

# Facilitating Learning in the Governance Action Hub

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## Background

The Governance Action Hub (the Hub) works with local and global change agents around the globe to strengthen and build governance systems by fostering and enhancing local stakeholders' agency in addressing collective challenges through common goals.

We bring together system-level, design thinking, and development entrepreneurship approaches to show what is possible and encourage audacity, while actively connecting local ideas and local innovators with the global governance and anti-corruption community.

In pilot countries, we will work with local partners to identify feasible entry points to address systemic problems by finding ways to realign incentives for change. We will do this by supporting local agents of change with tools, strategic processes, investments in learning and action research, convening and connecting.

In each country we seek to:

1. Strengthen existing participatory spaces and networks that promote and nurture local coalitions, only creating new ones if needed.
2. Build local capacity to tackle concrete challenges by brokering and adapting existing knowledge and evidence to identified needs.
3. Test solutions proposed by local participants with an emphasis on learning.
4. Embed networks and solutions generated in local systems for sustainability and local ownership.
5. Connect and foster complementarity between local and global actors for impact, sustainability, and appropriate scale up.

The Hub is managed by Results for Development (R4D).

Our approach involves providing tailored support and facilitation for participatory systems thinking and action-learning. This approach builds on a growing consensus about the contribution that problem-driven cycles of action-learning can make to addressing complex and systemic challenges that have both political economy and technical aspects, and, in turn to improving the governance and functioning of such systems. Recent learning recognizes that:

- **Coalitions need to set their own priorities** and drive their own agenda;
- **Relationships are crucial** to systems change efforts;
- **Change in complex systems is non-linear** and is the result of collective action;
- **Coalitions need to be adaptive** to changes in context.

The document first outlines some **key concepts**. It then sets out the **main structures** within the Hub to facilitate learning. And it then outlines a series of **processes and tools** to facilitate learning.

### Our Principles

1. Context-adaptable and relevant
2. Locally-led and owned with external allies and sponsors
3. Politically savvy and agile
4. Experimental and learning-centric
5. Equity and human-centered

## 1. Key Concepts

### a) Learning

**Learning is a social process through which we gain understanding and insight about the world around us by thinking deeply about our assumptions and beliefs and how these relate to that world.** It entails critical thinking about what we think we know and understand, discovering new perspectives and ideas, and detecting and correcting errors (see Agyris, [1977](#)). Practically, learning means taking stock of what we think we know, examining our evidence base to support what we think we know (or not) and questioning whether our assumptions hold in a particular context related to the change we seek. Learning must then be translated into action. It should help close the gap between monitoring (performance measurement – such as indicators) and evaluation (judging overall value – see Schwandt, [2015](#)).

### b) Collaborative learning

**A collaborative approach to knowledge creation and learning is empowerment-centered and enables peers to help each other on an ongoing basis.** It involves collaborative action- or implementation-oriented research across countries and sectors over several years, applying peer-to-peer learning and working directly with relevant in-country institutions that can help develop the supportive ecosystems needed to bring about long-term system reform (Ling *et al.* 2023).

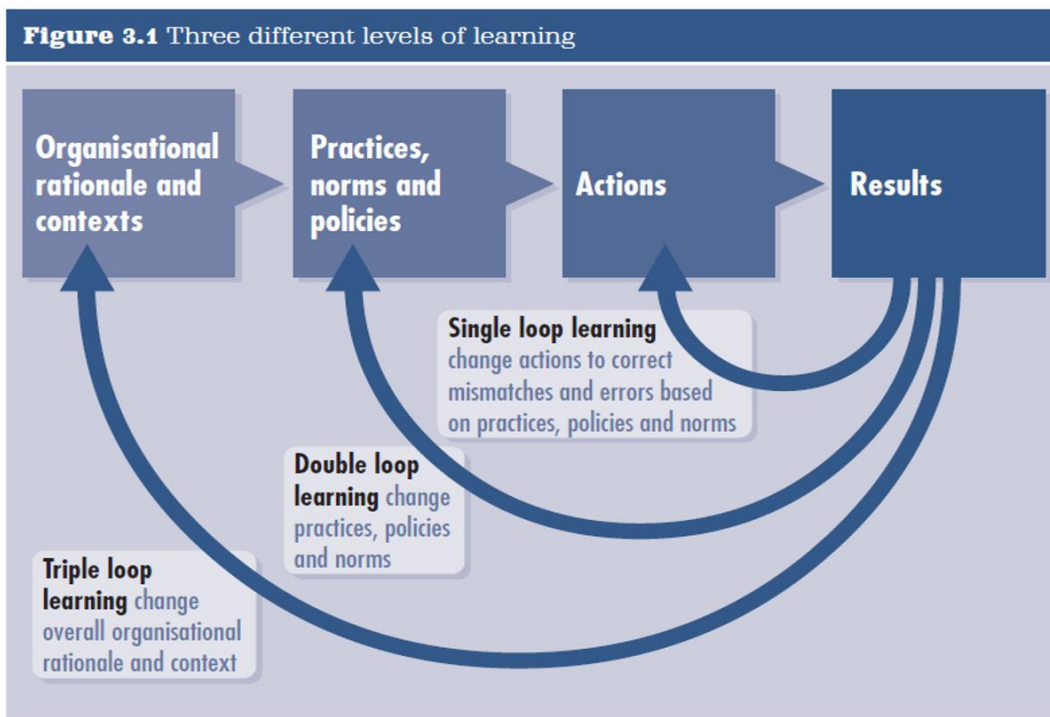
### c) Adaptation

**Adaptation is understood as the *decision (or action)* from gaining knowledge and understanding through a social learning process.** As an adaptive program, the Hub is interested in how learning informs project execution in all its locations. The learning informs specific ways that the program adapts its implementation, strategies, and approaches.

### d) Triple loop learning

**The Hub aims to facilitate three learning loops.** Learning at each loop level informs project adaptation actions over the short, medium, and long term:

We can see a good representation of the different levels and learning loops below:



Ramalingam *et al.* 2009

- i. **Single loop learning:** This is geared towards reflecting on the question: *are we doing things right?* Coalitions in the Hub can ask questions about whether planned activities are being achieved (or not) and what immediate course corrections may be required to get back on track. Single loop learning is often thought of as a thermostat (too hot or too cold). Here we commonly reflect upon detecting errors and enabling short-term improvements in working practices and results. So, we're talking mostly about **WHAT** we're doing and address day-to-day operational problems.
- ii. **Double loop learning:** This is about asking: *are we doing the right things?* This is a slightly deeper reflection on emerging patterns or trends, often over a longer period in a single location, or in comparison across different locations. This can be about how we interact with partners and communities and whether we're doing this in the right way. It's therefore a reflection on causal assumptions, pathways of change, organizational norms, practices (or processes) and policies. So, we are not only talking about the **WHAT**, but also about the **HOW**.
- iii. **Triple loop learning:** Triple loop learning is even deeper still and tends to be about longer timeframes, considering organizational principles and goals (values, mission, vision). Beyond a reflection on patterns of success and failure, it's about asking *what is right?* In other words, it's about considering why we do what we do and reflecting on who we should be as a program and even the organization itself (our identity). This is therefore also about the **WHY & WHO**.<sup>1</sup>

#### e) Systems lens

To align analysis, decision-making, and management with how complex and adaptive systems behave. A systems lens implies:

<sup>1</sup> See Argyris, 1977; Roche, 2010; Prieto Martin *et al.* 2017; Cabaj, 2019

- A holistic perspective, while keeping concrete, actionable goals in focus;
- Understanding the key relationships shaping how individuals and organizations interact;
- Accepting uncertainty and complexity, working in adaptive, flexible ways;
- Recognizing that different people have legitimately different perspectives;
- Awareness of the resilience and adaptability of systems;
- Working in interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral ways.

System boundaries are artificial social constructions. But we must focus on something, so problem-driven efforts should be towards a **system of interest**. According to Lowe and French ([2021](#): 78), 'a system of interest is defined in relation to a purpose... The boundary of that system is an artificial line that human beings draw around a set of interactions that are happening in the world. It is a map, not the territory.'

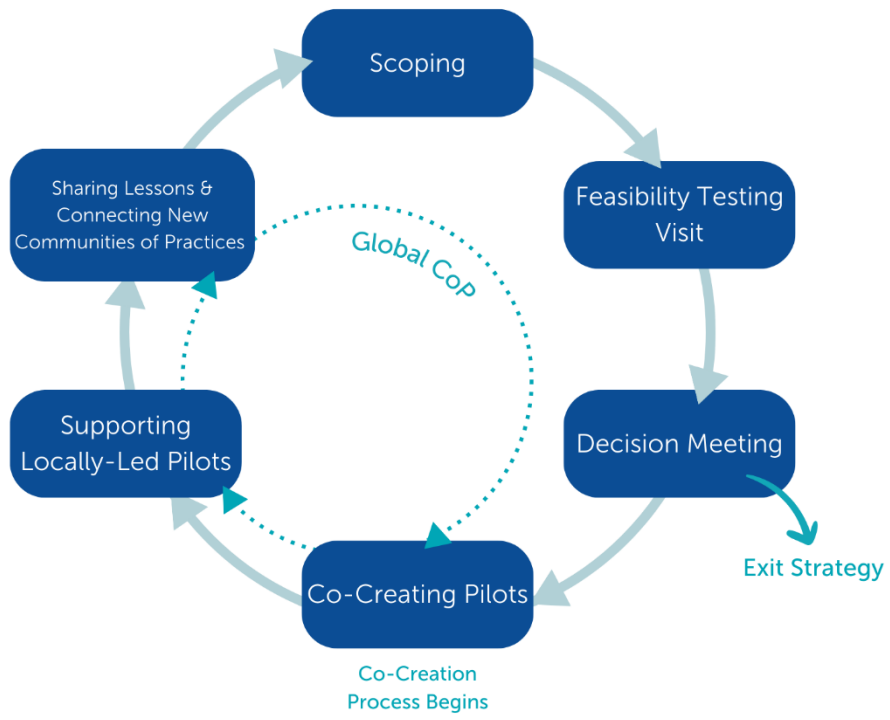
## 2) Key Learning Support Structures

The Hub's approach to Participatory Systems Thinking includes five sets of actors:

- (1) **System Sponsors:** A sponsor is an individual or organization that provides financial and/or programmatic support to a development project or initiative. Sponsors play a crucial role in ensuring the success of development programs by providing the resources and expertise needed to implement them effectively. Sponsors include members of the core Hub team.
- (2) **Local Facilitators:** A local facilitator coordinates and supports efforts within a specific country. They serve as a bridge between international organizations, donor agencies, and local stakeholders, ensuring that development initiatives are aligned with national priorities and effectively address the country's unique needs and challenges. Local facilitators and learning partners co-design and support tailoring of the approach in the countries in which it is being implemented, to facilitate collaborative learning and learning cycles between local conveners/stewards in multiple countries, and to lead the monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) strategy to build evidence regarding this approach. Selecting the local facilitator in each country is critical to identifying the system problem to target in each country, facilitating participatory systems thinking approaches with local partners, linking them with other relevant experiences and structuring learning. The local facilitator works closely with the Hub's core team member for each country.
- (3) **Learning Partners:** Alongside local facilitators, learning partners are also a liaison between R4D and the local actors, but take more of a leading role in facilitating coalition learning.
- (4) **Local Coalition Conveners/Stewards:** Local coalition conveners, or system stewards, build the coalition of change in each context. A steward plays a crucial role in overseeing and managing resources, ensuring the long-term success of development programs and projects. They serve to ensure that activities are aligned with intended goals, implemented effectively, and contribute to sustainable and positive change for the communities they serve. With support and facilitation from the local facilitator and learning partner, local stewards will go through a process of analyzing and identifying the inter-related causes of the focus problem, co-developing ways to address these causes, trying these approaches and implementing and adapting them to ensure impact. In more detail, a steward:
  - Creates a truly global community, giving voice to new, local actors;
  - Connects actors with a "piece of the puzzle" bridging theory and practice;
  - Tests new tools and approaches across different contexts to fill evidence gaps;
  - Builds trust, capacity and a valuable process for collective problem solving.
- (5) **System Supporters/Allies:** Local system supporters, including critical friends that have technical and relational expertise as well as donors and others. A critical friend is a trusted advisor who provides constructive feedback and support to individuals or organizations involved in development initiatives. They play a crucial role in promoting reflective practice, strengthening project design and implementation, and enhancing the overall effectiveness of development efforts. They consist of local NGOs, researchers, thought leaders and donors.

Next, we will turn to the **six proposed stages of co-creation at the country level.**

The Hub foresees 6 stages to co-creation at the country level, as follows:



## Stages 1 and 2

We are committed to finding entry points where the Hub can support local teams to move beyond “interesting” or “relevant” activities and focus on identifying entry points that have the potential for meaningful impact because behavior can be changed.

