



Documenting Systems Change through
Effective Collaborative Action

The Early Signals of Change
Self-Assessment Tool



Table of Contents

Early Signals of Change Self-Assessment	1
What is it about?	3
The Early Signals of Change Self-Assessment Tool	5
Facilitation Tips	11



What is it about?

Documenting early signals of systemic change in effective collaborative action initiatives.

This is a qualitative exercise aimed at supporting participants of effective collaborative action initiatives to identify and track early signals of change related to their individual and collective journey of transformation. It is not an exhaustive list of indicators. While there are many potential “signals of change”, we are focusing on the ones where we want to put stronger attention - where we think one small thing can have a big impact (e.g. changing the way we listen).

Signals of change are grouped in the following 10 key principles that reflect the building blocks and essential practices of effective collaboration action:

1. Build a safe collective space - *building trusted relationships*
2. Understand the system - *embracing complexity and aligning around a powerful shared intent*
3. Build systems leadership capacity - *developing the necessary skills and competencies to drive system change*
4. Include and work with power - *understanding and shifting power dynamics*
5. Work through conflict - *creating spaces for divergence*
6. Collaborative actions and investment - *experimenting our way forward together and demonstrating value*
7. Participatory learning - *continuously reflecting and adapting*
8. Communicate effectively - *building a common and compelling narrative*
9. Gender equality - *equal rights, resources, and opportunities*
10. Institutionalize the new - *sustaining long-term outcomes*

It is recommended to complement the “Early Signals of Change Self-Assessment” with the “Signals of Change Harvesting”, an exercise based on outcome harvesting and aimed at capturing emerging and more advanced signals of change, including at organizational and system level. Please get in touch with your UNDP Green Commodities Programme (GCP) counterpart, or write to methodology.feedback@undp.org for more information on the “Signals of Change Harvesting” exercise.

Why?

To encourage experiential learning and support adaptive management in effective collaborative action initiatives, through engaging participants in a periodical assessment of progress and change, aimed at fostering group reflection and planning, informing capacity building needs, and driving group innovation.

Who is it for?

Participants of effective collaborative action initiatives and Backbone Support Teams, to inform co-creation and adaptation to existing plans.

When?

At a minimum, at the start (after a few kickoff sessions), mid-point and end of the initiative. Ideally, with a fixed cadence throughout the lifecycle of the initiative, depending on the frequency at which participants meet (e.g. every 6 months, if participants meet at least monthly). The assessment can also be planned and effectively used at key decision-making points or other significant junctures in the initiative.



How?

Group self-assessment engaging all participants of a certain effective collaborative action initiative.

Thinking about their engagement with the initiative, each participant can select in the tool whether s/he thinks that the limiting condition and/or any of the five early signals of change apply for each principle. It is important to note that participants can select more than one early signal of change for each principle. Additionally, participants can also write their own emerging signal/s of change, if they find the proposed selection incomplete.

After each participant has completed their individual assessment, the results should be aggregated and used to inform a sensemaking session aimed at unpacking the reasons why change is or is not materializing (and is there agreement among participants on whether change is materializing and where?), and inspire co-creation and planning of the continuation of the journey.

The process of completion, aggregation and reflection on the results of the self-assessment should be facilitated through expert facilitation and duly planned by the Backbone Support team. The “facilitation tips” section further down in this document provides important inputs. The monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) unit of the UNDP Green Commodities Programme can also provide advice on how to plan the assessment properly.



The Early Signals of Change Self-Assessment Tool

Handout for individual voting

Select the actor that you represent:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Instructions: For the voting, tick the small boxes within the descriptions. For each of the 10 principles, you can select the limiting condition and/or any of the five early signals of change. Additionally, in the last row, you can also write your own emerging signal/s of change if you find the proposed selection incomplete.



