



Structuring the Evaluation Process

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Why do we undertake evaluations - what are evaluations for?

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- Plan and design new policies
- Assess and Demonstrate success /failure
- Improve delivery and implementation
 - Explain outcomes
- Confirm to EU and national authorities that € well spent
 - Strengthen future plans and policies

Evaluation not just about accountability – also learning

Not just about policy makers – many intermediaries, beneficiaries and stakeholders are involved

Why do we use different approaches in evaluation?

e.g. – monitoring, experimental approaches, Theories of Change (ToCs), Foresight, time-series

Why do we use different approaches in evaluation

- Sometimes looking forward, sometimes backwards – *Foresight and Impact oriented*
- For simple programmes we know what success is and how to measure – *monitoring* may be enough – usually we need to *set criteria and make judgements, discover valid measurements*
- Implementation is a process which has to be followed through – which is why we *need to map stages of implementation, causal pathways, use time series data and process tracing*
- Some evaluation requires explanatory methods – e.g. *causal analysis* - but not always if we already know what works

Who are the users of evaluations?

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Includes...

- Policy makers – European, national, regional, municipal – EU is the home of 'multi-level governance'
- Intermediaries – banks, enterprises, university sector, science institutes responsible for successful implementation and delivery – smart specialisation and RTD are not a state monopoly
- Intended beneficiaries – who have to accept and use new services and sometimes change established behaviour, e.g. essential for green transition
- Citizens – to whom policy makers are accountable and whose consent matters for sustainability and continuity

What is the policy cycle and how does evaluation align with the cycle?

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Cycle usually understood as moving *from*

- Problem identification and prioritisation – integrated into plans, budgets, strategies and legislation
- *To* delivering what was planned, solving problems and uncovering new problems and priorities for new policies
- Poor healthcare in rural areas → Build more hospitals
Recruit staff → Develop regional health plan →
Open hospitals → evaluate → measure health improvements

*Adaptable evaluations - keeping focus when
circumstances and knowledge change*

Adaptable evaluations - keeping focus when circumstances and knowledge change

- Evaluations have purposes and users but policies change, crises happen, governments change – we often discover new knowledge when an evaluation is underway
- Keeping focus on *why* we evaluate and keeping potential users *engaged* is often a challenge - as we saw during Covid and during last financial crisis
- Keeping focus requires pro-active evaluation management, institutional arrangements, dialogue, feedback

E.g. Following evaluation progress, re-orientating evaluations, contract review clauses, setting up communication channels – liaison meetings, newsletters - with users and stakeholders who matter.....

How to decide on the 'object' of evaluation – wide or narrow, short-term or long-term


How to decide on the 'object' of evaluation – wide or narrow, short-term or long-term....

- Consider *evaluation purposes* - to monitor beneficiary access to services or explain why a complex intervention makes a contribution sometimes but not always
- Evaluation purposes are made more specific by the *Evaluation Questions* we ask – what we want to know about because of relevance to policy making, stakeholders and users
- Some policies are '*free-standing*' others '*embedded*' – e.g. interconnected with other policies e.g. SMEs; - or part of a national strategy – different evaluations can provide complementary answers to related Evaluation Questions

What is Intervention Logic, Programme Theory and Theories of Change?

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- Policy makers make assumptions about how policies will work –at the planning stage simple assumptions or '*intervention logics*' – better broadband will increase competitiveness.....
- Once programmes are launched we can develop a *Programme Theory* that include priorities of stakeholders and intermediaries; regional strengths and weaknesses; likely barriers/risks to overcome as well as assets or 'enabling factors'
- As policies evolve we understand better how to implement change – as well as difficulties – these 'Theories of Change' continue to evolve during an evaluation as evidence is collected....



Why are we evaluating? For what uses?

- Evaluation is justified primarily by use. Those uses can be related to the findings or to the process itself, and of many types !
- Consider uses along the policy cycle
- Find users within or outside the administration

Make a case for use

Defend choices

"Defend and justify our choices before decision-makers or partners and revise them if necessary."



Inform strategy

"Stimulate strategic reflection by management (at operative, executive, or top level)."



Learn lessons

"Learn lessons and put good practices to work when carrying out interventions."



Better appraise and design

"Provide better insights at the appraisal phase (better ex-ante evaluation of projects) and improve the design of future interventions (wider range of methods, feasibility, etc.)."



