

Playing the Game Toolkit:

A guide for sport-for-development practitioners





Introduction

This document serves as a guide for applying the Sport for Development (S4D) framework described in the report “Playing the Game: A framework for successful child-focused sport for development programmes”.

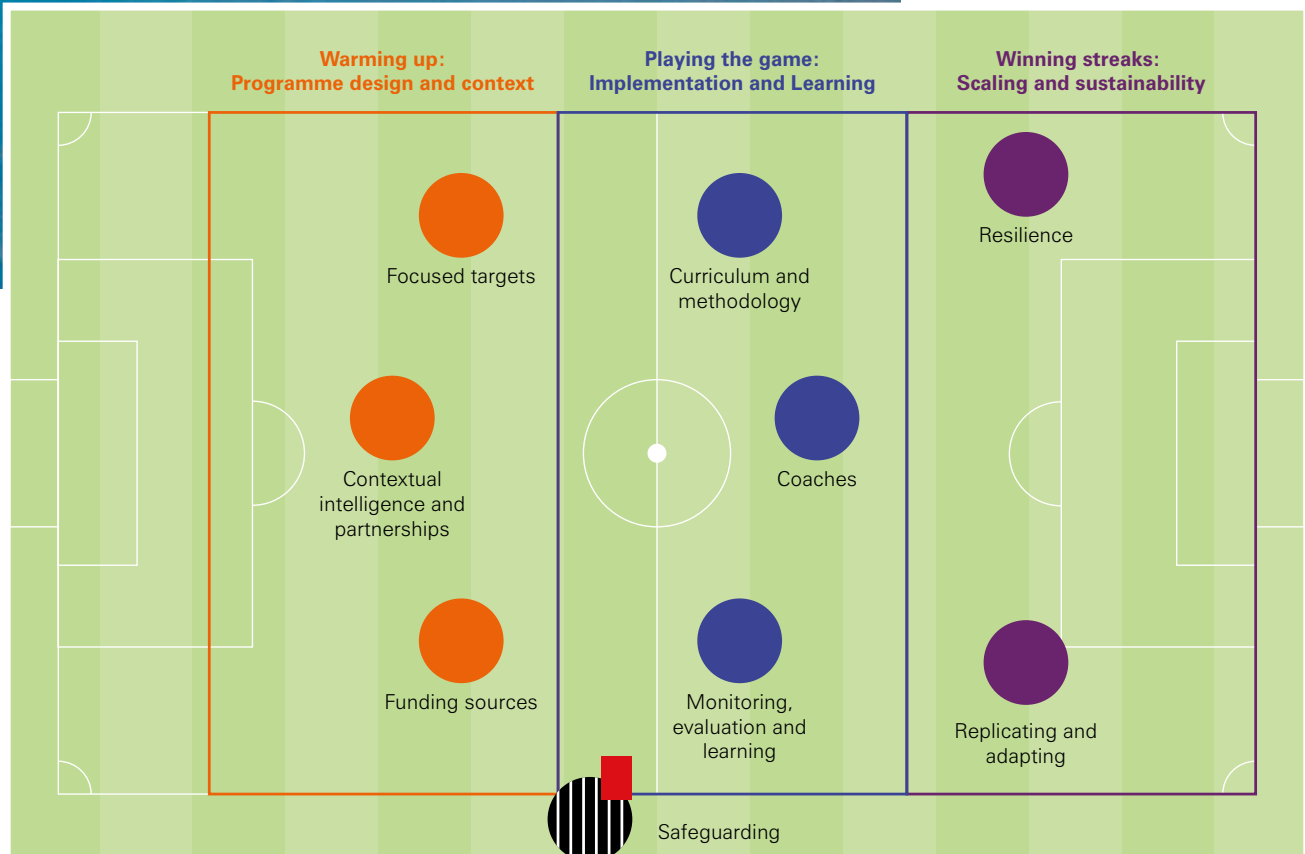
The framework can be used as a starting point for designing a new programme, to guide the expansion of an existing one into new locations, or to improve and re-organize specific programmatic and organizational aspects.

The framework follows the different phases of a programme and their respective components, and recommends best practices (see *Figure 1*). For each component of each programming stage, this toolkit offers practitioners guiding questions and practical recommendations.