As a first step, through a desk review we seek answers to the following types of questions:

- What is the general institutional landscape of institutions, actors, formal and informal relationships?
- How do actors in a chosen sector behave? What are their interests, capabilities, and motivations?
- How has change happened in specific contexts and what we can learn from those experiences?
- What are potential entry points that might provide coalitions of actors to realign incentives to address a problem of interest in a system of interest?
- What are some initial hypotheses of how this might happen, based on an understanding of the local context and existing organizational capacity?

Answers to such questions can help to come up with hypothesis for feasible entry points for impact.

### Political economy analysis

Tools to support this stage, include a range of toolkits for applied political economy. Political Economy Analysis (PEA) is commonly defined as the analysis of:

‘The interaction of political and economic processes in a society: the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time (OECD-DAC in DFID [2009](#): 4).’

There are many political economy analysis toolkits and guides available (Harris and Booth, [2013](#); Fritz *et al.* [2014](#); Oxford Policy Management and Oxfam, [2014](#); Ansu *et al.* [2014](#); Haines and O’Neil, [2018](#); USAID, [2018](#); Pact, [2023](#)).<sup>2</sup> Generally, PEA tries to deepen our understanding of power and politics through analysis of:

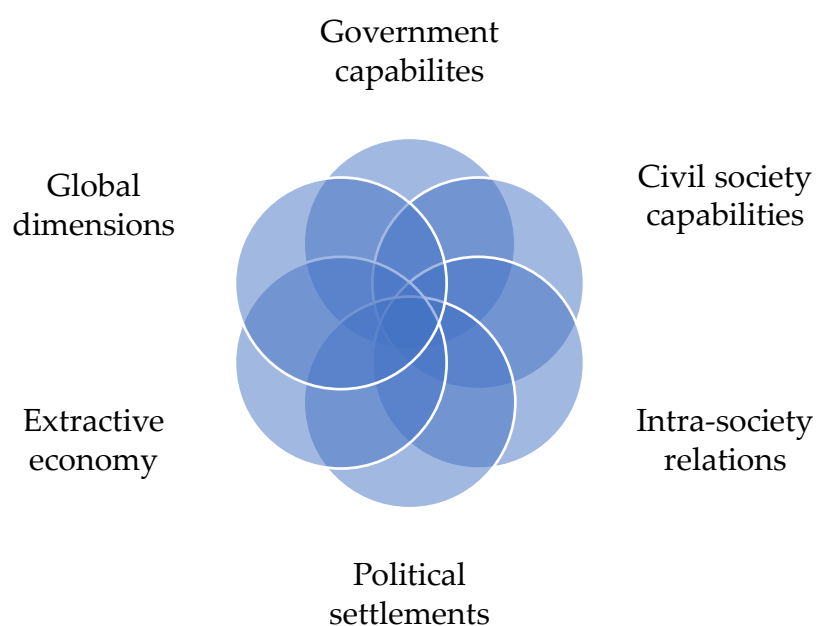
- social, political and economic influences in society, and how these shape people’s incentives and behavior;
- which individuals and groups have an interest in an issue, and how they drive or obstruct change;
- overall political barriers and opportunities in relation to a particular development challenge, and how these might be addressed or harnessed.

More recently there have been guides focused more explicitly on the study of corruption (Roy *et al.* [2022](#)). This guide considers the power, capabilities, and interests of different groups in relation to corruption. So, this is worth reviewing as part of the analysis.

Building on a previous learning from LTRC (Eisen *et al.* [2020](#)) and framework from O’Meally ([2013](#)) on contextual factors that influence social accountability efforts, the Hub has identified a set of relevant contextual dimensions to compare across countries. These factor areas are illustrated below:

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<sup>2</sup> See The Policy Practice’s [Using Political Economy Analysis Tools](#) for further information.



System sponsors and coalition partners should take these dimensions into account. Further information on each of these dimensions can be found in the *Governance Action Hub Contextual Factors to Monitor* document.

System sponsors will first need to conduct a sector-level analysis prior to problem-driven analysis with coalition partners. Three initial (not mutually-exclusive) sectors have been identified:

Development and implementation of <b>regional development plans</b>	<b>Better management and use of extractives revenue</b> for better health, education, and nutrition outcomes, and buffering its negative effects	<b>Just climate transition</b> , including securing pathways to a <u>just energy transition</u> at the local level
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The Hub is not limited to these. Moreover, these can be broken down into smaller chunks, depending on which specific problems coalitions aim to address.



### **Stage 3: Decision Criteria:**

After the country visit, the Hub team submits its findings to a decision panel who review:

- Feasibility for change given sector dynamics and patterns of change to-date;
- Likelihood for impact based on existing organizational capacity, levels of trust and incentives;
- Resources required vs resources available;
- Timing.

## Stage 4: Co-creating local pilots

**Taking a participatory systems approach is helpful when addressing complex problems.** It helps understand the bigger picture and the whole system rather than focusing on individual system elements that may or may not result in sustainable change. A participatory systems approach aims to:

- a) Facilitate dialogue between diverse stakeholders;
- b) increase understanding by illustrating the system from the perspective of multiple system actors;
- c) Explore the physical and non-physical elements of the system structure largely relationships, resources, rules/regulations (policies) as well as the, politics, values, norms and incentives that influence behavior of system actors;
- d) Empower change agents to use their deeper understanding of the system structure and the multiple perspectives of system actors to identify and leverage entry points;
- e) Prepare for adaptive, learning-centric pilots.

**The co-creation of local pilots is carried out by local actors – the conveners/stewards, with the support of the local facilitator.**

**Co-creating local pilots includes the following 4 steps:**

- 1) Preparation and set-up activities to review and adapt the design of the overall approach to the problem and the context** in which it will be implemented. During this step, the local facilitator identifies existing organizations and individuals that are well placed to steward the local process, taking care to identify those that have the power and capability to support change, while recognizing the principle of equity and the need to incorporate the voices of potential winners and losers;
- 2) Project and systems actors undertake cycles of mapping the problem** (including validating a problem statement, its causes, and consequences, defining and bounding the problem, and identifying and understanding relevant actors and their roles and incentives about the problem);
- 3) Planning actions to address the interrelated causes of the problem**, using local and technical knowledge to come up with a series of “best guesses” of possible solutions or pathways forward to try;
- 4) Being explicit about assumptions and theories to “learn on the go.”**

While we envision the systems thinking exercises completed in this step to be the most time-intensive, as it involves creating a new mapping of causes, stakeholders, and actions for the first time for this group of local stewards, systems thinking recognizes the value in revisiting these mappings in subsequent learning and adaptation cycles so that stewards can revise their view of problems and actions based on what they have learned and experienced in the previous cycle related to technical and political economy aspects of the problem as well as changes to context that may have occurred.

### A Few Words of Caution on Systems Change

David Byrne and Gillian Callaghan describe the need to [“being humble”](#) about our knowledge claims in complex environments.

Rob Ricigliano makes recommendations such as [“don’t overpromise on systems change.”](#) He reminds us that shifting systems is also about **shifting ourselves**, that you need the **right fit** approach for your context, and to ensure that you’re prepared to **learn from both success and failure**.

## Project and systems actors undertake cycles of mapping the problem

There are several relevant tools to assess key problems in a system of interest:

- Causal Loop Diagrams
- Fishbone (Ishikawa) diagrams
- The 5 Whys

## Participatory systems maps

The Hub’s [systems maps](#) will look at system patterns for a system of interest (e.g., a type of corruption, a service failure) (Hudson and Bain, [2023](#)). The most common form of system map is a causal loop diagram.

Causal loop diagrams are a system dynamics tool that produces qualitative illustrations of mental models, focused on highlighting causality and feedback loops. They can help to capture a shared understanding of complex problems and how different elements of a system relate to one another.

These diagrams visualise the elements (nodes) of a system and the relationships between them. They can even be thought of as sentences identifying the key variables in a system (the “nouns”) and indicating the causal relationships between them via links (the “verbs”) (Lannon, [n.d.](#)). The relationships between the elements of the system (expressed as feedback loops) can be either positive (+) or negative (-). These are called reinforcing (positive) and balancing (negative). Reinforcing loops will strengthen the initial assumption and can lead to exponential increases or decreases. Balancing loops will contradict the initial assumption and can lead to a plateau being reached (Lowe *et al.* [2023](#): 71).

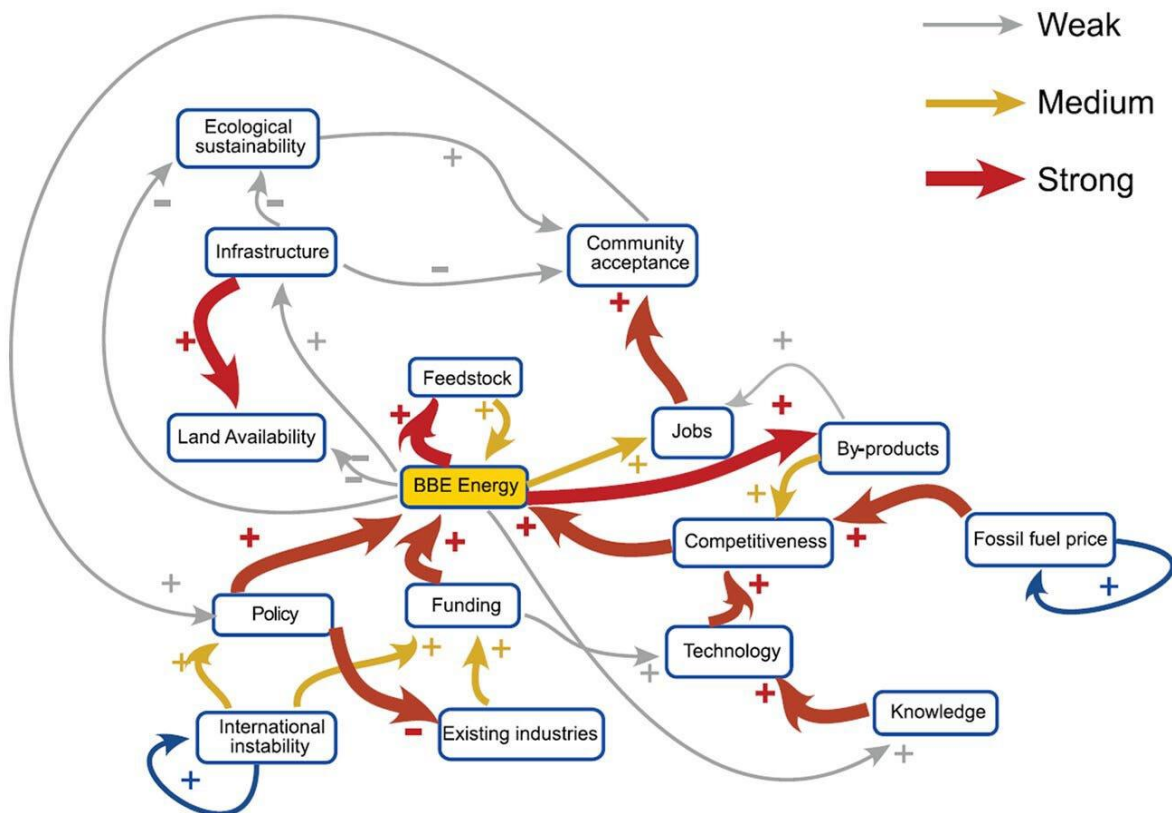
The drawings can be further developed by categorizing the types of variables and quantifying the relationships between variables (or factors) to form a stock and flow diagram.

Colleen Lannon ([n.d.](#)) provides a helpful step-by-step guide which outlines the following steps:

- 1) **Create the variable names:** You first need to identify the nouns—or variables (i.e., factors) —that are important to the issue.
- 2) **Draw the links:** The next step is to fill in the “verbs,” by linking the variables together and determining how one variable affects the other. In the language of systems thinking, links are labeled with either an “+” or an “-.” If variable B moves in the same direction as variable A, the link from variable A to B would be labeled with an +. If variable B changes in a direction opposite of A (i.e., as A increases, B decreases), the link from A to B should be labeled with an -.