Support discussions

"Substantiate internal and external debates on the best policy guidelines or ways to solve development problems."



Strategic uses

Internal uses or uses that target institutional partners, to support sectoral policies and strategies

Continuous-improvement uses

Primarily internal uses, to improve future projects and interventions

Monitor over time

"Help in project implementation monitoring, especially by providing the data needed to make informed choices."



Management uses

Primarily internal uses, to better monitor and manage ongoing projects and interventions

Dialog uses

Mostly external uses, aimed at strengthening or stimulating partnerships in the projects and policies supported

Dialog with partners

"Facilitate dialog with partners, in particular by building a relationship of trust."



Support decision-making

"Support decision-making on appraisal, progress, or renewal of projects."



Reflect with the team

"Facilitate reflection within teams on the purpose and quality of the action, by providing internal feedback."



Strengthen capacities

"Help strengthen the capacity of the stakeholders involved"



Situate the evaluation in current / future debates

Socio-ecological transition

Territorial convergence

Inclusion, gender, discriminations

Grants vs Financial instruments

Trust in institutions

Feeling towards Europe

What can you do to identify and foster uses?



Visit projects and beneficiaries and **ask** questions



Consult policy stakeholders internally and externally

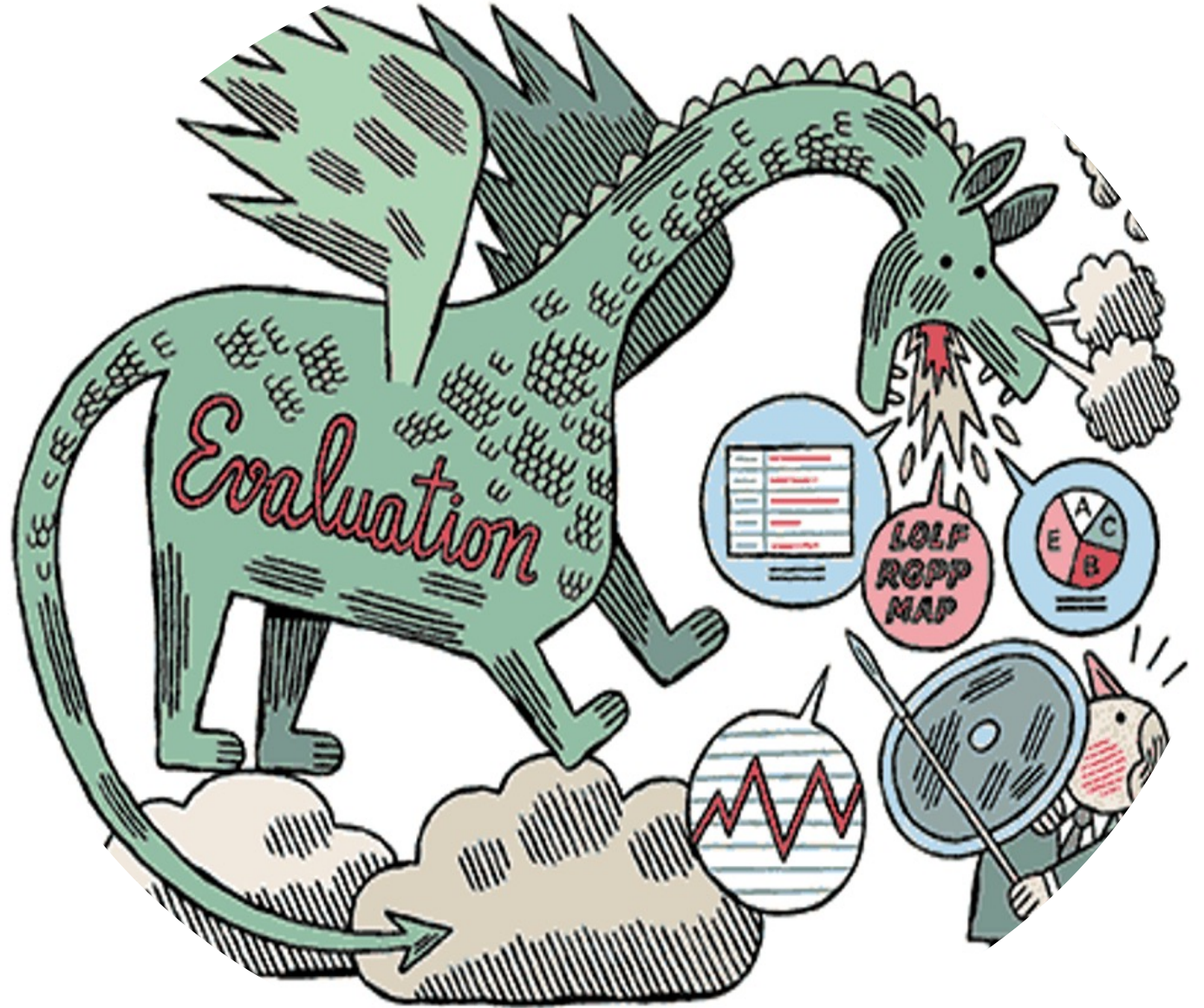


Reconstruct the programme theory and **ask** stakeholders to identify potential issues along it



Identify potential uses and make a case for them

... Evaluation as
seen by your
colleagues



Many stakeholders are concerned and could use the evaluation process or results

Who is concerned?



**Operators,
intermediate bodies**



**Other authorities,
public organisations**



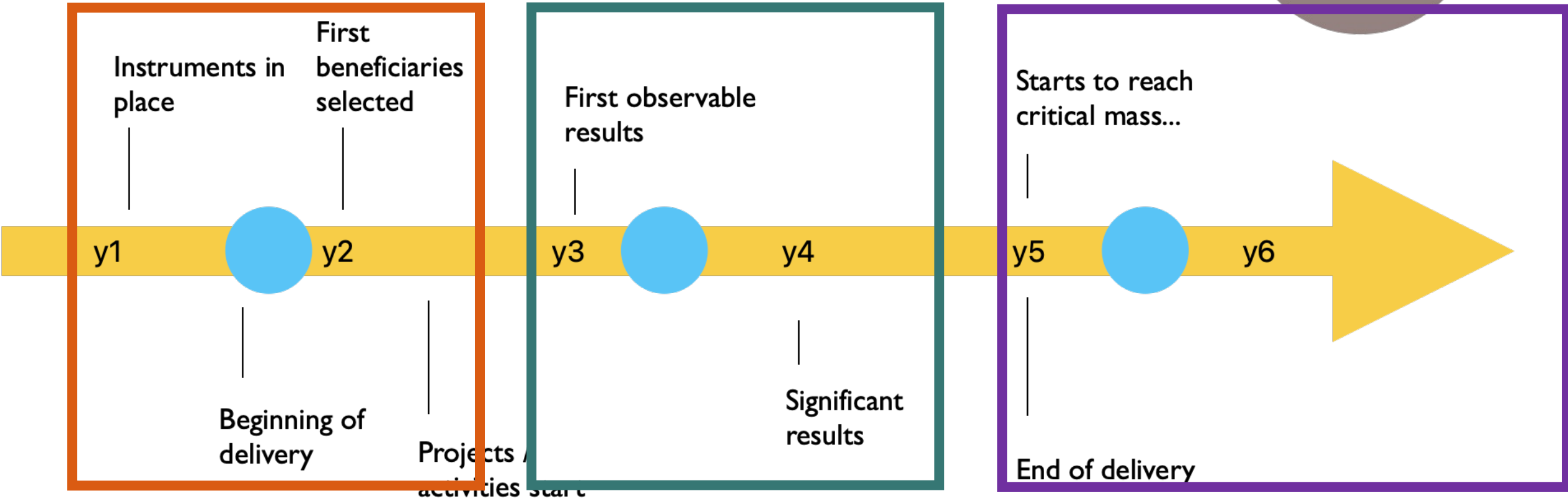
**Target groups,
(Financial) beneficiaries,
addressees in general**



Citizens at large...

Evaluations at different stages of the policy cycle meet different types of needs

When should an evaluation be carried out?

