

ENGAGING KEY ACTORS

In a nutshell:

Participatory Market Systems Development (PMSD) is dependent on you being able to facilitate the participation of key market actors who can bring about significant change in the market system. This tool helps you to develop an understanding of what will drive those actors to want to participate and develop a strategy to facilitate that engagement.

Status:

Optional Tool

Key principles:

The actors you target with this tool should be those that can encourage shifts in the market system (**systems thinking**). The tool can then play an important role in helping you to improve the **participation** of influential market actors. Engaging market actors, as described in the tool, requires **facilitation** skills.

Preconditions and preparation:

This tool can be used by itself, as well as after a **Preliminary Market Mapping**, which identifies all market actors in the market system. It can also be used in combination with the **Influence / Relevance** matrix, which identifies which actors to then prioritise.

These will mostly be private sector companies but could also be Government Departments, research organisations and civil society organisations. Most of these will have preconceptions about NGO led initiatives or even your organisation. They will not automatically see the benefits of the PMSD process you are advocating, so understanding them and their potential motivations to engage, or not to engage, and the 'hooks' that can be used to get them involved, is essential. The following section provides a step-by-step process for understanding each actor's motivations.

Step 1: Understand which systemic issues affect them

If you have done a Preliminary Market Mapping exercise, you will have a basic understanding of some of the systemic constraints and opportunities affecting the market system. Identifying which of these are most relevant to the key market actors provides a start point for your engagement with them.

- Systemic constraints: Bottlenecks / situations that hinder the performance and inclusivity of the market system.
- Systemic opportunities: A set of favourable circumstances in place now, that create an opening for market actors to pursue their objectives in a way that will improve the overall system for everyone.

Example below:

Market Actor	Systemic Constraint	Systemic Opportunity
Organic Inc	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Quality standards of smallholder produce● Transport links	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Expansion in demand for organic produce in urban areas
Local Government extension services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Reduced funding for extension agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Interest from agricultural research bodies and ICT developers in mobile extensions

Step 2: Understanding incentives

The incentives of market actors are the reasons and driving forces behind their behaviour. When you understand incentives you can tailor your messages to specific actors, making it easier to attract them to the PMSD process. Incentives can be unpacked into Interests, Motivations, Influence and Drivers.

Interests

Interests are what market actors need to achieve – e.g. expand market share, increase customer based, or develop a resilient supply chain. Interests are usually expressed formally (e.g. company objectives) but in some organisations they may be informally expressed. Interests also vary with timeframe – actors may have short, medium and long term interests. It is often important to be able to show how PMSD can appeal to long term interests.

Influences

Certain market actors have influence over others. For instance, if a lead firm is only interested in short term profits, this will affect the willingness of other companies to participate if you are only talking about long term goals. Of course, the reverse can be true and the lead firm's interests in sustainability and inclusivity can help you mobilise other market actors. These sorts of dynamics should influence who you engage first – prioritising the influential may make your job a lot easier.

Motivations

Actors will be motivated to engage, or not engage, for a number of reasons. For instance:

- They may have had negative experiences of market facilitation or of engagement with NGOs.
- Alternatively, some company leaders may have personal motivations to improve inclusivity or sustainability that do not appear in company literature but that can help you.

Understanding motivations of companies and influential individuals within companies is where the detective work comes in!

Drivers

Not everyone in an organisation has the same level of influence. Drivers are the people who can make change happen in an organisation. They could be the CEO –but not necessarily. They could also be someone else who is forward thinking and has the ear of the CEO. Knowing who those people are is essential or else you run the risk of identifying the right organisation but the wrong people to bring into the PMSD process.

For each market actor, you can research and map their Needs, Motivations, Influences and Drivers. This can involve reading through documents from the organisations, talking to key informants and reviewing media and third party reports.