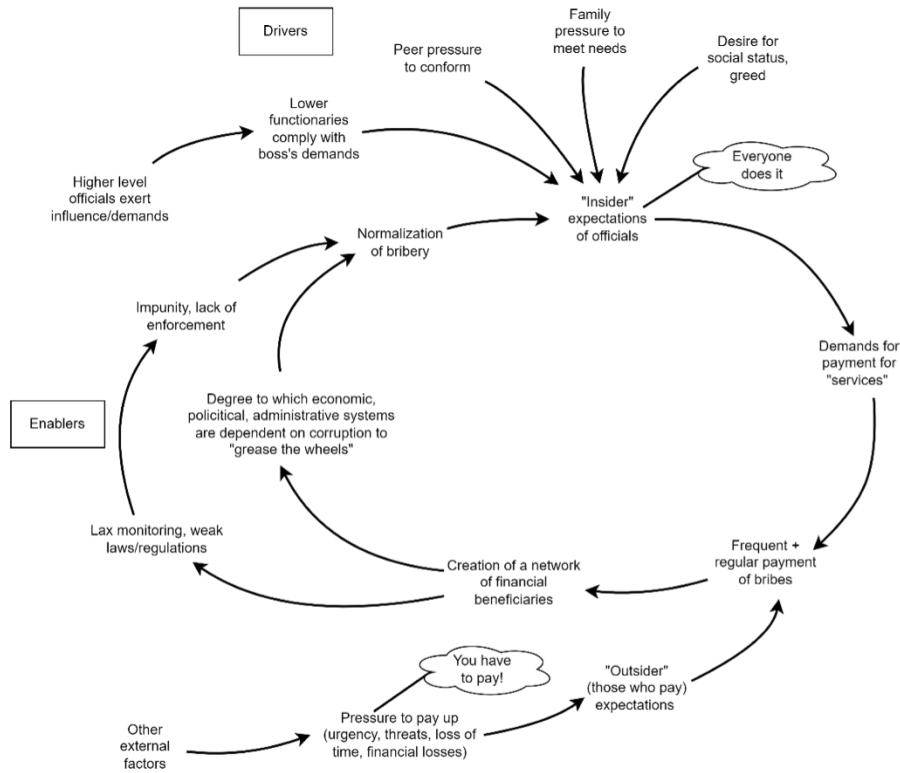
- 3) **Label the loop:** Once you have completed all the links in the loop, you want to determine what type of behavior it will produce (balancing or reinforcing). To determine if a loop is reinforcing or balancing, one quick method is to count the number of “-’s.” If there are an even number of “-’s” (or none are present), the loop is reinforcing. If there are an odd number of “-’s,” it is a balancing loop.
- 4) **Talk through the loop:** Once you have completed the causal loop diagram, it is wise to walk through the loops and “tell the story” to be sure the loops capture the behavior being described.

The main thing systems maps can help with is provide greater attention to potential feedback loops and denoting whether these are positive, negative, and strong or weak (see Wilkinson *et al.* [2001](#)).



You can use a platform such as [Kumu](#) to draw system diagrams.

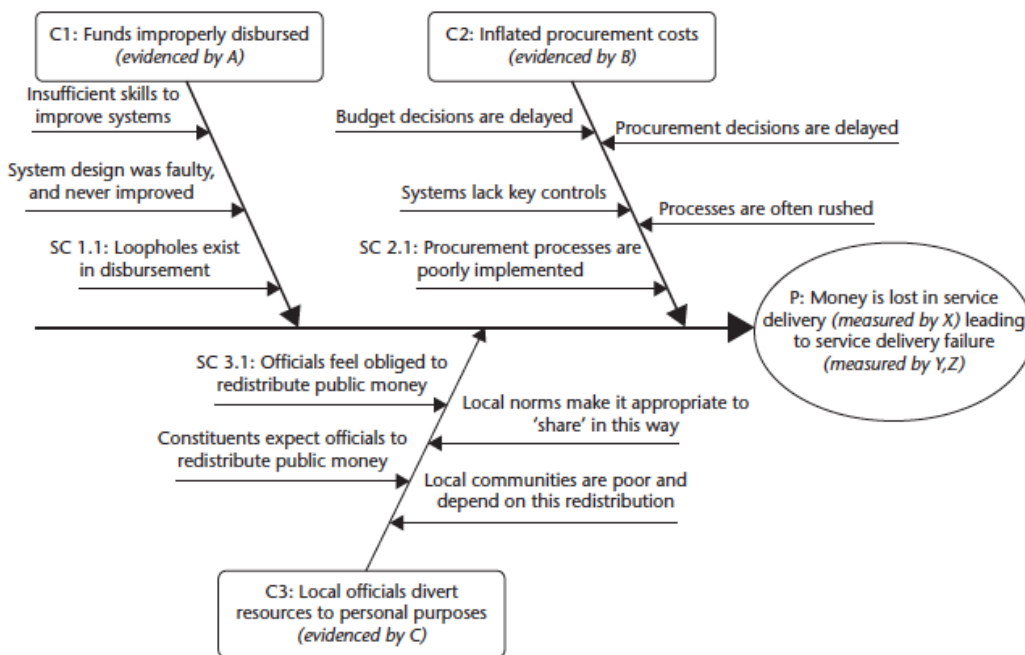
The Corruption, Justice and Legitimacy Program (CJL) has used causal loop diagramming/mapping to develop more nuanced and profound understanding of the complex dynamics involved (Woodrow, [2023](#)). The [common systems patterns](#) approach is intended to accelerate the process of getting to a useful systems map which can then be used to “identify possible points of intervention and subsequent program planning”. The common patterns developed so far relate to the following areas: systems of pervasive patronage; the diversion of government resources; corrupt patterns in procurement and contracting; and, common patterns of bribery. Below is an example of bribery:



You can see another example on the case of neonatal mortality in Uganda (Rwshana *et al.* [2014](#)).

### Fishbone (Ishikawa) diagrams

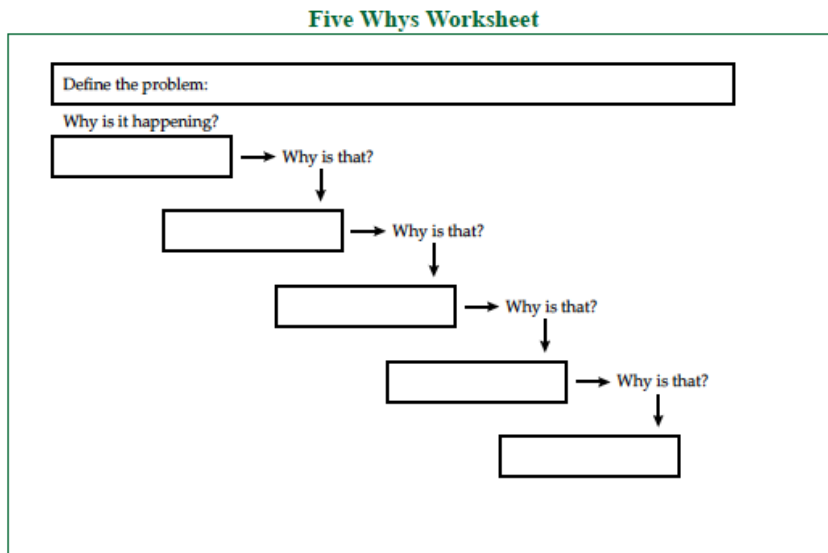
Fishbone (or Ishikawa) diagrams are designed to help visually display the many potential causes for a specific problem or effect. The fishbone diagram specifies the problem effect at the right. Potential causes and sub-causes are shown as “bones on the fish.”



This is a tool used in Problem-driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA).

### 5 whys

For the [5 whys](#), you first define the problem, and then ask why is it happening five times? This will depend on whether there is sufficient time in the session to dig deeper into the reasons for the problem.



Serrat, [2009](#): 2

This is also a tool that is widely used in PDIA.

**There are a few tools/processes to help plan actions for how to address those problems identified:**

- Theories of Change
- Scenario Planning
- Assumption-based Planning

## **Theory of Change**

*'Change emerges as a result of the simultaneous push and pull of multiple political, cultural and social forces involving many individuals and entities (van Es et al. [2015](#): 7).'*

A theory of change, or more accurately *theories* of change, are the ideas and hypotheses people have – consciously or not – about how and why the world and people change (van Es et al. [2015](#): 12). A theory of action is how and why people believe their intervention/project will contribute to that change and different levels of intermediate change.

**A theory of change can be considered as an approach, a process, and a product.** It is an approach because it is a way of thinking about change. It is a process because it is a way of doing analysis and planning, and it is a product because it provides particular outputs (diagram, narrative) (van Es et al. [2015](#): 13).

**With the support of system sponsors, learning partners should develop an initial theory of change** to articulate their collective understanding of the key problems the coalition aims to address, the key factors perpetuating the problem, and the binding constraints to change.

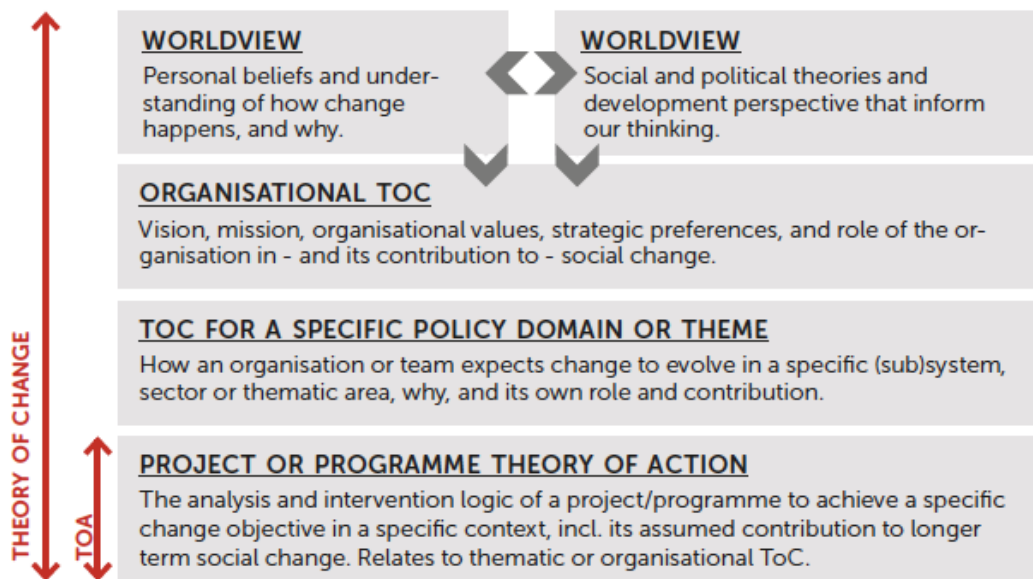
**Understanding context and the key actors and relationships within that context are key to building a solid theory of change.** You can draw on the political economy analysis and systems mapping as prior steps before developing the theory of change itself.

**Theories of change can be combined with participatory systems mapping.** It is possible to build a system map focusing on the whole system of interest before developing a more project-centric theory of change with clearer problem-driven focus (Wilkinson et al. [2021](#)).

**There are many different ways to develop a theory of change.** However, in general, once you understand the key problems you want to address, you identify a long-term goal and work back from this to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place (and how these are causally related) for the goal to be achieved.

**There can be multiple levels to theories of change.** There are so called “nested” theories of change (Mayne, [2015](#)). See the graphic below which illustrates different levels of theory of change:

## THEORIES OF CHANGE @ DIFFERENT LEVELS



van Es *et al.* [2015](#): 18

In the case of the Hub, there will be **global level and country-level theories of change**. These are most similar to a policy domain theory of change in the case of the global level and a project theory of change in the case of country level.

It is common to include the following elements:

- Explain the **situation** and key **problem(s)** you want to address (i.e., what is the key system challenge being addressed?);
- What you **aim to change** (i.e., higher-level goal);
- What different **pathways** and **steps** may lead to that change;
- **Assumptions** around how you move from one step to the following in the change pathway;
- Which **actors** will be involved in achieving that change and how;
- What **evidence** you have for how you think change will happen (Aston and Mathies, [2018](#)).

### i. Explain the situation and key problem(s) you want to address

The boundaries you draw should be around a **system of interest and the key problem(s) that the coalition aims to address**. These should be derived from political economy analyses, Ishikawa diagrams, the 5 whys, and/or causal loop diagrams.



ii. **What you aim to change (i.e., higher-level goal)**

**The Pursuit of Healthier Systems over Fixing Problems**

Systemic problems are not necessarily “fixed” or “solved.” As Rob Ricigliano reminds us, ‘they need healing — healing of relationships, historic inequities, destructive patterns, and the environment.’ You do not cross a finish line – ‘maintaining healthy systems is an ongoing task (Ricigliano, [2021](#)).’ However, this does not mean that coalitions should not have a long-term goal for the kind of they seek and what a healthier system of governance or environmental management might look like (see Snowden, [2021](#) for a contrary view).

**There is not a simple binary between an idealized future and a vague (dispositional) sense of direction.** Even if you choose a goal, you need not be intractably committed to that goal if contextual constraints become too difficult or if other opportunities are presented. You can change your anticipated changes and even your goal.

**The immediate future will likely be much clearer than the middle distance, which is invariably more ambiguous** (Snowden, [2021](#)).<sup>3</sup> It is unlikely that coalitions will have a high degree of clarity beyond the short term.

**One way to help with dissipating degrees of uncertainty is to employ a [Three Horizons model](#) with different time periods under consideration in the theory of change** (e.g., 6 months, 2 years, and 5 years). For example, The Omidyar Group’s [Systems Practice Workbook](#) refers to an aspirational state (guiding star) and a nearer term desired outcome (near star). Having a few clearer short-term outcomes and looser (or more contingent) medium-to-long-term outcomes can temper expectations of how quickly systems change is likely to happen and the likely level of uncertainty related to long-term goals in a complex system where change is non-linear and emergent.

iii. **What different pathways and steps may lead to that change**

**More often than not, contributing to a higher-level goal will require multiple strands of action, or domains of change,** from a coalition and from other actors in the system of interest identified. The actions the coalition will take can be called the theory of action. These actions and those of other relevant actors constitutes the theory of change. Remember that links in theories of change are not necessarily unidirectional (i.e., they can go in more than one direction). Causal loop diagrams may help to pick up recursive loops.

