Hivos change labs
A TOOLKIT

By Felia Boerwinkel
August 2018
SOME BACKGROUND...

From the vantage point of the open society and humanist values, Hivos has long had an interest in spaces and places where new ideas are born or where conventions may be questioned. The history of Hivos is one of long term support to arts and culture, civil society in general and a bias towards the movers, shakers and critical voices in a society. Under several generations of arts and culture programmes, Hivos supported cultural centers and arts festivals. From our work on ICT for development, an interest emerged to support tech-hubs. Our work on the creative economy led to supporting or setting up coworking spaces, design studios and makerspaces. And we had also started to look at the political arena, recognizing the need to forge safe political space for these initiatives and ideas to take fruit – here, the multi-actor approach got traction.

In the run up to our strategic repositioning some five years ago (a process known as ‘Future Calling’), Hivos had already started responding to changes in the international development context, by moving away from our established practice of grantmaking to individual civil society organizations. Instead, we increasingly emphasized support to problem-focused, collaborative efforts by multiple actors that were using their complementary strengths to address complex social problems. We were starting to take on a variety of roles in these multi-actor initiatives, such as facilitator, coordinator, knowledge integrator and social innovator.¹

This process coincided with the emergence of a new phenomenon: social innovation labs. They seemed to be spreading throughout the world like wildfire, often with grand claims around forging systemic change. Armed with our rich track record and history, we started exploring and interrogating this field. Not unlike some of the multi-stakeholder strategies that we had been working on, Labs seemed to provide a new avenue to co-creating solutions with societal relevance. Ultimately, we started setting up Labs of our own – first in the Food and Energy domain,² later expanding to the Hivos Open domain with the Living Wage Lab³ and most recently, the Waste Lab (Zambia) and Vital Civic Spaces Lab (Europe).⁴

In February 2017, we organized a learning event with Hivos staff and a selection of our Lab partners, taking stock of our experiences and synthesizing learnings. One outcome of the meeting was a first attempt to document tools and general principles of the Hivos Change Labs.⁵

This toolkit is another outcome of that documenting process. It provides prompts, inspiration and practical handles for those looking to set up a Change Lab. It is per definition a living document, as we continue to learn and adapt while we lab for social change.

¹ For an elaborate description and analysis of Hivos’ first steps in the field of MAIs, have a look at our MAI synthesis paper: https://www.hivos.org/sites/default/files/publications/hi-15-18_multiactor_synthese-07.pdf and a range of case studies in the same publication series (available at hivos.org/knowledge-dossiers).
² www.energychangelab.org and www.foodchangelab.org (latter website not up to date - more recent information will move to the new Sustainable Diets 4 All website that is in the making and to be launched soon).
³ https://www.livingwagelab.org/
⁴ https://www.vitalcivicspaces.org/.
⁵ Internal paper outlining the Hivos history of Labs and some first lessons learned can be accessed here.
A few words of warning, in advance,

- Labs are the proverbial flavour of the month. Who would be against a call for creativity, experimentation learning and innovation, especially when packaged in the promise that it happens in a safe environment, closed off from ‘business as usual? In the realm of funders and policy makers, the lab discourse is used from anything ranging from what we would previously just call a workshop, learning process or whole new institutions and units. What the outside world calls a Lab varies tremendously and it’s good to be aware of this.

- Even in our internal Hivos environment, where we have some control over what we call certain interventions, there are overlaps and contextual considerations. The collaborative element of labs bears stark resemblance to our multi-stakeholder work. The much hyped U-process and references to design thinking draws heavily on good old action research and Participatory Rural Appraisal methodology. Then, there are differences across regions: for example, whereas in Africa, Labs are commonly perceived as an avant garde tool of the new civil society movement, in some Latin American countries, they might be treated with (neoliberal) suspicion.

- Many of the tools that we present below, have been tried and tested in the context of our first generation labs. Yet you can also use them in the context of internal processes, non-lab programmes, even in your own life. This toolkit is not meant as a prescriptive list of activities and steps you need to follow to magically arrive at a great Lab and ‘disruptive change’ - whatever that may be. The craft of social innovation is not so much a full toolbox, but the ability to pick and tailor your strategies to each specific situation you operate in. Labbing and social innovation are essentially about being smart about how change happens.

- Still, then, the hodgepodge of experiments, interventions and processes that have been tried out, offer useful references and something of a package approach that can enrich your work. We hope you will take from this toolkit what follows in that spirit...
WHAT IS A HIVOS LAB?

Google ‘social innovation lab’ and you will find many examples and definitions. This is the definition we use at Hivos:

* A Hivos Lab is a multi-actor change process, addressing social and public needs, by aiming to better understand them, generate ideas, and test them on the ground.

As Hivos, it is important to stick to a model that is recognizable. This model is not to be perceived as a straight jacket; more like a list of common denominators that need at minimum be in place. Taking stock from our existing Labs, those are the following:

- **A Lab is a project / longer-term process, not a one-off event.**
- **A Lab is an open problem-solving process.** You use the Lab approach if you want to explore a thorny issue and come up with new avenues of tackling it. You might not have a defined workplan like a logframe to start with; you rather use an iterative approach and you are open to new participants and stakeholders throughout the process.
- **A key element of your Lab is prototyping.** Out of your process arise ideas for solutions, which you will test in a comprehensive way. A prototype is a small intervention with the aim of learning what are workable solutions.
- **Hivos Labs are inherently multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary.** Because we believe that difficult societal issues can never be solved by one sector alone, we strive to include all sectors in a Lab: government, civil society and businesses – and all that’s in between. And stemming from our Hivos DNA, among the Lab participants we purposely include frontrunners and voices of citizens that are normally not heard (eg. women, youth, marginalized communities); our Labs put people at the center and pay attention to issues of diversity and inclusion
- **Immersion is key.** Reports and powerpoint presentations can only do so much when it comes to knowledge transfer and resulting engagement. We all regularly find ourselves at events with lengthy, non-engaging presentations, half of the audience ‘multi-tasking’ as they listen while simultaneously cleaning up their inbox or feeding their Twitter. It does not work. To truly foster understanding and engagement, we need to find other ways of transferring knowledge to others, and just as important, other ways of acquiring knowledge ourselves. In our Labs, we reserve time to immerse ourselves in the living reality of the problem we are trying to address.
We call our Labs ‘Change Labs’ to underline they are an approach to making change. They are no talking or learning shops, the ultimate aim of our labs is tangible change. The size of that change / ambition, is to be determined depending on many factors, such as: duration, funding amount, convening power – etc.

It’s all semantics. But we do value, and cling onto definitions. How do Hivos Labs relate to other modalities we encounter in the field?

A Lab versus a Multi-Actor Initiative
Multi Actor initiatives bring together a number of organizations / individuals to work on a specific goal or problem, which signals a significant overlap with labs. Differences might be that a) labs are bit more open-ended in terms of their starting proposition - they more often start with a question or a prompt; and b) labs start with more flexible constellation of partners that usually expands during the process.

