From analysis to action

The reason for conducting an institutional analysis in the context of a rural development programme is to use the outputs of that analysis to design action for change that will result in improved institutional support for poor people. These changes can take many forms, ranging from more appropriate and accessible goods and services, delivered more efficiently to poor people, to better representation of poor people in local institutions and more transparent and accountable local government that effectively articulates and responds to the needs of poor people. But, whatever the targeted result, the institutional mechanisms behind these changes need to be carefully thought through before the process of working to achieve those changes is initiated.

Identifying pro-poor change

To turn the analysis of institutions into action, the changes needed in the livelihoods of the poor must first be identified – what are the intended livelihood results that future change should bring about? This information should have been generated from the first step of the institutional analysis in which the analysis of the livelihoods of the poor included identifying the kinds of livelihood outcomes to which people aspire. Identification of these desired outcomes, and the changes in people’s livelihoods required to achieve them, should be generated through direct interaction and engagement with poor people themselves. This should clarify their aspirations for the future and the sorts of opportunities they perceive for change and improvement. Evaluative criteria can also help to establish standards regarding people’s livelihoods and the outcomes they are able to realise from the resources at their disposal and the institutional support they receive. The positive changes, to be measured through evaluative criteria, in their livelihoods to which poor people aspire should become the goals for future pro-poor change.

The institutional analysis process should also have clearly identified how people’s current livelihood outcomes are linked to existing delivery and governance results generated by institutions, and shown what new results are required in order to bring about the changes to which poor people aspire. These new results can be taken as the purpose or objectives that will contribute to achieving the goals identified at the level of people’s livelihoods.

In both these steps, attention needs to be paid to identifying the strengths of what is already happening. This includes looking carefully at what poor people already achieve – the skills they have, the advantages that they deploy in order to survive – and looking at those aspects of existing mechanisms for governance and service delivery that work and respond to the needs of the poor. This focus should not be exclusive – clearly those aspects that do not work also need to be addressed – but an initial focus on what is working can help the analysis to identify current strengths upon which future changes can build, instead of attempting to “start from scratch”.

To identify positive pro-poor change, the action arenas that currently generate positive results should also be considered. This can provide important clues to how action arenas to generate positive change might be constituted in the future, or influenced and changed to become more pro-poor. Relatively limited changes in existing action arenas – such as changes in roles or responsibilities, shifts in the skills applied by different actors or agencies, the introduction of one or two new actors or agencies into a particular arena – may be sufficient to produce the desired changes. In other situations, more radical changes in action arenas, or even the creation of entirely new ones, may be required. Whatever the extent of the changes that seem to be required, they need to be described in detail in a way that links desired livelihood results to positive delivery and governance results that will support them, and the action arenas that will generate those results.

Making strategic choices – who and what needs to change?

Once the desired changes have been described, different options for achieving those changes need to be thought through and choices made regarding how to achieve them. Strategic choices about what sort of changes to
attempt, taking into account the time and resources available, can only be made after the general change has been broken down into a series of more specific changes in relation to the different institutional actors and agencies involved.

It is at this point that the detailed work carried out during the institutional analysis provides essential material for analysing the factors that are likely to either support or inhibit change. The range of different institutional actors potentially involved in a particular change needs to be established, based on the listings of actors and agencies produced as part of the mapping of action arenas. The analysis of roles, responsibilities, mandates and capacity, as well as the investigation of the rules and incentives governing different institutional actors, should provide the information required to identify those actors that could contribute to the kinds of pro-poor change desired.

In addition, the analysis of the institutional context will provide information on the policy, legislative and resource aspects that may be affecting the performance of different institutional actors and should also give indications regarding whether change is needed in these areas in order to support the desired pro-poor changes.

Finally, we can look at the broader aspects of power and processes underpinning these institutional actors and the way they behave to help explain differences between what is supposed to happen and what really happens and possibly identify major opportunities and obstacles in terms of power relations, unwritten rules of the game and cultural factors.

Changes are unlikely to be required in all actors and agencies concerned with a particular issue. The list of potentially concerned actors and agencies should be mapped out in terms of their actual and potential authority and influence over the areas of desired change. This form of stakeholder analysis to identify who needs to be involved in possible processes of change needs to take into account both the formal roles, responsibilities and mandates, as well as “informal” patterns of authority and influence.

Once the actors and agencies that should be engaged have been identified, and their relative levels of influence on possible change processes defined, the specific changes that are required for each of these actors can be studied in more detail. The following questions should be posed regarding each potential actor in the change process.

- What does each of these actors currently do (their roles, responsibilities, and capacities)?
- What level of influence do they have on the desired changes?
- What changes would they have to make to support the process of change?
- What incentives do they have for making these changes?

Answers to these questions should produce a general picture of the possible avenues of pro-poor institutional change, including different ways of reaching the same goal at the level of livelihood outcomes, delivery results and governance results.