**Theories of change can envision multiple possible futures** rather than a single expected future. You can shift to an adjacent possible if you are not fully committed to a single future (see Lynn, [2021](#)).

**In addition, theories of change can have different paths to the same outcome.** The green and red diagrams illustrate that we can include and/or specifications to logic models/theories of change. The green has a reasonable chance of success because there are so many “or” paths (i.e., there are multiple paths to success), whereas the red shows a doomed programme because to achieve the desired outcome all paths must work. There are also potentially interrelationships and interaction effects between different pathways.

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<sup>3</sup> In contrast, Dave Snowden recommends a [vector theory of change](#).

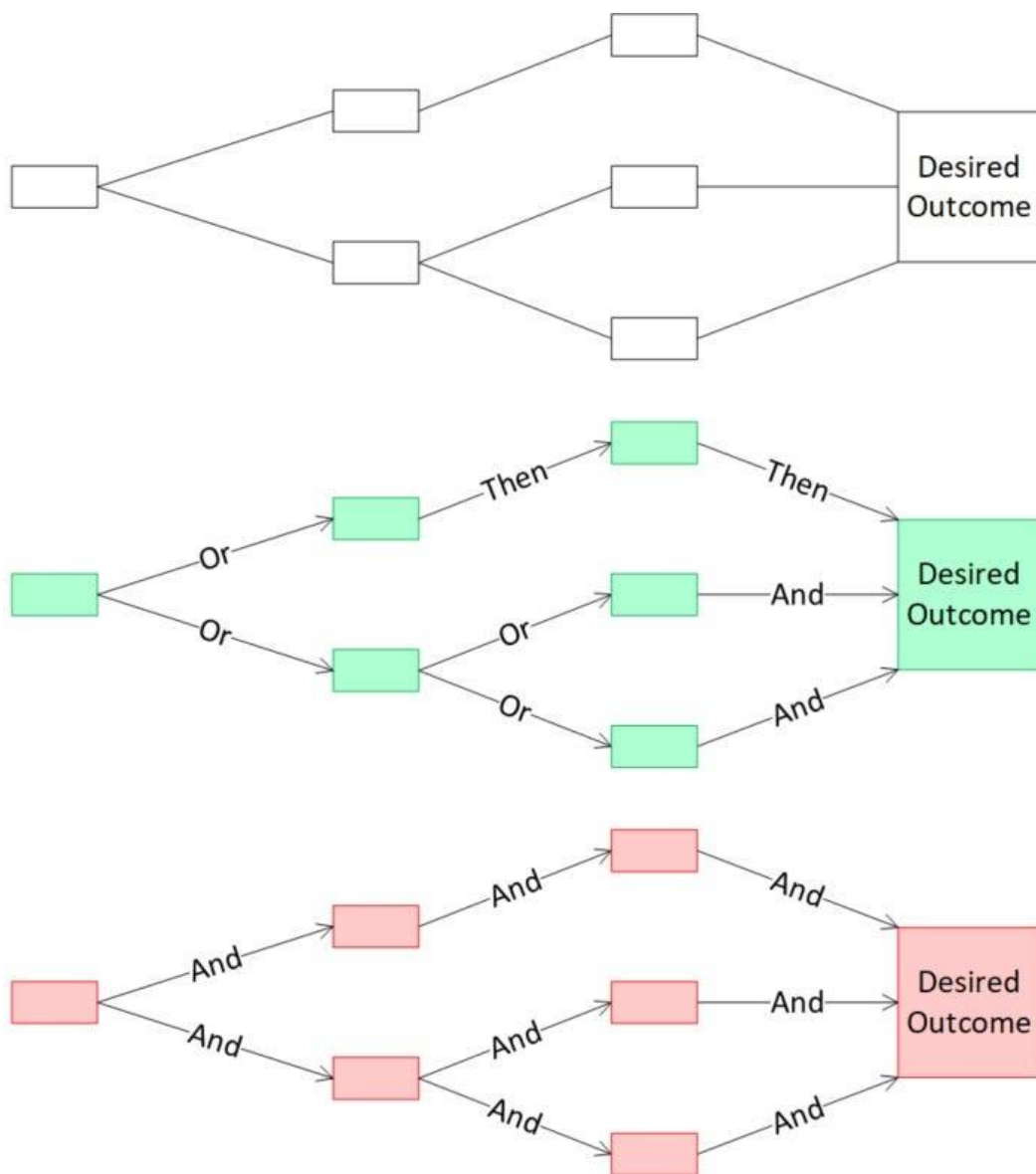


Figure 1: Specifying Conditionals in a Model

Morell, [2023](#)

**iv. Assumptions around how you move from one step to the following in the change pathways**

Then you need to consider what your assumptions are for how change is expected to happen. Assumptions are (generally unspoken) beliefs about what is true or expectations of what will happen. They are tacit assertions about the world which we rarely question or check. They stem from and represent values, norms, and ideological perspectives which inform our interpretation and understanding of reality and how the world works (Williams, [n.d.](#); Van Es *et al.* [2015](#); Morrell, [2018](#); Aston, [2020](#)). Assumptions are rarely right or wrong, they are contextually appropriate (Brookfield, [2011](#): 21).'

In theories of change, assumptions connect different levels of change (e.g., outputs to outcomes). Learning partners should focus on a few key assumptions for each level of the theory of change. Making a long list of potentially relevant assumptions is not particularly helpful, it helps to identify those that will likely be most important or make the biggest difference. See assumptions-based planning section below.

There are also different types of assumptions coalitions may want to disaggregate (Guijt, [2013](#); Aston, [2020](#)). Perhaps the two most important types are the following:

- **Operational assumptions** are assumptions about the operating environment for delivering a programme (it is otherwise called “ecological context” as it can directly affect operations). These assumptions might include external context, such as issues of political stability, freedom of expression or movement, environmental factors (e.g. epidemics). These provide access and opportunities for different stakeholders.
- **Causal assumptions** are assumptions about how different parts of the world work and about the conditions under which these can be changed. These are the events and conditions needed (i.e. necessary) for the associated causal link to work-for the cause to lead to the effect. These are the most common form of assumptions.

More often than not, operation assumptions relate more to the output level and causal assumptions relate the outcome level. However, operational assumptions can also obviously affect outcome materialization.

#### v. Which actors will be involved in achieving that change and how

Learning partners can go back to stakeholder analysis exercises to identify potential actors. If this hasn’t already been done, then you may consider the following guidance.

#### **Stakeholder analysis often focuses on those with the most visible power in society.**

We often forget to map those with power that is less obvious or official. We also often do not consider how invisible forms of power (such as social norms) affect the position of different stakeholders and their ability to act to defend their interests or challenge injustice (or how this might change).

you should be looking for a mix of powerful actors that are positive and negative (champions and blockers) and take account of which actors are excluded, but that might have a keen interest in being included.

You can colour code these to make it easier:

- Key decision-makers can be in purple;
- Champions (positive) can be in green;
- Blockers (negative) can be in red;
- Target marginalized group can be in blue.

You may also wish to divide stakeholders by type of actor/group. Particularly, if you’re looking to broker partnerships, it is usually best to choose a mixture of different stakeholders (e.g. press, CSO, insurance companies, state committee) as generally a variety of actors are needed to achieve the change you want. Stakeholders might be grouped as: (i) private; (ii) public; (iii) civil society; and (iv) external actors. See the below table for an example:

Types of Stakeholders			
Private Sector	Public Sector	Civil Society	External

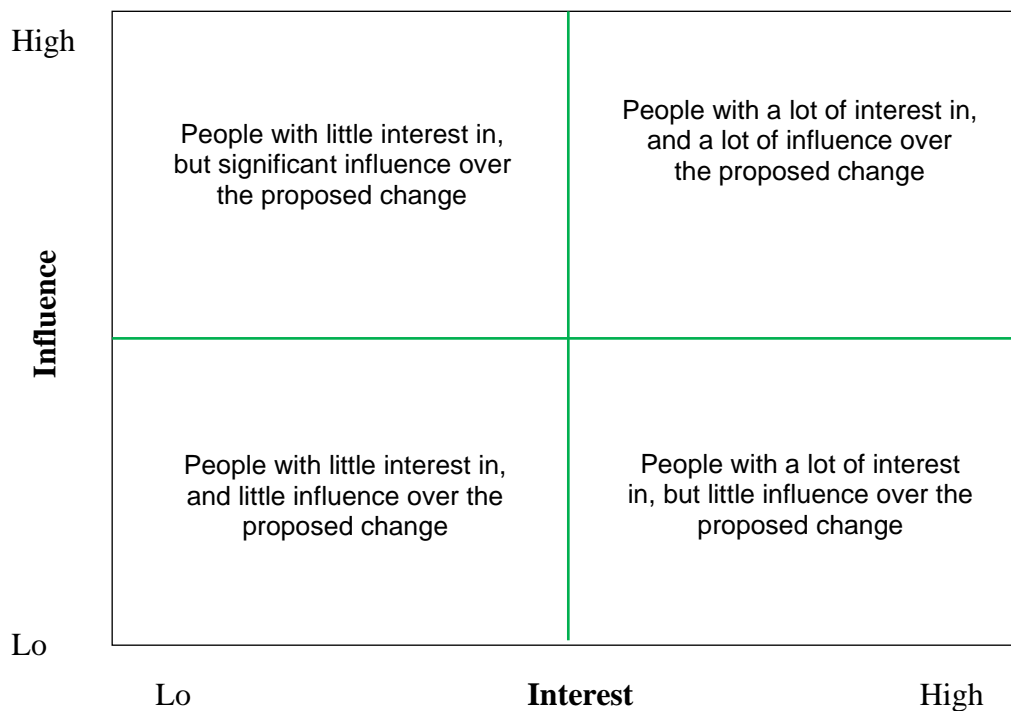
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporations and businesses</li> <li>• Business associations</li> <li>• Professional bodies</li> <li>• Individual business leaders</li> <li>• Domestic financial Institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministers and advisors (e.g. executive)</li> <li>• Elected representatives (legislature)</li> <li>• Courts (judiciary)</li> <li>• Civil servants and departments (bureaucracy)</li> <li>• Political parties</li> <li>• Local governments/councils</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National media</li> <li>• Churches/mosques</li> <li>• Schools and universities</li> <li>• Trade unions</li> <li>• Local NGOs</li> <li>• Women's organizations</li> <li>• Youth organizations</li> <li>• House of chiefs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donors</li> <li>• International orgs. (World Bank, UN) active in the area/sector</li> <li>• International NGOs</li> <li>• International media</li> <li>• Transnational corporations</li> </ul>
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You should focus on a few stakeholders that have high levels of interest and high levels of influence first.

**Focus on where there is interest**

Donella Meadows reminds us that **you can't talk or "evidence" people into paradigm shift.** When you encounter sceptics, you do not have to try and convince them – in fact, seeking to convince them in advance may well be impossible, and is likely to be a [waste of your energy](#).

Identifying which stakeholders have a high level of interest and also power (or influence) is an important step. This can be illustrated in a classic 2X2 grid:



**A theory of change is a living process, so it is important to revise a theory of change.**

How often coalitions and other partners should do this depends on the nature of your project, but every time you notice a significant change in context that might undermine your key assumptions, you should take another look. Take the time to sit down as a team and reflect on progress and barriers to that progress (see below). Focus on bits of your theory you think are most vulnerable because of the changes you see around you. And think about how you might need to change your tactics and strategies accordingly.

**Coalition-level theories of change should be updated bi-annually** by country teams. The **global Hub-level theory of change should be updated annually** by the core global team with the participation of stewards, sponsors, and allies based on updated national coalition theories of change.

The aim is to develop logical theories of change with sufficient stakeholder input and based on an understanding of the context, relevant analyses, and existing technical evidence, test and explore theories of change and their assumptions and modify theories (as needed) based on results, and use and share learning from testing theories of change to inform R4D and other stakeholders' planning and implementation (see this [rubric](#) from USAID regarding the quality of a theory of change).

## Scenario planning

**All our decisions are really bets about the future.** Scenario planning can be consistent with theories of change (Boulton *et al.* [2015](#); Snow *et al.* [2015](#); Lynn, [2021](#); Aston, [2021](#)).

**Scenario planning is a structured process for making key strategic decisions in the face of uncertain futures.** It involves sketching out 2 – 4 external scenarios, and then identifying the internal actions you'll take to prepare for and respond to one or more of those scenarios (Algozo, [2020](#)).

**First, come up with three potential scenarios**—an optimistic one, a pessimistic one, and one in-between – related to the key goal or higher-level outcome identified.

**Identify your key assumption**—the variable that drives the scenario. This can be taken from a theory of change and then adapted and updated in case these change for different scenarios. It is not worth looking at every single assumption. At best, it is worth considering one or two of the most important variables only.

