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Dealing with complexity in evaluation

Jos Vaessen, PhD

VEP seminar
Brussels, November 23, 2018

Outline

Complexity in evaluation: a framework

Four concise examples

The rationale for dealing with complexity in evaluation

- Interventions are part of an increasingly interconnected world and should not be assessed in isolation
- The importance of history, time, context, unintended consequences
- The move toward more ‘complex’ interventions
- New opportunities in emergent technologies and data
- Disconnect between evaluation research and ‘complexity science’

Seven manifestations of complexity in evaluation (Pawson, 2013)

- Volition
- Implementation
- Context
- Time
- Outcome
- Rivalry
- Emergence

Dealing With COMPLEXITY in DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

A Practical Approach

Michael Bamberger | Jos Vaessen | Estelle Raimondo
Editors

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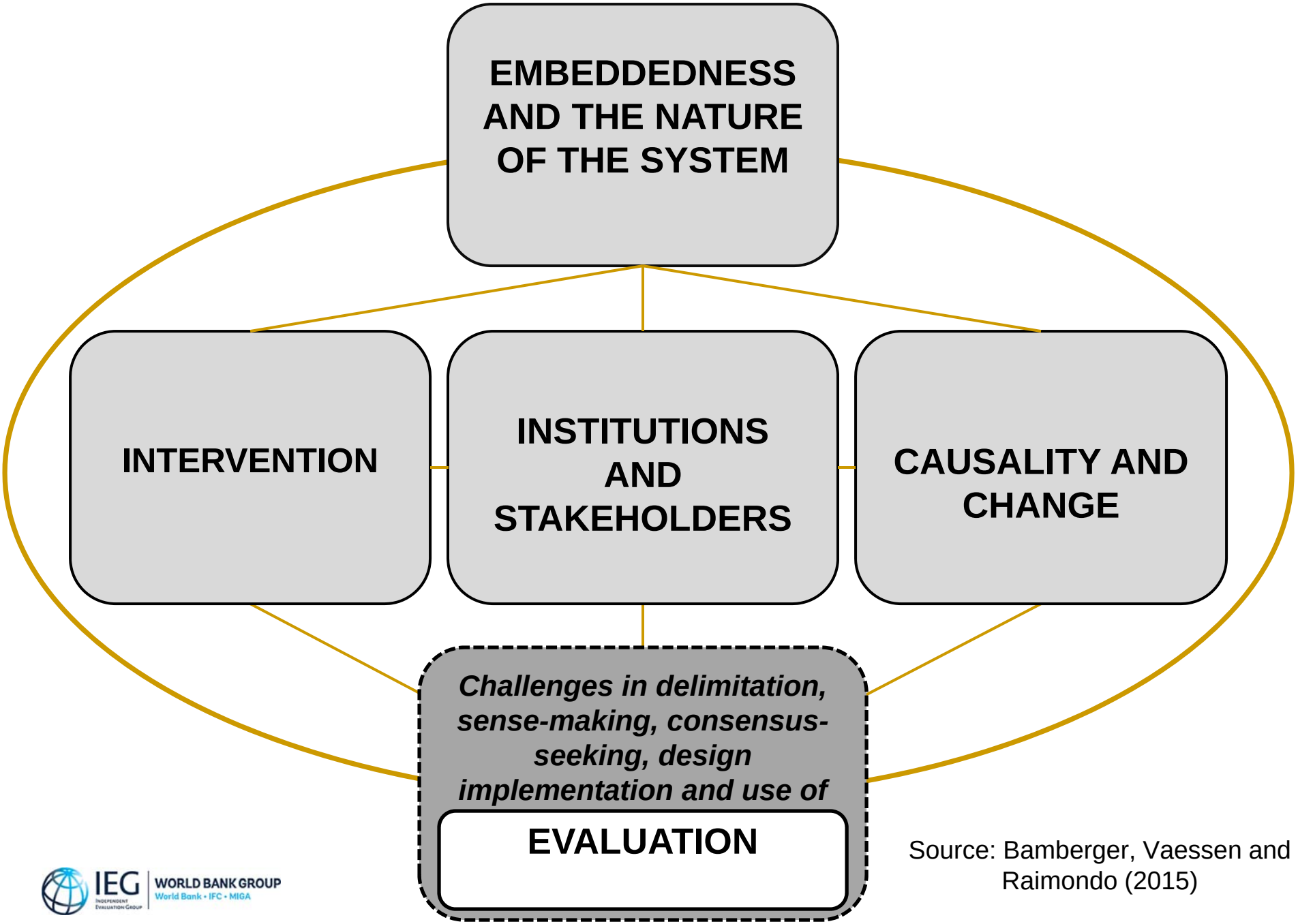
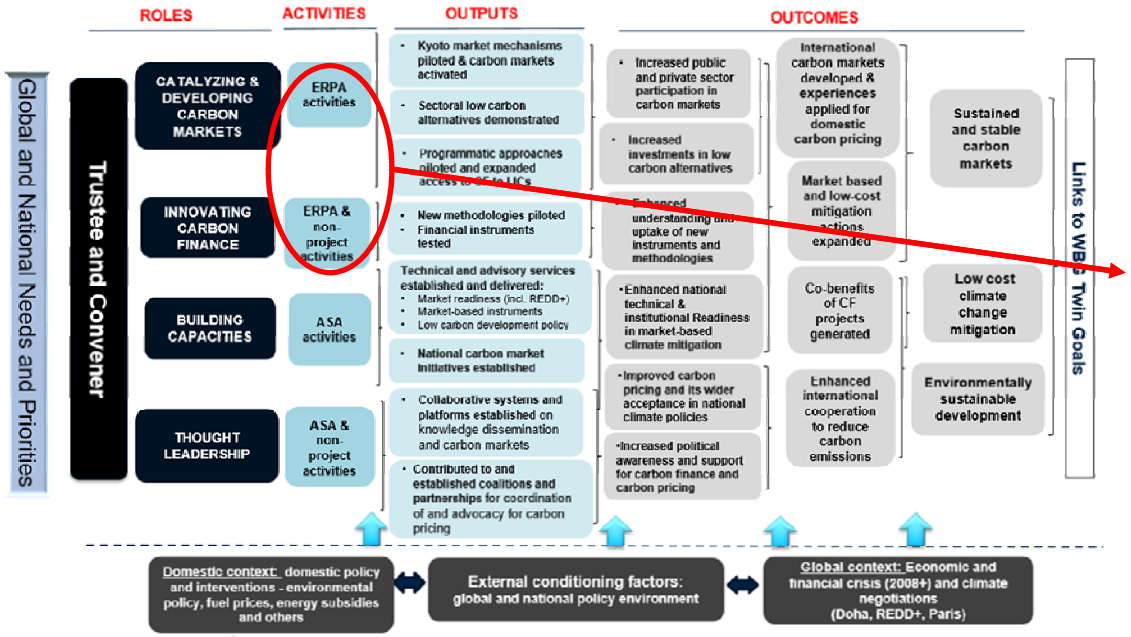
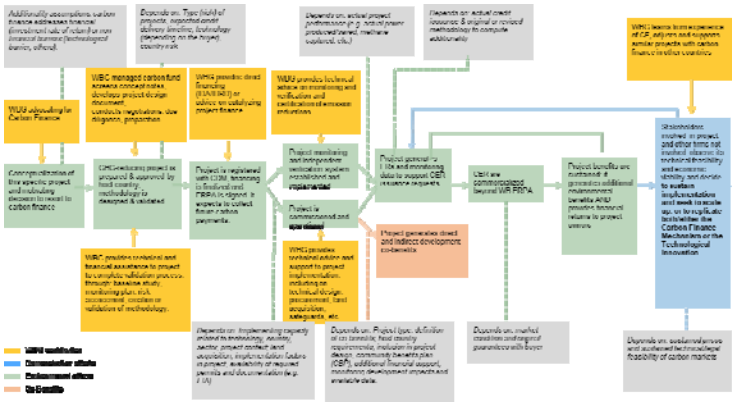


Source: Bamberger, Vaessen and Raimondo (2015)

