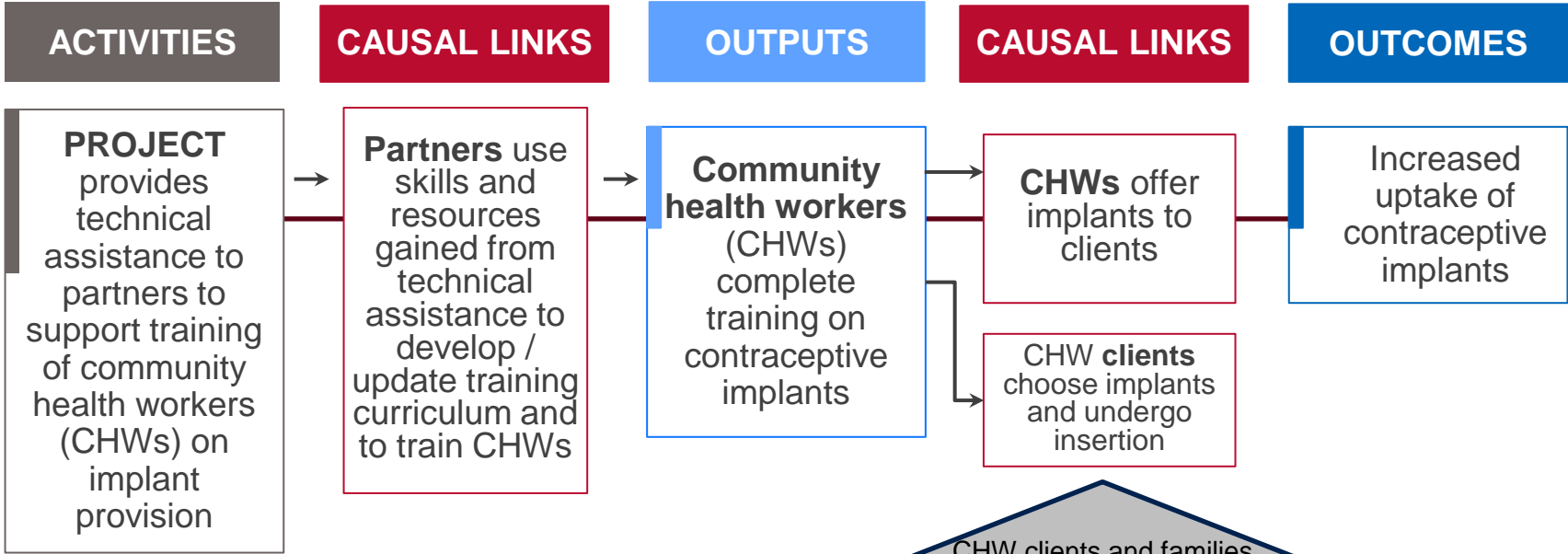
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Whose perspectives do we prioritize?

- Whose perspectives influence the achievement of outcomes?
- Whose views on the situation are likely to be different from the project?

Building the capacity of local partners to increase uptake of contraceptive implants



Theory of change enhanced with:

