

Scaling Up: A Path to Effective Development

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The global community has set itself the challenge of meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 as a way to combat world poverty and hunger. In 2007, the halfway point, it was clear that many countries would not be able to meet the MDGs without undertaking significantly greater efforts. One constraint that needs to be overcome is that development interventions—projects, programs, and policies—are all too often like small pebbles thrown into a big pond: they are limited in scale and short-lived and therefore have little lasting impact. This may explain why so many studies have found that external aid has had a weak development impact or none in the aggregate, even though many individual interventions have been successful in terms of their project- or program-specific goals.

Confronted with the challenge of meeting the MDGs, the development community has recently begun to focus on the need to scale up their interventions. Scaling up means taking successful projects, programs, or policies and expanding, adapting, and sustaining them in different ways over time for greater development impact. This emphasis on scaling up has emerged from concern over how to deploy and absorb the substantially increased levels of official development assistance that were promised by the wealthy countries at recent G8 summits. A fragmented aid architecture complicates this task; multilateral, bilateral, and private aid entities have multiplied, leading to many more—but smaller—aid projects and programs and increasing the transaction costs for recipient countries. In response, some aid donors

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have started to move from project to program support, and in the Paris Declaration official donors committed themselves to work together for better-coordinated aid delivery.

The current focus on scaling up is not entirely new, however. During the 1980s, as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) increasingly began to engage in development activities, scaling up emerged as a challenge. NGO interventions were (and are) typically small in scale and often applied new approaches. Therefore, the question of how to replicate and scale up successful models gained prominence even then, especially in connection with participatory and community development approaches. Indeed, the current interest among philanthropic foundations and NGOs in how to scale up their interventions is an echo of these earlier concerns.

In response to this increased focus on scaling up—and its increased urgency—this chapter takes a comprehensive look at what the literature and experience have to say about whether and how to scale up development interventions.

To Scale Up or Not to Scale Up?

The first question to ask is whether a project, program, or policy should be scaled up at all and, if so, by how much, for how long, and in what direction or dimension. Dams and flood protection works have natural physical or environmental limits. Replication or scaling up beyond those limits makes no sense. On the other hand, attaining universal school enrollment in quality primary schools and providing clean water to all are explicit targets under the MDGs, and most countries' efforts are way below the scale needed to achieve these goals. It is not surprising, then, that it is especially in the areas of social policy—education, health, poverty reduction, rural and urban community development, and so on—that scaling up is of particular concern.

A decision to scale up a program (or project or policy) requires reflection on its optimal size. Should the program operate on a national, provincial, or only a local level? Diseconomies of scale, quality versus scale trade-offs, and institutional versus organizational constraints might limit the scaling-up path. Therefore, scaling up does not necessarily mean national coverage. On the other hand, scaling up also may entail going beyond national borders. To be effective, some programs need to be expanded to a regional scale. This is typically the case for regional infrastructure and for water, energy, and environmental programs—especially for small countries in Africa, Central America, Central Asia, and southeastern Europe. Some interventions must operate on a global scale, such as programs to combat global epidemics (HIV/AIDS) or global environmental threats (global warming).

Considerations about desirable size are particularly important for programs based on participatory processes. Because these programs are highly contextual and depend on the trust and processes established in a community, the scope for

expansion might be limited. If greater outreach is sought, it might be suitable to use a “franchise model” whereby basic principles are transferred to another environment but ample room is left for the establishment of context-specific decisions and interactions among community members. Good examples of organizations that successfully transferred activities are BRAC and the Grameen Bank—microcredit programs in Bangladesh that are replicating some of their programs in African countries. In a very different field, Transparency International, the global anticorruption NGO, scaled up across several countries via a franchise model.

Scaled-up interventions should not always last indefinitely. Some interventions have a natural limit. For example, privatization has a limit in terms of both extent (how much to privatize) and duration: once all requisite firms and assets have been privatized, the process needs to be wound down. Scale limits and sunset provisions are especially important where public action is taken to correct for what are at best seen as temporary private market failures (those of state banks, state marketing boards, and so on). In these cases, the critical issue is to ensure an effective enabling environment for private initiatives rather than to provide large-scale, long-term public interventions.

