# Reaching for the stars:
# Nurturing participatory change at scale

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# The challenge for participatory research

Participatory research has long established itself as a research paradigm which can generate very high quality local understanding and provide the basis for action underpinned by a strong democratic ethos.

BUT

It has often struggled to take that to **scale,** and so it has been to easy to criticise as anecdotal AND

It has often failed to engage the poorest and most marginalised.  In other words its **reach** has often been very limited.

# Yet participatory research has major advantages in producing robust knowledge at scale.

- It can generate robust findings because open processes produce knowledge that has not been pre-constructed by researchers
- multiple methods produce an extraordinary triangulation of meaning
- Large numbers of people can self mobilise in a participatory research endeavor
- The research can reach the places that other research cannot reach
- Participatory research can genuinely engage the most marginal in analysis

# Reach and scale

Concern here is with both scale of 'interventions' and their impact, and scaling participatory processes.

Scale Upwards

Scale Outwards

Reach Out

Reach Into the hidden spaces

Slaves, disabled people, women in the home, sexual minorities, people without formal identities.

# Processes for scaling participatory research

Participatory Inquiry processes (seeing the system)

Systemic Action Research (structured learning to action)

Nurtured Emergent Development (nurtured learning to action)

Local action to global and national policy

# SYSTEMIC ACTION RESEARCH

## A strategy for whole system change

DANNY BURNS

# NAVIGATING COMPLEXITY IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

'Burns and Worsley bring an acute understanding of the practitioner's art and science of development.'
*Steve Hollingworth, Freedom from Hunger*

'One of the most thoughtful explorations on the nature of complexity in the development sector.'
*Dave Snowden, Founder & Chief Scientific Officer, Cognitive Edge*

International development interventions often fail because development experts assume that our world is linear and straightforward when in reality it is complex, highly dynamic and unpredictable. Things rarely happen in the way that they were planned. The dominance of logical planning models in international development therefore needs to be challenged and replaced by a complexity-based understanding of how change happens.

*Navigating Complexity in International Development* describes three such processes. Firstly it explores processes of 'participatory systemic inquiry' which allow complexity to be collectively seen and understood by stakeholders. Then it outlines two approaches to 'engagement': the more structured approach of 'systemic action research' and the more organic processes of 'nurtured emergent development'

The design and process of each are described clearly, allowing readers to utilize and quickly adapt the ideas to their own situations. They are illustrated through detailed case studies which range from water resource management in Uganda, to agriculture transformation in Egypt and Kenya, to education of girls in Afghanistan, and community responses to conflict in Myanmar. Each builds a detailed picture of how local people and practitioners were able to respond to complexity. The final section looks at issues of power, participation and policy that arise in emergent development processes.

This book is essential reading for planners, practitioners, policy-makers, students, and researchers in international development.

Danny Burns leads the Participation Research Cluster at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
Stuart Worsley is Head of Development Partnerships, International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Kenya.

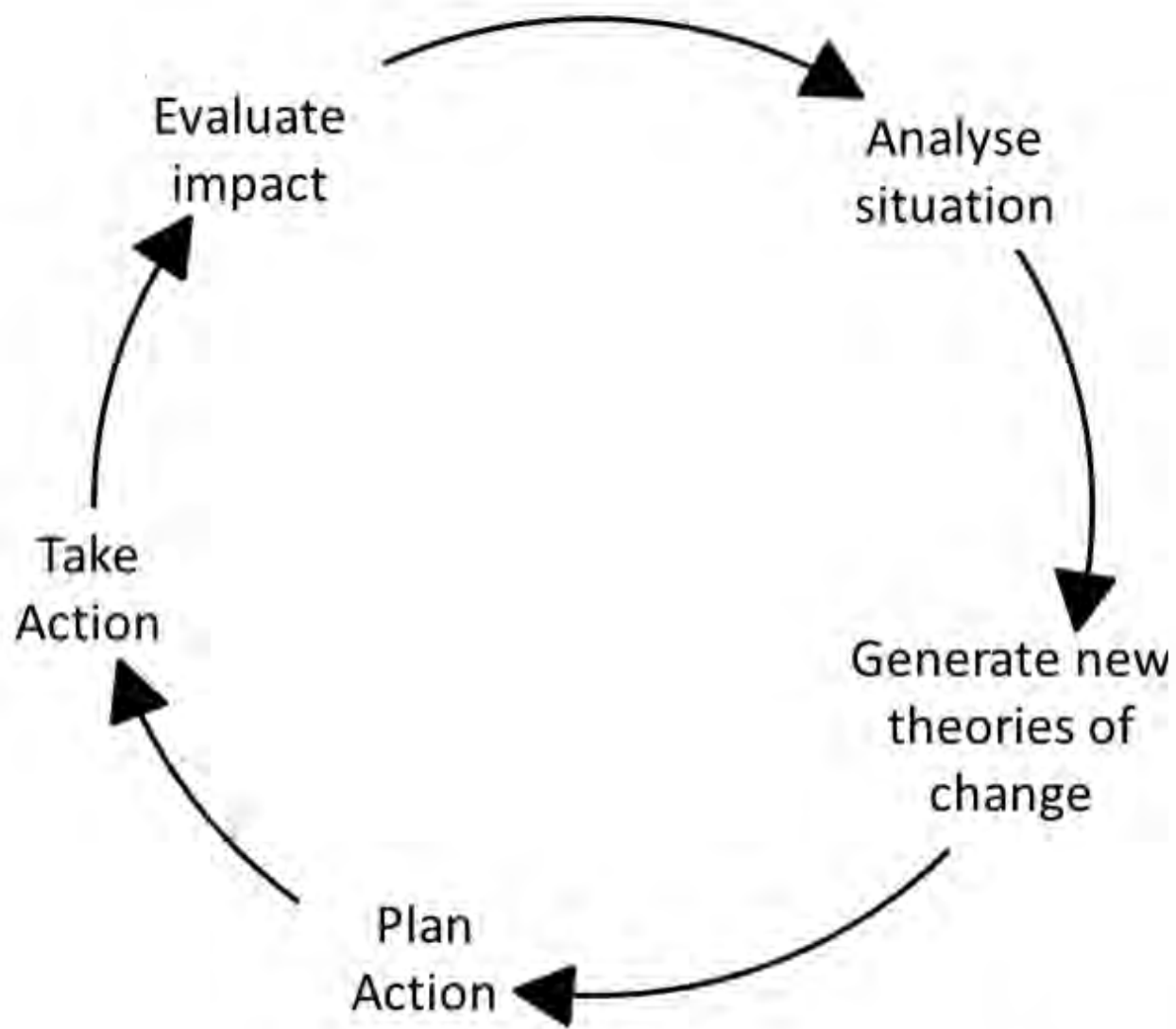NAVIGATING COMPLEXITY IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BURNS & WORSLEY