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Figure 1: Framework for S4D programming



Warming up: programme design and context

The key ingredients for programme designs that have impact are **focused targets** and **contextual intelligence and multi-level partnerships**. **Funding sources** are a necessary precondition for programme implementation; without these resources long-term planning would not be possible.

Focused targets

Choosing and focusing on a target or outcome means designing an S4D programme that fits the purpose and centres on children and youth. This entails identifying and understanding the target population, including their needs and challenges and what content and delivery methods successfully respond to these needs. Using a theory of change approach, which involves identifying the desired outcome and 'backward mapping' to guide programme development, ensures the programme responds to the identified challenges and proves it through specific outcomes.

Guiding questions

- What is the problem?
- Who is in need of support?
- What outcomes does the programme want to achieve?
- What kind of inputs will help achieve the desired outcomes through sport?
- How can sport help to achieve these outcomes?

To answer these questions, an organization can, in addition to internal conversations, conduct:

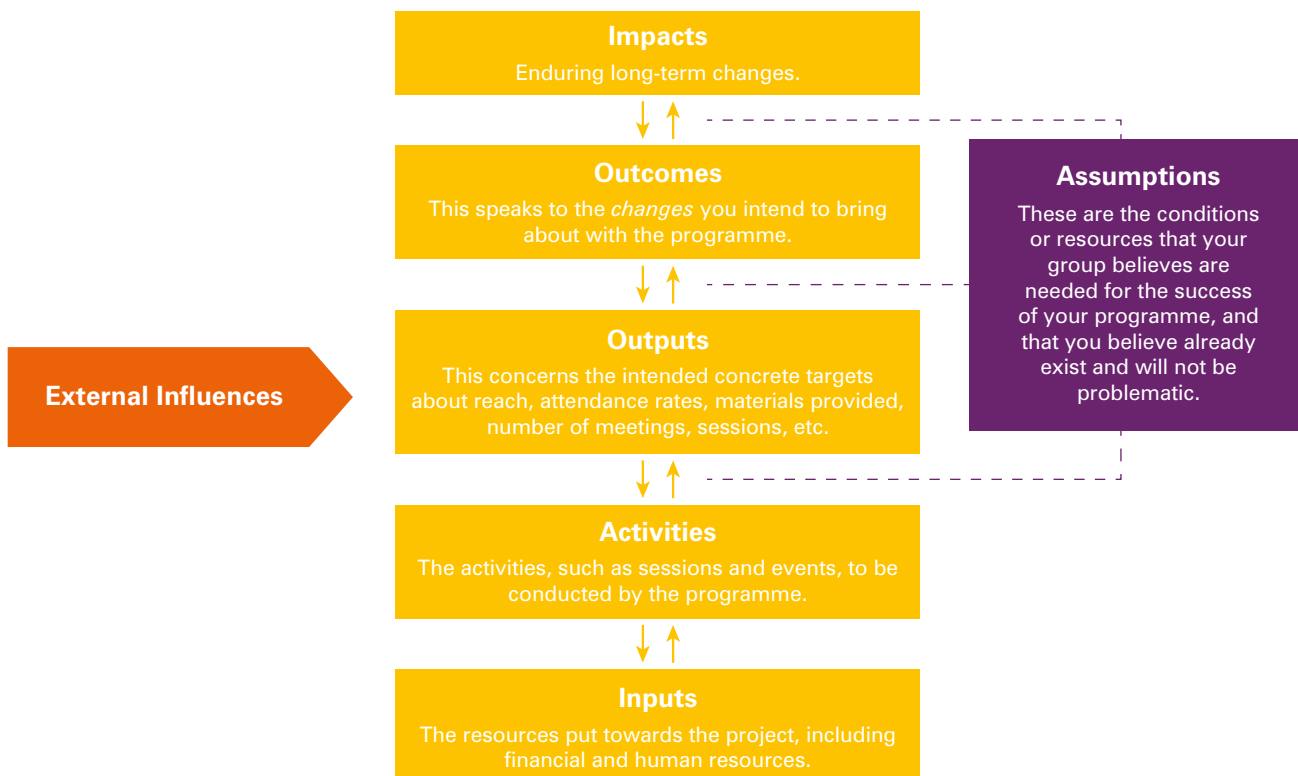
- A problem analysis:** An in-depth study on a given problem to identify its causes, enabling factors and how it affects stakeholders differently, in order to design a more effective solution
- Research on existing programmes and best practices:** Searching for examples and case studies can guide programme development
- Stakeholder consultation:** Programmes should be co-designed with the local communities and key stakeholders (such as parents and teachers) to ensure they meet the needs of those they aim to serve.

