



## **MPEP** SEMINAR SERIES

Exploring Frontiers in Inclusive Market Development

# PRACTICAL TOOLS TO MONITOR MARKET SYSTEM DYNAMICS

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PRESENTATION AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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*Kristin O'Planick:*

Good morning, everyone. Well, I guess for some of you it's afternoon or evening. I see a lot of people are still logging on, but we're going to go ahead and get started. So, welcome to today's Microlinks webinar, "Practical Tools to Monitor Market System Dynamics."

I'm Kristin O'Planick from USAID's Bureau for Economic Growth, Education, and Environment. Those of you that have been working with us for a long time know that over the years, as we've moved into market facilitation approaches, our M&E practices have struggled to keep up. It turns out that monitoring systemic change is quite challenging. When we started the Leveraging Economic Opportunities – or LEO – project three years ago, this was flagged as a major area for research. Donors, staff, and practitioners alike have been eager for solutions. Over time, we've collectively moved through theories and principles and are finally getting to the practical. And that is our focus today.

And I'd just like to give a special shout-out to the BEAM Exchange and the DCED, who have also been putting out good work in this area and have been great partners for collaboration. We couldn't have done it without everyone who's contributed.

So let me introduce our speakers. Tim Sparkman is a development economist, entrepreneur, and systems thinker. He is currently a senior consultant with MarketShare Associates, a boutique consulting firm that provides systems-focused research, results measurement, and economic empowerment to support a wide variety of donors and other clients, including USAID under LEO. He has about ten years of development experience, including five years of program design and management experience in East Africa. He also works on innovative approaches to market system analysis and impact evaluation for systems-focused programs.

Eric Derks has come to systems thinking through practice and failure, with nearly 20 years' experience intervening in market systems and organizational development. During this time, he has designed, led, and advised large and small-scale projects alike, and learned a great deal about systems thinking as it relates to project strategy, activities, operations, and knowledge management. He is currently the co-director of The Canopy Lab, an organization dedicated to the practical application and promotion of systems approaches.

And finally, Michael Field has over 20 years of designing, assessing, implementing, and training on leading edge private sector development and enabling environment approaches. Through his work, Mr. Field has played a key role in setting learning and research agendas in the field of systems approaches. He is currently leading USAID's Agricultural Value Chain project in Bangladesh. Other research experience includes designing, advising and training staff in Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe on applying systems concepts to private sector and enabling environment challenges. Mr. Field continues to provide guidance on improved practice on systems approaches via his role on the advisory board of BEAM Exchange and contributions to USAID's learning investment, LEO.

And it's been a great privilege to work with these three over the last few months. And I am excited to hear what they have to say. So I will hand the mic over to you guys.

*Michael Field:*

Thanks, Kristin.

So this is Mike Field. And welcome everybody. I think the first thing I wanted to do to get us started was give a little bit of context on the project and why AVC was kind of

interested in taking on this role of testing practical tools for really getting at systems health or systems thinking applied tools around systems change.

So I think one of the things is trying to give you a little context of what AVC is. It's a \$34 million project. It was designed to be five years. The end date is July in 2018, so in two more years. So after about two years, the project essentially had a little bit of a change, meaning that DAI and USAID together changed the original intent of the project, which was supposed to be kind of taking on some systems approaches as part of a Feed the Future project, had kind of evolved to be more of a direct delivery traditional model. So they wanted to see if they could get the project back on track, taking a systems approach. And that came in, which is just about one year ago.

So myself, with a very talented operations and a kind of procurement specialist named Gwendolyn Armstrong Tweed essentially went through the process with our local team to restructure the project from top to bottom really. We changed structures; we changed the layout of the office; we changed the staff performance processes; we changed the whole procurement processes, still making it compliant, but changed it pretty dramatically.

The one other area that kinda focuses this discussion is the M&E section. As you would expect from kinda direct delivery traditional approach, the M&E system had kind of evolved to being just a reporting and accountability system. A lot of the information needed to kinda make adaptive decisions or to even look at the system in any real way just wasn't happening.

What we initially did was got in touch with Eric to come and help me. Because the initial change process – I needed to focus in on kind of the culture of the project to make it less about doing the interventions and delivering targets and more about learning and thinking in better kinda concepts ..... So I was really looking at the tacit knowledge in the knowledge management transition that we were trying, from M&E to knowledge management. And then I was asking Eric for his help to try to get the more formal, more rigorous tools to collect information on the system change or the system health, as we were calling it.