# NAVIGATING COMPLEXITY IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
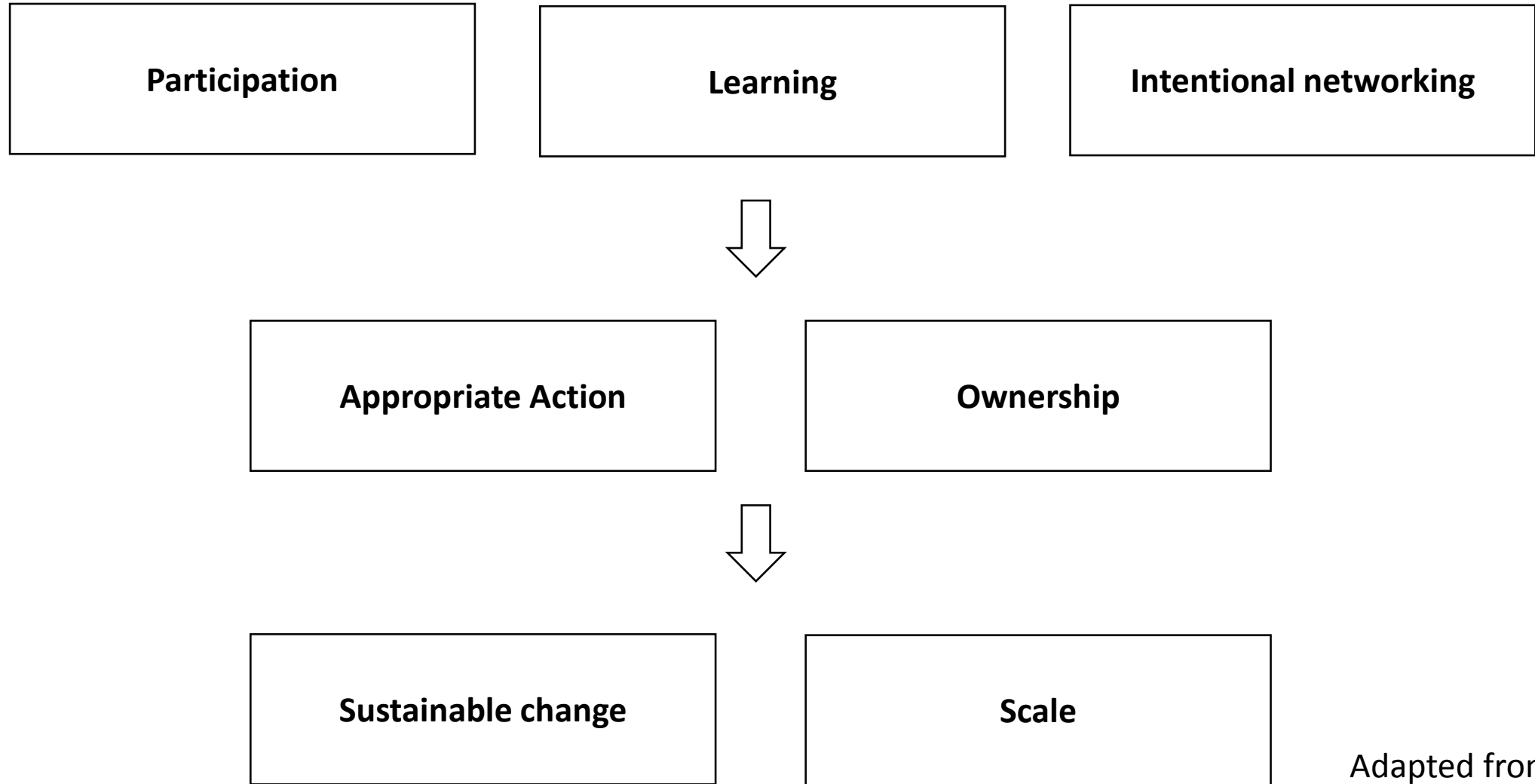
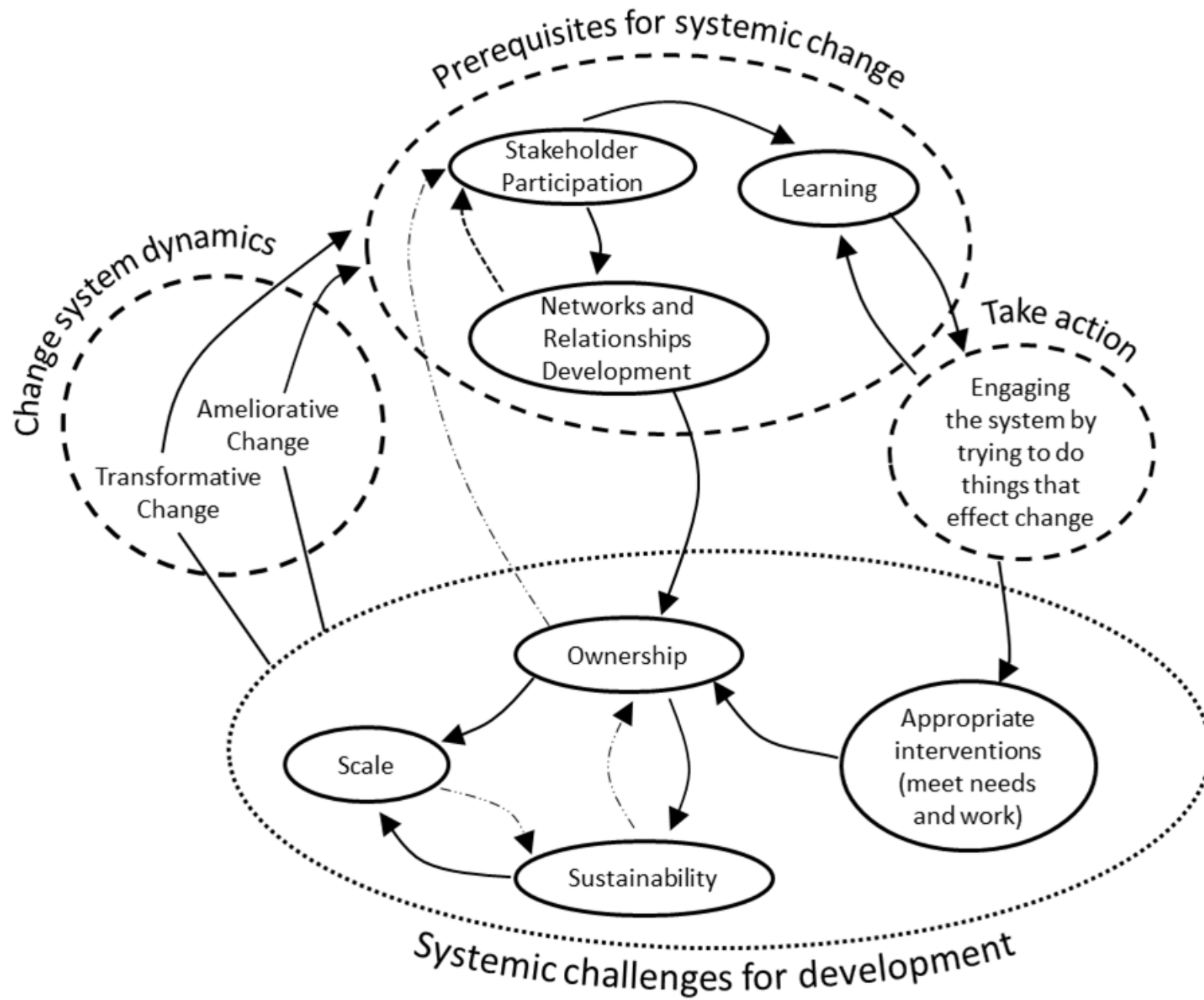Facilitating sustainable change at scale