KEY PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATIVE ACTION	LIMITING CONDITIONS <i>What gets in the way of effective collaboration</i>	EARLY SIGNALS OF CHANGE					YOUR EMERGING SIGNALS OF CHANGE
<p>1. BUILDING A SAFE COLLECTIVE SPACE</p> <p><i>Building trusted relationships</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Conversations between stakeholders are mostly focused on technical content. Building trust and relationship are neglected resulting in limited personal connections among stakeholders.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Effective tools such as <i>check-ins, storytelling, mindfulness, generative listening and conversation practices</i> are being used to better connect stakeholders within themselves and to each other.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Backbone support team designs and facilitates interventions in ways that encourage stakeholders to learn and practice systems thinking, collaboration and trust.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders feel in a safe space that cultivates trust and relationships and have personal connections to one another. They can say what they really think and voice significant concerns.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders directly and explicitly welcome and encourage different voices, opinions and perspectives to the table; show a sustained capacity to listen, reflect and take in perspectives different than their own, to the extent of even being able to change their own views and opinions.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders support each other outside of formal dialogue events, including through establishing new collaborations and/or partnerships.</p>	
<p>2. UNDERSTANDING THE SYSTEM</p> <p><i>Embracing complexity and aligning around a powerful shared intent</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Dialogue is focused mostly on the parts of the system, such as sharing information on individual initiatives, or discussing symptoms rather than underlying structural problems. Oversimplification of issues and failure to identify interconnections.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders actively share their knowledge, experience and welcome other stakeholders' inputs to collectively understand the system they are part of and are trying to change through practices such as (but not limited to) systems mapping, learning/sensing journeys, scenario planning, iceberg model, etc.)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> There is evidence of breakthrough in how the system is understood by stakeholders. New insights emerge, and leverage points (key elements to work on that can produce significant impact) are identified.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders recognise that no single entity has authority over or the capacity to change the entire system. Collaboration between stakeholders is strengthened by a shared intention to work together.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders collectively build (co-create) a clear and powerful shared vision of success, which provides energy and purpose to collaborate across boundaries, take risk and act beyond their individual scope of direct influence.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Shared solutions with potential for system change are proposed as a result of sustained collaboration.</p>	



<p>3. BUILDING SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP CAPACITY</p> <p><i>Developing the necessary skills and competencies to drive system change</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> There are no capacity building activities in place to support stakeholders in developing their ability to facilitate/drive system change. Leadership is happening in institutional and/or initiative silos. Low appetite for collaboration. Personal development/individual change is neglected.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> There is an intentional, explicit commitment to devote time and financial resources to build leadership capacity of stakeholders to facilitate/drive systems change.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> A comprehensive and tailored leadership skill building/learning plan exists and is implemented to support stakeholders in their journey.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders are showing initial evidence of applying the learnings from the leadership skill building, including self-reflection on their own strengths and opportunities for further improvement and starting to focus on the 'bigger picture' and the interconnections of the system rather than the separate parts</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders are actively and regularly displaying systems leadership capacities such as, but not limited to, showing self-awareness, authentic openness and curiosity about other stakeholders' points of view, genuine interest in driving collective action beyond their immediate sphere of influence</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders have incorporated the practice and ongoing development of systems leadership capacities such as (but not limited to) self-awareness, working with the whole system, facilitating trust and collaboration as a new way of working.</p>	
<p>4. INCLUSION AND WORKING WITH POWER</p> <p><i>Understanding and shifting power dynamics</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> A few key actors drive the process. Marginalised groups are not represented (may not have the opportunity, permission, skill, language, or confidence to participate). Power is not discussed or analysed.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> A thorough mapping exercise endorsed by early-stage actors reveals all stakeholders, their interests and positions in the system. Particular attention is being paid to peripheral voices, who is not at the table and why.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders are given the tools to jointly explore different forms of power and what to do about it.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Power dynamics are identified and named. Actions are taken to shift the power imbalance and build more equitable relations (for example through creating inclusive decision-making rules).</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Better/different working relations between the marginalised groups and those who have more power are emerging. If needed, strategies for change are developed to support marginalised group and reflected in collaborative actions.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> All stakeholders now have a voice and a sit at the table. Whenever power imbalances emerge, stakeholders feel confident and safe to voice these out and take corrective action.</p>	



<p>5. WORKING THROUGH CONFLICT</p> <p><i>Creating spaces for divergence</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Significant and sensitive issues are denied and avoided. Unresolved conflict is present and taints the relations between stakeholders and the work Too much emphasis on the harmony of the group – too diplomatic yet superficial/limited impact.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Spaces are created for conversations about divergence and the “Elephant in the room” so these topics are not ignored and instead proactively explored for greater understanding. The backbone team has the confidence and skill to do this.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders are given the tools to address conflict efficiently by looking at underlying causes and how to address them.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Solutions to prevent or resolve existing conflict are starting to emerge.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Conflict is addressed and actively worked through. Compromises are being made. Deals are agreed that are clear, acceptable and attractive to each negotiating party.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> A safe space for people to be honest about their beliefs, daring to disagree and shifting their perspective is established for all stakeholders. This leads to increased collaboration amongst previously distanced parties.</p>	
<p>6. COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS AND INVESTMENT</p> <p><i>Experimenting our way forward together and demonstrating value</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Zero or fragmented collaborative actions. Stakeholders are working in silos. No resources available for prototyping/experimenting together. Too many commitments, studies or dialogues but not enough action (Analysis paralysis).</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders start to connect with each other and show a strong intention to collaborate. The group begins to use tools, resources and devote time to test multiple possibilities, adapt and learn rather than focusing on one optimum solution /plan.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration among stakeholders is taking place - some collaborative groups are operational and working with pre-identified, key priorities with potential for significant impact.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> A series of actions are developed including all relevant voices and taken forward collaboratively by group/s of stakeholders.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders can see the benefits of collaborating with each other as they achieve 'quick wins' and positive impact on some dimensions of the initiative/platform/dialogue</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Successful collaborative prototypes are going into full implementation and are resourced adequately.</p>	