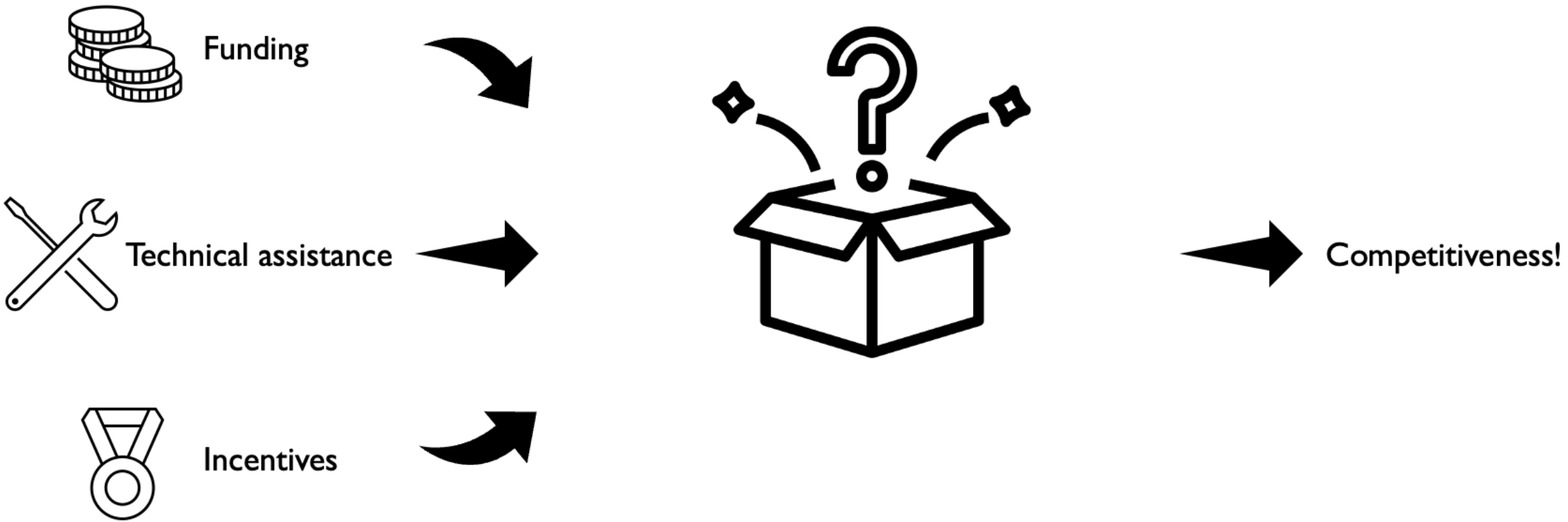


Identify barriers to delivery
Assess level of information, capacity of potential beneficiaries
Adjust selection criteria

Clarify who the beneficiaries are & what they do
Detect unexpected consequences
Fix programme, review ambitions

Clarify impacts, anticipated or not (if, how, in what cases, why)
Strategic implications & lessons
Accountability to the people

The mystery box



What's inside the box?

- **Intervention stakeholders:** their priorities and actions will affect both progress towards and the results of an intervention
- **Causal pathways:** these are sequences of actions and effects leading from the intervention to its (expected) outcomes
- **Proximate 'conditions'** such as institutional capacities, stakeholder priorities and beneficiary responses - that shape composition of causal pathways and likely progress
- **Broader contextual factors** – the more distant and difficult to influence factors such as geography, socio-economic characteristics, culture, etc.

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- These are actors — institutions, organisations, groups... which attitude or behaviour will influence the results of the intervention:
 - Through their ambitions and strategies
 - Capacity and motivation to seize opportunities for support
 - Capacity and motivation to perform activities