Example 1: 'Unpacking' - Carbon Finance evaluation

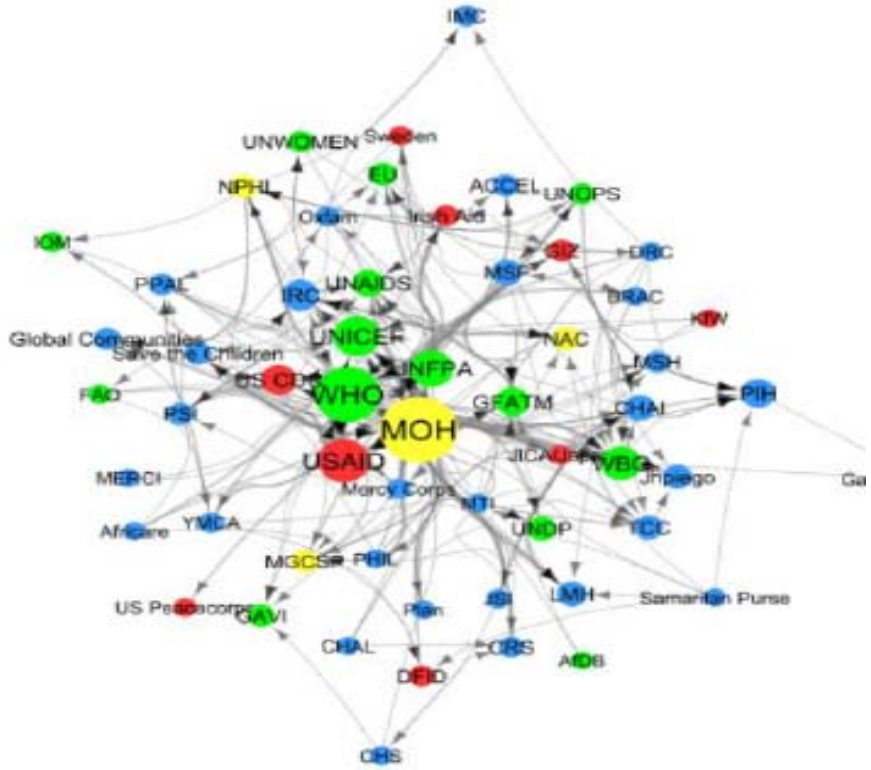


Synthetic 'high-level' ToC

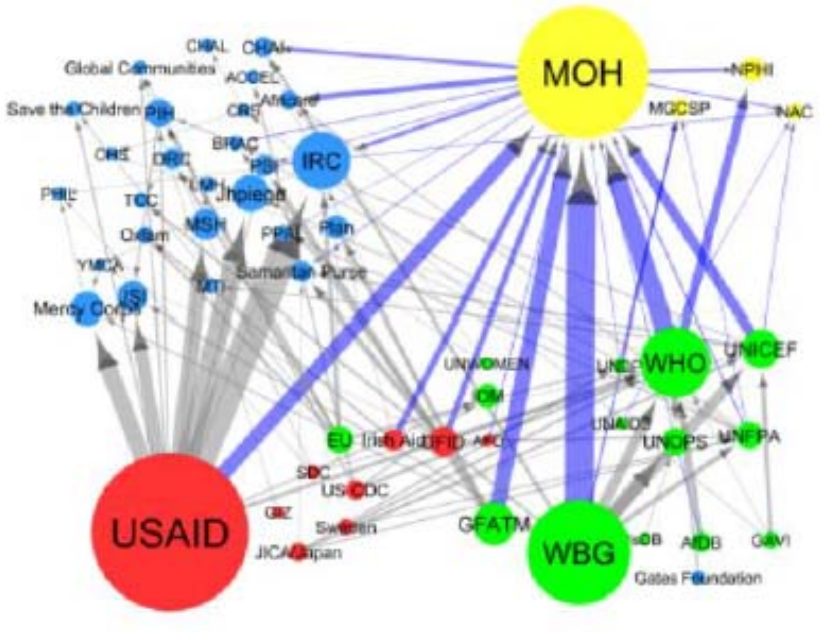


Nested 'detailed' ToC

Example 2: SNA - Health sector in Liberia evaluation case study

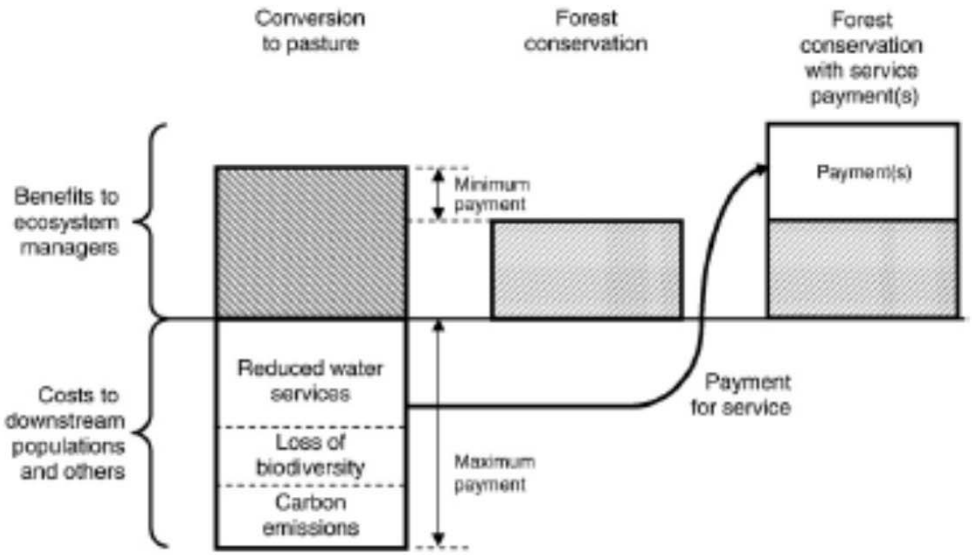


Knowledge leadership in the Health Sector in Liberia



Financial Flows in the Health Sector in Liberia

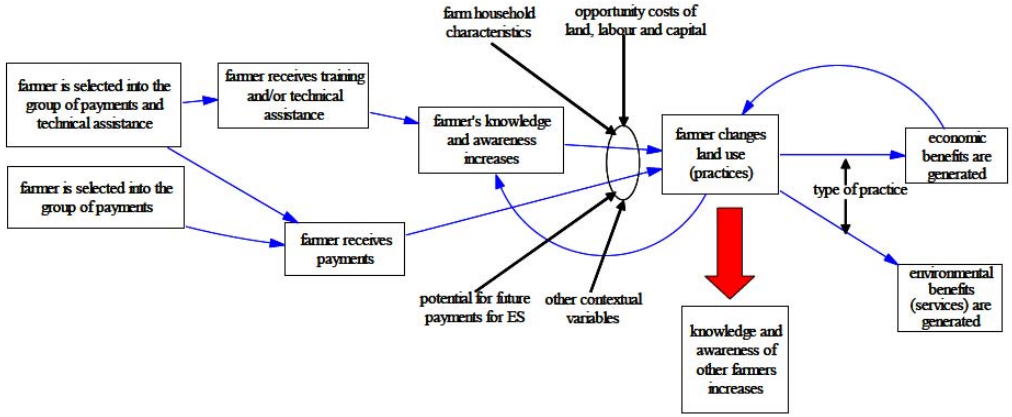
Example 3: Identifying 'systems' of causal pathways – Payments for ecosystem services in agricultural landscapes in Latin America



The logic of payments for environmental services. Source: Adapted from Pagiola and Platais (2007).

- Generate environmental services and economic benefits through LU change
- Research effectiveness of incentives (payments/TA) and relations between LU and environmental benefits
- Publish and disseminate findings