### Different Time Horizons

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the question we asked was “how long?” Using this assumption, a scenario plan begins with, “When do we think the restrictions resulting from the pandemic will end? By June? By October? Or, by the end of the year (or even later)?” From there, you can examine other assumptions, such as impact on programs, revenue, and people, for each duration (Management Center, [2021](#)).

**You should consider the potential impact of particular scenarios.** Each scenario can be summarized on a scale of low, medium, or high.

**Then you should also consider the likelihood of each scenario.** This can also be summarized on a scale of low, medium, or high.

This information can be outlined in the table below:

Assumptions ↓	Scenario A: Optimistic	Scenario B: Medium	Scenario C: Worst Case
<b>Key Assumption<sup>4</sup></b> (e.g., Timing: When do we think the restrictions resulting from the pandemic will end?)	Restrictions will end in a month	Restrictions will end in a few months	Restrictions will end many months in the future
<b>Programmatic Impact:</b> How deeply would our coalition goal or higher-level outcome be impacted (and			

<sup>4</sup> This is the anchoring assumption that drives the scenario. A key assumption might be “X wins the next election” or “The Supreme Court rules X on Y issue.” The other assumptions (programmatic, revenue, and people) follow from the key assumption. Read [How to Scenario Plan](#) for more guidance.

how)? How would this impact our people (coalition or other partners)? How will it affect coalition resources?			
<b>Impact Level</b>	Low	Medium	High
<b>Likelihood of Impact:</b> How likely is it that this scenario will materialize?			
<b>Likelihood</b>	Low	High	Medium

Adapted from Management Center, [2021](#)

Once you have determined the key assumption to assess (e.g., timing)

<b>Scenario Name and Description</b>	<b>Our Strategy</b>
Copy and paste the scenario name and scenario summary from the “Constructing the Scenarios” page here.	The overall approach you’ll take if the scenario comes true.
<b>Scenario A, B, or C</b>	Ask: “If this scenario came true, what would we do?” Who would be your priority stakeholders?
<b>Immediate Next Steps, Timelines, and Owners</b>	<b>Ideas for Future Consideration</b>
List the actions you’ll take to pursue the strategy. These could be “no regrets” moves, options to buy you time, and/or innovative ideas you want to try out.	Keep track of things you want to do eventually as the scenario becomes more likely to happen. You can also use this section as a parking lot for ideas.
<b>Write out all the defensive moves</b> you’d make to prepare for the worst-case scenario.	
<b>Indicators to Track (and Owners)</b>	
These could be metrics that indicate if a scenario is coming true and/or that help you see if the steps you’ve taken so far are successful.	

Adapted from Management Center, [2021](#)

## Assumption-based planning

For a plan to work, key assumptions (i.e., generally unspoken beliefs about what is true or expectations of what will happen) should hold true. Assumptions are often difficult to identify because they may be implicit. They typically lie in how we think the world normally works (a mental model), so they are not always interrogated.

You don't need to look at all assumptions, **only those that are important** or "load-bearing." You can help define which assumptions are important based on how **certain** they are and whether they are likely to have a large **influence** over the plan. Assumptions that are highly uncertain but have a high level of influence over the plan are particularly vulnerable.

### 1) Identify important outcomes:

Here are three criteria to identify important outcomes:

- It is a **central storyline** for the initiative (e.g. more people report sexual assault);
- **Lots of arrows** = main channel/pathway (lot of outputs to use hotline);
- **Lots of actors have a stake** (positive or negative) in the materialization of the outcome.

### 2) Identify key vulnerable assumptions:

**Key** means that there is a large influence over the achievement of initiative goal or outcome of interest.

'What makes an assumption vulnerable are those elements of change that would violate the assumption or cause it to be wrong (Williams, [n.d.](#): 1).' Criteria you may consider include:

- **Limited evidence** of what works in this context (need for further investigation);
- **Low agreement** on stakeholders' preferences or what will work (highly diverse perspectives);
- **Highly exposed** to external threats (e.g. climate shock).

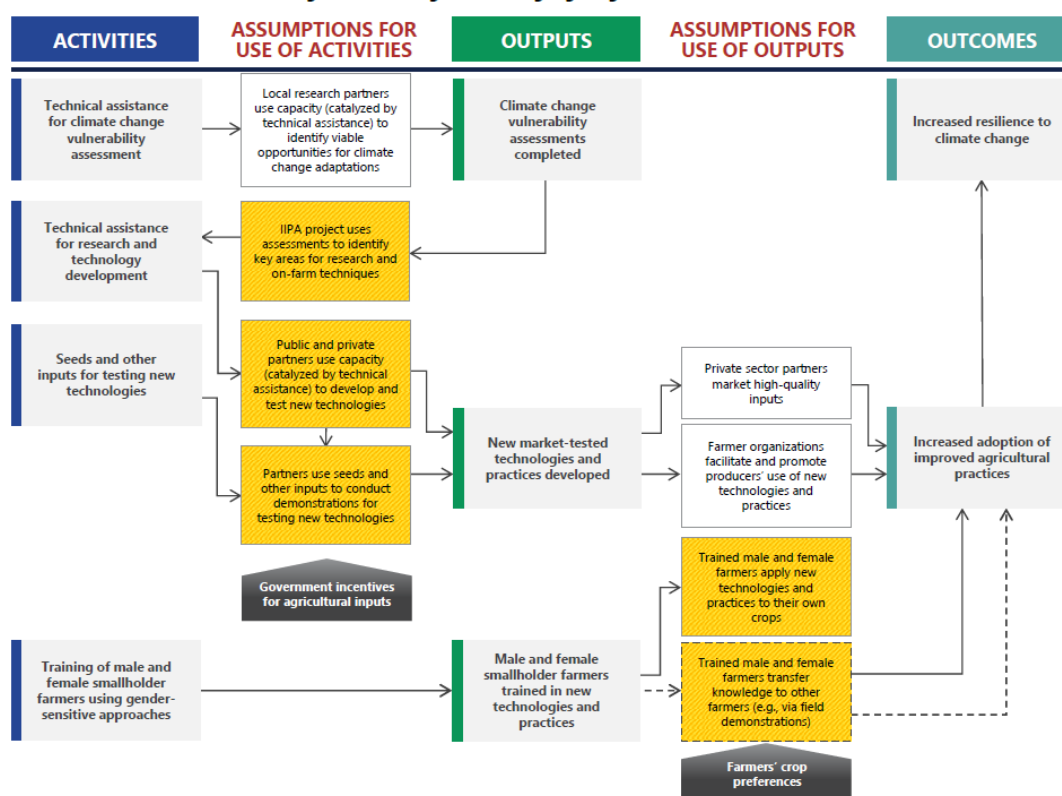
To assess the vulnerability of your key assumptions, you should also define what your **time horizon** is for assessment. 'The *planning time horizon* is the farthest point out that a given planning effort would consider and sets the limit of vulnerability of an assumption (Williams, [n.d.](#)1).' For our purposes, this might be that we thought changes in behaviour of a key actor were expected to materialize within 3 months, but 6 months later we see no evidence of either a change in attitude or behaviour, and moreover signs of behaviour you would not like to see.

Assuming the coalition has a theory of change, you can then review the how assumptions link activities and outputs or outputs and outcomes. Causal Link Monitoring does this by suggesting that implementers must *use* activities to produce outputs and actors must use outputs to achieve outcomes. For example, local research partners use (new) capacity to identify viable opportunities for climate change adaptations, or farmer organizations facilitate and promote producers' use of new technologies and practices. We know that often in practice outputs don't translate into outcomes because our assumptions about actors' incentives to change their behaviour are often wrong.

Below in yellow you can see an illustration of areas of observation on key assumptions, based on their strategic importance over the life of the project. In black you can see contextual factors. Prioritization is based on causal links where there is low certainty around assumptions and agreement.



Figure 7. CLM Logic Model Highlighting Areas of Observation



Britt *et al.* [2017](#): 26

In the case above, farmers may not want to use new technologies and practices to their own crops despite the training. They may have various and diverse reason why they would choose to continue to use their tried and tested practices. In this sense, you can think about why they may want to maintain the status quo. Or, in some cases, where a blocker has strong influence, you may be able to think of things that could cause a negative change related to the outcome you want to achieve.

### 3) Step 3: identify key actors related to vulnerable assumptions:

Beyond identifying the most important, but vulnerable assumptions, you can also think through how different stakeholders might have an interest in blocking change (i.e. the materialization of your key outcome. See Catholic Relief Services ([2016](#)) for a helpful video on this.

We recommend identifying a maximum of 3 key stakeholders we believe are blocking change for the key pathway of interest. You can then consider 3 key champions who may be able to help neutralise or counteract opposition and support you towards the achievement of the outcome.

Of course, assumptions we have about how change will happen is not only about actors. You should also consider our assumptions about the stability or instability of the wider context in which stakeholders act (a political crisis, ministerial reshuffle, natural disaster, epidemic etc.) and which are beyond their direct control.

You then think about how your key assumptions might be affected by opposing actors or changes in context.

### 4) Step 4: Define signposts

You should then construct signposts that tell you when a key assumption is changing. Signposts are a form of indicator such as an event or threshold which clearly indicates that the vulnerability of an assumption is changing (i.e., it has tipped). Signposts are mechanisms for monitoring the uncertainties in an organisation's future and help an organisation to perform shaping and hedging actions (Williams, [n.d.](#): 2).

A signpost might be rooted in the souring of key relationships. If, for example, Coalition members and partners' relationship with a key champion of change or blocker gets significantly worse quickly, there will likely be negative repercussions on the plan. The signpost might be that they no longer take your calls, or stop inviting coalition members to meetings.

#### **5) Step 5: Define shaping actions**

A *shaping action* is an organisational action designed to avert or cause the failure of a vulnerable assumption. This step helps to decide whether a potential change is for the better or the worse, identifying how much control an organisation has over the assumption and exerting the control (Williams, [n.d.](#): 2).

#### **6) Step 6: Defining hedging actions**

A *hedging action* is an organisational action intended to prepare an organisation better due to the failure of one of its important assumptions.

A hedging action is different from a shaping action and involves replanning. Arriving at a hedging action is based on rethinking the organisation's plans as though an important assumption has failed. It helps an organisation to act to preserve important options in the light of the possibility that an assumption will fail at a certain point (Williams, [n.d.](#): 2).

## Learning and Reflection Sessions

**This stage is led by local stewards and involves implementing pilots.** The actions will be carried out by local stewards with the support of the local facilitator, critical friends and any other external resources identified. Ultimately, it is up to the local stewards to decide how best to implement its pilots and when to adapt, based on what they learn. The data collection and learning described is designed to help the process of adaptation; however, we may observe that partners pivot or change course in the moments based on experiential learning as they try different actions.

We anticipate that the actions implemented in this step will be lean, targeted, and low-cost, carried out over a period of 3-6 months to quickly test ideas and iterate on lessons learned during short activities.

**The Hub can have a mixture of regular structured learning and reflection sessions and punctuated moments for coalitions to take stock, learn, and adapt.**

**Learning together should help to build trust among coalition members and enable different types of conversation, which in turn may lead to collective action.**

**The Hub can have three different types structured learning sessions geared towards single, double, and triple loop learning.** The core of these sessions it to enable coalitions to reflect on what is working, what, isn't, the implications of these findings, and what to do about it.

According to [Rob Ricigliano](#), '*systems and complexity MEL is more about the process of constantly sensing the impacts of your work (the **what**), making sense of them (the **so what**), and learning what they tell you about how the system operates and how to engage it effectively (the **now what**).*' The learning and reflection sessions are therefore geared to connecting the [what, so what, and now what](#).

**The quantity of learning and reflection sessions needs to be manageable for coalition members.** Coalitions need adequate time to carry out their plans, but they also need to regularly create space for learning and reflection. The Hub proposes to have quarterly, bi-annual, and annual reflection sessions. We propose between 7 and 10 sessions per year.

**Consider identifying a dedicated note-taker** who can note take during your sessions and circulate it afterwards.

## Quarterly Reflection Sessions

Coalitions should have **quarterly reflection sessions** to promote single loop learning. These sessions should be practical **problem-solving** sessions for teams to learn and adapt approaches to achieve results.

**The session should have a joint hybrid working space such as a [Miro](#) board that participants will use during the workshop.** Facilitators will need to prepare the online board and upload required templates beforehand in the dedicated workspace.

Before the meeting coalition partners should update the Governance Action Hub Activities Tracker (spreadsheet) and participatory systems maps.

### *What*

**Firstly, coalition members should reflect on what key events have happened over the quarter.**

- How significant were these external events and how did they affect the implementation of planned activities?
- What, if any, barriers were encountered?
- What, if any, new opportunities were identified?

If any new outcomes have materialized in the period, these can also be mentioned.

**Coalition members should review any key [operational assumptions](#)** in their theory of change.

**Operational assumptions** are assumptions about the operating environment for delivering a programme (it is otherwise called “ecological context” as it can directly affect operations). These assumptions might include external context, such as issues of political stability, freedom of expression or movement, environmental factors (e.g. epidemics). These provide access and opportunities for different stakeholders.

Consider:

- Are these assumptions still valid?
- Were coalition partners able to implement activities as anticipated?

