THINK SYSTEMS

SCALE+ is a systems methodology to accelerate broad stakeholder engagement in sustained collaborative action to address a complex development issue.

SCALE+ includes 5 elements. The ability, and the willingness, to **Think Systems** to addresss a development issue underlies the entire approach.

SOCIAL SYSTEM: *The series of interrelationships existing between individuals, groups, and institutions and forming a coherent whole. The term draws a line to ecosystem, biological organisms, psychical systems and technical systems. They all form the environment of social systems.*

—Merriam Webster

ADOPT A MIND SHIFT

When system-wide change is the goal

Systems are made up of *interdependent parts* that continuously affect one another. Systems are by nature *dynamic* rather than static. These two features are common in ecological systems, market systems, social systems, organizations and even the average family. A system may be healthy or unhealthy: it may meet the varying needs of its different members or institutions, or it may be dysfunctional and cause harm.

To change or transform a system requires more than unilateral action because the whole functions as a web of mutual relationships. Applying a systems lens to a development issue requires a mind shift. One must step back from the narrow perspective of any single part of the system and consider the processes of mutual causation—or the "underlying determinants" as well as those that are immediate or "proximate"—that may cause harm at any given point.

Foster collective impact

Changing a system is different from analyzing one. Development projects typically are based on careful analysis of a problem and its history. Nevertheless, they usually move from that analysis to target narrow, sector-specific goals, often through one or two kinds of technical assistance. Although development projects talk of casting the net wide for stakeholder buy-in and are concerned that processes be participatory, most are driven by a narrow technical assistance agenda designed and delivered by external experts.

A donor or client may find that "thinking systems" or "applying a system lens" requires a more flexible project model than has been supported in the past. Using dynamic intelligence promotes better collaboration and lasting impact. Having a discussion about these paradigm shifts and establishing agreement and willingness to apply a systems lens is an important first step. The dialogue should continue throughout a project—not only with a donor, but with government partners, private sector partners, and all stakeholders brought into the SCALE+ process.

Paradigm shift – The system is "owned" by multiple sectors Instead of launching a project with one or two predetermined partners in a given sector (environment, livelihoods, economic, education or communications), stakeholders are sought from multiple sectors who may not normally work together or who appear to be in competition or speak "different languages." They may include marginalized populations with far less power than other actors within the system.

Paradigm shift – Stakeholders identify common goals

Most international donor projects are initiated with a predetermined set of interventions, inputs, expected outcomes and impacts. The priority is quick, measurable results. SCALE+ requires that stakeholders agree on their common goals in relation to a development issue. This may be a list of two or five or 10 goals. The resulting Task Forces and work plan are based on commitments made by stakeholders to act and contribute resources to achieve those goals for project outcomes.

Paradigm shift – Technical assistance needs to emerge through consultation
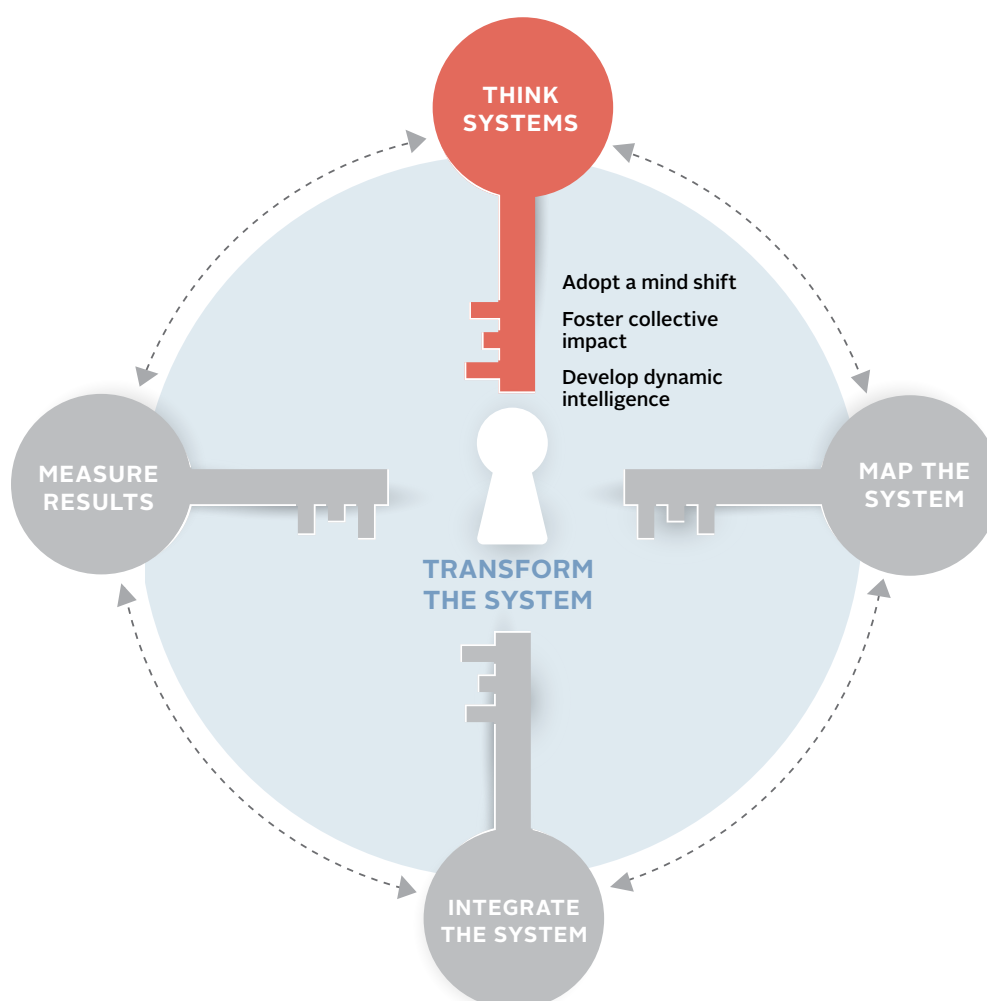
A large percentage of the funds for a development project generally go toward technical assistance. The nature of this assistance and the intended recipients are usually decided as part of the project design process. Applying a systems lens means priorities may emerge in different parts of a system. Moreover the tools appropriate to meet those needs may vary: from technical training, to organizational capacity building, to advocacy and social change strategies.

Paradigm shift – Focus on building social capital

Improved social capital leads to better development outcomes. SCALE+ invests in building bridges across networks and increasing the bonds within organizations. It measures traditional sector-specific results but also carries out social network analysis (SNA) and measures changes in the level of communication and connection among stakeholders and also the nature of relationships themselves as a condition for sustained collective action and impact.

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SCALE+: Unlocking the Power of a Social System

Advancing technical excellence and evidence-based social change

THINK SYSTEMS

- **Adopt a mind shift**
- **Foster collective impact**
- **Develop dynamic intelligence**

MEASURE RESULTS

MAP THE SYSTEM

TRANSFORM THE SYSTEM

INTEGRATE THE SYSTEM

APPLYING THE SCALE+ METHOD

1. Ensure that the project donor (or client) supports and understands the implications of a systems approach. Sector participation may be expanded; the typical results framework may be enhanced; technical assistance may be influenced by system and stakeholder analysis.

2. Invite the donor to participate as one of the many stakeholders in the system (such as, in the Whole-System-in-the-Room retreat).

3. Focus on collaboration and trust (social capital) from the outset.

4. Focus the Cross-Sector Advisory Committee at the systems level to ensure that the project maintains broad focus.

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For more information on SCALE+: **scaleplus.fhi360.org**