One of the things that Eric and I came to pretty quickly – and this is mostly due to the issue of the delays in the program during the first two years; kinda put the project in the hole in terms of targets and burn rates. And that I had to also get the project up to speed as soon as possible in terms of kind of operational rates, in terms of changing the intervention to running, engaging more market actors and such. And then we didn't really have the time or the luxury to do any more intensive analysis on the system. So tools like SenseMaker or network mapping kinda just fell away. They didn't really become a viable option for us.

That's when Eric and I started to talk about this idea of sentinel indicators, where we could use quick, sharper tools to target specific kinda information points that had systemic health or systemic change implications to them. And the thinking was that if we could get a number of these tools targeting some key nodes or key areas within the system, we could kinda create a series of early warning systems that there could change, systemic change happening, of which we could then kind of organize resources to take a deeper dive.

So this is where it starts to get interesting. Now that we've kinda settled on the idea of sentinel indicators. And we were looking at a range of quick, sharp tools to get at it. We kinda needed to create those off of a stronger pretty robust theoretical base so that

we could essentially have a good sense that these early warning systems, if they went off, would give us some real sense that system change was happening.

One thing that's kind interesting, related to this, is that because the project was in the hole and because there was so much change happening in the project as soon as I arrived, I didn't also have the luxury of going through longer kinda strategic thinking processes, like setting up results chains and theories of change for each of our market systems. Instead, what I decided to do was rely more on an emergent kinda strategic thinking process where, through practice and through adjusting the interventions and stuff, we would start to develop a modified sorta project.

Key to being able to do that though was that I had in my back pocket quite a large number of different frameworks in my head and that I was using to kinda filter through how the team was communicating to me about the challenge they had with working with private sector or the challenges they had between farmers and traders and things like that.

And what started to emerge is that one framework in particular was very helpful. And it really focused on norms and patterns. And that framework really was kinda constructed with two different continuums. The one continuum focused in on business practices and business norms and decision-making patterns. And that continuum kinda went from what we called extractive business strategies to business strategies that'd be more solution-seeking or would be more growth-oriented.

So, for example, what we're seeing is that businesses and business strategies that tend to be more extractive were using tools and tactics such as cheating on scales, manipulating grades and standards, putting often the farmer who had a weak cash position or had some issues in cash position and cash flow – to put 'em against a wall to lower the price. So we started to track business practices to see where the average was of the types of businesses we were working with. With the idea, I should say, that the kind of growth or value addition strategies – they would be more clear and focused on creating value through their products, value through their relationship with their staff and their customers and their suppliers.

So, interestingly, in Bangladesh, in the southern delta where we're working, we saw that it was an interesting and exciting kinda mix. Meaning that there was a lot of extractive behavior happening in the businesses, especially the small and medium-sized businesses that were active in open markets. But we were also seeing a lot of practices and efforts of businesses to be more value-added in their business practice. And we saw this as quite an interesting indicator that there was some change happening towards being more inclusive or having a healthier market system.

But we also needed to start looking at what we call the kinda second continuum, which is really looking at relational networks. And then that, the continuum we were using, is where the relational networks were really driven by patronage or loyalty, often around family dynamics. Versus market relationships on interest or merit capacity. This is actually where we saw more of a challenge in the Bangladeshi context.

Almost all the businesses we've seen and engaged were kind of family-driven businesses; they were owned and operated by families. And while a lot of these businesses were coming to the conclusion they needed to be more value-added or growth-oriented, there were quite a lot that were still ..... that were also so closely related to family that the midlevel-management and senior-management-level positions were really driven by family interests, and not really the norms of the interests of the business.

In this case, we were seeing that, for the system health or for the market system to really move towards being more and more inclusive, the governance of these firms would have to improve some. So that actually created these sum adaptations in terms of focusing more of our resources toward catalyzing greater and improved cooperation across wider stakeholders using stakeholder methodologies and other tools we used.

That has become a pretty important strategic framework that we're using. But we also identified, in conversations with Eric, that we needed to get a better understanding of flows and how the flows, particularly of information and finance, was affecting the norms and patterns, and how those flows could be identified as either positive or negative from of incentive around the system becoming more inclusive.

So these two kinds of areas of inquiry, one off of the strategic frame around known pattern, and the other off of flows, has kinda guided us to the point where we were looking for sentinel indicators, and then tools around tools around sentinel indicators in those two areas.

And I think, Eric, if you had any – or Tim had any more you wanted to add on this. Because when we first started talking about doing these tools, we had quite a lotta discussions about the kinda theoretical underpinnings of these.

