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The Policy Practice

Understanding stakeholders and political networks

Practical Guidance Note

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About this publication

This note is part of a series developed by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice (TWP CoP) to provide technical guidance to practitioners who want to incorporate a political economy perspective in their work.

The original idea for these notes came as a result of conversations with US colleagues including David Jacobstein, Jonathan Rose and Sarah Swift. Other notes in the series cover politically informed context analysis and participatory methods for political economy analysis.

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Summary

In 2023, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice published *Understanding political economy analysis and thinking and working politically*. This complementary note sets out more detailed guidance on how to undertake a dynamic Stakeholder Analysis and Political Network Mapping, which are core elements of political economy analysis and other forms of politically informed context analysis.

This guidance note is designed for practitioners (such as development partners, diplomats and other international actors) who want to understand the human dimensions of complex problems: who matters, what motivates them and how they relate to each other. This knowledge will help design more effective interventions (whether through diplomatic influencing or through programmes).

Stakeholder Analysis identifies the key actors relevant to your objective, assessing their interests, influence and position. Political Network Mapping goes further, revealing how power actually operates by examining the relationships between actors – their access to each other, the nature of their ties and how these connections shape what is politically possible. The two tools are related but distinct. Stakeholder Analysis identifies *who* matters; Political Network Mapping reveals *how they connect*. In practice, they are sequential but iterative – you cannot map a network without first identifying the actors, but mapping relationships often reveals actors you had overlooked.

Political Network Mapping requires more time and resources than Stakeholder Analysis, as it relies on relationship information, which is harder to obtain and verify. However, it can generate more nuanced influencing strategies, particularly useful for diplomatic engagements. Both tools help practitioners move from a general political understanding to specific, evidence-based decisions.

The guidance walks through seven steps common to both approaches to contribute to the design and implementation of a strategy, policy dialogue or programme, and the management of risks. The steps are: 1. Clarify your objective, 2. Gather information, 3. List stakeholders, 4. Explore what you know about stakeholders, 5. Map stakeholders' interest and influence, and their relationships, 6. Discuss operational implications and 7. Develop an engagement plan. A hypothetical agricultural liberalisation example illustrates each step, showing how analysis translates into decision-making.

The guidance offers practical tools, in particular stakeholder tables (table 1, table 3), a 2x2 stakeholder (interest/influence) matrix (diagram 3), a central actor map (diagram 4), a coalition map (diagram 5) and a software-generated network visualisation (diagram 6). The guidance emphasises keeping analysis dynamic: relationships shift, windows open and close, and effective practitioners update their analysis and maps as the political landscape changes.

The purpose of Stakeholder Analysis and Network Mapping is utility for decision-making, not representation accuracy. Treat your tables and maps as hypotheses to be tested and updated. They are part of an iterative process as the context changes or there is new learning – not fixed truths about the political landscape.

Finally, make sure that your use of personal information, and what you write and store, is in accordance with the privacy and data protection laws and regulations in your country.

Introduction

Political economy analysis (PEA) is intended to help practitioners get 'under the surface' of complex issues. Numerous practical tools are available, such as the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice (TWP CoP)'s 2023 publication, *Understanding political economy analysis and thinking and working politically*.

Stakeholder Analysis and Political Network Mapping are particularly useful for understanding the human dimensions of the problems and opportunities analysed in PEAs, going further than formal rules, systems and responsibilities. They are a standard element of different context analyses, beyond PEAs.

Development partners, diplomats and other international actors use these tools to determine whom to work with and how to engage with them. They help identify the most relevant stakeholders, their relative power and their influence in relation to a specific objective. They make explicit the relationships and dynamics between stakeholders, which may have been hidden or unclear.

The tools can contribute to the design and implementation of a strategy, policy dialogue or programme, and the management of risks. On their own, they can help refine stakeholder engagement strategies and contribute to more effective influencing.

One advantage of stakeholder and network mappings is that they can be undertaken in a participative manner during workshops or team discussions. They help teams visually represent what they know about their main stakeholders and facilitate agreement about what to do next. There are also software and online applications that can help get the best visual representations of the most complex mappings.

Stakeholder Analysis and Political Network Mapping are related but distinct tools:

- Stakeholder Analysis identifies *who* matters – the actors who have a stake in an issue, their interests and their relative influence over that issue.
- Political Network Mapping examines *how stakeholders relate* – the connections between actors, their access to each other, coalition dynamics and bridging roles.

In practice, the two are sequential: Stakeholder Analysis provides the foundation (*Who are the actors?*) and Political Network Mapping builds on it (*How do they connect?*). You cannot map a network without first identifying its nodes (actors). However, the process is also iterative; mapping relationships often reveals stakeholders who have been overlooked, prompting a revisit of the stakeholder list.

This guidance covers both tools together because they share common steps and are most powerful when combined. Stakeholder Analysis is lighter-touch and can be carried out quickly by a team in a workshop as part of a PEA process. Political Network Mapping adds depth and can generate more nuanced stakeholder engagement strategies but requires more data on relationships. You can use either tool on its own or combine them for richer analysis. (See Box 1 for more details.)

The main steps, for both Stakeholder Analysis and Political Network Mapping, are:

1. Clarify your overall objective and how you will use the analysis.
2. Gather the information you will need for the analysis.
3. Make a list of the main stakeholders in relation to your objective.
4. Explore what you know about the stakeholders and their networks (in terms of their power, interest, influence, relationships and interconnections).
5. Map the stakeholders (in a stakeholder matrix and/or political network map).
6. Discuss the implication of the mapping for your strategy, dialogue or programme.
7. Develop and implement a stakeholder engagement plan.

This guidance is structured around these common steps, indicating the additional information and analysis needed for Dynamic Political Network Mapping under step 5. Each step is illustrated by a hypothetical example from an agricultural market liberalisation initiative, to provide more practical insights.

Box 1: How these tools relate to political economy analysis

Stakeholder Analysis and Political Network Mapping are not the same as PEA, though they are often key components of it.

PEA examines the broader landscape: the rules (formal and informal), systems, incentives and ideas that shape political, economic and social outcomes. It asks: *Why are things the way they are*? and *How can change happen*?

Stakeholder Analysis and Political Network Mapping focus specifically on the actors within this landscape. Stakeholder Analysis asks: *Who matters*? Political Network Mapping asks: *How do they connect?*

These tools can be used as part of a full PEA – helping generate an understanding of who the key players are and how they relate to each other within the broader context, before analysing how processes of change can happen and how they can be supported. Or the tools can be used as standalone exercises when you need focused, practical insight into the human dimensions of a specific problem.

The process is sequential but also iterative: mapping relationships often reveals actors who have been overlooked, prompting you to revisit your stakeholder list, and even your broader PEA, as new realistic pathways of change emerge that you may be able to encourage the use of through diplomatic influencing or programmes.

Step 1: Clarifying the objective of the analysis

The first step is to specify how you will use a Stakeholder Analysis and/or Political Network Mapping.

It is particularly important to agree the specific issue or objective against which you are mapping stakeholders, and the decisions that will be taken based on your analysis. Your starting point should be a specific problem you want to overcome, or an issue you want to understand better.

You also need to decide at the start of the process who will participate in the analysis, how to keep it live over time and what resources you have at your disposal.

In practice, the resources can range from very few to generous: you may have to do this analysis on your own or within your team; or, you may be able to partner with other organisations to undertake a joint analysis. A team-based approach will make for a richer analysis but requires more time and resources.

Box 2 presents a concrete illustrative example that is used throughout this guidance.

Box 2: Setting the objective and agreeing the process – an illustration

You work for an international organisation focused on the agricultural sector in low- and middle income countries. You try to promote agricultural market liberalisation where this is likely to boost incomes for farmers and their communities, such as in this country. In practice, this means identifying a technically sound and politically feasible process to remove price and marketing controls on agricultural products.

The policy objective in the country you are analysing is therefore to encourage market liberalisation. The problem you are facing is that past domestic reforms have not been effective, and international organisations seem to have very little real influence.

You decide that a Stakeholder Analysis and a Political Network Mapping are needed to deepen your understanding of the problem and to come up with solutions tailored to your organisation's capacities. You need to know who is involved in the agriculture sector and who can influence market liberalisation.

In particular, you want to understand the stakeholders (i) who can influence the direct involvement of the state as a producer and exporter (rather than just as a regulator) in agriculture and (ii) who can incentivise greater private sector production and international exports.

The Stakeholder Analysis and Political Network Mapping will help your country director decide whether the policy objective of market liberalisation is realistic in that country for your organisation, and how to support it.

In this example, used in the rest of the guidance, you have been given resources to undertake some limited research and to hold workshops with your team and selected external experts over two months.

Step 2: Gathering information

The second step is to collect evidence about what motivates stakeholders.

Ideally, a Stakeholder Analysis/Political Network Mapping is part of a PEA (or another contextual analysis, such as conflict analysis), carried out to understand the different factors influencing the stakeholders you are investigating. (See Box 1 in the introduction.)

Even without a full context analysis, the preparation for a stakeholder/network mapping can include:

- A review of documents (e.g. newspapers, social media, academic articles, PEAs of the country, economic analyses of the sector, programme evaluations, non-governmental organisation reports, etc.);
- Key informant interviews and/or focus group discussions.

