

Engaging Key Actors

'Market actors are motivated to engage with each other to improve their system.'



Stephen Browne/FEI

AIM: to develop and implement a strategy to convince market actors to join the process of engagement to improve their market system.

This step helps you to:

- understand the actors that you want to engage; and
- devise 'hooks' based on market actors' interests in order to attract them to get involved and then keep them engaged in the process.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Gather information on the interests and motivations of each actor** you want to engage, and design your invitations accordingly.
- When inviting actors, remember that **almost anything can be a hook or a detractor**. Think about factors such as who delivers the message, who is hosting the meeting and where it is held.
- Remember the key is to speak to **market actors' interests** which may well not be 'conservation' or 'a healthy ecosystem'; but they may be interested in issues such as sustainability of supply, product quality etc. which can be linked to ecosystem health.
- **Build relationships first:** if the actors you want to engage like and trust you, it will be much easier to get them involved.

You will know you've prepared a great hook when it feels that you are doing the market actor a favour by inviting them, not the other way around.

UNDERSTAND MOTIVATIONS OF KEY ACTORS

In your preliminary market mapping and analysis, you identified key market actors (using stakeholder analysis/influence-relevance matrix) and systemic blockages. As facilitators, you need to understand the motivations for market actors' behaviour in order to effectively engage and motivate them to participate.

Note that 'actors' can be individuals, such as a producer or trader, who represents others like them, either formally or informally; but also include organisations, associations, government departments or companies. Within these groups, you need to identify individuals to invite to engage with the process. Wherever market actors include women as well as men, every effort should be made to ensure that these female actors are included in the process.

Questions to answer to identify incentives:

- **What** are the **motivations** of each key actor? I.e. what positive and negative factors affect the choices they make?
- **What** do they want to **achieve** in the short, mid and long term...expand their market share? Improve their processes? Increase their profit margin? Ensure a sustainable supply of inputs, goods and/or services? Advocate for policy change?
- **Who** are the primary **innovators** and **decision makers**? What is **your relationship** with them?
- **How could engaging** with other market actors help them achieve **their objectives**?
- **What reservations** might they have about engaging with you?
- **Who influences** (positively or negatively) each key actor?

Most market actors are attracted to – or deterred from – events, depending on who is convening or facilitating, who else they think will be there, etc. Letting them know that someone who is a positive influence on them will be there can be a major incentive to attend.

You may find it useful to record the answers to each of these questions in a standardised format for each actor and update this 'profile' as you learn more about them.



DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

An engagement strategy comprises:

- the communications message, or “hook”, you use to attract actors to engage; and
- the initiation of relationships with key actors so that you can communicate the hooks.

Your analysis of actors’ incentives should help you identify hooks that reflect what is important and urgent for the actors. These may be different for different actors or sometimes a common message will bring market actors from different backgrounds to the table.

INITIATING RELATIONSHIPS

Ways to start to develop relationships with new key actors include:

- Contacting them as part of the preliminary market mapping and analysis to help address your knowledge gaps i.e. to find out more about their roles in the market system, their interests and challenges. You can then use this opportunity to explain what it is you are trying to do and establish their interest in being involved.
- Networking, through business-oriented events such as trade fairs organised by chambers of commerce and other business associations. For example, in FFI’s work with non-timber forest product cooperatives in Indonesia and Romania, attendance at such events has enabled them to build new market relationships with other actors.
- Asking for introductions from other actors, including relevant government agencies, with whom you already have contact. For example, the Kyrgyzstan National Academy of Science – the scientific body that issues permits for companies to harvest forest products – introduced FFI’s Participatory Market System Development (PMSD) facilitators to private sector actors in the herbal products market system.

