Facilitators and inhibitors

Tools for Shared Agendas, No. 7

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Shared Agendas

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Tools for Shared Agendas is a series of practical instruments designed to support collective work on place-based challenges under conditions of complexity. The tools are built on established frameworks in systems thinking and transformative innovation policy and are adapted for use within Shared Agenda processes.

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1. Why facilitators and inhibitors matter in Shared Agendas

Shared Agendas organise collective action around place-based problematic situations and a shared direction of system change. Progress in that direction depends on how individual initiatives interact with system conditions: rules, routines, infrastructures, investment patterns, technologies, forms of coordination, social practices and environmental conditions.

Facilitators are system conditions that make progress towards the shared direction more viable. They may support coordination, experimentation, learning, investment, social legitimacy or the development of alternatives.

Inhibitors are system conditions that reinforce the existing configuration or limit the development, stabilisation or expansion of alternatives. They may appear through fragmentation, rigidity, dependence on existing arrangements, weak coordination, limited investment or low institutional support.

Facilitators and inhibitors also shape adaptive capacity. They influence how organisations and systems maintain continuity, adapt to changing conditions and connect emerging alternatives with existing arrangements.

In Shared Agendas, facilitators and inhibitors are therefore interpreted in relation to the shared direction. They help participants understand which conditions support progress, which conditions constrain it, and where collective action may need to focus.

2. What the facilitators and inhibitors tool is used for

The facilitators and inhibitors template helps interpret how system conditions shape what becomes possible in practice.

Facilitators and inhibitors are treated as evolving constraints. They influence how people, organisations, infrastructures, rules, investments, technologies and social practices interact. Some constraints create conditions for coordination, experimentation, learning and adaptation. Others stabilise existing arrangements, reinforce dependency or limit the development of alternatives.

The template is used to examine how a specific facilitator or inhibitor affects progress towards the shared direction. It helps clarify how the condition operates, where its effects become visible, and what may need to change, adapt or be strengthened.

This interpretation supports more precise judgement about where collective action may focus. It helps participants understand whether system conditions are

enabling adaptive capacity, reinforcing existing patterns, or shaping the interaction between emerging alternatives and dominant arrangements.

The result is a more concrete understanding of how facilitators and inhibitors affect coordination, experimentation, adaptation, continuity and the development of alternatives over time.

3. How the facilitators and inhibitors tool is structured

The tool is organised around four questions.

1. How is this facilitator or inhibitor affecting progress towards the shared direction?

This question clarifies how the condition affects coordination, experimentation, learning, continuity, adaptation or the development of alternatives.

2. How does this facilitator or inhibitor become visible in practice?

This question connects the condition to observable situations, such as governance routines, procurement practices, infrastructure gaps, investment priorities, institutional cultures, weak collaboration or difficulties in connecting experimentation with implementation.

3. What may need to change, adapt or be strengthened?

This question identifies where collective action, coordination, institutional adaptation, investment or learning may be needed.

4. What developments should we pay attention to?

This question defines the signals that should be observed over time to understand how the condition is changing and how it affects the Shared Agenda.

4. How SharedAgendas.org uses the facilitators and inhibitors tool

The facilitators and inhibitors template is used to interpret system conditions in place-based transformation processes.

It examines how specific facilitators and inhibitors operate in practice. It supports a closer reading of the conditions that affect coordination, experimentation, learning, continuity, adaptation and the development of alternatives.

The work starts from selected facilitators or inhibitors that have become relevant in the process. For each one, the template clarifies how the condition affects progress towards the shared direction, where its effects become visible, what may need to change, adapt or be strengthened, and which developments should be observed over time.

This makes facilitators and inhibitors easier to work with as evolving constraints. The template helps participants examine whether a condition is opening space for new interactions, reinforcing existing patterns, reducing adaptive capacity or shaping the relationship between emerging alternatives and dominant arrangements.

This interpretation connects systemic diagnosis with ongoing coordination and learning. It provides a structured basis for discussing where attention is needed, how conditions are changing, and how collective action can remain connected to the shared direction.

