The Role of Rural Development Interventions in Creating a Sustainable Society

Isabel Chender
Raquel Luna Viggiani
Zulma Patarroyo

School of Engineering
Blekinge Institute of Technology
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Thesis submitted for completion of Master of Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability, Blekinge Institute of Technology, Karlskrona, Sweden.

Abstract: The inter-related social and ecological facets of global sustainability imply that the way society develops will impact the environment. Development presents complex, multifaceted challenges. Interventions in the developing world in the form of projects created by the agencies, organizations and agents of the international development community increasingly appreciate and seek to address these challenges. Yet, to do so effectively, interventions need to shift from fragmented, sector-specific approaches based on formal data reports to approaches that anticipate, adapt, transform, and learn. This research aims to complement and support the practical and theoretical knowledge of rural development agents with insights from practitioners using approaches that consider complexity in other fields, in order to explore how development interventions could play a role in moving society toward sustainability. A prototype guide for rural development interventions synthesizes results gathered from interviews with rural development agents within Latin America and learning experience designers into three levels: system, interaction, and personal. The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) provides a systems perspective and unifying definition of sustainability. The interaction level presents key recommendations, rationale, and methods for action, and the personal level presents reflection questions. This research hopes to inspire mutual learning between development actors and communities.

Keywords: development interventions, sustainable development, complexity-based approaches, rural community development, international development community, rural development agents.
Statement of Contribution

ABOUT RESEARCH DESIGN
With grace and commitment three curly brunettes embark on a journey of hope and despair
Connecting their passion for Latin America with the brainy world of the academia weaving of ideas lots of conversations doodles everywhere and help from our mentors a constant revision of goals and expectations a very intense journey hurray for the iteration if we speak of goals conceptualization overall development of writing and methods we can only speak of great co-creation

ABOUT METHODS, DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS
Literature reviews we all tried to tackle but only Isaas turned out as juicy as an apple building on her background in international studies she could speak the lingua of the academia a bit of a nerd as smart as a whip she would keep us grounded Buddhism is her chip

I’m sending this survey Zulma said one day where she needed action and a break from her head

We all shared our networks and fruitful it proved with interview dates calendar improved so many great people who gave out their time to share us some learning and leave us inspired

Our interviews none of us would miss listening, note taking it was such a bliss
Raquel em português
Zulma en espanol
Isabel in English way to accomplish our goal

Excel charts for sense making that’s Raquel’s domain categories and patterns just emerge in her brain here come the transcriptions and the scary coding but for these great people we even enjoyed it

Analysing data we all did our part diverging converging it was like a dance post its on the wall the whiteboard with doodles brains and hearts together prototype and noodles the sense making drawings the challenging questions Zulma’s contribution with communications

WRITTEN REPORT DUTIES
Collective discussions followed by the writing R and Isa excelling and they keep smiling I will take two days to format the text offered the Brazilian we said “be our guest”

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS
Girls I am so sorry But this makes no sense it needs to be simpler feel the flow of Z oh so many versions of the presentations with different styles we crafted those slides Don’t forget citations Isabel would say very much appreciated by our good friend shai

FINAL VERSES
Our knowledge we expanded Laughter, smiles and care existential crisis we hope we make sense On our contribution I could write for days you must read our paper will you be amazed?

Isabel Chender
Raquel Luna Viggiani
Zulma Patarroyo
Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our advisors César França and Brendan Moore, for their continuous support during our research, for their patience, motivation, and guidance.

A special thank you to Tracy Meisterheim for always having time to give us that little extra help and guidance.

Thanks, Gracias and Obrigadas to Jane Baldwin, Sergio Beltran, Gerardo Berthin, Carlos Cerna, Angel Cruz, Wilder Mamani, Michael McGarrell, Camila Rodrigues and Valcleia Solidade for sharing their wonderful stories with us and taking us back, if mentally and spiritually, to our beloved Latin America.

Gracias as well to Pablo Olmeno, whom we never managed to interview but whose lack of availability helped us be flexible and creative about how to go about our research.

We want to especially acknowledge the contribution of the following people who inspired and challenged us: Juanita Brown, Maria de los Angeles Cinta, Carlos Mota, Bob Stilger, Zaid Hassan (additional thanks to Zaid for existential crisis #3.784) Maria Temmick, Ana Maria Aristizabal, Rodrigo Alonso, Ezra DeKorte, Katie Morihead, Aerin Dunford, Deborah Frieze, Le Anne Grillo, Torsten Jorgensen, Maaiane Knuth and Pete Sims. Thank you for sharing some of your time, journeys, contacts, learnings and questions with us.

A big thank you to Isabel Sandoval for the beautiful design for our prototype.

We also extend our deep appreciation to our house mates Kate, Ana, Lamia and Zulma’s family Rowan, Ilona and Naira, for supporting us intellectually and emotionally, for listening to our rants and for allowing us to transform our houses into working spaces and brainstorming paradises.
Executive Summary

The socio-ecological challenge of achieving global sustainability given declining resources and increasing population is multi-faceted. The specific ways in which the human development of nations and populations is perceived and conducted is arguably a key part, given its implications for ecological resources. The development challenge is complex, and thus there is a need for research regarding how to effectively address this complexity to ensure sustainability.

This thesis examines how learning based approaches designed to deal with complexity can support rural development interventions in moving society towards sustainability

Introduction

The ecosystem services upon which society depends are being systematically degraded in ways that cannot be sustained (IPCC 2014). Resources are being utilized faster than nature can regenerate or replenish them, which could lead to unpredictable impacts upon the Earth’s capacity to support human life (Robèrt 2010). The interconnectedness of society and the environment, and thus the interconnection between human development and ecological resources, ensures that human development will strongly impact environmental sustainability on a global level.

This socio-ecological challenge is a multi-faceted, complex issue of which population growth, anthropogenic activity, and patterns of development are a part. Developed nations evolved at the cost of unsustainable consumption and production patterns that continue to drive the erosion of the socio-ecological fabrics of society and the ecosystem. This trend represents a risk to global society in terms of exhaustion of natural resources, loss of biodiversity and strains on food production. The question becomes: What will now happen if developing nations follow the path of developed ones?

To encourage and guide developing nations to pioneer a move toward sustainable society, there is a need to understand what such a society would look like. The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) is specifically designed to address the complexity of the sustainability challenge (Robèrt 2010). Given the unpredictability of the challenge and the need for a common understanding of how society should take action towards a solution, the framework presents common principles to be complied with to foster socio-ecological sustainability. The FSSD also serves as a conceptual framework to guide a systemic understanding.

The definition of the development challenge directly influences how the global system of international development community responds to it. Based on different ways of classifying developed and developing nations, and the different indices and ways to measure this, the questions that arise are: What is being developed? What does it mean to develop? How can nations develop?

The programs designed and implemented by development organizations can be called development interventions, as members or actors from outside of their target of “poor and vulnerable” developing communities intervene within the community to assist in different development initiatives. These interventions are being transformed and redefined in light of the new call for sustainable human development from the UNDP that has arisen alongside the
growth of academic literature on complexity thinking in international development. These points towards a fundamental shift in mental models, strategic approaches, organizational philosophies, and performance approaches.

Although the indices that underpin measures of development have recently become more holistic and consider more multifaceted forms of development, there is still a fundamental mismatch between the objective and the solution. Current interventions are fragmented and sector-based, while sustainable human development is complex and multi-dimensional. To appropriately engage this complexity, interventions need to shift from fragmented, sector-specific approaches based on a “silver bullet” solution, to approaches that anticipate, adapt, transform, and learn (Ramalingam 2013; Barber 2011). There needs to be more emphasis on learning as a means of mutual transformation (Parsons 2002).

This thesis seeks to explore the potential of learning as an approach to address the complex challenge of human development. Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

Methods

Research design and methods - In order to guide the research and organize the multiple parts, Maxwell’s 2005 model for qualitative research design was selected due to its iterative nature that allows researchers to consider complex, system-based questions (Maxwell, 2005). Using the FSSD as a conceptual framework and referring to defined goals to hold multiple levels of objectives, the researchers answered their research questions using exploratory interviews, semi-structured interviews, and a prototype with practitioner feedback.

Groups and Analysis – The researchers conducted eighteen interviews with two different groups – rural development agents (Group A) and learning experience designers (Group B). Thematic Data Analysis charts, graphic recording, and a Five Level Framework were used to analyse interviews from Group A, and transcript coding was used to analyse Group B.

The Prototype Guide – The complimentary guide, which possesses the current working title of: “Development Interventions toward a Sustainable Society,” was created by combining findings from the two fields of research framed with knowledge regarding systems thinking, complexity, concepts from Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD), and personal guiding questions into a complimentary framework or work guide for rural development agents.
Results and Discussion

Results are presented and discussed based on the three phases of research that correspond to the research questions.

Section 3.1 presents results collected through interviews with rural development agents (Group A) to describe the current reality and success characteristics of rural development interventions. Information is organized according to the Five Level Framework that present five patterns regarding the system, fourteen characteristics that were present in successful interventions, four strategic guidelines, a list of actions, and a list of tools. A sustainability maturity degree assessment conducted with the sustainability profile tool is also included.

The discussion explains that in current practice, most rural development interventions face systemic constraints, and given the need for results and lack of flexibility, base their design and implementation on generic reports and data, rather than on an understanding of the specific situation on the ground. Interviewees noted several crucial success characteristics in retrospect, but found it difficult to incorporate these elements into design or find a rational or method by which to achieve them. Sustainability was considered important, yet definitions and ideas regarding the role of interventions in promoting it were very diverse. Low maturity degree scores on the sustainability profile suggest a low level of integration, yet many interviewees incorporate social sustainability into their work without naming it.

Section 3.2 presents insights gathered from interviews with learning experience designers (Group B) to answer the second secondary research question regarding how these practitioners can support rural development interventions with their knowledge of complexity. Findings are divided into categories of approach, actions, and tools that support, complement, and add to the success characteristics and actions identified by Group A. An interpretation of the overall results implies that learning experience designers can support rural development agents in addressing the complexity of the development challenge by contributing approaches, actions, and tools that support their vision of success and contribute rationale, guidelines, and concrete steps that can be pursued. The prototype guide expands on this in its bridging of the results.

The most significant results are presented in the prototype that combines findings from Group A and Group B into a multi-level guide. To answer the primary research question, the content is presented in four levels: framing; system; interaction; and personal.

The frame states the basic assumption that development is a complex challenge and shares an overarching philosophy gathered from the approach results of Group B. Thes philosophy is that individuals designing and implementing development interventions should adopt a position of learning with openness and curiosity. It highlights that letting go of expectations and being open to what is discovered in the situation can allow new ideas to emerge. The ability to adapt plans is understood crucial, in light of the unpredictability and interconnectedness of variables that compose the development challenge. There is a need for phasing action, considering principles above plans or rules. Learning experience practitioners believe that building on what is present and taking an appreciative mind-set to the current reality is also a good starting point for forming lasting relationships.

The system level presents results from Group A regarding how they define and incorporate sustainability. In addition to the lack of common understanding about the concept, there is also some resistance toward working with it. Results reveal a need to shed the stigma and
basic assumptions associated with the word and re-define it in a way that is meaningful in practice. Based on these results, the guide provides the SSD concepts as a framing for the sustainability challenge. These have four sections: human society, sustainable society, development, and what role development intervention work can play in moving society toward sustainability. There is an emphasis on the interrelation between sustainability and the development challenge, and it presents a definition of sustainable society as defined by the sustainability principles. The last section invites a reflection of what role development intervention work could play in moving society toward sustainability.

The interaction level surfaces results from Group A and supporting information from Group B regarding what actions to take, why they should be taken, and how they can be realized. The current pattern of interventions is to emphasize the expected results that the offered solutions will provide, rather than examining how effectively the solution actually addresses the root causes of the problem. Thus, this section compliments the key findings and success characteristics of the rural development agents with insights for working with complex problems. The key findings/recommendations for an interaction that address complexity to become socially and ecologically sustainable are:

- Deeply understand local reality
- Identify needs and create goals, objectives, vision, and new narratives together (co-create)
- Balance expectations from organizations and communities
- Create and cultivate local infrastructure
- Choose appropriate and localized solutions
- Consider people first, titles after
- Create ownership through participation and empowerment
- Explore the connection between people and the ecosystem
- Host open dialogue with the community
- Consider unintended consequences
- Create a safe space for experimentation and risk sharing
- Learn together
- Set limits and exit carefully (gradually)
- Reflect on and learn from success and failures

The guide explores the whys and how rationale and practice of each recommendation.

The last section highlights the importance of the rural development agent, and reveals results regarding the need for personal reflection and attention in order to achieve successful interventions. A significant success factor is not only by the passion and intention of the people involved in it, but also on how much they are able to learn from being in contact with different perspectives in the communities where they are working. Therefore, the guide offers a phase-based series of personal reflection questions to spark insights and inspire learning for the rural development agents.

As a whole, the discussion serves to evaluate the results and the methods used to obtain them. The objective is to explore how significant the results of the research are and to what extent they answer the research question, while considering the accuracy and reliability of the methodology and how it could be improved. The results are also discussed in relation to previous assumptions, existing academic literature, and their potential contribution to the larger field of sustainability.
The main limitation of the research is an inability to conduct participatory research in the field, given geographic location. The researchers also acknowledge that the small sample size is an insufficient basis from which to authoritatively generalize or make statements regarding the whole system. In hindsight, the researchers also recommend that future studies conduct the Group A interviews before designing and conducting the interviews with Group B so that the questions crafted for the later would be more relevant.

**Conclusion and Further Recommendations**

This research explores how interventions conducted by development organizations in rural developing communities can positively contribute to moving society towards sustainability. One key aspect of this puzzle is the need for the organizations and their agents to have a higher awareness regarding the complexity of the development challenge.

The results highlight a need for a shift in mind-set and approach. To address a strategic gap in how interventions could play such a role, this research seeks to prepare the field by adopting a systems perspective, guiding reflection and action towards sustainability, reporting learning and success characteristics, and bridging fields of knowledge. It plants questions as opposed to providing answers, and advocates that mutual learning and mutual knowledge sharing should become the norm.
Glossary

**Capacity building**: Long-term continual process of development that involves all stakeholders to tackle problems related to policy and methods of development, while considering the potential, limits and needs of the people of the country concerned. It takes place on an individual level, an institutional level and the societal level (UNDP 2006).

**Complexity**: a state in which the interaction between a number of interconnected variables result in unpredictable outcomes and where relationships between cause and effect only become apparent in hindsight (Snowden and Kurtz 2003).

**Community**: Group of people living in the same locality and sharing some common characteristics (IFAD 2014).

**Climate Change**: A change in the state of the climate that can be identified by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. Climate change may be due to natural internal processes or external forcing, or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use (IPCC 2007).

**Developed countries**: Countries in the top quartile of the Human Development Index (HDI) distribution, also classified as Very High Human Development, which means their index is 0.76 – out of 1 - or higher (UNDP 2013).

**Developing countries**: Developing countries consists of countries in the high group (HDI percentiles 51-75), medium group (HDI percentiles 26-50), and the low group with bottom quartile HDI (UNDP 2013).

**Five Level Framework** (for Planning in Complex Systems): A model that provides a structured understanding for analysis, planning and decision-making in complex systems. It consists of five distinct, interrelated levels – Systems, Success, Strategic, Actions, Tools (Robèrt et al. 2010),

**Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development** (FSSD): A systems-based framework that identifies the ecological and societal conditions necessary for human survival within the finite limits of the biosphere. The FSSD is structured with the Five Level Framework and a key aspect is the strategic use of backcasting from the four sustainability principles (Robèrt et al. 2010).

**Funnel metaphor**: A way to illustrate how systematically increasing demand for resources and biosphere services is exceeding the capacity of the earth to replenish and sustain life (Robèrt et al. 2010).

**Empowerment**: The expansion of freedom of choice and action, of assets and capabilities to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (World Bank 2002).

**Human Development Index**: HDI is a composite index of three indices measuring countries achievement in longevity, education and income. It also recognizes other aspects of development such as political freedom and personal security. It is used by the UNDP as the
measure for country classification system, which aims to take into account the multifaceted nature of development (UNDP 2013).