<p>7. PARTICIPATORY LEARNING</p> <p><i>Continuously reflecting and adapting</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Learning is not thought of, planned or actively discussed. Learning is not captured and/or shared with stakeholders.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Some reflection on the process (e.g. what works, does not work) is captured through initial discussions, interviews or surveys and shared with the group.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> A process is in place to consistently and regularly check learning and document results.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> A safe space has been built to talk about mistakes and failures so that learning can occur. The backbone team encourages this culture by role modelling it.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Commitments, actions, and processes are regularly adapted due to collective knowledge, learning, changing circumstances and stakeholders providing feedback to each other.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders identify a strong learning culture as one of the key success factors for the process.</p>	
<p>8. COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY</p> <p><i>Building a common and compelling narrative</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders are not clear about their participation and roles in the process; and/or the vision, objectives and activities of the process they are participating in. Little buy in on the business case for participation. Communication work is underresourced as not seen as strategic.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> An external communication strategy is in place and shared with all stakeholders – Initial communication tools are created to build trust, commitment and collaboration (e.g website, newsletter, personal storytelling, amplifying messages from each other).</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> A multistakeholder Communication working group is active to develop key messages collectively, support amplifying each other voices, drive progress and maintain momentum.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Narratives used in meetings by stakeholders are converging and reflect a shared understanding of the key aspects of the process (e.g. “we have diverse needs, interests and priorities but we’re collectively committed to this powerful shared intent”).</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Results and learning from collaborative action/s are shared transparently to all with humility (sharing credit for success with others) and vulnerability (openly sharing mistakes made, challenges, learning from failure, etc.).</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Champions are taking the lead in sharing the collective narrative externally.</p>	



<p>9. GENDER EQUALITY</p> <p>Equal rights, resources and opportunities</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Significant under-representation of women on platform. Gender issues are not/minimally considered and discussed. Patriarchal practices. Lack of disaggregated data.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> A psychologically safe space has been built so that all genders feel comfortable expressing their opinion and know that it will be valued. Participants reflect on gender inequalities.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> People are given the tools and safety to call out inappropriate behaviour when they see it. Check-ins are done proactively in joint events to make sure this is the case</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Women are represented at all levels and targets are put in place to increase the participation and retention of women at all levels.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> The group recognises and embraces the value of diversity of thoughts – men in the group don't feel discriminated against due to increased participation of women.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative actions integrating gender equality perspectives are implemented. Male allies in the group are championing gender equality.</p>	
<p>10. INSTITUTIONALISING THE NEW</p> <p><i>Sustaining long-term outcomes</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Activities and backbone support team are funded by one project. Political commitments to dialogue and collaboration routinely perish at the change of government.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Partner institutions take leadership in managing dialogue activities and securing funding from public and private sources for their continued operations.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Multi-stakeholder dialogue and collaboration broadly recognized by different stakeholder group/s as a priority, independent of political rivalries.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Permanent institutional arrangement in place with funding streams to sustain dialogue and collaborative actions.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> New institutional structure in place for scaling up activities.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders are widening the focus of implementation in terms of sectors, partners, location, etc.</p>	



Facilitation Tips

This section outlines some facilitation tips for the recommended implementation in-person of the Early Signals of Change Self-Assessment, based on the experience of the UNDP Green Commodities Programme. Adjustments for virtual and/or hybrid implementation are presented in boxes under each step.

1. Planning and preparations

The Early Signals of Change Self-Assessment should be completed during a regular or ad hoc meeting session of any effective collaborative action initiative. It is important that the initiative coordinator/s schedule/s adequate time for the participants to familiarise with, and complete the assessment, especially if it is their first time. Hence, it is recommended to divide the exercise over a min. of 2 meetings, considering the preparation time needed for stakeholders to review the tool (requests for clarifications should be addressed) before the assessment.

Virtual Adjustments

The **Miro version of the Early Signals of Change Self-Assessment Tool** should be used and shared with all participants. It is recommended that the same version (without editing or commenting access) is already shared with participants ahead of the session/s, so that they can start familiarizing with the content. Participants need to be able to anonymously select the limiting condition (if applicable), up to five signals of change and/or write their own signal/s of change, for each of the 10 principles.

Participants need to be given editing access as the voting is conducted by moving shapes to the different criteria and they also need to be able to write on the sticky notes so that they can add their own signals of change if they wish to.