A Lab versus a Community of Practice
A CoP overlaps with labs when we look at its emphasis on sharing and learning, but it tends to be more a platform of independently operating teams/organisations that come together to learn about specific topics or methods.

A Lab versus a Knowledge Programme
Knowledge Programmes, like Labs, place a lot of emphasis on multidisciplinarity, collaboration and, often, alternative methods. They differ in that KPs take the creation and documentation of new knowledges as its main aim and end product.

A Lab versus a Coworking Space
Coworking spaces, just as labs, position themselves as spaces for innovation and change. They differ due to their emphasis on the power of serendipity and community in a physical space, and the wide variety of actors they harbour with different objectives and business models.

Old meets new: two types of Hivos Labs

Our first Labs were not set up according to a fixed method, nor did they follow a certain fixed process or logic – they enjoyed a broad mandate or vision ('fix the broken food system'; 'make the energy transition more people-centered') and methodological flexibility. They saw and defined themselves as ‘innovation platforms’ and used tools and methods that corresponded to that mission.

Soon a ‘second wave’ of Hivos labs followed, including the Living Wage Lab and a number of programmes that included a strong experimental nature, such as the Bridges (former ‘Shelterme’) programme. Increasingly – and not coincidentally as a selection of staff worked across different Labs –, a core process seemed to emerge, incorporating new theories and practices, while simultaneously honoring those that are around for years.
In our Lab methodology and toolbox, we build on the experiences of our own colleagues and civil society partners over the last fifty years. Social movement and participation literature brings insights on power relations and social change. Design thinking has taught us about the value of being agile; about designing prototypes in a social field, and about new tools to get creative juices flowing. Theory U has been of immense value as both a process and a leadership tool; it points to process discipline and underlines the need to move beyond our comfortable intellectual focus where data rule, but to very consciously building a safe container where different voices and thought systems come together and connect on more personal levels as well. And as a last example, systems thinking and transition theory call our attention towards ‘how it all hangs together’; towards the complexity of many moving parts and how our on-the-ground work can be of relevance to the larger forces of change.

Before diving deeper into the step-wise process and related tools and approaches, it is important to shortly describe the two main ‘shapes’ of the current Hivos Labs:

- **A Lab as a problem-solving process.** The Food Change Labs in Uganda, Indonesia and Zambia are all an example of this kind. The Living Wage Lab also (partly) falls in this category. These types of Labs describe themselves as a process, where a multi-stakeholder alliance moves through different phases – from problem identification to ideation and prototyping of solutions. From this process, different prototypes may emerge which in turn can lead to separate projects. Increasingly, we see value in limiting these types of processes to a certain (tight) timeframe. Labs can be catalysts for new impulses that disband. What remains is the insights, prototypes and new relations that are taken up in other initiatives and/or by other actors.

  Sometimes though, the Lab can start to look more like the second category, namely:

- **A Lab as an innovation platform.** The Energy Change Lab is the best example of this type of Lab, but the Living Wage Lab can also be placed in this category, as it developed to be become an established project after it had gone through the first Lab process cycle. In this typology, the Lab identifies itself first and foremost as a project or initiative; as an innovation platform where different actors meet and work on different issues. This can go as far as having a physical space. We can best illustrate this with the set-up of the Energy Change Lab: that Lab consists of different staff working on different projects (funded by different donors), that all work towards accomplishing the same vision. Projects themselves however can follow the problem-solving logic and processes such as the Labs in the former category: processes with a set timeframe to spark interest and ideas for solving a problem in an open-ended manner.

These two different Lab types also call for two different sets of guidelines – that are however, and luckily, overlapping to a large extent.

---

6 See, for example the Power Cube (http://www.powercube.net/) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/Approach/PRA and Robert Chambers, ‘Rural development. Putting the last first.’)  
7 https://www.ideou.com/pages/design-thinking  
8 https://www.presencing.org/#/aboutus/theory-u  
9 Get inspired by the DRIFT website (Dutch Research Institute for Transitions), where you can see how transition theory is connected to practice, for example, the sustainability transition. On systems thinking, see text box on page 20.  
10 The word ‘set-up’ seems to imply the Lab has been set up according to this logic from the start. This is not the case however, it slowly morphed into this current state.
Why the modern day interest in Labs and social innovation?

This all goes back to the notion of ‘complex problems’, or ‘wicked problems’. We’ve all heard that the world is getting more complex. So what is complexity exactly? Researchers at the Santa Fe Institute of Complexity have established that a complex situation has three characteristics: emergence, adaptation and information. Let’s start with emergence. Consider two different situations: the throwing of a ball and the throwing of a living bird. When you throw a ball (or, for example, launch a rocket), the path is largely predictable with the help of science like physics. With the bird however, and in other situations that are emergent, the situation cannot be predicted by simply looking at the parts. Secondly, information. All complex situations both use and generate information from internal and external environments. This means that in complex situations, we are always acting without fully knowing everything there is to know. There is always a report we haven’t read and a fact we’re unaware of. Therefore, we are forced to act in a situation of perpetual uncertainty. These two characteristics lead to the third characteristic of complexity: adaptation. When exposed to new information or a novel, emergent situation, actors in the system are adapting their behaviour in order to grow and survive.

Hunger, corruption, environmental degradation, human rights violations and climate change – the issues we are working with as Hivos and as aid sector at large, all qualify as so-called ‘complex problems’, and to top it off, there’s a huge sense of urgency to tackle them as well! But due to their complex character, they morph and change as we go, which means that typical planning-based responses do not work to address them. If we want to address them, we need to buy a new set of skills. We need new connections of players, methods, discourses and knowledges. We need new organizational forms to accommodate and structure these new approaches and collaborations. And luckily, we increasingly have the technical and physical capabilities to do so.

Labs as an agile, reflective way of working, and its bigger brother ‘social innovation‘ as umbrella concept embraced by Hivos, can best be understood against the backdrop of an analysis of complexity. This great, short video explains the above – an idea to show during your Lab inception meeting? [https://vimeo.com/230892040](https://vimeo.com/230892040) .
A LAB AS A PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS: A STEP-WISE APPROACH

As said above, examples of this type of Lab are our Food Change Labs, the Waste Lab and a large bulk of work from the Living Wage Lab. And in some of its separate projects, the Energy Change Lab also follows this approach. In its core, the set-up and execution of these Labs follows a U-shaped process that deepens by exploring a starting proposition and resurfaces again with new visions, insights and a number of ‘tested’ solutions. This Lab process is inspired by the steps of the design thinking process (not owned by a specific entity) and by Theory U. Theory U is a process and leadership tool developed by MIT.\textsuperscript{11} It outlines a step-wise process that attempts to explore our inner-source of motivation and drive. The process leads us to first move down one side of the U (connecting us to the world that is outside of our institutional bubble), towards the bottom of the U (connecting us to the world that emerges from within), and up the other side of the U (bringing forth the new into the world). This simple logic tackles our persistent habit to immediately jump into ‘solutions mode’. Whether we think of changing something on an individual, group, or societal level, we often immediately move to ‘what needs to be done’, instead of pausing to reflect deeper on the problem we try to tackle and to interrogate our own habits and sources of inspiration. In essence, by walking a U-shaped path, we build in necessary attention and preparation time that in the end makes our actions substantiated, sustainable and purposeful.