Finally, there has been a lively debate in the literature about the dimensions of scaling up. It helps to distinguish among horizontal, vertical, and functional scaling up. Horizontal scaling up refers to the expansion of coverage of a project, program, or policy across more people and greater space. Vertical scaling up refers to creating the organizational and political framework needed to permit moving to a larger scale. Functional scaling up means moving beyond one function (for example, health or education) to include others. The key here is that usually horizontal and vertical scaling must go hand in hand: expanding programs to cover more people across wider geographic areas inevitably requires working with higher-level (provincial, national, regional, and even global) institutions and political forces. Functional scaling up is more of an optional dimension, but functional stovepiping can be a serious threat to the long-term success of development interventions. These are the risks now faced by the new global “vertical funds,” such as the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, as they intervene in countries with weak overall health systems. Mexico’s conditional cash transfer (CCT) program, *Oportunidades* (formerly *Programa de Educación, Salud, y Alimentación*, or *PROGRESA*), which gives cash benefits to millions of poor families provided they use certain public services, clearly benefits from combining health, education, and nutrition interventions.

The Building Blocks of Scaling Up

The answers to the questions of what to scale up, how far, how long, and in what dimension cannot be set in stone. It is important to be aware of the questions and

address them systematically and continuously when proceeding with implementation. At the same time, it is important to consider how to scale up. Scaling up takes time, often 10–15 years or more. This long time horizon poses great challenges: donors shift priorities; governments change; NGO funding increases or wanes, driven by fashion; and agency managers and staff move in and out. The long time horizon requires that scaling up be perceived as a systemic effort, not a short-term fad. Experiences with successful scaling-up programs have shown the importance of long-term commitment on the part of institutions, donors, and individuals. External partners need to stay the course. At the same time, programs have to be designed in such a way that they will survive changes in government. This requires a systematic strategy for scaling up. At a minimum, it requires a basic set of institutional values and incentives to ensure that key actors are continuously searching for ways to build on successful interventions, which, in turn, will ensure that they are replicated, expanded, transferred, and adapted in other settings.

There are three building blocks for designing scaling-up strategies and instilling them with the basic values and incentives: vision, drivers, and space to grow.

Vision

Ideally, a vision for scaling up should be developed as the first phase of a program, frequently called a pilot, is being put into place. Pilots should be designed in such a way that they can be scaled up if successful. However, such a vision for scaling up rarely exists when programs are first designed and initiated. Far too frequently, donors and governments design operations as one-time interventions. Projects that are “expensive boutiques” that have high unit costs and require high-intensity management and human skills may be successful on a limited scale, but they generally cannot be replicated on a larger scale and are not. Because not every project or program could or should be scaled up, the question of whether scaling up is appropriate should be explicitly factored into the decision of whether and how to implement the intervention in the first place. If the program designers believe that their interventions eventually should be taken to a larger scale, they need a vision and a strategy for how to proceed beyond the first phase or the pilot project. *Oportunidades* is a good example of a program whose designers had a clear vision of the appropriate scale of intervention; although it started with a pilot phase, from the very beginning it aimed to eventually provide CCTs to all of Mexico’s poor.

Drivers

Scaling up is a dynamic process that requires a force—or driver—to propel it forward. First, there has to be an idea, an innovation that meets a need or creates a demand among people. Second, there has to be a leader or champion. All successful programs that have expanded from small beginnings have benefited from

charismatic leaders who are endowed with a vision, are persistent in their efforts, are often well connected to major stakeholders and constituencies, and have the ability to command respect and guide people. The innovative idea that micro-credit could help poor entrepreneurs was propelled by the vision and leadership of Mohammed Yunus and Fazle Hasan Abed to achieve the tremendous scale and impact of the Grameen Bank and BRAC, respectively. Similarly, the notion that an NGO can combat global corruption required the inspired leadership of Peter Eigen, which led to the establishment of Transparency International. Finally, external catalysts can serve as drivers of change and scaling up. They might be crises such as natural disasters or economic melt-downs. Or they can be agendas introduced by outside actors. In central and southeastern Europe, the prospect of accession to the European Union has been a driver of sustained change, reform, and scaling up for more than a decade.

Space to Grow

Ideas, champions, and external catalysts are not enough, however. For interventions to be scaled up, they need space in which to grow. Sometimes such space already exists, but more often than not it has to be created. A number of interrelated spatial dimensions must be available if interventions are to be replicated and scaled up successfully. These are discussed in turn in the following subsections.