Before the day/s of the assessment, the facilitator/s should print enough handouts of the Early Signals of Change Self-Assessment Tool. Prior to printing them, the facilitator/s should define the stakeholder groups ahead of the meeting (private sector, smallholder farmer, academia, NGO, government, etc. as applicable), so that participants can select which one they represent, instead of their personal names. Currently, the handout proposes eight options, including “other.” The facilitator/s should add as many options as necessary. With the handouts, each participant can anonymously select the limiting condition (if applicable), up to five signals of change and/or write their own signals of change, for each of the 10 principles. The facilitator/s should also print the Tool in a large format to aggregate and present the results of the assessment to the group.



2. Assessment and aggregation of answers

On the day/s of the assessment, the facilitator/s should hand out copies of the Early Signals of Change Self-Assessment Tool, one for each participant, so that they can complete the assessment individually. As anticipated, participants should write on their paper copies the stakeholder group that they represent instead of their personal names, to ensure anonymity. Once each participant has a handout of the Tool, the facilitator/s should explain clearly the purpose of this exercise. Then, participants should be given enough time to review and understand the limiting condition and early signals of change for each principle; it is suggested to limit the assessment to a max. of 5 key principles per session, to make sure that enough time is dedicated to review and discussion. Any requests for clarifications on the terminology or the exercise should be addressed by the facilitator/s at this stage.

For each principle, participants can select the limiting condition (if applicable), as many signals of change as applicable and/or write their own Emerging Signals as to represent their current experience in the most accurate way.

It is important to make clear to participants that they are absolutely not expected to select just one of the boxes. Participants have the option to select the limiting condition and/or one or more early signals and/or write down their own Emerging Signal. If participants want to leave the principle in blank, they also have the option to do so. They should only select the limiting condition, any of the five signals of change and/or write their Emerging Signals if they feel that they are representative of the state of collaboration in their cohort. The hypothesis is that only a few boxes will be selected at early stages of the initiative, while more signal will be picked and/or proposed in future assessments. Participants can select all the boxes if they find this relevant, but they should be instructed to select only those that they deem most relevant to their experience.

As participants terminate to complete the assessment, answers should be aggregated by the facilitator/s on the large printout, using different colors (or other notation) for each group of stakeholders if the situation allows it. The aggregate version should then be presented to the participants, highlighting the number of votes for each box, with the relevant disaggregation by stakeholder group. As for the Emerging Signals of Change, the Backbone Support Team can select which ones will be shown to the cohort if not all can be included.

Virtual Adjustments

A similar process to the above should be followed in the case of a virtual dialogue, and the [Miro version of the Early Signals of Change Self-Assessment Tool](#) will



allow for seamless aggregation of the individual assessments. Participants will use pins (of the color and shape of the stakeholder group they represent) to select any applicable limiting conditions and up to five early signals for each principle, and sticky notes (also of the stakeholder group that they represent) to write any emerging signals independently and anonymously. The aggregated version should be then presented to all participants. The same principles and rules apply as per the assessment in person.

(Optional) Besides showing the results with a disaggregation per stakeholder group, they can also be disaggregated per gender, with the due preparations. Adding a gender disaggregation to the results provides granularity to the data and will allow to find differences in perceptions between genders. For that, participants need to indicate their gender alongside the stakeholder they represent. It is suggested to allow participants to indicate “Prefer not to say” if they wish to.

3. Group reflection/sensemaking

Once the assessment is completed, the facilitation team can contact the MEL unit at the Green Commodities Programme, who in turn can support with the analysis of the results and provide a report that can be shared back with the participants.

When the results are presented to the group (or during the presentation), the facilitator/s should lead a sensemaking discussion in plenary or smaller groups. This is a critical time of the process, as it offers the group an important opportunity for reflection, learning and the common crafting of potential paths for improvement. The discussion should be as open and flowing as possible. The following questions can help the group get started:

- Looking at the aggregate results, what do you observe? Do you agree with the emerging picture? Is it representative, for you, of the limiting conditions and early signals of change in this cohort?
- How is it similar/different from what you selected? / what do you find the most surprising from the final results? / why do you think participants selected answers different than yours? / are there any particular conclusions that you would like to share with the group?
- After having had a chance to engage in this exercise, which are – in your opinion – the most important principles to be prioritized going forward? Any particular “early signals of change” that you find critical to receive more votes in the next round? Why?
- In the case of a Limiting Condition having received many votes, ask: Why do you think this received so many votes? What could you do, as individuals and as a group, to overcome this obstacle?



(Optional) if relevant, after the discussion, participants could be given a chance to review and adjust their scorings.

The facilitator/s should log inputs and any agreed action points from the discussion as per point 3 together with the final table of aggregated results.

This information can also be shared with other relevant parties connected to the initiative (e.g., any leading organization and its funders) and the UNDP Green Commodities Programme, and/or used to communicate results related to systems change to wider audience.



U	N
D	P

GREEN
COMMODITIES
PROGRAMME