**Learning experience:** For the purpose of this paper, it is experience designed around learning as an approach to deal with complexity.

**Learning experience designers:** People who design, implement and evaluate process of community engagement— not necessarily focused on rural development — and whose approach to deal with complex situations is developed around creating learning experiences.

**Participatory processes:** A series of methodologies used in the facilitation of processes for addressing complex issues. Most of the methodologies are dialogue-based.

**Rural community:** Usually they are independent producers and wage workers whose livelihoods principally depend on agriculture and agriculture-related activities. “They are [smallholder] farmers, herders, small entrepreneurs, fishers and landless agricultural labourers. They are members of indigenous groups, minorities and scheduled castes. They are those with the least land and water, and with the least control over the assets they do have. They typically have little access to formal financial institutions for capital of any sort. They often have very little access to modern technology and very little preparation for the development and management of modern forms of association. More often than not, they are women, and, as such, have special difficulties in accessing key development resources, services and opportunities. Frequently the rural poor are socially excluded, isolated and marginalized groups on whom those responsible for the development of modern institutions and services have all too often turned their backs. Their lives are characterized by vulnerability and insecurity, which make it difficult for them to take risks that could lead them out of poverty.” (IFAD 2006, 6)

**Rural development:** It generally refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas.

**Rural development interventions:** Programs conducted by development organizations as members or actors from outside of the community intervene within the community to assist in different development initiatives. Rural development interventions are carried out by development organizations such as regional organizations, government development departments NGOs etc (Ramalingam 2013).

**Rural development agents:** People who design, implement and evaluate rural development interventions and who have direct contact with rural communities.

**Systems thinking:** A holistic approach to analysis that focuses on the way that a system's constituent parts interrelate and how systems work over time and within the context of larger systems. The systems thinking approach contrasts with traditional analysis, which studies systems by breaking them down into their separate elements (Robèrt 2010).

**Sustainability Challenge:** Challenges caused by unsustainable behaviour that is systematically increasing the degradation of the socio-ecological system. It is the challenge of transitioning from an unsustainable society to a sustainable one (Robèrt 2010).
**Sustainability:** A state in which the socio-ecological system is not systematically undermined by society. The four basic sustainability principles must be met in order to have a sustainable society (Robèrt 2010).

**Sustainability Principles:** In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing...
1. ...concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust; 2. ...concentrations of substances produced by society; 3. ...degradation by physical means; and in that society... 4. ...people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs (Robèrt 2010).

**Sustainable Human Development:** “the process of enlarging people’s choices by expanding their capabilities and opportunities in ways that are sustainable from the economic, social, and environmental standpoints, benefiting the present without compromising the future” (UNDP 2013).
List of Abbreviations

HDI Human Development Index

IFAD International Fund for Agricultural Development

UNDP United Nations Development Program

FSSD Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development

5LF Five Level Framework

IMF International Monetary Fund

IOM International Organization for Migrations

WFP World Food Program

NGO Non Governmental Organizations
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1 Introduction

1.1 The socio-ecological sustainability challenge

The environmental stability that has been acting as a precondition for unprecedented human development over the last thousand years is under threat due to anthropogenic activity (IPCC 2014; UNDP 2013; UN 2013). Two-thirds of the eco-system services that humans depend on are being degraded or used in ways that cannot be sustained (Worldwatch Institute 2006). Accelerating growth in the quantity of global greenhouse gas emissions, the amount of fossil fuel extraction, the scale of agricultural development, and the way these actions are affecting the planetary boundaries and carrying capacity of the biosphere puts environmental sustainability at risk (Holmberg and Robèrt 2010; Rockstrom 2009). Given the extent to which society is dependent on ecological resources, it becomes clear that changes in the biosphere and its capabilities to sustain life will seriously impact human development. However, the interconnection between the two implies that human development also impacts environmental sustainability on a global level.

This presents a multi-faceted, complex challenge of global socio-ecological sustainability that can be visually represented using a funnel metaphor (Robèrt et al 2010). The four key components include the state of the earth’s resources, the way that society is currently operating and how it affects these resources, the implications of continuing to exist in this manner, and a way to envision a sustainable future society.

![Figure 1.1. The Funnel metaphor](image)

The declining capacity of the socio-ecological system to support human civilization is depicted by the walls of the funnel (UNEP 2011; Robèrt et al 2010). The resources that society needs to survive, such as productive topsoil, food, clean air and water to name a few, are in decline (Robèrt 2010). This is due to the fact that these resources are being utilized, exhausted, or damaged faster than nature can regenerate or replenish them (Robèrt 2010). Planetary boundaries imply that there is a threshold beyond which these resources, or walls, cannot be replaced, reconstructed or regenerated (IPCC 2014; Rockstrom 2009).
Concurrently, the global demand for resources is growing due to an increase in population (World Bank 2013; Robèrt 2010), current unsustainable consumption patterns present across the world (Ny 2006; Broman et al. 2000), and increases in levels of human development that afford individuals more choice and thus more access to resources (UNDP 2013; Rosling 2006). The unsustainable nature of contemporary lifestyles (Ny 2006; Broman et al. 2000; Holmberg 1995; Robèrt 1994) is especially evident in the so-called developed world, where increased production and consumption practices have led to high levels of greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants.

While demands for resources are increasing, nature’s capacity to sustain and regenerate resources is declining. Society is beginning to move forward in a funnel whose walls are narrowing, implying less room to maneuver (Robèrt 2010). If society continues in the same way, they become more likely to “hit the walls of the funnel,” or run out of the necessary resources to sustain life (Robèrt 2010).

### 1.1.1 Society’s unsustainable path toward development

Society’s role in the global sustainability challenge is critically important considering the dramatic increases in anthropogenic emissions and their effects upon the biosphere (IPCC 2014; Robèrt et al. 2010). The path of development undertaken and currently maintained by the developed world draws largely upon consumption and production practices based on the extraction of minerals from the earth’s crust, as well as the emission of greenhouse gases and other pollutant emissions (Robèrt et al. 2010; UNEP 2011, Heltberg et al. 2009; UNFCCC 2007). These unsustainable consumption and production patterns that have evolved in developed countries are being increasingly followed by developing countries.

Developed nations have historically been responsible for higher levels of greenhouse gas emissions, as on a per capita basis, emissions from industrialized countries (as defined by the UNFCC) are on average 2.5 that of those from developing countries (IPCC 2014). Nevertheless, since the latest IPCC report AR4, the total emissions from nations not considered industrialized have overtaken the total greenhouse gas emissions of developed nations (IPCC 2014).

### 1.1.2 Risks and Consequences

This highlights the potential risks and consequences that will ensue if developing nations follow a similar path to that of developed nations. It presents a risk to global society as a whole. Developing nations possess the highest proportion of the world’s natural resources and biodiversity, they are the primary supplier of the world’s food, and they make up a huge proportion of society (Skoufias, Rabassa, Olivieri, and Brahmbhatt 2011; IPCC 2007).

The challenge is compounded by the fact that in developing nations, a lack of social and built infrastructure reduces the ability to adapt to changes in the natural environment (UNEP 2011; Robèrt 2010; Heltberg et al. 2009; UNFCCC 2007). Beyond an inability to adapt, the potential impacts of climate change on the developing world are far more severe than those predicted for the developed world (Acton 2010). The population of the developing world are on a whole more vulnerable to changes in resources and resource scarcity because of their relative lack of assets and the fact that a large proportion of livelihoods, especially in rural areas, are based on these resources (UNDP 2013).
1.2 Sustainable Society

1.2.1 Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD)

Given that the amount of resources available to support life is declining while human needs increase, and that this relationship is complex due to the inter-related parts and unpredictability (Robèrt et al. 2010; Kurtz and Snowden 2003) this thesis introduces the structured, holistic, complexity-based Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) to provide a concrete, rigorous, and applicable definition of sustainable development (Robèrt et al. 1997). One manner in which to confront anthropogenic impacts and address aforementioned risks and consequences, is to understand how society could become sustainable, and understand what this would look like.

1.2.2 Sustainability Principles

A sustainable society is defined by the FSSD as one which complies with four sustainability principles (SPs)* or boundaries, understood as the minimum conditions necessary for the human population to survive upon Earth in a sustainable manner (Robèrt 2010; Ny et al. 2006; Broman et al. 2000; Robert 2000; Holmberg 1995). The first three principles are related to ecological and environmental sustainability, describing direct and indirect anthropogenic deterioration of the biosphere, while the fourth emphasizes the need for a strong social fabric to achieve social sustainability. According to Robert et al “(i)n a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing:

1. concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust (SP1);

2. concentrations of substances produced by society (SP2);

3. degradation by physical means (SP3);

and in that society,

4) people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs (SP4)”1 (Robèrt 2002).

1.2.3 The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD)

In order to understand how a particular facet of the sustainability challenge affects the larger global socio-ecological system, the FSSD can be utilized as a conceptual framework. It has the ability to systematize knowledge and guide an understanding of systems and their sub-systems by dividing them into five levels: system success, strategic, actions, and tools (Robèrt et al. 2010).

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1 It is important to note that since their initial publication, the principles have undergone several revisions (Ny, 2009), and the fourth social principle is currently being presented as eight. However, given the recent publication of the new sustainability principles and a perceived lack in the ability of practitioners such as the researchers to skillfully present and work with all eight principles, four will be used for the purposes of this paper.
The system and success levels help to create a shared vision of sustainable society and its boundaries, while the strategic level prioritizes actions and tools by use of backcasting and prioritization questions related to the vision of success. The levels and their descriptions are captured below in Figure 1.2:

Figure 1.2: The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development
1.3 Human Development

The facet that this research explores is human development and how it is pursued. Though international trade as well as human and social development have existed for thousands of years, the concept of international or global development emerged following the Second World War in the 20th century (Fowler 2013; Worsely 2006; Voth 2004; Williams 1998). What development means in the context of international development, and how it is defined has shifted, evolved, and remains contested.

1.3.1 What is being developed?

Explanations and theories have been largely based upon a distinction between nations and populations that are developed, and those which are in the process of becoming developed or developing. Although there is no universally accepted criterion (UN Statistics Division Data Base 2013), the UN, CIA, OECD, IMF, and World Bank all release public lists categorizing nations and their relative attributes. Currently, nations are presented by the UNDP on a spectrum ranging from very high, to high, to medium, to low development (UNDP 2013). Appendix A illustrates how the word “development” can possess different definitions depending upon the indicators it is based on, and this has changed over time.

The distinction between “developed” and “developing” points to questions regarding what is being developed, what does it mean to develop, and how can nations and human beings develop. This research adopts the most recent and peer-reviewed body of reference in the field, reports and indices developed by the UN and UNDP. This choice is based on the fact that the UN, on a global level, has set an agenda and built consensus on action for development since the 1960s. Moreover, the reports and literature published by the UN and their branches are peer-reviewed and based upon the most recent statistics available.

1.3.2 Changing definitions of poverty

The definition of poverty can be understood in relation to the indices that measure a nation’s development. The evolution of these indices demonstrates how poverty has been and is being redefined, affecting development approaches on an ideological and practical level (Fowler, 2013). Initially it was assumed that inputs of finance and expertise from rich developed donor countries could accelerate and direct change in poorer developing countries of the world (Barder 2011; Rosling 2006; Fowler 1997). The UN acknowledged and accepted the economic measure of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the primary indicator of national development (Angus 2003). Rostow’s 1960 economic model of growth stipulated that an increase in income and GDP would lead to national development, lift nations out of economic poverty, and thus nations would achieve development (Barder 2011).

Within a mindset of economic development, the role of human development oriented organizations was to invest aid in the form of monetary donations to increase domestic capital and increase savings (Barder 2011). This line of thinking was also the basis for a series of national plans created during the 1950s and 1960s, characterized by a focus on industrial development and sectorial analysis (Voth 2004). A reaction to these unilateral aid donations in the form of structured loans saw the rise of advocacy from development organizations for a re-definition of development and poverty, in order to mainstream practices based upon capacity building, human needs, and a more social definition of development (Voth 2004; Fowler 1997).
The term capacity building is included in the methods and objectives of several international organizations that work with development, such as the World Bank, UNDP, and many non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In the 1990s, the Human Development Index (HDI) created by Hag and Sen was published and adopted by the UNDP (Sen 1990; UNDP 1990). This measure combines life expectancy, education, and income indices in a composite index used to rank countries into four tiers of human development (HD): very high, high, medium, and low (UN 2013). HD is now a central focus and core principle of the UNDP, defined as a concept which “focuses on the process of enlarging people’s choices, looking both at the formation of human capabilities and the use people make of their acquired capabilities” (UNDP 2013).

1.3.3 Re-defining the development paradigm

The concept of sustainable development popularized by the publication of the Brundtland Commission's report in 1987 has arguably become the latest paradigm in development thinking (Williams 1998). The Brundtland definition of poverty is based upon the idea that “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987, 43).

Sustainability has been promoted as a key goal by development oriented organizations and UN since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio in 1992 focusing attention on the relationship between environmental degradation, poverty, development, and social justice (UN 1992). In the 2013 UNDP Strategic Report, “sustainable human development” is stated as the goal of the UNDP’s objectives, defined as “the process of enlarging people’s choices by expanding their capabilities and opportunities in ways that are sustainable from the economic, social, and environmental standpoints, benefiting the present without compromising the future” (UNDP 2013).

1.4 Interventions to address the human development challenge

1.4.1 The international development community

To address the multi-faceted development challenge, a global system of actors has emerged and continues to evolve. Every nation on the globe plays a part as either a donor, a recipient, or as both (Ramalingnam 2013). The international development community has existed for 30 plus years (Fowler 2013), employing many different intermediaries to deliver physical, financial, and knowledge assets to developing nations (Ramalingam 2013).

This sphere of actors can be divided into three layers: international development agencies, development organizations, and developing communities. The international development agencies adhere to global mandates, provide financial support, set objectives and targets for the development program cycle, and provide guidelines. They include actors such as UN bodies, international financial institutions, government departments, Red Cross/Crescent, grant making foundations, small private trusts, think tanks and universities, and multinational corporations (Ramalingam 2013).

Development organizations are purposeful, role-bound social units or groups of individuals who allocate tasks to contribute to a common goal of alleviating poverty (Fowler 1997). They organize and follow through on all levels of the program cycle from design to monitoring and
evaluation (Ramalingan 2013). This group includes a variety of NGOs whether international, regional, or national, as well as civil society movements, local governments, community-based organizations, small businesses, and other such initiatives (Ramalingam 2013).

Developing communities are the target audience of the development organizations. Generally speaking, they are considered the one billion people described by international agencies and institutions as “poor and vulnerable” (Ramalingam 2013). Figure 1.3 depicts the multiple levels of the international development community.

Figure 1.3: The Development Community

1.4.2 Development interventions

Unlike previous configurations that were characterized by a more linear pattern of investment, the current system of the international development community is described as “many-to-many.” Many development actors support many different communities and groups in many different ways to achieve many different objectives. Today there is “more money, more frameworks, more partners, more disciplines, more pathways, and more channels” (Ramalingam, 2013, 150). Through these different patterns and channels, the programs conducted by development organizations can be called development interventions, as members or actors from outside of the community intervene within the community to assist in different development initiatives (as represented by the arrow in Figure 1.3). These interventions can take a variety of forms, from multibillion-dollar reconstruction projects to microfinance loans of less than 10 United States Dollars (Ramalingam 2013).

The new call for sustainable human development elicits a new kind of development interventions. It has become clear that development cannot be effectively only externally directed but rather requires local ownership and sufficient capacity to guide the process (Fowler 2013). Thus, more integrated development projects that are more service-oriented and appreciative of local perspective should be considered (Ramalingam 2013).
Holistic and participatory approaches define the new paradigm of development interventions, and are aligned with current UN indices and measurements of Inequality-Adjusted HDI, Gender Inequality Index (GII) and Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (UN 2013). In order to address the multi-faceted challenge of development, methods such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) create participatory interventions aimed at incorporating community members. They are holistic in that they address the development of the whole community. Other frameworks and methods integrate sustainability at the core of interventions, such as the UN’s Integrated and Sustainable Rural Development Strategy (IRSDP) (Public Service Commission of South Africa 2009), and the Integrated Sustainability Assessment (ISA) (Bohunovsky et al, 2011). However, a literature review that considered many reports did not encounter frameworks or methodologies that are holistic, participatory, consider sustainability and address complexity.