For each market actor, compile the following table:

Name of organisation:

Key individuals

- Driver – Who is the driver in the organisation who can make change happen?
 - Additional influential or relevant people – who else needs to be involved from the organisation?
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Needs and interests

- Short term – What are their short term interests that could attract them or dissuade them from participating?
 - Long term – What are their long term interests – are they supported by the aims of the PMSD process or are they in conflict with it?
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Motivation

- Reasons to engage – What might drive the organisation/ the driver into believing that engagement with PMSD may be a good strategy?
 - Reasons to not engage – What might drive the organisation/the driver away from participating in PMSD?
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Influential actors

- Positive influences – Which other organisations have an influence which may encourage them to participate in PMSD?
 - Negative influences – Which other organisations have an influence which may encourage them to avoid PMSD?
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Step 3: Strategies for engagement

Once you have an understanding of the incentives of the market actors, you can develop a strategy for engagement.

The first part of this is the identification of 'hooks'. Hooks are the messages you use to attract the market actors. Hooks are not just about the content of the message, they are also about how the message is communicated and who communicates it.

When thinking about hooks consider the following:

- Content: Based on what you know about incentives, what will attract the actor?
- Opportunities to communicate: Are there natural opportunities to communicate with them – e.g. events you're both going to? Is it likely that they could be interested joining an event you are running, such as a Preliminary Market Mapping session?
- Other communication methods: What other opportunities can you create yourself – e.g. is direct contact via a phone call or email feasible?
- The communicator: Who would be the best person to communicate with the actor? It may not necessarily be you, and it may be better coming from a third party – for instance, a private company may be more persuaded by a message from another company or a sector wide body.
- The recipient: Who should you target in the organisation?
- The intensity and frequency of communication: What will be an effective follow up strategy?
- This information can be plotted onto a table such as this:

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Key actor

Hook content	What is the relevant information that will attract them (e.g. the potential of this process to contribute to x, the involvement of y)? Think of their interests and motivations. What is it that is going to attract them in?
Opportunities to hook	How might you approach them? Are they an organisation you can simply write to? Do you need to arrange a formal meeting? Is it better if you connect to them first at a workshop organised by a third party? Or should you discuss with an individual informally?
Other opportunities to hook	One approach on its own is unlikely to be successful. You can also think about how you could prepare for a direct approach – should you promote the programme in the media more widely first, or hold a breakfast meeting for example?
Hook communicator	Ask the question – who should the approach be made by? Is hierarchy important?
Hook recipient	Who is the person who is going to receive this? This may not be the same as the Driver as they may not have the time. You may need to communicate first with someone who has the time and the ear of the Driver. Or you may target someone who knows you, who you think will champion what you say to key people within the organisation.

An iterative process

Most of all, always remember that this is the development of a relationship. It is not enough to have a 'killer pitch' and then walk away. You need to build up trust, understanding and a recognition of mutual goals. This may take time and is likely to be an iterative process. Three stages can be envisaged for this process:

Stage 1: Engagement of key actors

During this phase there is strong, direct and regular contact between the facilitator and a range of market actors. The role of the facilitator is to 'hook' the actors into the PMSD process with a good pitch based on your understanding of what motivates them. This is where good research on the actors will help immeasurably. In this phase you may want to be strategic in the actors you target. You will want to target actors that are likely to sign up quickly and can help you build momentum and can influence others.

Stage 2: Engagement of other actors in response to evidence of change

Once you start achieving things, it becomes easier to convince other market actors to join. Communication skills and a good pitch are still important but now, you can back these up with evidence of the potential value of them joining. The running of a Participatory Market Mapping sessions or similar meetings, that have brought together market actors, can be used to demonstrate your ability to convene actors from across the market system. This is where communicating what you are doing through the media can be especially valuable.

Stage 3: Engaged market actors convince others to participate

In this stage market actors themselves are mobilising other market actors to join the PMSD process. The role of the facilitator, in this instance, is to equip them to do this well or eventually, to walk away – because your job is done!