

# INTERVENTION STRATEGY

## Frequency & Use Case

**Objective:** The objective of this component is to articulate how a short-term project intervention can trigger a series of broader changes in the system.

**Overview:** In systems change interventions, our goals are distinct. The focus is on intervening in a way that enables actors in the system to take ownership, adapt and lead changes in their context, and sustain progress beyond the project's lifespan. Achieving this requires intentional strategy and tactics—doing enough to catalyze change, but not so much that we create dependency or history essential system functions.

A good starting point is to ask:

***Why does the system work the way it does? and Why isn't it changing in the way we hope to see?***

## WHERE TO START

Interventions should begin where there is already energy and momentum in the system (see Step 2: Context). The strategy should focus on finding entry points within these existing dynamics and developing interventions that build upon ongoing efforts. This grounds our starting point of interventions in the incentives and capacities of local actors.

If things are already moving in a certain direction, but this direction does not seem aligned with the vision for change, the question then shifts: *Do we need to rethink our understanding of the problem? How effective is this existing pathway? And how can we learn and adapt more effectively to either leverage or redirect this momentum?*

## BUILDING MOMENTUM

To build and sustain momentum, interventions must look beyond direct participants and consider second movers and adjacent possibilities. The key question is: *If something is working, what would it take for others to follow?* Rather than relying on direct funding or risk mitigation for individual partners, interventions should focus on changing the broader context and environment for others to follow. This often means responding to adjacent challenges, that once resolved, create a more favorable context for change.



Watch this leadership [video](#) of the dancing man that highlights how leaders can spark a movement.

The Intervention Strategy component will change the most frequently. Based on feedback and learning you collect from monitoring, the project should regularly revisit and update this component.

Teams may find it helpful to update this component around the time of workplanning.

## TIPPING POINT

Reaching a tipping point requires more than a single intervention. Lasting systems change depends on multiple shifts occurring across time and dimensions of the system. Some of the critical conditions that need to align include:

- **Roles** - Who does what in the system?
- **Relationships** - How actors interact and collaborate?
- **Power Dynamics** - Who has authority and influence?
- **Rules** - Sanctions and incentives governing behaviors.
- **Norms** - Cultural and behavioral expectations.
- **Resources** - Access and distribution of resources.
- **Diversity** - Variety of actors, elements and ideas in a system.
- **Voice and Agency** - Ability to make choices and influence decisions.

Since many of these factors take time to shift, a single intervention is often not enough to fully drive systemic change. This is why a **portfolio approach**—leveraging multiple interventions over time—becomes critical. Long-term impact often depends on **building off previous efforts** or ensuring that others can build upon what has already been set in motion.

### Thinking Like a Systems Navigator: Ditch the Linear Thinking

Many traditional approaches rely on **linear thinking**—the assumption that if we do X, it will lead to Y, which will then cause Z. This cause-and-effect logic is embedded in many theories of change, that interventions will unfold in a predictable, step-by-step manner.

If our goal is **Z**, and we start with **X**, we don't assume a direct path but instead focus on **how X shifts the system**, setting off **transitional phases (Y)** that may or may not lead to the desired outcome Z, each presenting opportunities for course correction.

For example, in an intervention aimed at strengthening agricultural markets:

**Intervention (X)** A project supports anchor firms to improve sourcing practices with smallholder farmers, offering a contract, technical assistance and pre-financing.

**Y1:** Some firms adopt the model, with a project subsidy, leading to increased farmer loyalty and improved quality, demonstrating the model works.

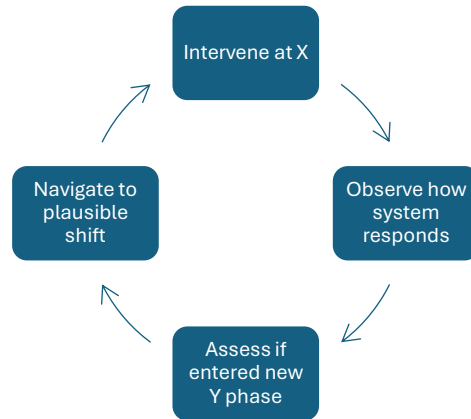
**Y2:** As others see benefits, norms around the role of firms in their supply chains shift, creating social and market pressures for other firms to provide similar support.

**Y3:** Firms facing capacity constraints in playing this role, create alliances with financial institutions and input providers to offset the assistance to farmers.