Scholars argue that development interventions are now “at a crossroads” and can expand, reduce, or transform (Ramalingam 2013; Barber 2011). Foreign aid taking this into account involves a fundamental shift in mental models, strategic approaches, organizational philosophies, and performance approaches (Ramalingam 2013). Complexity thinking suggests that the role of aid in development would shift from being an external push filling gaps in a predictable and linear fashion to becoming an internal catalyst wherein aid efforts catalyze and give rise to social change (Ramalingam 2013; Rogerson 2011; Barder 2011).

1.5 Human development and development interventions: mismatch and potential

1.5.1 Mismatch: Solutions are not tailored for complex problems

Although indices have become more holistic and consider more of the social, environmental, and ecological facets of development, there are still wide inadequacies and gaps between policy reports and methods or frameworks designed to guide interventions. Recent scholars argue that development is in fact a complex issue, and thus there is a fundamental mismatch between the objective and the solution as current interventions are fragmented and sector-based (Hassan 2013; Ramalingam 2013; Bohunovsky et al 2010; Stiglitz 1998). As Ellerman, former chief of the World Bank explains, “aid agencies deal with some of the most complex and ill defined questions facing all of humanity” (Ellerman 2002). The UNDP 2013 Strategic Report explains that sustainable human development is a complex and multi-dimensional issue that is often unique to each society (UNDP 2013; UN 2013; Ramalingnam 2013; Barder 2011).

Complexity is a state in which outcomes are unpredictable due to the vast number of interconnected variables, wherein relationships between cause and effect may only become apparent in hindsight or retrospect (Kurtz and Snowden 2003). Responding to the complexity, interventions need to draw upon knowledge and expertise gained in all development settings (UNDP 2013). It is argued that there needs to be a shift from fragmented, sector-specific approaches to approaches that anticipate, adapt, transform, and learn (Ramalingam 2013; Barber 2011).
1.5.2 Potential to bridge the divide

There is a need expressed by the UN and development scholars to explore methods and approaches to deal with the complex nature of development and its root causes (UNDP 2013; Ramalingan 2013). The UN’s definition of sustainable human development is arguably a shift in the right direction as it considers sustainability and considers the multifaceted nature of development. The question becomes, *how?*

International development scholars who consider development a complex challenge argue that knowledge and learning are the primary basis of effectiveness and suggest that interventions consider this at the heart of their approach (Ramalingan 2013; Barber 2011). Exploratory interviews with experts in the field of learning as an approach to address complex problems confirmed that learning experiences can, and do address complex problems (Hassan 2014; Stilger 2014). Within the context of international development interventions, Temmick, who has worked for several high profile NGOs, the UN, and now works to build capacity in European NGOs designing development approaches, explained that her work seeks to integrate mindsets and approaches that consider complexity into development interventions of NGOs (Temmick 2014). She cited explained that learning oriented complexity thinking is necessary in development interventions (Temmick 2014).

A lack of focus on supporting learning, and the emphasis on transferring knowledge, has meant that the generally used mental models of aid work have become less diverse and less creative in recent years even as the scope and ambition of aid has expanded (Easterby-Smith and Lyles 2003). This has reinforced conservative mindsets, outdated aid approaches, entrenched attitudes, and rigid and unresponsive processes. Thus, promoting freedom of choice for communities targeted by aid efforts would mean placing less emphasis on knowledge as product and as power, and more emphasis on learning as a means of mutual transformation (Parsons 2002). This seeks to address this gap by exploring how learning-based approaches and experiences could be relevant for designing international development interventions.

1.6 The Scope

The research focuses on development interventions, referring to initiatives in which an actor from outside the community enters or intervenes. This research excludes examples of bottom-up, grass roots approaches pioneered within communities.

A second focus is within the rural sector of the region of Latin America, building on the group member’s experience, connection, and genuine interest in the area.

Though the researchers hope that this inquiry will prove useful to all members of the international development community, as well as scholars and practitioners in international development, the target audience is rural development agents that design and implement development interventions. Rural development agents are a critical leverage point in contributing to the hoped-for transformation in the field, given their strategic position in the development community. While they hold the view and needs of the international development agencies, they also have a deep understanding of the reality in the field.
**1.7 Research Objective**

The researchers believe that:

i. Due to the potential impact of human development, both socially and ecologically, interventions that foster development should intentionally consider the sustainability challenge.

ii. The development challenge is complex in nature and therefore development interventions need to be suited to the complexity of the challenge.

The objective of this research is to bridge the gap by exploring how approaches to address complexity can be practiced in development interventions in order to move toward a sustainable global society.

This gap can be illustrated by an intersystem analysis that places the topic of study, rural development interventions, within their sub-system of the international development community, within the broader system of civilization in the biosphere. The analysis considers the five levels of the FSSD in order to see the relation and contribution from the topic area to the systems it is nested within. After conducting the literature review, gaps were identified at multiple levels. However, due to lack of information on the strategic level and the crucial relevance of exploring strategies for rural development interventions to address complexity and move society toward sustainability, the research of this thesis will focus on this level. To see the preliminary Intersystem Analysis, please see Appendix B.
1.7.1 The Research Questions

The research poses two secondary support questions that will allow the researchers to answer the primary research question. They are stated as follows:

Primary Research Question: How can development interventions play a role in moving society toward sustainability?

Secondary Research Question 1 (SQR1): What is the current reality of rural development interventions in Latin America?

Secondary Research Question 2 (SRQ2): How can learning experiences support rural development interventions to address the complexity of the development challenge?
2 Methods

2.1 Research Design Overview

In order to guide research and organize the multiple strands of information, Maxwell’s 2005 model for qualitative research design was selected. Its iterative nature allows researchers to consider complex, system-based questions (Maxwell 2005). Working with this approach, the researchers continually revised goals, research questions, and methods.

The researchers intentionally collected information exclusively from primary data sources. This was due to a desire to base findings upon the most recent data possible and on opinions directly from practitioners working in the field. The literature review revealed that reports
cited completed case studies rather than interviews or dialogue with practitioners or ongoing projects.

The Methods Section outlines the conceptual framework and the presents the methods used in relation to the secondary and primary research questions. Goals and validity are presented in the discussion and conclusion.

2.2 The FSSD as a conceptual framework

The FSSD was utilized as the conceptual framework of this thesis to develop a structured overview of complex problems using systems thinking, and to encourage a common definition of sustainability. The five-levels of the FSSD (Systems, Success, Strategic, Actions, and Tools) were used to organize information and assumptions. An awareness and basic understanding of these levels helps the user to situate themselves within the larger global system to understand the implications of individual actions on the larger whole of civilization in the biosphere. All of these applications were particularly useful for bridging two fields of knowledge in the way that this thesis proposes.

In order to fulfil the objective of using the FSSD as a conceptual framework, the data collected during interviews with rural development agents was organized using a generic 5LF to understand the current reality of rural development interventions. The sustainability profile tool was applied to assess the strengths, limitations, and gap in considering, defining, and incorporating sustainability. For use in this thesis, the organization-focused self-assessment was adapted into a more generic framework for organizing results from different actors. Information regarding sustainability is divided into the five levels and then assessed based on four maturity degrees (MDs) that represent maturity in addressing sustainability in a strategic way.

2.3 Methods Overview

2.3.1 Sampling and Relationship between interview groups

A combination of opportunistic sampling and snowball sampling (Bryman 2012) was used to select interviewee candidates. The interviewees form two distinct groups : Group A and Group B. Group A refers to rural development agents, and Group B refers to learning experience designers. The criteria of each group can be found in Appendix C.

In order to explore the primary research question of how rural development interventions can play a role in moving society toward sustainability, the secondary research questions consider the current reality of the interventions and in what way learning experiences can support interventions to address the complexity of the development challenge. Given this relationship, the research was designed to allow for data and information collected from Group B to support and bridge gaps identified in Group A.

The researchers analyzed data from Group A to identify strengths and limitations or gaps in considering and moving toward sustainability, and then analyzed the findings of Group B in order to complement and bridge the limitations and gaps of Group A. Therefore, given their different objectives, the data analysis methods used for Group A and B are different.
2.3.2 Method Phases

To collect qualitative data, three methods were utilized: surveys, interviews, and a prototype. Surveys helped to assess the need in the field, the research gap, and identify interview candidates. Interview information was used to answer the two secondary research questions. The synthesis of the combined findings was used to answer the primary research question. The data collected was analysed in three phases according to research question: Phase 1 answers SRQ 1; Phase 2 answers SRQ2; and a synthesis of Groups A and B answer PRQ.

Figure 2.2: The Methods overview

2.4 Phase 1 – Collection and Analysis

This section outlines the data collection and analysis of interviewees from Group A in order to answer SRQ1.
2.4.1 Data Collection

Surveys - In parallel with discussions about observations from previous experience working in rural development and conducting a literature review, a survey was sent on Google Forms in English and Spanish to 50 people working in rural development in Latin America. The objective of this survey was to identify the needs in the field, gain information and insight regarding the current reality, obtain further guidance to build the literature review, and identify potential interview candidates.

Exploratory Interviews – Two exploratory interviews in the field of rural development with Maria Temmink and Zaid Hassan were conducted in order for researchers to gain a better sense of the international development community and to ask for guidance and insight regarding research. For a full list of interviewees, please see Appendix D.

Semi-structured interviews - Requests for interviews and a flyer outlining the basic assumptions and topic of the research were sent to potential interview candidates identified from the survey, exploratory interviews, and connections to the researchers. Interview dates and times between March 5th and April 11th, 2014 were proposed. A total of nine interviews were conducted with Group A.

While awaiting responses and organizing the interview calendar, the research team co-designed the interviews composed of fixed questions, and open responses in order to systematize the collection of qualitative material (Weiss 1995). An interview guide was created that followed a list of questions (see Appendix E) with the ability to change the order to allow the interviewee leeway in their response, and to allow the interviewer to ask additional questions if necessary (Bryman 2012). To conduct the interviews, a quiet setting with a high quality recording machine was arranged, and each research team member prepared themselves based on Kvale’s preparation guidelines (Kvale 1996). Each interview lasted one hour to one hour and a half in duration, and was conducted by one primary interviewer whose native language was that of the interviewee. Interviews were conducted primarily in English, with three in Spanish and two in Portuguese. Each interview was recorded, labelled, and categorized based on group and date.

2.4.2 Data Analysis

Answering SRQ1 required a broad understanding of the system and stories of success of Group A. Therefore, analysis was conducted in four ways: Thematic Data Analysis charts were used as the primary method for organizing and categorizing raw data; a secondary method of visual sense making (see Appendix F) was utilized to see the bigger picture, identify patterns and validate the findings with the interviewees; a tertiary analysis using a 5-Level Framework was used to systematize data and identify create a picture of the current reality; and a sustainability profile was used to identify strengths and limitations in moving towards sustainability.

Thematic Data Analysis - The Framework for Thematic Data Analysis matrix was chosen as an analysis method for Group A interviews given that the framework is a clear and effective way to organize and analyse findings, has the ability to synthesize multiple interviews under common themes, and can be employed in relation to other data methods (Bryman 2012). The matrix was designed using two central themes related directly to SRQ1, and was then further divided into two groups of sub-themes based on the topics covered by the interview
questions. One theme was entitled “undefined” in order to ensure a place for data that seemed important but that could not be definitively placed under the existing categories.

Working individually, the researchers listened to an audio recording of the interview and captured phrases and information stated by the interviewee into each of the categories divided by theme, with the objective of generating a full chart of all the interviews from Group A. The chart can be divided and is read-able both by theme, and by interviewee. Any information that was unclear or did not fit into one of the themes was categorized under the “undefined” column to be reviewed afterward.

*Graphic Recording* - Given that one of the objectives in analysing the first set of interviews was to see the international development community as a system, a graphic recording that visually captured the narrative and the key points of each interview was created by one of the researchers. This served to surface patterns, similarities, and differences between interviewees. Graphic recording, when used as a research method, has the ability to identify patterns and gain a more macro-scale understanding (Pink 2013).

*Group Sense Making* - In order to ensure the validity and gain further understanding and reflections of the primary and secondary recordings of the interviews, a group sense making session was designed. Each graphic recording was hung on the wall in turn, and the graphic recorder guided the researchers through each phase and theme of the interview. This information was compared with the Thematic Data Analysis chart and any new insights were added. By the end of the session, each of the interviews was reviewed. The last exercise was to identify patterns and themes between all nine interviews. In order to accomplish this, the graphic recordings were hung side by side along a wall and the researchers discussed the emerging similarities, differences, and patterns unearthed by the visual graphics, combined with a fresh knowledge of the details of each interview. These patterns were recorded and utilized in the next stage of analysis.

*Five Level Framework Synthesis* - In order to gain a more systematic understanding of all nine interviews, two researchers reviewed the Thematic Data Analysis Chart column by column, theme by theme, sorting information into one of the five levels (System, success, strategic, actions, tools), or placing into a category entitled “undefined”. Each interviewee was recorded in a different colour, in order to show situations in which multiple interviewees stated something similar, or where there was divergence.

*Sustainability Profile* - In order to gather a deeper understanding of how sustainability is currently being viewed and incorporated in the rural development interventions, a Sustainability Maturity Level analysis was conducted, using the sustainability profile matrix.

For use in this thesis, the organization-focused self-assessment was adapted to create a more generic framework for organizing results from the different respondents. The measurement criteria were adjusted to the specific topic. The information regarding sustainability was collected through interviews and then assessed in relation to its maturity. The measurement is based on four degrees that represent maturity regarding how organizations understand and incorporate sustainability into their interventions on a scale of four degrees ranging from low to high. The sustainability profile then creates a visual representation to display information in a compact and easily accessible manner.
The understanding of the current view of sustainability by the agents allowed the researchers to identify gaps and help to guide a discussion of how the field explored can be strengthened so interventions can guide society toward sustainability.

2.5 Phase 2 – Collection and Analysis

This section outlines the data collection and analysis of interviewees from Group B in order to answer SRQ2

![Figure 2.4: Overview of methods to answer the Secondary Research Question 2](image)

### 2.5.1 Data Collection

Both exploratory and semi-structured interviews (see 1.4.2, 1.4.3) were conducted. One exploratory interview was with Bob Stilger, and the other was a group interview with Juanita Brown, Maria de Los Angeles, and Carlos Mota. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight learning experience designers from from Group B. As aforementioned, a list of criteria and interviewees can be found in Appendices C and D.

### 2.5.2 Analysis Group B

Answering SRQ2 required very specific information to complement the field of rural development. Based on the categories identified in the analysis of Group A’s interviews, codes were developed which were utilized to identify, isolate, and then surface key insights and patterns from the verbatim transcripts of the Group B interviews. Findings were clustered into 3 main categories: approach, actions and tools.

*Transcript and coding* - The objective in analysing the interviews conducted with learning experience designers was to see how knowledge and insights for dealing with complex problems could be relevant for rural development interventions. In order to identify, isolate, categorize, cluster, and make patterns and recommendations with the insights from the
second group, a transcription and coding method of analysis was selected. A content analysis (Taylor-Powell and Renner 2003) was used to analyse text or narrative data obtained from word for word transcripts of the individual interviews.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim in a word document transcription by listening to an audio recording. In order to categorize information, themes and patterns selected from Group A’s interviews, alongside others related to SRQ2, were stated and organized into coherent, overarching categories, with corresponding descriptions. The present categories were selected before reviewing the data, and some themes and patterns that emerged during analysis were stated and added afterward to the list of themes and categories.

**2.6 Phase 3 – Prototyping**

To answer the Primary Research question, an analysis of Group A and Group B’s interviews were combined to create a prototype of a complementary guide to help rural development agents use their interventions to move society towards sustainability. The guide is designed to incorporate knowledge of complexity, the FSSD, both theoretical and practical information from rural development agents and learning experience designers, and personal reflection questions along the phases of the intervention cycle.

