Theory of Change

An overall aim of this research is to expose in what ways participatory community development experiences are having an impact on community change and whether they are opening pathways to transformation. A 'theory of change' has emerged from my theoretical readings and perspective, the processes of field work, analyzing findings and interpreting results. That theory is depicted in Figure 6.1 and illustrated in a more linear way with a description, in Figure 6.2. This theory of change was derived through an inductive (also called 'bottom up' or 'grounded theory') approach to knowing, in which the researcher conducts field work to build an abstraction or to describe the issue being studied (Lodico *et al.*, 2010). In inductive research no established theories need to be tested during the research process, but rather, patterns are observed and theory is built from the ground up. Inductive reasoning is based on learning from experience. The community case data and synthesis findings that apply to the theory of change are illustrated in Figures 6.3 and summarized in Figure 6.4.

Figure 6.1: Theory of Change: From Community Stories to Transformational Narratives
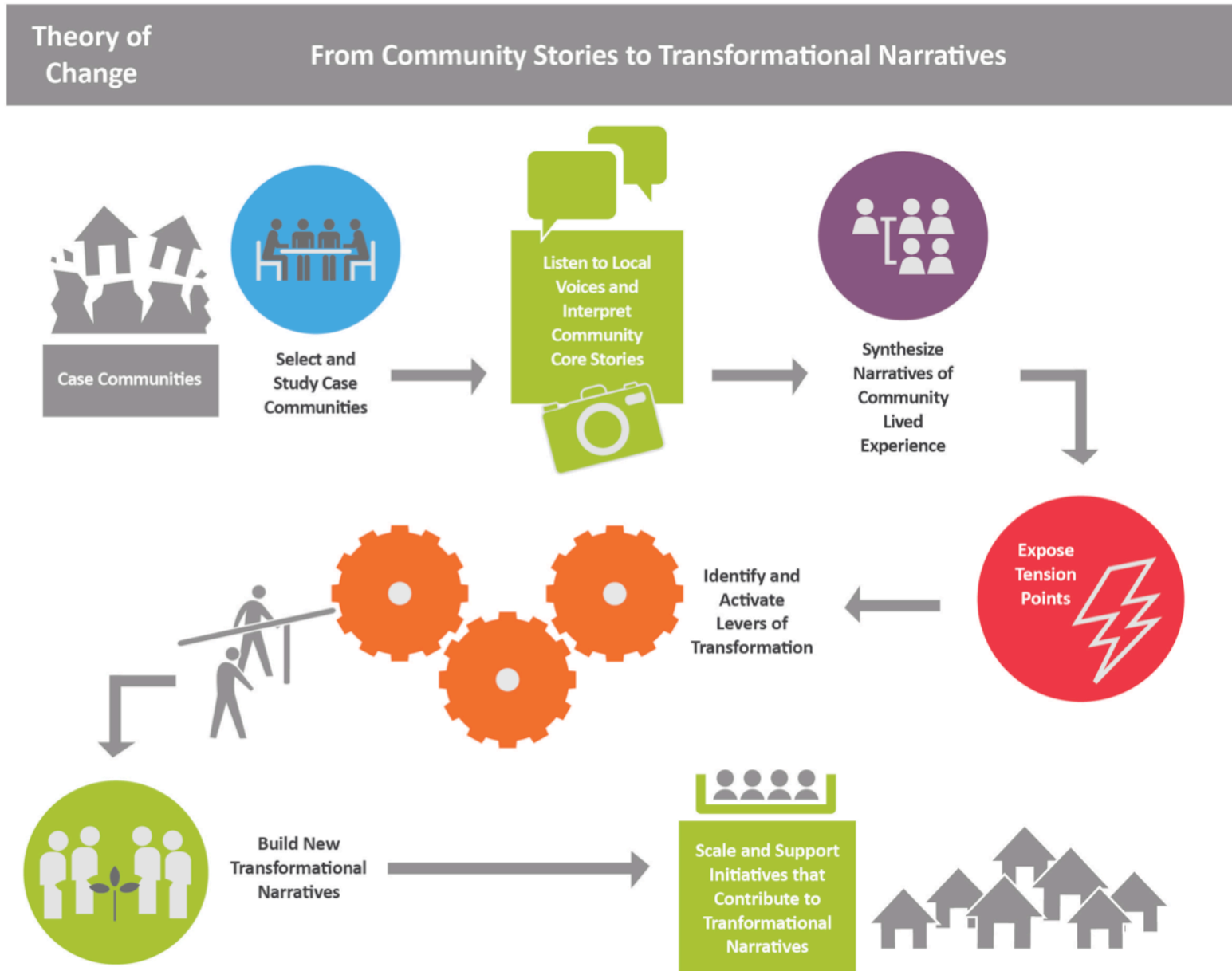
Figure 6.2: Theory of Change and Summary Description

This **Theory of Change** was derived through an inductive (also called 'bottom up' or 'grounded theory') approach, in which theory is built from the ground up through learning from experience in the field and patterns observed. Core elements are described below.

