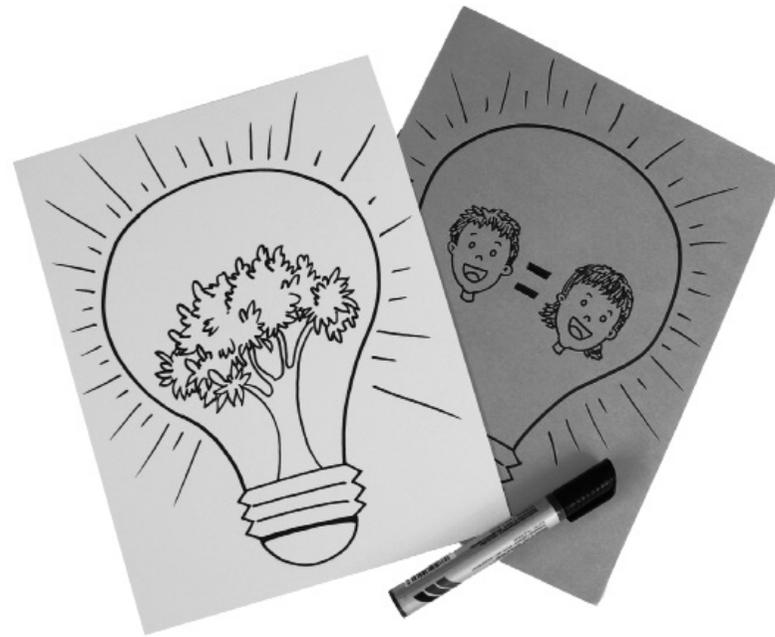


# Climate Action

Identifying and outlining our first ideas



*Systemways.*

## Who searches... finds here

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## We would like to introduce you to...

With this tool we will introduce you in a very practical and concrete way to draft a very first idea about an action, initiative, prototype or project you would like to design and implement.

## Outlining your climate action idea

### What do we want to achieve with this step?

With the outline of your idea, you may...

- ensure that the climate action idea is geared towards the objectives of sustainable development, as well as your personal and/or collective vision,
- identify in a preliminary way the validity of the theme, the scope of action and influence, the social actors and the territorial delimitation of the idea you have to address the prioritized problem, for example, climate justice in your country or municipality;
- document your initial idea which helps you to deepen your analysis in a more intentional and effective way.

### Outputs

- Idea outlining

### Content

- The theme or field of work
- The problem or situation we want to change
- Change agents and social actors
- The articulation of the idea with SDGs and/or the strategic plan of your group or organization
- The scope of action and area of influence

## Our starting point



## The idea



*Great ideas are those of which the only thing that surprises us is that we have not thought of them before.*

Noel Clarasó (1905-1985),  
Spanish writer

Before embarking on the path, it is essential that we identify, reflect on and outline a preliminary definition of the key aspects of the sustainable development project we want to design and implement:

- The topic or field of work
- The problem or situation we want to change
- The change agents and social actors related to the sustainable development topic
- The articulation of the project with our strategic plan
- The scope of action
- The scope of influence

The following sections will provide us with a short description about some of these key aspects.

## The topic or field of work

Each organisation has determined since its foundation at least some key theme or disciplinary field on which it bases its intervention strategies to achieve the proposed changes at the level of the pathway to vision and sustainability. The topic(s) selected are often related to the professional work of the founders or to a specific need of this particular historical moment and context.

As the organisation grows, the range of prioritised themes often expands; sometimes it even becomes too dispersed and the organisation has to refocus on 2 or 3 key strategic themes. The agenda of cooperation agencies also strongly influences the selection of themes by local organisations.

Generally, as part of its strategic planning, the organisation has discussed its position in relation to each prioritised theme. If this is not the case, it is a good time to do so.

Each strategic theme has a series of sub-themes which are generally made more concrete at the level of each project. For example, the environment theme can be sub-divided into different sub-themes:

### Environment:

- Climate change
- Organic farming
- Biodiversity
- Environmental education
- Waste management
- Food sovereignty and security
- Water basin management
- Sustainable tourism, etc.



At this moment, our worldwide common Agenda 2030 provides us with a framework to align our contributions regardless of where we are working from: from the so-called Global South or Global North; from public institutions, civil society or private economic sector.

As a starting point, it might be very useful to identify one of the **17 Sustainable Development Goals** as a theme or field of work. One SDG could be an entry point for our project, but at the same time we could work on other goals that are related to the one we selected or, at least, we need to be aware about the mutual influences.

It is also key to integrate SDG 16 "Peace, justice and strong institutions" and SDG 17 "Partnerships for the goals" in our project design. The previous 15 SDGs will only be achieved, if we advance towards peaceful and just societies with strong institutions; and that for partnerships at all levels and between all sectors are required.



Graph: United Nations (2019)

Each SDG is very broad and complex. Thus, we need to focus on one or a few more specific targets and indicators if we already have sufficient information and knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

For example, we want to work on the issue of responsible production and consumption and more specifically on food waste<sup>2</sup>:

SDG 12:	Responsible consumption and production
Goal:	Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns
Target:	By 2030, halve global per capita food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses in production and distribution chains, including post-harvest losses
Indicator:	Global food loss index

If we use the theme, in this case a sustainable development goal as an entry point, then you can identify which concrete problems you want to concentrate on. For example, waste due to poor post-harvest handling or processing, waste in a specific industry or at the consumer level.

If we already have identified a problem, gap or conflict we want to address, we can connect it with one of the SDGs.

Both entry points, the topic or the problem, are interrelated.

<sup>1</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>2</sup> More specific information about the global food loss index here: <http://www.fao.org/3/CA2640EN/ca2640en.pdf>

## The problem

The selection of the topic is closely linked to the problem to whose solution the project is intended to contribute. As all changes depend on the people affected and/or involved in a problem, we will take a look at the definition of the problem from systemic psychology.