**2.6.1 Creation of Prototype**

The guide was created through the basic prototyping phases and received one round of expert feedback that is currently being incorporated to create a second version. After identifying user needs, the prototype was designed, built, and then reviewed by peers before redesigning the second version (Curtis 1990). Unfortunately, due to geographic location, lack of resources, and lack of time, the prototype has not yet been tested.

![Figure 2.5: The Prototype Cycle](image-url)
3 Results

This chapter presents results according to three phases, each one related to one of the research questions. The results of the two secondary research questions are presented first in Sections 3.1 and 3.2, as the findings build upon each other to answer the primary research question. Section 3.3 showcases the most significant findings of the research, presenting a prototype guide that reflects results from Phase One and Phase Two.

3.1 Current Reality of Rural Development Interventions

This section reports results collected in response to secondary research question one: *What is the current reality of rural development interventions?* Information from the nine interviews conducted with rural development agents and from the sustainability profile tool are considered. Results gathered from the survey are not considered given that the response rate of four of fifty candidates cannot be deemed statistically relevant.

3.1.1 Five Level Framework

To present the current reality of development interventions, results are organized according to the Five Level Framework. The questions, as stated in the interview guide (see Appendix E) surface six different patterns that represent views of the system; fourteen characteristics that were present in successful development interventions; four strategic guidelines, a list of actions, and a list of tools. Findings are grouped by patterns, and different opinions are represented within each pattern.

The System

Interviewees shared information regarding the system in which they conduct development interventions.

*Historical perspectives of development* – Beltran, from Mexico, explains that first attempts to address the development challenge in Latin America came from politicized programs from the United States during the Kennedy era and student volunteers traveling to Latin American countries to promote development. Though the politics have changed, some of this mindset still remain embedded in the work. He points to the fact that “we still look for foreigners to finance us”.

The way the work is conducted directly depends on the way poverty and development are measured and defined by the international development community. Thus, changes in trends lead to changes in the nature of interventions. Berthin explains that:

“We are now in a very important moment when conditions to promote development are very different when compared to the 1980s, 1990s, and the 2000s. When the UNDP started working in many countries, they realized the way programs were conceived was not appropriate, so they created a new paradigm, that is the Human Development approach. In 1989, the UNDP started ranking the countries based on the Human Development Index. From then on, development became an issue of capacity, of expanding opportunities, of the freedom to choose (for the people, by the people, of the people)” (Berthin 2014).
**Complexity of the development system** - Berthin states that the UNDP is starting to realize the complexity of the development challenge. He explains that “change is there, and the speed has increased, and it (development) takes place faster. There is more uncertainty, and instability, and so it is difficult to plan. There is an increasing amount of complexity. Now we talk about multilevel governance and simultaneous different transitions in different places.” (Berthin 2014)

**Interpreting the current reality** – Three interviewees state that organizational mandates and projects in general are not always based on the current reality of communities, but rather present the organization’s version of community needs (Beltran; McGarrell; Solidade). Interviewees also mention the disconnection between what is planned and the reality of the communities. Beltran explains that there are many examples where outsiders assume what the communities need from their own perspective and work from their own point of view. In his opinion, this can be the source of failure of plans and programs. He explains that after the agents leave, things in the community go back to how they were before, and original problems are sometimes worsened.

There are also examples where the community voices interest in projects, even if they do not understand them, in order to receive funding (Beltran; Solidade). Beltran explains “the game in development can sometimes be that communities tell organizations or donors what they want to hear in order to receive support, even if this does not reflect their true needs or desires” (Beltran 2014). This was also identified as a result of the cycle of dependency, where communities wait for solutions and support to come from outside as they are historically accustomed to this and are taught to believe that they should behave in this way (Baldwin; Beltran; Berthin).

**Specialization, fragmentation and a need for cooperation** – A huge challenge in creating relevant and sustainable development interventions expressed by interviewees is the fragmentation and specialization that exists not only between the various projects or sectors within a single organization, but also between organizations. (Baldwin; Berthin; Cerna). Berthin explains that “in the development community, we are victims of our own success. In order to resolve some of the problems, we created bureaucracy, specialization agencies, and brought a lot of elements to the picture. Now, how do we go back?” (Berthin 2014)

Cerna explains that the concept of the familia rural (rural family), or the idea that within a rural community or family there are many inter-related and overlapping parts, is not taught or used by organizations. In his education and experience, people are taught to be specialists and are not taught to adopt a holistic view of families or communities as a whole. Several interviews build upon this idea as they explain that in order to mitigate fragmentation, there is a need for an integrated development approach. Such an approach will ensure that organizations are not just developing one sector, but rather are adopting a holistic perspective.

Related to this, Cerna and Manami add that there is a lack of cooperation among international development actors and institutions. Cerna explains that “there is jealousy between institutions that find a way of being, a method. There can be a strong jealousy to not share. Sometimes if one shares, it can be better as we can see what we are doing well and badly.” (Cerna 2014)

**Sustainability Paradigm** – Four of nine interviewees explain that sustainability is considered a hot topic or buzzword in international development (Baldwin; Berthin; Cerna; Cruz) and
Berthin refers to it as a new paradigm or trend. He states that experience and practice is leading to a redefinition of sustainability currently being translated into policies that consider the balance between economic development and environmental sustainability. He also explains that indigenous and traditional communities already possess knowledge regarding how to take care of the earth in a sustainable way, and believes their practices can inspire modern society to become more sustainable.

In Beltran’s opinion, there is a need for a cultural regeneration of indigenous communities, and he believes there needs to be a change in how these communities reuse or re-appropriate the tools of the modern world for their own settings. Instead of identifying and replicating traditional ways of practice, the new and traditional can be blended by uncovering and understanding the mental models or line of thinking behind actions. The traditional knowledge and wisdom within traditional mindsets and practices can then be paired with technologies and innovation of the present.

Impact – Some rural development agents possess a critical view on the impact of the interventions. They mention the dependency cycle created by the constant interventions in communities, negative impacts on local self-esteem, and loss of local culture and traditions as main concerns (Manami; McGarrell; Solidade). Beltran observes that although there is a widespread belief that it is possible to bridge traditional and Western culture, the Western logic often ends up being predominant because the West is where money comes from. This is the globally dominant way of thinking and it has changed and influenced the way traditional communities think. Moreover, he states that some development interventions have made communities become more dependent on external organizations and government.

Success

This section outlines the main characteristics and key points that the rural development agents stated were present in successful development interventions. The researchers do not define the word “success.” The interviewees were instructed to define the word themselves. These success characteristics were mainly identified in stories, when interviewees were asked to state what elements allowed success to occur.

Ownership, empowerment and participation – All interviewees mention the importance of having the local community support, buy into, and be involved in projects and interventions in different forms. Ownership, and the creation of ownership through empowerment and participation, is considered crucial in creating durable, lasting effects. Projects that were not owned by the community did not continue after agents left.

“For ownership to occur, local people need to be empowered to take the lead and become the “protagonists in the project” (Solidade 2014). Several interviewees express the idea that people will not support something they did not help to create (Baldwin; Beltran; Cerna; Cruz). Some examples involve youth, women, and other less-heard or marginalized groups participating and taking an active role (Baldwin; Rodrigues; Solidade). Interviewees also explain that ownership becomes extended and durable over time through partnership with local allies (Cerna; Cruz; Manami; Rodrigues).

Informal personal relationships, building trust, and empathy – The majority of interviewees express the necessity of personal relationships and creating connections between the rural development agents and the community they intervene within. They explain that empathy is a
crucial aspect for the cultivation of relationships and, consequently, for the success of the interventions.

Seven of the nine interviewees say that connecting on a deeper, more personal, informal level with people in the community is the way to build and cultivate trust, to identify community needs, and to ensure involvement and participation of the community members in the project (Beltran; Cerna; Cruz; Manami; McGarell; Rodrigues; Solidade).

Three interviewees explain that informal relationships should be considered as friendships (Beltran; McGarrell; Solidade). Beltran points out that “as an outsider, all you can offer is your friendship and support” (Beltran 2014). He explains that creating friendships rather than formal relationships mitigates expectations and hierarchy and invites humility, authenticity, and honesty. Three different respondents also explain that success is when one can return to the community and be greeted with open arms (Cerna; Mamani; McGarrell). However, Beltran clarifies that “we are friends, but I am not from the community, we are not born here, we are visitors” (Beltran 2014). He explains that being honest about this is important for balancing expectations.

*Open conversation and communication* – In the context of fostering trust and connection, a common subject in five different interviews is how communication occurs between the agents and the community.

Interviewees state the importance of language in transmitting messages, ideas, and projects from the agent to the community and vice versa. In order to work together, finding a common language that is both understandable and context relevant is crucial (Beltran; Cerna; Manami; Solidade; Rodrigues).

Another significant condition for project effectiveness an expansive array of interactions within the community. The distribution of people present in conversations will impact the whole intervention. Interviewees explain that there is a need to talk not only with leaders and the people who are the usual points of contact for the communities, but to also have conversations with people representing different parts of and different roles within the community.

Where conversations take place is also important. McGarell explains that more understanding and trust can come more from informal conversations in homes, community centers, and on the street than in formal arranged spaces for dialogue or workshops. Solidade adds it is also important to put attention on creating safe spaces for people to talk, meet and exchange information.

*Co-creation and learning together* – Solidade explains that success in rural development interventions has to be seen as a group of people working for a common goal. It is not about someone coming in to help, but the whole group of people working together (Cerna; Cruz; Manami; McGarell). Cruz makes explicit that her way of working with communities is by finding a balance of learning and offering, and that the results of this relation can be equally impactful for both sides.

*Safe spaces for experimentation and risk sharing* – Manami, Cerna, and Cruz explain that it is integral that projects do not risk resources or endanger the food security of the community. Cerna and Cruz both explain that innovations can be tested in a space that allows for
experimentation and curiosity where everybody can learn together. Then, if successful, such innovations can be more naturally incorporated by community members.

**Appropriate and localized technologies and solutions** - Beltran explains that there is a pressing need to keep cultural roots and then build from these roots with the technology, wisdom, and logic of the modern world. This addresses the concern interviewees raise that some innovative technologies and solutions brought by outsiders do not serve community needs. They are simply new tools that the agents or their organizations have developed and wish to test in a new context. Cruz explains that with very good intentions, many times these resources, technology, and operating systems are doomed to be underutilized or forgotten due to a lack of connection to local needs and culture.

**Strengths-based approach** – Three interviewees explain that in order to be successful, the agent needs to adopt an attitude of building on strengths rather than identifying problems to solve. McGarell and Rodrigues explain that working with an approach that focuses on strengths and potential rather than weaknesses and needs is more empowering for the community.

**Time** – The majority of the agents interviewed cite ample time as a critical resource to consider for fruitful interventions. Projects that foster community transformation, or mobilization towards a goal can be long-term enterprises. The vision can take much longer to realize than planned (Baldwin; Cruz; Manami; McGarrell; Rodrigues; Solidade).

**Unintended consequences are considered** – A critical aspect to take into account when designing successful development interventions is the interdependence and unpredictability of actions within complex systems and communities, and the unintended consequences they can lead to. While the unintended consequences can be negative, failures can lead to learning and in some cases such consequences are a success. Baldwin, Cruz, and McGarrell mention projects in their stories of success where the unintended consequences led to outcomes or results that were not foreseen but positively impacted the community (Baldwin; Cruz; McGarrell).

Cruz explains that the creation of a community garden sparked community conversations about the importance of working together and motivated local youth not to quit school, promoting aforementioned characteristics of empowerment and ownership. These results were not intentional, but were a positive consequence of the action. On the other hand, interviewees mention possible negative impacts, such as dependence and reduction of self-esteem as possible consequences of projects brought by outsiders (McGarell; Solidade).

**Success is measured not only quantitatively** - In contrast to the quantitative evaluations and result reports that are common practice by organizations, Beltran explains that “success is not about reaching a hundred communities with radio in an year and a half - it is about the communities knowing how to use the radio, and that the radios continue to last for long time” (Beltran 2014). Baldwin adds that success in the case of development projects should not only be represented in quantitative numbers, but more in terms of less quantifiable effects on people. In some cases measuring impacts is not even possible.

Several interviewees explain that development organizations commonly use their own goals as objectives for success. They tend to be more interested in the current activity and less in its capacity to sustain itself. Manami explains that, for example, organizations are more interested in community members continuing to follow their initiative regarding chicken
raising as a livelihood strategy, but less interested in whether a community member has the ability to transition from chicken raising to a new form of livelihood if there is a better market. He adds that the organizations are more concerned with the sustainability of their initiatives succeeding as a whole, rather than with the abilities or capacities they are instilling in individuals. Abilities and capacities are difficult to measure but integral to personal sustainability.

*Limits of the organizational mandate are clearly set* – When an institution initiates an intervention, a crucial element is clarity regarding what lies within the organization’s domain of action and what lies outside of their scope and their budgets of time, money, and support. This can help define the activities and balance expectations. Baldwin and Cerna add that it is important to set expectations upon entering the community, and Beltran explains the need to be honest about expectations.

*Awareness surrounding when the work is done* - This inquiry collects different perspectives regarding when the agents consider interventions are done and how agents and organizations should exit communities in an ideal situation.

Solidade and Rodrigues agree that for an organization to leave it is important that the roles of the community members are understood and operations and projects are working naturally by themselves. It is also important not to quit abruptly - a gradual exit can guarantee that the project has continuity. The beginning stages of projects may be marked with a more frequent presence of the organization in the community. When communities develop their potential, capabilities and capacities, the relation with the organization transforms into one where the organizations provide a more lose support role.

To Baldwin, it is crucial to establish and define clear entry and exit points both on personal and professional levels, indicating the parameters of relationship, handover requirements, and anticipated investment and commitment from the community beyond the limited timeframe.

Moreover, Beltran states that the organizations should leave the communities as soon as possible and leave behind generative questions that can help the community move forward.

*Sustainability for rural development interventions* - Some interviewees speak not only about their personal and organizational definitions of sustainability and incorporation into work, but also about the vision of sustainability for their development interventions. All interviewees express the idea that success for rural development interventions means that people from outside are no longer needed because communities have the infrastructure to be independent and lead themselves.

Durability and continuity are also common approaches to sustainability when considering interventions. Baldwin explains that sustainability for rural development interventions is when a program or project can be continued beyond first investments and resources, so there is a need for financial sustainability. “It has also to do with continuity – in terms of continuous effort and action - to continue what you have started” (McGarrell 2014).

**Strategic**

The strategic level presents the current guidelines, frameworks, and also recommendations and pieces of advice identified in the interviews as the basis for rural development agents to prioritize and define plans and actions.
**Deeply understand the local reality** - The first strategic guideline emerging as a pattern among all the respondents is that for any action to be successful, it must be based on the local reality the intervention is about to influence. This understanding can be gained in different forms, and should be considered a first step that will provide a basis for and define the direction of further actions.

Seven interviewees explain the importance of pre-work in identifying local needs, and stated that it should directly inform the strategy of organizations (Beltran; Cerna; Cruz; Mamani; McGarrell; Rodrigues; Solidade). Solidade explains that many errors in strategy come from designs and plans that are still based on what the organization believes is needed in the community, rather than what the community needs.

**Build on what is there** – Six of nine interviewees express the need to first consider the actions already being taken by the communities and other projects that are already in motion. The key point to define the strategy is to connect to someone who is already trusted and working on similar issues locally. Rural development agents can then use their ideas, innovations, and projects to complement and enhance local initiatives (Baldwin; Berthin; Manami; McGarrell; Rodrigues; Solidade).

**Adaptation** - Another important question to guide strategy and future actions is to check that organizational frameworks, strategies, and guidelines as well as the actions, technologies, and processes that support them, are contextually relevant. It can not just be assumed that best practices and frameworks that were successful in one location or case study will work in all if there is no connection to the specific context (both cultural and geographical). If the framework is not contextually relevant, interviewees explained that it is unlikely to prove successful or sustainable. Baldwin explains that it is important not to “copy and paste” strategies. There are many valid and useful frameworks, but the same model cannot be used everywhere (Baldwin; Berthin; Beltran).