Select and Study Case Communities. Participatory community development case examples are selected based on an information-oriented sampling strategy and to develop a metaphor or establish a school of thought for the domain which the cases concern. In the case of Bellevue-La-Montagne, this is education-centered community development.

Listen to Local Voices and Interpret Community Core Stories. By listening to voices and stories of local people and engaging context-specific methods, including participatory photography, mapping and dialogue circles, we interpreted community core stories.

Synthesize Narratives of Community Lived Experience. Various methods are triangulated and data are analyzed to reveal narrative patterns. Data collection methods include interviews, observation, document study, and participatory methods. An aim is to value local knowledge and lived experience of community development processes and change underway.

Expose Tension Points. Scrutinizing emerging narratives from different perspectives exposed tension points, which involve relationships of power particularly susceptible to change because of dubious practices, contestable knowledge, and potential conflict.

Identify and Activate Levers of Transformation. Like crises, tension points open possibilities for change. Certain levers show promise for transformation with relevant community development processes underway, and others represent opportunities for developing new innovative interventions.

Build New Transformational Narratives, then Scale and Support Initiatives that Contribute to those Narratives. Activating levers of transformation opens pathways to new development trajectories and changing narratives. Resulting transformative community development experiences can be scaled up, scaled out and scaled deep.

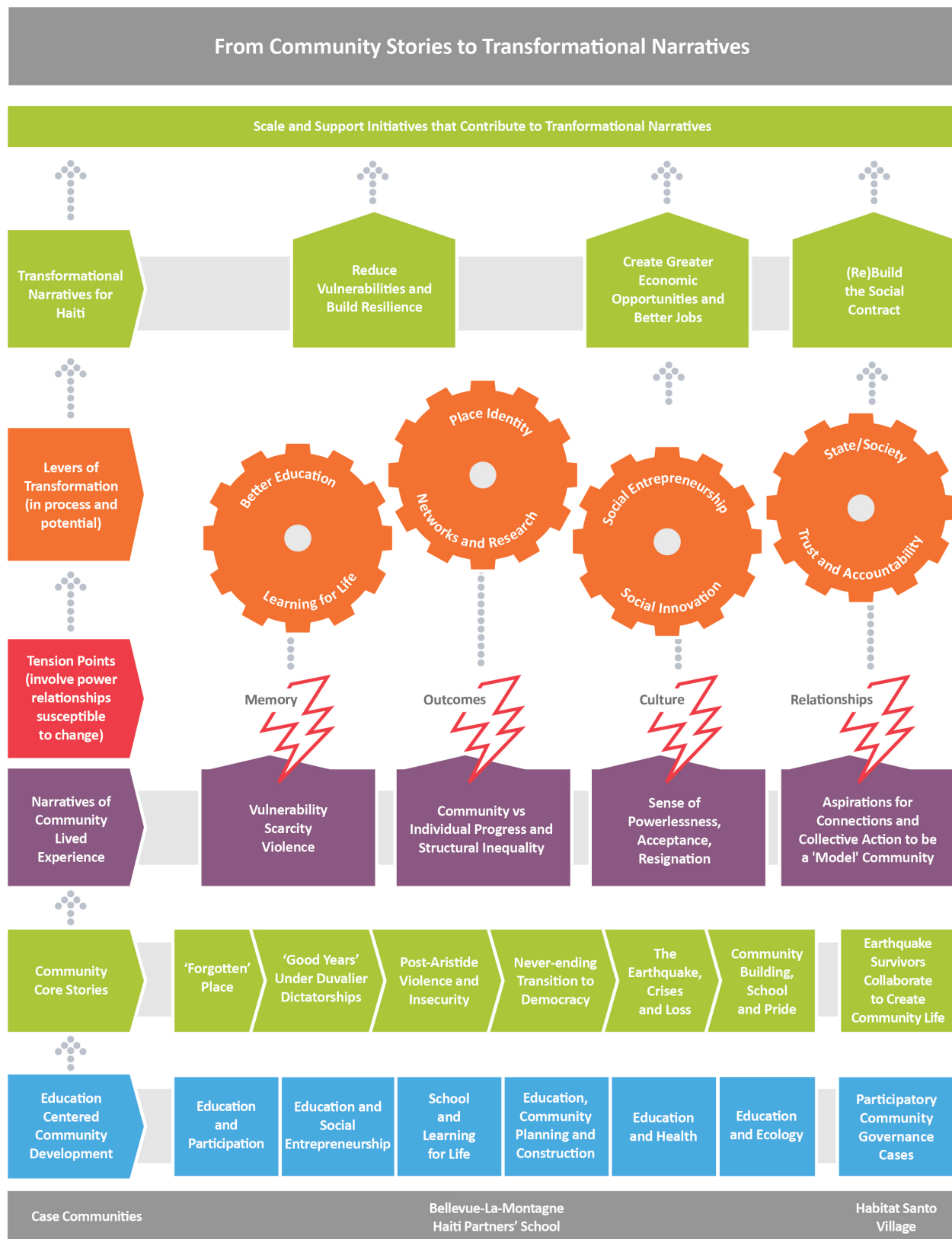**Figure 6.3: Theory of Change Applied to Case Communities**