The final step is developing a theory of change. Figure 2 shows a basic structure and explains its elements. Please see Annex 1 for a theory of change template that you can use for your programme.



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Figure 2: Theory of change structure



Contextual intelligence and partnerships

Adapting to the context and leveraging local partnerships and local knowledge are key steps during the development stage. Programmes need to be adapted to the context and be sensitive to the specificities of each location. Programmes also need to map out pre-existing stakeholders, consider how to work with those stakeholders, consult the community, and look for long-term partnerships to ensure sustainability. Building on existing structures and organizations and making the most of their know-how and networks are key factors for success.

Guiding questions

- What are the characteristics, norms and needs specific to the programme location?
- What child-focused organizations are already operating in the area?
- How does my S4D programme relate to other existing programmes? Are there synergies? Are there conflicts?
- Is it possible to collaborate with these organizations, private actors and local authorities?

In particular, it is important to:

- Understand the political and social situations** and the local norms and population living in the area and their needs.
- List the service providers available and the challenges faced by existing services.** To maximize the effects, consider which organizations are already working in the context, especially sports organizations, and what their approaches and objectives are.
- Meet with the various stakeholders** to form a well-rounded understanding of the needs, challenges, and gaps. Talk with organizations working with children and youth in the area and try to identify if your programme can complement what they are doing, or if you can start something new together. Table 1 shows the main categories of potential partners and the possible benefits of a collaboration.
- Acknowledge that a safe space is a crucial ingredient;** therefore, the diagnostic exercise should identify potential physical spaces where the sessions can be conducted.
- Ensure a functional relationship with local authorities.** Projects cannot be sustained without the buy-in and approval of local government and community leaders. This can sometimes involve considering the pre-existing role of other organizations on the ground to ensure that the new project does not interfere with pre-existing dynamics.

Table 1: Potential Partners

Type of partner	Benefits
Community-based organizations	Contextual knowledge, community participation, access to large pool of participants
Corporate partners	Funding
International non-governmental organizations	Capacity building, funding
Schools	Sustainability, access to large pool of participants, integration into system
Government entities	Funding, sustainability, contextual knowledge, integration into the system

Funding sources

Organizations can face challenges when applying for funding and reporting to funding bodies, such as conflicting demands, short-term focus and crisis situations. However, these issues can be mitigated through various strategies.

Guiding questions

- Which donors, companies or organizations would be interested in funding my S4D programme?
- How does my programme benefit the central or local government? Could the central or local government be interested in a partnership?
- How can we mobilize the general public?
- Can current donors be persuaded to provide longer-term funding by showing achievements through monitoring and evaluation (M & E)?

Consider:

- **Diversifying funding sources where possible:** It is advisable not to rely on a unique funding source. Funding can be diversified by applying for multiple grants and also by partnering with private sector companies that might have synergies with the S4D sector.
- **Finding innovative ways to fundraise:** This can include social media campaigns and fundraising events targeted to the general public or to the private sector.
- **Working with governments:** This might not always be possible, but long-term sustainability can be more easily achieved when the government owns and funds the initiative. Working with government ensures the authorities understand how the programme is useful, how it fits within their normal operations and how to run it.
- **Theory of Change:** Outputs and outcomes clearly identified in the theory of change should be associated with indicators that measure them. Such objective measures can be used as evidence of the effectiveness of the programme and therefore help make a compelling case to donors for funding.



Playing the Game: Implementation and Learning



Once the ingredients for impactful programme design are in place, implementation can begin. Three crucial components for programme implementation are:

Curriculum and methodology

Curriculum and methodology take the foundations built through contextual intelligence and turn the theory of change into actions. A curriculum is a detailed set of contents that is shared through the S4D experience, while a methodology outlines how certain values and skills should be acquired. A programme needs both, and their interaction becomes a defining feature of the programme, shaping participant experience and learning. Crucially, curriculum and methodology must be developed taking into consideration the targeted groups as well as implementation logistics and context.