- Uncertain causal links
- Contextual factors
- Diverse perspectives

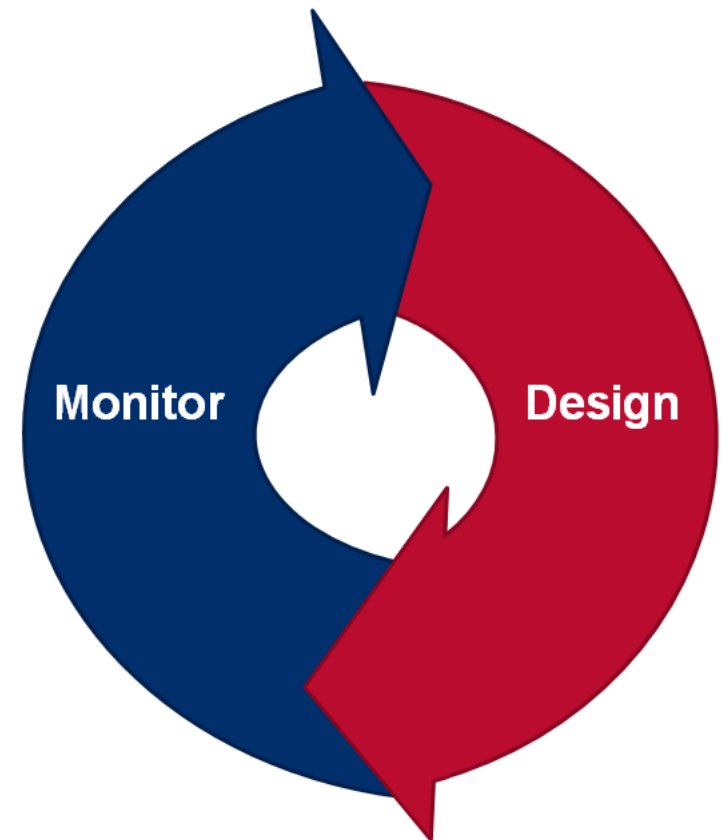
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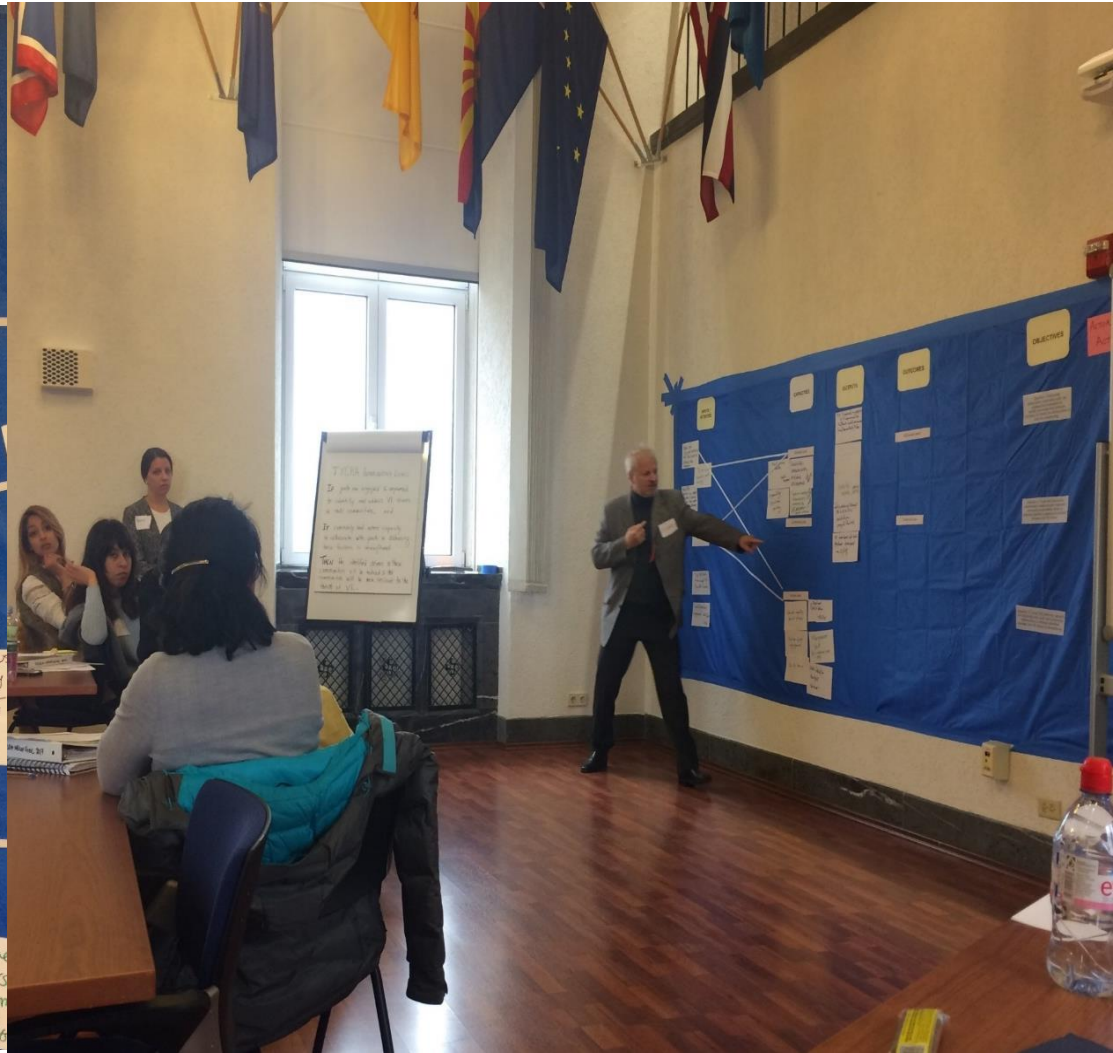
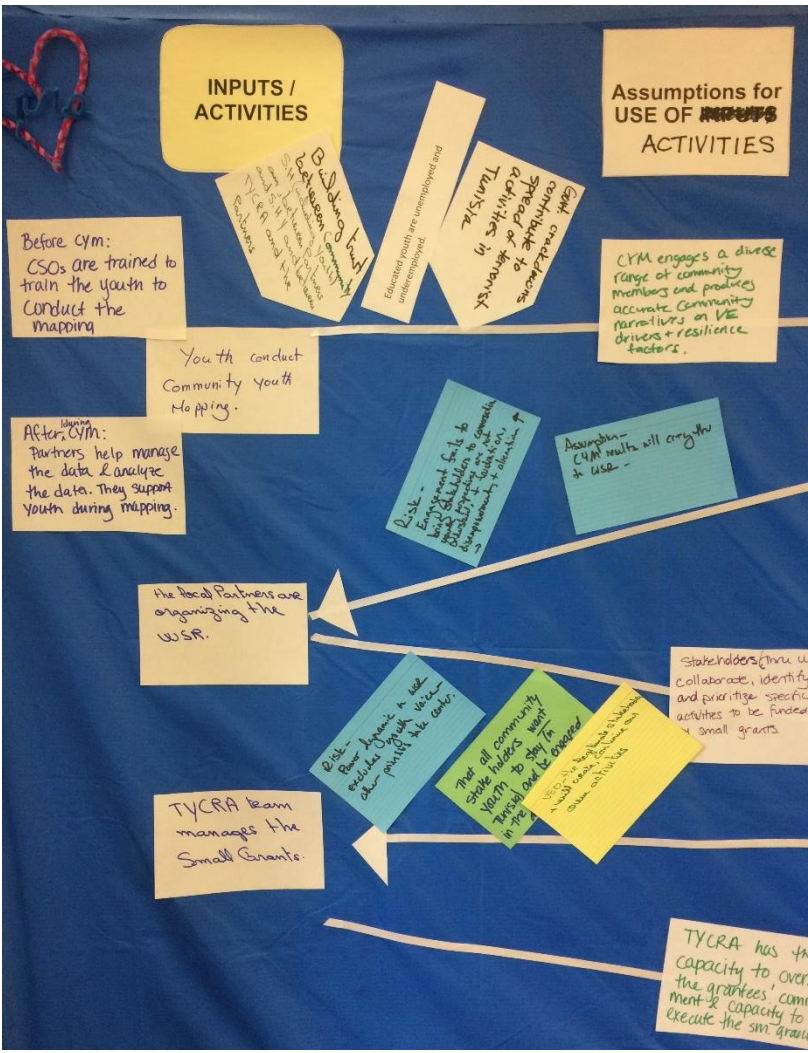
Update the theory of change to reflect new information and project adaptation



