Practical ACTION

SELF SELECTION

In a nutshell:
Self selection helps a project narrow down who it is directly working with. It identifies a set of behaviours that signal progress towards desired systemic change. Market actors signal that they want to be involved by adopting those behaviours (i.e. they 'self select') and the project responds with facilitation support that further aids change. Actors that do not adopt the behaviours are effectively opting out.

Status:
Optional/Advanced Tool

Key principles:
Self selection is built around the principle of **Systems Thinking** – it focuses on the durability of any change, by focusing on system-level patterns (rules and norms) that shape behaviour. The tool links a view of the high-level system biases to practical interaction with individual market actors. These actors (partners) are mechanisms to achieve systemic change – so need to be prioritised on their ability to effect change. Self selection also integrates **Facilitation** – defined as "an action or investment that catalyses a durable systemic change, but is temporary in nature and does not remain as a part of a system". Here, three important dimensions of facilitation are introduced:

- Relationships: Increasing connectivity of a system: "does this intervention improve the connectivity of the system, or does it redirect actors towards the project?".
- Ownership: Facilitation is about catalysing internal change processes that are durable from the perspective of the market actor: "Is this intervention catalysing actor(s) to want to change for their own interests, or is it creating a temporary effect driven by the project?".
- Intensity: The more resources invested in a specific actor, the more challenging it is to ensure they are doing things for their own interests: "Are the resources being offered or is the facilitation role appropriate to achieve connectivity and internally driven change, or are resources directing actors towards the project or a false incentive that will fade with the project's end?".

Preconditions and preparation:
Self selection can be adopted as a project-wide management strategy, or as a lens for thinking about particular interventions. For it to be used project-wide, the team leader and senior management of the project need to be well versed and bought into the approach, and to have communicated their thinking to the donor. This is more likely to be effective when it has been written into the project design. For projects already underway, it is more likely that self selection will help to guide the thinking of sector leaders or Project Officers working with individual firms – thus using the ROI principles from above (Relationships, Ownership and Intensity) to reflect on why partners are engaging with the project.

Timeline and resources:
As noted above, self selection requires significant thinking, reading and commitment to be internalised as a project management philosophy. However, it can also be adapted to ongoing projects as a useful set of prompts or reflection questions.

Outputs

The crux of self selection is to link specific behaviour patterns that need to change for each type of actor in a given local context, with the overarching systemic change objective. This helps to prioritise among a range of possible different interventions with different types of actors. The offer needs to be framed in a way that tests (a) actors' commitment to specific changes; and (b) their capacity to influence the wider system.

The table below gives a detailed set of examples of the self selection criteria and possible interventions for an example in the horticultural sector, where the goal is "to improve the performance of the horticultural market system and the poor engaged in the system by improving the supply chain management strategies and practices of buyers".

Local Actor	Self Selection Criteria	Specific Criteria
Buyer	• Commitment to build dedicated supply chain • Investment in time and money to upgrade their supply chain • Investment in time and money to train mid-level managers to upgrade internal management capacity • Commitment to implement performance based incentives throughout their supply chain • Commitment to a transparent pricing policy • Show constant improvement in performance	• Production zone prioritisation and research • Cost share aggregator upgrading • Development of services market for smallholders • Cost share capacity building of other potential players (aggregators, transport, nucleus farmers, etc.) • Facilitate and cost share access to communications technology for financial and internal management upgrading, including information flow, supplier payment, and inventory management • Cost share development and roll out of performance based incentives at multiple levels of supply chain • Facilitate capacity building via link to national and international expertise via volunteers or consultants • Capacity building for mid-level management via training and interns • Facilitate link to financial services
Aggregator / Trader	• Commitment to quality that may include investment in practice equipment upgrades • Transparency on pricing and quality when buying, including possible shift to brokering services • Investment in time and/or money to upgrade their supply chain (farmers) • Commitment to implement performance based incentives throughout their supply chain • Show constant improvement in performance	• Facilitate capacity building via link to national and international expertise via volunteers or consultants • Facilitate capacity building on how to apply performance based incentives for farmer/suppliers • Facilitate capacity building on delivering extension messages cost effectively to farmer/suppliers • Facilitate and cost share link to communications technology for financial and internal management upgrading, including information flow, supplier payment, and inventory management • Facilitate capacity building on shifting to broker-based business model • Cost share access to communications technology • Costs share access to entrepreneurial opportunities on the input and services side • Capacity building for mid-level management via training and interns • Facilitate link to financial services

Outcomes / behaviour changes

The short-term implication of self selection is to work closely with individual market actors to work out strategies that the actors themselves are interested in, but that align with a systemic change goal. It is useful to position this as a strategic planning process for the firm/actor – it is their planning process, not the project's! This planning process is the foundation for agreement on project support.