On this basis, choices can be made regarding which overall strategy to adopt in order to achieve pro-poor institutional change. Other key questions that should be asked when assessing these different options include the following:

- What are the opportunities that could influence change? – Independently of any planned intervention, what processes, attitudes or events exist that might contribute to change? Examples might include changes in political power or responses to crises or shocks.
- Who wants to change and why? – What indications exist within key institutions or among key actors that there is a desire to change or an awareness of the need for change and what are the incentives for actors and agencies to change?
### Institutional actors
- Actors
- Agencies

### What needs to change?
- Skills, knowledge, attitudes, behaviour
- Roles, responsibilities, mandates, incentives
- Relationships
- Policies, laws, resources
- Power relations

### Specific changes required

#### Taking account of:
- Incentives for change
- Opportunities
- Obstacles

### Actions to bring about change
- What?
- Who?
- When?
- What resources?

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### Wider implications

**Potential conflicts and synergies:**
- Within arenas
- Across arenas
- Between levels

**Mechanisms for harmonization**

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- **What processes of change are already working?**
  - Why are these changes already taking place and who is leading them?

- **What points of leverage are there for institutional change?**
  - Are there any specific issues or institutions where a small intervention could have widespread impacts and help to create momentum for broader change?

- **What can an intervention realistically achieve?**
  - Given the resources and time available, and the mandate of the institutions involved, what could an intervention realistically set out to achieve?

- **What or who are the antagonists of change?**
  - What actors or agencies are likely to actively oppose change and how influential are they?

- **Who are potential “champions of change”?**
  - Are there any actors or agencies that could lead the change process and influence others to follow?

- **What opportunities are there that would deliver “quick wins”?**
  - Are there short-term processes that could deliver significant positive results and help create momentum for broader change?

- **What medium- and long-term processes are needed to achieve change?**
  - What key changes will be required in the medium to long term? How can the processes required for these changes be initiated and sustained?

- **What sort of coalitions of common interest could be formed to support longer-term processes of change?**

- **How essential is institutional change?**
  - Is change in institutions essential for the achievement of changes for poor people or could change take place in spite of institutional resistance or immobility?

The assembled information on institutions should make it possible to answer these questions and come to a decision regarding what sort of change process might be initiated, its scope and the potential partners that need to be engaged.

#### Identifying what is to be done

Initiating action to promote pro-poor institutional change requires careful thought regarding the kinds of activities to be undertaken. Often the process of institutional change focuses on setting up new institutional structures (without giving enough careful thought to what those structures are intended to do) and increasing the physical capacity of institutions (without creating the skills and mechanisms to make effective use of that capacity). The process of institutional analysis undertaken so far should help to identify concrete activities that will relate to specific institutional actors but together contribute to the overall objective of change.

Once the institutional actors have been identified, what needs to change in relation to each of these groups of stakeholders can then be defined. Key areas for possible change might include:

- **The skills, knowledge, attitudes or behaviour** of individual actors or of people within institutions;
- **The roles, responsibilities, mandates and incentives** that establish what they do;
- **The relationships** between different actors and agencies;
- **The policies, legal framework or resources** available to them;
- **The power relationships and the processes** affecting them.
Next, the specific changes required in each of these need to be defined in detail. This can most easily be done by defining the current state of these actors, what the desired future state would be, and how the change from one state to another could be measured. It is important to define the incentives that the target actors or agencies would respond to in order to make this change and identify possible opportunities or constraints that might help or hinder the process of change.

The actions required to bring about this change can then be developed, taking into account the incentives that will influence the subjects of the changes, and, for each action, identifying who can undertake it, when, and what resources will be required in terms of time, money and materials.

To complete the planning process, the wider implications and potential collateral effects of each of these changes should be considered and efforts made to pre-empt any possible negative impacts.

Starting the process

How a process of institutional change is initiated will have a significant impact on how it subsequently develops. Careful thought needs to be given to the individuals and agencies involved as they will strongly influence the chances of overall success. The question of who should take the lead is particularly sensitive. In processes of institutional change, institutions as well as the people within them are inevitably engaged in “changing themselves”. This implies a certain level of critical awareness within the institutions, questioning whether there is a need for change and asking what are the advantages to be generated by change. Whether or not this critical awareness is present should be a key criterion in identifying which individuals or agencies are likely to take the lead. Often, specific champions of change may exhibit this awareness but work in institutions where change is actively discouraged.

Various approaches can be used to start the change process. The process of conducting the institutional analysis described here, if key stakeholders are properly engaged, can itself become a potent force for change. Analysis of the trade-offs involved in change and the different scenarios that could emerge can also help to encourage people to think through and initiate change. Likewise, visioning processes can also help people to view change as an opportunity rather than a threat and may be particularly useful in institutions where change is actively discouraged.

Particular care will also be required to monitor sources of potential conflict generated by the change process; it is important to develop mechanisms for dealing with those conflicts and harmonizing changes taking place in different institutions, at different levels and in different sectors. In order to quickly identify where these conflicts are emerging, and establish a strategy for overcoming conflict, effective and responsive feedback mechanisms are an essential part of the process for managing change. These feedback mechanisms should not be limited to providing information about changes to “the project” but should concentrate on improving the quality of communication between all the actors involved. This is particularly important in the context of pro-poor change, given that effective communication between poor people and the institutions that are supposed to be supporting them is often lacking. Decision-makers and policymakers in particular are often far-removed from the realities affected by their decisions and need to be engaged in mechanisms that bring them into closer contact with the “subjects” of their decision-making.