Plan to monitor and evaluate

1. Review the complexity-aware TOC
2. Prioritize knowledge gaps and determine who needs information and when
3. Develop questions
4. Select/design approaches for answering questions

Map knowledge gaps and prioritize information needs collaboratively



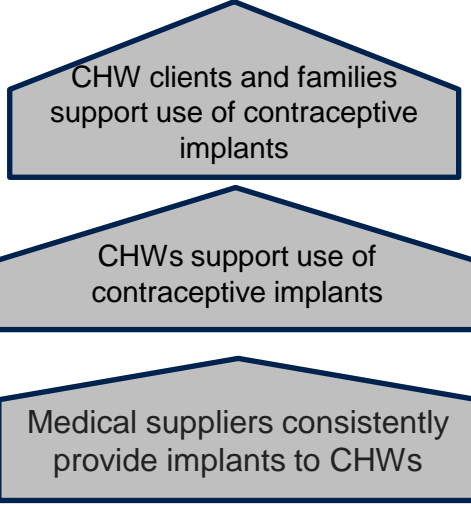
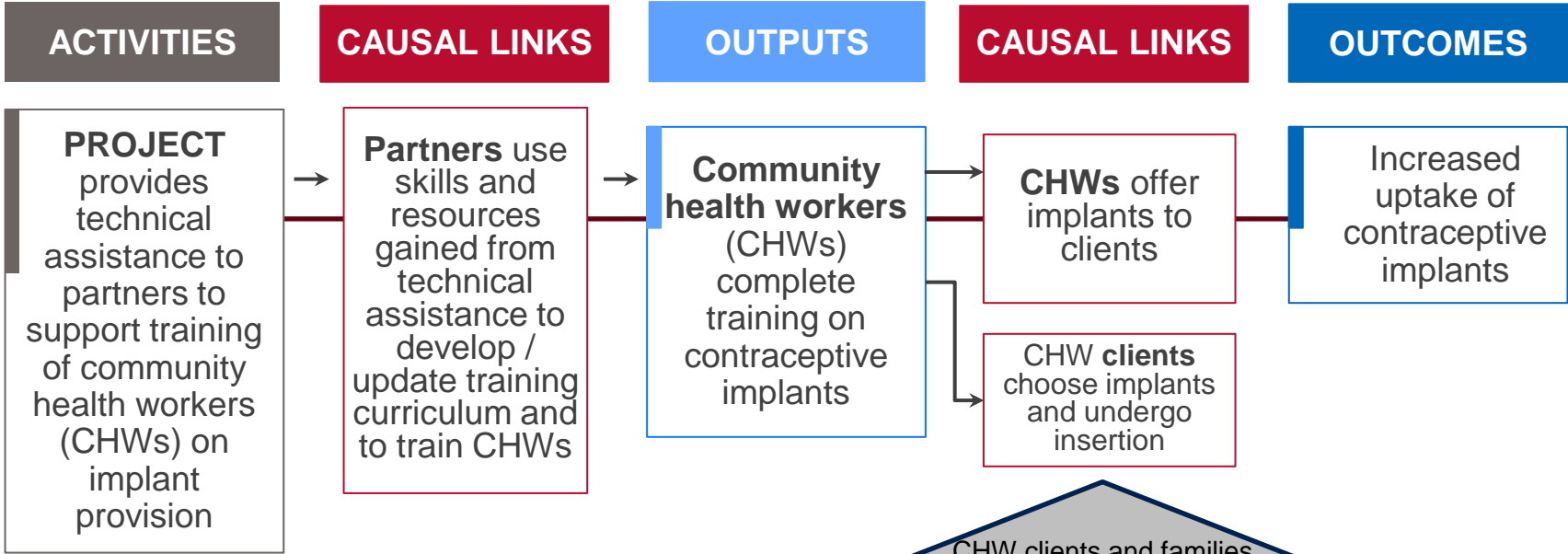
Select the methods that are the best fit for the question and ensure use