So let’s now move onto the different Lab phases and related tools! As Hivos, we have defined the process steps as follows (see figure). Needless to say, they are not to be followed in an absolute way; rather, the phases are fluid and flexible.

\textsuperscript{11} Theory U states that the complex issues of our time (hunger, climate change, inequality) call for a new consciousness and a new collective leadership capacity to meet these challenges in a more conscious, intentional, and strategic way. Our collective ‘stuckness’ in solving these challenges results from the fact that we fail to connect to deeper dimensions of leadership and transformational change. These dimensions have everything to do with our inner place; the source from which we as individuals and groups operate.
Phase 1: Defining

This is the foundation of your Lab. You have decided you want to set-up a Change Lab, and for good reasons. Perhaps you already have a team (at Hivos, with partners, with stakeholders in the field) and you surely already have a (roughly) formulated problem analysis and a vision of what you want to achieve. You have possibly (but not necessarily) also undertaken a stakeholder analysis, baseline study, etcetera.

These ingredients are the basis of your Lab – in fact, of any project. But they do not need to be all in place before you start your Lab; in fact, we urge you to have a look at some of the tools mentioned below that can help you attain those ingredients in a slightly different way than you are used to. Core of a Lab process is co-creation and shared ownership of purpose, so the more of those ingredients you can attain together with your Lab stakeholders, the better.

So what do we mean by ‘defining’ and why do we deliberately build in a phase for it? Isn’t ‘defining’ what we normally do in phase 0, before starting a project? Yes, that is what we normally do. We retract in a room (as Hivos, sometimes with partners), we hang a brown paper on the wall and we start filling in the technical details, the theory of change, the budget, the milestones and outputs, etcetera. But in doing this, we skip a lot of important elements that will come back to help us in the future. So that is why we explicitly build in a ‘defining phase’ in our Lab process.

In our normal way of doing things, we underestimate how important it is to pause for a moment and to reflect on what is calling you to embark on this journey. What problem do you see and why is it important for you? What is your intent that will drive you throughout this project? What are your hopes and expectations, and what are you scared of? What do you already know, but more importantly: what do you still need to find out? What other actors can we already involve, by means of an open invitation to think with us?

But the defining phase is also about the content of your Lab. At the onset, you need to devote enough attention to draft and agree on a key convening question of the Lab, linked to stakeholder mapping and decisions about your Lab life cycle. These can be thorny issues as they require some firm decision making from a team that is just getting started. However, if not done correctly, they will come back to haunt you later on in the process. Therefore, we advise to hire a good facilitator to take you through this first phase. Ideally, take at least two days to walk through the essential building blocks sketched below. Some tools are given as suggestions, but as with all tools in this document – they are merely suggestions. There’s a plethora of other methods you can use and we are actually looking forward to hearing from you what works as well, so we can add it to our toolbox!

Building a strong team and ‘we space’

A successful project starts with a strong, motivated team and a safe space where all are free to express themselves. Build in time to get to know each other. Share your skills, fields of interest, working history – that sort of intelligence comes in a handy down the road.
One nice tool to do this is a **111 talk**. 111 talks are short talks, consisting of 3 x 1 minute, where a team member is invited to (creatively) introduce him/herself.

Another useful tool can be to **assess personality profiles**. Personality types give insight in behavior of team members. An assessment of types can provide learning about yourself and why you act as you do, while simultaneously increasing understanding about others. It can help you separate ‘behavior’ from ‘character/personality’ which leads to understanding and increased empathy. Examples of approaches and tests are DISC\(^\text{12}\) (undertaken Hivos-wide), Myers-Briggs\(^\text{13}\), or the Integral Model from Ken Wilber\(^\text{14}\). To do an in-depth assessment is costly and time-consuming, but you can opt for a ‘light’ version that is free and easy.

An easy way to do DISC is to color print [this paper](https://discprofile.com/what-is-disc/overview/), hand it out to all team members upside down (so they cannot see it), then count to three, have them turn it around (so they can see it) and for one minute, circle the words that they feel are best applicable to how they behave. After one minute, people have to drop their pens and assess what color they have circled the most. Big chance this is their dominant personality profile. Spend some time to explain DISC (show them a picture of the model) and have a group discussion about the surfacing personality types in the team (it is possible that people don’t agree with the outcome—that is fine, it is a ‘light’ test, they are free to put themselves in another box). Discuss whether the team is balanced, what the outcome will mean for team dynamics, etcetera.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening is the source of all great leadership. Theory U, a process and leadership tool developed by MIT, that inspires elements of our Lab approach, has identified four levels of listening. When engaging with others, and especially in your exploration phase, it is advisable to be aware of your own listening and to try to expand to so-called ‘level 3 and 4’. For an explanation on what this entails, have a look at <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4dNqCuXiks">this video</a>. As Lab facilitator / convener, it is very powerful to introduce this theory to your other Lab stakeholders and to constantly remind each other (for example, before embarking on a learning journey).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another fun and inspiring activity is a **dialogue walk**. You typically engage in a dialogue walk with two persons. You can ask a very basic question, such as ‘Why do you do what you do?’ and ask couples to go on a walk (varying from 15 to 45 minutes) and discuss this question. You may choose for a format when first one person speaks and the other only listens, and then you switch roles. This format makes for better quality of attention. (see also ‘Levels of listening’ Text box)

Lastly, don’t refrain to spend some time discussing practical, but crucial!, matters such as **how you will be communicating with each other**. More on this also below.

When the team base is strong, it is time to start defining your intention and key convening question.

---

\(^{12}\) [https://discprofile.com/what-is-disc/overview/](https://discprofile.com/what-is-disc/overview/)

\(^{13}\) [http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/home.htm?bhcp=1](http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/home.htm?bhcp=1)

\(^{14}\) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4dNqCuXiks](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4dNqCuXiks)
Intention setting
Why are we here? What brings us in this room, why did we accept the invitation to be part of this lab? Intention setting at the start of your process is crucial. Spend some time discussing people’s personal and professional motivations; sketch the horizon we will be working towards; check in on fears, hopes and expectations - etcetera. You can have a group discussion about it, or, for example, use journaling\footnote{The journaling guidelines in the Google Drive and respective questions are geared towards phase 3. So when you use journaling in this phase, you have to think of some other questions.} as a tool.

Formulate your key convening question
All Labs should have a key convening question. This is the tagline that reflects what the Lab is trying to solve or work towards. The uncomfortable rule is: if you can’t nail this, don’t even think about starting. If you start anyway, without a clear and agreed convening question, you know it will haunt you at each step of the process, regardless of how well you design and facilitate it. Good news is, at this point your convening question does not need to be super-detailed and well researched. But it does need to provide enough strategic direction to start your exploration phase. Here’s some examples of convening questions from other Labs (and note, it can take up to a whole day of facilitated brainstorming to arrive at these simple sentences - rule of thumb: take your time!):
- Energy Change Lab: What is the role of citizens in future energy systems? How can we strengthen the role of citizens in the energy transition?
- Food Change Lab Uganda: How does the city (of Fort Portal) eat?
- Food Change Lab Zambia: How can Zambia move away from a mono-diet of maize towards a more diverse diet - how can we work towards healthy food from healthy soils?