**Flexibility in Planning** – Several interviewees explain that entering communities with a rigidly structured and planned strategy for the project is a potential barrier to success. Rodrigues explains that organizational proposals should be open to design and redesign the strategy based on what occurs in the field. In fact, Rodrigues advises bringing only the most minimal framing. Interviewees also explain that flexibility during interventions is important. They identify the need to keep measuring and evaluating the impacts of previous actions to choose next steps.

**Actions**

This section presents actions that interviewees identified as enabling them to achieve success and reach their goals. Some information was gathered from questions regarding approach and some came from success stories.

**Foster partnership and alliances** - A rural development intervention usually starts by identifying the organizations, people, and projects that already exist in a given area. Establishing partnerships with local organizations and setting intentions is an action that has to be taken to ensure the success of the project. A critical step is to present oneself to the maximum provincial authority and also to all provincial institutions in different sectors - education, health, police, etc (Cerna). It is also important to maintain contacts and build on a local infrastructure and network of relationships over time (Baldwin; Cerna; Cruz).
**Diagnosis and assess needs in a participatory way** - All interviewees agree that an assessment of the reality should be the first action taken within the community, before any decision is made. Baldwin highlights the importance of conducting needs assessments in person so that interventions are based on the current situation, not academic surveys out of touch with the true present reality. The diagnosis should be conducted with the leaders of the communities, with the local associations, or preferably, with all the public of the community (Cerna; Manami; Rodrigues).

The interviewees point to the importance of conducting diagnosis and needs assessments in a participatory way, and recognized that this often does not happen. In this phase it is crucial to ask questions, observe and listen; ideally to listen more and speak less (McGarell 2014). This attempts to ensure that the organization does not proceed on mistaken assumptions, and particularly does not assume that what they are bringing is new. “It happens many times that institutions organize the same workshops to talk about the same subjects that communities have heard many times before” (Solidade 2014). The result of this action should be that in a group effort, communities and the organizations come together around the criteria of the project to guarantee ownership, empowerment and participation.

**Discuss assumptions and challenge narratives** - Although it is crucial to understand the current vision and story of the community, it is as relevant to promote an open conversation about it before decisions are taken and actions are planned. Solidade explains that both the communities and the organizations often possess deeply rooted assumptions and perspectives. An important preliminary action is to surface and name these assumptions, so that the project can start from a clear field where both sides are ready to progress.

Beltran and Manami point to the importance of “unlearning” in order to create a space for learning. “Good dialogues can be hosted to help transcend the levels that exist between two cultures that, historically, were in a position where one dominated another: to transcend the first contact to reach a point between the two cultures and create a common territory where we are equal.” (Beltran 2014) Solidade and Rodrigues also state this.

**Cultivate trust and build relationships** – Four interviewees explain that being present in the day-to-day lives and routines of the community and participating in local events that are not directly related to the work are ways of building and feeding relationships (Cruz; McGarell; Solidade; Rodrigues). Solidade explains that accepting invitations to baptisms, local soccer tournaments, and having lunch in people’s houses were even more important to bolster the program than official meetings and workshops.

Cruz emphasizes the importance of solidarity and living in the community, putting oneself on the same level. She explains that “while many external facilitators come only to work and at the end of the day go back to their hotels with air conditioning, I stay, have dinner and sleep in the same type of houses, living like them” (Cruz 2014). McGarell also echoes this sentiment as he explains that volunteers staying in fancy hotels and coming to work each day made it difficult to connect.

**Co-create and learn together** – Interviewees explain that for this to happen, it is essential that answers are not brought from the government, organizations, or outsiders, but rather are constructed together through learning, group processes, and conversation (Beltran; Cerna; Manami; Solidade).
Support collective, community – oriented work - Collective work is a characteristic present in most of the intervention activities. Cerna states that after clarifying where the community wants to move towards, it is important to create a conversation regarding how to do it together. Rodrigues explains that social dynamics of cooperation and relationships are not always present before interventions. This way of working needs to be presented and spoken about to allow it to be possible.

Train and build capacity – In order for the community to receive new information, systems, or processes, trainings in methods and new technologies are necessary (Baldwin; Berthin). This is stated as an objective of many organizations. However, interviewees also say that it is important to explain to community members what capacity building is for and to make sure the capacities are relevant, considering community needs and customs.

Build the vision - In order to ensure credibility, empowerment, and ownership, it is vital that the vision, goals, and objectives of the project are at least discussed with the communities. Four interviewees explain that in their work, the vision is created collaboratively from dialogue and planning in workshops with the community (Cerna; Mamani; Rodrigues; Solidade). In Cruz’s case, the vision is designed after diagnosis and observations and then presented to the community so they can provide feedback.

Monitor and evaluate in an iterative manner - Although some plans are made with a long-term perspective, three interviewees point to the fact that constant and iterative evaluation of the results should be taken in order to adapt the plan to the real conditions of the project at the given moment (Cerna; Manami; Rodrigues). Check-ins, as well as quarter, mid-point and annual evaluations can be the occasions to start conversations about new ways to make things work or make things better (Baldwin; McGarrell).

Take actions to ensure sustainability - Some interviewees describe their methodology for designing and implementing workshops on sustainable development. Rodrigues explains that she created a reflection on the state of the world to promote a discussion to dive into illusions and assumptions regarding development.

In terms of actions to ensure the durability of the project over time, and thus ensure project sustainability, some emphasized the need for communities to learn the appropriate tools, knowledge and technology so they can administrate themselves after rural development agents leave (Berthin).

Tools

The following is a list of tools that support actions, as well as the larger goals and elements of success stated by interviewees:

Participatory Rural Appraisal - can be used in the assessment and diagnosis phase and represents a flexible way of interacting with the community and building shared values (Cerna; Cruz).

Focus groups – are used to guide programming forward by gathering groups of stakeholders in clusters to identify challenges and barriers (Baldwin).

Graphic facilitation can be a good way to bridge communication and linguistic barriers (Cerna; Manami).
Surveys and semi-structured interviews - are tools used to assess needs and personal networks (Baldwin).

Community led confidence action – can be an effective process that enables communities to recognize strengths and work with them (McGarrell).

Self-assessment or community driven needs assessment - can be used when the community is trained to lead the process (Cruz; Mamani; Rodrigues).

Project Management tools - help guide processes when speaking with partners, and can also be used in exploring and how projects can developed, implemented, and shared across locations (Baldwin).

Games - were cited by Rodrigues as a powerful tool to connect to the community and to bring up delicate subjects in a lighter way.

3.1.2 Results Regarding Sustainability

Defining Sustainability - When compiling the definitions of sustainability brought by all the interviewees, it becomes clear that the term does not possess a common definition. Beltran says that he considers the term sustainability an “amoeba word”: nobody knows what it means yet everyone uses it. He explains that people define and use it based on what the other person they are speaking about it with already knows. Some of the respondents even state that is a word that makes them feel uncomfortable, since it is a contested term and it is often used to mean different things in different contexts. It is unclear and difficult.

Many interviewees use the Brundtland definition and its characteristics when defining sustainability. Some build on the idea of providing resources for the existence of future generations by pointing to the need to pass on practices and knowledge to the future generations (Cerna; Cruz; Mamani).

Another idea almost all interviewees raise is the idea that people are the center of their attention when it comes to sustainability. Environmental sustainability is deemed important, but the focus of the interviewee’s work is people. Their belief is that through working with people, environmental sustainability can be addressed (Beltran; Solidade).

The idea of shared responsibility for environmental damage also arises in different conversations (Beltran; Rodrigues). Rodrigues explains that for her, sustainability is about taking responsibility for the environment together. Beltran illustrates the idea by saying that “if water runs out everybody dies and it doesn't matter who is rich and who is poor" (Beltran 2014).

Mamani argues that sustainability can be the manifestation of the best we can be on earth, and Cruz adds the idea that in a sustainable world all members of are represented, including water and air – the environmental members.

Tensions between basic needs and environmental – Four interviewees explain that for poor communities, sustainability is a balance between basic needs, food security, sovereignty, and environmental sustainability (Cerna; Beltran; Manami, Solidade). There are tensions between the different kinds of sustainability and whether it is considered on a global, local, or personal level.
It is important to consider financial and economic development as well as environmental when addressing basic needs (Baldwin; Berthin; Cerna; Mamani). Cerna speak about some of his projects involving agro-forestry and illustrated the tension between social and ecological sustainability. It can be difficult to suggest more costly organic ways of farming that do not provide returns on investment as quickly as the use of pesticides and fertilizers. Manami provides another example as he explains “there are places where people have nothing to eat, and if you come in telling them they need to take care of the environment and plant trees, and if you care for this in five years you will be able to sell them, they will explain that they cannot – they need to worry about eating today” (Manami 2014).

Incorporating Sustainability - When considering how sustainability concepts are currently incorporated in their work, answers are also varied. Solidade and Rodrigues say that all of their activities consider sustainability, since that is the core of their organizations purpose and they work in environmentally sensitive areas. Solidade says “my work is 100% sustainability” (Solidade 2014). Mamani explains that his interventions address financial sustainability, as he works together with communities on ways to generate and manage their income. He also considers the environmental aspect as these initiatives for income generation are through traditional and ecologically sustainable activities.

### 3.1.3 Sustainability Profile Tool

Based on each interviewees’ answers when asked about their definition of sustainability and how they incorporate it into their work, an assessment of their sustainability maturity level was conducted in order to gain a basic understanding of the current sustainability reality of rural development interventions.

The analysis points to nine very different definitions of the term. More than a lack of common understanding about the concept, the researchers also note some resistance toward working with it. Interviewees explain that it is often a “buzzword” or an extra consideration. Interviewees seem to agree it is important, but no one provides a clear, confident, decisive definition.

The analysis identifies different levels of maturity. Two of the responses score a high maturity level, since their answers point to the incorporation of sustainability in the design of their programs and the concept was embraced by their organization. Four respondents score a level of two on the maturity scale from one to four, mainly because they do state a definition of sustainability that is directly used in their work. A full table of results is presented in Appendix G. These results provide a base for further reflections of how maturity levels could be raised. Such considerations are present in the discussion.

### 3.2 The Contribution of Learning Experience Designers

This section reports results collected in response to the second sub-research question: *How can learning experiences support rural development interventions to address the complexity of the development challenge?*

Information gathered from interviews conducted with eight learning experience designers is presented. Interviewees were asked to describe their approach; core elements of their work; mental models; ways to achieve success; and how they build trust and relationships. Ways to achieve the success characteristics identified by the rural development agents were searched
for in the second set of interviews through transcription coding. These results are organized into three sections wherein the learning experience designers support the success of the rural development agents: Approach, Actions, and Tools.

**Approach**

The main approach that interviewees identify is taking one step at a time based on the situation, context, and people involved. All interviewees explain that it is essential to be adaptable and flexible in planning.

**Acknowledge and honor what is already present** – Several interviewees explain the importance of acknowledging, speaking about, and honoring what is already present in the community, and surfacing the knowledge that already exists. Frieze explains that the four principles of Berkana Institute are to “name, connect, nourish, and illuminate.” The “name” phase, including the naming of basic assumptions and habit, is a first step. Interviewees explain that it is important not to judge different perspectives, or impose a point of view (Dunford; Frieze; Knuth).

**Come with questions and not answers** – Interviewees recommend that facilitators adopt the position of a learner and come with a willingness to understand and share, with an openness to embrace unintended consequences (Frieze; Grillo; Knuth). The external agent should not come with prepared answers for what is next (Alonso; Dunford; Grillo; Knuth), but should ask “powerful questions” so that the community can have meaningful conversations around the proposed subject, and then create a strategy based upon that.

**Let Go** - Informed by her ten years of experience in Kufunda Learning Village, Knuth has learned the importance of letting go of previously imagined ideas. She explains this in terms of actions, advising to build upon what is actually occurring, and being careful of responding to an imagined or hoped-for reality. With this approach, the project becomes a journey that unfolds at each phase, and the actions respond to what is needed in the community in the present moment. Interviewees also explain that before taking the next step, it is fundamental to have a space for reflecting and talking about the learnings gathered so far (Alonso; Dunford; Frieze; Sims).

**Embrace what comes** – Linked to the idea of letting go is the idea of letting come or emergence, which interviewees advise to allow room for within processes, plans, and strategies. Knuth asks:

> “Can we work with emergence in development? Imagine if we could. Imagine if we could trust ourselves enough to work with what is emerging and be more flexible so that you actually follow the energy of the place and people. And then things can begin to unfold. Maybe that is another of the biggest challenges. We are in these boxes and then it doesn’t work and then you make a proposal for a year and already it has changed” (Knuth 2014)

**Work in phases** - Alonso explains that, based on his experience working with *Warriors without Weapons*, success comes about by incremental and phased activity, rather than starting with a fixed action plan.

**Actions**
Below is a list of specific actions that reflect the general approach, core principles, and vision, as reported by the learning experience practitioners and support the success characteristics presented by the rural development agents.

Craft a clear and compelling invitation to participate – Interviewees explain the importance of inviting the community to participate in and become a part of projects, rather than demanding or paying for them to do so. They explain that one must be savvy about the invitation to engage people (Dunford; Knuth; Sims). The key aspect is that the invitation should be made in a very clear way, stating what the conversation is about, so the people that should be involved in the conversation feel compelled to show up (Dunford; Grillo; Knuth; Sims). At this point, the organization’s mandate should be already clear to everyone involved in order to align expectations (Sims). Artistizabal adds that a good invitation is one that considers issues or topics that are relevant to the public and make sense in the local context.

Enter consciously – Several interviewees explain that creating a connection to the place one is entering and understanding the context is crucial. Alonso points out that the best entries are when the organization is invited by the community, rather than when it is the organization offering support.

Hold pre-work conversations and make observations – Before implementing actions, interviewees explain the need to speak to community members and observe their current situation. One action many identify is to pursue informal conversations in order to understand the reality, have an attitude of learning, and build relationships with the community (Alonso; Aristizabal; Knuth; Sims).

At this stage, someone from outside the community can gather key information that can directly relate to the project, such as how initiatives were conducted in the past, the challenges they faced, and how they overcame the challenges or how they did not. According to Grillo, the way one starts, frames the conversation, and makes people feel safe and free of judgment, is a crucial point of the initial phase of the project. An essential attitude when one is looking for responses that really represent the view of the community is that of genuine curiosity, asking any naïve questions that come to mind in order to explore the knowledge present in the community (Grillo; Sims).

Adopt an appreciative approach - The moment of first connection is an opportunity to develop an appreciative view and identify the existing beauty within the community (Alonso; Knuth). To develop this approach, some key questions to ask are - what makes people proud of their community, and what do they do that could inspire other communities (Knuth).

During this initial phase at the Warriors Without Weapons program, Alonso explains that outsiders do not even talk to the community. The people entering the community create their own view of what is good and what is beautiful in their surroundings, so when they begin to interact with the community there is already a positive view upon which friendship can be built. Alonso provides an interesting observation regarding this topic, as he explains that no friendship can start by pointing to problems or bad qualities:

“You can never start a friendship saying ‘you seem a bit dirty today’. And when someone from outside comes and says ‘why not clean streets? We have a group of volunteers so we want to come and clean the streets?’ Well, in other words you are telling them that they are dirty. So if you ask, ‘why are you not starting a
campaign to bring awareness about the environment”? You are telling them they are not educated.” (Alonso 2014)

Witness - Many interviewees explain that simply witnessing the stories, experiences, community projects, and people in general is an offering that can be made by outsiders. Without even changing anything within the community or building on anything, the act of simply being present and hearing what the community has to say and has experienced can be transformational (Dunford; Frieze; Knuth). It is a step towards challenging basic assumptions by seeing possibilities in front of the community and asking where to go (Knuth), and a moment where a new narrative can be created (Alonso; Sims). The processes can involve debriefs and dialogues that help to surface habits and beliefs. It can get people to suspend their voice of judgment (Grillo).

Mirror - After witnessing and trying to understand where people are operating from, there is the moment to name observations and mirror them back, surfacing them for all to see (Frieze). The intervener can mirror back to the local community what was seen and identified with fresh and appreciative eyes from the outside, in order to start a conversation that can prepare and lead to an activity that identifies community’s needs and visions. Grillo explains that this can be done verbally, but also through song, dance, or acting.