This information will help you identify who the main stakeholders are, their positions and influence over the issue you are interested in, their relationships and the different networks they constitute.

If you have little time, make sure you have at least some conversations with a range of contacts, read the latest news and discuss emerging insights with colleagues.

If you are organising a workshop, invite participants from a diversity of viewpoints and with firsthand knowledge of the stakeholders and sector. Using a diversity of sources is called triangulation; this is central to ensure quality and avoid bias.

Box 3: Data collection – an illustration

In our example, your initial questions are: *Who are the main individuals, organisations or networks in the agriculture sector? How do they work together? How are decisions made and then implemented?*

You have access to public information (e.g. government agricultural policy, World Bank economic analysis) as well as administrative information (e.g. minutes of official government meetings, data on subsidies reaching smallholder farmers, etc.) but these don't give you a good sense of how decisions are made and implemented in practice in the agriculture sector. You know there is a gap between formal systems and ground realities.

Interviewing some farmers, large exporters, politicians, civil servants, academics and development partners involved in agriculture policy can give you a better understanding of decision-making processes, why the state remains involved in agriculture production and what is blocking economic liberalisation despite official policy statements. Focus group discussions with agricultural smallholders or women's cooperatives will improve your understanding of what is happening in rural areas, and the potential of these groups to influence change from the bottom up.

If you cannot meet such persons directly, you should aim to interview some researchers or policymakers who do have firsthand knowledge, and invite some of them to a workshop.

Step 3: Listing the main stakeholders

The third step is to make a list of the main stakeholders in relation to your objective.

These can be individuals, organisations, groups or networks who can influence or who are affected by the issue you are examining (i.e. they have a "stake" in it). To help you focus, consider who needs to be involved in solving the issue and who may be preventing its resolution.

Here are some tips to generate a good but manageable list:

- Consider separately government, private sector, civil society and international stakeholders.
- Think about local, regional, national and international levels.
- Distinguish categories of individuals within the same organisation (e.g. a minister and civil servants in the same ministry) as they have different interests and levels of influence.
- Don't limit yourself to the formal system. Consider who has influence on the process but may sit outside the formal system – for example individuals that those you interview mention as important but who don't have an official role (e.g. the business actors funding political parties or the politicians with influence over agricultural board nominations).
- Ask "Who is missing from the analysis?" before finalising the list of stakeholders, to incorporate gender and inclusion considerations.
- Then shorten your list, focusing on the most relevant 20–30 stakeholders. This range captures meaningful political dynamics while remaining manageable for stakeholder data collection, to map networks (see section 5.3) and for decision-making.

In a workshop setting, you can ask participants to start by thinking on their own about who they consider to be the most relevant stakeholders for the issue you are examining. They can write each name on a separate Post-it before comparing their suggestions with those of others around their table and then finalising the list as a group. This gives space for all group members, including introverts, to contribute, and can prevent groupthink or the emergence of one dominant voice.

Another way of coming up with a list is to start by visualising the process involved (see diagram 1 on the next page). In a workshop, this can be done by drawing the process on a flipchart or in PowerPoint, and discussing as a group which individuals and organisations are involved at each step (including those without a formal role).

A workshop facilitator often needs to remind participants to consider women and less powerful groups who are nonetheless affected by the issue and who could be involved in solutions – such as women's agricultural cooperatives or farmers in remote regions in our illustrative example.

Finally, make sure that your use of personal information, and what you write and store, is in accordance with the privacy and data protection laws and regulations in your country.

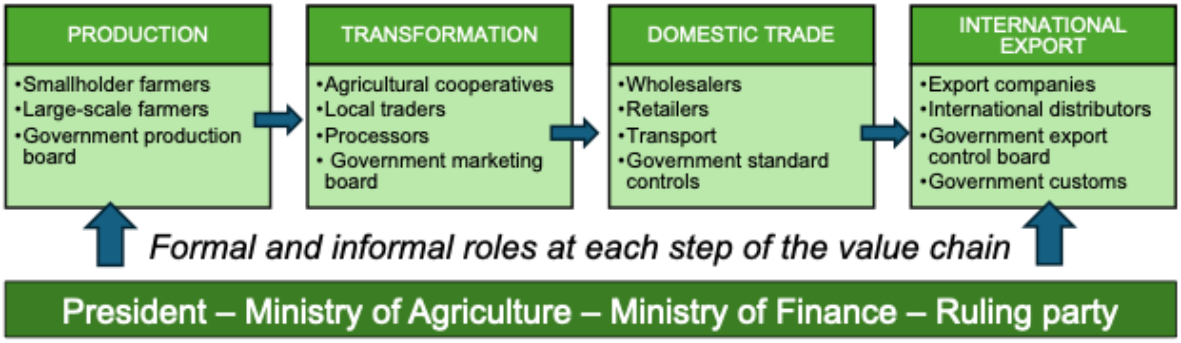
Step 4: Recording what you know about stakeholders

The fourth step is to explore and write down what you know about the main stakeholders.

For each stakeholder, identify the sources of their power, their interest in relation to your objective or the issue you want to address and the influence they have over that objective.

You can start with your process diagram if you have one (diagram 1) to help you assess the interest and influence of the stakeholders you have identified.

Diagram 1: A simplified agricultural value chain with some illustrative stakeholders



For a realistic mapping, go "below the surface" and reflect on the less visible sources of power and the informal ways in which power and influence is exercised. Box 4 provides some examples. Consider the different types of interests, beyond financial or material gain (e.g. reputation, ideology, etc.).

Box 4: Different types of power

- Highly visible: official positions, recognised authority, public status
- Invisible power: dominant ideologies, values and social norms that shape expectations and behaviours
- Formal: as in constitutions, laws and rules
- Informal: based on reputation, respect, mutuality or fear
- Coercive: through the use of force
- Symbolic: through the deployment of ideas and images
- Top-down: highly directive, visible leadership
- Backgrounded: such as convening power to bring people together

You can use a table to summarise what you know about stakeholders, and update this over time (e.g. after relevant meetings or political events). Such a table could also be completed as part of a small group exercise during a workshop. You can add other categories to the table, depending on the analytical framework you are using (e.g. you would indicate which stakeholders are connectors and dividers in a conflict analysis). Table 1 (on the next page) illustrates how you can synthesise information about the different stakeholders. Such a table is also required for a Political Network Mapping but you will need to add columns about relationships between stakeholders to generate networks (explained in section 5).

Table 1: Agricultural liberalisation stakeholder interest and influence table – an illustration

Stakeholder	Role and sources of power (formal and informal)	Interest in the reform	Influence over the reform
President	Ultimate political authority. Controls cabinet appointments and dismissals, arbitrates between competing elites and sets the outer limits of reform. Power derives from constitutional authority, patronage control and ability to balance factions.	Conditional and instrumental. Interested in agricultural reform only insofar as it preserves political stability, sustains elite coalitions and improves fiscal or reputational standing without triggering backlash among key constituencies.	Very high. Final veto player. Can enable reform windows, stall initiatives indefinitely or override ministers regardless of formal mandates.
Presidential advisors	No formal authority over agricultural policy but trusted access to the president and ability to frame issues before they reach formal decision points. Often drawn from technocratic or business backgrounds with international connections. Serve as a conduit between executive and external actors.	Varies by individual. Generally receptive to evidence-based arguments and international perspectives on agriculture sector liberalisation. Some may favour modernisation; others are cautious about disrupting patronage networks that maintain stability.	Moderate but strategic. Cannot determine policy but can shape what options reach the president and how they are framed. Key entry point for external actors; bridging role often underestimated.
Minister of agriculture	Formal cabinet authority over agriculture sector, reinforced by informal power as a relative of the president. Exercises control through oversight of cooperatives, Commodity Production and Marketing Board and Export Control Board, giving leverage over prices, inputs, licences and market access.	Strongly opposed. Liberalisation would undermine control over sector rents, weaken patronage networks built through subsidies and price controls, and reduce political leverage within the ruling coalition.	High. Can block or delay reform through formal authority, direct presidential access and mobilise cooperatives and allied actors to raise political costs.
Minister of finance	Formal authority over Ministry of Finance and national budget process. Key interface with international financial institutions (IFIs) but politically subordinate to the president and vulnerable to being overridden.	Strongly supportive. Reform would reduce fiscal losses from agricultural subsidies and price controls, improve budget discipline and signal credibility to IFIs and investors.	High but constrained. Can push reform via budgets and external conditionality but depends on presidential backing to prevail.
Large-scale producers and export-oriented farmers	Part of the economic elite, owning large farms and agro-processing facilities. Some embedded in international trade. Influence mediated through political donations, personal ties to ruling party figures and access to export licences.	Mixed. Many favour liberalisation to improve profitability, access foreign markets and adopt new technology; others fear losing preferential patronage-based deals.	Moderate. Limited direct policy authority but able to exert pressure via political connections, party financing and international commercial networks.