In this way, the project can identify a set of associated behaviours (from the strategic plan) which become good indications of commitment. These are the second column in the above table: "Self Selection Criteria". By taking on these behaviours, market actors signal that they are self selecting in, and are therefore committed to, the overall systemic change. In response, the project can offer targeted support via the "Facilitated Interventions" listed in the third column of the table.

If, however, firms stop taking actions from their own strategic plan, it offers a powerful opportunity for the project to say "That's fine, you don't have to do this... but we are going to redirect our resources to other actors who are more serious/committed". This redirects attention to the actions of market actors themselves and whether they are helping the market system change. A "wait and see" or withholding of resources until market actors take action has proven powerful for bringing actors back to the table.

The bigger picture or longer-term perspective of self selection involves a recognition that systemic change processes involve a sequence of phases. And by working with a portfolio of actors that ebb and flow in their commitment, the project can continually reallocate resources where there is momentum. The table below summarises key systemic change phases and the market system conditions and possible project priority areas for each. What is important to note is how project priorities should shift over time: it is less about picking 'partners' that are then guaranteed for the life of the project, but to continually adjust and adapt support based on behaviours of individual actors and the wider system. In many cases, it may not be the first adopter that pushes a system to a tipping point; in fact it is often the third or fourth actors that really bring momentum to systemic change.

System Change Phase	Market System Conditions	Project Priorities
Initiate Change	Few or no firms demonstrating behaviour and/or few interested in trying new behaviour.	**Action:** Project wants to work with small number of firms to take on or expand adoption of new market behaviours. **Learn:** Identify if there are any underlying drivers limiting adoption.
Early Adoption	A few more firms start taking on behaviour and a small percent start to adapt it to their business models.	**Action:** Project targets more adoption and pushes to catalyse adaptation of market behaviours. **Learn:** Comparative value of change to other competing behaviours (e.g. financial transparency versus informal financial management due to risk from corruption).
Early Adaptation	The behaviour starts to generate reinforcing internal and external feedback – e.g. competitive pressure to adopt.	**Action:** Focus more resources on the market actors that are creating wider influence. This will enable you to leverage energy for change in the system. **Learn:** Identify behaviour patterns that form in response to competitive and cooperative pressure, as well as influence/resistance from other functions in the system.

Reinforcing system change through interconnected systems	Behaviour is starting to root in the market system, but supporting/ reinforcing mechanisms in the system are weak and start to slow and weaken the targeted behaviour.	**Action:** Exit efforts where behaviour has started to root in the system and focus on related behaviour change processes. The project is entering and exiting change processes as behaviours get rooted but uncover underlying constraints that manifest in new or different behaviours that are not aligned with the systemic change objective. **Learn:** Assess particularly influential feedback – both reinforcing (e.g. social capital, competitive response, etc.) or negative (e.g. stigma, competitive response, etc.) feedback. For example, where are the reinforcing incentives as well as incentives that push back against the change coming from interconnected systems?
Alignment of systemic feedback creating new biases	The initial core behaviour change is rooted in components of the system, but overall system change has not happened because underlying, or more powerful, feedback is/are pushing back preventing the tipping point from taking place.	**Action:** The project shifts resources to catalyse change in interconnected systems that amplify or dampen specific feedback so that wide spread system change can reach the tipping point. **Learn:** Assess comparative connectivity and influence from other social, market, political and civil society systems to determine the level of robustness and resilience around the change objective.
Change rooted in the system	The change process has rooted to the extent possible given the time and resources remaining in the project.	**Action:** Begin removing resources in a way that is responsible and ensures some level of change remains rooted in the systems and cannot be reversed. **Learn:** Assess if the system, and related interconnected systems, are starting to create additional positive change evolving from targeted change catalysed by the project.

This view of systemic change is built on an understanding of feedback – both reinforcing feedback that supports a behaviour, or balancing feedback that pushes back on a behaviour.

For example, for an agricultural input distribution system to function in a way that would positively affect poverty over time and support sustainable agriculture, it needs other systems to apply pressure to reward and sanction good and bad business behaviour respectively. Specifically in Kenya, agro-input retailers typically take a short-term trade orientation to their business practices. This manifests itself in more counterfeit products, limited or distorted information, limited investment in information gathering processes and a focus on products that provide quick income gains despite potential negative impacts on health and environment, for example.

A current programme in Kenya has stated that its objective is to shift those behaviours to better align with a longer-term customer orientation and environmental sustainability—i.e. investments in smallholder farmer customer satisfaction, better management systems, and more information on products/services including their links to good health and sustainability. The challenge is how to shift the current market biases that favour short-term predatory behaviours so that they pressure retailers to take a longer-term customer orientation. For such a shift to become a normal way of operating, other processes and actors within the system (e.g. regulatory oversight, consumer protection, media, marketing research firms, ICT, etc.) all need to reinforce the change. This can only be sustained if they play those new roles based on their own interests. These accumulated and aligned pressure points are what drive firms to behave in a way that can achieve inclusive growth (defined by changing wealth in the businesses and overall market system—not short-term profits) over time.