

# Health Systems Performance Towards a “Systems-Wider” Approach

Don de Savigny  
Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute

SwissTPH Virtual Symposium  
Global Health in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

June 30, 2021



# Outline

- 1 A critique of the current predominant **health systems framework** used in global health.
- 2 Some reflections on **what is missing**.
- 3 A conclusion to work collectively towards a more integrated framework of '**systems for health**'

# Health system considerations to bear in mind ...

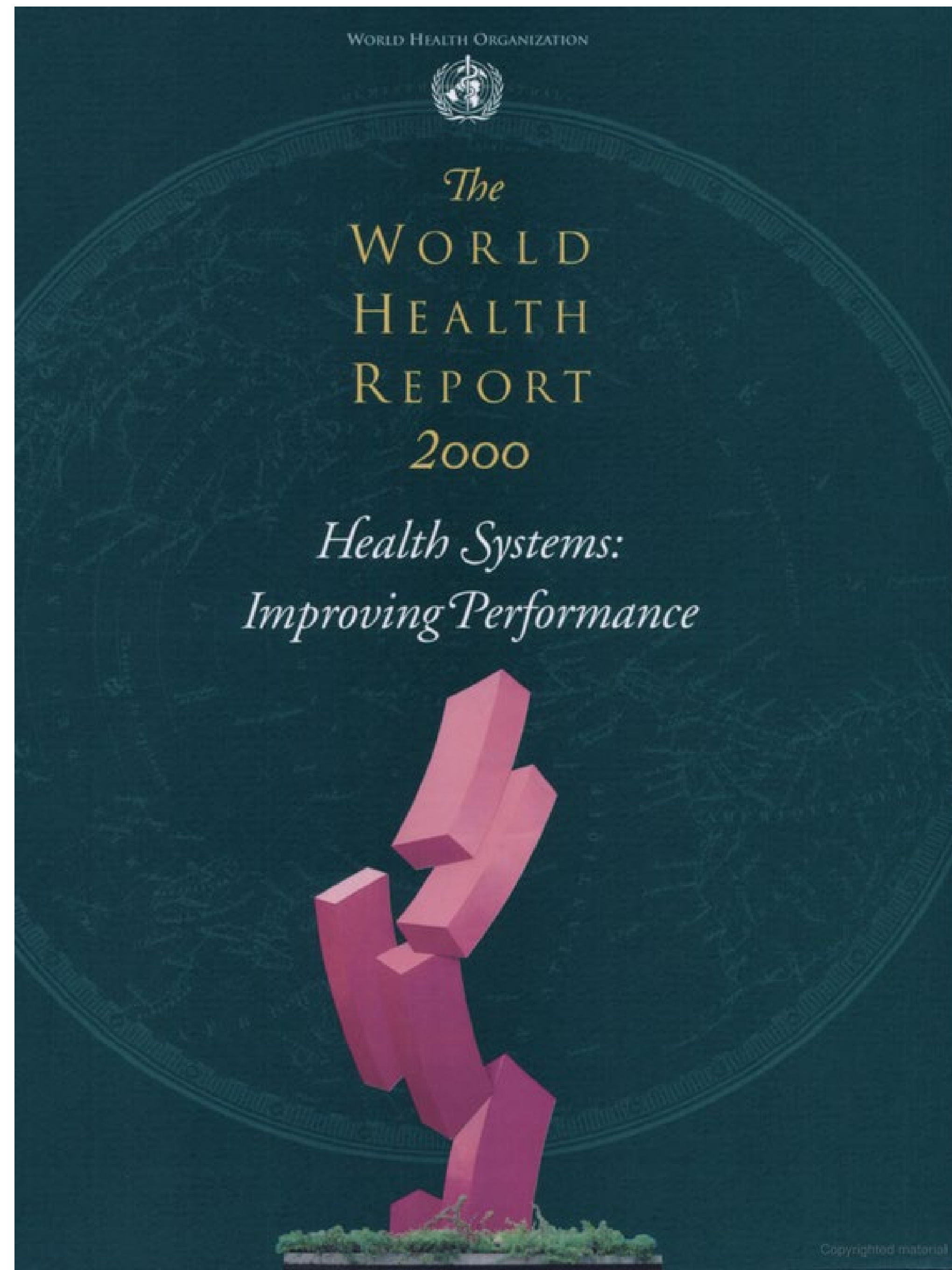
*The system isn't broken.*

*It was built this way.*

*Every system is perfectly  
designed to deliver the  
results you get.*