**DANNY BURNS**
**STUART WORSLEY**

Evaluate impact → Analyse situation → Generate new theories of change → Plan Action → Take Action → Evaluate impact

Adapted from Burns (2014)

# The core components of change at scale

| Participation | Learning | Intentional networking |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|

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| Appropriate Action | Ownership |
|:---:|:---:|

⬇

| Sustainable change | Scale |
|:---:|:---:|

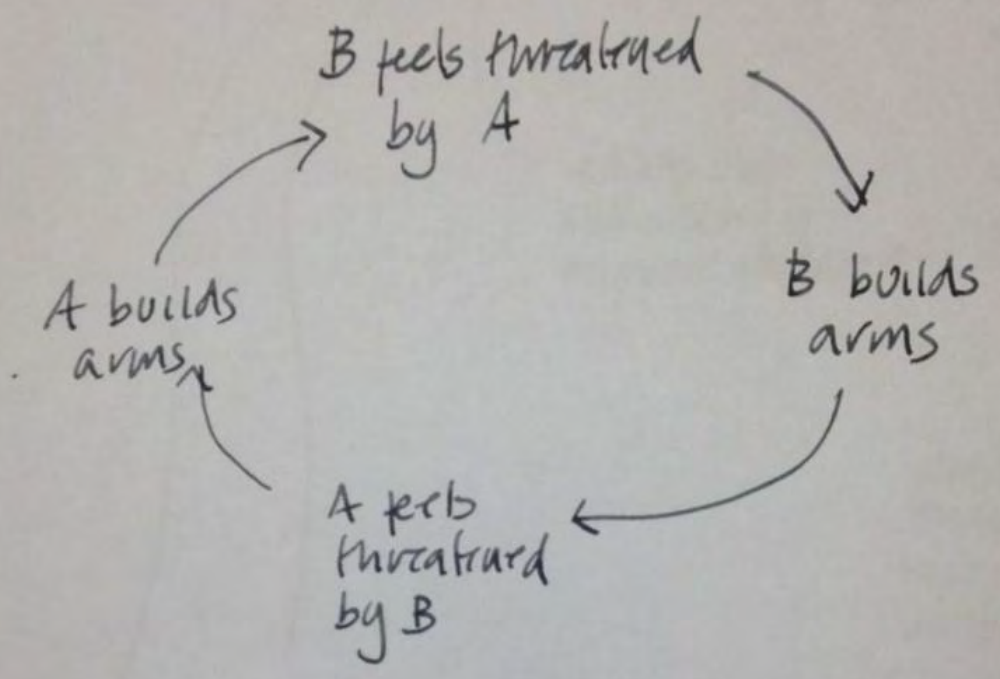Adapted from Burns and Worsley, 2015

Burns and Worsley, 2015

# A few reflections on complexity and systems thinking

Systems thinking

- Everything is connected. Need to understand the complex inter-relationships between factors and feedback loops. These enable us to understand the multiple places where interventions can be made.

