ADOPT ADAPT EXPAND RESPOND (AAER)

In a nutshell:
Adopt, Adapt, Expand, Respond (AAER) is a framework for managing and measuring systemic change. It introduces a model of systemic change that starts with piloting (initial proof of concept) and leads to crowding in (spreading to a wider group of actors).

Status:
Optional Tool

The AAER model was developed by the Springfield centre (www.springfieldcentre.com)

Key principles:
AAER is a model of how systemic change can happen, focusing on how actors respond to the behaviours of others. As such it has Systems Thinking at its core.

Preconditions and preparation:
Project staff should read the core AAER guidelines and also at least one case study to familiarise themselves with the framework (case studies can be found at the bottom of this page). AAER can be used in the early stages of intervention design and adaptation, or integrated later once a project is in a more mature stage of development. In either case, AAER works best with strong buy-in from the team leader of the project, so it can be used as an overarching way of strategising the type of systemic change being targeted. This aligns with the three prerequisites of the AAER framework:

1. A programme-wide ambition to develop systems;
2. An understanding of what the systemic constraints are and a solution that responds to them; and
3. A vision of future system functioning focused on behaviour changes by actors with the aligned incentives and capacities to pay/perform those functions in the future.
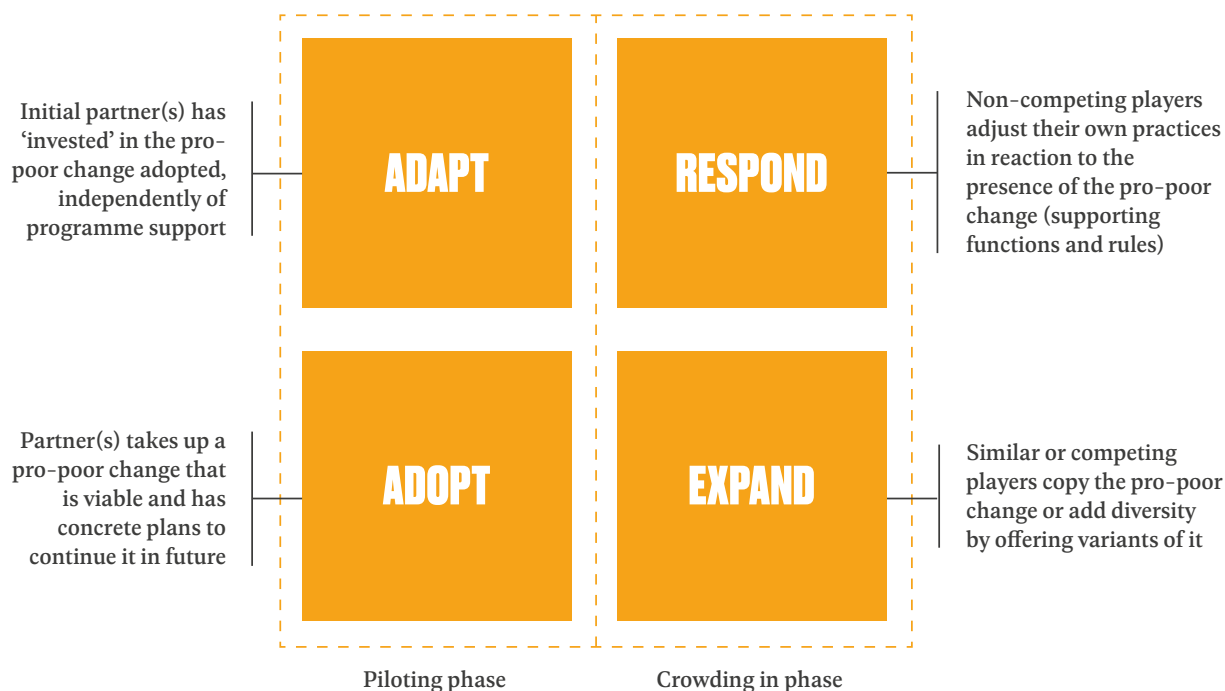
Timeline and resources:
AAER is most appropriate for sustained use and iteration over a longer period of time – months to years if possible. It relies on a strong partnership between project staff and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) staff with a shared vision of the systemic change being targeted, and clear roles on who leads the gathering of data/evidence and who interprets and acts on that information.