EVENT INVITATIONS AND ORGANISATION

Depending on the motivations of different actors, you may want to personalise the invitation to workshops or other events/activities. Use the information you have gathered to determine the:

- **Message** that is most likely to motivate each actor to participate;
- Most appropriate **contact method**: letter, phone call, email, personal contact;

- **Communicator**: would the actor be more likely to come if the invitation was from a third party, such as relevant local government department, chamber of commerce etc.?
- **Title, timing and location**: what will attract – or at least not put off – all the required actors? Using venues provided in-kind by the community, government or private sector can be cost effective, but will it encourage or discourage different actors to participate?;
- **Convenor, facilitator and/or chair**: if needed, you could choose to have different people playing each of these roles, each one attractive to different sets of key actors;
- **Technical experts**: sometimes inviting experts to present on topics of interest to key actors can provide the necessary hook. You need to know what the key messages they will present and, when dealing with **controversial topics**, ensure that the expert(s) presents all aspects of the debate openly and fairly; and
- **Cultural and gender issues** to be addressed: e.g. does the location, timing and format lower the barriers to the participation of vulnerable or marginalised actors, such as women, poor and/or indigenous people? Do you need to provide translators, child care, transport?

ENGAGEMENT OF KEY ACTORS IS AN ITERATIVE PROCESS

To begin with, you will probably need frequent, direct, one-to-one contact with a wide range of actors in order to ‘hook’ them in. Finding the right hooks and using effective communication is key to building strong, trusting relationships.

Successes from initial engagement and facilitation of market linkages can then provide evidence to other actors who have not yet been actively participating. Over time, engaged market actors will convince others to engage. Your role as a market facilitator gradually changes and diminishes over time but you may still provide guidance and support – for example, accompanying market actors during phone calls and meetings or providing technical backstopping.

In a conservation context, your role is likely to include technical support on how and why the ecological sustainability of the system should be addressed, why biodiversity and ecosystem services are important from a business perspective and the links between livelihoods and biodiversity benefits.

CASE STUDY

'HOOKING' MARKET ACTORS INTO SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES AND MARINE CONSERVATION

On the island of Pemba, in Tanzania, FFI and partners are working with local fishers and other stakeholders to promote sustainable fisheries and marine conservation. The project team recognised that multiple actors in the octopus fishery were interested in exploring how to increase the quality of the catch as larger specimens secure significantly higher prices throughout the market chain. **Product quality** (in terms of size/weight of individuals) was therefore used as the **'hook'** to engage market actors in discussions on how to better manage the fishery. A Participatory Market Mapping and Analysis workshop was framed to private sector actors as a conference entitled "Upgrading the sustainable octopus supply chain for international market competitiveness: challenges and opportunities". The conference agenda had a strong focus on the business case for managing the fishery to expand international market share while ensuring a sustainable supply of high quality produce.

Octopus was chosen as the initial focus due to high market demand and because, unlike other commercial species, they have high growth rates, relatively short lifespans and reach sexual maturity at an early age. Seasonal closures of the fishery therefore yield significant visible increases in number and size (and hence price) of individuals. While seasonal closures for octopus have limited wider biodiversity benefits in the short-term, such measures enable fishers and other market actors to see the connection between better

marine management and catch quality. They can therefore act as an entry point through which to explore other measures, for example permanent 'no-take zones' or gear restrictions, that can lead to marine biodiversity impacts, such as increased diversity and abundance of commercial and non-commercial fish species and recovery of important habitats including coral reefs and seagrass meadows.

At the same time, 'quick wins', in terms of quality and price, demonstrate to all market actors the benefits of working together. This sets the foundation for subsequent discussions on the ecological sustainability of the fisheries through improved marine management, on other ways to increase product quality (e.g. through reducing post-harvest losses) and on fairer distribution of benefits between market actors, including between women and men. Due to better understanding of these issues, local market actors on Pemba agreed to use a proportion of the higher price paid for the product to help finance community patrols to ensure compliance with seasonal closure rules.

The international market system for octopus is dynamic. It is important for local market actors, such as the fisher committees and primary traders, to continuously update their knowledge of the system. As a result of their participation in the PMSD process, the Tanzanian Department of Fisheries now share contacts of new exporters entering the market, helping to facilitate direct linkages between buyers and fisher committees.





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