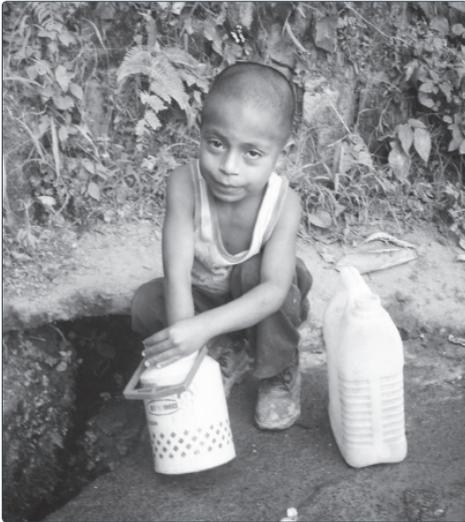
### What is a problem from a systemic perspective?<sup>3</sup>

"A problem is something that **someone** considers, on the one hand, as an **unwanted state that requires a change** and, on the other hand, as **a state that in principle is modifiable.**" (von Schlippe et al, 2003)

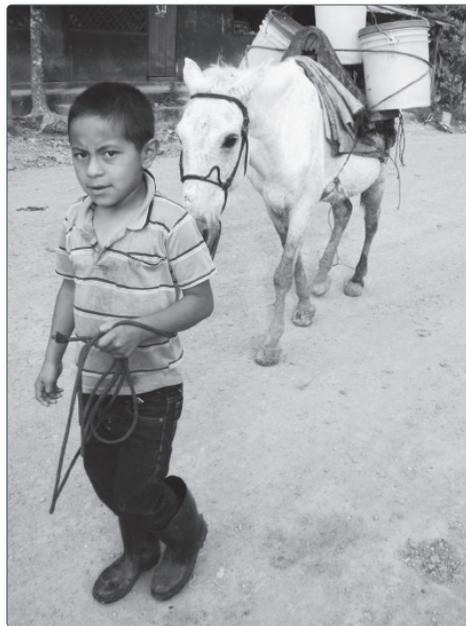
The very elements of this definition imply possible ways of solution:

- A state
- Someone... the drivers, promoters and change agents of the project
- Something unwanted or undesired, something that requires a change, what we want to change
- Something that can be modified

Next, we will find the definition of each element and a concrete example from our work with communities: children carrying contaminated water.



Children carrying contaminated water



<sup>3</sup> The theoretical inputs were adapted from: von Schlippe, Arist; Schweizer, Jochen. *Manual de terapia y asesoría sistémicas*. Herder. Germany. 2003

## A state

"The simple fact that **a problem is seen by a number of people as a state** is already an important selection. Of many simultaneous processes, one or more become the focus of attention and are given a name. But this selection is not based on the fact that a situation only occurs once. It takes a lot of actions and communications expressed by different people as 'always the same' or 'this doesn't change' to identify what is finally designated as 'state' or 'problem'." (von Schlippe et al, 2003).

Since ages, children have been pulling and carrying water, often walking long distances and exposed to diverse risks. The water may come also from sources contaminated by faeces and agrochemicals that might affect their own health. And often these children drop school because they do not have enough time to do their home work.

For a long time, this state might not even have been observed or simply seen as normal without thinking about it. Only if a significant number of people start paying attention to this situation that happens frequently including this issue in their daily conversations or even undertake some actions, it will be identified as a 'state' or 'problem'.

The challenge that we as members of social movements, NGOs or public institutions often face is that based on our access to information and knowledge, we already identified this state or problem in the communities, but for the community members it still has not been 'selected' or identified as a problem.

So, when we work with a very participatory approach based on what the community expressed as their needs, their priorities may not fit with our priority list of problems. This leads us to the next element.

### Someone... the drivers, promoters and change agents of the project

"One or more **observers** are always **required to discover and describe a condition**. Observers may agree or argue strongly about whether something is a problem and where the problem 'really' lies." (von Schlippe et al, 2003)

In the case of sustainable development projects, observers could be members of the organisation or social movement, the project design team, community leaders, teachers, a state institution, a group of researchers or scientists, donors and the parents and children themselves.

Crucial questions are: **Who is observing the problem? With what glasses?**

- If we look at it from the perspective of child rights advocates, we will surely argue that the problem is the exploitation of working children.
- If we observe it through the lens of ecological child rights advocates, we would say that their right to safe and quality water is being violated.

- If we see it through the glasses of the Ministry of Health, we would say that the water needs to be decontaminated to reduce the rate of diarrhoea.
- If we observe it from the teacher's perspective, we would say that a lot of students do not finish the school year, because their parents overload them with domestic tasks and care work.
- If we see him from his father's point of view, we might say that it is good like that, because "it has always been like that in our community and at least he doesn't laze around, he helps around the house".
- If we observe it from the children's eyes, it also may vary. A boy might see it as a great opportunity meet friends at the river and go to swim. A girl might say that she feels afraid when men are following her on her pathway to the river.

Who is right? What will be our priority perspective?

How can we find a common perspective?

What could be our shared entry point to the problem?

What can we do if the parents do not see this as a problem, but rather as a solution for another problem (avoiding laziness)?

To get a better understanding of the problem, and thus, a more appropriated identification of possible solutions, we need to observe the state or problem from different perspectives, even those we do not like. So, let us start using different types of glasses.