Main ‘systems’ of causal pathways of change



1 Farm (household) environmental and economic effects

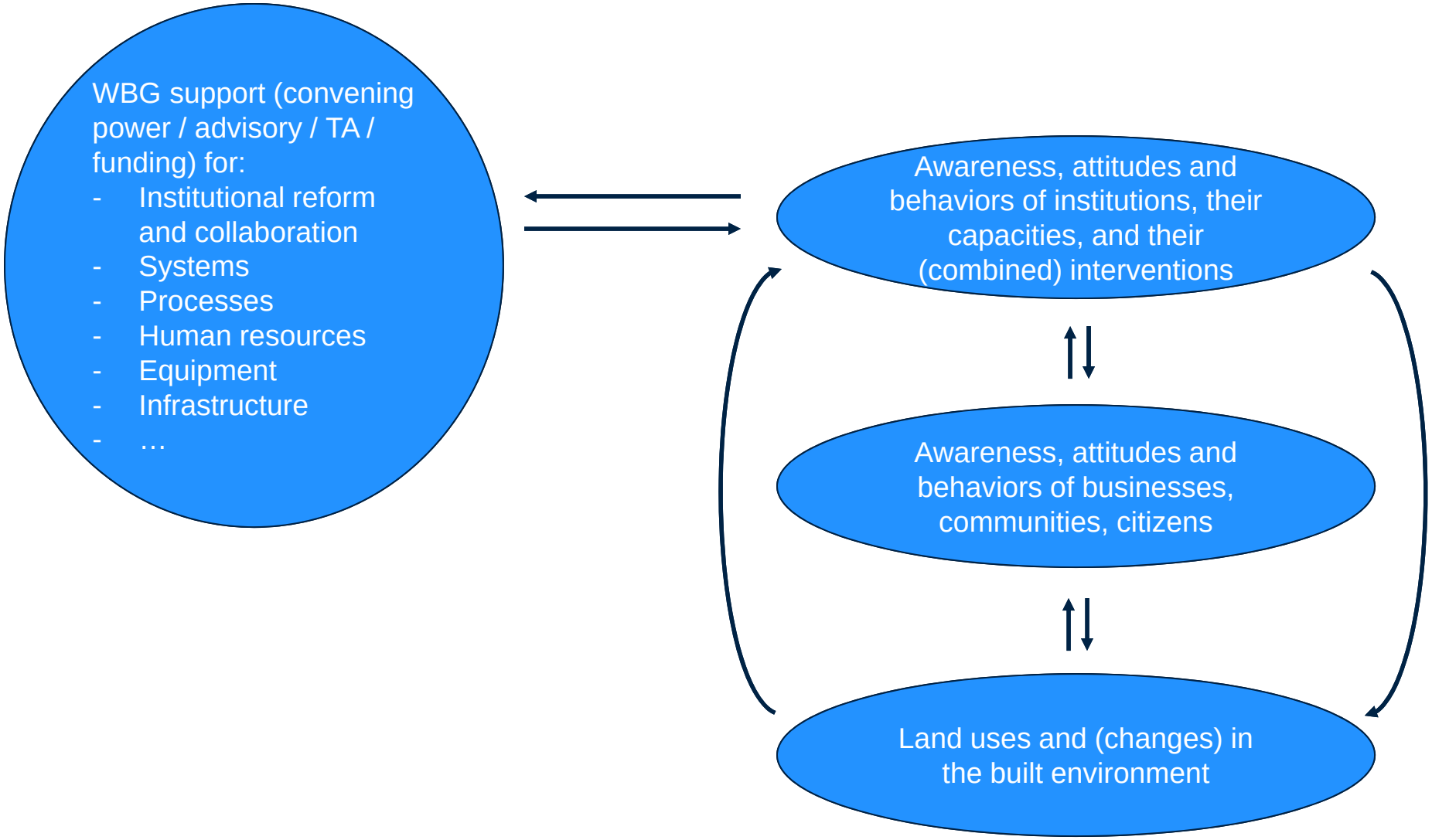
2 Regional ‘corridor’ environmental effects

