

Systems Thinking-The Teenage Lens

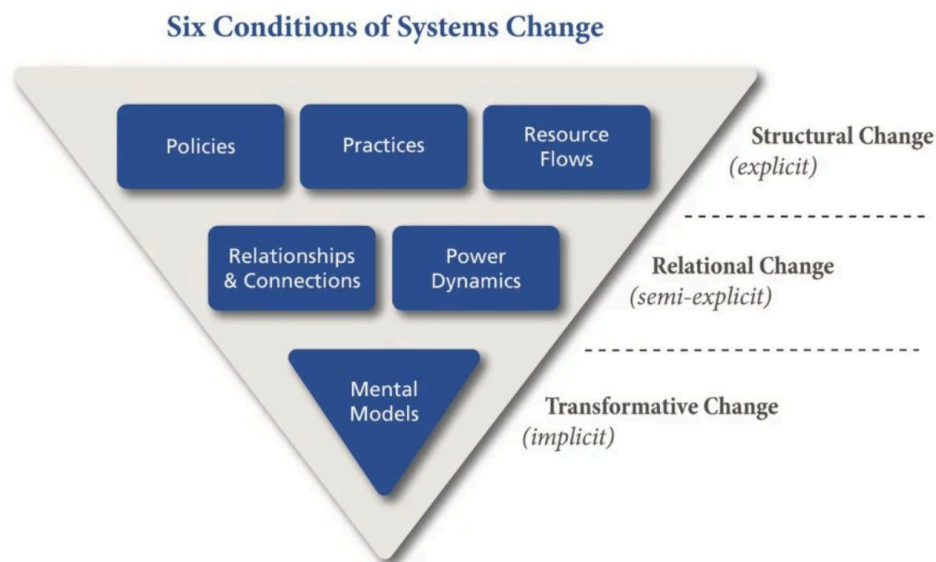
There are two contrasting approaches to understanding human being's responsibility and capacity to change **difficult social problems**. One perspective places accountability on the shoulders of the individual; this is the idea that a single person has the power to make changes in their personal conduct that could alter the course of complex issues.

The second way to assess our role in addressing societal issues is to use **systems theory**. This helps us to understand and view ourselves as part of an interwoven group of connecting systems. If one part of a system weakens, it may influence other elements in that system, and other systems may have to react to adapt. In this way, human actions are collective and their impact ripples throughout other networks.

Systems change makes it necessary for us to ensure that the various parts of an ecosystem work in cohesion.

The Water of Systems Change, a 2018 paper by FSG in which they specify a systems change framework, describes three categories of conditions that need to be influenced for systems change to take place:

- Structural changes, which are explicit and therefore easy to influence and measure. (For example- laws, policies, education curriculum)
- Relational changes, which are semi-explicit and harder to influence and measure (the interactions between stakeholders)
- Transformative changes, which are deeply held beliefs and assumptions (mental models) that are implicit and the hardest to determine, but which last the longest. (Mindset, attitudes, prejudices)



Project- Systems Mapping

- **Identify a local problem**

Begin by observing your surroundings for pressing issues that catch your attention.