**Potential Outcome (Z):** A more inclusive, resilient agricultural market where smallholders have stable access to buyers and financing.

The trick to this is to see systems change as a **series of system shifts**, rather than a single, direct route. This allows us to better anticipate **emergent patterns**, leverage **unexpected opportunities**, and course-correct when necessary.

- **System responses:** Is the system pushing back, embracing, or reshaping the change?
- **Tipping points:** What shifts in behavior, relationships, or incentives indicate movement toward systemic change?
- **Embrace uncertainty:** One transition may open doors to new opportunities or reveal constraints that weren't initially considered, meaning we need to shift course.
- **Recognize thresholds:** Some transitions require **energy and momentum** that exceed our capacity for intervention, meaning **timing and sequencing** matter. We often have to act strategically on adjacent issues to get to where we want.



## DESIGNING INTERVENTION STRATEGY

The Intervention Strategy is an approach to facilitating change over time. It outlines how change happens through phases—from the initial disruption to building momentum to system-wide transformation. This section helps define the who, what, when, where, why, and how of your systems change. A strong intervention strategy should show how the project will spark change in a way that continues its own, even after the project ends.

Key questions to consider:

- **Who** in the system will drive the change? At which phases?
- **Why** is it in their incentive to act?
- **What** is shifting in the system that could trigger broader transformation?
- **How** do we expect change to progress from localized shifts to system-wide change?
- **Where** does the change begin, and where does it expand to?
- **When** do we expect to see the first signs of change, and when will it mature?

Refer to the **diagram below**, which illustrates the logical sequence of change:

- **Where to Start** → identifying entry points, disruptors, and early mobilizers.

- **Building Momentum** → Enabling second movers, reinforcing incentives, and expanding adoption.
- **Tipping Point** → Institutionalizing change, shifting rules and norms, and ensuring long-term sustainability.

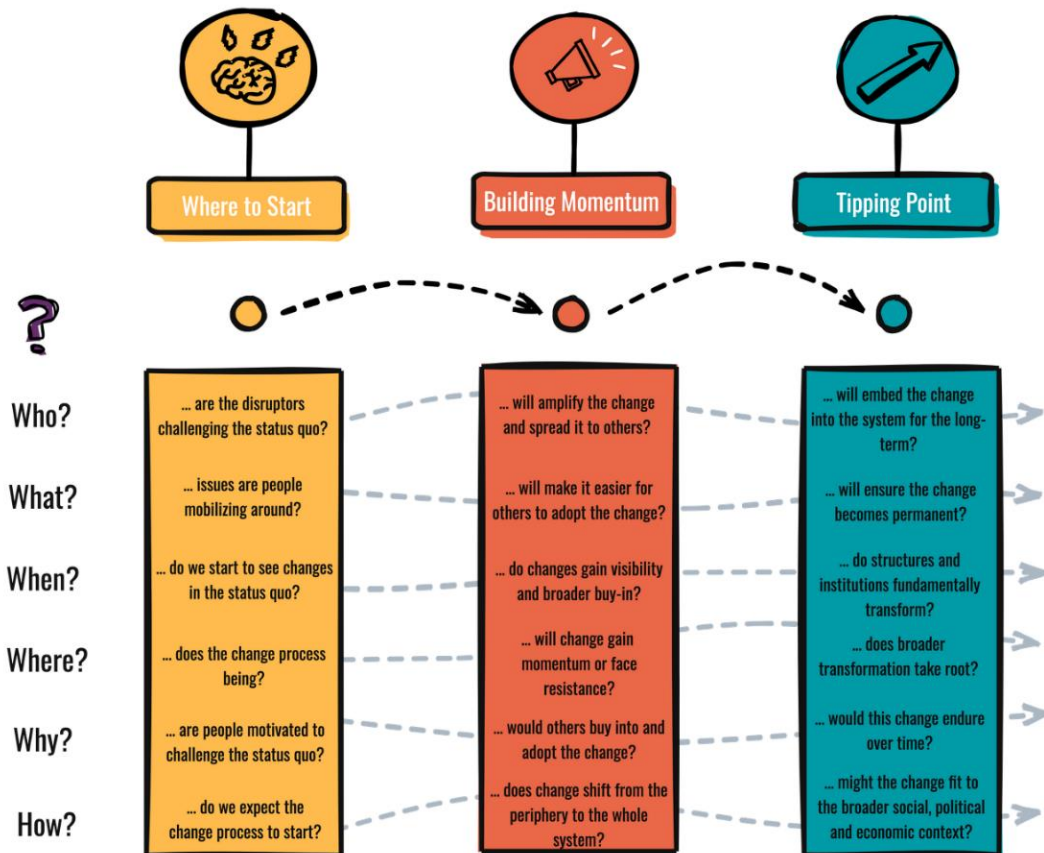
This diagram can also serve as a **facilitation handout** (see the last page of this guide) to help structure this discussion.