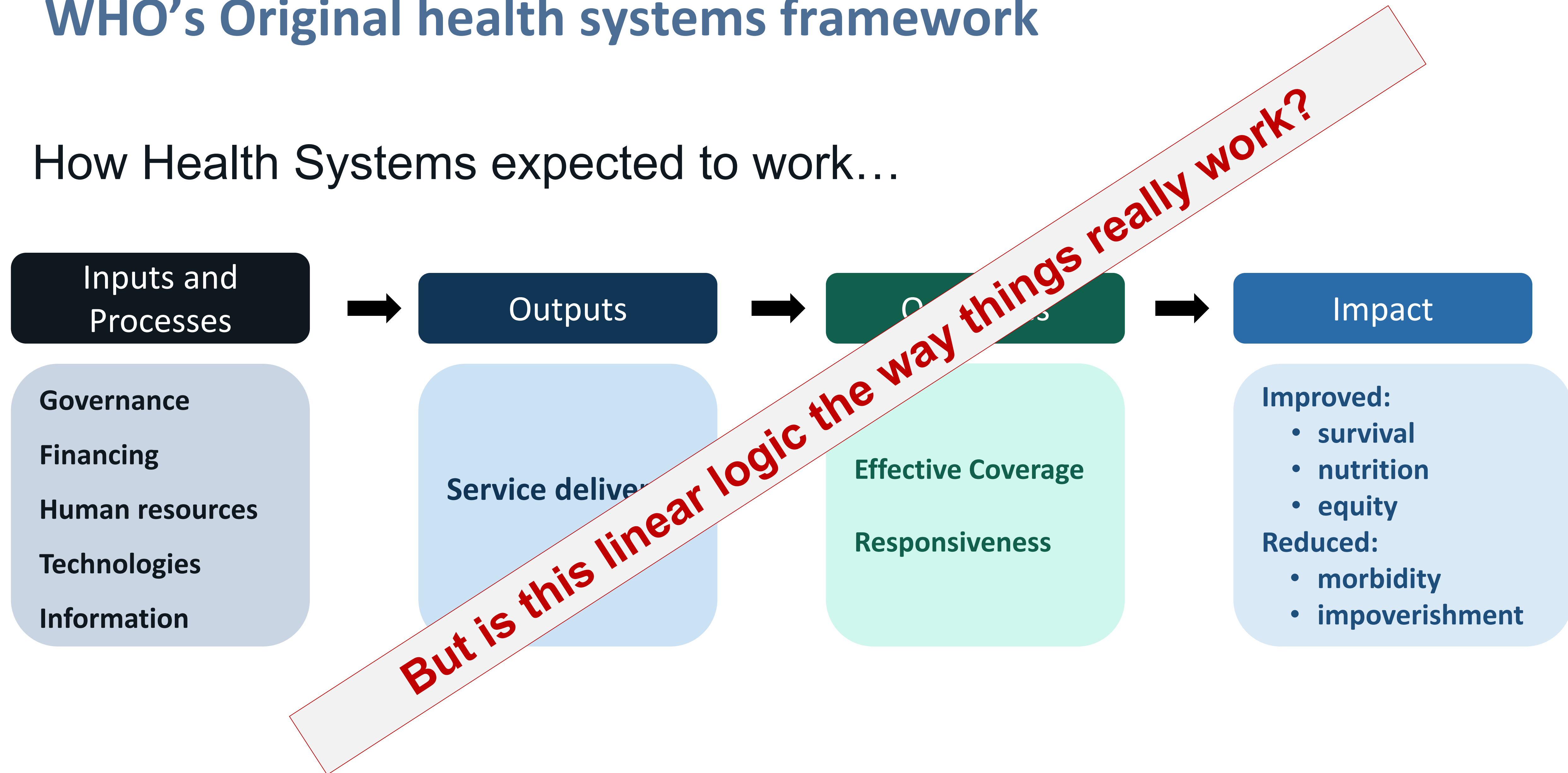
*If you don't like the  
results, change the  
system*

# How it started



# WHO's Original health systems framework

How Health Systems expected to work...



# Health systems

## Re-framing WHO's building blocks as a network of connected sub-systems



*“A system is not the sum of its parts;  
It is the product of the interaction of its parts”*

*“What happens between  
the sub-systems is more  
important than what goes  
on within them; and is  
usually neglected”.*

# Systems Thinking for complex adaptive systems

*"... a discipline for seeing wholes. ... a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than events, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots."*

