

MASTER CLASS FORESIGHT AND FUTURISTIC THINKING

SESSION 3: SYSTEMS THINKING APPROACH SUMMARY



3rd June 2021



9:00 – 11:00 am

Facilitator: Dr. Katindi Sivi

Background and Introduction

East Africa Philanthropy Network (EAPN) has been running a virtual masterclass on foresight and futuristic thinking in the months of May and June 2021. The four part series seeks to enhance members' capabilities in futuristic thinking and enable them to position themselves for impact within the sector. So far, EAPN has hosted two sessions as follows;

- **Tuesday, 18th May 2021** – Introduction to Foresight and Futures Thinking
- **Tuesday, 25th May 2021** – Strategic Foresight Methodologies

This was the third session in the series.

Introductory Remarks – EAPN CEO, Evans Okinyi

Evans invited participants' to the session and briefly went over the contents of the last two sessions that looked at the basic concepts in foresight and futures thinking and strategic foresight methodologies.

Introduction to Systems Thinking – Dr. Katindi

The session started with a definition of systems thinking as an interconnected set of **elements**, that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something **(a function or purpose)** over time. *As illustrated in Figure 1*

Participants then drew the process of making a cup of tea and shared their experiences as they did the exercise.

- A system is an **interconnected** set of **elements** that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something **(a function or purpose)** over time
- A system is any entity with many interacting parts to create a whole and produce results



**This is a heap
Not a System**
Nothing changes when a part is taken away or added to this heap



This is a System
Changes definitely happens if you add or take away a part of this system

Figure 1: System

Below are some of their responses:

- *There many ways to get the cup of tea and though the processes vary but the end result is the same*
- *Making tea is culture specific*
- *One's interpretation of tea will determine the process*

This was followed by a discussion on the components of a system that includes, **elements, interconnections** (physical and informational). For instance, the elements participants used to make their tea determined the process followed. These relationships between elements over time bring out **patterns** that eventually become the norms. Outcomes define the function of a system hence its **purpose or goal**.

A system includes sub-systems and for philanthropy actors to succeed they need to zoom out of the system, use tools such as the iceberg analogy, feedback loops to deal with the underlying patterns, behaviours and mental models to anticipate disruptions in their environment and design strategic interventions.

Hence, to understand the systemic point of view one needs to understand how the system operates and the rules of the game. *As illustrated in figure 2*

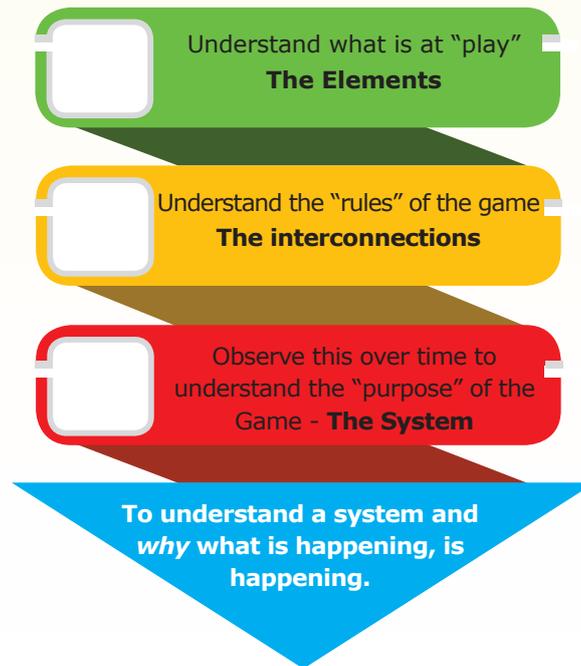


Figure 2: Systems Approach

Group Work: Participants then broke into two groups to describe a philanthropy system of their choice, its constituent parts, and social systems and try to tweak certain element to change the system. Group 1 looked at Water and Sanitation Project while Group 2 looked at Climate Change. The plenary session discussion that followed identified that there are areas or leverage points (decision points) where actors can use resources and networks with the system to design interventions.

A context analysis of the philanthropy sector from a systems thinking ensued looking at how stakeholders in the sector can start to change the rules of the game. The discussion identified the need for members to better package themselves or manage informational flows within the philanthropy ecosystem to attract more funding using the Equity Foundation as a case study.

The session ended with two videos. The first one¹ demonstrated the value of using a systems approach in designing interventions. The second² video demonstrated the risk of not including systems thinking in designing interventions. The videos communicated that it is always better to solve problems by design (when you understand the rules of the game) than by default.

The next session is on **8th June 2021 at 9:00 am** and will be a foresight application exercise in philanthropy. The assignment will be sent to EAPN members prior to the session.

¹ Systems thinking in Obesity

² A cautionary case of cats in Borneo