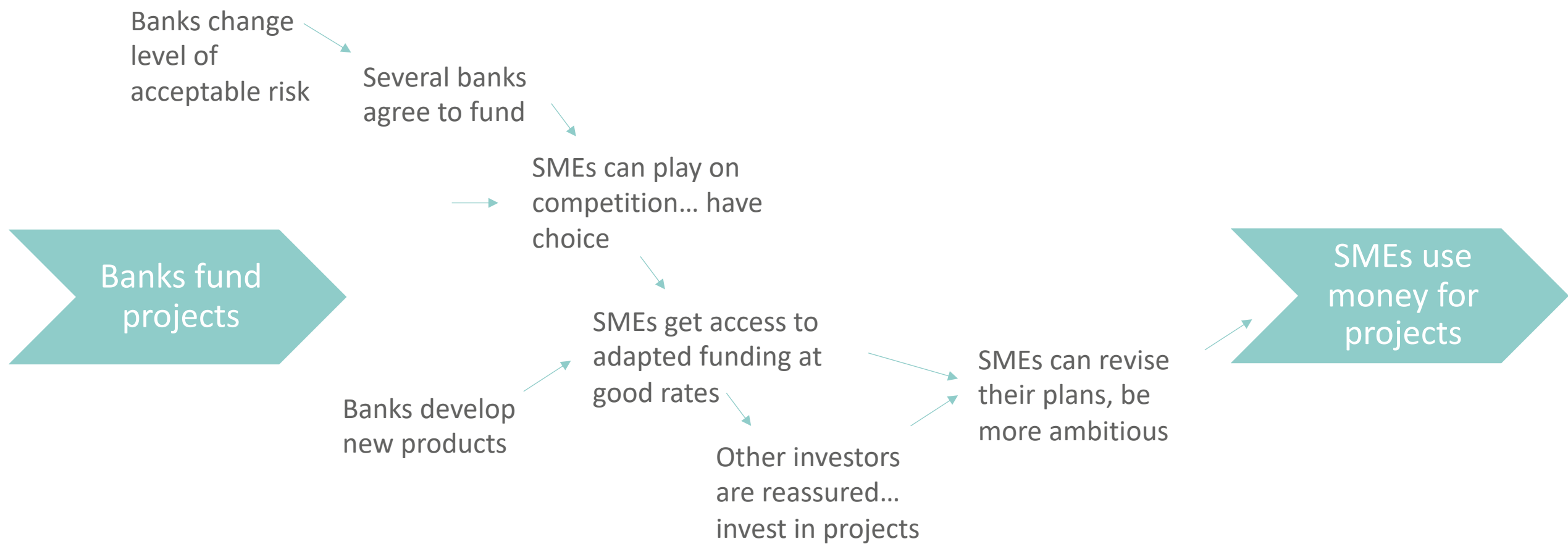
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- These are uninterrupted chains of assumptions linking the intervention with their consequences on stakeholders towards policy goals
 - Pathways can:
 - work in parallel or as alternatives
 - be sequential: implementation & impact pathways
 - Different pathways can be triggered by different behaviours of stakeholders, contexts or conditions



Causal pathways

Example : Financing instrument towards SMEs



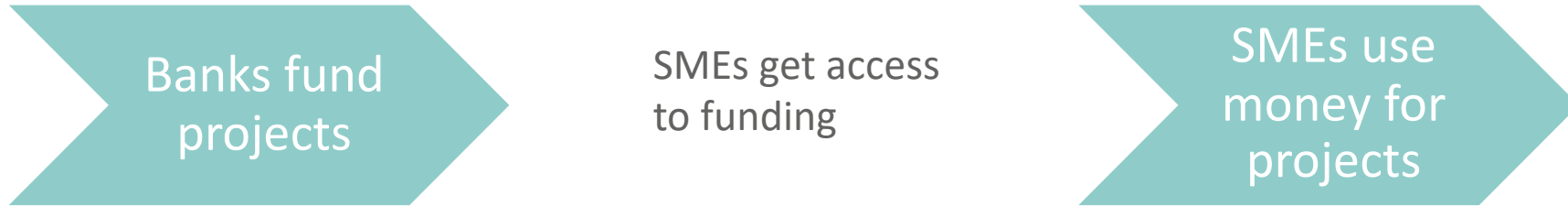


Plausible assumptions regarding causal pathways ?

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- At each step of the different policy pathways, there are factors associated with the success or failure of an intervention.
 - Can be formulated as positive (enablers) or negative statements (risks).
 - Are sometimes sufficient or necessary to lead to success or failure