*Peter Senge  
The Fifth Discipline*

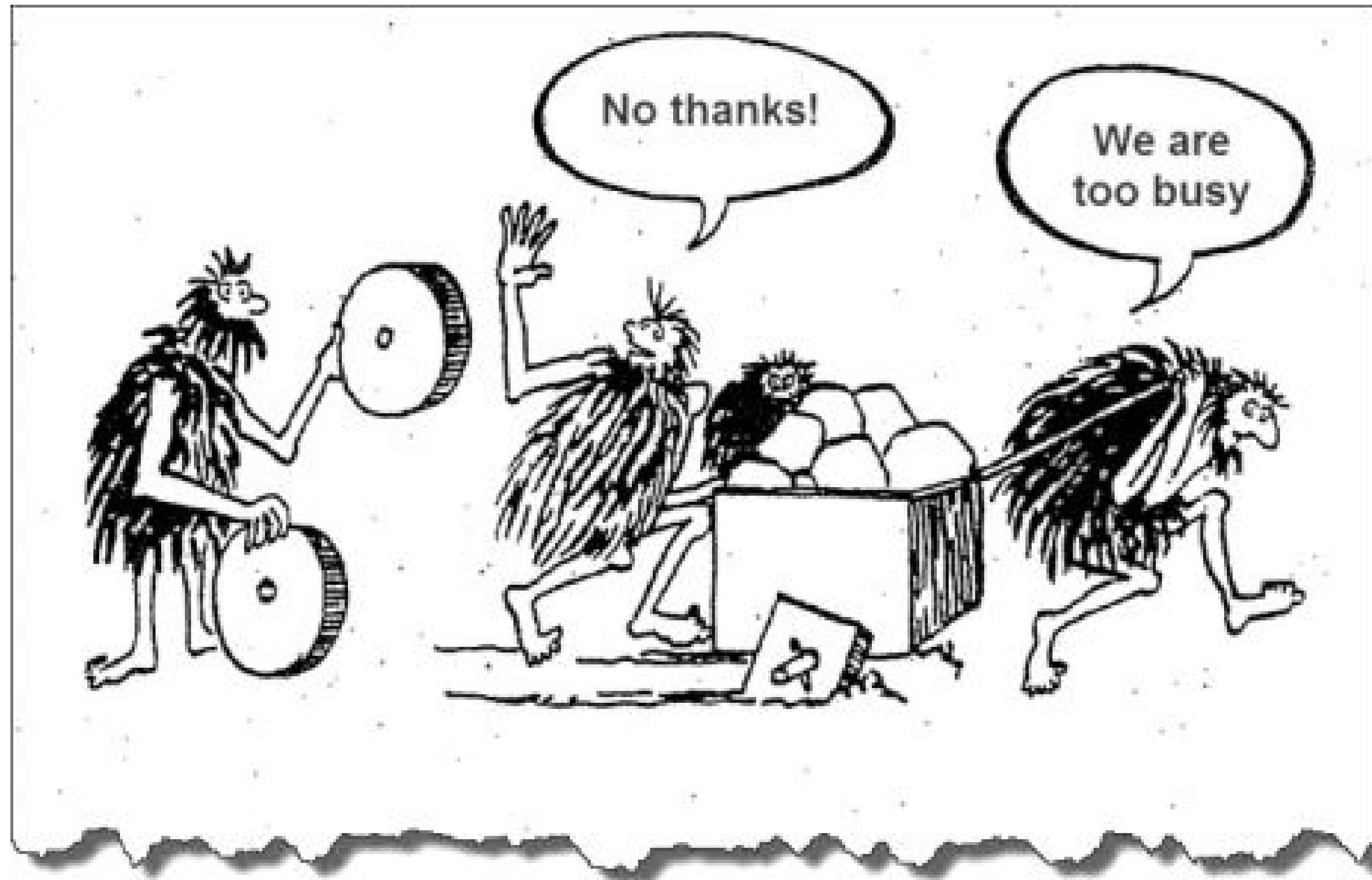


# Complex adaptive systems

Constantly changing, self-organizing, non-linear, history dependent, counter intuitive, and governed by nodes, emergence and feedback....