Cultivate local infrastructure - Behind effective action are all the needed strong local connections and relationships that allow the right people to take part in the decision-making and acting (DuKorte; Sims). Before entering a situation, it is important to assess the relationship between the organization and/or rural development agent and the local actors that help the outsider to navigate the local context (Sims).

Several interviewees explain that it is important at this stage in the process to identify and engage with key respected people in the communities that are not the official or political leaders. These people could be the elders and in some cases, people who started the community, who Alonso called the “authentic leaders.” Moving forward, interviewees also explain that these local actors need to be involved in all stages of the decision making process (Aristizabal; Dunford; Grillo; Knuth). It is crucial to cultivate personal relationships and be able to stay in contact after leaving (Dunford).

Find and hold common territory- One aspect to be considered in connecting people is to start from something that both the communities and the interveners have in common (Alonso). Sharing personal stories can create connections between people (Frieze; Grillo; Knuth). Completing practical, day-to-day tasks together can also be a way to build relationships, trust, friendship, and find common ground (DuKorte; Knuth).

Create a safe container – Interviewees explain that in order to assure participation it is important to create an environment where people have the confidence to step in and become co-creators in the process. It is important to get to a point of trust, and a safe container is created through mutual listening (Grillo). The quality of facilitation is crucial to create a participatory process so more voices can be heard (Dunford; Grillo). Sims complements this idea by explaining that a horizontal, co-creative approach allows for humility and sensitivity when working with others.

Check in and reflect - To ensure that actions are tied to the overall goal, and are building on what is happening already, many interviewees speak of the importance of convening conversations where the results and impacts of the project are identified and considered to
inform the next steps. In conversations where the community and organization reconvene around the project, it is important to talk about the community’s current reality, the results to date, and then to re-negotiate expectations as necessary (Sims). It is crucial to take time for reflection and discussions so the learning can sink in (Dunford).

Celebrate unexpected consequences - “Sometimes unexpected things happen and those can be richer than anything that you have planned. So I think you have to hold the learning journey with a little bit of a light touch too. So there is the schedule and a plan, but there might be that serendipitous thing that the group makes a call on that can affect the schedule, but it ends up being the absolutely right thing to do” (Grillo 2014). Many interviewees reflect on the unintended consequences that the project can encounter, and the importance of identifying and working with them.

Step back – The final important stage essential for the continuity of the project is the time when the organization should step back. It is the moment where the intervener gives space for the local community to take leadership and become the main actors by themselves (Sims), while providing support, caring for, and protecting the local connections. Dunford, Freize, Grillo, and Knuth all note the importance of stepping back as a facilitator or project leader to create space and promote co-creation.

Tools

Some tools, concepts and methods utilized by the learning experience designers were identified in the stories they told and are listed in this section. However, as Knuth states, “(t)he methods actually at one level don’t matter. We all need to get really good at as many of these methods as possible so that we will know when to use what” (Knuth 2014).

Circle Dialogue – is useful for community engagement, to hear all the voices in the room (especially the ones that are not always heard), and to create a deeper space for sharing (Dunford; Freize; Knuth).

Storytelling and witnessing – can be used to foster empathy, to connect on a personal level, to gain mutual understanding, to gather basic confidence, and to communicate meaning and purpose (Alonso; Freize; Knuth).

The Art of Hosting - is a set of practices that can be used to foster innovation and creation (Knuth, Dunford). The Four-Fold practice guides personal development and helps relate individuals to their larger group (Knuth). Open Space can be used for creating together (Knuth), and provides Chaordic Stepping stones for strategic planning processes (Dunford).

Theory U – can be used to identify community vision and needs and to guide creation and processes (DeKorte; Freize; Grillo; Knuth).

Appreciative Inquiry - is as a concept that can guide an intervention by building on strengths (Alonso; Knuth).

Games – Many cite games as a way to connect on a personal level and inspire an energetic approach. In particular, the Oasis Game and the seven principles of Warriors without Weapons were referenced (Alonso; Knuth).
3.3 The Prototype of A Guide for Rural Development Interventions

This section reports results collected from Group A and B to create a complementary guide for rural development agents. The objective is to answer the primary research question of: *How can development interventions play a role in moving society toward sustainability?*

Each part of the guide is based upon results and findings from SRQ1 and SRQ2. In the prototype of the guide, information regarding complexity, the FSSD, and a phase-based series of personal reflection questions is incorporated. This framing, organization, and addition will be addressed in the discussion.

The content of the prototype is divided into four different sections: the framing; the system; key points for interventions to consider; and individual, personal reflections for the rural development agents. Below is a summary of each section.

### 3.3.1 Addressing the Complexity of the Development Challenge

*Frame* - Results from rural development agents validate the starting assumption that development is a complex challenge. Berthin explains that the UNDP is beginning to realize the complexity of the development challenge, and he explains that there is more uncertainty, and instability, so it is difficult to plan given an increasing amount of complexity. Temmick echoes this in her exploratory interview.

Therefore, guidelines gathered from learning experience designers on how to approach complexity create the framing. The results gathered in the Approach section of the results from learning experience designers provide the components of the philosophy to guide rural development agents in addressing the complexity of the challenge. Figure 3.1 below is an excerpt from the guide that presents all the key elements of approach in a narrative.

![Based on insights gathered from approaches designed to deal with complexity, the base philosophy of the following collection of recommendations is:]

| Those involved in designing and implementing development interventions should adopt a position of learning with openness, willingness, and curiosity. Letting go of expectations and embracing what comes can allow new ideas to emerge. Building on what is present and taking an appreciative mindset to the current reality is a good starting point for forming lasting relationships. Adaptation, flexibility, and following the energy of the place and people is needed considering unpredictability and interconnectedness of the development challenge. Actions should be incremental and move through phases, considering principles not plans or rules. |

*Figure 3.1. Guide framing and Philosophy*
**3.3.2 Sustainability and Systems thinking**

The first section of the guide is designed in response to results regarding the definition of and incorporation of sustainability in rural development interventions presented in each level of the current reality of Section 3.1.1, and summarized in the results of the sustainability profile tool in 3.1.2. Interviews reveal a lack of common understanding of the term and a multitude of different personal and organizational definitions. The sustainability profile tool identifies different degrees of maturity regarding how sustainability was incorporated into projects, yet all have a low score. Given the lack of a common definition, resistance to defining the word, a general lack of clarity regarding to what extent it is incorporated into interventions, and low maturity degree scores, the guide seeks to address this explicitly through providing a shared definition and systems perspective using SSD concepts in the second section entitled “system.” The use of the concepts and contents of the section will be discussed in 4.3.2.

**3.3.3 Interaction**

This section provides recommendations to keep in mind when interacting with communities and realizing development interventions. Each recommendation takes the form of “what”, each “what” is supported by an explanation of “why” and ideas for “how” to put them into practice.

These results come from information gathered in the 5LF of rural development agents and their sustainability profile, complimented by approaches, actions, and tools recommended by learning experience designers for dealing with complex problems. In order to address the complexity of the development challenge to move society toward sustainable human development and sustainability, the key recommendations are as follows: deeply understand local reality; identify needs and create goals, objectives, vision, and new narratives together (co-create); balance expectations from organizations and communities; create and cultivate local infrastructure; chose appropriate and localized solutions; consider people first, titles after; create ownership through participation and empowerment; explore the connection between people and the ecosystem; host open dialogue with the community; consider unintended consequences; create a safe space for experimentation and risk sharing; learn together; set limits and exit carefully (gradually); reflect on and learn from success and failures.

Each “what” presented here is accompanied by a “why” (rationale) and “how” (actions and tools). Table 4.1 expands each of the key recommendations, creating a summary of the research’s key findings.
Table 4.1. Key recommendations for a successful interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>WHY</th>
<th>HOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deeply understand local reality</strong></td>
<td>• Communities may just say what they think the organization wants to hear so there is a need to go a level deeper to understand what is truly the reality of the community and their needs. The intervention or project rests on this so it is very important.</td>
<td>• Come with questions and not answers. • Let go of pre-judgments, pre-research and what is believed to be needed by the community and be open to hear what they have to say. • Look for strengths and abilities rather than problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify needs and create goals, objectives, vision, and new narratives together (co-create)</strong></td>
<td>• Based on the idea that no one person can have the answer and that people will not support/continue things they did not help to create. • Builds responsibility, involvement, and engagement within the community. • Empowers the community to be part of their own future to and to transcend old narratives of dependency.</td>
<td>• Mirror back what has been seen with fresh and appreciative eyes from the perspective of an outsider. This can start a conversation about narratives, existing needs, goals, vision, objectives, and narratives so that new ones can consider what already exists and either transcend or build upon them. • Challenge basic assumptions by asking questions. • Use participatory processes and iterative processes such as collaborative needs assessment and diagnosis through surveys, interviews, conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balance expectations of organizations and communities</strong></td>
<td>• Expectations, mandates, and requested outcomes can differ from the amount of time and resources available in reality and from intervention to community. • There are many factors that can influence and act as barriers and enablers - this should be realized and accepted not ignored. • Sometimes the two cannot align and there needs to be an awareness of this in order to promote transparency and authenticity.</td>
<td>• Ask: what can we offer? What can be learn? • Consider multiple ways of measuring things - some results come in quantitative form and others in qualitative. • Consider continuity and sustainability as a result. • Be flexible and adaptable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Create and cultivate local infrastructure

- Continuity depends on how embedded the project is in the community and its social networks of institutions, groups, and people.
- There is a need to build infrastructure of relationships to hold interventions, associated projects, their impacts, and continue them.

- Build and maintain partnerships and alliances with people from all sectors of the community.
- Maintain contacts over time.

## Choose appropriate and localized solutions

- New technology and can be complementary and useful, but needs to be realistic, contextual, and have a connection with the need of the community.
- People have to feel a connection with the solution in order to integrate it into their lives and community.
- There is a need to balance the tools, methods and products, such that the project offers with the actual needs of community and their ability to integrate it.

- Present and check with the community whether or not the solution is logical.
- Give space for local input and innovations.
- Let go of needing one big solution to solve everything - allow for smaller solutions to work together to solve the bigger problem.
- Design capacity building and training exercises that are simple, experiential and leave space for asking questions and making adjustments to ensure that the new solution can be maintained.

## Consider people first, titles after

- Informal personal relationships cultivate trust, break down barriers, foster collaborations and invite people to share and learn from each other.
- The influential people in the community may not only the people in power positions.
- Coming from a position of hierarchy can offend, intimidate, or shutdown potential relationships.

- Meet people where they are (physically, linguistically, socially, emotionally).
- Come to listen and share in a conversation – do not always bring papers, surveys, and questionnaires.
- Eat, dance, play games with people in the community.
- Participate in daily activities of the community while being clear that you are not part of the community (ie visitor).

## Create ownership through participation and empowerment

- Ownership is important because people only support what they are part of creating.
- Local buy-in is important for continuity, sustainability and evolution of the initiative.
- Promoting participation and empowering the community to create and be responsible for the project allows for community ownership, which re-distributes existing power.
- Ownership protects against the reproduction of

- Bring questions and not only answers.
- Step back as an intervener by pausing, listening, and giving space for people to step up.
- Make the invitation to the community members in a clear way that makes them feel compelled to participate.
- Use collaborative participatory processes that invite people’s opinions and learning to
patterns of dependency and paternalism.
- Changes potential narrative of interventions coming from the outside to “save” or “help” the community to one of people working together to achieve a common goal.
- Empower their voices. Incorporate contributions from the community into final products and actions to ensure ownership. One concrete way is by co-creating evaluation criteria and basic rules from the beginning.
- Rather than giving money or resources, connect the money and resources that already exist, widening participation across the community and empowering other actors.

**Explore the connection between people and the ecosystem**

- This is about connecting people to their environment, on an emotional and spiritual level as well as a tangible level where they consider their actions in relations to the whole of the world.
- Environmental sustainability is an “amoeba” word that is somewhat meaningless until it is further defined, and so it can be more fruitful to surface what is behind the word.
- It is crucial that the interventions and actions realized in communities consider this relationship of interconnectedness and interdependency.

**Host open dialogue with the community**

- People working together need to trust and respect each other.
- People need to feel able to contribute.
- There is need to foster collaboration and allow for voices to be heard.
- Invite people to participate, do not command them to.
- Use simple language and multiple ways of communication such as: visual/pictoral, body/movement exercises, storytelling.
- Facilitation is crucial – listen and be reflective not reactive.
- Engage with as many community members as possible (not only the people in power position).
- Create moments for reflection and internalization.
- Invite and accept feedback from community members.

**Consider unintended consequences**

- Things are interrelated and one action can affect many others. An action designed for one
- Acknowledge consequences and work with them along the course of the project
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Result could have another result or multiple other results and influence multiple levels.</th>
<th>Consider what your action will affect before you take them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Unintended consequences can be both harmful or can be incredibly beneficial</td>
<td>• Let things go and let things come - allow for things to die and for things to emerge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Create a space for experimentation and risk sharing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Allow people to learn together without risking what they have (ie: livelihoods).</th>
<th>• Invite community members to share the ideas and solutions they already possess</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Give a sense of security which will promote innovation. (if you are acting from fear it is harder to be innovative).</td>
<td>• Offer innovations and solutions with simple explanations. Ask if they suit needs and desires. Offer humbly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experimentation and innovation can break old dependency patterns</td>
<td>• Gradually test new ideas without compromising the resources that the community depends on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shared risk deepens trust, respect, and a helps to break down hierarchy and foster a horizontal power relationship.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Learn together**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• A large potential of learning comes from the difference between fresh eyes of an outsider and cultural heritage and traditions of community members.</th>
<th>• First, there is a need to unlearn by shedding or at least becoming aware of assumptions and ingrained patterns.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Many new things can emerge from this interaction – it is important to value this.</td>
<td>• Identify narratives currently blocking evolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Starting from a place of learning allows for conversation, dialogue, and collaborative work and relationships as opposed to one side holding answers and another asking for help.</td>
<td>• Witnessing – be a witness to someone else’s story or experience. This is powerful in itself and can help the person sharing to feel heard, acknowledged, respected, and valued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mirroring – The act of repeating back what someone has said or what a room of people has said so it can be heard in a different voice. This can help surface new insights.</td>
<td>• Complete practical day by day tasks together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Step up when needed and also step back to allow space for others to contribute.</td>
<td>• Create space and common territory to learn together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Set limits and exit carefully (gradually)

- It is important to manage expectations of what interventions are committed to delivering and regarding timeframes.
- To avoid creating a relationship of dependency.
- Why gradually? To guarantee continuity, awareness of what is needed and what needs to be in place in order to exit.
- State purpose, intention and mandate form the beginning, as an organization and (when possible) as an individual.
- Keep a relationship, but allow for the relationships to change - i.e. gradual handover of responsibility, expectations, roles and responsibilities - maintain friendship and connection while shifting roles.
- Leave questions to help unlock responses the communities are working with so that they can move forward.
- Understand when it is time to leave by asking the community and constantly reflecting on your involvement.
- When the community has already organized to lead the project on their own, this is an indicator than the intervener can leave.

Reflect on and learn from success and failures

- There is a need to be aware of and honest about failures so that learning can spring from them.
- There is a need to observe what allowed for success to occur and replicate if and when possible.
- Celebrate both success and failure equally and treat as learning experiences.
- Name success and failures and explain them in an open way that does not assign blame or responsibility.
- Create space for reflection (private, group). Through journaling and dialogue

3.3.4 Personal

After interviewing Group A it became very clear that the intentions and personal motivations of rural development agents play a significant role in interventions and in the international development community. A large part of the work is driven by the passion and commitment of the people involved in it. All the rural development agents interviewed became involved in the work due to the transformative learning they experienced in themselves. They realize how much they learn working in the development field and being in contact with communities with different perspectives. Thus, despite the fact that the research does not seek to explore the personal role of agents, given the frequency with which personal attributes, mindsets, and passions were mentioned, the researchers surface this finding in the final section. In order to create successful interventions, there is a need to intentionally incorporate personal training. The phase-based questions designed to do so will be presented in discussion section 4.3.4.

