

Building CARE's confidence to claim our impact

What is Contribution Tracing?

Contribution Tracing: an approach that combines Process Tracing and Bayesian (Confidence) Updating.

To apply it, we first articulate a [contribution claim](#) (causal claim) about the role a specific intervention may have played in bringing about an observed outcome. We then unpack and describe a fine-grained mechanism which we hypothesise causally linked our intervention to the observed outcome – this is what we then test by seeking out data that has the power to reject or confirm our claim. Next, we update our confidence after gathering data precisely tailored to the claim, using the principles and [four tests of process tracing](#), combined with Bayesian (Confidence) Updating.

Finally, we put our evidence up for 'trial', inviting peers to critically review the claim and the associated evidence. This process provides a great deal of insight about a project's influence on an outcome. It ultimately provides a level of confidence to assert whether a claim holds true or not, and whether that claim is the most likely explanation for the change that occurred.

Sound complicated?

To help break it down, Pamoja produced a **vlog series** with the GSAM team. Take a look at what they have to say about each of the key steps in these five YouTube videos provided in the textbox links.

- Vlog 1: [What is Contribution Tracing?](#)
- Vlog 2: [Developing a contribution claim](#)
- Vlog 3: [Unpacking your mechanism](#)
- Vlog 4: [Understanding process tracing tests](#)
- Vlog 5: [Designing data collection](#)



Capturing the effects of inclusive governance training in Ghana
Photo: Pamoja

Introducing the Complex Change Initiative

[CARE International's 2020 global programme strategy](#) places supporting inclusive governance at the forefront of our efforts to enable 150 million people from the most vulnerable and excluded communities to overcome poverty and social injustice. A growing recognition in the development sector is that sustainable solutions to these global challenges require mechanisms which foster citizen empowerment and improve social accountability. Yet, articulating a cause and effect chain of such complex social change processes is easier said than done. It requires us to apply more robust and targeted approaches, moving beyond traditional practices of project activity and outputs-based monitoring and evaluation.

Rising to this challenge, CARE is investing in innovative solutions to evidence our impact and demonstrate *how* complex change happens. CARE's global Inclusive Governance Team launched the [Capturing Complex Change Initiative](#), aimed at better explaining our influence in enacting meaningful change in the communities we serve. To support us in this, CARE entered into a learning partnership with [Pamoja Evaluation Services](#). We are building on CARE's substantial expertise in inclusive governance with a strengthened approach to monitoring and evaluation, centred on a theory-based methodology called [Contribution Tracing](#).

Perspectives from the pilot country teams in Bangladesh and Ghana

"There is a tendency to focus on activities and outputs...We can become fanatics about activities! But it is now clear that we must work backwards from the outcomes that we want to deliver upon...I believe we can apply the probability tests we have learnt to help us to eliminate stories that might not be as useful, and to focus on the stories that are the most powerful." – Peter Francis Xavier

"Contribution Tracing is a new way of telling our stories to the wider world and that is exciting! It has made me realise that not all stories can be told with numbers. There must be more discussion around how and why changes happen. Contribution Tracing is therefore very relevant for our projects, such as women's empowerment and governance work." – Albab Ur Rahman

"Before this training, I thought that the randomised control trial was the best approach for impact evaluation. Now I understand that appropriateness of methods is more important. Moving forward, we will be very certain about choosing the right design for our needs...I realise now that there is a lot of evidence out there that is very weak, while other evidence can be very strong. I can now critique the kind of evidence that we want to look for." – Nana Kwabena Owusa

Owusa

Why is Contribution Tracing relevant for our work on complex change?

CARE's [first blog](#) about this learning initiative notes that CARE is increasingly interested in using theory-based methods to measure complex change because they can help explain **what worked, how it worked, and why**. One key challenge in demonstrating our impact is gathering the *right* evidence along the way. We are often overloaded with pages of data, which is time consuming for staff to collect, yet produces little value when it comes to answering our most important questions such as:

- How and why did the intervention work?
- What role did the intervention play in the achievement of the outcome?
- What was the contribution of the intervention to the outcome?
- How confident are we that the intervention contributed to the outcome?

Throughout our years of reflecting on and refining our inclusive governance work, we have learned that what matters is not **how much evidence you have, but how good that evidence is** to help confirm a program's contribution to complex change. For instance, a complex change process is one where we are influencing people's behaviour (e.g. convincing a district assembly to reallocate resources to marginalised areas), rather than merely building knowledge (e.g. health rights), or giving people things (e.g. cash). That process usually involves multiple strategies and actors moving in different directions at once. In sum, complex change is non-linear.

The need for stronger measurement approaches

We hold a strong belief that CARE's work creates meaningful social impact and can point to numerous positive examples of facilitating innovative approaches, such as our tried and tested [community scorecards](#). However, we need stronger measurement approaches to meet our own demands for organisational accountability, while also providing our stakeholders with more substantial evidence on our contribution to complex change. Thus, CARE has sought clearer guidance on what data to collect and an effective approach to test **how and why particular changes come about as a result of our work**. We also aimed to increase our overall **efficiency in monitoring and evaluation to ensure optimal resource use**, criteria that factored heavily into our choice of approach.



Capturing the effects of inclusive governance training in Bangladesh
Photo: Pamoja

What have we done so far?

Our journey to pilot Contribution Tracing started in early 2017 with the launch of two pilot evaluation processes in Bangladesh and Ghana through **The Journey for Advancement in Transparency, Representation, and Accountability Project (JATRA)**, funded by the [World Bank's Global Partnership for Social Accountability](#) and **Ghana's Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms (GSAM)**, funded by USAID. Having received training by Pamoja and developed their own contribution claims for JATRA and GSAM projects, CARE staff are now ready to start evidence collection and then undergo contribution trials in both projects. Once the evaluations are complete in September 2017, CARE will better understand, with credible evidence, how we are contributing to improving social accountability of local structures in target communities of Ghana and Bangladesh. CARE's [latest blog](#) details this process in Ghana.



What's next?

A report showcasing our learning and achievements will be finalised by November. CARE will hold a UK-based launch event with our staff, peers and donors to share the project's learning, challenges, and achievements. To stimulate learning beyond our pilot country teams, CARE and Pamoja are hosting a series of webinars on how we can better measure our impact in complex programming. Over 40 staff from around the world participated in the first internal webinar, highlighting the relevance and perceived value of Contribution Tracing to our country offices. CARE and Pamoja will host another webinar for staff and external stakeholders to support the continuation of dialogue within the community on the utility and application of Contribution Tracing, once the report is published.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- Follow us on Twitter @CAREgov and @PamojaUK and join the [Pamoja Evaluation Facebook Page](#)
- For more information on CARE's Complex Change Project, contact capp@careinternational.org
- For more about the Contribution Tracing approach, contact Pamoja at info@pamoja.uk.com