Stakeholder	Role and sources of power (formal and informal)	Interest in the reform	Influence over the reform
Smallholders	Numerically dominant group of farmers, largely subsistence-oriented with some cash crop production. Often required to sell to state marketing boards at unfavourable prices and excluded from subsidised input programmes.	Ambivalent. Interested in higher prices and fairer markets but concerned about exposure to price volatility and loss of implicit state protection.	Low. Fragmented voices, weak representation and limited organisational capacity constrain collective influence.
State-controlled agricultural cooperatives	State-funded entities receiving subsidised inputs and operating under controlled pricing regimes. Closely linked to ruling party structures and used as patronage and mobilisation channels.	Strongly opposed. Liberalisation would threaten financial viability, remove political protection and erode their intermediary role.	Moderate. Can slow or obstruct reform through apex bodies and party links but cannot determine outcomes alone.
Prominent farmers' activist	No formal office but significant moral authority from longstanding advocacy for smallholders. Informal leverage through proximity to the president's family, strong media access and rural mobilisation capacity.	Conditional. Supportive of reforms that benefit smallholders; sceptical of rapid liberalisation without credible safety nets.	Moderate but strategic. Can raise political costs, shift elite perceptions and signal grassroots legitimacy or opposition.
Agricultural journalist	Influential editor with agenda-setting power. Shapes narratives among urban elites, donors and international audiences through national and international media networks.	High interest in transparency and accountability. Generally sympathetic to reform logic but willing to expose transition costs, losers and rent-seeking.	Moderate. Can amplify or undermine reform momentum through framing; international reach extends influence beyond domestic politics.
Women farmers and women's farming associations	Provide a large share of agricultural labour, especially in food crops. Often excluded from formal cooperatives and input programmes. Some organisations through women's groups linked to civil society and church networks.	Generally supportive of reforms that improve market access and reduce discrimination but highly vulnerable to transition costs if safeguards are weak.	Low formal influence but latent potential as coalition partners able to mobilise grassroots pressure and link reform to gender and equity agendas.
Religious leaders	Hold moral authority and command extensive grassroots networks, particularly in rural areas. Widely perceived as above partisan politics, lending social legitimacy.	Low intrinsic interest in technical policy but engagement increases if reform is framed around fairness, poverty reduction or rural livelihoods.	Moderate. Cannot decide policy but can confer or withdraw legitimacy. Public statements can shift political risk calculations.
International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other IFIs	No formal role in domestic policymaking but exercise external leverage through financing, balance-of-payments support and policy conditionality. Influence is mediated primarily via Ministry of Finance and budget process, shaping fiscal space and reform incentives.	Strongly supportive of liberalisation and subsidy reform to restore fiscal discipline, reduce quasi-fiscal losses and signal macroeconomic credibility. Interest is instrumental rather than sectoral.	High but indirect. Cannot impose reform alone but can materially alter the president's and minister of finance's calculations by tightening or easing fiscal space and signalling international confidence or risk.

Step 5: From Stakeholder Analysis to Political Network Mapping

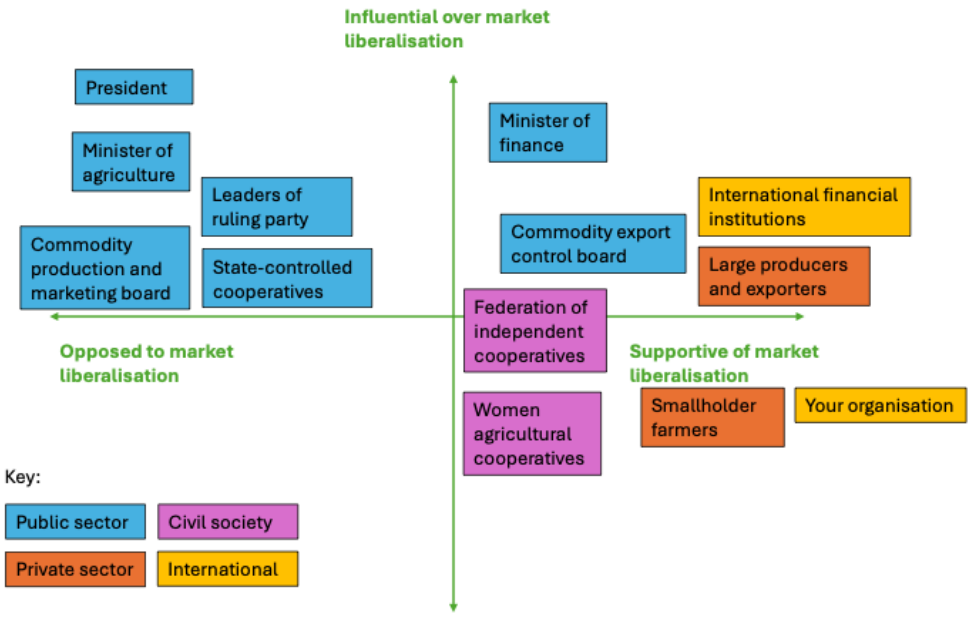
5.1 Stakeholder matrix

The fifth step is to map the stakeholders visually. In a Stakeholder Analysis, the stakeholders are placed in a matrix based on their interest in and influence over addressing the issue, according to your prior analysis. Diagram 2 indicates the four quadrants in a standard stakeholder matrix.

Diagram 2: Stakeholder matrix template

Influence over the issue	Interest in solving the issue: Low	Interest in solving the issue: High
High influence	***Low influence / Low interest*** *Blockers* These stakeholders are not interested in the reform process or initiative. Some may be neutral; others may oppose it, or even actively block it.	***High influence / High interest*** *Reformers* These are the key stakeholders. They can drive the reform or initiative forward. Often, they could be even more effective by working together and broadening the political, economic and social constituencies in favour of the reform.
Low influence	***Low influence / Low interest*** *Disengaged* These stakeholders are not interested in the reform or initiative and are unlikely to derail it. There is no reason to include them in the map, unless they could become supporters or blockers under realistic scenarios.	***Low influence / High interest*** *Supporters* These stakeholders support the reform or initiative but do not drive it. They could potentially become more influential (e.g. by forming coalitions or through increased capacities).

Diagram 3: Agricultural liberalisation stakeholder matrix



In a workshop, you can use Post-its with the names of individuals or organisations. Move Post-its around your flipchart to place the stakeholders according to their influence and interest as the discussion progresses, until you reach a consensus. You can transcribe your map into PowerPoint, using colour coding for types of stakeholders and size to indicate their degree of importance. Make sure you include your own organisation in a realistic manner.

The stakeholder matrix (diagrams 2 and 3) is the bridge between Stakeholder Analysis and Political Network Mapping. It shows where stakeholders sit based on their interest and influence – but not how they are connected. The network maps that follow add this relational dimension.

5.2 Preparing political network maps

Political Network Mapping adds dynamics and relational dimensions to Stakeholder Analysis.

- Stakeholder Analysis identifies who matters, what they want and how much influence they hold. But it tends to be static and to treat actors as independent units.
- Political Network Mapping reveals how power actually operates, through connections, dependencies and informal ties. This matters most in politically contested or fluid settings, where outcomes depend less on formal mandates and more on who controls access, who brokers deals and whose relationships are shifting.

Political Network Mapping should be driven by clear political questions:

- Who controls access to decision-making?
- Who enables or blocks reform?
- Which relationships need to shift for change to occur?

Here are the five main steps in developing networks.

Step 1 **Start by drawing the boundaries of the "ecosystem"** you want to analyse and in which stakeholders are situated. In our illustrative example, this could be an institutional system (e.g. the agriculture sector), a policy objective (e.g. market liberalisation) or a political arena centred on a key decision-maker (e.g. the minister of agriculture).

Step 2 **Identify the actors (stakeholders) within the ecosystem.** In network terms, these are the **nodes** of the map. You can refer to the list of stakeholders created previously for the initial nodes. Women are often a neglected group; make sure you consider their positions within networks.

Step 3 **Identify which types of relationships** matter the most for understanding how influence is exercised. (In a network map, relationships are sometimes described as **flows**.) Not all types need mapping. Prioritise those that best explain how decisions get made or blocked. Options include:

- Bureaucratic (e.g. hierarchical relations);
- Financial (e.g. an economic actor funding a politician in a clientelist system);
- Ideological (e.g. a shared vision);
- Cultural, personal or social connections (e.g. educational background, linguistic group, gender identity, family or friendship links – these personal relations should never be underplayed);
- Information flows (e.g. how information and knowledge is disseminated).

Step 4 **Capture dynamics.** Static maps miss political dynamics: relationships strengthen, weaken and realign as incentives and events change. To capture this, you can specify up to five attributes for each relation, as table 2 illustrates.

Table 2: Capturing relationship dynamics – a template

Attribute	Definition	How to record it
Direction	Who influences whom? Some relationships are reciprocal; others flow only one way.	Arrow direction. A → B means A influences B. Double arrow ⇔ for reciprocal relations between A and B.
Intensity	How strong is the connection? Strong ties involve frequent interaction, resource flows or deep interdependence.	Arrow thickness. Thick = strong. Thin = weak.
Trend	Is the relationship gaining or losing importance? Rising relationships signal growing access or alignment.	↑ Rising. → Stable. ↓ Declining.
Volatility	How stable or fragile is this relationship? High-volatility ties can shift quickly in response to political events or changing incentives.	Rate degrees of volatility as High, Medium or Low. Show high volatility with dashed lines - - -
Strength of evidence	How confident are you in this judgement? Strong evidence comes from direct observation and reliable sources. The strongest evidence is based on triangulation between different sources.	Rate strength of evidence as High, Medium or Low.