Coalitions can revise the Governance Action Hub Activities Tracker spreadsheet to support this activity.

**Coalitions should also consider any key changes in stakeholder dynamics (i.e., power, incentives, and capabilities).**

- In what way, if at all, have these factors changed in the period?
- How, if at all, have any key relationships changed?

Coalitions can review their participatory system maps to inform the conversation.

**If the coalition has encountered a new problem, they may consider asking why through the [5 whys](#) tool explained above.**

### *So what*

**Coalitions should reflect on the implications of the findings in the learning session.**

Overall, why might we think differently or approach a problem differently with this newfound understanding from these data and this analysis?

- Are there new winners and losers in the sector who have enabled or impeded the implementation of the coalition's strategy?
- Does the coalition need to build any new relationships or rebuild relationships to make progress?

***Now what***

**Coalition partners should create a list of any key actions points, particularly if any of these actions require any adaptation.**

Coalition stewards and learning facilitators can decide which actions may require escalation to the global level for additional support or resources.

## Bi-annual Internal Reflection Sessions

Coalitions should have **bi-annual reflection meetings** to promote double loop learning. This is a key moment at which coalitions should reflect on both intended unintended outcomes from programming. At this point, teams should start to reflect on whether they are *doing the right things* to achieve these results or whether they may need to change processes or strategies to achieve the intended results (i.e. strategic pivot).

Outcomes tend to materialize slower than activities and outputs. They may not materialize in quarterly cycles in line with quarterly reporting. So, the Hub proposes to reflect on outcome trends biannually.

**Coalitions should update their timeline and the Outcome Harvesting reporting template before the session.** See below for an example of a timeline that can be kept in an Excel spreadsheet.

TIMELINE OF MAJOR EVENTS, DECISIONS, AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS			
Name and Country of Initiative: Hydropower Development, Nepal			Date: May 2, 2014
Date	Major Events, Decisions and Accomplishments	Event Type	Relevance/Explanation
3/2014	TAF and Niti Foundation establish a partnership with the National Association of Community Electricity Users Nepal (NACEUN) to engage policymakers in the Constituent Assembly (CA)	Achievement	As NACEUN has a huge voting bank, this partnership will be effective in raising electricity-related public interest issues to the CA
4/6/2014	CPN-Maoist party releases a statement citing its opposition to foreign direct investors (FDIs) in hydropower	Roadblock	While the CPN-Maoist opposition to FDIs in hydropower has very little impact at the policy level, it could result in disruption of FDI-supported hydro power generation at ground level, especially in remote locations
4/7/2014	NACEUN discusses the reform agenda with the new Energy Minister and the Deputy Secretary. The Minister presents NACEUN with a written commitment to support the Electricity Bill	Achievement	Getting the Ministry of Energy's support for the Electricity Bill is a step in the right direction
4/9/2014	Prime Minister (PM) Koirala, at an Investment Board Nepal meeting, speaks of fast tracking mega-hydropower projects	External	Commitment from the PM bodes well for future policy reforms

Ladner, [2015](#): 7

### What

**Firstly, as in quarterly learning and reflection sessions, coalition members should reflect on what key events have happened over the quarter.**

- What have we learned about the nature and extent of the problem the coalition is trying to address since the last iteration of the theory of change?
- How significant were these external events and how did they affect the achievement of results? (i.e., behavior changes)

- What, if any, barriers were encountered?
- What, if any, strategies failed during the period?
- What, if any, new opportunities were identified?

To assist with this discussion, coalitions should review the timeline and Outcome Harvesting reporting template to see what events have taken place and what outcomes have materialized or not. They should review what has happened since the previous theory of change was drafted as in the example above.

**Coalition members should then review any key [causal assumptions](#) in their theory of change (see Aston, [2020](#)).**

**Causal assumptions** are assumptions about how different parts of the world work and about the conditions under which these can be changed. These are the events and conditions needed (i.e. necessary) for the associated causal link to work-for the cause to lead to the effect. These are the most common form of assumptions.

Consider:

- Are these assumptions still valid?
- Are outcomes materializing as anticipated or not?
- What, if anything, has surprised you?
- Which, if any, assumptions do you need to revise?

The discussion is generally an iterative process that involves team members sharing different perspectives, critiquing each other's hypotheses, and triangulating information to reach agreement on program directions going forward.

The team reviews and discusses the coalition's latest theory of change, using a set of guiding questions. In this reflective session, the team discusses relevant changes in the external environment, analyses changes in the interests and relationships among key actors, and assesses progress made or roadblocks encountered in achieving their expected outcomes.

### ***So what***

- Who are the key actors now, and how have their relationships, interests and incentives changed?
- Has any pathway become technically unsound or politically impossible?
- Are any alternative paths possible? Does the coalition need to pivot or are different paths complementary?

### ***Now what***

**Coalition partners should create a list of any key actions points, particularly if any of these actions require any adaptation.**

- What should the coalition stop doing?
- What, if any, new actions do the coalition need to take to reach the hoped-for (intermediate) outcomes?

Based on the discussion, key coalition members can make further revisions to the theory of change, as needed.

Coalition stewards and learning facilitators can also decide which actions may require escalation to the global level for additional support or resources.



## Bi-annual Comparative Learning and Reflection Sessions

**Many organizations at country and global levels are experimenting with bold, novel approaches to collective action, but the opportunities to learn from each other and join forces remain elusive.** The Governance Action Hub global community will crowd in those calling attention to emerging insights and informing a new generation of efforts to foster governance reform through collective action. We hope to find other individuals and institutions who are willing to contribute their action-research so that we can all learn through a series of local level pilots about how systems change happens across contexts.

**The Governance Action Hub aims to progressively build a global community that promotes exchange and cross-learning between and among local and global level actors,** leveraging new voices and connecting actors with different perspectives and experiences. Bi-annual comparative reflection sessions are a key moment to bring in new voices and share different perspectives regarding what technically possible and politically feasible.

**In R4D’s collaborative learning approach, a small set of country teams can receive more intensive, focused peer learning and problem-solving support as they advance and share updates on their implementation efforts.** Bi-annual comparative reflection sessions provide an opportunity to compare opportunities and constraints and what might be possible (or not) in their context to address similar problems.

The Hub will work in a small number of natural resource dependent countries (starting in Peru, The Philippines, Ghana) and aims to facilitate the sharing of comparative learning between these countries. Several countries will be looking at some of the following:

Development and implementation of <b>regional development plans</b>	<b>Better management and use of extractives revenue</b> for better health, education, and nutrition outcomes, and buffering its negative effects	<b>Just climate transition,</b> including securing pathways to a <u>just energy transition</u> at the local level
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So, at global level, the **Hub can facilitate comparative thematic learning and reflection sessions.** In addition, there may also be occasional emerging themes proposed by coalitions themselves which may go beyond a particular issue or theme which they want to learn about collectively.

Each comparative learning sessions should enable a coalition or organization to share their experience, how they learned from failure, navigated political economy challenges, and achieved results.

**The Hub also support solutions proposed by local stakeholders to generate demonstration effects that can be then adapted or scaled up, and foster coordination between national and international partners for radical collaboration and impact.**

Therefore, the experiences of other similar coalitions and/or countries can provide insight and inspiration to coalitions to overcome potential “reform pessimism.”

Before the Comparative Learning and Reflection Sessions coalitions and the global team should review the notes of quarterly and bi-annual reflection sessions, systems maps, and coalition timelines. Prior to the sessions, the global team should synthesize any key patterns to inform the discussion.

**What**

**These learning sessions should include a presentation from a coalition to share their experience.** These coalitions could be within the project or outside the project. This presentation should focus on progress such as achieving a key milestone, breakthrough, or even a perceived tipping point related to the issue addressed. The aim of this presentation is to provide real-world inspiration to other coalitions.

**However, it is important to ground any accounts of success (e.g., narratives of most significant change) in their political economy context.** Even if coalitions are working on similar problems (Just Transition and local development planning), we know that their opportunities and constraints at sub-national and national level may be similar in some ways but different in others. Therefore, presenters should bring out the enabling factors which supported the change that their coalition contributed to. This also allows other coalitions to compare and contrast their experience and to identify whether similar conditions might be present or absent in their context.

***So what***

- How relevant or comparable is this learning?
- What learning from one context might be applied to another context?

***Now what***

- What, if any, new actions do the coalition need to take?

## **Annual Reflection Meetings**

Coalitions should have annual reflection meetings to promote triple loop learning. Annual reflections should enable the Hub to ask the question '*what is right*' for the project and what kind of project it wants to be? It is about challenging the mental models which underpin program design. This is undertaken by critically examining the project's overall approach and goals.

### ***What***

At the global level, the Hub can have annual reflection meetings. At this meeting, the core Hub team can revise the overall theory of change, comparing learning and insights from national/local coalitions.

They can reflect on whether the coalition has the right partners to achieve the change it seeks.

### ***So what***

### ***Now what***

At the end of the project, coalitions can participate in an Experience Showcase at the end of the engagement where all three teams presented their most significant milestones, key lessons learned, and major challenges.

These meetings should draw on Outcome Harvesting reporting, Outcome Rubrics, and the CPI Indicator Tracker, and reflect on the key contextual factors mentioned in the graphic above.

## Punctuated Reflection Points

In addition to structured quarterly, bi-annual and sessions, coalitions may also consider punctuated reflection moments. These can be conducted through intense period debriefs.

### Intense Period Debrief

An Intense Period Debrief is a tool developed by Innovation Network and is typically used in advocacy evaluation (Coffman and Reed, [n.d.](#)). However, it also applies to coalitional engagement strategies more broadly.

As part of their work, advocates often engage in a flurry of activity as windows of opportunity open. These intense periods often contain lessons for advocates, if they explore what caused the window to open, how they were (or were not) able to take advantage of the window, etc.

However, once the intense period is over, coalition members need to take the time to actively process what happened – otherwise these lessons are likely to be lost. If advocates gather to debrief what happened, they can codify their lessons, and base future strategy on what they have learned.

As part of the process, advocates can meet and hold a discussion that addresses: The events contributing to the policy window, coalition actions contributing to the opening of the policy window, the actions that coalition members took to move their agenda forward, the outcomes that were achieved, the outcomes that coalition members hoped for but were not achieved, and whether the coalition members might have done something differently to achieve a more favorable outcome.

It can also be important to consider who participates in these debrief meetings. It can often be helpful to include people from different levels and spheres of influence, or indeed with varying perspectives (program, influencing, and communications staff).

#### Guiding Questions

1. What events triggered this intense period?
2. How was the coalition's response agreed?
3. Who was responsible for that decision? How was that decision communicated to other partners and allies?
4. Which elements of our coalition's response worked well? Which elements could have been improved?
5. What was the outcome of the intense period? Was the result positive or negative?
6. What insights will you take away from this experience that might inform your engagement strategies going forward?

## Outcome Harvesting Guidance and Template

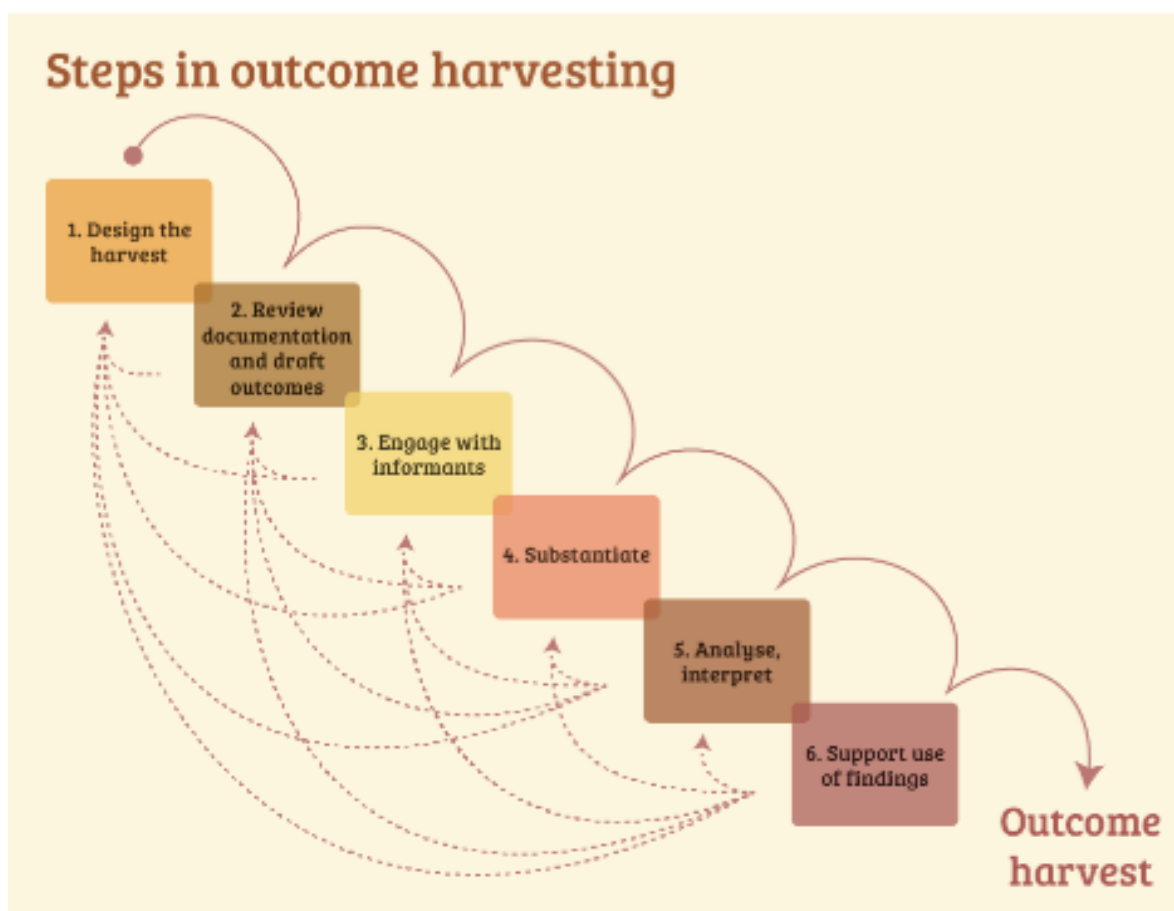
### *i. Overview of the outcome harvest statement approach*

Outcome Harvesting collects (“harvests”) evidence of what has changed (“defined as outcomes”) and then, working backwards, determines whether and how an intervention has contributed to these changes. It has proven to be especially useful in complex situations when it is not possible to define up front and concretely most of what an intervention aims to achieve, or even, what specific actions will be taken over a multi-year period.<sup>5</sup>

This method describes whether and how your initiative has contributed to outcomes, defined as **changes in the behaviour** — actions, activities, relationships, policies, or practices — of one or more actors. It allows staff to identify, formulate, verify, analyse, and interpret ‘outcomes’ in programming contexts where relations of cause and effect are not fully understood.