For those familiar with (some of) the Labs above: you will find that in some cases the convening question has changed (for example, in the Uganda Food Change Lab. New question: How to plan for a productive, sustainable and inclusive food system in the face of rapid urbanization in Uganda?). This is fine, as insights further long the road can of course influence the course of your Lab (it is this agile approach that we embrace!). So while a key convening question is key, it is just as important to be flexible and tweak it when necessary. When this happens however, make sure the new question is underlined and understood by all Lab stakeholders.

The life cycle and sustainability of your Lab
When does your Lab end? Sometimes, the answer to this question is easy: when it’s dictated by the reality of your funding cycle. But as we have found, in none of our Labs so far, there was a clear funding cycle... Our first generation Labs started with MFS money and a mandate to ‘find resources’ for when that funding was ending. They were not pushed to formulate an end date. Some of these first Labs got ‘adopted’ by new programmes (for example, the Foodlabs transferred to the SD4All programme - one has ended in 2017 and two will most likely be ending in 2018) or they started in fact fundraising on their own and are currently still running on diverse funding streams (the Energy Change Lab).

By experience, we have found that there is really a lot of value in being explicit about the life cycle of your Lab up front. \textbf{And there is a lot of value in having a relatively short Lab life cycle.} It focuses your efforts
and prevents processes from dragging too long. It really connects to the Lab spirit: an intense process to try things differently. If you stall that process, you will lose the intensity and motivation, hence, innovation.

Putting an end date to your Lab also brings necessary attention to the sustainability of your interventions in the larger system. How will the solutions or interventions coming out of the Lab process be sustained when Hivos pulls out? We know that will happen some day so we better already anticipate on it. Some advice:

- Involve actors that will be around in the ecosystem for a long time and that have the capacity to sustain the Lab’s work (eg. established local/national CSOs/NGOs, government, etc.)
- Involve donors from the onset! Donors are also looking for new interventions and solutions to the issues in their portfolio. They can be a great critical thinking partner and Lab actor, with the potential added value of possible funding in a later stage. That funding can be either for scaling of prototypes (implemented by Hivos or other partners) or for a new programme - as Hivos wants to use the Labs as vehicles for programme development as well
- Budget for your prototypes, so they can really take off and hopefully turn into something bigger (more on prototyping in phase 4)
- At set times throughout your Lab process, convene as a group and reflect on the issue of resourcing, sustainability and possible fundraising

Lab management and stakeholder mapping
There is an important choice to make: is your Lab managed by a small core group (Hivos + partner(s)), or by a wider group (Hivos, partners and representatives of ‘the system’)? Most of our Labs have at least started with a smaller core group in the driving seat. The Food Change Lab in Zambia is steered by Hivos, in close cooperation with IIED. The Food Change Lab Uganda has been set-up by Hivos, IIED and local partner KRC, and by now, it is mainly KRC that is in the driving seat – with input on request from Hivos staff in Kampala and The Hague, and IIED staff in London. In Indonesia however, the Lab has opted for another set-up. From the beginning onwards, it has opened up discussions about the design and direction of the Lab with a wide group of stakeholders. On day one, it invited streetfood vendors, municipality and local partner Riset Indie to design the Lab process. Later in the process, we saw ownership shifting to Riset Indie (with support of Hivos) as the core convener. A third possible set-up is to include your

Convening power

When answering the question who will be managing / convening the Lab, you need to reflect on the concept of convening power. Do you as Hivos, or your partner, have enough credibility in the system to convene the Lab? Will you be able to get the crucial actors on the table, to have them free up their agendas to embark on the unknown Lab journey? This is not a checkbox to be taken lightly. Lack of convening power can severely impact the success of your Lab. In Indonesia we have learned this the hard way: Hivos, nor its local partner Riset Indie held enough convening power in Bandung city to get the relevant stakeholders involved in the Lab. The Lab wanted to forge policy change on provisions of informal streetfood vending, but was never able to get local policymakers really engaged in the Lab. As a result, the Lab organised a set of interesting gatherings and was able to generate a range of good ideas, but did not meet the ambitions it had set beforehand.

---

16 www.iied.org
17 http://krcuganda.org/
donor in the core group from day one. The Vital Civic Spaces Lab has done this: Hivos is designing this Lab together with the Bosch Foundation, including team building sessions and the whole shebang.

The good news is that you don’t need to firmly decide on this set-up in phase 1. You can decide to start with a smaller core group (for the purpose of a swift take-off) and invite more stakeholders in your core team when opportunities arise – or vice versa. In any way, no matter how many stakeholders you kick-off with, you will need to do an extensive stakeholder mapping in phase 1. Ask yourself which actors you need to invite to upcoming Lab meetings. Which actors are holding a certain amount of power and leadership; which actors are able to start shifting the system? And please mind that we don’t necessarily look for formal power. ‘Leadership’ is a better word here, as it encompasses both formal elements as more intangible elements, such as the ability to convene, inspire and move people. Leadership is related to a level of credibility in the system. You need those leaders in your Lab. And also reflect on your own leadership and credibility in the system!

Learning, documentation and communication

Our Labs take a public goods approach. This means that information gathered in the Labs is in principle available to the public and that we strive to be as transparent and open to new actors as possible – to the extent that confidentiality (when appropriate) is ensured. Also for the purpose of impact / reach and let’s be honest, for possible fundraising (which you might need to do, when there’s promising prototypes!), we value transparency and communication about what happens in our Labs from the onset. So in your Lab’s inception phase, come up with a clear plan on how you will document the Lab process and how that will translate into communication products for a wider audience. This has consequences for your staffing: have a comms person on board and assign tasks of documenting. And involve a DMEL (Design, Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation) Officer to design a learning process.

Later on, you will find that your old documents will prove extremely useful for internal learning and reflection. Not in spite of, but because of our agile approach, we need to be strict on the documentation, learning and communication front.

We have developed a set of learning questions that can guide your learning (and design) from the onset of the Lab. See text box on the next page.
Questions to guide your Lab design and learning framework

Lab focus

1. Relevance: is the lab focusing on important issues in the respective system which can best be addressed by actors in a multistakeholder process like a Change Lab?

2. (applicable if your Lab is part of a bigger Hivos programme) Relation to your ToC: are the Lab convening question and surfacing focus areas connected to your programme’s Theory of Change?

Conditions for success

3. Inclusivity: how are the more vulnerable stakeholders/actors (incl gender!) included in your Lab, are they able to speak out / fully participate and drive the agenda?

4. Transparency: availability of information, accessible for many, including communication/visibility

5. Convening power: who is convening / driving the Lab? Does this actor have enough credibility and authority in the system to convene the necessary actors required to tackle the issue?

6. Reflexivity: assess the internal learning capacity of the Lab, does it adjust to external/internal changes (context)?

7. Sustainability of the longer-term change process: what is the life span of the Lab and is sustainability beyond that life span built into the design? Reflect on ownership of third actors, resource mobilisation and intangible outcomes (see also point 12).