3.3.5 Feedback

In order to improve the guide, the first version of the prototype was sent back to the interviewees that contributed in its creation for a first loop of comments and feedback. This
section presents the main feedback that will be incorporated in the next version of the prototype.

*Framing and overall comments* – Interviewees believe that the language is clear, yet there are some grammatical and wording corrections that could make it more direct. There is also a need to make the idea of what would it mean to move society towards sustainability more clear.

*System* - Since the idea of strategic sustainable development and it’s concepts are presented in an introductory manner, there could be references if someone wishes to find more information about the framing. In the same line, some explanatory diagrams could be introduced to highlight the main points.

*Interaction* - This section is described as very clear and presents important points to be considered when interacting with communities that are considered highly valuable, especially for people that are starting to work in the field and for researchers lacking field experience. Some respondents point to new information that could be added to that section, and will be considered in the next version.

*Personal* – Respondants say that this section is very useful even for experienced agents, since it provides reflections that are usually forgotten when conducting the work on field. Two respondents point to the need to restructures the layout of this part to make it more readable.
4 Discussion

In this chapter the researchers discuss and evaluate the results and methods used to obtain them. The objective is to explore how significant the results of the research are and to what extent they answer the research question, while considering the accuracy and reliability of the methodology and how it could be improved. The results are also discussed in relation to previous assumptions, existing academic literature, and their contribution to the larger field of sustainability.

Section 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 state and interpret the major findings divided by research question; Section 4.4 discusses the contribution of the results to strategic sustainable development; Section 4.5 outlines general assumptions; Section 4.6 summarizes the major strengths and limitations of the research methods; and Section 4.7 points the reader to future studies.

4.1 Current Reality: Results for SRQ1

The results gathered from Group A to answer SRQ1 can be stated broadly as: six different patterns that represent views of the system; fourteen characteristics that were present in successful rural development interventions; four strategic guidelines and tips; a list of actions; a list of tools; and a chart of sustainability profile maturity degree scores.

Interpreting these results through four different methods allowed for a big picture summary of each interview from each graphic recording, a more in depth analysis with the details of the thematic analysis chart, and a general or overall picture of the current reality from the organization of findings into the 5LF. The researchers believe that the interviewees selected, the questions asked, and the methods used to present the data was able to answer SRQ1 and create an image of the current reality of development interventions.

The results imply that the current reality of development interventions is that deeply understanding the local reality, building on what is there, adapting, and being flexible in planning are considered by agents in order to face systemic pressures, the complexity of the challenge, and the fragmentation that exists. Interventions are often not based on information from the current reality, and impacts are not fully considered. Success characteristics identified in retrospect are not always intentionally incorporated into projects, and there is a need to align actions and tools to achieve success. Sustainability is defined in many different ways, agents possess personal and organizational definitions that are different, and the extent to which it is incorporated is difficult to measure. Agents understand the importance of sustainability yet have diverse answers when reflecting on their role in promoting sustainability.

Though questions about sustainability were asked in several different ways, little relevant was information gained and the degree to which it is incorporated is difficult to understand. The sustainability tool helped to bridge this inadequacy but arguably not entirely. Low scores on the sustainability profile suggest a low level of integration, yet many interviewees incorporate social sustainability into their work without naming it.

Key strengths are the use of primary and recent data from rural development agents working in the field; contact with a variety of persons working internationally and in seven countries within Latin America; consideration of a multitude of projects; and the rigorous big picture
(graphic) and detail oriented (Thematic Data Chart) analysis of findings to create 5LF, complemented with sustainability profile

Limitations include the small sample size, the fact that the interview questions did not focus more on the strategic level, and difficulty categorizing data into the five levels, as some information may be considered strategic to one researcher yet an action to another.

**4.2 Learning Experience Designers: Results for SRQ2**

The results gathered from Group B to answer SRQ2 can be stated broadly in three clusters: Approach, Actions, and Tools. When the researchers coded the interviews of the learning experience designers to find information to support the rural development agents based on success characteristics, the three clusters emerged. The main findings serve to not only support and compliment the results of Group A, but also echo and add. The approach guidelines are to: acknowledge and honour what is already present; let go; work in phases; and come with questions and not answers. The former three echo and compliment the strategic guidelines of the rural development agents, and the third builds by incorporating a stance of learning.

An interpretation of the overall results implies that learning experience designers can support rural development agents in addressing the complexity of the development challenge by contributing approaches, actions, and tools that support their vision of success and contribute rationale, guidelines, and concrete steps that can be pursued.

The main limitation of the results is the timing of interviews and crafting of questions. Rather than interview Groups A and B simultaneously, the researchers believe that stronger results could be collected if Group A was interviewed first and then preliminary results were used to build more relevant interview questions for Group B. The sample size was small, and it is also believed that the criterion for learning experience designers was too broad. The implications of findings for Group B was not explored given that Group A were the target audience. However, results could be relevant for Group B and this could be considered in future research.

**4.3 Prototype of a guide for rural development agents: Results for PRQ**

This section discusses how the researchers incorporated the conceptual framework of the research design to build on results and answer the primary research question. In order for rural development interventions to play a role in moving society towards sustainability, the results imply that a multi-level, systems perspective approach is necessary to address the complexity of the development challenge and thus contribute to the global sustainability challenge.

**4.3.1 Complexity of the Development Challenge**

The first section of the guide presents the basic assumption that development is a complex issue; defines rural development agents and complexity; and outlines the basic philosophy of the work based on insights from the learning experience designers on how to address complexity. Definitions were created by the researchers based on the literature review and results from learning experience designers. Feedback suggests that this section could be
strengthened with a more in-depth definition of why development is a complex issue, and the researchers note that they could provide more references and sources if the reader wants to further their understanding.

### 4.3.2 Sustainability and Systems Thinking

The exploration on how sustainability is currently incorporated by different rural development agents pointed to divergent and inconsistent results. Given this, it is not possible to provide a sustainability maturity level for rural development interventions in Latin America. However, reflections arose around how the international development system can move towards sustainability and thus help society as a whole to move in this direction.

It became clear that the international development system is already taking into consideration the intrinsic connection between the social and environmental realms and incorporating the term sustainability into policies and guidelines. Nevertheless, the agents do not broadly integrate guidelines, as they do not yet possess practical ways to apply it.

When considering results with the conceptual lens or framework of SSD and the four sustainability principles, the researchers identified that social sustainability is currently being addressed and is a core focus of the interventions, while the environmental aspect is still in early stages and is not fully incorporated.

In this sense, although the term sustainability is deemed confusing and even rejected by many of the agents, the majority of the actions and aspects they presented are directly related to social sustainability. For example, efforts on promoting a better quality of life, building trust, ensuring participation, promoting ownership, and fostering empowerment are all related to social dynamics and inclusion. It became clear that although they may not name it as such, projects address social sustainability to some degree.

Interventions need to be designed and implemented in a way that holds a system perspective and considers the interconnection between human development and the sustainability challenge. Given the complexity of the challenge that development interventions are designed to address and the inter-dependent variables they possess, the researchers believe it is crucial to step back and take a broader view of the system they influence. With a higher awareness of the interrelated parts that compose the system and one’s role within it, an action can be more intentionally designed and implemented with the purpose of moving the whole system towards a more healthy and sustainable reality. It is also important to possess a comprehension of the limits within which society can operate.

This section of the prototype guide uses SSD concepts as a framing for the sustainability challenge, and is divided into the following sections: human society, sustainable society, development, and what role development intervention work can play in moving society toward sustainability. There is an emphasis on the interrelation between sustainability and the development challenge, and a definition of sustainable society as defined by the sustainability principles is presented. The last section invites a reflection of what role development intervention work could play in moving society toward sustainability. A more detailed explanation of each section can be found in Appendix H.

The objective is to provide a common definition of sustainability and a systems perspective for rural development agents based on a scientifically rigorous, peer reviewed, politically neutral framework. This section was intentionally presented in a simplistic form so as not to
overwhelm the reader with information and simply deposit the framework in its entirety in the hands of the agents. However, early feedback suggests that rural development agents are curious about the FSSD and SSD concepts, and so the second version will incorporate an extended version of this section with references to resources and readings to gain further knowledge.

### 4.3.3 Interaction – the nature of interventions

The recommendations to keep in mind when interacting with communities and realizing development interventions come from results gathered in the 5LF of rural development agents and their sustainability profile, complemented by results regarding approaches, actions, and tools recommended by learning experience designers for dealing with complex problems. It is important to discuss the relevance of these actions and how they provide an alternative or response to the current nature of solutions and current constraints.

For an intervention to have a role in a societal shift toward sustainability it is crucial to shift the way “solutions” envision problems. Current practices largely address pieces of the problem. There is a need for responses that explore the deeper causes of the issues they try to address. The current pattern of interventions is to emphasize the expected results that the offered solutions will provide, rather than examining how effectively the solution actually addresses the roots of the problem.

The actions taken during development interventions are often more focused on the eventual imagined outcome than seen an important and meaningful steps on their own. With this mindset, it is harder to consider the unintended consequences of these actions. Very often actions generate other types of social and economic problems including the reinforcement of patterns of dependency, negative environmental impacts in the long term, etc. It is evident that if problems are considered in an isolated and fragmented way, it is very difficult for practitioners to adopt a holistic perspective. In order to consider related issues that go beyond one specific sector and thus provide more effective responses that leave less negative traces behind, such a holistic mindset is arguably necessary.

Additionally, while there is evidence that the field of development is adopting more sustainable and holistic practices, the way the development community is now structured can represent an obstacle to bringing this into practice. The development community is an industry. Though this is beyond the scope of the research, the information is highly relevant and important to consider.

The main purpose of the industry is to support human development, but there is still a lot of self-interest, jealousy, competition and “project over people” focus. There are bureaucratic structures embedded throughout, making it very difficult to propose innovations and to adapt and be flexible. The weight of the bureaucracy and structure of the system is felt throughout each layer, from the agencies to the communities targeted by the interventions.

The design of most development initiatives, with a heavy reliance on quantitative indicators to measure success, imposes high expectations around outcomes. Striving towards meeting indicators hinders the ability of people or projects to adapt to the real needs and timing of the people they are working with. There is so much speed and need for numbers and results that there is often no space for stopping, learning and adapting what is being done. This reality is evident “on the ground” (micro level) and also in the organizational level of design.
The system’s operational rules do not provide space for appreciating the lessons of failure, and thus learning and adapting from it is difficult. The need to please donors with results that meet the planned targets hinders the capability of being transparent about the learning and evolving with experience.

To widely adopt a new and arguably more effective way of working, the field has to be prepared to allow space for new approaches. One idea for how this could happen is to connect people from different levels of the system to speak about how innovations could find ways to fit in the larger system. Currently, some of the innovative projects that are more adapted to the complexity of the systems they are operating in have difficulties in finding support from the bigger organizations, due to the acknowledged uncertainty of their outcomes.

4.3.4 The role of the agent

The results prompted the researchers to intentionally address the role of the agent in rural development interventions. Given the desire to inspire and support agents rather than teach or instruct them, the final section provides questions that can guide reflections in different phases of the work: entering, exploring, acting, completing, and letting go. It holds the assumption that the intervention depends on the state of the intervener and that the highest potential is achieved when both sides (agents and community) are willing to learn together and act towards a common objective. The phase-based framing and questions to ask are inspired by and build on the Wise Action model presented at ALIA Institute. This model supports decision makers acting in complex situations and helps balance action and reflection. A full list of phases and corresponding questions can be found in Appendix I. Though the way this is presented and organized needs to be adjusted, early feedback pointed to the importance and relevance of this section.

4.4 Contribution to Strategic Sustainable Development

The research represents a preliminary work that tries to bridge two fields of practice: rural development interventions and learning approaches that are designed to deal with complexity. The overall objective is to present basic guidelines of what to take into consideration when developing and implementing interventions with the goal of moving society towards sustainability.

The prototype guide, designed to answer the primary research question, is a first step in preparing the field towards addressing a strategic gap in the way interventions are currently conducted. It offers a new philosophy of work that provides strategic guidelines that address complexity and are relevant in the context of rural development. The research also suggests actions and ways to implement them that reflect the proposed guidelines.

In this sense, when considering the five different levels of the FSSD, it can be said that this research offers a practical tool within which there can be found information on the five different levels of the explored topic. This is illustrated in Figure 4.1 the Intersystem analysis.

This emphasis on the practical extends to the translation of academic results of the work into a prototype with set of recommendations for rural development agents, providing guiding questions for reflection and insights in a direct, applicable material.
4.5 General Basic Assumptions

Given that the researchers possess previous experience working in the field, some assumptions about how rural development interventions are currently being conducted and how the global development paradigm is set were naturally brought to the work. Some of them were that:

- The success of most interventions are still evaluated based on economic growth
- The idea of a holistic, integrated, sustainable approach is only theoretical and not translated into practice
- Interventions create dependency
- Interventions are fragmented and work in silos
- Ecological sustainability is still a weak concept
- The interventions are actually making things worse for communities

By being aware of and naming these assumptions from the beginning, inspired by an exploratory interview with Juanita Brown, Maria de Los Angeles and Carlos Motta, the researchers were able to let go of them and not take them into the conversations with the interviewees. Researchers then found that the data gathered often surprised them, as some findings reinforced the assumptions, while the majority brought new perspectives that helped to deconstruct former assumptions. During the literature review it became obvious that the discussion of new perspectives was already alive, and researchers were surprised by the holistic reports from the UNDP and by some academics that were presenting the idea of complexity and the need for a shift.

This proved to be a key realization as the researchers began to find ways to build on strengths and support what already existed, following the advice given by the interviewees. The
decision was made that the best contribution in this context was to organize and surface the successful practices, and to gather more inspiration from another field that could connect and build on to the existing practices. It was not about deciding something was wrong, but offering new ideas and reinforcing the one that were generating a positive impact.

Given that the objective of the interviews was partially to surface existing knowledge, the key elements found and presented come neither as a big surprise nor are unknown to the audience. However, the results provide an interesting collection of systematized information. They express the elements that compose a good intervention in the view of the interviewees, which has a value in itself.

4.6 Strengths and Limitations of Methodology

This section briefly outlines the strengths, validity, and limitations of the research design and the specific method of prototyping.

4.6.1 Strengths and weaknesses of the Research Design

This section presents the strengths and limitations of the research design.

Strengths of the Research Design

The strengths of the research design are that it is: iterative and adaptive; allows researchers to draw on personal experience; utilizes primary data; and incorporates visual analysis.

Maxwell’s research design is iterative and adaptive, which allowed the researchers to keep a basic design while changing some elements and repeating others. This was especially important in crafting relevant interview questions based on exploratory interviews and information obtained in the initial survey. The personal experience of the researchers allowed them to have relevant and educated conversations with the interviewees. In the data collection phase, the researchers chose to interview people with experiential knowledge in the field, based on the belief that primary accounts would provide the most appropriate information for the research question. In the analysis, the use of multiple ways of knowing and learning, including both analytical (chart) and visual (recordings), helped to build a vivid description and tie together the interviews. This allowed a holistic perspective, as researchers could see what each person said and also see what all people said about each theme. The thematic data analysis chart allowed the researchers to receive and collect data and organize it without pre-analyzing, while the graphic facilitations of each interview allowed them to gain a big picture of perspective, see interconnections, and identify patterns.

Limitations of the Research Design

The limitations of the research design are that: the survey did not provide sufficient information to be included in results; the sample size was small; time to conduct research was limited; researcher location inhibited action research; language and translation created difficulties; and potential bias existed.

Although the survey was helpful for the first steps of the research, it could have been more developed in order to collect more relevant and needed information. The sample size interviewed is not large enough to generalize or make statements regarding the whole system. In practice, investigative research was conducted in three months. The researchers were
forced to reduce their expectations of what they wanted to accomplish. This impacted the sample size and number of interviews, as well as the scope. Another limitation was geographic. Being in Sweden, far from the field of research, the researchers were unable to conduct participatory research, as they would have liked. They were not able to speak with community members, and because of the time difference they had to work with scheduling conflicts. The language can be seen as a limitation in the sense that some elements, such as local expressions and specific terms, could have been lost in the translation. Research was conducted in three different languages – English, Spanish and Portuguese - and all information had to be processed and translated. This increased the time pressure and complicated analysis. Since the researchers have very close previous experience in the field of work, it is possible that their preconceptions and assumptions clouded or biased their ability to see objectively.