5. Examples of interpretation in practice

The following completed templates show how the questions can be applied to different facilitators and inhibitors. They provide a practical reference for interpreting system conditions in relation to movement towards the shared direction of system change.

How is this inhibitor influencing progress towards the shared direction of change?

Procurement systems often prioritise cost, administrative standardisation and large-scale supply capacity. This can limit the participation of local producers and reduce the capacity to integrate healthier, more sustainable and place-based food models into school systems.

How is this inhibitor becoming visible in practice?

- Limited participation of small local producers in school procurement.
- Difficulties connecting health, sustainability and food-system objectives with procurement criteria.
- Dependence on highly centralised food supply chains.
- Weak coordination between education, health, food and territorial actors.

Inhibitor: Rigid procurement practices in school food systems

What may need to change, adapt or be strengthened?

- Procurement criteria and administrative interpretation.
- Coordination between schools, local producers and public administrations.
- Connections between food, health and sustainability objectives.
- Intermediary infrastructures capable of connecting local production with school demand.

What developments should we pay attention to?

- Increasing inclusion of health, sustainability and proximity criteria in procurement processes.
- Greater participation of local producers in school food provision.
- Expansion of healthier food models across schools.
- Changes in procurement guidance or administrative interpretation.
- Stronger coordination between education, health, food and local development actors.

How is this inhibitor influencing progress towards the shared direction of change?

Investment structures often prioritise established business models, predictable returns and proven large-scale operations. This makes it difficult for emerging circular bioeconomy initiatives to access the financial resources needed to move beyond pilot stages. Limited investment also slows infrastructure development, reduces operational capacity and weakens the competitiveness of circular alternatives in relation to existing linear systems.

How is this inhibitor becoming visible in practice?

- Circular bioeconomy initiatives remaining dependent on short-term project funding.
- Pilot projects struggling to scale into stable business operations.
- Lack of infrastructure for processing, logistics or industrial scaling.
- Difficulty connecting local experimentation with larger investment flows.
- Existing linear value chains continuing to dominate markets and investment priorities.

Inhibitor: Limited investment and scaling of circular bioeconomy models

What may need to change, adapt or be strengthened?

- Connections between investment and longer-term transformation processes.
- Coordination between public institutions, investors, research actors and territorial initiatives.
- Experimentation environments capable of reducing uncertainty and generating evidence under real conditions.
- Shared infrastructures and coordinated value-chain approaches.
- Visibility of viable circular bioeconomy models and successful territorial experiences.

What developments should we pay attention to?

- Increased investment directed towards circular bioeconomy initiatives.
- Greater continuity of initiatives beyond pilot phases. · Development of shared infrastructures and bio-industrial areas.
- Expansion of circular value chains across territories. · Growing demand for bio-based products and services.
- Reduced perception of risk among investors and institutions.

How is this inhibitor influencing progress towards the shared direction of change?

Shared monitoring and coordination systems can strengthen collective capacity to respond to drought conditions by improving information sharing, coordination across sectors and adaptive decision-making. They can support more integrated management of water resources across agriculture, industry, ecosystems and urban consumption while helping actors anticipate pressures and adjust responses over time.

How is this inhibitor becoming visible in practice?

- Greater sharing of data across institutions and sectors.
- Improved coordination between water agencies, municipalities and productive actors.
- Faster identification of drought pressures and emerging risks.
- Better integration between emergency responses and longer-term adaptation strategies.
- Increased capacity to test and implement water reuse, efficiency and ecosystem-based approaches.

Facilitator: Shared water monitoring and coordination systems under drought conditions

What may need to change, adapt or be strengthened?

- Interoperability between monitoring and information systems.
- Coordination routines across administrative levels and sectors.
- Shared interpretation of data and risks.
- Long-term investment in adaptive water infrastructures.
- Connections between monitoring, territorial planning and collective learning processes.

What developments should we pay attention to?

- Increased coordination across institutions and sectors.
- Greater use of shared data in decision-making processes.
- Earlier identification of drought-related pressures. · Expansion of water reuse and ecosystem restoration initiatives.
- Reduced conflict between water users during drought periods.
- Greater adaptive capacity under changing climatic conditions.

5. The facilitators and inhibitors template