### Something unwanted, something that requires a change, what we want to change

**"At least some observers describe the state as undesirable, requiring change. The state is seen as 'not right' and therein lies the reason for changing it or requiring someone to change it. In that sense, it is useful to distinguish between 'problem' and 'suffering'. Suffering only becomes a problem when the person who suffers in a subjective way, communicates it to another person - or the latter assumes that the former suffers. For example, if someone says they are suffering and someone else replies, 'You're imagining it,' then neither a problematic system nor a help system develops, unless there is another person who reacts linguistically to this fact and the problematic part of it: 'Someone is suffering and no one is helping them.'** (Loth 1994, Anderson and Goolishian 1990)." (von Schlippe et al, 2003)

Above we already have seen that several observers described the state as undesirable advocating for change. That means there is a **"helping system"** ready to start an intervention.

If the girls say that they suffer because they are afraid to go to the river because they are exposed to harassment or rape, then we have a **"problematic system"**

Even if the parents and community leaders ignore this suffering expressed by the girls, *'You're imagining it'* there is a need to intervene, because *'the girls are suffering and no one is helping them.'*

But now we have another problem, the boys do not suffer from this state, they enjoy going to pull and carry water because it is a chance for them to take a break and have some fun with other friends. Does this mean we should not intervene? No. It is important to intervene because, for example, as a public institution, we even have the duty to take care of all citizens and especially children. The huge challenge for us will be, which interventions should be undertaken.

We already have seen that one problem may be seen from very different perspectives and quickly, it might become very complex, and we are only talking about children pulling and carrying water to their home. That means also we need to focus. Often the "helper systems" want to fix all the problems at once and at the end, nothing is getting fixed and even new problems might be created.

- What part of the observed state do we want to change?  
What is the undesirable situation?

If we decide to go in for children's ecological rights, then we can focus on the aspect of access to and availability of quality water at the household level.

If we approach the issue as Health Ministry, we are focussing on how to decontaminate the water.

As teachers, we would focus on parents' responsibility to send children to school.

### Something can be modified

"The state is regarded as something that is in principle **modifiable**, i.e. at least **some of the people involved in the problem process ("members") define it as modifiable**. Problems differ from "fate", "bad luck" or "tragedy" in that at least one person believes that some participant in the problematic system (usually another...) can end the unwanted state. " (von Schlippe et al, 2003)

The situation of children pulling and carrying contaminated water can be modified. This is a problem and not a fate or an issue of destiny because they were born in a poor family and community. It only requires that some participant of the problematic system is convinced about the possibility of change.

For example:

- A community leader thinks that it is possible to build a water system of their own accord and with their own resources or to demand that state institutions build the system.
- A public employee is convinced about the possibility to reduce water contamination by carrying out quality control, and restricting the use of agrochemicals at a certain distance from the water source. They can raise awareness among producers not to continue using chemicals....

What will be our entry point to the problem? Which aspect can be modified?

What is easier to modify? What is more difficult?

## A problem from a global and science-based systemic perspective

The interaction of these four factors constitutes what is ultimately defined by von Schlippe et al as a problem: "A problem is something that **someone** considers, on the one hand, as an **unwanted state that requires a change** and, on the other hand, as **a state that in principle is modifiable.**" Now, we need a very good and solid understanding of this problem.

Nowadays, we count on very solid scientific sources that describe the state of socio-ecological systems in a very precise, well-founded and evidence-based way.

A fundamental part of the process of facilitating, accompanying and advising on sustainable development actions, whether in the personal, organizational, community or societal dimension, consists of identifying the people and communications that participate in the appearance of the "problem state" and including them in the solution process.

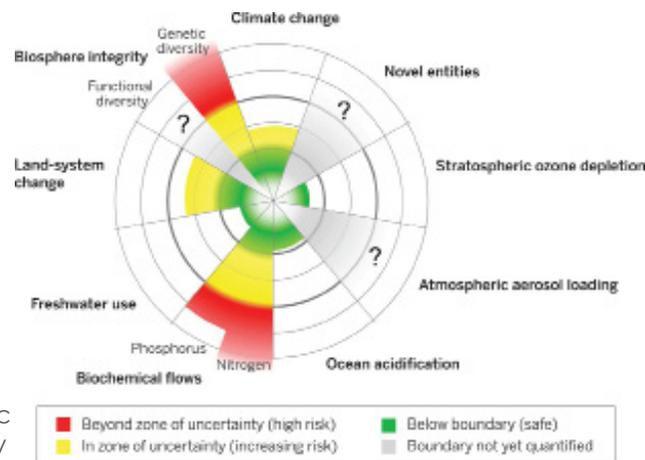
At the same time we need to encourage the combination of the perception of the problem and its scientific description. Both perspectives are key to having a more complete view of the problem.

Returning to our example, how this very specific problem for millions of children around the world is being approached from a broader scientific perspective?

That for, we can look at Kate Raworth's doughnut<sup>4</sup> that combines the **9 planetary boundaries**<sup>5</sup> that should not be crossed and **12 dimensions of our social foundation** that are derived from the SDGs and to which all human beings should have access to.

The planetary boundaries represent our ecological ceiling and should not be overshoot.

Although at the global level of the 9 planetary boundaries fresh water withdrawal has not yet crossed the line, several projections indicate that due to climate change and the inter-action between earth-pressures systems, in some geographic areas the situation is already very critical and/or will become so in a short term.



Graph: Stockholm Resilience Centre (2015)

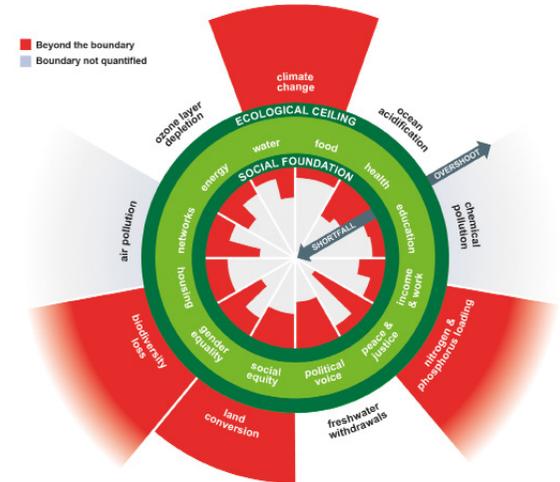
4 Raworth, Kate. *Doughnut Economics*. 2017.