### Work Planning Note

Your intervention strategy should align with a systems-change orientation to ensure that interventions are locally owned, sustainable, and embedded in the system, laying the foundation for long-term impact beyond the project lifecycle.

- **Goals and objectives** should clearly define what part of the system you aim to change and specify how this change will improve the system's functionality and create lasting impacts.
- **Activities** should focus on facilitation rather than direct service delivery, prioritizing initiatives that build the system's capacity to deliver and sustain change independently.
- **Roles and responsibilities** should ensure that local actors and partners are the agents of change, leading activities they can own and sustain over the long term.
- The **timeline** should allow for testing, learning, and adapting ideas, while also providing flexibility to reflect the iterative nature of systems change.
- **Resources and budgets** should prioritize partnerships and system-wide interventions, with flexible funding allocated for ongoing learning and adaptation.
- **Indicators and targets** should recognize that systemic impacts take time to materialize, and the work plan should include mechanisms for real-time learning and adaptation.

The below framework helps to think through a coherent systems change intervention, where to start or your 'entry point' to disrupting the status quo, then how to build momentum to amplify change, finally, how to get past the tipping point to where the system will drive the change.



! Watch this BEAM Exchange [video](#) on why it's important to have an intervention strategy.

**Illustrative Example:** Below is an example of the Intervention Strategy for the USAID Transforming Market Systems (TMS) Activity in the tourism system. It highlights a project intervention that has found an entry point and built momentum but now faces a tipping point—whether the change will endure long-term or revert to the status quo.

WHERE TO START	BUILDING MOMENTUM	TIPPING POINT
<p><i>Describe the elements within the current system (the status quo) that will ignite the change process.</i></p>	<p><i>Explain how the momentum will grow from within the system and how the system itself will embrace the change process.</i></p>	<p><i>Explain how the tipping point will be reached, where the system responds to and adapts to the change.</i></p>
<p><b>Who:</b> The change began with a strategic shift led by the Minister of Tourism at the Honduran Institute of Tourism (IHT), focusing on expanding from the domestic to international markets.</p> <p><b>What:</b> TMS co-invested with IHT in a strategic promotion initiative, increasing Honduras' visibility in global markets through articles and publications.</p> <p><b>When:</b> The change became evident when Honduras was featured in high-profile publications such as <i>Conde Nast Traveler</i> and <i>The New York Times</i>.</p> <p><b>Where:</b> Increased online visibility in North American markets reverberated through news and media in Honduras signaling the sector new potential.</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Perceptions of tourism in Honduras improved, and its visibility and reputation grew in international market.</p>	<p><b>Who:</b> Hotels and tour operators amplified IHT efforts through digital marketing practices that showcased their destinations, driving greater visibility.</p> <p><b>What:</b> Businesses digitalized booking and marketing practices with support from the National Chamber of Tourism.</p> <p><b>When:</b> Momentum became evident through user-generated content showcasing visitor engagement with Honduran tourism establishments.</p> <p><b>Where:</b> Destinations like the Bay Islands and Copán saw increased first-time visitors, signaling new tourism flows.</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Rising visibility and interest pushed businesses to professionalize their services to capture new opportunities.</p> <p><b>How:</b> Digitalization provided critical feedback, spurring innovation and enhancing marketing strategies.</p>	<p><b>Who:</b> Stronger tourism governance structures will be essential to coordinate and sustain promotional and marketing efforts over the long term.</p> <p><b>What:</b> To build Honduras' tourism brand, stable mechanisms are needed to ensure consistent promotion strategies, secure funding, and protect efforts from political disruptions.</p> <p><b>When:</b> This will be reached when a public-private agency (or similar institutional structure) is established to sustainably mobilize resources and develop infrastructure, services, and attractions.</p> <p><b>Where:</b> This mechanism will likely occur at the national level but would also depend on destination-level initiatives driving practical implementation.</p> <p><b>Why:</b> A governance solution is needed to address collective action, if economic and political will supports</p>