Process

8. Phase 1: ‘down the U’. Does the Lab function as a learning vehicle? Has the process led to new findings, has it incorporated citizen’s voices and knowledge, has it brought better understanding and knowledge exchange between different sectors and actors?

9. Phase 2: ‘up the U’. 1) Is the Lab a space for social innovation? Has the process yielded relevant ideas for prototyping, are they successfully being implemented and fostering new learnings or pathways of change?; 2) Has the process yielded new advocacy messages and are those messages being successfully communicated / owned by the Lab stakeholders (including those holding power)?

10. Did the lab change relationships that help so-called inclusive lobbying?

Outcomes / impact

11. How has the Lab contributed to tangible outcomes, i.e.: policy change / implementation, new services or infrastructures, better conditions for citizens?

12. How has the Lab yielded intangible outcomes, i.e.:  
   - Human capital (new capacities and skills)  
   - Social capital (increased trust and collaboration)  
   - Intellectual capital (new knowledge and learning)
Phase 2: Exploring

Now that you are more clear on your convening question and who to invite as Lab participants / stakeholders, you are entering the exploration phase. This is where your Lab really kicks off. There’s very different ways of doing this. The Energy Change Lab started exploring in a small team (consisting of Hivos staff in The Hague and Kenya and IIED staff in London), by interviewing leading energy thinking and doers around the world and by going on a learning trip to Tanzania. The outcome was a clear guidance for the coming year (what issues to focus on) and a strong network with potential Lab stakeholders, consisting of all the people they had talked to in their exploration process. The Zambia Food Change Lab did otherwise. They kicked off their Lab exploration phase with a large 2-day event, which also marked the public birth of the Lab. They invited 70 key stakeholders somehow related to the Zambia food system (local and national policy makers, farmers, journalists, NGOs / CSOs and small / medium food entrepreneurs) and invited them to map the Zambia food system, as a way to surface the knowledge of the system and have them identify key focus points. The Uganda Food Change Lab kicked off in a smaller set-up, with a group of approx. 15 key local stakeholders of the food system in Fort Portal (again, multi-sectoral). Together, they mapped the system and identified key priority areas to focus on. That led to a deeper exploration, consisting of a few months of (citizen) research. The Living Wage Lab kicked off with a breakfast session where around 15 stakeholders discussed the main challenges and opportunities in relation to living wage and defined a question they together wanted to solve with the lab. Stakeholders were partly found at a living wage conference taking place a week prior, where Hivos hosted a 1-hour tasting session to present the LWL idea. So from the onset, the Lab was open to all who were interested to join.

Before showcasing some exploration tools and methods more in depth, let’s remind ourselves why we very explicitly build in an exploration phase into our Lab process. First of all, we cannot assume that our analysis of the problem is the same analysis as the other stakeholders in our Lab. Co-creating an analysis of the problem together with these often very different actors gives a much better reflection of lived realities (and hence, solutions run a chance of actually landing). And secondly, exploring together, which includes inquiring into our own beliefs and assumptions, builds understanding and trust between stakeholders that would normally not meet or work together. It build a strong foundation into your Lab.

Dialogue interviews
In a dialogue interview, you engage the interviewee in a reflective and generative conversation. It is in essence an interview, but you divert from the practice of working through a sequenced set of questions and generally, questions in a D.I. tend to be a bit more personal. A D.I. has an open set-up and flow, where you are also part of the conversation and not just the one shooting questions. This set-up allows for unexpected turns of the conversation and, potentially, for relationship building. As a preparation, have a set of questions ready, but be willing to divert from them as the conversation leads you elsewhere. Ideally, you do the interview face to face, but if not possible, you can very well do them over Skype (if a good connection allows...). There is an in-depth guideline on how to do a D.I on the website of the Presencing Institute.

As said earlier, the Energy Change Lab used dialogue interviews to kick-off their exploration phase. The Lab started from a very broad question: “what is the role of citizens in (future) energy systems?” . They decided to put forward this same question to 15 global experts and practitioners with a mixture of backgrounds, including investors, NGOs, policymakers, aid donors, international organisations and activists. They are all
working to change energy systems either by increasing energy access in developing countries or by promoting renewable energy. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the team used a participatory, facilitated process to make sense of the findings (see page 14-18 of this Snorkel session report). These were supplemented through discussions with practitioners in Tanzania, as part of a field trip to Tanzania to establish the Lab. The findings were to determine the strategic focus of the Lab, and next to that, they were bundled in the Lab’s first global Think Piece, *Demanding Supply. Putting ordinary citizens at the heart of future energy systems*\(^{18}\). Lastly, it provided the young Lab with a rich database of valuable contacts, that were eager to follow the Lab’s proceedings in further fleshing out these questions in concrete projects.

The Vital Civic Spaces Lab started from the observation that civic space (i.e. space for NGOs, CSOs, community initiatives and individual critical voices) is shrinking all around the world - not just in the countries Hivos is working in, but also in Europe. The Lab was convened by Hivos global office and the Robert Bosch Stiftung - a donor interested to tackle this challenge in light of their own funding portfolio - , with the explicit desire to interest 1 to 4 other foundations to join the Lab. In the exploration phase, the two organisations undertook dialogue interviews with seven thought leaders in the foundation field. Questions were not only geared at finding out more on the topic (their take on shrinking civic space and the importance of vital civic spaces) but also an exploration under what circumstances they would participate in the Lab. The experts gave back that the question and Lab focus was relevant to them and that they would participate if the Lab would be really cutting edge. Another outcome of the interviews was an insight to use ‘experiential learning’ (i.e. learning by experience / doing / going outside) to explore new types of civic spaces. After the interviews it was decided to immediately start prototyping this idea, by organising a learning journey in the heart of Vienna (Austria). That 2-day journey took place early June 2018 and was visited by a range of foundations. The Lab is currently taking stock and contemplating next steps.

**Sensing / learning journeys**

Sensing, or Learning Journeys, are a fantastic tool for exploration. The rationale behind the practice goes back to what has been flagged earlier: the need to immerse in real lifeworlds, the need to diversify your sources of knowledge and to question your own assumptions, and the value of exploring together with actors you would normally not deeply engaged with. A sensing journey is not just a normal field trip however - there is a key principle to adhere to, which is that you, the visitor, is not the expert. On a sensing journey, all participants are asked to let go of their expert role, i.e.: they are not allowed to give advice or an opinion to the person they are visiting, but they are urged to just listen (and smell, see, feel) - to take it in. We do this, because as an expert, you carry a bag of assumptions, which dilutes your capacity to learn new things. Before embarking on a sensing journey, it is worthwhile to take the participants through the practices of listening on different levels (see text box) - to make them more aware of this practice. A step-wise guide for sensing journeys can be found [here](#). Please note that there are three equally important (hence, crucial) elements to a sensing journey: the preparation, the journey itself and the debrief. So don’t compromise on a focused preparation and debrief (instructions in the step-wise guide)

Let’s feature two examples of sensing journeys from our own Lab practice, to give you an idea about the added value. The Food Change Lab Zambia used sensing journeys on the first day of their Lab kick-off event. Eight locations were selected, all related to the food system (for example: a diversified farm, a charcoal burning site, a formal and an informal food market). Participants split up in groups, embarked on

---

\(^{18}\) This paper also contains a detailed description on how we approached and planned the dialogue interviews. [http://www.energychangelab.org/assets/2015/08/demandingsupply.pdf](http://www.energychangelab.org/assets/2015/08/demandingsupply.pdf)
minibuses (carrying packed lunch) and went out into the field. When they came back, something had shifted in the room. One participant that had visited the charcoal burning site shared an emotional impression, how shocked he was that this practice was still happening on such a large scale. He was determined to do something about it. No powerpoint presentation containing facts on devastating effects of this practice could have done the same trick. And in general, by visiting these sites and engaging with the citizens and with their peers, the participants had shifted from being a participant from organisation X, to being a citizen of Zambia. It made all the difference for the remaining event.