5 <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>

Regarding the social foundation, Kate Raworth identified 12 dimensions:

1. Food
2. Health
3. Education
4. Income and work
5. Water and sanitation
6. Energy
7. Networks
8. Housing
9. Gender equality
10. Social equity
11. Political voice
12. Peace and justice

The red areas in the centre of the doughnut represent the people who still do not have access to the corresponding dimensions.



Graph: Kate Raworth (2017)

Behind these dimensions, human needs are reflected. When we analyse the problem to whose solution we want to contribute, it is very important to identify the **needs of each change agent involved from their perspective**. To this end, there are different theories on this subject, including the most widely recognised:

- Maslow's pyramid of needs: physiology, security, affiliation, recognition, self-realisation and some authors have added transcendence to it.
- The needs in the framework of Max Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication: security, meaning, freedom, development, subsistence, celebration, identity, relational needs and recreation.
- Max Neef's matrix of needs and satisfiers: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity and freedom. (see next page)

Returning to our example, regarding the **basic need for access to water**, the United Nations reports the following: "In 2017, 3 billion persons lacked soap and water at home. In 2016, 47 per cent of schools worldwide lacked hand-washing facilities with available soap and water, and 40 per cent of health-care facilities were not equipped to practise hand hygiene at points of care."<sup>6</sup>

Although this corresponds to a physiological need for subsistence, it is interrelated with the interaction of planetary boundaries and the scope of other dimensions of the social foundation such as food, health, gender equality, social equity, political voice, as well as peace and justice, among others.

6 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal6>

**Matrix of needs and satisfiers** (Manfred Max-Neef. 1991)

Needs according to axiological categories	Needs according to existential categories			
	Being (personal or collective attributes)	Having (institutions, laws, norms, methods, tools and mean)	Doing (personal or collective actions)	Interacting (spaces or atmosphere, vital support)
<b>Subsistence</b>	(1) Physical health, mental health, equilibrium, sense of humour, adaptability	(2) Food, shelter, work	(3) Feed, procreate, rest, work	(4) Living environment, social setting
<b>Protection</b>	(5) Care, adaptability, equilibrium, autonomy, solidarity	(6) Insurance systems, savings, social security, health systems, rights, family, work	(7) Cooperate, prevent, plan, take care of, cure, help	(8) Living space, social environment, dwelling
<b>Affection</b>	(9) Self-esteem, solidarity, respect, tolerance, generosity, receptiveness, passion, determination, sensuality, sense of humour.	(10) Friendships, family, partnerships, relationships with nature (pets, plants, garden, forest...)	(11) Make love, caress, express emotions, share, take care of, cultivate, appreciate	(12) Privacy, intimacy, home, space of togetherness
<b>Understanding</b>	(13) Critical conscience, receptiveness, curiosity, astonishment, discipline, intuition, rationality	(14) Literature, teachers, method, educational policies, communication policies	(15) Investigate, study, experiment, educate, analyse, interpret, meditate,	(16) Settings of formative interaction, schools, universities, academies, groups, communities, family
<b>Participation</b>	(17) Adaptability, receptiveness, solidarity, willingness, determination, conviction, dedication, respect, passion, sense of humour	(18) Rights, responsibilities, duties, privileges, work	(19) Become affiliated, cooperate, propose, share, dissent, obey, interact, agree on, express opinions	(20) Settings of participative interaction, parties, associations, churches, communities, neighbourhoods, family
<b>Idleness</b>	(21) Curiosity, receptivity, imagination, recklessness, sense of humour, tranquillity, sensuality	(22) Games, spectacles, clubs, parties, calm, peace of mind	(23) Daydream, brood, dream, recall old times, give way to fantasies, remember, relax, have fun, play	(24) Privacy, intimacy, spaces of closeness, free time, surroundings, landscapes
<b>Creation</b>	(25) Passion, determination, intuition, imagination, boldness, rationality, autonomy, Pasión, voluntad, intuición, imaginación, audacia, racionalidad, autonomía, inventiveness, curiosity	(26) Abilities, skills, method, work	(27) Work, invent, build, devise, design, compose, interpret	(28) Productive and feedback settings, workshops, cultural groups, audiences, spaces for expression, temporal freedom
<b>Identity</b>	(29) Sense of belonging, consistency, coherence, differentiation, self-esteem, assertiveness	(30) Symbols, language, religion, habits, customs, reference groups, sexuality, values, norms, historical memory, work	(31) Commit oneself, integrate oneself confront, decide on, get to know oneself, recognize oneself, actualize oneself, grow	(32) Social rhythms, everyday settings, settings which one belongs to, maturation stages
<b>Freedom</b>	(33) Autonomy, self-esteem, determination, passion, assertiveness, open-mindedness, boldness, rebelliousness, tolerance	(34) Equal rights	(35) Dissent, choose, be different from, run risks, develop awareness, commit oneself, disobey	(36) Temporal/spatial plasticity

