

# The theory of no change

The article presents an analytical framework to identify relevant barriers to market transformation. The framework allows not only a consistent and structured stock taking, but comes with a visualization tool and allows to identify appropriate project interventions. The tool can assist policy makers and stakeholders to improve policies, projects or programs during the design phase, and to learn from past shortcomings to increase intended impacts.

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## Introduction

During the evaluation of projects, programs, or policies failures or shortcomings are frequently reported, but the evaluation often does not provide a satisfying understanding of the reason “why” an intervention has failed. Frequently evaluations do not go beyond the assumptions and the logic that underlie the *evaluandum*. In such cases learning from the evaluation is limited.

## Methodology

A meta-evaluation of climate change mitigation evaluations supported by a community of practice hosted by the Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF EO) identified a series of factors underlying failures. Rather than a classical

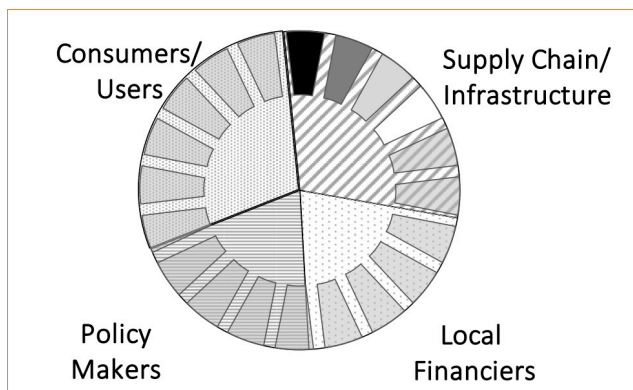
theory of change, which postulates that certain causal linkages and assumptions make an intervention “work”, a theory of no change (TONC) puts forward hypotheses regarding why certain causal linkages are in fact broken, or why implementation interventions mechanisms cannot (yet) work in identified circumstances.

The meta-evaluation led to the formulation of a framework that identified explicit barriers to change – in this case intended market changes – that had prevented the up-scaling of desired practices, i.e. energy efficiency measures. A case study of ten evaluations on energy efficiency projects, policies and programs in Thailand was undertaken to test whether the identified barriers helped explain market dynamics. A second case study in Poland was used for further testing [1]. The latter case study helped reduce the “Theory of no change” framework to twenty crucial barriers.

## The barrier circle

The “barrier” approach framework stipulates that it is not always the behavior of the target group of an intervention

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**FIGURE 1** Structure of the barrier circle

that makes an intervention fail. Our analysis suggests that most markets can be represented as a circle with four segments representing four stakeholder groups: (1) consumers/users, (2) supply chain and infrastructure, (3) local financiers and (4) policy makers (Figure 1).

Each of these actors faces four to six of the following generic types of barriers: (1) lack of motivation, (2) lack of awareness, (3) lack of access to the “better” technology, (4) lack of technical expertise, (5) lack of affordability, or (6) lack of cost effectiveness (Table 1). In some cases, the barriers may already be part of the intervention program. In most cases, where projects failed though, at least some relevant barriers were not part of the original considerations but merely identified as “contextual challenges” to project success. The barrier circle illustrates the relevance of these “overlooked” barriers to the achievement of intended outcomes using a specific color scheme. Specifically, the barriers that have proven to be effectively limiting change are marked in black. Those that exist, but are not decisive, bear grey shade colors while barrier-free dimensions are displayed in white.

To give an example: in the case of a market where the financiers’ activities, attitudes and awareness levels slow down the change in the market, particularly due to a ‘lack of business model’, the barrier is symbolized by grey wedges in the financiers’ part of the circle.