*Eric Derks:*

Yeah. This is Eric. I don't have anything else to add at present, Mike. I think maybe for some of these things, getting into the tools and showing how they relate back to some of these frameworks would be helpful. But perhaps it's worth noting at this point just some of the resources that have been I guess accompanying this webinar. There was the paper you and I were working on on how to identify patterns of behavior using these two continuums, and a lens of value-chain governance to be able to pinpoint what types of patterns were predominant and which directions they were taking place. So, for further detail, that's a good resource for people to look at. Tim?

*Tim Sparkman:*

Yeah. I think that's probably the best resource in terms of being able to explain the background and thinking behind the relational strategic biases, which, having come into it partway through the process with the two of you, definitely took me a bit of time to catch up as well. So, for those of you on the webinar, that should be linked by Microlinks as a good resource for getting a better understanding of exactly what we're referring to with the discussion of institutional biases.

*Eric Derks:*

So, why don't we move forward, and I'll just take us to the first tool. First, thanks, Kristin, for the introduction and hosting all of this.

This tool is getting at: we wanted to develop a picture of the relationships of particular actors in the value chain. I should start by prefacing that the focus was on a particular segment or function level in the value chain, the trader level, in particular ones buying from producers, and that level of wholesaler and then the next level of wholesaler perhaps often found in the Dhaka market. And we were looking at I guess the range of value chains that the AVC project is in: mangos, flowers, vegetables, and other things.

So what we wanted to get a picture of through these questions was: how many suppliers does any particular trader have, producers? What's the turnover in those suppliers? What's the regularity? How does this change over time? And then the same with the buyers they have: how many buyers do they have and how this changes over time.

Relating back to the two frameworks that Mike mentioned that he keeps either in his back pocket or his head – I think he has a lotta places for the frameworks he keeps – that it really gets at the idea of the diversity of flows. Are we seeing more interconnections, longer-term types of interconnections, diversity in types of connections between different types of suppliers, different types of buyers, that would indicate a potential for greater learning, greater input, greater contributions, new ideas, flow, different things, with regard to the flows, but that also has a – perhaps reflects a potential to reflect more purpose-based or interest-based types of interconnections beyond just small-group types of interconnections?

So that's the theoretical underpinning of this. Now, interestingly – and perhaps this is indicative of all the sentinel indicators we're looking at – so much depends upon the context behind this. For example, the ag inputs project in Uganda was using a similar indicator. We were looking there for more regular, less churn in supplier or trade relationships overall, to indicate or presumably indicate more investment in long-term types of business relationships, more coordination, more cooperation and the like.

In Bangladesh, interestingly, what seems to be the case, bearing further investigation, is that there's not a great deal of churn because we are finding – or seems that, to the traders in these cases, have locked in some suppliers or locked in buyers. Or these relationships are bound in certain social norms and practices that can be perhaps more reflective of extractive inter-firm trade relationships. So very different dynamics. So, in Bangladesh context, we might be looking to see more churn, at least initially, where in another context, we might be looking to see less churn. But either way, it all kind of indicates – whatever change we're finding, we want to be able to see beyond and interview the actors and businesses to find out what's happening in the context.

Do you guys have anything to add?

*Michael Field:*

No I don't. Well, actually, one point I would say is that this became quite important in terms of trying to get a sense of how we work with businesses. And like Eric said, we need to have more information about how we work with businesses around understanding new businesses, and how to send repeat clients and things like that. This has become quite an important indicator or thing we're looking at in the budget.

*Eric Derks:*

Tim, then, over to you.

*Tim Sparkman:*

Okay. So looking at maintenance risk growth. So the questions in this tool – it's a very simple, very quick tool. It's four questions. They're on the right side of the slide there. This really came out of an ecological resource-focused system, and it's drawn partly by work by Robert Elenowitz and Sally Goodner looking at the degree to which resource flows are adequately nourishing the agents or the actors in a system. And so we wanted to know – not having the ability to really fully map out the flow of resources around a system of multiple agents. And we tried this in multiple different contexts, and basically doing network analyses. Extraordinarily difficult. Are absolutely entrenched in completion and accuracy problems, etcetera.

So we wanted to have a sorta quicker view of whether the way the flows were moving around – in this case financing – could give us an idea of, one, the degree to which firms were able to maintain themselves and then grow with the resources, but also whether we could use the flows to deduce norms around the management of the businesses as well.