Source: Methodology developed by Wilfred Mwamba

Step 5 **Analyse patterns** in your visual representation. Use the map to identify:

- **Bottlenecks:** highly central actors who control flows;
- **Coalitions:** tightly connected clusters;
- **Exclusions:** isolated or marginalised groups;
- **Leverage points:** relationships that could shift outcomes if targeted.

Initial Political Network Mapping versions can be quite messy, but they are refined as the team discussion hones on the relationships that matter the most.

(Network mapping is a tool that can also be used beyond stakeholder relationships. For example, it can map financial flows in the agriculture sector or the flow of agricultural products, such as seeds and fertilisers. Nodes do not need to represent individuals or organisations; they could also represent processes or deals, such as contracts, that connect stakeholders. In this guidance, we focus on mapping stakeholders and their political networks.)

5.3 Visualising political networks

There are different ways to represent networks visually. This work can be done manually in a workshop, using a flipchart, Post-its and markers, or by using software for online workshops or reports (such as PowerPoint, Miro or Kumu). We illustrate three main options in turn.

- You can draw Dynamic Political Networks around a **central figure** (diagram 4).
- You **can cluster stakeholders** based on shared characteristics (e.g. levels of power, objectives, type of organisation, location, etc.) (as in diagram 5).
- If you have over 20–30 stakeholders, you can use a **software program**, which will turn your list of stakeholders and their characteristics and relationships into a complex map. Software can cluster 100+ stakeholders using Social Network Analysis Metrics and Algorithms (diagram 6).

Mapping political networks around a central figure is particularly useful when reform hinges on a small number of powerful gatekeepers. Rather than mapping the whole system, mapping around a central figure can reveal who has access, who is losing ground and where the pressure points lie.

Box 5 Preparing a Central Figure Political Network Map – an illustration

We continue our case study of agricultural liberalisation by examining the ecosystem, with the minister of agriculture at the centre. Our PEA of rules, systems and processes and our Stakeholder Analysis have identified this figure as one of the most important actors in the agriculture sector in general and in liberalisation policymaking in particular.

To prepare the map, you can amend the table prepared at step 4 of your Stakeholder Analysis by capturing how each stakeholder relates to the minister of agriculture, and how relationships are evolving, capturing dynamics in terms of level of access, relationship trends, volatility and evidence. This is presented in table 3, and then visually illustrated in diagram 4.

As you examine diagram 4, you can observe a key insight from the network map: the minister's power rests on presidential protection. His control of licences and subsidies creates dependencies he uses to block reform.

What are the practical implications of this map for your organisation, given the questions you identified at the start of your process (in box 2)? The maps show that influencing the state's direct role in production and export requires engaging the minister of agriculture's network: the Commodity Board, state cooperatives and the export control functions he controls. But his gatekeeping position means external actors have limited direct access. The maps also show that incentivising private sector production and exports depends on strengthening the pro-liberalisation coalition, particularly large producers, who bridge both coalitions, and the minister of finance, who has international backing but weak internal access to the minister of agriculture.

Table 3 is the core analytical product (with illustrative analysis of relationships and trends based on our illustrative agricultural case study). Diagram 4 presents a visualisation of these judgements. It shows relationship types, exchanges and tends. Flow labels are illustrative. In practice, teams will include the visual information they need depending on how they will use the map.

Diagram 4: Dynamic Political Network Map around the minister of agriculture

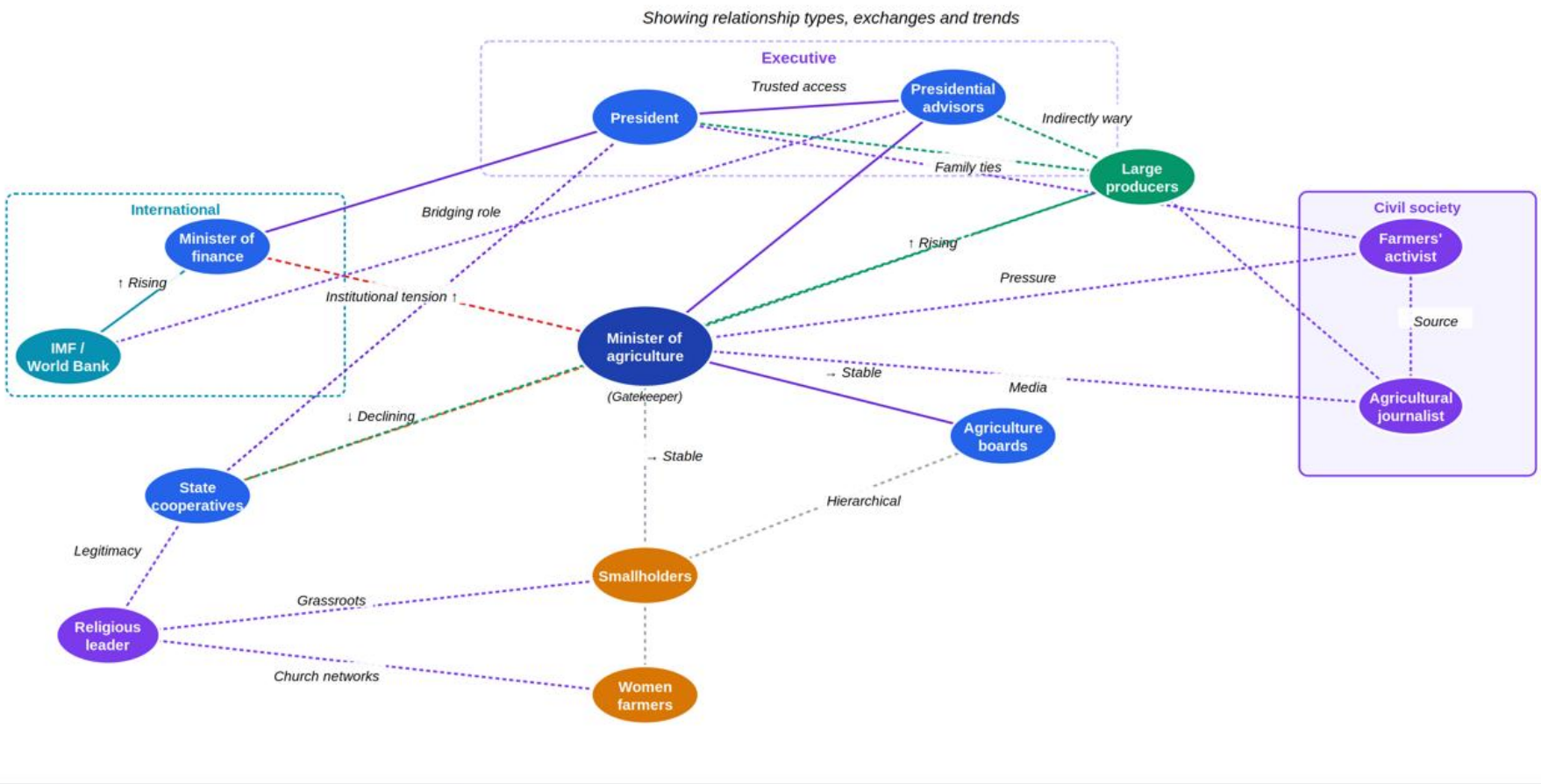


Table 3: Information for a political network mapping – an illustration around the minister of agriculture (MoA)

Actor	Nature of relationship with MoA	Interest in relationship	Access	Trend	Volatility	Evidence
President	Family alliance and political hierarchy. Reciprocal: provides jobs, protection, final authority; receives loyalty, patronage delivery, mobilisation capacity.	Presidential: political control, patronage distribution, sector performance. MoA: protection from rivals, mandate security.	Very high (direct, informal)	→ Stable	Medium	Strong
Presidential advisors	Indirect, mediated through president. No direct operational relationship with MoA but can shape presidential priorities and frame policy options. Occasionally broker meetings between international actors and executive.	Advisors: access to information, relevance to presidential decision-making, maintaining trusted insider status. MoA: wary – advisors can bypass his gatekeeping if they channel external pressure directly to president.	Low (formal) Medium (informal via president)	↑ Rising	Medium	Medium
Minister of finance	Institutional tension. Reciprocal but adversarial: both compete for presidential favour. Minister of finance controls budget; MoA controls sector economic rents.	Finance: reduce expenditure, meeting IFI conditions. MoA: protect subsidies and his control of agriculture sector.	Low (only via formal channels)	↑ Rising	Medium	Strong
Agriculture boards	Hierarchical oversight. Reciprocal: MoA sets mandates, budgets, appointments. Boards implement policy and channel resources.	Boards: preserve their mandate and resources. MoA: operational control over agriculture sector.	High	→ Stable	Low	Strong
State cooperatives	Clientelist. Reciprocal: MoA provides subsidies and protection. Cooperatives provide political mobilisation and party funding.	Cooperatives: survival (they are not viable without subsidies). MoA: mobilisation, capacity to block reform.	Medium	↓ Declining	High	Medium
Large producers	Transactional. Reciprocal: MoA controls licences and rules. Producers offer economic performance, foreign exchange, party funding.	Producers: market access, favourable rules. MoA: economic results, economic rents, alternative funding.	Medium	↑ Rising	Medium	Medium