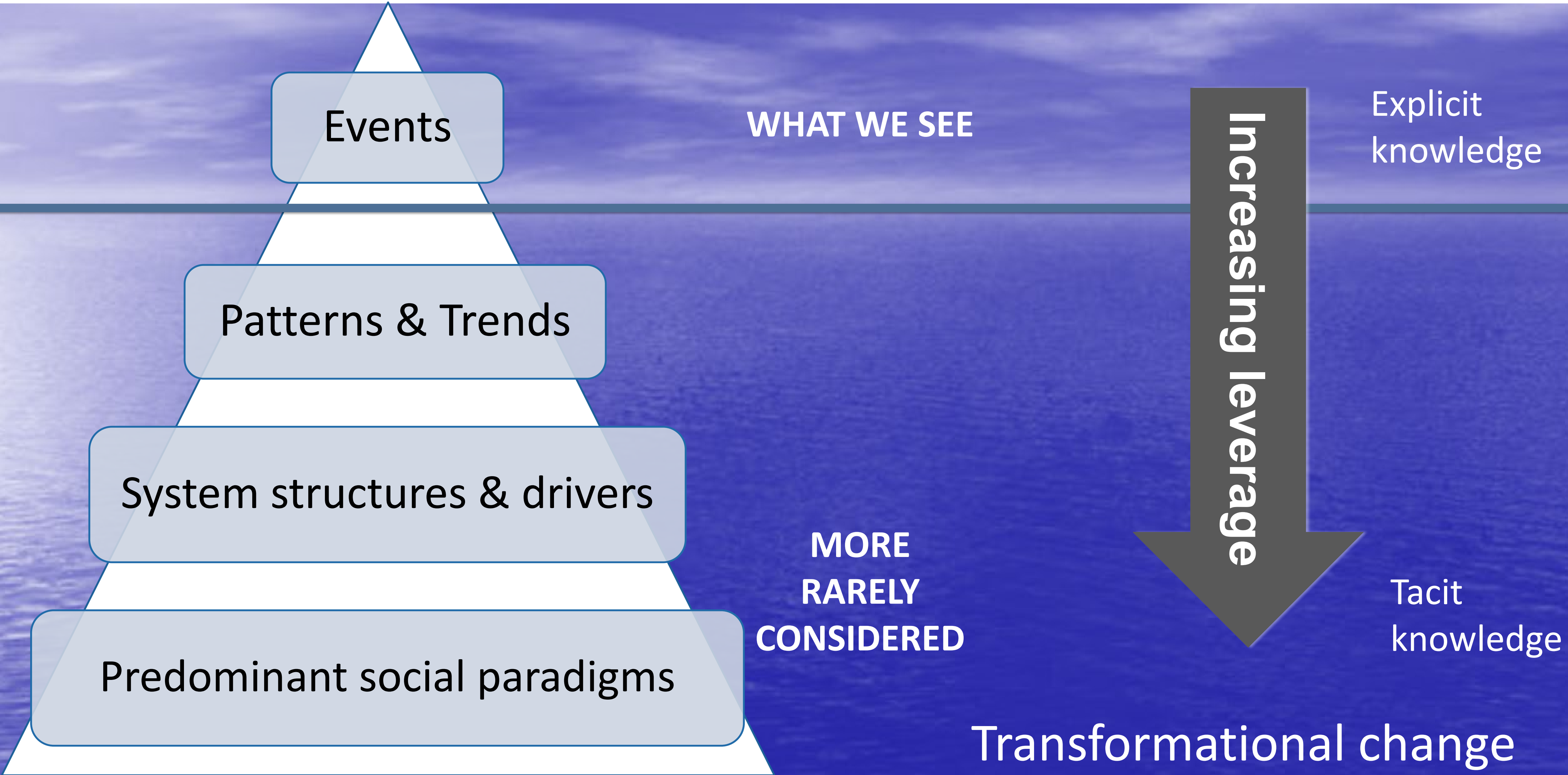


**But systems are resistant to our interventions for change**



**We need to think differently for system change**

# Discovering patterns of behaviour in complex adaptive systems



*World views*

*History*

**Multiple Perspectives**

*Knowledge systems*

*Voices*

**Some Systems Thinking Components**

*Non-linearity*

*Leverage points*

**Influences**

*Drivers*

*Blocks*

*Nested sub & super systems*

**Boundaries**

*Levels*

*Scope*

*Communities*

*Relationships*

*Networks*

**Interconnections**

*Feedback loops*

*Patterns*

*Flows*



# What is wrong with this Health Systems framework?



Boundary restricted  
to health services



# What is missing from this Health Systems framework?

Responsive interfaces with the health dimensions in “super-systems”:



- Public health systems (e.g. WASH; communities; households)
- Health security, social protection systems and well being
- One health, ecosystem services, and syndemic synergies
- Climate systems
- Environment, Agriculture & Food systems
- Urban systems (cities as systems)
- Digital health and algorithmic ecosystems
- Global and local health metrics systems (national data systems)
- Evidence and knowledge systems
- Other major determinants of health:
  - Commercial determinants / unhealthy commodities
  - Political determinants
  - Asymmetries in power and privilege
  - Justice, equity, intersectionality, accountability and governance



# Systems change needs collective action for transformational change





# Summing Up

## Beyond the building blocks: Transformational change in framing our challenges requires



Moving from a narrow '*Health Systems*' framework to a more integrated framework of '*Systems for Health*'

