



# INTERACTING THRESHOLDS

## PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY

The purpose of this activity is to reflect on thresholds of potential concern, across different sectors and scales in your system, and how these may influence each other. Actively working with thresholds is an important part of navigating towards more sustainable trajectories. But this is challenging, since thresholds are difficult to detect, and often only discovered *after* they have been crossed. A first step is to build awareness around the existence of thresholds in your system, and jointly reflect on what they mean. This exercise is useful both as a building block in understanding the overall system dynamics and in preparing strategies for change, some of which may need to be directed specifically at thresholds. See also related discussion guide.

## RESOURCES NEEDED

Required skills: Moderate facilitation skills, some expertise and detailed knowledge of the key thresholds, systems thinking and complexity

Time: 1hr

Materials: recording materials, the list of thresholds, any technical information relating to the thresholds

## HOW TO DO IT

### STEP 1

Add potential or known thresholds in your system to the figure below in the appropriate sector and scale. For example, at the smaller scale, a thresholds in household income should be placed in the economic domain whereas a threshold in plot size should be placed in the environment domain. At the focal scale there may

#### Phase 3: Exploring system dynamics

Module A: Understanding social-ecological interactions across scales

Work card 19: Identifying thresholds and traps

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be thresholds related to total area of arable land, rainfall amount, rate of out-migration, or distance to markets, while larger scales thresholds might include average temperature, length of growing season, or the size of specific markets such as biofuels.

## **STEP 2**

Once you have placed your key thresholds appropriately in the table, illustrate important relationships between them by drawing arrows to indicate how the crossing of one threshold might trigger another threshold to be crossed. You might also consider identifying external shocks that could trigger these thresholds and their relative level of certainty (low, medium, high). Discuss how the crossing of one or several thresholds in your system would affect system dynamics and influence the systems trajectory of development.

## **TIPS**

Identifying thresholds are difficult, and it is not always possible to come up with thresholds across all domains and scales. If that is the case, don't force it, but discuss the issue in more general terms. Are there important limits in your system that probably should be avoided? Are there limits that may already have been crossed?

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**Smaller-scale system**  
*(E.g. local/ household)*

**Focal-scale system**  
*(E.g. community/ region)*

**Larger-scale system**  
*(E.g. state/nation /global)*

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Social

Economic

Environmental

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