



MICROLINKS

FACILITATING SYSTEMIC CHANGE: INSIGHTS FROM FEED THE FUTURE PROGRAMS IN RWANDA, SENEGAL, GHANA, AND ZAMBIA

Q&A AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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Olaf Kula:

Sure. Thank you, Ben. And, actually, just for time management purposes and the fact that there are so many robust questions coming from our participants, I'm going to pass on monopolizing the question part and try to summarize these cases, and then open it up to open the floor up to questions from our participants.

So, what are we seeing here? Let me move off to kind of the summary slides. Interesting to me is: all of the projects show evidence of systemic change, even kind of the most – I'm assuming that PROFIT PLUS has a model that's very recent; as well, it's a Rwanda case. All appear to have innovation induced or at least embraced through private-sector actors. I wasn't completely clear as to who introduced the standards innovation in the Rwanda dairy case, but it's clearly embraced by industry actors.

The other thing that I find interesting is this notion of bridges between buyers and sellers, between those who have access to information or technology or standards and the diffusion of that to large numbers of small-holder farmers. And it seems like there is evidence of that in all of the project models.

Ghana and Senegal seem similar environments, similar commodities. But the environments look pretty different in terms of the rate of change and the kinds of change that we're seeing in that place. And my question would be: why are we seeing that? Is it ease of doing business, or is it lack of strong producer organizations in Ghana? I don't have the answers to that, but I think they're interesting questions.

Zambia also provides I think a very interesting case because it's a case in which one of the system changes anyway is one that was not thought of by the project, but it was a response by farmers to the innovations – to the external environment.

Some of you will be aware of or familiar with this sort of bar chart on the right because it came out from one of the earlier publications that Elizabeth Dunn and Ben Fowler worked on, looking at the steps or scale of evidence of buy-in: satisfaction, continued use, adaption, adaptation, further investments, and then finally, replication by non-project stakeholders. And what we're seeing is a lotta difference, but certainly in all of these projects, clear measures of satisfaction and increasing continued use. In Ghana and Senegal, we're actually seeing all of these indicators, including further investment. Replication I indicated was widespread in Ghana, but it's already beginning to happen in Senegal with the financial institutions, leasing companies beginning to crowd in and offer additional services.

What I take away from this is: one, the physical environment and the political enabling environment, business enabling environment, are going to have an impact on the rate of adoption and the kind of adoption. Harsher enabling environments don't necessarily mean don't work in this environment, but we should be aware that the degree to which there's either serious draught: obviously in an agricultural program, it's gonna affect adoption; the degree to which there's strong government intervention in a distortionary way is going to affect the uptake.

And, finally, I think the introducing change within a group or within groups are gonna necessitate creating some sort of competitive bridges between groups. Because I think

there's a lot of earlier research by LEO that suggested that if you have very strong producer organizations or associations of traders or wholesalers, there's tendency to form cartels; there's tendency to stifle innovation. So I think that while producer groups or any kind of horizontal groups within a commodity chain can be very effective for the distribution of inputs or enforcing rules within a system, we also need to look at the degree to which they may stifle innovation and affect the rate of adoption of change that we wish to become systemic in a system.

So we've, as presenters, gone a little bit over. What I would like to do is ask if Kristin will assist in directing questions to the participants. And want to thank all of you for sitting in and listening to us for this long. Kristin?

Kristin O'Planick: Okay. Thanks. I want to go back to an early earlier question from Marcus Jenal that he asked regarding ADVANCE, but is applicable across all four cases. To what extent would the market actors be able to self-organize into these business arrangements without donor intervention at this point? And I assume any of you could respond to that.

Olaf Kula: As the moderator, I'll take the first shot at that, and then I will also pass it on. I think that's an interesting question from two perspectives. One is: when have we done enough? When have the project interventions reached enough actors in the system that the system will continue on its own? And I think that's a really important question for the management of resources, for the use of scarce government resources. I don't know that we have really strong theories about that. I know, in discussions with Dan, we've talked about: "What is the point at which the forces driving change in a status quo outweigh or overcome the forces trying to enforce the status quo?" Because that would be the point at which there's no longer a need for an external intervention.

But I think the other perhaps even more interesting part of the question that Marcus asks is: in all of these projects, we have a donor-funded project that's introducing a change model. But what about the process of getting communities to begin to evaluate from a set of choices and develop and implement their own change models? We're talking about systemic change as change introduced from the outside becoming systemic; what about: can we move towards introducing the change process into communities so they continue to innovate, update, and introduce change?

And because I referred to a discussion with Dan, I'm gonna pass that to Dan just for a second.

Dan White: Yeah. So I think that there's a lot to be said about the –

Olaf Kula: Dan, would you like to add to that?

Olaf Kula: I do not hear Dan. I'm gonna pass that to Ben. Ben, do you want to comment on that?

Ben Fowler: Sure. Thank you, Olaf. I think it's different a little bit for each of the two case studies that we looked at. I think in Rwanda, the monitors of the system who are organizing how it works are really the milk processors. I think they play a really critical

coordinating function. And so I think – my sense, and of course this is merely projection, is that: as long as that model continues to work, and the processors continue to adapt, as they seem to be doing, that I see a good likelihood of that continuing. I think the key question that needs to happen is: will the enforcement on the government side take place and therefore ensure that that market channel is indeed continuing, over time, to produce and provide high-quality product? And I think if you get the enforcement and the institutionalization factor with government enforcing that, then that's more likely to occur.