As markets develop, new barriers that used to be “not yet decisive” (grey color code) will then come up and become “limiting” (black color code). New barriers can also be created by external factors, such as changes

Stakeholder	Barrier
Consumers/Users	Consumers Ignorance Lack of interest/motivation Lack of expertise Lack of access Lack of affordability Lack of cost effectiveness
Supply Chain and Infrastructure	Ignorance Lack of expertise Lack of access Lack of affordability Lack of cost effectiveness Lack of business model
Local financiers	Ignorance Lack of expertise Lack of cost effectiveness Lack of business model
Policy Makers	Lack of interest/motivation Ignorance Lack of expertise Lack of affordability

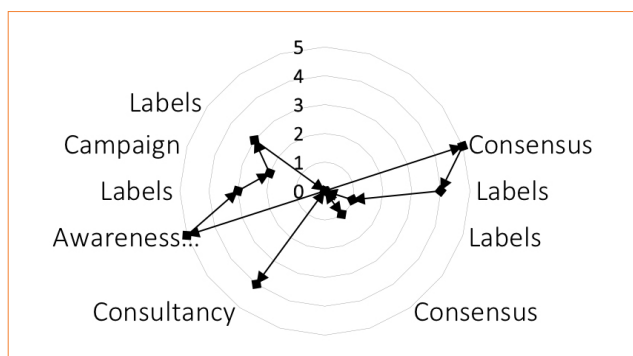
**TABLE 1** Stakeholder groups and barriers

in government, financial crises, failure of technical infrastructures, or new technological developments.

### The intervention circle

A second visualization tool is the intervention circle, represented in a spider web diagram (Figure 2). The project interventions (shown as the spikes of the spider web) point in the direction of the barrier they are designed to address. The intensity of the barrier removal activity varies on a zero to five scale. The relative rank of the activity relates to its importance within the project or program. The spikes of the intervention circle are not calibrated with the intensity of the barrier in the market but are relative to the other activities in a project. The most important element of an intervention is given the highest ranking of five.

To visualize, for example, the case of a labelling policy for energy-efficient appliances each activity is illustrated as a spike of barrier removal activity on the

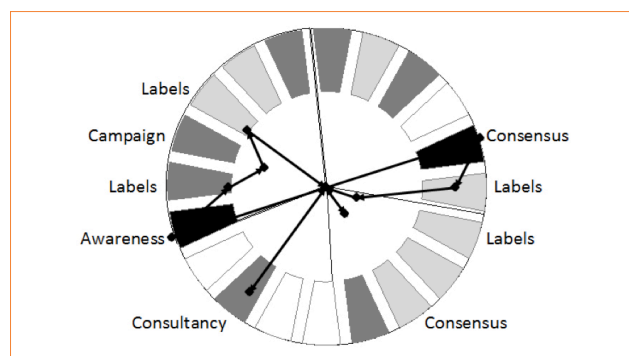


**FIGURE 2** Intervention circle

spider web. The first activity addressed for instance the supply chain by building a consensus on a labelling system among manufacturers. The second activity addressed the barrier “lack of awareness among consumers” with an awareness campaign.

### Project impacts on market barriers

The two tools can be combined to illustrate an intervention match with the existing barriers in a market (Figure 3). A simple overlay of the two diagrams illustrates the degree to which the activities align with the barriers. In the example presented here, the consensus achieved with the supply chain and the energy efficiency labels directly addressed the lack of awareness for this not-yet-cost-effective product and created a new business model, consisting of selling energy-efficient appliances in addition to the original appliances. However, the overlay of the diagrams shows that the black and dark grey barriers were not addressed by the project activities. It can be deduced that these barriers were not removed successfully through the intervention.



**FIGURE 3** Combination of barrier and intervention Circle

This example illustrates how the combination of the barrier circle and the intervention circle can give an indication of the likelihood for success of an intervention at the design stage of a project. When used in evaluation, the direction of the spikes of the intervention circle will be aligned with those barriers that they actually addressed (even if they might have been designed to address other barriers, or without an explicit barrier removal consideration). The tool is able to illustrate the sector in a holistic manner.

### Conclusions

The barrier circle is a useful tool for the analysis of a market. When used for up-front project planning, it can help to identify the relevant barriers and design the appropriate barrier removal strategies. When the barrier circle is drawn for the situation before and after the project, comparing these two circles clearly illustrates the barrier removal impact of a project.

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references & notes

[1] The original studies can be downloaded from the website of the Climate-Eval Community of Practice of the GEF Evaluation Office (<http://www.climate-eval.org/?q=node/2>).