Actor	Nature of relationship with MoA	Interest in relationship	Access	Trend	Volatility	Evidence
Smallholders	Indirect, mediated through boards and cooperatives. One-way: services flow down, no meaningful return channel.	Smallholders: higher prices, stability, access to agricultural inputs. MoA: legitimacy (constituency important for his narrative).	Low	→ Stable	High	Weak
IMF / World Bank	External leverage via minister of finance. Indirect: no direct MoA relations but set conditions for fiscal space and reform pressure.	IFIs: liberalisation, fiscal discipline. MoA: resistance (as threatens sector control).	None (all via Ministry of Finance)	↑ Rising	Low	Strong
Farmers' activist	Adversarial but indirect. No formal channel – influence exerted through public advocacy and family ties to president. MoA dismisses her publicly but monitors her closely.	Activist: visibility, leverage for smallholder interests, access to president via family. MoA: wants to neutralise her influence without creating a public confrontation.	Low	→ Stable	High	Medium
Agricultural Journalist	Managed and guarded. MoA's office controls official information flow; journalist cultivates informal sources inside ministry and boards.	Journalist: stories, access, credibility with domestic and international audiences. MoA: favourable coverage, or at least damage control when stories break.	Low	→ Stable	Medium	Medium
Women Farmers	Marginalised and mediated. No direct access – filtered through boards and cooperatives that often exclude them. MoA's rhetoric supportive but actual engagement minimal.	Women farmers: market access, input supply, recognition. MoA: rhetorical constituency but not a political priority; prefers they remain unorganised.	Very Low	→ Stable	High	Weak
Religious Leader	Distant and ceremonial. Occasional public events but no operational relationship. Neither party actively seeks engagement on agricultural policy.	Religious leader: moral framing if reform affects rural poor. MoA: legitimacy endorsement if needed, otherwise mutual indifference.	Low	→ Stable	Low	Weak

Source: Illustrative content, based on a methodology developed by Wilfred Mwamba

Mapping political networks by shared characteristics is useful for identifying coalitions, faultlines and potential bridging actors. Stakeholders can be clustered around, for example:

- Stance towards a reform (supportive, opposed, swing);
- Level of power;
- Institutional affiliation;
- Geographic or sectoral position.

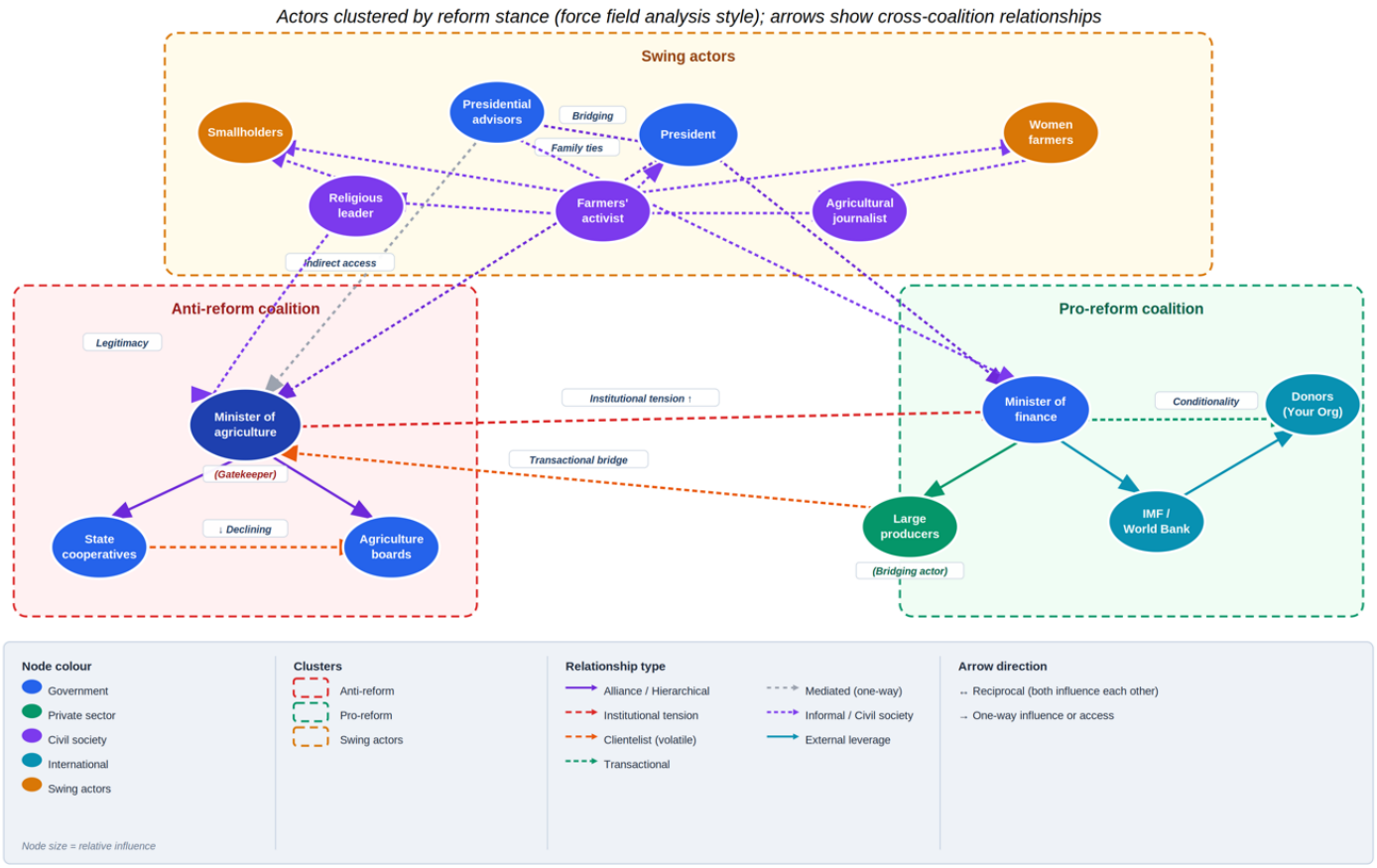
Box 6 Preparing a Coalition Political Network Map – an illustration

Your director now wants to understand better what are the coalitions with which your organisation could collaborate, and asks you to visualise it through a network map.

Diagram 5 below uses the data from table 3 about the agriculture sector stakeholders. It clusters them based on their position towards market liberalisation, with lines showing cooperation, tension or influence between clusters. The boundaries of the clusters are illustrative; in practice, actors may shift between clusters.

The key insight is that market liberalisation depends on which coalition is most likely to win presidential support. You find that the anti-reform bloc is internally coordinated but losing ground. The pro-reform bloc is being strengthened through external pressure (e.g. from the IMF) and rising commercial interests. Cross-cluster ties show coalitions are permeable; stakeholders transact across the divide. Smallholders remain fragmented and women farmers continue to be marginalised.

Diagram 5: Reform Coalition Map – an illustration



Software-based political network visualisations are useful when you need to visualise more than 20 stakeholders, or when you want to explore patterns that are hard to see manually. Specialised tools such as Kumu, Gephi or NodeXL can generate network maps from structured data. They support but can never replace political analysis.

Box 7 Preparing a Software-based Political Network Map – an illustration

Your director now wants to understand better where your organisation is positioned within the wider agriculture ecosystem, going beyond the pro- and anti-reform coalitions you previously identified.

Diagram 6 below uses the underlying data from table 3 about the agriculture sector stakeholders, and the associated judgements on relationships. You have input this qualitative data into software to generate a complex map of all the stakeholders in the ecosystem.

The metrics panel (table 4) interprets the quantitative data generated by the software. It shows the sector is a fragmented network with distinct clusters, with the **minister of agriculture** at the centre of the most important cluster and in a gatekeeping role. **International actors** interested in market liberalisation have very few entry points to influence him, constituting a separate cluster dominated by the IMF.