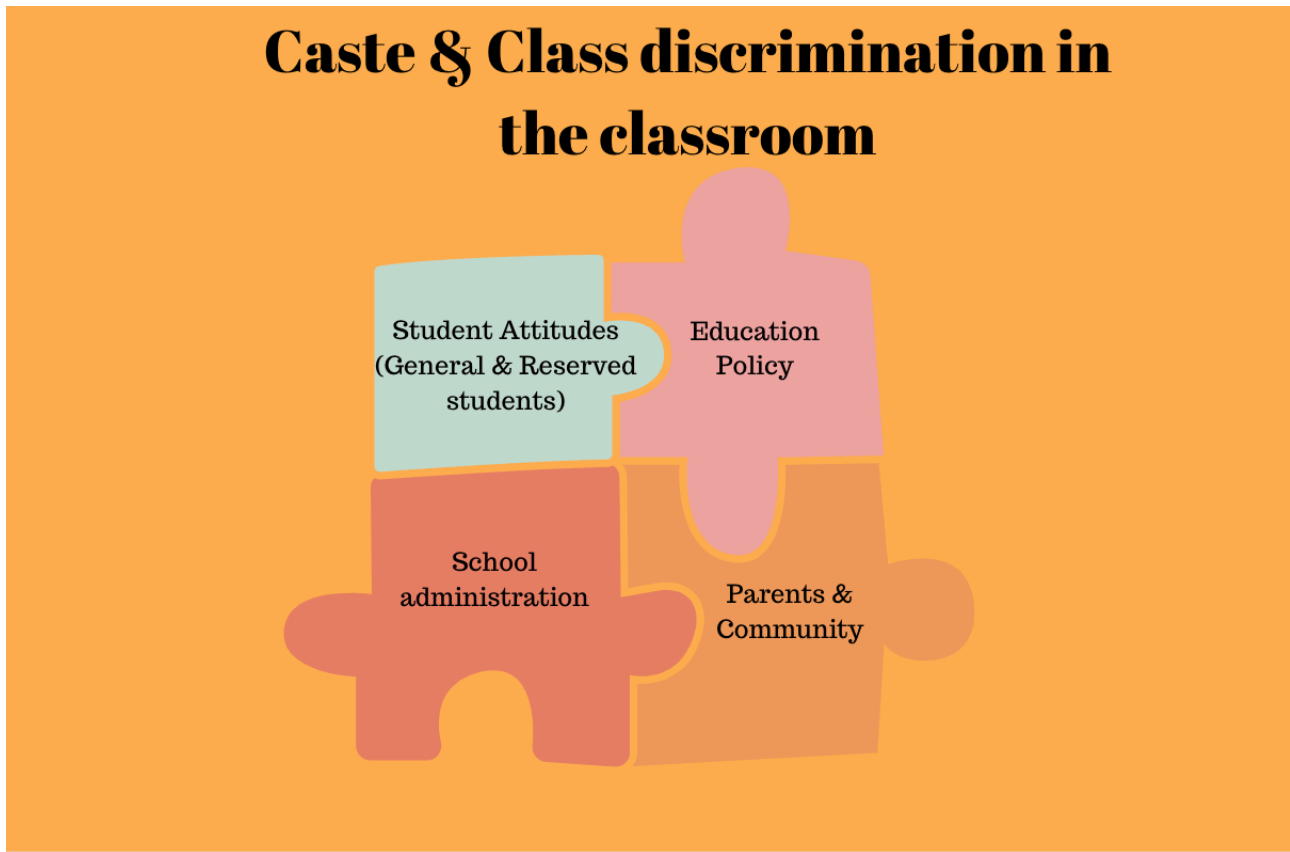
Remember, the problem you choose should resonate with you personally—it could be

anything from environmental concerns like waste management, social issues such as the cost

of school uniforms, or even something positive you wish to initiate, like an art event in your local park. The key is to choose a problem that motivates you to act.

- **Identify stakeholders**

Take a look at the PPT and the example presented. Keep in mind the systems approach and always think of the various components, people, communities, structures and systems come together to influence your chosen local problem. Make a list of as many stakeholders as you can think of (3-4+) Take a look at the example below:



Identify interactions between stakeholders

All your stakeholders are constantly interacting with each other. People have different roles in different scenarios. We have oppressors, the oppressed, the enablers, the silent spectators, the legal system, the education system, the police system (just an example!). Try to identify the ways in which all of these various components affect each other. Who controls the scenario? Who is benefitting? And at what cost? What conflicts or cooperations exist among stakeholders? Ask yourself these questions:

- Who controls the scenario?
- Who is benefitting?
- And at what cost?
- What conflicts or cooperations exist among stakeholders?
- Am I looking beyond myself and my immediate surroundings?
- Am I looking beneath the surface?
- What can I change?
- Where can I start?

Example:

Interactions and Influences for Caste in the Classroom:

- *Between Students:* perpetuate stereotypes, bullying, provide support
- *Teacher and Student Dynamics:* Teachers' biases (conscious or unconscious) towards certain groups can affect their teaching methods, evaluation practices, and student engagement, influencing students' academic self-esteem and performance.
- *Curriculum's Role:* A curriculum that includes discussions on social justice, caste, and class can encourage critical thinking and empathy among students, challenging prejudices and promoting a more inclusive classroom environment.
- *Administration and Policy Impact:* The administration's implementation of reservation policies and their approach to handling caste-based discrimination can set the tone for either a supportive or divisive school culture.

- **Ideate solutions** (realistic, actionable, keeping into account systemic change, acknowledging all stakeholders)
Keep in mind that this is your capstone project and as council members, this will be a part of your local chapter. In the upcoming sessions, we will explore more concepts on media literacy, networking, collaboration and team building and how we can fortify our local chapter and actually implement some of these solutions. We will try to involve local government, civil society and youth led organisations (like The Teenage Lens!) But remember the six conditions of systemic change and how the mental models ie. changing mindsets and attitudes is the most difficult. Though we will start from targeting structural change- at the end of the day, change can only begin through a conversation: through listening, empathy, compassion and being welcoming towards all people. This is what will finally allow us to create *transformative* change.

Example- Solutions to Caste Discrimination in the Classroom

- For teachers- diversity and inclusion training sessions in schools
- Revising the curriculum to have open and inclusive discussions on caste and class
- Student discussions, workshops harnessing cultural sensitivity- involvement of civil society and NGOs
- A committee, board or student body/club overseeing diversity and inclusivity in school

Readings

- We need a system for systems change
- What does systems change look like in practice?
- Intro to systems thinking-Civics Unplugged