## Scope of action and influence

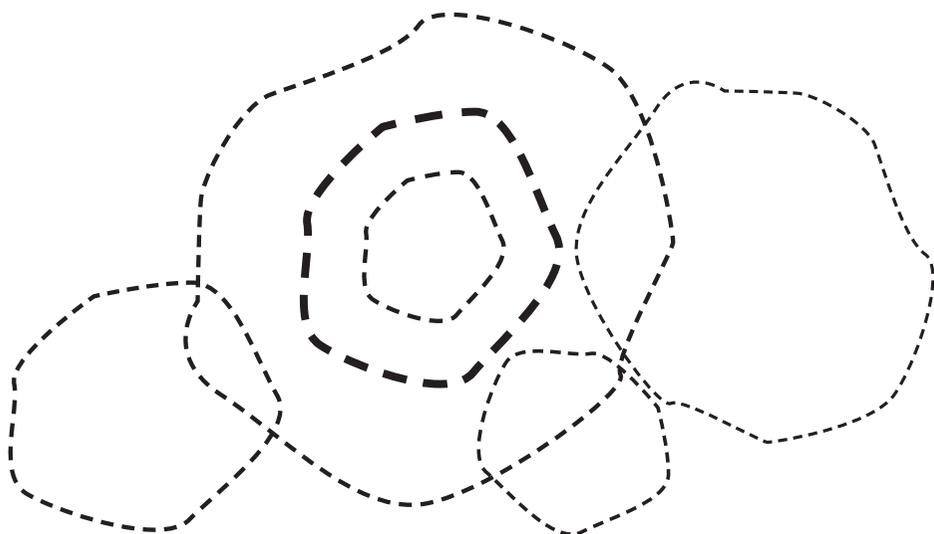
### Spatial levels, systems and sub-systems

Although it sounds like other galaxies, we are talking about very specific spaces.

The spatial levels are “spaces” or systems, which can generally be defined geographically, but also in terms of a specific social-ecological system, depending on how we - the observers - delimit the system or systems and sub-systems where we intend to intervene.

In these spaces and systems there are many parallel, simultaneous, and at the same time interconnected processes that are relevant to sustainability.

A project can aim to generate change at different spatial levels, systems and sub-systems.



Each spatial level, system or sub-system includes social actors and change agents who decide on particular aspects of sustainability by influencing the processes that occur in the system to which they belong and in other systems and sub-systems with which they interact.

This is why it is key that from the outset we identify all the social actors and define their level of participation throughout the project cycle.

The spatial levels can be political - administrative, ecological, social, cultural, etc. or a combination of the above, depending on what suits the project and above all what is required to contribute to the expected changes.

For example, we can determine as a basic spatial level the productive unit or farm in which the different activities of the rural family enterprise take place. It can also be the school if we want to promote respect for children's rights.

### The scope of action

We are referring to the levels of intervention at which we expect the project to generate change directly.

These levels are in turn composed of systems and sub-systems.

### The scope of influence

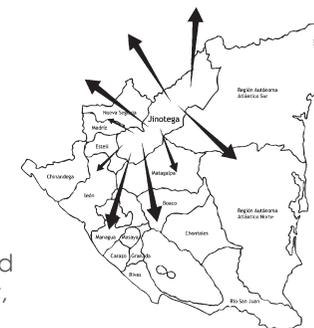
These are the levels above or below the scope of action at which we expect:

- to generate change indirectly or
- to irradiate the effects of the project in the long term.

### When is it a scope of action and when is it a scope of influence?

This depends on our starting point, our intervention strategy, our strategic decision as an organisation, the context and even may vary from one project to another.

- If we select the family, the farm and the community as our scope of action, we will influence in some way also at the level of the municipality or department.
- If we work with more organised producer families, they even might be able to influence at a national level the approval, application and/ or modification of legislation corresponding to product certification, payment for environmental services, etc.
- If our organisation has specialised in public policy advocacy processes, the scope of action will probably be at the national or municipal level and the area of influence will become the community, the family and its farm.



It may also be the case that an organisation intervenes directly at both levels: community level and national level.

Generally, the combination of both gives greater credibility to the work of the organisation, because it can show in practice what it is proposing at the institutional level.

This can also be achieved through a consortium of organisations, some specialising in community work and others in public policy advocacy work.