The approach is similar to sciences such as forensics, criminal justice, or archaeology. It does not measure progress towards predetermined outcomes or objectives, rather, it is applied when a project/initiative has completed the implementation of actions and, only then, the method helps collect evidence of what has been achieved and **works backwards to determine whether and how the project contributed to that change.**

Outcome harvesting officially has six steps, but the step that matters most for the project is reviewing documentation and **drafting outcomes** (step 2).



<sup>5</sup> See here for further information: [https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/outcome\\_harvesting](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/outcome_harvesting)

## *ii. Writing convincing outcomes about significant changes*

The development of **concise and verifiable outcome statements** can support the Hub team to identify, evidence, and communicate outcomes better.

Country teams should be responsible for the initial identification and formulation of outcome statements because they should be the most knowledgeable about the outcomes. One straightforward way to do this is to first review available documentation about changes the team has seen.

## *iii. Making Outcome Statements SMART*

This blog I wrote on writing good outcome statements and the provision of coaching and peer review can help improve the quality of these statements. Even though it is not always possible (or even desirable) to set SMART targets, making outcome statements **Specific Measurable Achieved Relevant and Timely (SMART)** can make a huge difference in explaining how the project may have contributed to significant changes. Outcome statements that are SMARTly formulated are, among other qualities, observable and hence verifiable. In particular, when you make your outcome statements specific, it can help substantiate (or refute) your claim. Using active verbs (e.g., used, promoted, published), rather than passive verbs, helps. For example, take the following change from Burundi:

In 2019, the PCDC (*Plan Communal de Développement Communautaire*) were successfully adopted by community development committees in all eight target communities in Burundi, and these plans were more representative of women's concerns. Women's concerns were better represented in all eight PCDCs.

From this statement, we are clear **when** the outcome happened (in 2019). We know **where** it happened (in all eight pilot communities). We know **what** the change was (*Plan Communal de Développement Communautaire* were adopted) and **whose** behaviour we are talking about. We also know that part of the outcome is the representativeness of the plans themselves. We can also be reasonably confident that the outcome has been achieved by checking government records, and we could see whether women's concerns were really better represented by comparing previous plans and the new plans. We can also note a related outcome said to be connected to this training that there has been a doubling of women's participation in the Inclusive Committees on Communal Development from 25% to 50%. So, it is argued that this nominal representation has led to more substantive representation of women's concerns in the plans themselves. To put this in context, PCDCs officially establish a 30% gender quota, but this argued not to be well enforced in practice. It is also argued that the fact that two of the eight communes having female administrators also made a contribution. So, the team notes that other actors played a role, and as such does not take full credit for the increased representation in committees or the increased gender representativeness of plans themselves.

While the overall explanation is good, it **can still be improved**. There does appear to be a likely connection between the trainings and women's confidence to raise their interests in PCDCs. However, it is less clear how the project would have made a significant contribution to the dramatic change of doubling women's representation in committees. So, one could ask what the most relevant and specific contributions to that adjacent outcome are (nominal representation in committees), which in turn supports the primary outcome described (women's representation in plans). We would also need to compare and contrast the previous

plans to demonstrate clearly how (and how much) more representative these plans are of women's concerns. This would be helpful to improve the measurability of the change.

While the above illustrates how teams can write and potentially improve the writing out outcomes, the key for country teams is to ensure that the narratives are **“good enough” for intended purposes**. In this case, what matters is that the narratives are clear and coherent for an external reader. There is no need for all outcome statements to be perfect. You can always add missing information and update your narratives.

In principle, with **more frequent harvesting** it should be easier / quicker to recall information and less chance of forgetting important outcomes. However, in practice, outcomes do not necessarily materialise every month or even every quarter. It is most common to **draft outcome harvesting statements on a quarterly or biannual basis**. It is often considered that annual reporting is too infrequent because those writing outcomes may have forgotten the details, and this can lead to inaccuracies of the outcome narratives themselves. So, we recommend the country teams report any significant outcomes they have on a quarterly basis and the team in the Hague review the quality of these outcome and contribution statements on a biannual basis with support from external monitoring and evaluation consultants.

#### *iv. Peer Reviewing Outcome Statements*

It can also be helpful to have other members of the Hub team **peer review the outcome statements that team members have drafted**. This is a relatively efficient way to ensure descriptions are coherent and explanations are plausible. If outcome statements do not make sense to your peers, they will not make sense to others. Each of these narratives should be between 1 and 2 pages. As such, the volume of narrative to be reviewed is likely to be minimal.

As a recent review of the use of Outcome Harvesting in the Dialogue and Dissent programme shows,<sup>6</sup> taking the time as a team to **write up outcomes collectively** is often seen to be a positive experience. These are known as **“writeshops.”**

Identification of stakeholders who can potentially **corroborate the contribution statements** is often recognised to be a challenge because these stakeholders need to be knowledgeable about the outcome and the Hub's contribution but need to be independent from the project.

As the aforementioned review confirms, the majority of programmes in the Dialogue and Dissent programme which used outcome harvesting typically **used spreadsheets for their analysis** (typically, Excel). For up to 50 outcome statements, this is a good option. After that, the Hub may choose to build a more sophisticated system. There are various Outcome Harvesting related software which might work for us.

#### *v. Coaching to Improve Outcome Statements*

Getting SMART-enough outcome statements is largely about **coaching** teams describing their outcomes to help them turn vague (and passive) statements about change and their role in it into something concrete and observable. Pushing country teams to be specific and plausible clarifies their thinking and results in less concrete notions of possible changes being excluded. So, coaching can help **refine a team's critical thinking** about what they have achieved (or not). We recommend that this coaching coincide with biannual reviews of significant outcomes because those are the moments at which an external eye can make the most difference.

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<sup>6</sup> See here for further information: <https://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/use-of-outcome-harvesting-for-monitoring-in-dialogue-and-dissent-alliances-findings-from-a-survey-and-discussions>

Coaching involves back and forth exchange between the Hub team and external consultants. This is often referred to as “**ping-pong.**” This process can be draining, so it is worth limiting the number and frequency of this form of interaction and carefully considering the most motivating medium of exchange. The process tends to comprise two or three rounds of feedback. So, we propose to set this as the limit for the number of exchanges for each significant outcome reviewed. Secondly, as exchanges only through email are generally considered to be the least motivating, I recommend having virtual webinar-style exchanges on at least one occasion, and with follow up by email.

If the coaching is timed to coincide with the biannual review of significant outcomes, then this can support the “writeshop” virtually and there can be a follow up call and email exchange on outcomes identified for quality assurance review. When the situation of the pandemic significantly improves, we can consider changing virtual “writeshops” to in person exchanges.

Coaching should help increase the confidence of Hub staff that they can both write and peer review the quality of outcome statements. When monitoring, evaluation and learning focal points have enough confidence, it will no longer be necessary for this coaching to be provided by external consultants. However, it can be helpful even for MEL professionals themselves to have peer review.

#### *vi. Evidencing and verifying significant changes*

While I recommend country teams to include key evidence to support their explanation of contribution to outcomes, it may not be necessary to externally verify all outcomes either during the programme or at the end of the programme. It is most commonly recommended to verify a sample of outcomes. Three criteria might be considered to identify which changes to verify:

1. **Most significant** in each country context – i.e. most significant change which merits corroborating by external actors;
2. **Relevance** to theory of change – i.e. representation across all three domains;
3. **Feasibility** of corroborating the outcome – i.e. whether teams can identify who can credibly confirm or refute their contribution statements.

As mentioned previously, stakeholders who can corroborate the contribution statements must be independent from the Hub programme itself. There are a number of different ways in which they can corroborate outcomes. The most obvious and least complicated way is to share the description of the outcome statement and the Hub’s contribution with them by email and ask if they agree with it. Provided below is a **survey template with example questions** as a reference that can be used and adapted by the project.



1. On the outcome description: To what degree do you agree that the information is accurate?

- Fully agree
- Partially agree
- Disagree
- Do not know

Please explain any disagreement you may have with the accuracy of the description of the outcome or present an alternative description or additional information:

2. On the programme's contribution: To what degree do you agree that the information is accurate?

- Fully agree
- Partially agree
- Disagree
- Do not know

Please explain any disagreement you may have with how the programme contributed to the outcome or present an alternative description or additional information:

However, even if you ask whether there may be any disagreement, particularly if the source knows the programme there is a good chance there will be some degree of courtesy bias (they will tell you what you want to hear out of politeness). So, they may not dispute the explanation, even if they actually disagree with it.

A preferable alternative is for Hub core team members to **interview identified stakeholders** either virtually or when they visit country teams, describing the outcome but then asking the interviewee to shed light on how the outcome happened. However, this too has various similar problems of courtesy and confirmation bias.

Resources and time permitting, the best option would be for **external evaluators to conduct these interviews**. Given that we are talking about perhaps a total sample frame of 50 outcomes, it might be reasonable to select roughly 20 of these for verification as part of the final evaluation. This would entail interviews with up to 40 people. That these sources are prepared to go on record is one key part which makes the outcomes credible (Wilson-Grau, 2019: 88 – 89), so it is important that these sources are prepared to confirm outcome statements publicly.

#### vii. Outcome Harvesting Template

Below is a template:

<b>Outcome Harvesting Template</b>	
<p><b>Choose a behaviour change (i.e., outcome) and formulate a statement.</b></p> <p>This should be an outcome you believe you and your partners made an important contribution to. Explain <b>what</b> changed, <b>who</b> changed their behaviour, <b>when</b> the change took place, and <b>where</b> the change took place.</p> <p>If you have more information, you can also include any <b>key steps</b> along the way you think are relevant.</p>	<p>Here is an example of an outcome statement:</p> <p><i>In 2008 (<b>when</b>), the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) (<b>who</b>) strengthened the language (<b>what</b>) in its semi-annual review of peacebuilding in Burundi (<b>where</b>) regarding the importance of accountability and human rights training for the security services, reflecting civil society concerns about human rights abuses in 2007-2008 (<b>when</b>).</i></p>
<b>Significance</b>	
<p>How <b>significant</b> is the outcome?  <i>Why</i> you believe this outcome is significant.</p> <p><b>Prompts:</b> Is this a major change? Will many people benefit? What is new?</p>	
<b>Contribution</b>	
<p>On a scale from high, medium, or low, how would you rate the coalition's and/or the Hub's <b>contribution</b> to the behaviour change?</p> <p>Please <b>describe</b> the project's contribution in one paragraph.</p> <p>*See explanation on rating in footnote.<sup>7</sup></p>	
<b>Evidence</b>	
<p>Do you have any <b>evidence</b> that links the change to the project?  e.g., meeting minutes; emails; credible testimony; budgets; policies. Providing a few different triangulated sources is even better for evidencing the change.</p>	
<b>Context</b>	
<p>Briefly explain the intervention <b>context</b> and <b>key stakeholders</b> you believe played a role in this context.</p> <p><b>Prompts:</b> What are key factors to highlight about the context and why is this change significant for this context? Who are the key actors of influence? What is the project's relationship with them?</p>	

<sup>7</sup> **High** = The outcome could not have happened without your actions. **Medium** = You made a substantial contribution to a key part of the outcome, and you believe it would not have happened in the same way without your efforts. Other actors also played a substantial contribution to the outcome. **Low** = The outcome would have probably happened anyway.