Guiding questions

- Based on the problem assessment, what content can help participants?
- How can this content be communicated through sport?
- What type of activities should be included in a balanced session?

The **curriculum** is the set of contents covered during sessions, which depend both on the thematic focus of the programme and the assigned role of sport in the programme. The curriculum's contents can be categorized into the following:

- **Values:** These typically aim at making participants experience, internalize and live by values that are widely recognized such as friendship, respect and anti-racism
- **Psycho-social skills:** The objective here is to make participants acquire psycho-social skills, such as assertiveness, conflict resolution and tolerance, that can help them in their day-to-day life
- **Health information:** In this case, participants learn health facts which can be focused on a prevalent disease (e.g. HIV or COVID-19) or general health, such as sexual and reproductive health
- **School curriculum:** An S4D programme can complement the work done at school, by for example, covering mathematics or a language through play.

The **methodology** is the way the curriculum is delivered and sets the pace for how the S4D sessions take place. It defines the following:

- **Structure of the session:** How much time is allocated to various activities
- **Type of activities** for each part of the session (e.g. high energy such as running, or low energy such as stretching, sport, movement, discussion)
- **Materials to be used:** Support materials needed for the various activities (such as ball or music)
- **Role played by coach and participants:** Participants can be more or less involved in deciding which activities to do or which part of the curriculum to cover. Coaches need to assess the needs of the group and tailor the session to address the needs.

Child-centred coaches

Coaches turn the curriculum into practice, guiding participants through the methodology. Their background, training and role in keeping children safe are critical to the success of any programme.

Guiding questions

- What type of person is needed to lead the S4D sessions?
- How can I find coaches from the programme location?
- What skills and competencies should these coaches have?
- Based on the curriculum, methodology, and specific needs of participants, what additional training do coaches require?

Considerations:

- **Volunteers or paid coaches:** Limited funding might make it difficult to hire a sufficient number of coaches, but employing volunteers might have repercussions on commitment and continuity of coaches. Every programme should at least consider covering for expenses and providing a small stipend.
- **Background, education and where they come from:** Coaches need to master the curriculum, the methodology and other techniques to interact with children who may be from difficult or vulnerable contexts. Periodic training should be provided by the S4D organizations; it might, however, help to have coaches with specific backgrounds.

- **Peer educators:** Participants might benefit from a figure that they do not find too distant from themselves. This may mean having a coach who is not much older than they are (but old enough for the responsibility) and a coach who shares or understands their background and problems.

Coaches should be trained in all aspects of the programme:

- Safeguarding:** Understand why it is important and how to implement organizational policies
- M&E:** Know why data is collected, how it is used and how to guide participants in providing the information
- Session facilitation:** Be able to manage sessions and keep participants involved
- Sport:** Know the sports techniques and how children can practice them
- Curriculum:** Understand and be able to explain the contents of the curriculum
- Methodology:** Master the methodology so that contents are delivered as planned
- Other relevant skills:** These include how to interact with children in need of psychosocial support, which is relevant, among other reasons, when working with refugees, or know how to implement the referral protocol when the programme has one.





Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) represents a holistic approach to M&E, where M&E data is analysed not only to ensure that implementation processes are followed but also to generate learning that can be used to improve programme delivery and implementation of future S4D programme designs. Organizations need to invest in strong MEL systems, building on promising practices while being aware of common challenges. These practices include building quality theories of change, using well-designed research and instruments, training data collectors thoroughly, embedding a learning culture throughout the organization, and adapting to local contexts.

Guiding questions

- What indicators are needed to measure input, output, outcomes, impacts and activities as outlined in the theory of change?
- What questions can be used to measure the indicators?
- When and how often should this information be collected?
- Who is best placed to collect this information?
- What training do data collectors need?
- What conclusions can be drawn from the data collected?
- How can we use the findings to improve programming?

To set up a solid MEL system consider the following:

- **MEL should be embedded in the programming:** Everyone should be involved, and data should actually be used, not just collected.
- **Train data collectors and show the value of MEL:** Those who collect the data must be trained to fully understand key processes and purposes of MEL.
- **Cultural adaptation is key:** MEL should be an organizational mission but must be adapted to the local contexts and updated as programming evolves.
- **Perfection can be the enemy of progress:** Conducting a rigorous evaluation can be costly in terms of time, resources and money. When resources are limited, MEL can be a simpler data collection exercise to understand if you're headed in the right direction.

