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# SYSTEMS THINKING APPROACH: DEVELOPING A VISUAL BACKBONE

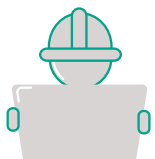
The USAID-funded Asia Resilient Cities (ARC) Project will address cross-cutting urban development challenges in secondary cities in Asia by promoting sustainable urban growth; supporting resilient, low-carbon urban infrastructure; and integrating climate change and environmentally-conscious approaches. Systems thinking is central to how ARC works in close partnership with a city and its residents to sustain livable environments in the face of climate change.



## Systems Thinking Approach

Systems thinking is a way to make sense of complex environments and solve problems in a comprehensive way, viewing every problem as the result of overlapping issues. There are many types of systems thinking approaches, and many tools to facilitate systems thinking. The goal of these activities is to strengthen the system, in this case to make it more resilient to shocks. ARC will employ a version of systems thinking that encourages a wide range of city stakeholders to become systems thinkers in order to jointly create practical, sustainable solutions to the problems they face.

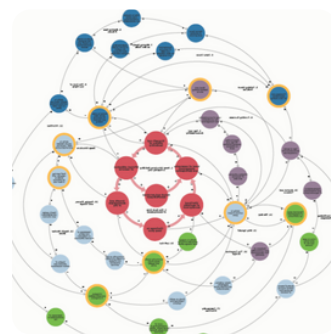
Throughout ARC's partnership with cities, we will use a variety of tools to work with city governments and residents to achieve their goals. The first tool ARC will use is a **system map**, which will create the visual backbone for our systems approach in each city.



## Building ARC's Visual Backbone

ARC will use system maps as the visual backbone of the project because they show the connections between the perspectives, behaviors, and structures that form the city system.

ARC will lead a diverse group of city stakeholders and government officials through a series of discussions to better understand systems thinking and to jointly develop, or "co-create," a system map. ARC will include people in this process that are often left out of urban planning. This map will help us set the project's initial agenda in each city.



# How It's Built

## Define the Context

ARC will bring together a range of people to create a common goal for that city and document the city's unique context in a drawing which forms the first layer of the system map. This layer provides the backdrop for the problems we are trying to address and allows us to identify obstacles and opportunities on the way to reaching city goals.

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## Identify Leverage Points

ARC will then work with the same stakeholders to identify where change is possible. Together we will build the second layer of the system map by identifying points that have the greatest potential for improvement. We call these leverage points.

## Create ARC's Work Plan

Next, ARC will bring together stakeholders once again to design a set of activities based on the two layers of the system map. We will combine these activities into a work plan that guides ARC, city government, and other entities to create sustained changes across the system.

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## Revisit and Adapt

ARC will regularly work closely with stakeholders to adapt and refine the work plan as we gather new evidence and make progress. This continuous feedback allows ARC and the city to incorporate new information into our work and ensure it fits well within the overall system context.



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ARC newsletter