- Systems are not fixed they are constantly changing to maintain their equilibrium (Sandyhook).
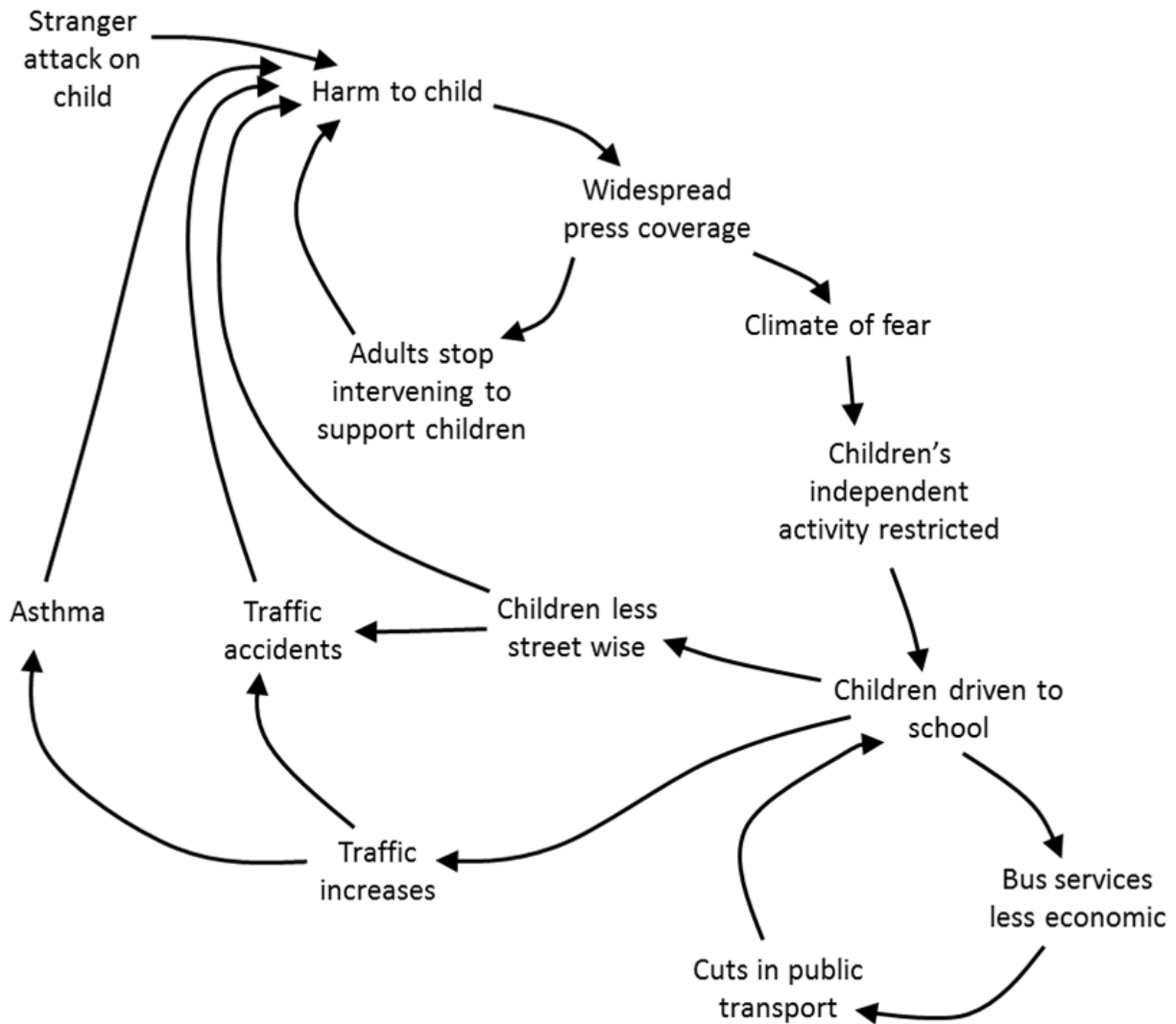
Complexity theory

- Change is not linear

- Transformative change occurs when we can move from one attractor pattern to another

- Very small changes in a system can create these large shifts in the system
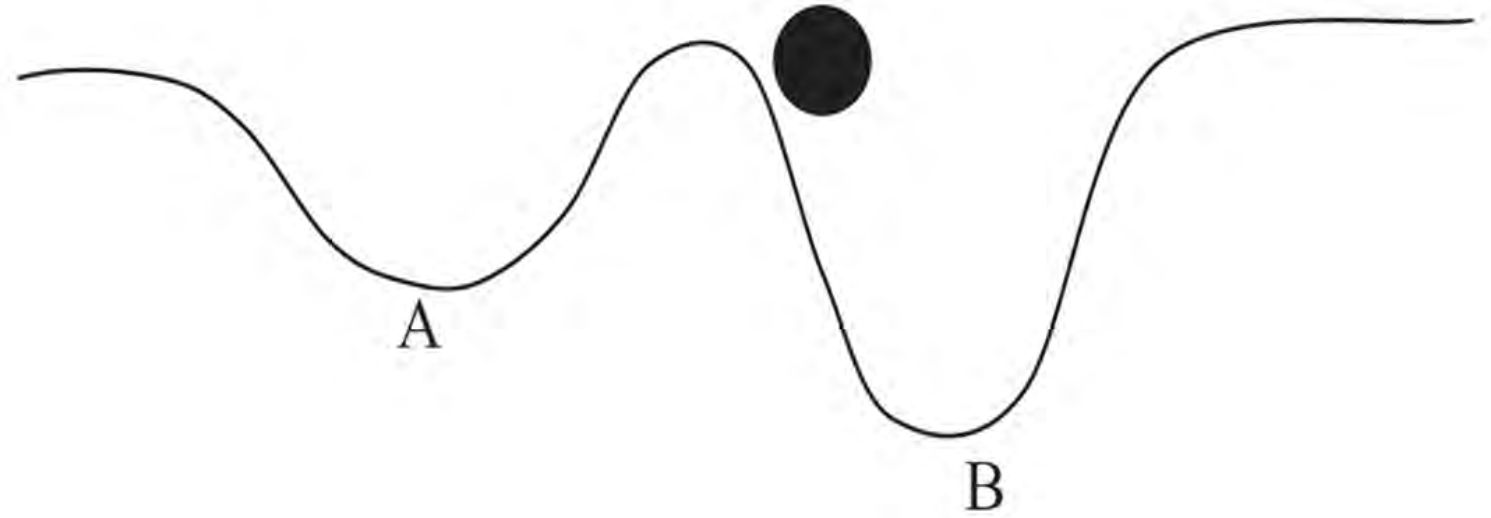
B feels threatened by A

B builds arms

A feels threatened by B

A builds arms

Ricigliano 2010

# Understanding system dynamics



Stranger attack on child → Harm to child → Widespread press coverage → Climate of fear → Children's independent activity restricted → Children driven to school

Harm to child → Adults stop intervening to support children

Children driven to school → Children less street wise → Traffic accidents → Harm to child

Children driven to school → Traffic increases → Asthma → Harm to child

Traffic increases → Traffic accidents

Children driven to school → Bus services less economic → Cuts in public transport → Children driven to school

Adapted from Burns (2014)

# Understanding attractor dynamics



A

B

(Nowak et al, 2010)

It is not enough to create change. We have to change the dynamics of the system.

By looking at the system maps we can identify multiple points of intervention that can trigger these changes

# Bangladesh disability pilot

- 3 groups of 7-8 people all researching with their 'peers' - 2 community groups from city slum in Dhakka and rural villages Cox bazaar, 1 of grass roots NGO's across Bangladesh. Built in triangulation.
- Very few people in the community groups were literate. Five of the group were blind or severely partially sighted.
- Trained to collect stories and then came together to collectively analyse them

DEEP CHALLENGE TO ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT RESEARCH CAPABILITY

# Myanmar peace action research process

- Working in Kachin and Northern Shan state
- With regional civil society network (women's union, farmers unions, education groups, religious organisations etc.)
- Collection of multiple narratives, collective analysis, creation of action research groups.
- Laiza groups focusing on drugs, IDP host community relations, and resettlement and return.