<p><b>How:</b> The process gained traction when IHT, as the governance entity for tourism, embraced its role in promotions for the international market.</p>		<p>tourism as a key part of a diversified economy.</p> <p><b>How:</b> A political consensus must be reached on the value of tourism and its promotion as a critical driver of Honduras' economic growth.</p>
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**Process & Facilitation Guide:** Below is a recommended process and facilitation guide to develop the Intervention Strategy component as part of an in-person workshop. Note, it is not the only way and can be adapted as needed.

**Timing:** Analyzing the intervention strategy should be done on a regular basis. It can be particularly helpful to update around the time of workplanning. In a workshop, allocate at least 60 minutes for this component.

**Participants:** The primary participants to feed into this component should be the technical team.

**Materials:** Use the Systems Change Outcome Map (printed on a poster) and have sticky notes and pens/markers available. It may also be helpful to have the Intervention Strategy Diagram printed as a handout for groups.

**Step 1. Introduce the Intervention Strategy component of the poster (see image below).**



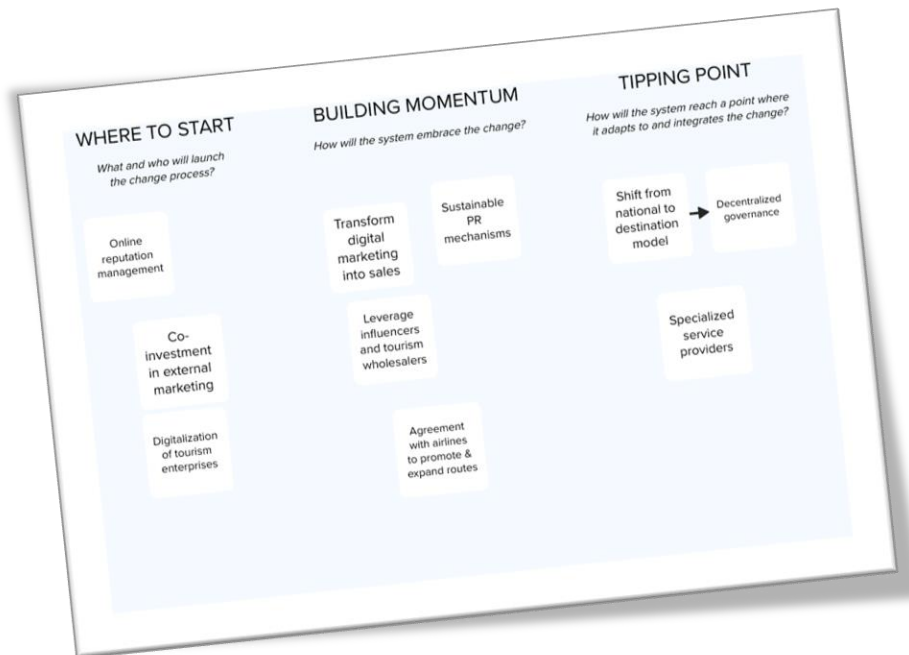
Starting on the left (“Where to Start”) prompt the team to think about what and who will launch the change process within the system of focus. You are encouraged to use the Intervention Strategy Diagram for additional who, what, when, where, why and how questions.

It may be best for staff to think individually or in teams first, and then share. Add to the poster (using sticky notes) the points of consensus.

**Step 2:** As you facilitate, remember to consider ACDI/VOCA’s four impact areas and integrate them into the intervention strategy as appropriate.



Using the Honduras tourism sector example above, a completed Intervention Strategy on the poster may look something like this:



**Step 3:** Be sure that at some point after the Intervention Strategy is developed, this is put into the Word document worksheet. It is important to capture this narrative. As the project implementation progresses, you can see where on the continuum you are.

### Tips & Additional Resources:

- To sustain the change process, it often requires building partnerships with a diverse set of actors - beyond the original 'disruptors' - and shifting power dynamics, reforming institutions, and creating coalitions for change. A helpful resource to think through an intervention strategy are [change wheels](#). Change wheels are frameworks that guide users in thinking systemically about possible pathways of change within particular market systems.

Workshop Handout