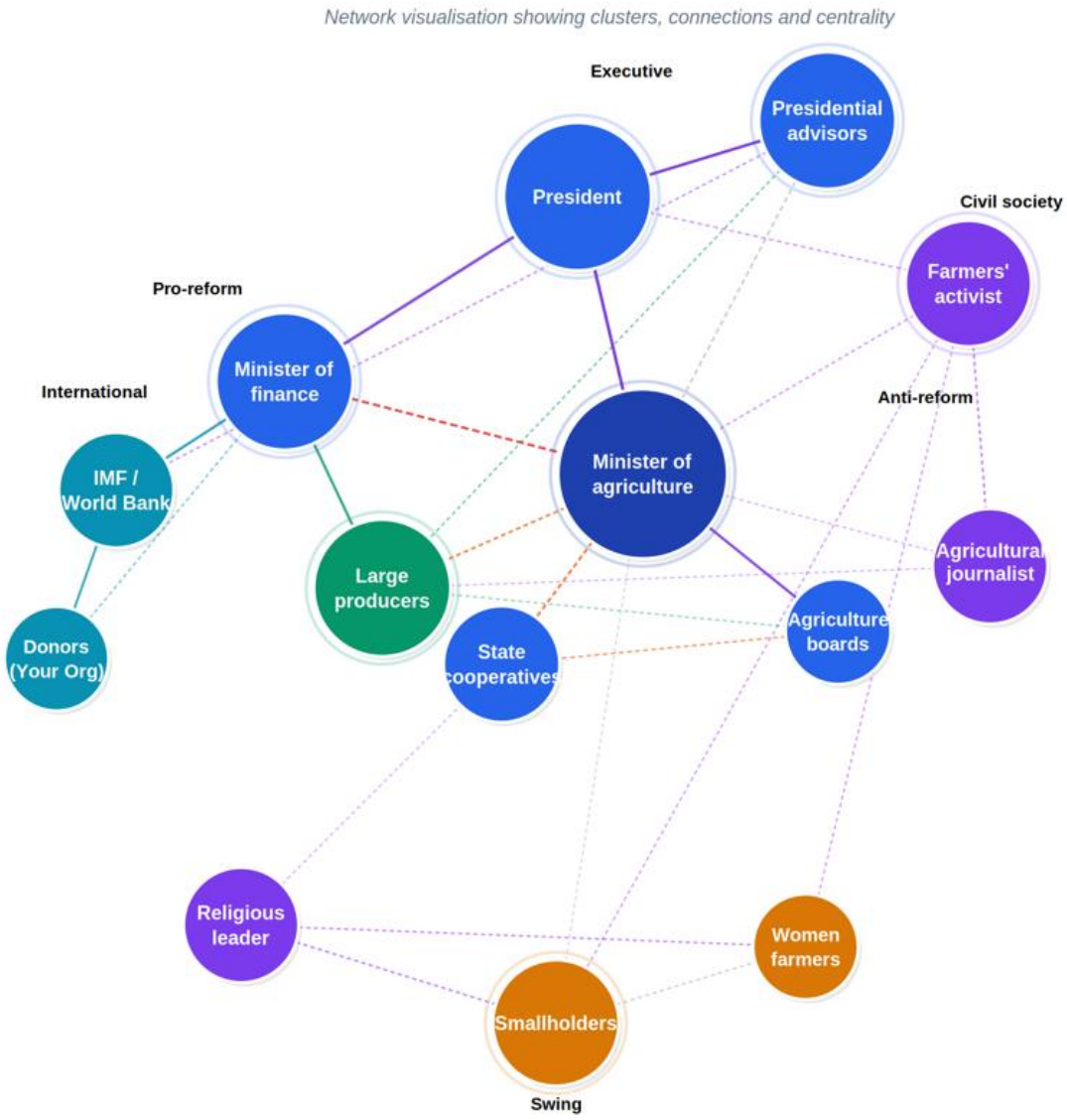
The map also reveals actors who don't seem important at first but turn out to be critical bridges between clusters. **Advisors** connect the executive cluster to international actors – ranking third for centrality (0.46) despite having no formal policy role. They are the main entry point for external actors seeking presidential access. **Large producers** bridge the anti- and pro-reform coalitions, with transactional ties to the minister of agriculture but commercial interests aligned with liberalisation. Conventional Stakeholder Analysis often misses these bridging roles.

The metrics panel on the right side of diagram 6 illustrates the quantitative analysis that can be undertaken when using software. Table 4 explains what the metrics in diagram 6 mean.

Table 4 Metric panel interpretation – an illustration

Metric	What it means	What it tells you about the agriculture sector
Nodes (14)	Total number of actors in the map.	There are 14 actors on the map, capturing the core political dynamics without giving overwhelming detail. Beyond 30–40 actors, maps become hard to read without filtering.
Connections (33)	Total number of relationships mapped.	There are 33 links. This shows a reasonably connected system – but not everyone is connected to everyone else.
Density (0.36)	Proportion of all possible connections that actually exist (scale of 0 to 1).	A density of 0.36 means only 36% of possible ties are present. The system has groups that talk to each other, but links between groups are limited. Information and influence get stuck.
Average degree (4.7)	Average number of connections per actor.	Most actors are linked to four or five others. The minister is well above average (in a gatekeeper role). Actors below average (e.g. women farmers at 2.2) are more peripheral.
Centrality ranking	Who is most connected and sits at the network's centre.	Actors at the centre control access and information. The minister is clearly at the centre. Presidential advisers help connect different groups.

Diagram 6: Software-generated Agricultural Sector Political Network Map



Network Metrics

Nodes	14
Connections	33
Density	0.36
Average Degree	4.7

Centrality Ranking

1.	Minister of Agriculture	0.69
2.	President	0.54
3.	Presidential Advisors	0.46
4.	Minister of Finance	0.46
5.	Large Producers	0.46
6.	Smallholders	0.38
7.	Farmers' Activist	0.38
8.	State Cooperatives	0.31
9.	Agriculture Boards	0.23
10.	Women Farmers	0.23

Node colour

- Government
- International
- Private sector
- Swing actors
- Civil society

Node size = centrality score

A note of caution: more data and beautiful visuals do not mean better analysis. Software can map hundreds of actors and thousands of relationships. But do teams really need so much information to make evidence-based decisions? The risk is that teams spend precious time populating databases and refining visualisations, while the political judgement (about which relationships actually matter for the issue you are trying to address) gets lost in the details. Table 5 can help you decide whether or not to use software.

Apply the 80/20 rule: 80% of political insight comes from understanding 20% of relationships. A simple map with 6–10 well-analysed actors, built through structured discussion, will usually generate more actionable insight than will a complex software map with 50+ actors and thin evidence behind each connection. Diagrams can be drawn manually on a flipchart or with PowerPoint in 30 minutes and force critical conversations, which are the point of the exercise. The visual maps they generate are different ways of structuring the discussion (stakeholder matrix diagram 3, central person network diagram 4 or coalition map diagram 5).

Table 5 When to use or not to use software for Political Network Mapping

When to use software?	When to keep it simple?
• You have more than 20–30 actors to track. • You need to combine multiple data sources (e.g. financial flows, meeting records, media mentions). • You want to run scenarios (e.g. what happens to the network if this actor is removed?). • You have the time and data quality to populate it properly.	• You are working with a small team and have limited time. • The political dynamics hinge on a handful of key relationships. • You need a tool for workshop discussion, not database management. • Evidence is patchy: a complex map will simply visualise your uncertainty.

When should you use Political Network Mapping as opposed to Stakeholder Analysis? Political Network Mapping requires more time and resources: it relies on relationship information, which is harder to obtain and verify. However, it reveals how power actually operates, which matters most in politically contested or fluid settings. It can also generate more nuanced stakeholder engagement strategies, which is particularly useful for organisations such as embassies, which rely more on influencing than on aid programmes. If you are short of time or this is only one step in a PEA process, Stakeholder Analysis is often good enough to offer practical insights about how change is likely to happen, and whom to work with (as we explain in the next section).

Step 6: Identifying operational implications

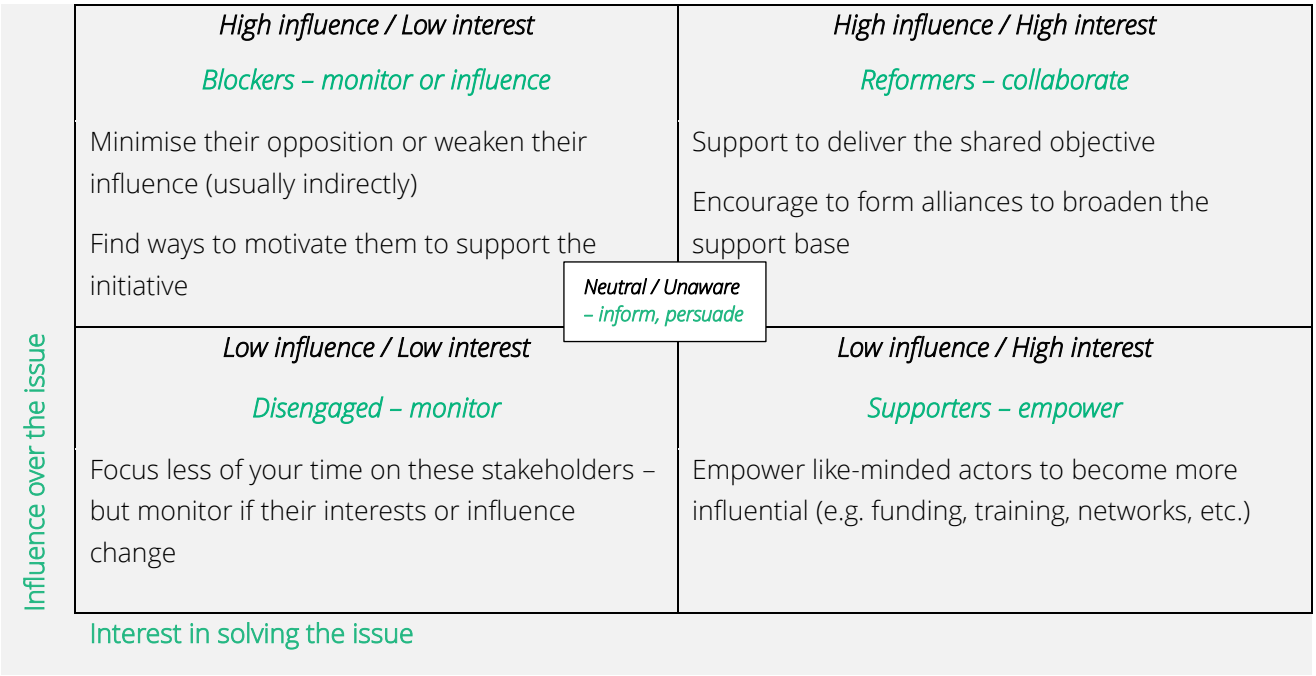
The sixth step is to discuss the implications of the mapping for your intervention (e.g. policy, project).