So the first question looks at the percentage of overall revenue that a business spends maintaining its operational capacity. Basically: if the business answers that they spent

100 percent of their revenue maintaining their operational capacity, then they're just barely staying afloat. They're doing everything they can to keep themselves for the current position. The next three questions are all asking sort of the same question, which is: "If you're not spending 100 percent of the revenue on maintaining your current position, what are you doing with what's left over?"

And that's ideally getting at the degree to which they're plowing surplus resources back into the expansion of the business, or they're pulling it out and using it for something else. And so that goes back to the question of strategic biases that Mike mentioned early on and then Eric was just talking about, and the degree to which you're looking at a sector or a market system that is populated by firms that are either extractively focused, and which are just sucking resources out of their businesses and using the resources for something else, or they're focused on solution seeking and growing businesses.

So looking at both flows and norms, this tool is a combination of the two, with flows, again, ideally giving some insight into norms of behavior around firm management. And, again, giving some sentinel indication of changes in opinions about how firms should be managed, if you see significant shifts in answers to these questions over time.

Mike and Eric, is there anything else that you can add to this one?

*Eric Derks:*

I don't have anything in particular. This is Eric. Perhaps maybe combine it with the third tool, and then see if there's anything more, which is also a little bit more on financial flows.

And this one is a little bit more detailed and focused just on payment terms. Again, with the idea that financial flows being such a lifeblood in a system, and detecting changes in how those flows are altered, and different patterns of those, can be very indicative of different types of changes. Specifically, payment terms, which seem can modify based upon different structural configurations, new actors coming into the market; other events happening at the policy level can force different types of changes in payment terms. New grades and standards coming in may cause effects in these areas as well. So, simply put, these questions are really trying to generate: who pays whom and when? And based upon what terms?

Anecdotally, one of the things we found as we were testing this tool is that in the flower sector, we were finding a shift that the project staff were not used to seeing, from traders paying producers directly cash on the barrelhead, to two-week payment terms delayed and payed through a broker.

And this was kind of an emergence as a newer function as this particular locality became a much more important source or a larger source of flowers, that a new function level was needed, and recognized by many of the actors, to be able to aggregate more flowers and get them through the channel into the Dhaka market. So that it was kind of an instance of what we would expect to see moving forward as a change found, applying this tool periodically, and then being able to go backward and find out more about a particular context.

Tim or Mike?

*Michael Field:*

Yeah. This is Mike. The one thing I might add to this is that, while we're doing these quick assessment tools and want to use them for regular kind of, you know, checking where the system is and where there's change, we're also doing a few other analyses. And related to this, we're doing an assessment of cash flows and financial interactions

between the key actors in one or two of our value chains to try and get financial flows in a deeper sense. In that we're also doing that in conjunction with MSTARS so that we can get a little more understanding of the opportunities for mobile money. So in some of these cases we're using these tools that will hopefully be additive to more in-depth analyses.

*Tim Sparkman:*

Okay. Then I'll take it forward with number four. So, information flows.

So this one is trying to understand the sources of various types of information and the perceived utility. Again, going back to an idea of flows, looking at picturing a network structure of firms interacting at multiple levels, exchanging financial resources, exchanging products, and exchanging information. So any network has energy, materials, and information move across it, regardless of the network. And in an economic system, financial resources are a decent proxy for energy. Of course it's not actual energy. And so it's important to look at the way that information moves around the system as well. And we wanted to develop a tool that would give AVC an idea of the current state of information exchange among actors as well as let it know if there were significant changes in the way that information was moving around between the different actors.

And so, again, recognizing that it would be extremely labor-intensive and not cost-effective to do a network map looking at information exchange and then go back and do that again and again, this is a sort of quicker-and-dirtier version of just a check-in that gives you some idea of who people are getting information from and what they think of the quality of that information.

It probably changes less frequently than the information gathered by the other tools. So where the other tools could be used every three or six months or so, this one probably needs to be used less, maybe annually.

And then, lastly, when looking at changes – for AVC, for example, or for your average market systems program, it's trying to improve the quality of relationships between actors, between agents in a market system; trying to identify whether there are feedback loops between the different actors or whether there's simply a bunch of material resources going to one, financial resources coming back to another. That's a significant amount of mistrust and no useful information moving forward, moving between the actors.

So this should be giving an idea of whether there are strong feedback loops between actors in the system. And if you have a situation in which there are not strong feedback loops at the beginning, then this can help you understand whether there's an evolving situation in the market system over time where feedback loops are being created and agents are exchanging more and more useful information with each other over time.

Eric and Mike, is there anything you'd like to add?