BUILDING THE RIGHT PARTERNSHIPS IS CRITICAL. TO DO THIS WELL TAKES TIME.

# Modern Slavery in India and Nepal

Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (stone quarries, brick kilns, sex trade) – 24 NGOs

Tamil Nadu (fabric and garments) - 13 NGOs,

Nepali Terrai (agricultural bonded labour) – 7 NGOs

- 350 stories collected in each project
- Collective analysis of stories – including large scale system mapping
- Generation of multiple parallel action research groups
- A large scale participatory statistics project in each area involving people collecting and analysing data in over 3500 chula's (households) in over 70 villages (in each project)

PARTICIPATORY METHODS CAN BE MIXED IN POWERFUL WAYS

# Participate Initiative

18 participatory research groups working in 27 countries

- Ground level processes with their own integrity
- Triangulation across multiple methodologies including action research, digital stories, reality check approach and many other methods
- Aim to bring participatory inquiry into the post - 2015 Millenium Development Goals decision making process.

STORIES, VISUALS AND THEIR EMOTIONAL CONTENT ALLOW KNOWLEDGE TO TRAVEL ACROSS TIME AND SPACE BUILDING EMPATHY AND THEREBY OWNERSHIP

# Collection of life story narratives

- Open ended within a broad inquiry domain
- Catalysed with story prompts not multiple questions
- Can be focused on whole lives or on incidents
- Can be focused on negative and or positive trajectories

# Domains for participatory work

Communities (mutual aid – what we can do or ourselves?)

Organisations and Institutions

Policy

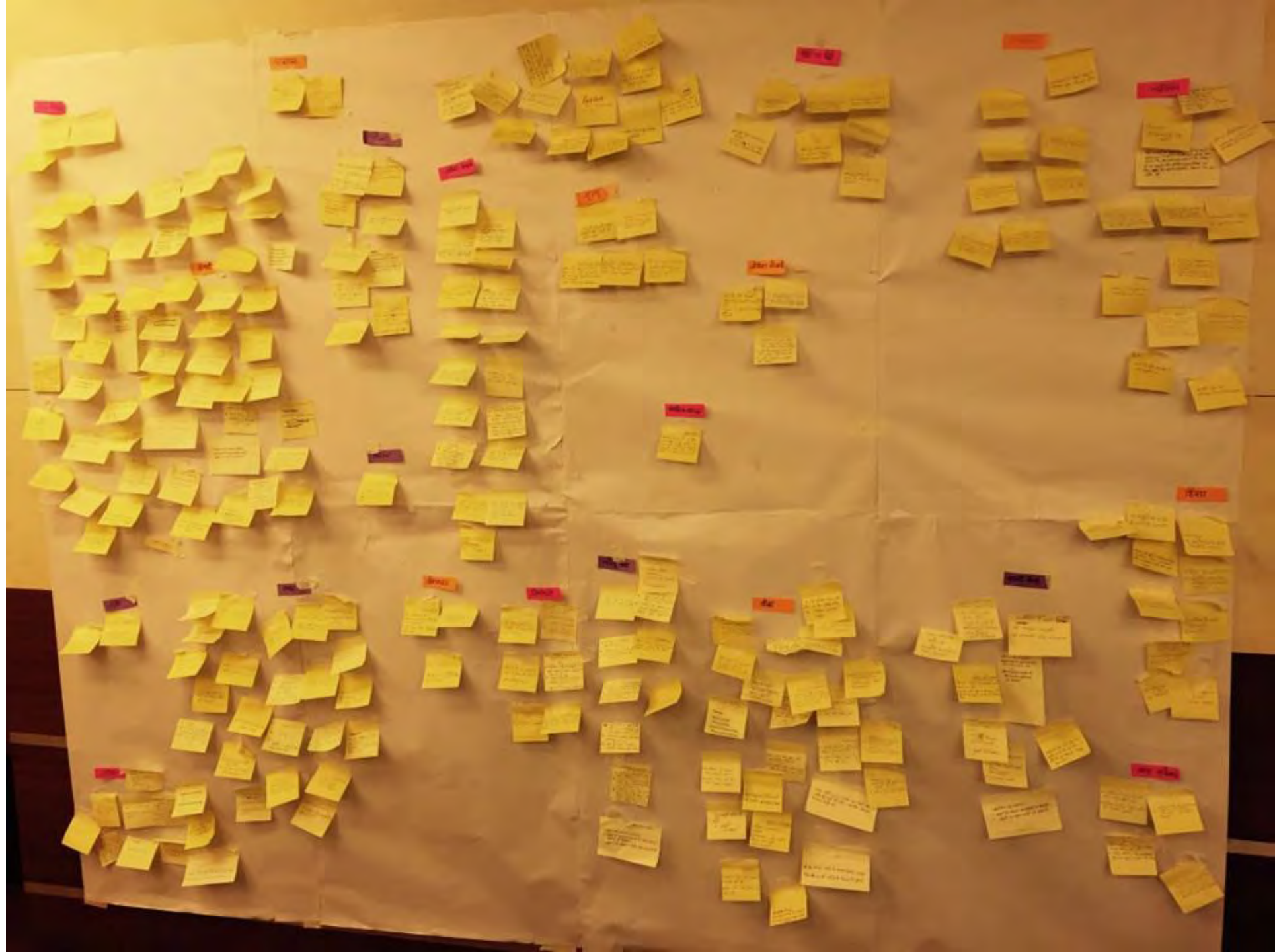# Large Scale Collective Analysis Processes

- Large numbers of narratives or transcripts
- Simple thematic and causal analysis –
- Small groups analyse 10 or 15
- Issues clustered
- Mapping of factors
- Collective dialogue