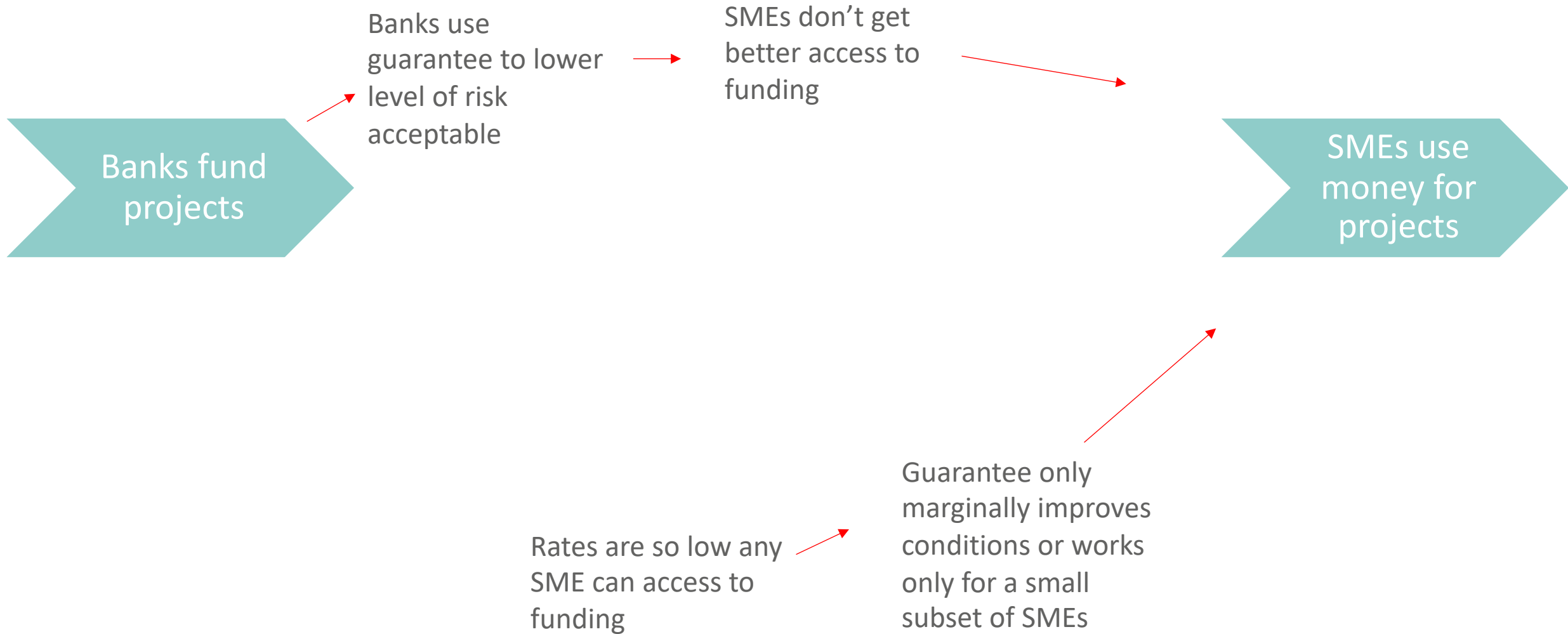
Conditions



In what cases did introduction of Guarantee change practices of Banks in funding SMEs?

Some assumptions on conditions here:

- Access to funding is a necessary condition for SMEs to develop
- SMEs have problems accessing funding at competitive rates. Banks usually don't lend them money or at less competitive rates
- Banks agree to increase the level of risk they are willing to take thanks to Guarantee
- Banks agree to fund projects in certain sectors they were not funding before
- Banks develop own instruments or products to do so and commercialise them
- SMEs are able to cope with due diligence process costs or Banks agree to pay for it
- SMEs actually implement projects
- ...



Plausible assumptions too?

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- Causal pathways unfold in specific environments which enable or prevent some results to be obtained
 - These may relate to major trends in the policy area or specificities of the territory in terms of geography, culture, capacity, or needs
 - These broader contexts define whether interventions have a chance to work and why



Broader contexts

Asking evaluation questions

- Questions are here to turn potential uses into empirical research. Use them to specify:
 - What do we want to know?
 - About what (that matters to us)?
 - What 'good' looks like in that case?
- Questioning is a collaborative and ongoing process:
 - Discuss questions with colleagues and other stakeholders
 - Reformulate to clarify expectations