1. Prioritize use in data quality considerations (timely, affordable, understood by users)
2. Traditional methods are often a good option
3. Integrate goal-free and complexity-aware methods to capture emergent outcomes and complex causal pathways



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Building the capacity of local partners to increase uptake of contraceptive implants



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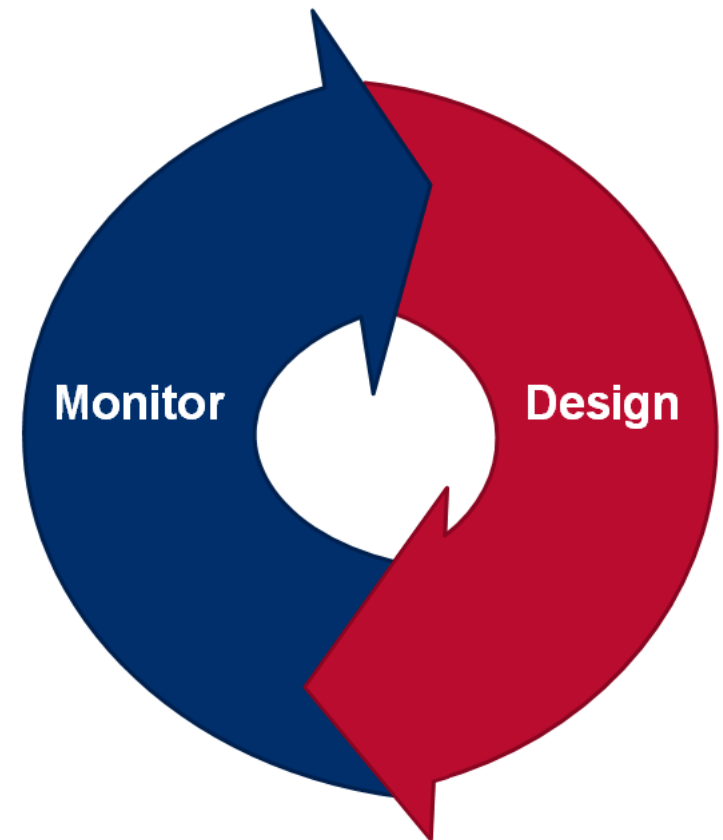
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Questions?



How does CLM strengthen learning about causal pathways?

1. CLM's causal pathways describe how the project and the system influence each other
2. CLM prioritizes where and when to monitor and evaluate
3. CLM supports good monitoring and evaluation design
4. CLM helps weigh data quality trade-offs; rigor to suit purpose

CLM adds value throughout the project cycle

- Developing a **theory of change** that pinpoints complexity
- Designing an **M&E plan** and making decisions about what to monitor, why and how
- Planning an **evaluation** to inform adaptive management
- Conducting a **mid-course project review** with stakeholders



Reflection: What are your priorities for understanding complexity in causal pathways?

Complexity

CLM can help by tracking ...

Uncertain causal links

Where would it be helpful to understand stakeholder causal contributions before results are observable?

Contextual factors

Where is the project sensitive to influence from the context?

Diverse perspectives

Where is the project sensitive to low agreement among stakeholders?

Emergent outcomes

Is the project contributing to unplanned results?

Discussion



Learn more about Causal Link Monitoring

- Process Monitoring of Impacts in Williams, B., & Hummelbrunner, R. (2010). *Systems concepts in action a practitioner's toolkit*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Britt, H., Hummelbrunner, R. and Greene, J. (2017). [Causal Link Monitoring](#). Available on BetterEvaluation.
- More resources coming soon! Contact Heather@HeatherBritt.com