Planet

Region

Country /  
Society

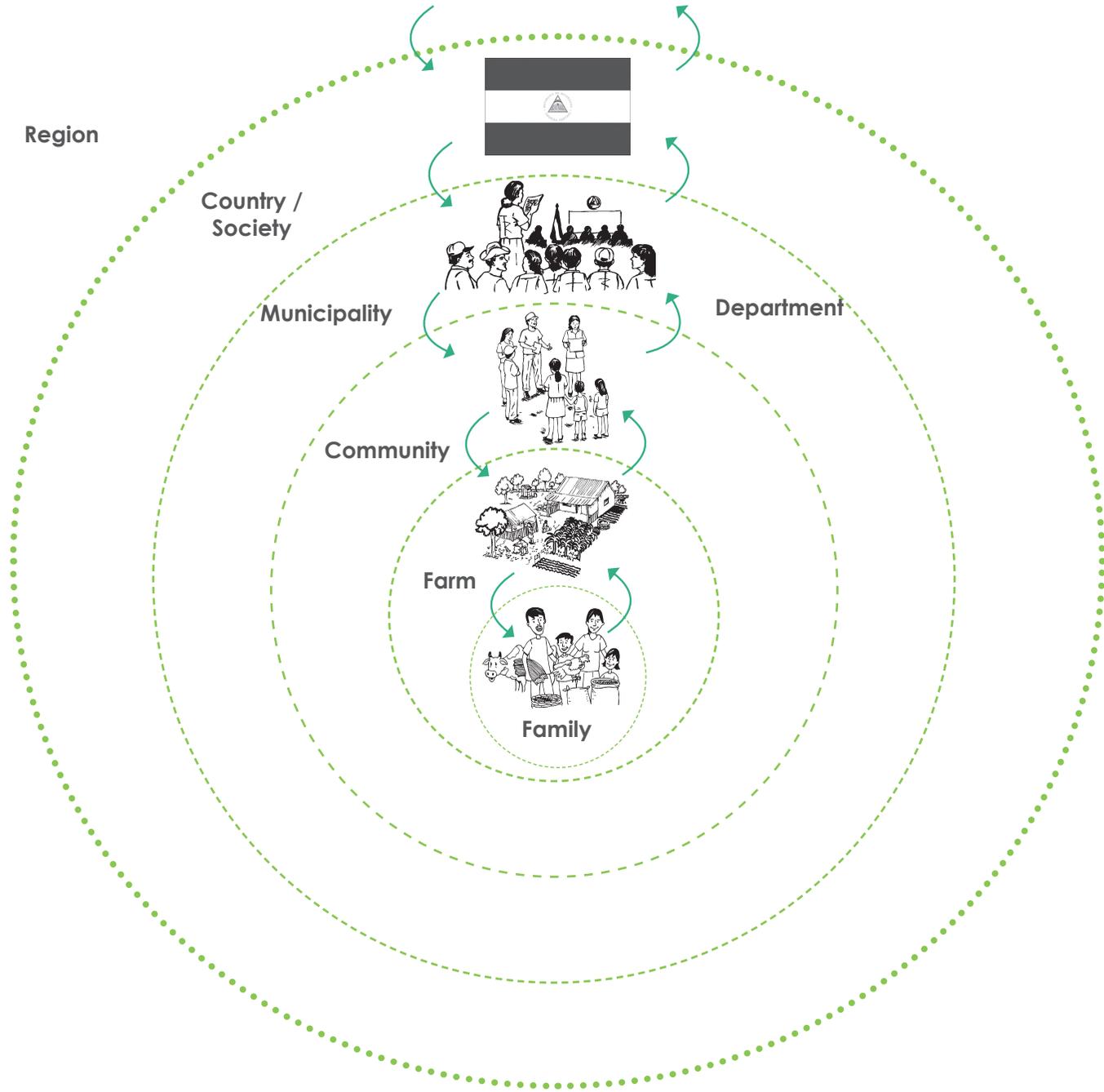
Municipality

Department

Community

Farm

Family



Let's look at an example of a project that aims at efficient water management.

**Project A:**

- The scope of action and therefore direct intervention can be implemented at the level of the family, the farm, the school and/or the community.
- From these levels of scope of action, the direct project participants can influence higher levels through the advocacy of their Potable Water and Sanitation Committees (PWSC) with the Municipal Government, departmental State institutions and even national authorities.

**Scope of influence:**



*...municipal or local authorities such as the Ministry of Health by influencing them to assume their mandate for monitoring the quality of drinking water.*



*...the school by ensuring access to safe water making it easier for girls and boys to implement good hygiene practices*

*The project actions influence on...*



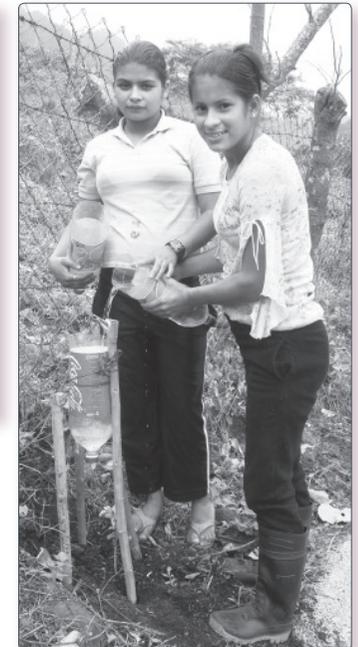
**Scope of action:**



*The PWSCs at community level are well organized and establish plans*



*The community improves access to clean water*



*Young environmentalists plant trees to maintain water sources*

**Project B:**

- The scope of action is at the level of the Network of Potable Water and Sanitation Committees (PWSC), which carries out advocacy work on a law in order to regulate the efficient management of potable water systems.
- Once the law is passed, it will have positive effects at the community level and of course on rural families throughout the whole country.

*Scope of influence:*



*...access to clean water for rural families throughout the whole country*

*The project actions influence on...*



*Scope of action:*



*The PWSC at community level*



*The PWSC Network at national level*



*The authorities at national level*

As we can see from the examples, it always depends on the entry point, the strategy we decide to use.

- There are organisations that are more deeply rooted in the community and therefore focus their projects on the family and community level as a scope of action.
- There are other organisations that prioritise public policy advocacy as a strategy and therefore their scope of action is often at the municipal, departmental, national and even international level. From these spatial levels they radiate the effects of their project to the lower spatial levels such as the family.
- In other projects we will find a combination of strategies and different spheres of action and influence. It always depends on the situation, the capacities of the organisation and the thematic and territorial priorities of the donors, also.

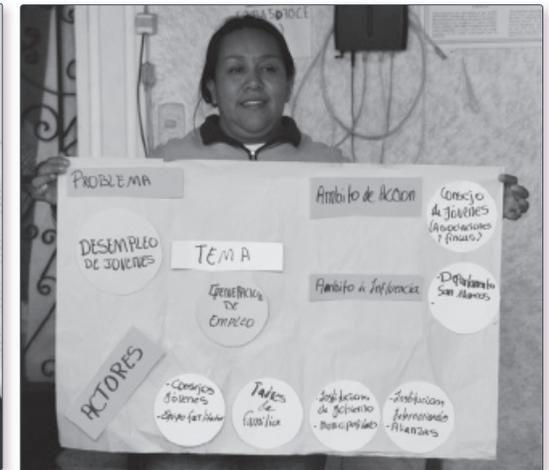
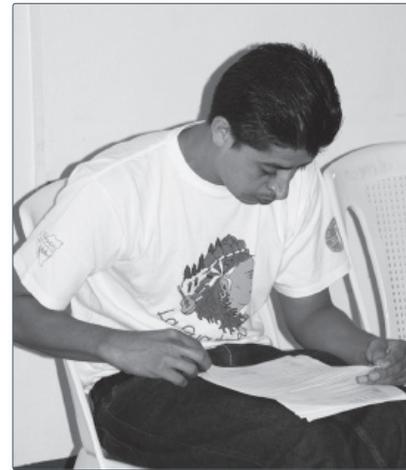
What is very important to keep in mind is to focus our actions and to avoid a high degree of dispersion. Otherwise the impact we can achieve might be diluted.