MEL should be present at different stages of the project cycle (see annex 2 for a template to embed M&E at all stages):

- **During curriculum development:** When a curriculum is developed, it can seem good on paper but when implemented in the field it simply doesn't function as anticipated. Piloting a curriculum to understand what works and what doesn't is key to ensuring that sessions are conducted effectively.
- **During training of coaches:** Coaches become mentors and role models for participants, so it is crucial that they have a complete understanding of the contents of the curriculum and the processes of MEL. This understanding is ensured through training, testing and ongoing monitoring of the coaches.

- **Before programming starts with a new group:** On the first day with a new group, coaches can ask participants to complete a "pre" assessment, to understand the knowledge they have before programme implementation starts. This assessment not only serves as a comparison for the "post" evaluation but also informs what aspects of the sessions should be focused on.
- **During programming:** Parallel to sessions, coaches should inform parents about the programme in a systematic way. In addition, coaches should be responsible for referring special cases, and follow-up on them.
- **After programming is completed with a group:** All participants should undergo a "post" assessment. This assessment is key to understanding whether the curriculum was delivered effectively and had the impact intended.
- **Annually:** At the end of every year, conduct a comprehensive review of the data collected and use the findings to improve the programme and its delivery, as well as to evolve and work on new ideas.
- **Periodic research:** Conduct research on programming, such as impact evaluations (randomized control trial or other experimental methods) or other mixed methods research.

Winning Streaks: Scalability and Sustainability

Once a programme is running, scaling up and ensuring resilience to external shocks come with their own challenges.

Replicating and adapting programmes

In scaling programmes from the original context, two main approaches are used: **simplifying**, by identifying core components from the theory of change (which must be present) and letting implementing partners adapt the programme as they see fit for the context; and **tailored adaptation**, where the programme is altered to fit the local context by making minor adjustments to the programme. Many organizations prefer the latter approach for the consistency it offers, though some examples show the value of simple approaches, especially in difficult times such as during the COVID-19 crisis.

Guiding questions

- What fundamental aspects of my S4D programme must be present?
- How can these aspects be implemented in the new location?
- What aspects of my programme will be most difficult to replicate in the new location?
- How can we adapt them so they fit the different contexts?

When replicating a programme in a new location, an organization should go through the various steps of design, implementation and learning, and assess how the processes in place in existing programmes will be adapted to the new location. Table 2 is a checklist of aspects to consider. Organizations can adapt and expand the list according to the specificities of their programme.

Table 2: What to consider when replicating programmes in new locations

Programming stage	Aspects to consider	
Assessment	Confirm need for S4D programme	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planning	Local connections and identifying partners	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Budget allocation	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Task team (mix of people to ensure knowledge sharing)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prepare for implementation	Identify location	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Recruit coaches	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Contextualize methodology and curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Establish M&E	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Train coaches	<input type="checkbox"/>
Implement	Sessions	<input type="checkbox"/>
	M&E and feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adapt	Adapt based on feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>



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Resilience to external shocks

The organization’s ability to successfully adapt to disruptive events is a key component of long-term success, given the potentially devastating impacts on programming that might otherwise happen.

Guiding questions

- What are the most vulnerable components of the programme?

- What can I do to reinforce them?

- What are the core components of the programme that need to be prioritized in a difficult situation?

- How can I ensure that these components are maintained?

- Given the particular situation, what new initiative can be taken?

Key aspects of organizational resilience include:

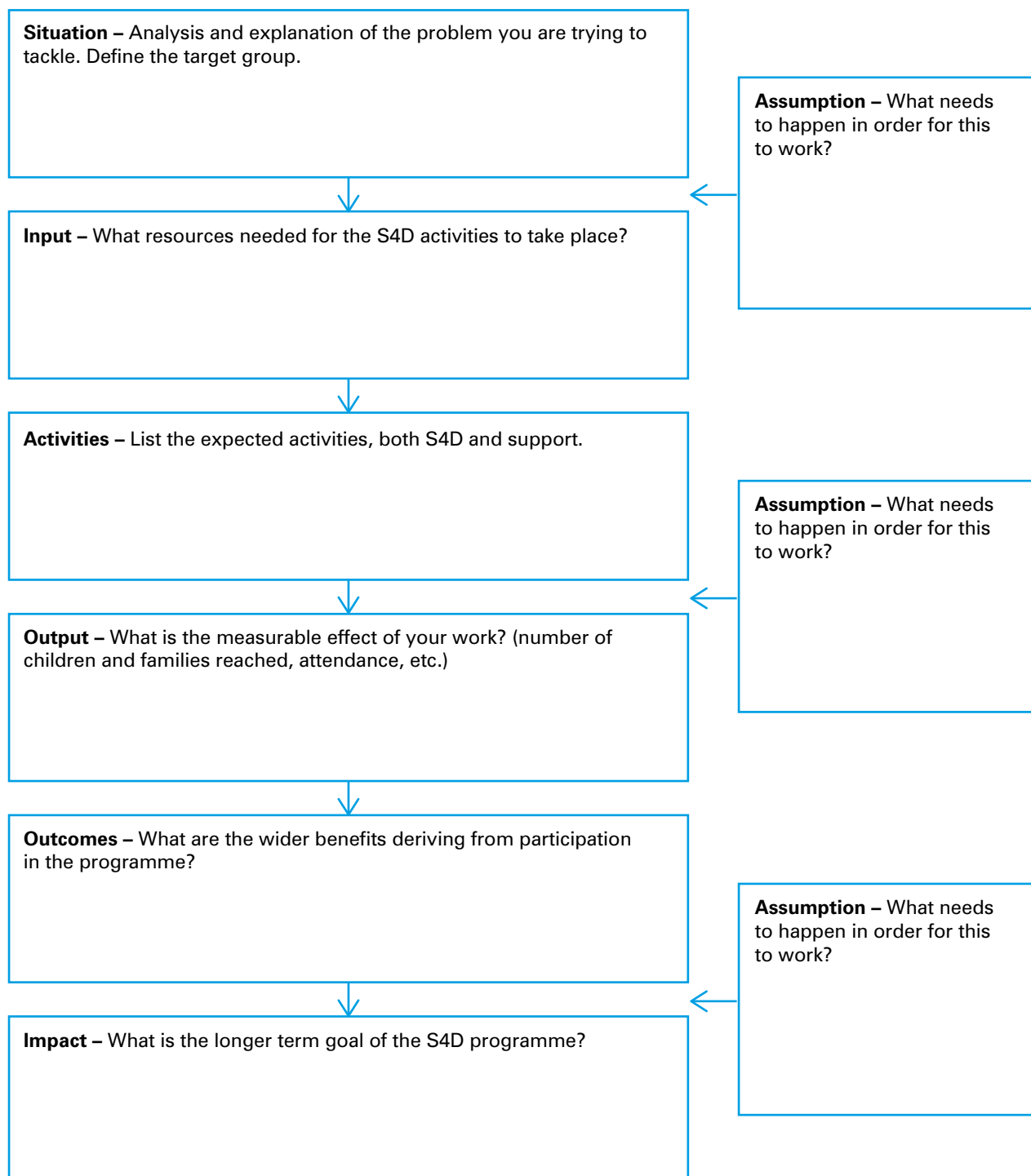
- **Leadership:** The organizational leadership should be open to new suggestions coming from all parts of the organization and push forward innovative ideas.
- **Preparedness:** Having sufficient financial and human resources to support changes in programming in response to changing contexts.
- **Culture:** An organizational culture that is flexible in adapting to situations and supports innovation.

To withstand major crises (such as COVID-19), it is important that S4D organizations:

- Conduct periodic risk assessments:** To assess their vulnerabilities and prepare mitigating strategies.
- Quickly adapt to changing contexts:** Based on the situation, it might be necessary to re-adapt the curriculum or the methodology used, change the funding allocation, or re-adjust dedicated resources.
- Share knowledge and learn from other organizations:** Other organizations might have had similar problems and found original solutions that can be useful to the S4D community.

Annexes

Annex 1: Template for theory of change



Annex 2: Template for M&E

	Why are we collecting data?	When can the information be collected?	Who can be in charge of collecting data?	What questions should be asked?	How can the information collected help improve programming?
Curriculum development					
Coach training					
Before programming					
During programming					
After programming					
Annually					
Periodic research					





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practitioners

for every child, answers

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September 2021