Where you place the stakeholders in a map is a good starting point for identifying the types of influencing strategies you may want to adopt and the interventions that could help you implement them (e.g. policy dialogue, international exposure, technical assistance, financial aid, etc.).

With a stakeholder map, you should easily see whether there are enough influential reformers and supporters for your objective with whom you could collaborate (top right quadrant), or whether there is strong opposition that makes your objective less realistic if you can't identify strategies to influence or weaken these blockers (top left quadrant). It will give you operational insights, such as which coalitions of interested but less influential actors you could empower (bottom right quadrant), thereby helping them become more influential.

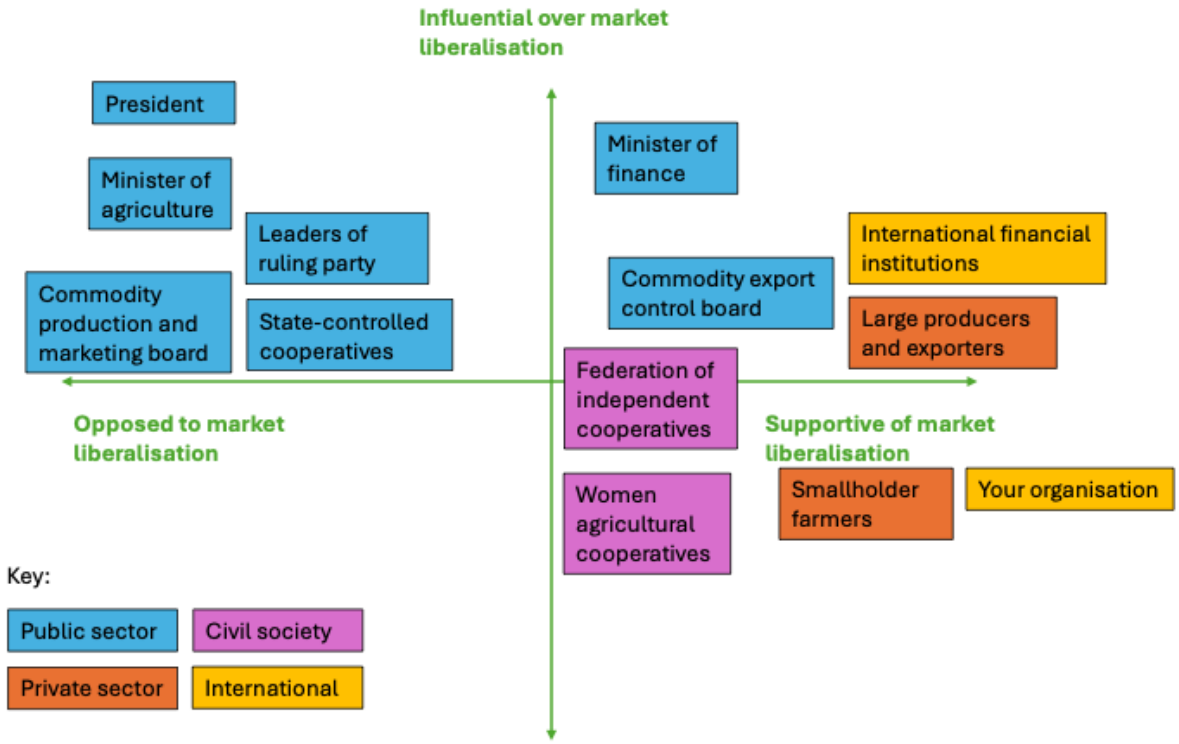
You may need to revisit your overall objective if you can't identify enough current or potential supporters, and as a result prepare a new Stakeholder Analysis around a more realistic objective (going through steps 1–6 once again).

Diagram 7: Example of potential strategies based on a stakeholder map



Box 7 (on the next page) illustrates how you can use a stakeholder matrix to develop operational implications, such as engagement strategies, relatively quickly. It builds on diagram 3.

Diagram 3 (repeated): Illustrative Stakeholder Matrix



Box 7 Drawing operational insights from a stakeholder matrix – an illustration

The stakeholder matrix (diagram 3) positions stakeholders according to their influence over market liberalisation and their interest in it. It needs to be interpreted, as follows, to decide how your organisation could work with them, either directly or indirectly.

Reformers (high influence, high interest). The *minister of finance* and *large producers* sit here. They have both the motivation and the capacity to drive reform. The strategy is to support their efforts and help them coordinate. This is something your organisation may be well placed to do through technical assistance.

Blockers (high influence, low interest). The *minister of agriculture* occupies this space. He has the power to obstruct but no interest in change. Options include finding ways to neutralise his opposition, shift his incentives or work around him through other channels. It's likely that your organisation can work only indirectly on this.

Supporters (low influence, high interest). *Smallholders* and *women farmers* would benefit from reform but lack the power to drive it. The strategy is to help them organise, connect them to Reformers and amplify their voice in policy dialogue. Your organisation has a track record of working with these actors but you could now consider how to focus more on coalition building, including with the Ministry of Finance.

Disengaged (low influence, low interest). Actors here can generally be deprioritised unless circumstances change.

The matrix suggests the following strategy for your organisation (which is placed in the reform supporter category). You should focus on connecting Reformers to Supporters: building a broader coalition that increases political pressure on Blockers while reducing their ability to claim they represent agricultural interests. One option could be to help facilitate a coalition of public, private and civil society actors who would support the Ministry of Finance in shifting government policy – perhaps in the face of a fiscal crisis.

However, your country director may decide that the prospect of market liberalisation is still too remote in the current political context and that your organisation is not likely to be able to exercise the required influence. He may therefore decide to prioritise other policy objectives, or even close your country programme.

Political Network Mapping can help you go a step further and decide where to target your efforts within these broad categories of reformers, supporters and blockers. You can identify the more powerful stakeholders (who have the most or strongest connections) with whom you should work most closely or whom you should manage because they could undermine your objectives. You can allocate your resources to the networks that are the most important for the objective, including deciding which new relationships to develop. It is important to consider the implications for women and girls who are often a neglected group facing specific barriers; the mapping can help identify new opportunities for agency, voice and influence. Box 8 illustrates this step in our agricultural case study.

Box 8: Using network maps to develop influencing strategies – an illustration

You manage to convince your country director not to give up (yet)! By looking at networks and unexpected relationships that emerge, you identify new interventions and engagement strategies.

Your Central Figure Political Network Map (diagram 4) confirmed the centrality of the minister of agriculture and your Coalitions Network Map (diagram 5) identified the swing role of the president. The high degree of fragmentation and low density of your software-based map (diagram 6) is probably a reflection that stakeholders supporting market liberalisation may not share the same vision and may not be working together, which weakens their collective influence (e.g. the minister of finance is not a dominant node).

Your network maps may show strong connections between potential supporters of agricultural liberalisation that were not previously identified. For example, the *minister of finance* and the *directors of the agricultural boards* have a shared vision of a modernised agriculture sector. They could become allies, working to convince the president and the minister of agriculture of the reform's benefits for them and the country.

You may also discover unexpected informal channels that can unblock a situation. For example, the network map shows the *president* has strong ties to the *minister of agriculture* (family alliance, very high access) but also informal connections through the *farmers' activist* (who has family ties to the president) and access to *advisors* who bridge to international actors. This creates potential bypass routes around the minister of agriculture's gatekeeping. The *agricultural journalist* also shapes how reform is framed publicly: coverage that emphasises benefits to smallholders could shift the political calculus. Reform advocates might work through these informal channels rather than confronting the minister directly, framing liberalisation not as an attack on his position but as a way to strengthen the president's economic credentials ahead of elections.

You may identify some "free-riders" as you further explore the members of the potential liberalisation coalition. These will benefit from market changes but will not do anything in the hope that others will do the work and carry the risks. In our example, *smallholders* and *women farmers* would benefit from liberalisation (higher prices, better market access) but lack the organisation to actively support the pro-reform coalition. They may also fear retaliation from the minister of agriculture if they openly align with reformers. The challenge for reform advocates lies in helping them become active and influential coalition members, or at least preventing the anti-reform coalition from claiming to speak on their behalf.