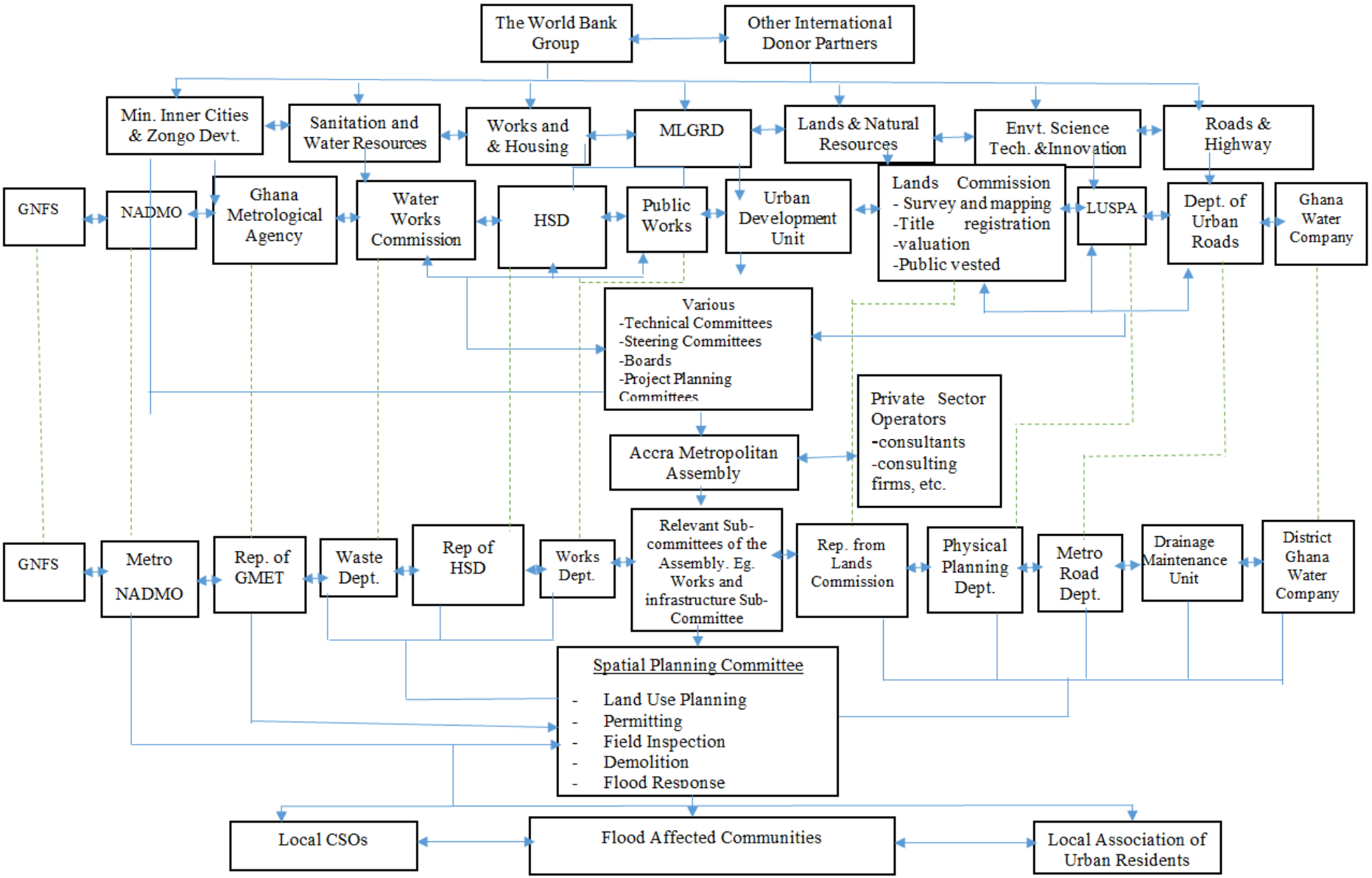
3 Regional market effects

4 Beyond project area/region environmental (displacement effects)

5 Regional, country and cross-country learning, replication and scaling-up effects

Example 4: Systems mapping - Flood resilience in Accra evaluation case study

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Works and & Housing
MLGRD
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Envt. Science Tech. &Innovation
Roads & Highway
GNFS
NADMO
Ghana Metrological Agency
Water Works Commission
HSD
Public Works
Urban Development Unit
Lands Commission
- Survey and mapping
-Title registration
-valuation
-Public vested
LUSPA
Dept. of Urban Roads
Ghana Water Company
Various
-Technical Committees
-Steering Committees
-Boards
-Project Planning Committees
Private Sector Operators
-consultants
-consulting firms, etc.
Accra Metropolitan Assembly
GNFS
Metro NADMO
Rep. of GMET
Waste Dept.
Rep of HSD
Works Dept.
Relevant Sub-committees of the Assembly. Eg. Works and infrastructure Sub-Committee
Rep. from Lands Commission
Physical Planning Dept.
Metro Road Dept.
Drainage Maintenance Unit
District Ghana Water Company
Spatial Planning Committee
- Land Use Planning
- Permitting
- Field Inspection
- Demolition
- Flood Response
Local CSOs
Flood Affected Communities
Local Association of Urban Residents

Concluding remarks

Think about degrees of complexity rather than in dichotomies

Importance of system mapping, delineation and understanding its dynamics

Importance of theory (in its various expressions), but ToC can also be a ‘trap of cognitive bias’

Oversimplification versus ‘complexification’

Robert Merton (patterns of regularity) meets *Ray Pawson* (context-specificity)

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Thank you!