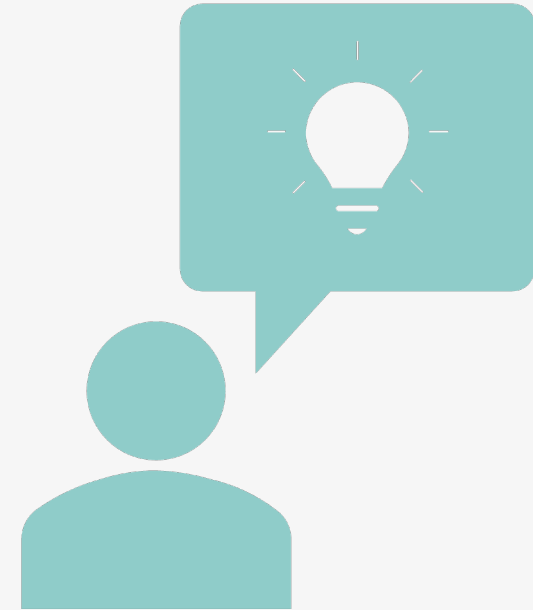


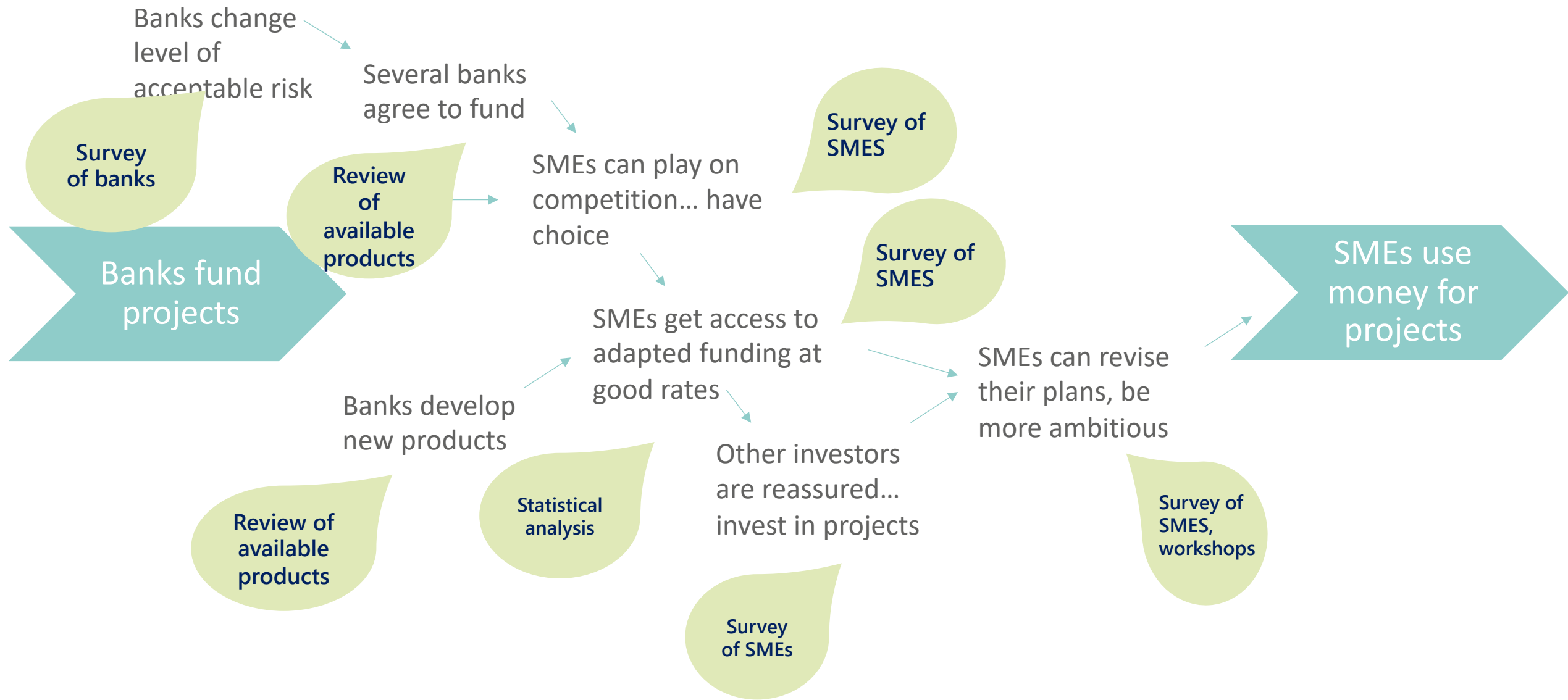
Use Better Regulation Criteria to
help you clarify or expand
questioning, not the other way
round!

... no point 'ticking the box', but they are useful to question the full
policy cycle

Asking *better* evaluation questions

- Ask *evaluation* questions:
 - That focus on the intervention and its assumptions
 - It is possible to learn from the answer
 - Judgement criteria are explicit
 - They should help solve problems
- Ask *less* questions
- Anticipate answers and how they could be useful
- Leave room for reformulation in proposals and later in the inception stage





Testing assumptions ?



Evaluation Helpdesk
on Cohesion Policy
<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12999148>
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Evaluation Helpdesk (2024)