You can now use this deeper analysis to identify several interventions based on structural positions:

Working through bridging actors. *Large producers* have transactional ties to the *minister of agriculture*, but commercial interests aligned with liberalisation. Rather than confronting the minister directly, reform advocates could work with large producers to demonstrate that liberalisation serves his interests. Your organisation could

consider the following intervention: providing technical evidence showing how export growth would strengthen the minister of agriculture's political standing with the president.

Accessing the executive through advisors. International actors have limited direct access to the minister of agriculture. But *advisors* connect the executive cluster to the *international cluster*. Your organisation could engage advisors (through technical exchanges, study tours or secondments), which may be more effective than formal policy dialogue with the ministry.

Strengthening the minister of finance's position. The *minister of finance* is backed by *the IMF, the World Bank and bilateral donors*. But his weak internal access to the minister of agriculture limits his influence. Reform advocates could help him build alliances within government, for example connecting him to Cabinet members or the president's advisors, who might support fiscal discipline arguments. This direct intervention may not be suitable for your organisation, but you may be able to indirectly support this strategy.

Engaging swing actors. *Smallholders* and *women farmers* are fragmented but not locked into either coalition. Your organisation could demonstrate concrete benefits of reform (e.g. through pilot projects), which could shift them towards the pro-reform coalition, make them more influential, and change the political calculus for the president.

In this guidance, we focus on how to develop operational intervention strategies based only on your Stakeholder Analysis and/or Political Network Mapping. However, as noted in the introduction, these tools are often used as part of a wider PEA or other context analysis. The additional elements of a PEA include:

- The wider contextual factors that influence the incentives of stakeholders;
- A range of "pathways of change" towards your desired outcome;
- A range of "intervention strategies" towards your desired outcome under different pathways of change. Your choice of intervention (e.g. influencing, technical assistance, financial support) should not be guided by your preferred pathway but by an assessment of which pathways are realistic and where your organisation is most likely to influence outcomes.

Pathways of change are a critical step between your analysis and your operational choices. They offer a realistic description of different ways in which change could come about, with a combination of actors' incentives, shifts in relationships and broader contextual factors. They make explicit the assumptions about other plausible slow or quick changes in the context (such as geopolitics, economic shocks) or in formal rules and processes (such as new laws or social norms) or planned or unexpected events (e.g. elections, pandemic). These assumptions about how change can happen underpin the justification for why certain interventions are most likely to be successful and are worth investing time and money in.

Stakeholder Analysis and Political Network Mapping help identify which pathways are plausible at a given point in time – for example how shifts in actors and relationships will allow progress to occur (e.g. ahead of an election, a realignment of coalitions, a response to a fiscal shock, the ability implement budget cuts, etc.). You can then identify which interventions you can use to influence actors and their networks.

For more guidance on how to use Stakeholder Analysis and/or Political Network Mapping as part of a PEA in order to draw operational implications, please refer to FCDO 2023's *Understanding political economy analysis and thinking and working politically*.

Step 7: Developing a stakeholder engagement plan.

The final step is to use your analysis to develop and implement a stakeholder engagement plan.

Once your objective is agreed (potentially revised based on several rounds of analysis, as part of an iterative process), and you have selected the most promising interventions, you can use stakeholder/network mappings to identify how best to engage differently with different stakeholders.

You can summarise your assessment of your existing relationships with stakeholders, in terms of how they perceive your organisation (see table 6). For each priority stakeholder, consider: What is the most effective channel (direct engagement, or through a bridging actor)? Which relationships need to be built or strengthened? Are there actors who could amplify your message or open doors?

A stakeholder engagement plan can also include the different messages you will want to communicate to different stakeholders, the time you should devote to them and other practical information. You can also use the stakeholder engagement plan to manage risks and to monitor how stakeholders' interests and influence evolve over time, to keep the analysis dynamic.

Table 6: Illustrative stakeholder engagement plan

Stakeholder	Interest and influence	Posture towards your organisation	Engagement approach	Example of practical steps (who, when, how, etc.)
Minister of finance	High / High	**Not known** – potentially positive as a potential ally but needs to be tested	*Reformer – collaborate* Potentially the most powerful domestic ally but your access is limited. Your aim is to develop a closer relationship, starting by reaching out through mutual connections.	The country director is eventually introduced to the minister at a high-level panel, and they agree to have a bilateral meeting on the issue.
Minister of agriculture	Low / High	**Negative** – perceives your organisation as Western-centric, suspicious of your economic agenda, no personal links	*Blocker – monitor or influence* You first try to positively influence the minister through evidence of the benefits of liberalisation for the sector, and how he will not be negatively affected.	You meet the minister's chief of staff, who was your former colleague on a regular basis. You facilitate meetings between the minister and ministers from similar countries who have managed successful reforms.
Women's agricultural cooperatives	Medium / Low	**Highly positive** – based on a long-term funding relationship creating trust	*Supporter – empower* You now want to move from a purely financial relationship towards supporting their voices in policy dialogue.	You consulted the leaders of the women's cooperatives network as part of this mapping. You now invite them to quarterly reform coalition meetings.

Managing limitations to keep the analysis dynamic

Stakeholder Analysis and Political Network Mapping can be very powerful tools, but they have some limitations.

These tools offer a snapshot at a moment in time based on a relative simplification of the main motivations and interconnections between the stakeholders, based on the knowledge and perceptions of those undertaking the analysis. You can add data on dynamics in your analysis (see table 3 above) to indicate trends and volatility, for example.

The usefulness of these mappings depends on the quality of the underlying research into these stakeholders and their networks, the knowledge of those participating in the analysis and triangulation to minimise subjectivity and partial views. By adding a column to summarise the strength of the evidence used to reach your assessments (as in table 3 above), you will be more cautious when the evidence is relatively thin, and seek additional sources of information before making final decisions.

The mappings need to be updated regularly to retain operational value. If you have created excessively complicated tables and diagrams, you may not be able to keep your information updated or simple enough for decision-makers. Make sure you design simple systems to capture, store, analyse and communicate your data, consistent with your organisation's staff skills and core systems. In practice, this means building simple habits into your routine:

- Log new insights about stakeholder after significant meetings or political events, even as brief notes capturing what changed and why it matters.
- Schedule a short quarterly refresh aligned with your reporting or risk review cycle – 30 minutes to update table 3 and flag any relationship shifts.
- Assign clear ownership for maintaining the stakeholder table and network maps, with responsibility for flagging material changes to decision-makers.
- After major political events (elections, Cabinet reshuffles, fiscal crises), trigger a rapid update of your stakeholder matrix and key network relationships.

Political Network Mapping is more time consuming than Stakeholder Analysis. Network analysis requires relationship data (e.g. who talks to whom, who trusts whom, who depends on whom), which is harder to obtain and verify than in Stakeholder Analysis (which can use more public data).

Maps can create false confidence. A well-designed diagram looks authoritative. But the relationships it depicts are simplifications, based on what you know at the time. Treat maps as hypotheses, not facts.

Despite these limitations, practitioners who invest in regular updates and treat their tables and maps as working hypotheses rather than fixed representations will find that these tools sharpen their political judgement. As a result, recommendations are more likely to be realistic and feasible, leading to more effective interventions. Remember: the goal is not a beautiful map, but better decisions about whom to engage, how to sequence interventions and where to invest limited political capital.

Other resources

Documents

Net-Map is a tool to create influence network maps based on interviews and that can be used in a low-tech, low-cost participatory manner.

Swiss Development Cooperation's 2021 *Tool connectors & dividers* is part of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs' approach to Conflict Sensitive Programme Management. It helps identify the dividing and connecting factors and actors in a conflict, and how to enhance the power of connectors while weakening dividers.

There are many guidance documents on stakeholder mapping and on social network mapping, but fewer documents combining both tools. Good examples of the latter include:

- International Rescue Committee (nd) *Stakeholder and social network analysis handbook*. This 10-page guidance provides advice on how to do both types of analyses.
- World Bank (2016) *Public-private dialogue stakeholder mapping toolkit*. This 38-page toolkit offers an approach that combines stakeholder mapping with social network mapping. It provides detailed advice to help you plan and deliver a participative analysis in a workshop context.

Tools and software

You can create visual representations of your stakeholder and network mapping by using Microsoft PowerPoint or Excel, or online tools such as Miro, Canva or Google Slides.

For more complex network visualisations, there are several options:

- **Generative artificial intelligence-assisted design.** Large language models (such as Claude) can generate initial network diagrams from your data, which you can then refine. This is particularly useful for teams without specialist software skills.
- **Open access network software.** For example, Kumu, Gephi or NodeXL can create sophisticated visualisations and calculate network metrics automatically.
- **Free programming languages.** Python or R, for example, offer powerful network analysis libraries for teams with technical capacity.

When selecting your software, it is important to consider how you plan to capture, store, analyse and communicate your data. You also need to be careful about inputting sensitive data in open software and must respect data protection regulations (which apply to both traditional and electronic data).

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The Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice (TWP CoP) is a global network of practitioners, researchers and policymakers in development and global affairs committed to promoting more effective policy and practice. The TWP CoP works to foster more politically aware approaches to understand how change happens and why, translate findings and implications emerging from political economy analysis into operationally relevant guidance, encourage more flexible and adaptable ways of working and provide evidence-based insights that can stimulate innovation, sharing and learning in international development and global affairs.

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