Breaking down your programme strategy

The core principles and framework for setting your programme strategy are based on five steps: poverty reduction objective; opportunities for poverty reduction; theory of change; feasible interventions; assumptions.

**Poverty reduction objective**

Start by asking, 'What change is my programme trying to achieve?' For example, this may include working with the extreme poor, productive poor, or poor people active in the labour market. Targets could be reductions in income poverty, improved health, or greater gender equity. The Growth and Employment in States (GEMS) project in Nigeria defines its objective as: ‘Increase growth, income and employment, especially for poor men and women, in target markets in selected states and nationally.’

The objective is high-level and focused; multiple objectives can make the programme less effective.

**Opportunities for poverty reduction**

Once you have a poverty objective, it’s time to investigate opportunities for change, by identifying the markets that are most important to your target group. Examples include: looking at raising the target groups' profits as producers within the poultry market, or improving the terms of employment for construction workers.
A theory of change

More detailed than a strategic framework, a theory of change shows the pathways of how programme interventions intend to achieve systemic change and how this systemic change results in poverty reduction. The USAID-funded Feed the Future (FTF) Agricultural Input Activity in Uganda understands their pathway to systemic change to start from a set of activities that are intended to change the behaviours of inputs suppliers, retailers and service providers within Uganda’s agricultural inputs sector. Based on new business practices and behaviours, the team predicts that the agriculture industry as a whole will change for the better. (More on theory of change).

Feed the Future's pathway to systemic change

Feasible interventions

Consider how the programme will create a range of conditions that will lead to changes in the target market. These might include setting out the right sorts of partnerships or types of collaboration, or list particular sorts of technical assistance or financial support.

Assumptions

Built into your strategy are assumptions that underline your hypothesis about how change will happen in the market system. The assumptions explain why you believe one step in your theory leads to another, and assumptions about the context and external influencing factors that may affect events, either as enablers or constraining factors. Making your assumptions explicit is important as many will turn out to be false.

M4P Operational Guide. Chapter 1 - Strategy

Initial steps for setting programme strategy to guide analysis and action.