Outputs

The initial output would be a projection of the desired future behaviours of key market actors in all four of the quadrants – see figure 1, as an example, below.

This provides a set of pathways and possibilities for behaviour changes which can be stimulated through facilitative actions in the project. Over time, data can be gathered to assess the extent to which change is occurring at different levels. Based on this information, the facilitation activities can, and should, be adjusted to reallocate resources where there is more or less momentum/response. This follows the idea of Self Selection.

Figure 1: AAER matrix

| Initial partner(s) has 'invested' in the pro-poor change adopted, independently of programme support | **ADAPT** | **RESPOND** | Non-competing players adjust their own practices in reaction to the presence of the pro-poor change (supporting functions and rules) |
| Partner(s) takes up a pro-poor change that is viable and has concrete plans to continue it in future | **ADOPT** | **EXPAND** | Similar or competing players copy the pro-poor change or add diversity by offering variants of it |

Piloting phase   Crowding in phase

On the lefthand side, the matrix describes individual market actors which the programme supports directly. This corresponds to the piloting stage of the programme, when new innovations are tested with different market players. Innovations may be products, services, role changes, the uptake of new or changed responsibilities, changes to business models – but always involve a behaviour and practice change. By the end of the piloting phase, behaviour changes should have 'stuck' with the market players that they've been trialled with; i.e. they should be fully owned, overseen, and paid for by the players themselves.

On the righthand side, the matrix refers to competing and non-competing market players that operate in the market system. The ambition of the facilitator should therefore be to encourage a market response to changes in behaviour in the actors they are working with directly, in order to improve the scale, sustainability, and resilience of pro-poor outcomes.

AAER also emphasises facilitation – by constantly asking what would happen if the program left now.

- **Adopt:** If you left now, would partners return to their previous way of working?

- **Adapt:** If you left now, would partners build upon the changes they've adopted without us?

- **Expand:** If you left now, would pro-poor outcomes depend on too few people, firms, or organisations?

- **Respond:** If you left now, would the wider system be supportive of the changes introduced? (allowing them to be upheld, grow, and evolve?)

From a monitoring perspective, it may be useful to develop contextualised qualitative indicators to look for in each quadrant. Some basic guidance on the types of indicators is given below. The main point though, is that each project team needs to develop appropriate indicators based on the configuration of the market system in question and their particular objectives for changing that system.

Adopt

- Partner contribution to pilot (could be financial or non-financial); demonstrating the value seen by the market actor in the change

- Long-term viability/benefit of practice changes – does changing the behaviour actually lead to outcomes the partner cares about (financial outcomes for a private actor; or social/political outcomes for public actor)?;

- Partner satisfaction and intent to continue – learning from pilot, willingness to assume future/recurrent costs;

- Partner ability to continue – organisational and HR resources.

Adapt

- Independent investment – upholding or improving changes without any programme support;

- Target group benefits sustain – beneficiary groups continue to benefit after programme support.

Expand

- Competitors or similar types of organisations 'crowd in' – depending on change, could be through competitive response, key 'apex' organizations (e.g. national associations) or influence (similar organizations copy);

- Ability to accommodate competition or collaboration – system is accommodating to expansion, evidenced through reduced barriers to entry which allow more actors to crowd in; joint ventures that expand benefits.

Respond

- System responsiveness and receptiveness – non-competing actors in supporting systems respond with behaviour changes that enable late adopters to engage with the change;

- Ability of adopters to cope with shocks – withstanding adverse events or negative reactions from players in supporting systems (e.g. the change is able to withstand the shock of disasters, commodity price shocks, subsidising contradictory models, etc.).

References:
Springfield Centre, 2014, *Adopt, Adapt, Expand, Respond: A framework for managing and assessing systemic change*