Another example of a sensing journey comes from the Energy Change Lab. Early 2018, the Lab visited Bangladesh, taking along a CEO of a Tanzanian solar company and an employee of the government regulating body. The Lab is currently exploring a new decentralised grid model (called ‘crowd grid’), for which it needs government to change regulation regarding selling of excess electricity in urban areas. Instead of first building this business case and then starting an advocacy process, the Lab has taken a different approach. It invited government to come to Bangladesh to see this crowd grid in action and have them reflect on potential benefits for a country like Tanzania. It is now exploring together with government whether regulation can indeed change and whether the model can be implemented in Tanzania. Needless to say: government is very engaged and willing to explore possibilities.

Research / Citizen-generated evidence

Research is of course a very good tool to use in the exploration phase. It might be that there are some knowledge gaps that you need to address urgently before you can move towards thinking of solutions. Sometimes, the conventional way of hiring a consultant just fits best. This is what we did in Zambia: the Lab commissioned a consultant to analyse the state of national nutrition and government agricultural policy.19 The paper was launched and discussed at a Foodlab event.20

But there’s other ways of doing research too, and they can be much more cooperative and co-creative. In the Foodlabs in Indonesia and Uganda, we used citizen-research methods, or: citizen-generated evidence. Factory workers in Bandung, Indonesia, and farming households in rural Kabarole district, Uganda, recorded a food diary over a set amount of time, detailing exactly their daily food intake and the sources of their food. It provided a very rich view into the daily lives of consumers and an exciting piece of evidence for the Lab. And the Uganda Lab did not leave it there: they asked the families to discuss their diaries on a local radio station, thereby engaging them around the evidence. The Lab in Uganda did other types of research too, together with Lab participants (so not commissioned to an external party): they started counting trucks with raw agricultural produce leaving a local trading hub, to get better insights in growth and types of export. They also assessed types of informal street food sold in the market of Fort Portal city, and the level of health of that food. Compiled research results can be seen in the Uganda Food Change Lab publication.21 You can find everything you need to know about different citizen-research methods in the newly published paper Citizen generated evidence for a more sustainable and healthy food system, a collaboration between Hivos and IIED.22

19 http://pubs.iied.org/G04163/.
Co-creative system mapping
This is a tool that was invented by accident, during our kick-off event of the Zambia Food Change Lab. Because we did not want to dictate our view of the Zambia food system and its issues on the audience, and we wanted to find ways to co-create an analysis with the 70 participants present, we decided to put an almost empty matrix on the wall of our event and opened up the floor to everyone to add their insights throughout the duration of the event. After each informative session (be it a powerpoint presentation, a learning journey or group discussions), we gathered the participants around this matrix and asked them to add new insights to the four categories we had pre-identified (consumption, production, access and processing) (insert link to google drive with the food map). After two days, the result was a co-created bulk of knowledge, which functioned as a stepping stone to identifying possible solutions (more on that in phase 3 below). See the repository for a visual of that Foodmap.

3D mapping
3D mapping is another engaging and creative way of system mapping. But apart from that it looks nice in pictures, there’s actually a science to it. We know that when we work with our hands, we tap into other parts of our brain system, different levels of creativity and intelligence. Next to this, 3D mapping is non-hierarchical sense-making; its collaborative nature makes it democratic. It values all knowledges equally. You need a minimum of 10 stakeholders, but you can do this with groups up to even a 100! All you need is some cool crafts material, flip charts and tables. And a group that is willing to stretch itself…! If you introduce this method, expect some resistance. It helps if you have already done this practice yourself and/or are with a facilitator that has the gravity to take the group along in this (for some) uncomfortable exercise. But not to worry - in the end, it has proven to be the most engaging and fun exercise and we have seen the biggest skeptics falling in love with the practice. It taps into our inner child - and we love it!
So how does it work? With 3D mapping, you are building the system as you understand it (and you come to understand it even better while building). You do this together with others, literally building on each other’s knowledge. After a round of building, you move through a set of questions that lead you through a deeper reflection process. And finally, you visit other groups’ sculptures and cross-pollinate your findings. Sounds vague? Just have a look at this step-by-step manual and sheet with inquiry questions, which will make things more clear.

Other tools
Other sense-making tools that we have used in our Labs are, for example, expert opinion polling (Indonesia Food Change Lab), causal loop models (Indonesia Food Change Lab) and Knowledge cafes (public events with engaging talks and interactive group discussion afterwards). You can also have a look at the designkit website by IDEO, to get inspired: http://www.designkit.org/methods.

Phase 3: Connecting

What happens after exploration? Diving deeper into the problem has given us insights in the nature of the issue we are working with and in the viewpoints of the people we are working with. We hopefully feel more confident that we are ‘onto something’, we feel a sense of urgency and inspiration. Now it is time to connect the findings and determine where to divert our time and energy next.

You might feel overwhelmed as the exploration phase has tends to generate a lot of knowledge and countless possible avenues to act on. But this is very normal. We follow a process of diverging > converging. Now, it is time to converge, ie. to make choices. There’s a range of things you can do to make sense of your data and to arrive at a choice of focus areas. One general rule of thumb: go where the energy is. If a group of people or an individual is clearly passionate about a certain topic, that’s your best bet. Because in the end, the success of our interventions largely depends on the source where they come from: you, the intervener. Change is a long and hard process, without this energy and intrinsic motivation, we will find motivation slowly fading and initiatives dying.
Reflecting on your findings - some tools
Build in some time to reflect, as a group, on your findings. Go back to your old assumptions; what has changed? What have you learned about the system and the other actors you have been working with? Where to you feel your energy is drawn towards? What new initiative or behaviour can you (easily) fit into your daily practice? What shocked you, what inspired you?
Some tools you can use for reflection (and identification of action points) are dialogue walks, learning retreats, mind-mapping (or go back to your earlier constructed system map) and journaling.