**Reliability of Methods – Ideas for improvement**

In order to improve the results, the researchers recommend adjustments to: the interview sets; analysis; validity measures; and considerations regarding audience.

If the researchers had more time and more awareness from the beginning, they would have interviewed and analyzed the Group A interviews before designing and conducting the interviews with Group B. The questions asked to the second group then could have been more relevant and provided more rich information. In an ideal setting the researchers would have conducted one more round of independent analysis of each interview to strengthen individual results before coming together as a group to discuss. The validity of data and the thesis would have been strengthened if the research team had the ability to triangulate methods and explore different ways of answering the questions aside from interviews and the prototype. For example, the team could have conducted case studies, document analysis, focus groups, expert panel, or world cafe. The researchers identify a large gap in their inability to speak with a broader audience of actors within their field. They would have liked to interview community members and more academics.

**4.6.2 Prototype**

This section presents the strengths and limitations of the prototype.

**Strengths of the prototype**

This section briefly outlines the major strengths of the prototype, which are that it is: complementary; provides questions; is divided into levels; was built on collaboration; bridges multiple gaps; and underwent one round of feedback.

The compilation of results and recommendations do not substitute anything that is already in place, and has the potential to be complementary to other approaches. The design of the prototype offers questions rather than instructions to spark insight. The researchers frame an invitation and present ideas, but do not provide a recipe or answer. The guide offers suggestions from different levels: personal, the interaction, and the whole system, given the belief that a transformation does not come from only one perspective or one level of the system. The prototype was the result of a collaborative, creative process that all researchers were equally invested in. The material used also came from a collaborative effort to surface information. Though it can act as a practical guide, it is based on academic research and so makes theoretical contributions as well to the way in which development should be
approached and conceptualized. The material is now garnering feedback and is opened to criticism and suggestions from the people involved in the results.

**Limitations of the prototype**

This section is a brief summary of the main limitations of the prototype, which are its: limited depth; difficult language; translation in only English; limited feedback; limits on the extent of research; lack of testing; and inability to be used.

Due to the limitation of time, although researchers would have liked to, they were unable to go into depth at each level of the prototype and specifically explore each one. Though the researchers have made an attempt to simplify the language, there are still some terms that are new for the field and that could be improved upon. The guide currently is only presented in English, and to provide access to a broader audience for feedback and testing it will need to be translated into Spanish and Portuguese. The window for receiving and incorporating feedback was small, and currently exists in the form of each person it is sent to providing comments based on questions. Ideally, researchers wanted to host a focus group or World Café to create a conversation built on collaboration, rather than incorporating the ideas of individuals on a case-by-case basis. The researchers believe that a deeper investigation of more secondary research through the analysis of organization documents and academic papers would strengthen the information within the prototype. The guide is yet to be applied in a real life setting or case study. Although it may serve future work, the researchers strongly desire testing findings in the field to gauge strengths and limitations.

### 4.7 Academic contribution and Future Studies

This research contributes to the academic work pioneered by Ramalingan and Barder regarding development theory, the implication of complexity, and the need for development cooperation to understand the emergent property of those systems. It points to the need of field work to be conducted in ways which reflect the context, and the special need for adaptation when dealing with the unpredictability of complex systems. Their work also concludes that the development community has much to learn from other fields, in which thinking about complexity is further advanced.

The findings of this study echo the points of previous researchers, by understanding the reality of one particular group that operates within the system, and by demonstrating how approaches that use learning to address complexity are relevant. The practical aspect adds primary data as researchers explored the current reality of development interventions using inquiry-based on stories and experiences. Rather than build findings on reports which are often criticized as being overly theoretical, inconsistent, or not “up to date”, the findings of the research are based on results gathered from agents currently working in the field of study.

If there are others who wish to explore this field of work, there is much to be explored and learned. Some suggestions for further studies are:

- Interview community members and use this as a basis for research.
- Revise, add to, and expand the findings and recommendations on each level of the prototype
- Conduct more localized, country-based or smaller regions studies.
• Design a process that would involve open dialogue and generative conversations around working effectively with the complexity of development that could bring different actors from different layers together.
• Explore the topic of the unintended impacts of interventions in communities with more rigor.
• Conduct research to gain a deeper understanding of the personal level of the agents, linking to more psychological studies.
5 Conclusion

This research investigates the role that rural development interventions can play in moving society toward sustainability, building on the existing trends in the international development community. A shift from GDP centred development, paternalism, the transfer of technology, and imposed solutions, to a more human centred understanding of development that considers ecological sustainability, is already underway. The most recent UNDP Strategic Report reflects this in stating their central goal of sustainable human development (UNDP 2013).

With an acknowledgement of the intrinsic complexity of development, and with rural development agents as the target audience, this research presents a picture of the current reality of rural development interventions. To envision how these interventions can shift society towards sustainability, the results offer a collection of approaches, actions and tools from the field of learning experience designers to support, strengthen, and clarify.

In researching the extent that rural development agents incorporate sustainability in their work, the researchers found a lack of commonly agreed definitions and even disenchantment and resistance to the term, highlighting the need for innovative approaches to sustainable development. This can be understood as the transition from the current unsustainable society to a sustainable society within the constraints of the sustainability principles as outlined by the FSSD.

A focus on the potential leverage and influence of the rural development agents, who impact both interventions and their targeted communities while representing mandates of whole international development system, guides the research questions and results. A distilled version of the results in the form of a prototype document provides an answer to how interventions can be designed, adapted, and implemented. The document presents a complementary guide to enable rural development agents to take an active and conscious role in harnessing the power of rural development interventions in helping society as a whole move toward sustainability.

To address a strategic gap in how interventions could play such a role, the guide seeks to prepare the field by adopting a systems perspective, guiding reflection and action towards sustainability, reporting learning and success characteristic, and bridging fields of knowledge. It plants questions as opposed to providing answers, and advocates that mutual learning and mutual knowledge sharing should become the norm.

Finally, while the researchers remain sceptical of the ability of the international development institutions to adapt themselves and respond in a timely and appropriate manner to the sustainability challenge, they acknowledge the immense influence that they have in shaping the paradigms of development at a global level. Thus, they recognise that these very institutions cannot be disregarded when exploring the potential of so-called developing countries to re-define development for the benefit of society as a whole.
References


## Appendix A: Development Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of developed countries</th>
<th>Name of developing countries</th>
<th>Subcategories of developing countries</th>
<th>Indices used to measure development</th>
<th>What underpins indices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developed countries</td>
<td>Developing countries</td>
<td>1. Low human development, 2. medium human development, 3. high human development, 4. very high human development</td>
<td>Human Development Index (HDI); Inequality-Adjusted HDI; Gender Inequality Index (GII); and Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI).</td>
<td>Considers and weights: health, education, income, equality, poverty, gender, command over resources, social integration, international trade flows of goods and services, international capital flows, Co2 emissions per capital, demography, composite indices, innovation and technology, trade/economy/income, population trends (HDR Report 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>Advanced countries</td>
<td>Emerging and developing countries</td>
<td>1. low incoming developing, 2. emerging and other developing countries</td>
<td>Key indicators: GDP valued by purchasing power parity (PPP), total exports of goods and services, population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>High income countries</td>
<td>Low and middle income countries</td>
<td>1. low income countries, 2. middle income countries</td>
<td>Gross National Income (GNI): is the total domestic and foreign output claimed by residents of a country, consisting of gross domestic product (GDP) plus factor incomes earned by foreign residents, minus income earned in the domestic economy by nonresidents (Todaro &amp; Smith, 2011: 44).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Developed countries</td>
<td>Developing countries</td>
<td>1. developed countries, 2. developing countries, 3. less developed countries, 4. least developed countries</td>
<td>CIA has published definitions as well as lists that consider developed countries, developing, less developed, and least developed. They base their information on the IMF with some from the UN as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>High income countries (part of developed countries club)</td>
<td>Developing countries</td>
<td>Also based on GNI and statistics from the WB.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B: Preliminary Intersystem Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global system</th>
<th>Intersystem</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilization in biosphere</td>
<td>International Development Community: agencies, organizations and communities</td>
<td>Rural Development interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>System</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 SPs met globally</td>
<td>Collaboration allows the communities to reach a level of social and ecological sustainability that complies with the 4SPs and so agencies and organizations gradually disappear.</td>
<td>Interventions are redesigned to address the complexity of the development challenge, acknowledge root problems, and play a role in moving society towards sustainability. An awareness of sustainability is intentionally integrated into design and evaluation/reflection that considers the position of the interventions within the broader system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backcasting from 4sps using prioritization questions</td>
<td>International policies and structures allow interventions to be more strategic when dealing with complexity to better address the development challenge</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy, mandate, funding, technology dissemination, plans, projects, conferences</td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports, indicators, goals/objectives, and evaluations.</td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tools</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Criteria for Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural Development Agents</th>
<th>Learning Experience Designers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 5 + years working in the development sector</td>
<td>• Experience in designing, hosting, participating, or facilitating international learning interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experience in all levels of the program cycle: research, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation</td>
<td>• Familiarity with learning based approaches and participatory methods of engagement that deal with complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experience in multiple communities working on multiple projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experience working with rural communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experience living and working in Latin America, or working for an organization that designs programs for these regions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix D: List of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural Development</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Baldwin</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Program director at Youth Challenge International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergio Beltran</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Universidad de la Tierra (Unitierra) in Oaxaca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerardo Berthin</td>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>Policy Adviser / UNDP Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Cerna</td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>Consultant in sustainable rural development and participatory methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel Cruz</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Phd on Rural Development in El Salvador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilder Mamani</td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>Rural development facilitator in several NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael McGarell</td>
<td>Guyana</td>
<td>Youth CG program director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camila Rodrigues</td>
<td>Brasil</td>
<td>Rural development Program Coordinator Instituto Centro Vida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valecleia Solidade</td>
<td>Brasil</td>
<td>Program Coordinator at Fundação amazonas Sustentável</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.M Aristizabal</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Procasur Learning Journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodrigo Alonso</td>
<td>Brasil</td>
<td>Elos Institute Founder, Warriors without weapons designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezra DeKorte</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Learning Journey designer in Nicaragua. Better Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerin Dunford</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Co-steward of Berkana Exchange. Hub Oaxaca de Juarez, RASA, Art of Hosting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah Frieze</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Learning Journeys Designer for Berkana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeAnne Grillo</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>process designer, learning journeys, Reos Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maaiiane Knuth</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Kufunda Learning Village Founder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Sims</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Kaos Pilot Team Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exploratory</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria de los Angeles, Juanita Brown, Carlos Mota</td>
<td>USA/ Mexico</td>
<td>World Café dialogue methodology founders and Experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Stilger</td>
<td>USA/Japan</td>
<td>Designer and facilitator Berkana, New Stories, Transform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Temmick</td>
<td>Netherlands/Colombia</td>
<td>Facilitator Capacity Building &amp; Learning for Change in Developing Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaid Hassan</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Zaid is the co-founder of Reos Partners and author of Social Labs Revolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Interview questions

**Group A**

How did you start working with Rural development?

What are the core components and principles you consider in your projects?

What do you take into account/consideration when building relationships and what challenges do you encounter when trying to create trust?

How do you identify the needs and vision of the communities you work with?

Story: Tell us a story related with your experience with rural development where you felt fully present, energized and proud of your work: who made it possible, what was present?

How do you and your organization define sustainability and given this, to what extent is this incorporated into your work?

How do you know when your work is done?

**Other potential questions**

If you could engage in conversation from different actors of the development community, what would you ask them, what are the important questions that need to be explored at this time in history?

**Group B**

Why did you start working with learning experience?

What is your project and what is the approach?

Could you tell us a bit about your approach to working with community development?

How has been you experience with learning journeys or why did you start working with them?

Describe Learning Journeys (or other equivalent interventions)– what are they? Objective, goal, method and what are the underlying principles or key components

Tell a story from your experience on the learning journey

What is your or your organisation’s definition of sustainability and in what ways do you think Learning experience as such can promote sustainability?

What are they good for and what are they not good for – who benefits and who is the target audience?
Appendix F: Visual Recording of Interviews
## Appendix G: Sustainability Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>MD1</th>
<th>MD2</th>
<th>MD3</th>
<th>MD4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describes the organization’s intrinsic goal, informed by sustainability principles applied as boundary conditions</td>
<td>The agent has a clear definition of success, including an operational definition of sustainability, and has an understanding of the business case of supporting society’s transformation towards this definition</td>
<td>The agent presents no formal definition of sustainability; the term is used in different ways in different parts of the organization</td>
<td>The agent presents no definition of sustainability, however is being considered in their interventions or the definition is just conceptual and is not incorporated in the work.</td>
<td>The agent has its own definition of sustainability and the concept is incorporated in their interventions</td>
<td>There is a formal definition of sustainability that is disseminated in the organizations and incorporated in the work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee 1</th>
<th>x</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 7</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Prototype – System level

SYSTEM

SOCIETY on PLANET EARTH

Human society has historically been small compared to the rest of life on the biosphere (the thin layer of the earth where life is possible).

The things we need to survive such as food, clean air and water are in decline because they are being used faster than nature can regenerate them.

Meanwhile the human population, demand for resources and levels of consumption are increasing.

Thus, human activities are impacting the ability of the earth to sustain life, as this continues to happen we as a society have less room to manoeuvre.

There is a pressing need to collectively re-think and modify our actions to help society move towards sustainability.

SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

According to the Natural Step Framework, in a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing...

... concentrations of substances extracted from the earth's crust

... concentrations of substances produced by society

... degradation by physical means,
and, in that society...

... people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.

DEVELOPMENT

The impacts made by humans are largely due to the way in which we have developed. If society as a whole does not rethink the way they approach this development, society as a whole will no longer be sustained on earth.
WHAT ROLE CAN YOUR WORK PLAY IN THE TRANSITION TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Simply put, a development intervention is when actors from outside the community intervene with the intention of social and economic development.

This book is an invitation for rural development organizations and agents to consider how development interventions can help in this transition.

Thus, we offer a compilation of points to consider when interacting with rural communities and personal questions to reflect upon in the different faces of an intervention.

To get started we invite you to think about your own experience working in rural development and write down any challenging questions you might have about it:
### Appendix I: Prototype - Personal Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENTERING</th>
<th>EXPLORING</th>
<th>ACTING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>moment of pause before stepping into a new situation</td>
<td>Actively look into the situation to then move to action</td>
<td>Taking step in moving towards the goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is my intention and purpose?</td>
<td>Am I open to understand what is actually there and let go of my pre-conceptions?</td>
<td>Am I considering local cultural and social norms dynamics?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the system and context I am about engage with?</td>
<td>What is the difference between what I thought and what it is?</td>
<td>Am I stepping back to allow space for the community to step up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What am I willing to offer?</td>
<td>Am I noticing what is present within me, while I engage and interact with the community?</td>
<td>How can I create a common territory, are we speaking horizontally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I entering with an attitude of not-knowing and curiosity so I can learn?</td>
<td>What am I inviting the community into?</td>
<td>Am I open to and valuing informal relationships?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I opened to observe, be appreciative and honor what is there?</td>
<td>What are the local structures and how do I cultivate them?</td>
<td>Where am I acting from? From my mind, from my emotions or from my gut?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I aware of my own judgments?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Am I making this action because it makes sense or because am attached to a plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What am I doing to communicate in a simple, accessible way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Am I slowing down to reflect? Or am I acting from reactivity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPLETING</td>
<td>LETTING-GO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Considering feedback and ensure learning</em></td>
<td><em>Leaving</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I taking time to reflect about what I learnt?</td>
<td>How do I feel about what I did?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I holding my true intentions, regardless internal and external reactions?</td>
<td>Am I leaving something unresolved?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did I create healthy relationships?</td>
<td>Will I be received or invited back?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have I considered what the continuity of this project should be after I leave?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How fully did I let go of my initial expectations to embrace the learnings?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>