I think on the Senegal case, it's an interesting question. Because there is a lot of players involved. And although the rice millers play a strong role, there's also maybe a greater degree of reliance on the activities of the farmer associations as well. So I think the convening function there and the fact that all of the actors are coming together and discussing and negotiating and engaging via their projections and their data management systems – that is really critical for this self-organization function to continue and for the coordination function to continue.

I think that the challenge is going to be, as I alluded to, how able are all of the actors to continue collecting that information long-term without project subsidies? And I think that's where the project's exploring models right now that might do that. I think that's gonna be really critical.

Olaf Kula:

Great. Thanks. Kristin?

Kristin O'Planick:

Sure. Question from Gunja Dallakoti. Systemic change in general is a time-taking process and oftentimes it is difficult to report within the short span of development projects. How do we handle this issue? And, I guess generally, how long do these projects last?

Elizabeth Dunn:

Hi, Kristin. I'll answer that. The systemic changes – as we learn more about it, it's beginning to look kind of like sustainability in some ways, where you can never get to a point where it's all done and now you can say how far it's gone and whether it's finished or not. So, as I mentioned earlier, systemic change is a dynamic process that continues and in different directions over time.

So I think the answer to the question is really: where we're looking – and, Ben, maybe you can comment after this. Where we're looking is to try to measure when we can tell that systemic change has started. And I guess in these case studies, try to look at what systemic change has occurred. But I'm not sure that we'll ever get to the point where we can say what was the full extent of the systemic change. Because we can't find the ending point. Just like sustainability: how far in the future are you willing to wait to ask a question?

So that's my comment. Ben, do you have something to add to that?

Ben Fowler:

Certainly. Yeah. I think it's just important that we always – as you said – recognize that these changes are not always permanent. Because systems are evolving. And therefore not always is sustainability what we want to see. We wouldn't expect or hope that a

system would be frozen in time. Actually I think a more positive measure would be that the system is continuing to evolve in even more positive ways, more inclusive ways.

So I think that that's actually perhaps what we should be setting as our hope, rather than looking for a static situation.

Kristin O'Planick:

Great. And a question from Thomas Tichar, who was asking in regards to Rwanda, but again, I think this could be a relevant question across the cases. Of the findings, are the ones that the project was initially looking to achieve there? Did the findings emerge during the project as unintended benefits?

Olaf Kula:

I'll speak to that. Although I think the Zambia case is the clearest illustration of where the outcome didn't match the initial project design. All the Feed the Future programs that we looked at were essentially programs that were designed to increase farmer incomes, to increase productivity and more effective marketing of farmers' surplus into market chains. What was interesting I think the Zambia case was the draught as an external factor affecting both the rate of uptake, but also the priority of farmers' decisions to focus more on resilient strategies that were enhanced by their relationships with these CADs and agro dealers but not part of the original design?

I think with all of the other projects, from my understanding of these case studies, is the changes that we saw fell within the umbrella of what was the original project design. Although these are market systems projects and not systemic change projects, so there were no systemic change indicators in the project design documents.

Kristin O'Planick:

Great. Thank you. And one last question before we wrap up. We've got a conversation that Boubacar Diallo has initiated around the sustainability in relation to the systemic change, and that's been interesting to follow if you're not tracking. So both thinking that this change is going to last everywhere and that understanding that systemic change is a process, but in terms of looking more specifically three to five years after the project – which I know Ben is responding: we have a couple ex-post studies that get at that, and we'll be sharing those links. But maybe something, Elizabeth, you can speak to a little bit more about the issue of sustainability in regards to systemic change and how they go together or don't.

And I know even yesterday we were having an interesting conversation of: is sustainability even the right thing to look at? 'Cause the system is always changing. So is anything ever even possible to be fully sustainable in a dynamic system?

Elizabeth Dunn:

Yeah. Thank you for that. The question is really very interesting. As I mentioned just a minute ago, I think sustainability and systemic change have some characteristics – in looking at them, they have some characteristics in common. Sustainability: is that a question that we can ask in a hard-and-fast way? I think the more that we learn, the more that we're coming to think that really what we're talking about are directions of change that are positive and continuing for change to occur in a positive way. Because the very nature of these systems are that they don't reach an equilibrium where they stay forever. They just move from spot to spot, responding to developments and shocks that occur, and new discoveries and innovations.

So, kind of going back to the point that I had tried to make at the very beginning, which is: one of the selling points for systemic change, and one of the reasons we began looking at systemic change at the beginning of the LEO project, is because we do think there is a connection between systemic change and sustainability in that when a donor intervention comes in and changes the way some things are done, we would not expect that to be sustainable unless it is also accompanied by changes in the underlying beliefs or norms of the actors in the system and changes in the way that they want to do business, the way they expect to do business, the kinds of things they expect from their business partners. And then also at the same time, changes in the way that the different economic actors are connected.

Earlier we were talking about – Olaf mentioned: how could a community self-organize? But I would ask the question: how can the economic actors in a value chain recognize that they have shared interest and want to work together to create shared value? And once you've got that idea in people's minds, once that idea is the operating principle, then we could expect positive changes to continue into the future.

Thanks, Kristin.

Kristin O'Planick:

Okay. Thank you to everyone for joining us today and contributing to the learning on this topic. I hope that as a broader community, we continue to exchange ideas and evidence as we explore how we can facilitate systemic change in support of our development objective.

As we close just a reminder – and Margie Brand has also posted it in the chat – which the LEO conference on Transforming Market Systems is coming up on September 27th in Washington, D.C. We will also be webcasting the opening plenary as an option for those who can't be with us in D.C. And you can register for both of those. Margie shared links, and they're also in the link pod on the left-hand side of your screen.

And, with that, we'll close this webinar. And enjoy the rest of your day.

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