From Community Stories to Transformational Narratives

Scale and Support Initiatives that Contribute to Tranformational Narratives

Transformational Narratives for Haiti → Reduce Vulnerabilities and Build Resilience → Create Greater Economic Opportunities and Better Jobs → (Re)Build the Social Contract

Levers of Transformation (in process and potential)

Better Education / Learning for Life

Place Identity / Networks and Research

Social Entrepreneurship / Social Innovation

State/Society / Trust and Accountability

Tension Points (involve power relationships susceptible to change)

Memory | Outcomes | Culture | Relationships

Narratives of Community Lived Experience → Vulnerability Scarcity Violence | Community vs Individual Progress and Structural Inequality | Sense of Powerlessness, Acceptance, Resignation | Aspirations for Connections and Collective Action to be a 'Model' Community

Community Core Stories → 'Forgotten' Place → 'Good Years' Under Duvalier Dictatorships → Post-Aristide Violence and Insecurity → Never-ending Transition to Democracy → The Earthquake, Crises and Loss → Community Building, School and Pride → Earthquake Survivors Collaborate to Create Community Life

Education Centered Community Development → Education and Participation | Education and Social Entrepreneurship | School and Learning for Life | Education, Community Planning and Construction | Education and Health | Education and Ecology | Participatory Community Governance Cases

Case Communities | Bellevue-La-Montagne Haiti Partners' School | Habitat Santo Village

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Figure 6.4 Summary Explanation of Theory of Change Applied to Case Communities

The diagram **'From Community Stories to Transformational Narratives'** is meant to be read starting at the bottom.

This research study **selected case communities** of Bellevue-La-Montagne and Habitat Santo Village, where NGOs and community residents applied participatory approaches to education-centered community development and local self-governance, respectively.

I interpreted '**community core stories** by listening to voices and stories of local people and designing context-specific methods, (including participatory photography, mapping and dialogue circles in the case of Bellevue-La-Montagne), in order to deepen understanding of development issues and power dynamics, with an emphasis on local people's perspectives. In Bellevue-La-Montagne a community core story with six aspects emerged. Habitat Santo Village is a new community built post-earthquake where the narrative was dominated by struggles of survival and building a new life and community.

I synthesized results from various methods of data collection (interviews, observation, document study, participatory methods) integrating 'outsider' and 'insider' perspectives on community development processes and changes underway and lived experience of community residents. Four main **narratives of community lived experience** were revealed for the Bellevue-La-Montagne case, and on reflection, we found that the same narratives were applicable to Habitat Santo Village.

Interpreting the revealed narratives from different perspectives exposed '**tension points'**, which involve relationships of power particularly susceptible to change due to their contestable knowledge, potential conflict, or dubious practices. Tension points highlight how power relations stand in the way of addressing problems. '**Memory'** refers to collective memories of turbulent histories, disasters, and nostalgia for the dictatorship era, as well as a broken education system that perpetuates societal problems of distrust and classism. '**Outcomes'** exposes the tension of improving community outcomes vis-à-vis stagnation in individual circumstances.   '**Culture'** represents the lack of a sense of agency evident among residents; participatory culture is emerging, but it has not yet crossed the threshold into 'changemaker' culture. '**Relationships'** among governments, civil society, NGOs and the international community are fraught with mistrust, lack of accountability and inertia.

Leverage points are places in complex systems where small shifts in one thing can produce larger changes in everything. They represent possibilities for transformative change. In the two case communities, some '**levers of transformation'** are in early stages of activation or process of cultivation, such as **better education**, **place identity and social entrepreneurship**; and several represent promising directions for change, through such levers as **network building, research over time,** and **state-society trust and accountability.**

Activating levers of transformation opens pathways to new development trajectories that would change narratives. The three **medium term priorities** are to**: 1) reduce vulnerability and build resilience; 2) create greater economic opportunities and better jobs; and 3) (re)build the social contract**. These specific priorities were identified in a World Bank report by Singh and Barton-Dock (2015), and they align with aspirations found in this research among NGOs and at local community level.

Community development efforts that are able to activate levers of transformation can scale up, scale out and scale deep, in order to effect shifts toward broader transformational narratives in policy, practice and culture.

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