Systems thinking: identifying leverage (or ‘acupuncture’) points
The notion of ‘leverage points’ comes from systems thinking theory. A leverage point is a place in a complex system (an economy, an ecosystem, a living body), where a small intervention and resulting shift in one thing, can lead to bigger changes. A nice analogy is Chinese medicine practice known as acupuncture. In acupuncture practice, you strategically place a needle on a part of the body. The underlying logic is that this small intervention leads to bigger shifts, i.e. healing something bigger in the body (for example, the liver, stomach, back pains, etc). Building further on that analogy: the acupuncture doctor only places a few needles on the body. If the doctor places too many needles on the body, it is likely to resist and the interventions will not have its healing effects (the patient might even get more ill!). This is the same when we interfere in another system, like a food system, health, energy - etc. We want to identify leverage points where we can place an intervention, but we want to choose those places strategically and carefully. Regarding being strategic: is the intervention in that little spot likely to result in bigger shifts; can it inspire a larger change? Regarding being careful: don’t step into a system and start intervening everywhere at the same time. Just as with the human body, the system will end up resisting you and kicking you out, and you might end up harming it.
This analogy and the bigger theory of systems change can be extremely useful in your Lab. What you want to do at this stage, is look at your system analysis (originating from the exploration phase) and together with the other Lab participants identify the leverage points you will focus your energy at. Here, it helps to make it visual. It is much easier to identify leverage points when you are looking at a large mind-map, or a 3D model. A last stage of 3D system sculpting can be the identification of leverage points (see manual).

Intervening in a system
There’s a lot more to say about systems change and leverage points. Want to know more? See, for example, this insightful blog by Donella Meadows, systems thinking guru and leading author of the influential book The Limits to Growth.
Connecting the dots together: events
One way of connecting dots and deciding on avenues forward, is organising an open event. The Uganda Food Change Lab chose this pathway: after approximately six to nine months of sensing, including research, it was decided to host a 2-day People’s Summit on Food in Fort Portal town. The Summit was attended by 70 participants from the town, district and national level and all levels and branches of society. Only a part of them had been engaged in the Foodlab so far. The two days followed a U-shaped process: day one was all about exploration (research results were shared and participants were sent on learning journeys to sites representing pockets of the local food system) and on the second day, participants were facilitated towards thinking of solutions. As a result, new initiatives emerged, among them a local Coalition of the Willing, representing diverse stakeholders, that is still active until today; sharpened advocacy messages and buy-in from local and national politicians; and a range of commitments from different stakeholder groups. You can read about this event in the Uganda Food Change Lab publication on page 28 to 31.

Phase 4: Testing

Now we get to the most exciting, yet also most difficult!, part of your Lab process: prototyping! It takes very good skills and preparation to facilitate a prototyping process and you already need to start planning for this at the start of your Lab. Next to this, we are still learning as Hivos what it entails to prototype. So it is key to keep on sharing with your fellow staff what works and doesn’t and to keep an eye open how other organisations and companies are doing it. But first, some background: what is prototyping and why do we do it in a Lab?

Prototyping is the act of implementing / undertaking small interventions, with the aim of learning ‘what works’. It translates an idea or concept into experimental action, bringing it to the end-users (those who will ultimate use or benefit from this intervention) and seeking their valuable feedback. This feedback provides the basis for refining the concept and its underlying assumptions. Does the intervention connect to their lived realities? What preconditions need to be in place for it to take fruit? Originally from the manufacturing / technology field, the practice of prototyping has gained great traction in the social field as well, including the development world. Just as you do not start producing a million TVs at once, but first build and test different models before switching to mass production; in the social field, we increasingly came to recognise that failure of pre-designed large interventions (common practice in a large chunk of development work) could have been partly avoided if we had started small by testing the intervention first, iterating it multiple times (based on feedback loops and learnings), and subsequently rolling it out on a larger scale. A prototype in your Lab can for example be a concrete product, a meeting, a process or a service; it can take a (few) day(s), weeks, months and sometimes even years. It is essentially a practical and tested mini version of what can later become a larger project at scale.

A playful and illustrative way to introduce the concept of prototyping is the marshmallow challenge. Make sure to do the challenge before you introduce the concept of prototyping. You really use it as a way to introduce the importance of an agile approach and to underline the importance of failing to get to success sooner.
“Fail fast to succeed sooner!” We’ve all heard this one before (or variations such as “Fail forward!”) and there’s truth to it. Do something rough, rapid, and then iterate. Do not be afraid to fail as failure will provide you with rich learnings and allow you to move forward.

The 7 Rs
The 7 R’s are a helpful tool in designing your prototype. Is your prototype relevant (does it matter to all key stakeholders individually and socially (for the communities involved)?)? right (does it have the right size and scope; does the miniature intervention somehow address/reflect all elements of the system you are dealing with?); revolutionary (is it new; a potential game changer?); rough (can you try it out locally, on a small scale?); relationally effective (does it leverage existing skills, strengths and possibilities of the respective community); and, finally, can it be done rapid (does it allow for enough time to get feedback and adapt?)? Here’s a powerpoint sheet outlining the 7 Rs (and some example prototypes), that you can use when presenting what a prototype is.

There is a rich amount of prototyping tools and guidelines available that can help you along your way when you facilitate the design and/or testing of a prototype. Your involvement (and hence, the tool you choose) depends on the scale of the prototype, so pay close attention to this. When a prototype will be rolled out as part of a longer-term process (duration: couple of weeks/months), you will most likely only closely facilitate the planning of it, but might be less involved in the actual execution as that will be done by your Lab participants. In that case, a prototyping canvas is the tool you need (see below).
In other cases however - hackatons, pressure cookers - you will also facilitate the testing of the prototype. In that case, you will find yourself facilitating building a prototype (get out the scissors, glue and papers!) and providing the opportunity for people to test it immediately. Many of the online prototyping tools (such as the DIY toolkit) are focusing on this last type of prototyping: the rapid prototyping where you build a mock-up and immediately test it. The Energy Safaris of the Energy Change Lab are a nice example of this type of prototyping, you can see the process in the video of the 2015 edition and the 2018 edition.

Prototyping canvas
Being a ‘small-scale intervention’, does not mean a prototype can be planned and implemented in a loose manner. To the contrary. As the ultimate purpose and outcome of prototyping is to arrive at rich learnings on what works and how to move ahead, you need a good system to collect your learnings in a systematised manner. That is even more important if you are looking at donors to fund the scale up of your intervention. A prototyping canvas (adapted from the business model canvas) offers a clear framework for designing your prototype, when this prototype will be tested over a longer period of time. Make an effort to jointly fill in the canvas and regularly go back to it to trace how you are doing.
If you are designing prototypes on the spot during an event, you may also choose for a more simple format with less questions - and then urge groups to fill in the more detailed canvas after the event. Here you find an example of a simplified prototyping canvas, as we used during our Zambia Food Change Lab events.

How to plan and budget for your prototyping phase?
This is really, really important. And yet, it is the part where we are still learning and cannot give you final answers on what works. But it is important to go back to the core question you had in mind at the beginning of your Lab, which circles around the sustainability of your process. What is the life cycle of your Lab and

---

of your involvement? If you will be prototyping, who is responsible for the potential scale-up of these prototypes?