## Other aspects to outline our project idea

Until now we have seen some basics about the topic or field of work, the problem we want to address with the project, as well as the scope of action and influence. The remaining aspects will be approached by the following tools and/or with other tools we are going to share during the process.



## Tools to drive our project idea



## Formulate the Problem Statement<sup>7</sup>

A good understanding of the problems is essential in the design of sustainable development projects. In the phase of “(re)recognising the terrain” we would like to familiarise ourselves with the problem. To concrete the challenge we want to address with the project, we therefore formulate a question, also known as a “problem statement”.

<b>Tool:</b>	<b>Formulate the problem statement</b>
<b>Outcome:</b>	<p>What you can achieve with the tool:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a common understanding of a problem within the team and - if possible - with some change agents (key stakeholders, potential beneficiaries or users).</li> <li>• Formulate collected findings from the problem analysis into a change challenge</li> <li>• Define the direction and framework for the generation of ideas.</li> <li>• Form the basis for the formulation of a target-oriented how-might-we question (so-called HMW questions).</li> <li>• Develop an initial reference value for subsequent measurement of success.</li> </ul>
<b>Output:</b>	The design team defines the central <b>problem statement</b> conclusively and record it in a <b>simple sentence</b> .
<b>Time:</b>	30-40 minutes
<b>What is needed:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Markers and post-its</li> <li>• Letter/A4 size sheets in portrait orientation and one A3 sheet in landscape orientation or pre-printed format.</li> </ul>
<b>Participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideally a group of 3-5 people from a design team</li> <li>• Optional 1 to 2 stakeholders or the commissioning/ donor organisation (if available)</li> </ul>
<b>Alternative and complementary tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context mapping to recognize interrelations and patterns.</li> <li>• Cause-effects- diagrams help to differentiate causes and effects of a problem.</li> <li>• HMW questions to guide the problem definition towards change opportunities</li> <li>• 6 W Questions.</li> <li>• 5 x W Questions</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> Lewrick M, Link P, Leifer L. *Das Design Thinking Playbook*. Vahlen. München. 2017.  
 Lewrick M, Link P, Leifer L. *Das Design Thinking Toolbook*. Vahlen. München. 2020.  
 Translated and adapted by Rita Muckenhirn October 2020.

Using various techniques and tools, the problem statement can be broader or narrower. The aim is to find out as much as possible about the needs of a target group or potential users. These insights help us to iteratively sharpen the “problem statement” and to achieve a common understanding of the problem in the team.

- When we design a sustainable development project, we always start by identifying and understanding the initial situation that we want to improve or the problem that we want to help solve.
- Before we start to solve a problem, we must first understand it properly.
- As a starting point, the Problem Statement helps you to consolidate and record your first analysis results.



“First let’s see what nails we have and then look for the right hammer.”

### Step 1: Prepare the sheets with the questions

- Write down the questions on several A4 papers (portrait format) and leave enough space underneath each one for answers.

<b>What is the problem?</b>	<b>Why is it a problem?</b>	<b>Who has which needs?</b>	<b>When and where does it appear?</b>	<b>How it is solved today?</b>
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**Problem Statement:** .....

**How might we** ..... (what)

**for** .....(whom, where)

**reconfigure to satisfy**.....(the need),

**taking into account**.....

(previous experiences, already existing solutions, context...)

## Step 2: Formulate the problem

The following questions are helpful in formulating the problem:

- What is the problem?
  - Why is it a problem?
  - Who has the problem? Who has which needs?
  - When and where does the problem occur?
  - How is it solved today?
- Use different colours for the questions and answers and write legibly and as large as possible.
  - Write at least 10 of such problem definitions.  
If you are working in a team, each team member could write at least 2 or 3 problem definitions

## Step 2: Visualize and consolidate the problem definition

- Attach these papers to a wall and place a landscape A3 paper underneath.
- Then consolidate the problem definitions or select the most appropriate ones, e.g. with dot voting.

## Step 3: Formulate the problem statement

- Begin to systematically transform the individual problem definition into a comprehensive problem statement, e.g. in the form: "How can we... (What?)... (for whom? where?)...reconfigure to satisfy... (the need) taking into account....?"

<b>What is the problem?</b> Children carrying contaminated water	<b>Why is it a problem?</b> Negative effects on health, safety and education	<b>Who has which needs?</b> Family: water Girls: safety Boys: fun	<b>When and where does it appear?</b> Since decades in rural area of Jinotega	<b>How is it solved today?</b> Girls go together to the river
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### **Problem Statement: Children carrying contaminated water**

**How might we prevent parents in the rural area of Nicaragua (who, where) from sending children to carry contaminated water (what) to satisfy children's need to be safe, healthy and educated and their family's access to clean water in their households, taking into account cultural beliefs, scarcity of water and contamination (context) as well as experiences from similar areas (experiences, solutions).**