*Eric Derks:*

This is Eric. Only perhaps just anecdotally: we went through so many different forms of how to ask these questions. I think my favorite was getting these off in a particular ball translated into Bangla, and the enumerators would be showing this in front of people and they would be ticking off boxes and the like, and we'd go out and test it and people would take the piece of paper that was handed by the enumerator; they would look at it and hand it back, say, "What's your question?" So obviously we shifted from something a bit more hands-on to just a verbal survey [*laughs*].

But, Mike, do you have anything? It doesn't seem like you're unmuted. So why don't I just go on to the next slide, which is the tool five and the stresses and concerns?

So the big difference here of this one is: where all the other tools are designed to get and ask analytical questions, for instance think about something about their business and the like, this was meant to get an emotional response; an emotional response about many of the same aspects that are found throughout the other questions: how they feel about – mostly focused around stresses and concerns regarding their suppliers, their buyers, different service providers, like logistics and transportation, which obviously is fairly high, and that allows a bit of a benchmarking for some of the other responses. Are they worried about new entrants coming in? Losing buyers? Losing suppliers? Motivating suppliers? Getting a bit at intentions of the actors.

In and of itself, it could probably be an interesting set of information about what are issues and concerns of individual actors. Or we were thinking: correlating this across the other tools and information would provide a much more nuanced picture, especially helping follow up research, more qualitative research to put together a richer context.

Tim? Mike?

*Tim Sparkman:*

I think you explained it well. I don't have anything to add to this one. Mike?

*Michael Field:*

No. I don't really have anything to add. Other than, again, we are doing a little bit more intensive one somewhat related to this, but was more around dispute, kind of doing a dispute landscape analysis we did trying to get at where there's tension in a system, whether it could be related or come out in here in terms of some kind of stress. And we started looking at the nature of commercial disputes, especially between commercial traders and farmers, find out how intense they are and how much that's creating some lingering tension within the system that's causing people to kind of bring that along from transaction to transaction.

And part of the idea of this one is also to kinda use that initial idea and start looking for wider set distresses that might indicate some other changes there or some other potential drivers of change.

*Tim Sparkman:*

Okay. So, moving to the last tool, and recognizing we've only got a bit of time left before the Q&A. So changes in business models. This one is my favorite of the tools. So if we think about, in the end, really, what we're trying to do with economic development writ large, is accelerate the process of productive evolution within a market system. And so ideally we'd like to have a way to understand the degree to which you've got a lot of actors tinkering with their business models and trying to find solutions to problems, trying to adapt to new opportunities, or whether you have a host of firms that are just sitting there doing the exact same thing year after year without very much change.

The reason that's useful – one is to get an idea of the degree to which you're walking into a dynamic market with a higher potential for significant change over time, or a relatively staid market with very little going on, with capture by a host of actors that have been there for dozens of years doing the exact same thing, and relatively little interest in making any changes. So if we were able to identify that at the outset of the intervention, it should give us an idea of the degree to which we should set high aspirations versus low aspirations for work within a given market system.

The second thing is that if we're successful in increasing the pace of productive evolution in a market system, you should see changes in the level of tinkering over

time. So originally we wanted to look at firm birth and death, like the startup and the demise of businesses, which in a relatively formalized economy like the United States you could do with data that would be available in government records, but in Bangladesh it is completely impossible. So we forgot about that side and we looked instead at iterations of business models.

We looked at 13 aspects of business models in core groups. The groups were looking at the product or service, the process by which the products or services is made and delivered, marketing, and then organizational innovations.

We then developed an index to rank and compare the scores between different market systems. And this is the third use: is that you should be able to use the tool to look at the relative dynamism of different market systems that you're monitoring over time. And with the little bit of sampling that we managed to do in the trial period where we were developing and then field-testing these tools, we did get some interesting insight, albeit with a massively statistically insignificant sample. We did get some interesting insight into, for example, the difference between flower retailers and companies in the jute market system.

So this is, in a nutshell, an effort to understand the heat under the pot, or the degree to which you have a highly energetic, highly solution-seeking market system full of actors that are constantly innovating and tinkering to try to find new opportunities and new competitive advantages, versus stagnant and staid market systems with relatively little potential for change over time.

Mike and Eric?

*Eric Derks:*

Nothing to add here, other than to say: this is one of my favorite tools. I'm really keen to see where this comes up and learn more about possible applicability across other markets. Though I understand obviously the caveats that different indices or different benchmarks for different markets are going to require some other figuring out. But it's definitely an interesting tool. Mike?