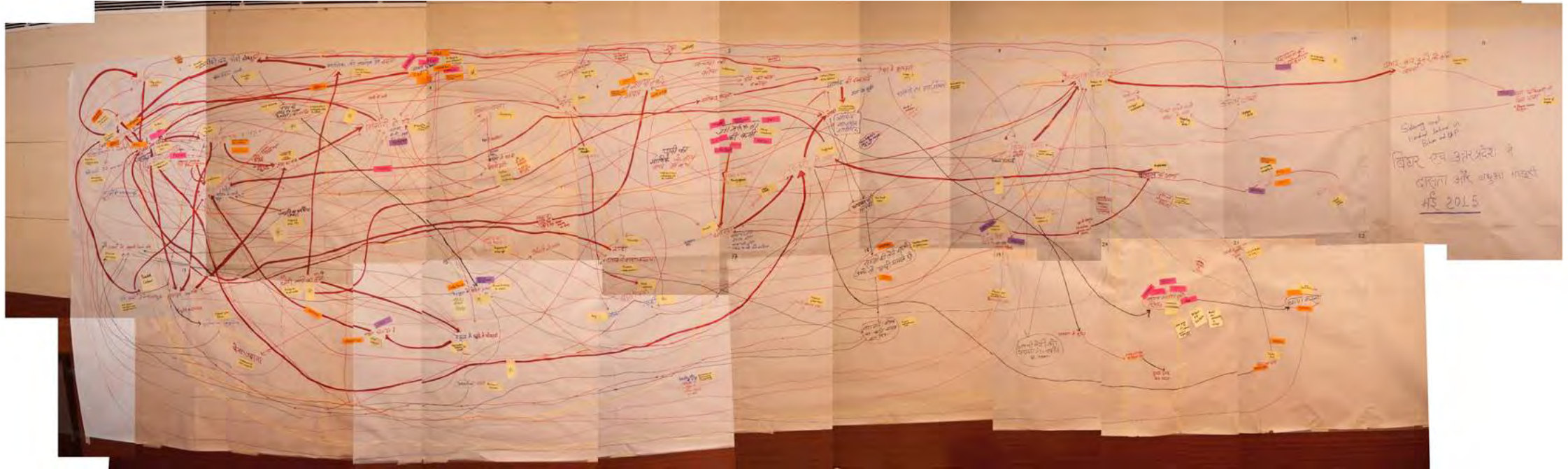# Clustering themes from stories
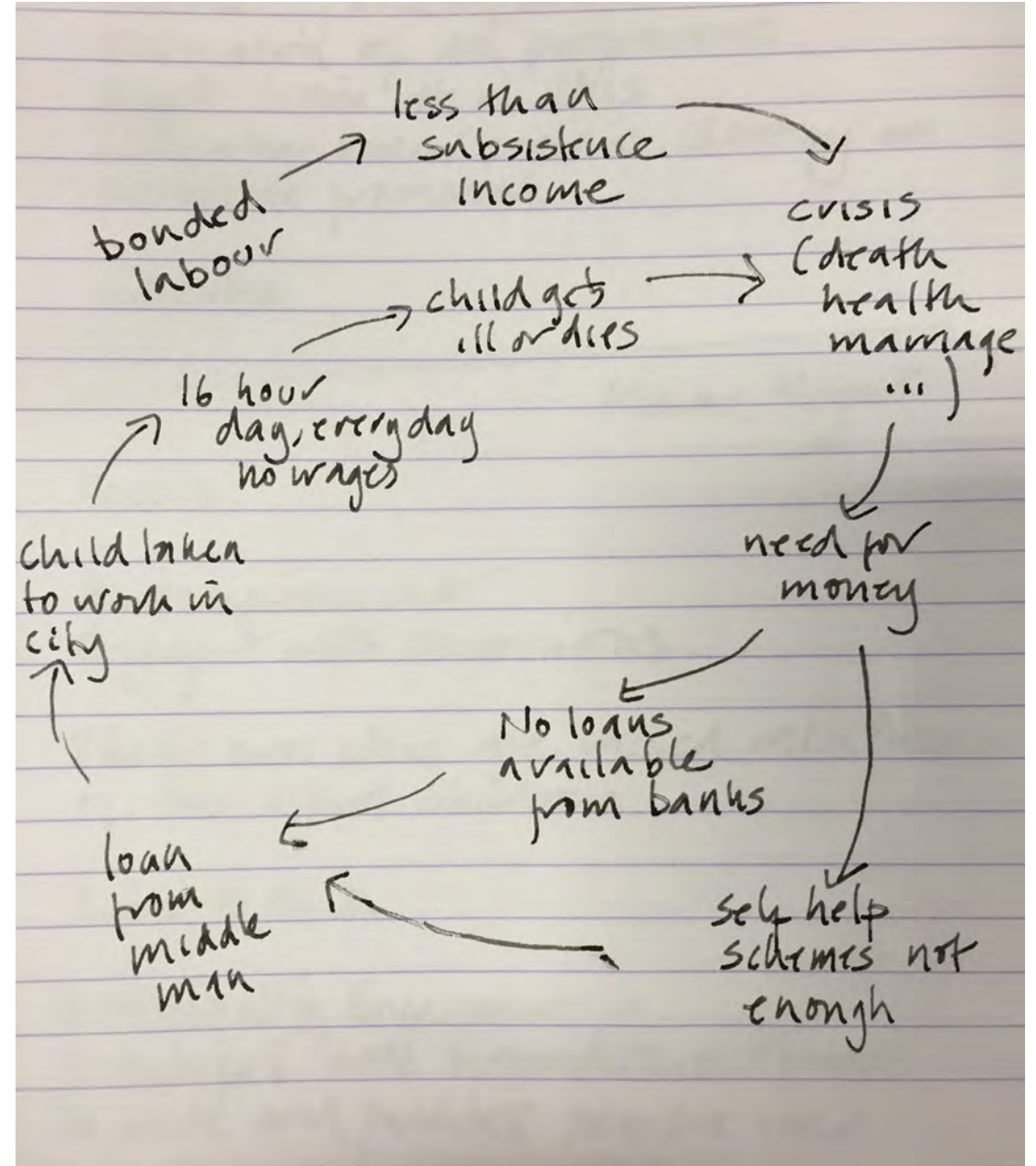