## Recommendations

- A good problem statement must first and foremost be understood by everyone in the team. It should also be focused on people and their needs. Often, we tend to focus on other criteria, such as functions, turnover, a particular technology, solution approaches or methods we have always used. These can be very valuable additions to a problem statement, but they should not be in the focus.  
A typical example is a digital solution design project. Here it can make sense to add that a certain problem should be solved using artificial intelligence because it can become important for the later solution finding. The disadvantage is that this also limits the number of possible ideas and we may miss opportunities for change because we have let ourselves be guided too much by one technology.
- Thus, two rules can be defined for the Problem Statement, which must be observed in addition to the focus on people:
  1. the Problem Statement must be **broad enough** to allow creative freedom to unfold
  2. the Problem Statement must be **narrow enough** that we can solve it with the available resources (team size, time, budget).
- Of course, a well-formulated definition does not solve the problem yet. Nevertheless, a clear formulation of a problem can already provide a good foundation for the later phases of project design. Sometimes, reframing requires a certain amount of persuasion from the decision-makers (director, board, donor...); but, it helps for a better understanding.
- Many projects deal with challenging problems which cannot be viewed from one perspective only. In some cases it is useful to formulate several problem statements from different change agent perspectives.
- Problems, causes and effects are often confused. Try to create structural clarity.
- Closely linked to the correct definition of the problem is also the early vision of a desirable target picture.
- It is important to note that problem and solution influence and change each other over the course of a project.
- Problem statements are helpful in getting to the heart of the basic challenge. For the further course of the project design, however, suitable design opportunities should be derived in the form of HMW questions.
- The development of clear and clean problem definitions often requires several passes.
- It is important to enjoy the precise formulation and choice of words.
- Creating variants and discussing them in the group is helpful.
- The discussion helps to develop a common language and understanding for the target group.

## Outline the idea

We have an idea. Now we need to bring more people on board to go-ahead with this idea.

<b>Tool:</b>	<b>Outlining the project idea</b>
<b>Outcome:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proponents clarify their ideas from different points of view and consolidate them at the level of a first profile.</li> </ul>
<b>Output:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First draft of the idea</li> </ul>
<b>Participants:</b>	Individual Ideally 3 to 10 team members
<b>Time:</b>	2 hours to 2 days
<b>What is needed:</b>	Flipcharts, markers, paper, computer, printer...
<b>Space:</b>	Calm space

### Step 1: Outline the project idea with a list of questions

Based on some thought-provoking questions, prepare a short presentation of your project idea and present it to your team:

#### Questions to land your idea...

SDGs, topic or sub-topic:

- To which thematic area of sustainable development or SDGs do we want to contribute? What would be the themes or sub-themes of the action, initiative or project?
- Open the following link and review the targets and indicators that refer to the SDGs you would like to contribute to with the project idea you selected. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Problem / gap / situation we want to change

- What situation/problem/gap do we want to change?
- On what problem do we want to intervene?
- What is our problem statement?

Link to the organisation's strategic plan (if applicable), plans and policies at local, national and/or international level:

- What is the position of our organisation with regards to this issue taking into account our values, mission and vision?
- What do we want to do about it?
- What we do not want to do about it?
- What is the role of our organisation regarding this issue?
- Does it point to the strategic priorities of our organisation?
- Does it contribute to plans and policies at local and/or national level?
- Is the project idea in line with the strategic priorities of the municipality, department, watershed and other related plans and policies??

Change agents, social actors and stakeholders

- Which actors have expressed the need and/or desire to work on this issue?
- Who is raising the need for the action, initiative or project and with what interest?
- Is the demand of the stakeholders (target groups, cooperation, municipalities, institutions...) in line with our Strategic Plan/Sustainable Development Goals?
- To change the situation, who do we need to influence to change their competencies, behaviour and performance?
- Which other social actors or stakeholders are involved in the same territory, on the same or similar issues?

Scope of action and scope of influence

- What is the context of the initiative or project idea and what are the trends?
- What would be our scope of action? What would be the area of influence?
- How would we describe in one sentence the current situation in relation to the issue raised in the proposed scope?

Outcomes, interventions and solution approaches:

- How would the desired changes look like?
- What might be solutions and interventions to face the problem?

Potential network, alliances and cooperation

- What would be the potential cooperation partners or sources of resources?

Feel free to complete this list of questions. But remember, at this stage we are only outlining the idea. It is a very first draft.

## Guide for the elaboration of the preliminary idea

1. Brief introduction (origin of the idea)
2. Organizational profile (if applicable)
3. Situation we want to change: problem, gap or conflict
4. Strategic topic
  - Thematic strategic objectives it targets (e.g. SDG 2, priority thematic area at strategic plan level...)
  - Link to our organisation's strategic plan, plans and policies at local, national and/or international level
5. Scope of action and influence
6. Change agents and social actors involved
  - Target groups
  - Project audience
  - Other stakeholders
7. Outcomes, outputs and interventions (first ideas)
8. Potential networks, alliances, cooperation
9. Preliminary feasibility analysis of project profile

## Step 2: Present the idea to get feedback

It is always important to get feedback from others.

There are different ways. You can present the idea to the team of your organisation, to your learning team, to potential participants and/or other stakeholders.

As it is still a very first draft, we would recommend to start feedback sessions in a safe space. In order to get insights from different perspectives, even if you don't have all the people in the room, you can distribute different roles to the team members. For example:

- Final beneficiaries (children, farmers, women, indigenous groups...)
- Community leaders
- Governmental institutions
- Donor

Before you start presenting your idea, you ask them to step into the shoes of the corresponding social actor and to provide feedback from this perspective.



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## What is the Systemic Toolbox?

Dear reader:

This methodological tool is part of the Systemic Toolbox with the aim of “tropicalising”, systematising and disseminating the systemic approach in our different local and global contexts in an interactive way.

In using this tool, we would like to ask you the following:

- quote the sources when you use it or you build on it,
- give us feedback on its usefulness,
- send us your impressions, comments, suggestions or contributions to improve the next edition or simply to know how their reading and/or use helped you.

*Thank you*

*Systemways.*