How much you budget for your prototypes of course depends on your total Lab budget, as well as a rough estimate what type of prototypes you will be expecting (but this can be really hard to anticipate). But basically, you need to reserve some ‘free project money’, with destination yet unknown. Some handles:

- At a minimum, no matter how small your budget, reserve some seed funding ‘to keep the fire burning’. More specific: funding that can be allocated to prototyping groups for when they want to meet each other or gather a meeting with other stakeholders. Funding for hiring a meeting room and providing some tea and snacks. This can make all the difference!

- The money you have reserved should be easy to disperse to the Lab participants. If you need to go through months of due diligence before being able to spend it, the energy has faded and your prototyping process is dead. One way around it is to not regrant the money to the partner / prototyping group, but to pay activity costs directly, as Hivos.

- How can groups access the money? That is up to you. Looking at our experience, what will probably happen is that it will be clear to everyone which prototype ‘deserves’ funding. These are the groups that are most motivated, that put in a lot of their own (in kind) resources, and that seem most likely to successfully implement the prototype and feedback learning from it. Linking to the point above, ideally, prototyping money is flexible and fast, which means there’s no official tendering / call for proposal process upfront and no reporting process afterwards. This means that Hivos needs to be to some extent involved in the implementation.

- Of course, a prototype does not need to be financed by the Lab. Ideally, Lab participants take their responsibility and also actively look for resources within their own organisation or network. Have open conversations about this from the onset, this will prevent falling into the trap where Hivos is solely seen as a donor.

- When you decide - as Hivos - to facilitate and implement the prototypes, instead of having the ecosystem (Lab stakeholders) take them up, your Lab can turn into an innovation platform or programme. This has happened with the Energy Change Lab. More on this below (‘A Lab as an innovation platform’) on page 25.

Examples of prototypes in Hivos Labs

From the Living Wage Lab process, a range of prototypes (pilots) have emerged. You can read about them on page 12 to 21 of this publication (marking the 2-year anniversary of the Lab).

We are currently in the process of documenting all prototypes coming out of the Food Change Lab processes. In summer 2018, the SD4All programme will publish 3 small booklets outlining the story of the Food Change Labs in Uganda, Zambia and Indonesia. Here, you can find a description of the prototypes, their results and how they are currently being sustained. Keep an eye out for the booklets (end of August), and otherwise contact Frank Mechielsen.

Another prototype documenting process currently underway is part of the Energy Change Lab’s Productive Uses of Energy project. Starting late 2017 and running until fall 2018, this project designed and facilitated the implementation of two prototypes meant to foster productive uses of energy in villages in Tanzania. The process, its lessons and follow-up will be documented (together with IIED) in PUE Guidelines which will be published in November 2018. For more information, you can contact Eco Matser.

An example of small-scale prototypes in the context of a pressure cooker programme (5 days) are the prototypes that were designed and tested at two Energy Safaris in Tanzania. For the 2015 Energy Safari, see this video. For the 2018 Safari, see this video and this report.
Learning from your prototypes

The ultimate aim of prototyping is to learn from it so you can potentially scale it up to a larger intervention (including programme development and fundraising, if necessary/applicable). This then means that as Lab convenor, you need to distill and document those lessons very well. Organise learning and/or feedback sessions throughout your prototyping process, try to build in at least two iterations (changes to the idea, based on feedback of end-users) and really document and communicate this process as your learnings may be of relevance to a larger community than just your lab.
And did we already mention the importance of failing? Don’t be afraid to fail and to openly communicate about this. As long as failure translates into insights and iterations, you’re good.

Phase 5: Unleashing

As Lab convenor (Hivos or a partner), we will not always be around. Our funding cycle will end some day and in general, as development organisation we want our solutions to take root and develop into something with its own dynamic. So far, we have seen different things happening within Hivos regarding Lab life cycles. As mentioned early in this toolkit, we see roughly two types of Hivos Labs: the ones that are a problem solving process (mainly the Food Change Labs) and the ones morphing into more permanent programmes, with their own funding. We so far spoke mostly about the Labbing process forming the backbone of this first type of Labs, so ‘unleashing’ refers to unleashing of the solution. When we’re talking of Labs that are more of a permanent programme / an innovation platform, such as the Energy Change Lab, ‘unleashing’ naturally means ending the programme and making sure different projects and solutions are sustained or scaled.

We do not have many examples of ‘unleashing’ yet, as our Labs and Lab processes are relatively young. But we are starting to see the first contours, specifically in some of our Food Change Labs, of which some are ending in 2018. You can read all about those results and how they will be sustained in upcoming publications (see text box ‘Examples of prototypes in Hivos Labs’).
A LAB AS AN INNOVATION PLATFORM: A STEP-WISE APPROACH

As you can see from the above, a Lab as a multi-stakeholder problem-solving process can in fact end up being an innovation platform – that is, if you decide that you (Hivos and/or partners) are the facilitator of the different project ideas coming out of prototypes and want to stay connected to those projects. These projects bundled together can lead to your Lab being an innovation platform.

But you can also consciously aim for this from the beginning. The process in this case is not that different from the one sketched above: it likewise follows a U-shaped process. The difference is that all steps are taken by the project team, not by external people, for example, the people you are trying to convince (policy makers, etc.). Prototypes / ideas that surface at step 5 and 6, turn into your own projects (with potential separate funding and separate implementation partners). The core team is the owner of the Lab platform. In the case of the Energy Change Lab: a team in Tanzania (currently consisting of four persons) and Hivos and IIED staff in London. You can read more about the Energy Change Lab and its projects in its Strategic Plan and on the website (www.energychangelab.org).
ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT & WAY FORWARD

This toolkit was drafted in response to questions from Hivos staff looking to set up a Lab and/or looking to enrich their own understanding of this type of innovation processes. It is building on an internal background paper about Labs in Hivos, which was drafted in 2017 by Felia Boerwinkel, Remko Berkhout and Josine Stremmelaar (the latter two being former Hivos colleagues). For this toolkit, I am thankful for Remko’s feedback and additions, which was as always extremely useful as his post-Hivos life has exposed him to many more Lab and Lab-like projects and processes. And even more so, I wish this to be an internal document where Hivos colleagues from around the world can add their insights to, and for it to be a stepping stone to more exchange between colleagues working on Labs.

Words of caution have already been given: there’s an inherent tension between the concept of a toolkit and the concept of ‘labbing’ (or social innovation, for that matter). Being innovative is so much more than simple following of steps. It requires a mindset of questioning, of daring to ask bigger questions and of employing a system’s view on things. It requires a deep understanding and passion to understand how change happens and sensitivity to different actors and viewpoints. It asks to step out of one's comfort zone and to be comfortable with a slightly less defined way of working. And it demands process discipline, proper documentation and efforts to gather learnings and have them translated in reality - even if that means going a diametrical different direction. All of these things cannot be taken from a document, but will come to us when we experience change in real life. With each event, conflict, victory or failure, we grow our understanding on how change happens and how we as Hivos can facilitate it better. I am hoping you feel inspired by the rich examples shared in this document and invite you to reach out and share your lessons as well as ask your questions to colleagues.

LAB ON!