Copyright: Danny Burns, IDS

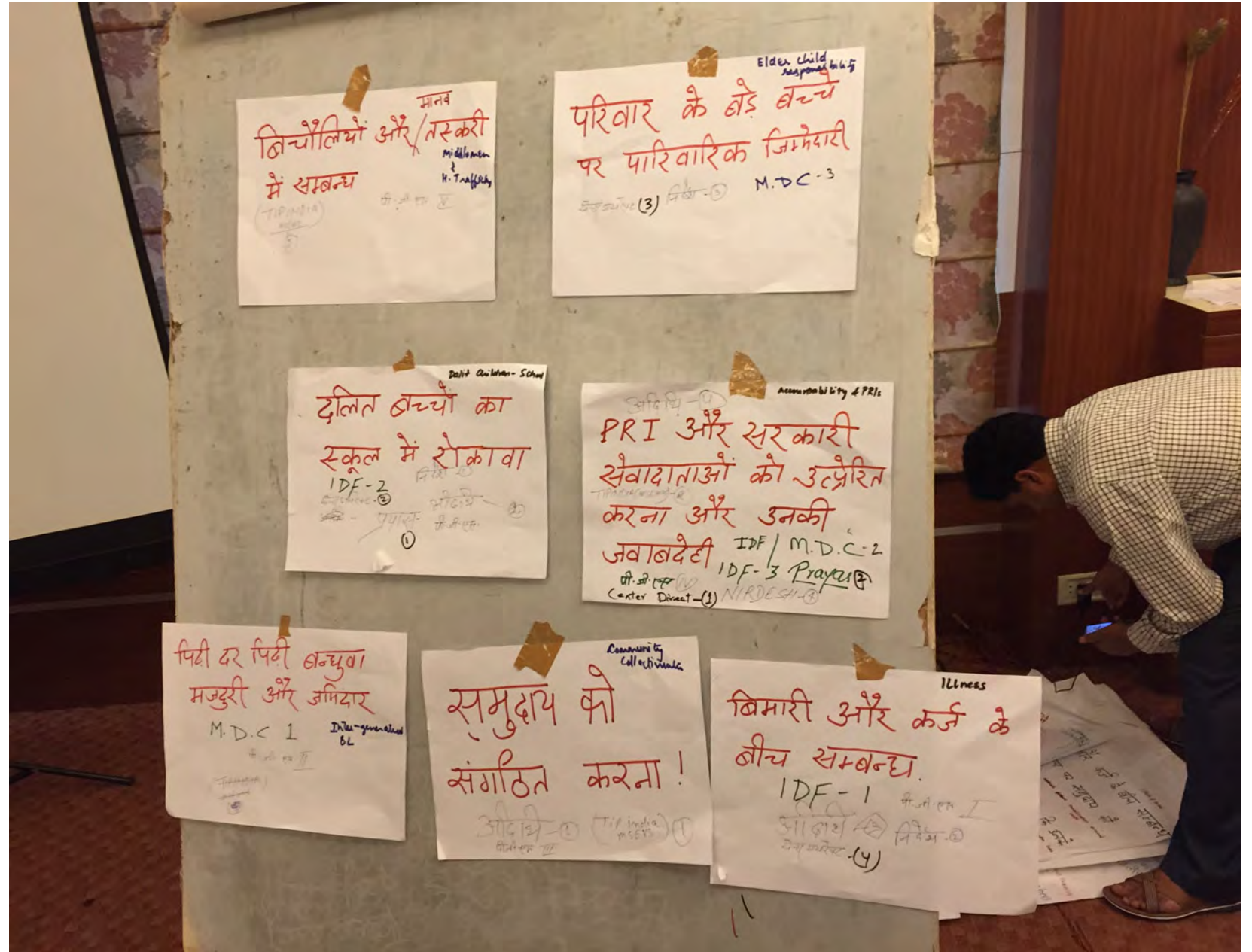# System map of modern slavery in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh

# Distilling the system dynamics from the maps
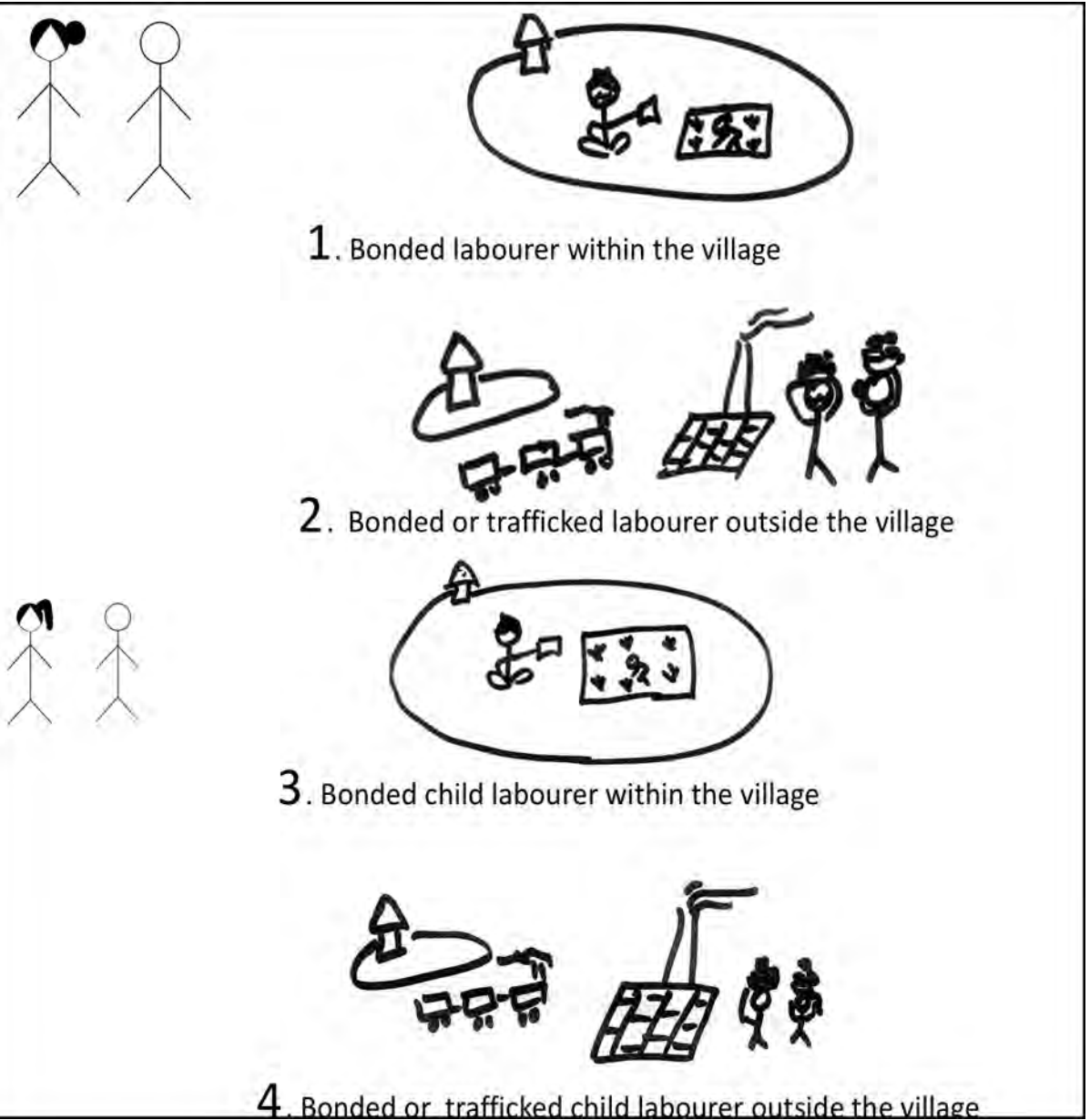
# The action research groups
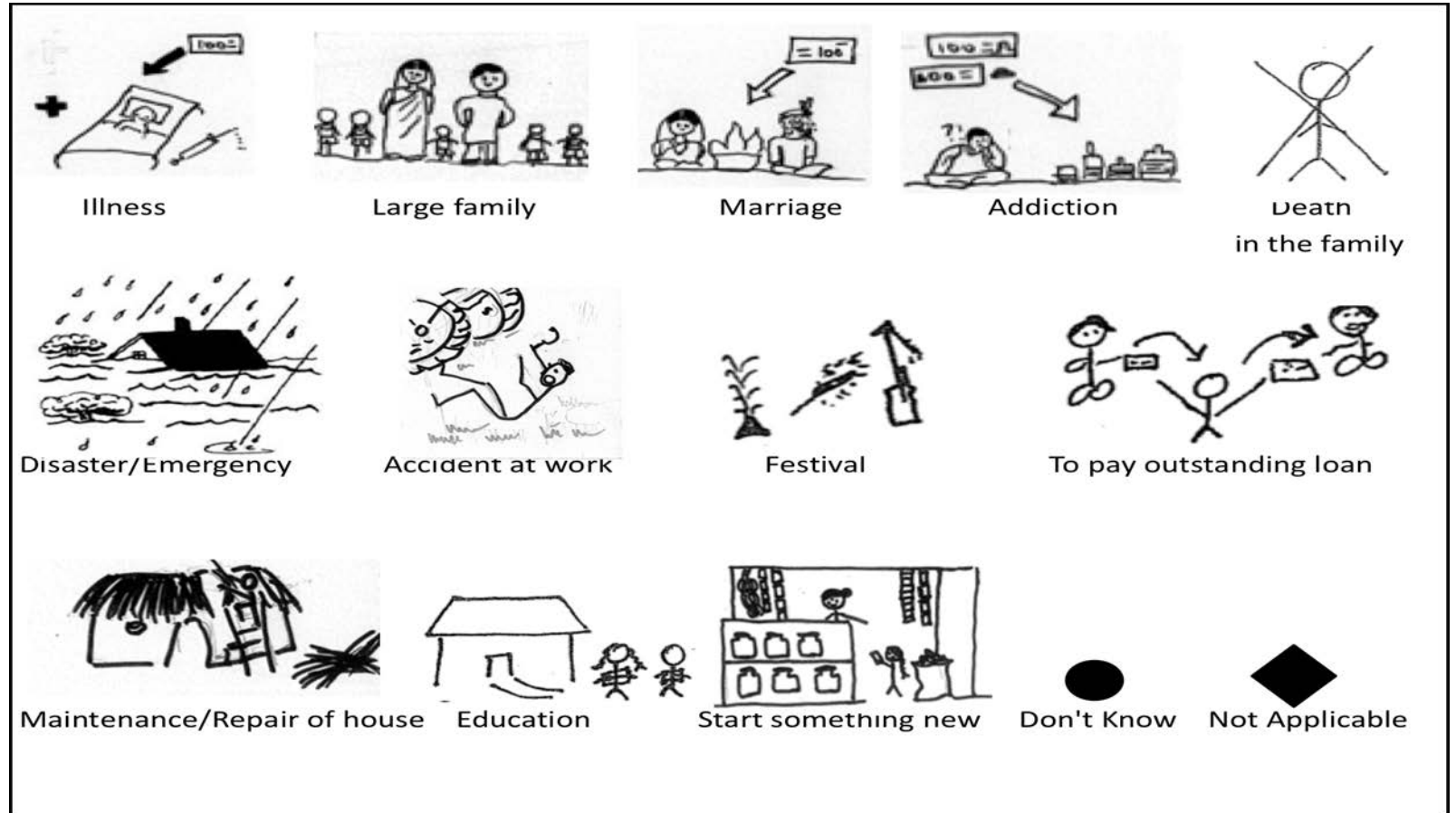
# Systemic Action Research

- Multiple actors engaged in the process

- Open ended group membership

- Multiple parallel and braided action research strands – on different but connected issues

- Horizontal and vertical learning architecture

Illness and loans

Adithi

PGS

Centre Direct

IDF

NIRDESH

A = Action between meetings

All NGO learning meeting

Local AR meeting

A

Time

# Symbols used in the prevalence study



1. Bonded labourer within the village

2. Bonded or trafficked labourer outside the village

3. Bonded child labourer within the village

4. Bonded or trafficked child labourer outside the village

# Symbols for participatory statistics



Illness
Large family
Marriage
Addiction
Death in the family

Disaster/Emergency
Accident at work
Festival
To pay outstanding loan

Maintenance/Repair of house
Education
Start something new
Don't Know
Not Applicable

# Nurtured Emergent Development

Movement based spread through networks and ownership

Preparing the ground, fertilizing, seeding, watering, pruning, nurturing

# Local inquiry to Global Policy Making

The Participate Initiative – Knowledge that travels

- Building a strong collective understanding
- Building relationships
- Creating products that could move emotional comprehension and understanding from place to place

Ground Level deliberative processes to scale … sustainable peace

- Critical mass of deliberative knowledge reveals patterns that can stream into policy with both the credibility of scale but also the legitimacy of ownership

# Some key learnings

- **Always assume that the communities have the capacity, intelligence and experience** to make their own analysis and lead their own change. It is only if processes are owned that they can go to scale.

- **Sometimes we need more formal processes at other times we need to let things develop and emerge in more organic ways**, prepare the ground, plant seeds, water and nurture them. Attend to the core change factors as we would with formal processes

- **Always we need multiple methods.** These help us to see the world through different lenses. Strong patterns generated through multiple methods in multiple places are much more robust than those generated through single methods

- **Knowledge travels through emotional connection**. Whatever strategy we use we need to nurture processes that enable that connection.

- Systemic change often means opening learning processes across divides of power. **PAR processes are often rooted in the idea of consensus, but this frequently fails to understand power.** Parallel inquiry processes leading to changes in different parts of a system can shift system dynamics in ways which are not necessary predictable or intended.

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