Picture the future

A credible vision provides your programme with a clear direction and realistic expectations about what you can achieve and what you plan to leave behind. In your future picture, consider how a market system will operate more effectively without continued support. The USAID Microlinks Wiki suggests utilising a competitiveness strategy, or, 'a vision for how firms might collaborate to achieve growth, rather than seeing one another simply as competitors.'

VCD Wiki: Competitiveness strategy

Good practice guidelines for developing a competitiveness strategy.

Sustaining competitiveness over the long term requires a willingness and ability to continuously adapt to changes (e.g. in consumer preferences), the availability and scope of supporting markets, and enabling environment policies and regulations. Similar to the sustainability analysis framework, setting out a future picture where the market system works more efficiently requires thinking about which players are best suited to perform which functions. One useful tool for this type of partner analysis is the will/skill matrix.
Will/skill matrix

This tool presents four quadrants based on the capacities and incentives that a market actor may have to change. For potential partners on the matrix, think about what types of support they need. For example, a cocoa farmers cooperative may have a high willingness to aggregate, buy from their members at a good price, and offer credit and services; but they may have management or financial constraints (i.e. a lack of skill). Alternately, a major commodity trading company may be much less interested in investing in a smallholder supply chain and choose instead to work through intermediaries or develop large commercial operations on their own (i.e. a lack of will). Each partner will require different intervention strategies.

There are three important factors to consider when assessing the feasibility of moving from the current to a future vision:

- **The nature of the selected market system.** Some markets may have different types of transaction costs that affect how the market operates.

- **The history (past actions) and momentum (present and planned actions) of players within the system.** New trends, such as buying preferences, can offer a guide to how the market is shifting.

- **Innovation from elsewhere.** Changes outside your market system may be workable for the context you’re operating in.

Note that a future picture is not a fixed five-year plan. There is a risk that the vision becomes a long-term plan, which must be rigidly adhered to. Instead, think of the vision as a current set of hypotheses about how change will happen, laid out in a **theory of change.**