*Micheal Field:*

Yeah. It's also very important. I think what's interesting is the conversations we had about: could we get information on birth and death, that led to us getting to this tool, which is: could we then look at individual businesses and see how active they are, as Tim said, in testing new ideas or trying to innovate to improve their competitive position. Which I think is hopefully gonna get us really interesting information that'll get us able to adjust our resources, from a practical perspective, to the firms and to the market that have the best chance of kind of pushing or catalyzing systemic change by their being innovative.

I think we should move up to the final one. So, our top takeaways are – the first one is: quick and simple. So, as I mentioned in the start of the presentation, I've kinda found that this process of doing an ... within some limitations has been quite useful in terms of getting the staff on board. But also getting a lot more nuance into the implementation process and the thinking and learning behind that. And I think by having a wider set of tools that can quickly give us indications of change, it has been quite interesting and something that I've found is potentially very powerful. And hopefully that, as we get these tools fully implemented and figure out which ones we're really able to get full use out of, it's probably something that I would probably apply again in the next project.

*Eric Derks:*

Why don't I just talk quickly about the second one: rooted in theory. That was a slide Mike talked about earlier: having theoretical frameworks within which to couch these. I

think, from my work with Mike and elsewhere, I've been coming up with churn indicators. But then working together with Tim, we were able to much better flesh out a lot of the other ones, especially maintenance and growth and information flows and the change in business models. And so all of these grounded in a diverse range of theories that are out there, but now the question of praxis comes into mind: well, we need to now do this for a while, be able to capture results, understand and learn, and feedback into theory. So I think that it's also useful to underscore the need for collaboration with academics, with theoreticians in these areas. Tim?

*Tim Sparkman:*

Yeah. So the third one, on benchmarking. So a lotta the comments that we got back on the paper that we wrote to sum up our experience of developing these tools had to do with the question of benchmarking. It's extremely complicated and it varies by tool. Broadly, I think it's safe to say at this point that we can feel confident that systems are not really comparable in many senses. Systems are idiosyncratic. They're path-dependent. They're historical creatures that have a unique path through history. And so we do ourselves a disfavor by assuming that systems dynamics, in like a maze production system, for example, in one place, is similar to that in another place.

So the same problem pertains to looking at the information coming out of these tools: with a lotta the tools, you wouldn't want to look at information flow in one context and then compare it to information flow in another context. That wouldn't be very useful, for one.

And the other aspect of benchmarking is that the initial read of what you're looking at doesn't necessarily give you a good or a bad picture. It's not that – we don't really have a very good idea of which are the dynamics that constitute the best possible market system. Although we have some ideas. So we should be careful with tools like this in trying to come up with: "Okay, this is what I want my ideal score to look like" in the first place.

The first thing we should do is use the tools to try to understand: "What are the current dynamics in the system?" And then sit down especially with staff who are from there who have a deep understanding of the context, and think about: "Okay, if we're trying to drive toward inclusive, sustainable growth in these systems, what are the dynamics that we'd like to see over time that we can track with these tools?"

So, in summary, let's not get carried away with developing scores for these tools that we would then try to put across all market systems. And let's certainly try not to use them as targets in formal M&E regimes, which would significantly detract from the learning opportunity that they offer.

Mike and Eric, I know you have more to say on this topic. So feel free to chime in.

*Michael Field:*

Yeah, just to reiterate what Tim said about the benchmarking. I think in context of where a system is in a specific context to where it needs to go, putting some kind of markers in place for comparison. But once you start getting outta context, it might not be very useful. And I don't think we really are there yet where we can get to knowing that we'd have a number that would work across systems in any case. And the case of the churn that Eric talked about – in Uganda where they were looking for less churn and in Bangladesh we're looking for a little more churn – is a good example of where if we started benchmarking around a number, we could get into some murky areas of going in the wrong direction.

I think part of this also is that you need to kinda look at all this together as well to kinda see the wider picture of systems change – is really important. And sometimes –

which is becoming awfully clear in some of the conversations I have on this project – when you look at a specific indicator or conversation on a specific indicator, and isolating it as if that indicator is everything, where that indicator has to be seen within the much wider picture.

*Eric Derks:*

I only have one small thing to add. Just number four: please improve the tools. As Mike said, he's pretty far gone already on the project. They're just rolling them out now. There're some things – their team is in the process of collecting data and we're trying to figure out how to make sense of this information. So, they're out there for experimentation and use. And so it would be really interesting to know who finds these interesting and how they're being applied, and group back and learn from one another.

*[End of Audio]*