## Theory of change

Please explain which component of the theory of change this change relates to.

### Outcome Rubrics

Rubrics are designed to support a holistic judgement about performance, based on diverse quantitative and qualitative evidence. They systematically and transparently synthesise evidence into an overall evaluative judgement about performance (Loveridge, 2023).

**Rubrics are a form of scale** that include:

- **Criteria:** the aspects of quality or performance that are of interest, e.g., timeliness.
- **Standards:** the level of performance or quality for each criterion, e.g., Poor/adequate/good.
- **Descriptors:** descriptions or examples of what each standard looks like for each criterion of the rubric (see Green, 2019; Aston, 2020; King, 2023).

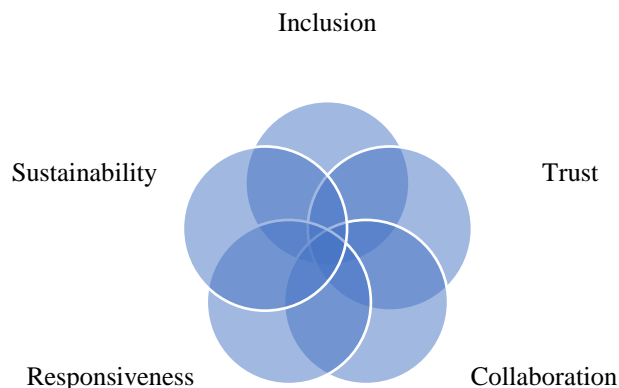
**A major reason for the Hub choosing rubrics as an assessment tool is that local coalitions themselves are expected to identify which specific governance issues they mean to address.** Therefore, it is potentially inappropriate and misleading to pre-define highly precise indicators. Instead, we believe it is more helpful to have a looser and measurement structure of assessment which provides greater flexibility and potential responsiveness to the particular governance issues that local coalitions mean to address.

**Most commonly, rubrics are made with 3-5 levels of performance.** Within each level, there are usually a few key features (or sub-criteria) – e.g., coalition members are aligned AND they collaborate. When using rubrics, you are always making choices about which aspects of quality matter most because *it is neither helpful nor feasible to assess everything.*

**It is also important to provide a narrative justification for why you believe a particular level is merited.** And it is also helpful for the reviewer to identify which qualitative or quantitative evidence supports the narrative justification. Evidence is understood as ‘information that has a bearing on determining the validity of a claim (Schwandt, 2007: 98).’ It is the material that either supports or undermines a particular evaluative judgement. It either provides a “warrant” for that judgement or such a warrant is lacking.

**Rubrics don’t solve all the challenges of evaluating complex initiatives, but they are helpful for constructive discussions** regarding what “good” performance looks like and how to achieve it (Loveridge, 2023).

**The Hub has identified five key criteria for assessment:** (1) inclusion, (2) trust; (3) collaboration; (4) responsiveness, and (5) sustainability. Rather than entirely separate criteria, these are seen as mutually



reinforcing outcomes. **These rubrics should be used for each local coalition.**

### 1) Inclusion

**Inclusion** is defined in terms of three dimensions: (1) access; (2) strategic participation; and; (3) influence over agendas:

- **Access:** The opening up of local governance spaces such as coalitions that were previously closed, whether formally or informally, tacitly, or explicitly.
- **Participation:** The institutionalization of participatory rights in governance structures, providing substantive opportunities to influence decision-making and represent their communities or organizations.
- **Influence:** The translation of presence into effective participation involves achieving influence over decision-making, e.g., by having the priorities of groups reflected in local government agendas and resource allocations (see Goetz, 1995).

Ultimately, the Hub aims help open doors for more marginalized actors and raise the voices and ideas of certain organizations and individuals who are currently not actively engaged in the conversation.

**Rubric 1: Inclusion**

1	2	3	4	5
Identified organizations and individuals are excluded from local and national coalitions and other formal local governance spaces. <sup>8</sup>	Identified organizations and individuals participate in coalition meetings and are able to access formal governance spaces.	Identified organizations and individuals participate in coalition meetings, and/or access formal governance spaces.	Identified organizations and individuals participate actively in coalition meetings (i.e., make substantive contributions) and influence coalition agendas, and/or participate in formal governance spaces.	Identified organizations and individuals participate actively in coalition meetings and formal governance spaces, and they effectively influence the agendas of coalitions and formal governance spaces.
<b>Justification:</b>				
<b>Evidence:</b>				

<sup>8</sup> Formal governance spaces may include participatory budgeting, government consultations, and the like.

## 2) Trust

**Trust** is defined as a relationship between social actors, both individuals and groups. It is sometimes conceived as a *bet* on contingent futures. In governance literature, trust typically relates to perceptions of state, private sector, and civil society legitimacy. There are argued to be overlaps between state legitimacy and trust in the state (Brinkerhoff *et al.* 2012), but this remains debated. Recent research in fragile states suggests that legitimacy is best understood as co-constructed rather than transactional (McCullough *et al.* 2020). In the case of the Hub, we are interested in trust *within* coalitions and *between* existing coalition members and other stakeholders. This touches on both group and out-group trust because coalitions bring potentially diverse groups together who may have different values and higher-level goals, but nonetheless may be willing to cooperate through a process of social learning (Guerzovich, 2023).

**Rubric 2: Trust**

1	2	3	4	5
Coalition members (old and new) are misaligned on goals and/or proposed tactics. They are unwilling to work together because of normative and/or strategic disagreements.	Coalition members (old and new) are willing to listen to others but share limited information within or beyond the coalition.	Coalition members (old and new) have discovered the potential of collective knowledge building, they share information and work together with new actors. They are aligned on the goal but disagree on tactics.	Coalition members (old and new) identify some additional opportunities for collective knowledge building, regularly share information, are aligned on both goals and tactics. Members express their confidence in other coalition members.	Coalition members (old and new) frequently identify opportunities for collective knowledge building, regularly share information, are strongly aligned on goals and tactics. Members express their high confidence in other coalition members.
<b>Justification:</b>				
<b>Evidence:</b>				

### 3) Collaboration

**Collaboration** is defined here as the act of “co-labouring.” This takes place when actors come together to achieve common goals. Collaborative governance should provide opportunities for voice and participation among public, civil society, and private sector actors regarding solutions and services that would otherwise be challenging for a single, unit, actor, or sector to create (Ansell and Gash, 2011; Boruvka and Amsler, 2021). For the Hub, the key aims are for diverse stakeholders to collectively create agendas and take collective actions to improve development outcomes and reduce corruption.

**Rubric 3: Collaboration**

1	2	3	4	5
Coalition members take individual action.	Coalition members see value in collaborating through action-oriented coalitions, open new channels of communication and discuss taking collective action.	Coalition members have regular communication, set a joint agenda and take at least one collective action geared towards development outcomes and/or reducing corruption.	Coalition members meet independently, they actively seek ways to better manage their competing priorities, take numerous collective actions, including with new actors, geared towards development outcomes and/or reducing corruption.	Coalition members effectively manage their competing priorities, take numerous collective actions with new actors which extend beyond those identified in coalitions’ joint agendas.
<b>Justification:</b>				
<b>Evidence:</b>				

#### 4) Responsiveness

**Responsiveness** is an action or series of actions by which governments ‘identify and then meet the needs or wants of the people (Moore and Teskey, 2006: 3).’ Responsiveness is an important proxy for better development outcomes related to key reform areas (i.e., action is taken by government to effectively address and resolve issues in line with the interests, needs and wants of coalitions). As Halloran (2021) notes, there are arguably different levels of responsiveness, ranging from responses (relatively one-off, isolated actions) to responsiveness (sustained and reliable patterns of positive response by governments to citizens). The latter is akin to institutionalised actions from public sector institutions. For the Hub, the aim is for there to be *patterns* of positive responses from key stakeholders rather than one-off actions.

**Rubric 4: Responsiveness**

1	2	3	4	5
Government and/or private sector actors are not willing to meet with the coalition and reject proposals.	Government and/or private sector actors are willing to meet with the coalition, make vague commitments, but do not follow through on commitments.	Government and/or private sector actors make clear commitments and take a one-off response to an issue raised by the coalition.	Government and/or private sector actors take responses to various issues raised by the coalition in a timely manner.	Government and/or private sector actors have a reliable and sustained pattern of positive response to issues raised by the coalition in a timely manner.
<b>Justification:</b>				
<b>Evidence:</b>				

## 5) Sustainability

**Sustainability** is defined in terms of “prospective sustainability” because sustainability can only be meaningfully assessed after the end of a particular initiative or program. According to OECD-DAC, “prospective sustainability” refers to ‘how likely it is that any planned or current positive effects of the intervention will continue, usually assuming that current conditions hold... the stability and relative permanence of any positive effects realized, and conditions for their continuation, such as institutional sustainability, economic and financial sustainability, environmental sustainability, political sustainability, social sustainability and cultural sustainability (OECD-DAC, 2020).’ This suggests that we can know something about what *might* be sustained even before a project has ended.

**Rubric 5: Sustainability**

1	2	3	4	5
Coalition actors trigger mostly negative responses from government and/or private sector actors. Or there is a boomerang effect; short-term positive effects have negative repercussions in the medium term.	Effects from coalition actions are largely ambivalent over the short term and there is little prospect that limited positive effects will be sustained by the end of the project.	Coalition actions have positive effects that show some promise of being sustained beyond the end of the project.	Coalition actions have very positive effects that show substantial promise of being sustained beyond the end of the project, with some actions being institutionalised by counterparts.	Coalition actions have very positive effects that show substantial promise of being sustained beyond the end of the project, with several actions being institutionalised by counterparts.
<b>Justification:</b>				
<b>Evidence:</b>				



### **What kind of corruption does the CPI measure?**

- Bribery
- Diversion of public funds
- Officials using their public office for private gain without facing consequences
- Ability of governments to contain corruption in the public sector
- Excessive red tape in the public sector which may increase opportunities for corruption
- Nepotistic appointments in the civil service
- Laws ensuring that public officials must disclose their finances and potential conflicts of interest
- Legal protection for people who report cases of bribery and corruption
- State capture by narrow vested interests
- Access to information on public affairs/government activities

## Mid-term Evaluation

**In addition to internal learning and reflection, the Hub has budgeted for an external mid-term evaluation.** This mid-term evaluation should make use of this results reporting infrastructure in mid-year 2 of the project.

**The focus of the mid-term evaluation should be on portfolio learning and more in-depth systemic explanations of observed outcomes** and contributions. It is important for the Hub to consider “inclusive rigor (Apgar *et al.* [2022](#))” because change is supposed to come from the coalitions themselves.

**It should be remembered that impact assessment is not just about numbers.** Purely quantitative evidence does not explain impact and therefore has limited utility for learning and improvement. Quantitative data are a support to contribution-to-impact claims but will not be the main basis for claims.

**Recommended methods are:**

- [Contribution Analysis](#)
- [Process Tracing](#)
- [Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis](#)
- [Outcome Harvesting](#)

Evaluators may also consider Social Network Analysis (SNA). It is also possible to combine these three methods, or parts of these methods through [bricolage](#).

The Hub aims to systematically track the existing technical evidence base, including up-to-date research and subject matter expertise generated by R4D & others. It aims to use a mix of relevant knowledge types & sources to identify implications & inform strategy, projects & activities and fill gaps and contribute new knowledge to the evidence base through a mix of knowledge synthesis, research, piloting/ experimentation & evaluation (see USAID, [2018](#)).

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## Annex: Recommended Further Reading

Source	Explanation
<i>Facilitation</i>	
The Coaching Approach: Building Capacity for Sustainable Systems Change <a href="https://www.learnworlds.com">Home (learnworlds.com)</a>	Local facilitators may be interested in accessing the R4D's e-module on coaching and mentoring.
Pact (2019). How to facilitate participatory, contextualized and impactful events: A Pact Handbook. Washington, D.C.: Pact.	Good facilitation advice for anyone setting out to facilitate a local participatory process.
<i>Political Economy Analysis</i>	
Serrat, O. (2009). The Five Whys Technique, Knowledge Solutions.	A common and easy technique for problem analysis.
Ansu, K. Cassidy, M. Ingram, M. and Meaux, A. (2014). Applied Political Economy Analysis: A Tool for Analyzing Local Systems: A Practical Guide to Pact's Applied Political Economy Analysis Tool for Practitioners and Development Professionals.	A problem-driven PEA guide.
Roy, P. Slota, A. and Khan, M. (2022). A New Approach to Anti-Corruption – When Rule-Breakers rule, SOAS-ACE.	SOAS-ACE's guide to political economy analysis.
Pact. (2023). Applied political economy analysis for human rights programs and campaigns: A guide for practitioners (second edition).	Accessible and practical toolkit.
Eisen, N. Kaufmann, D. Heller, N. Preston Whitt, J. Picón, M. Bassetti, V. Hudak, J. (2020). The TAP-Plus Approach to Anti-Corruption in the Natural Resource Value Chain.	
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