Fiscal Space. In most cases, increased capital costs can be covered only by determining what other expenditures can be reduced or what additional revenues can be raised. In Mexico, for example, the social programs that existed were very transparently phased out to make room for Oportunidades. However, because most budgetary decisions need endorsements by parliaments or other bodies, creating fiscal space also involves determining whether there will be political support for curtailing certain activities.

Political Space. Scaling up requires political commitment. Political dynamics often change as programs grow. Small programs tend to be watched benevolently and with appreciation by those in power. But as the programs expand, building constituencies around them and replacing other activities, they can be perceived as threatening and evoke negative reactions. Creating political space is a long-term process that must be started early in the scaling-up journey. It requires advocacy and the legitimization of the programs. This goes beyond simply informing decision-makers about the benefits of the program. It requires creating constituencies and mobilizing stakeholders who are willing to place the expanded programs on their political platforms. For this to occur, win-win solutions need to be forged, and at times second-best outcomes must be accepted. Advocacy, political engagement, leadership formation, and participation in the political process need to be integral parts of programs hoping to become larger and be politically sustained. In China's

many successful scaling-up experiences, the political space created and sustained by the Communist Party clearly played a significant role.

Economic Space. Scaling up requires that there be sufficient demand for the services offered by the larger program or that this demand be readily created. Insufficient demand is often an issue for preventive health and family planning services and sometimes, albeit less so, for education programs, for which cultural factors, earnings opportunities for children, or previous poor service provision might inhibit demand. Many agricultural innovations have not been able to be scaled up because farmers have been unable to accept the risks inherent in new crop varieties, inputs, or technologies. In the case of programs to substitute new crops for illicit drugs, substitute crops have not been able to compete with higher-value drug production. A realistic assessment of demand and of the factors needed to create it is therefore an essential step in scaling up successfully.

Capacity Space. Institutions that are unwilling or unable to operate a larger program are perhaps the single biggest constraint to scaling up. The problem is typically twofold. First, institutions lack the human resources, skills, and processes necessary to manage the enlarged program. Second, they are unwilling to support the process of change needed to scale up. The inertia of institutions, especially in the public sector, is a significant impediment. Therefore, it is essential to provide incentives for change, as well as to build a constituency favoring change within the institution—not only at the highest level of management but also at the middle-management and staff levels. The standard view of development practitioners that training will create the capacity required is inadequate. Training is one important component, but it is by no means sufficient. Improving organizational capacity, incentives, and commitment is equally important. In some cases, existing organizations have been bypassed for successful scaling up, as was the case with Indonesia's Kecamatan Development Program to support community-driven public service provision. And setting up separate donor-supported project implementation units is often likely to harm the chances of scaling up and sustaining interventions in the longer term, as the World Bank has learned the hard way.

Cultural Space. It is particularly important for participatory programs and for programs that deliver culturally sensitive services (such as education, health, and family planning) to determine whether the expanded or replicated program will fit the extended area culturally. Programs often need to be adjusted as they are being extended or replicated to accommodate other values or social interaction patterns, especially in multicultural communities and countries or when successful interventions are transferred to another country or continent.

Partnership Space. It is also essential to determine whether external and internal partners will continue to support the program or whether new partners will be required. In most successful scaling-up operations, partners were a key factor in

helping to maintain the program's momentum and focus. They can support the drivers and provide financial support in the scaling-up process. Successful programs such as BRAC and the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh have readily cooperated with partners despite being clearly in the driver's seat. The long-term partnership among international drug companies, international donors, and national health agencies was essential for the success of the River Blindness Eradication Program in Africa. And even as China has chosen its own way of scaling up and sustaining its highly successful development programs, it has frequently sought the technical and financial input of outside partners (as in the case of the Loess Plateau Watershed Rehabilitation Project supported by the World Bank). Effective cooperation among aid agencies remains a special challenge, even though official agencies have pledged to coordinate their activities under the Paris Declaration.

Space for Learning. Scaling up is not a linear process; it extends over many years and navigates much uncharted territory. Though a solid process must be laid out, it also needs to be adjusted regularly. Monitoring, evaluation, and feedback loops are important for learning and adaptation. BRAC and Oportunidades effectively used monitoring systems to provide learning opportunities, while China's ability to adapt its policy reforms and program implementation has been one of its greatest assets.

Five Lessons

Pulling together the various elements of the scaling-up story, five key lessons emerge for scaling up most development interventions.

1. Scaling Up Needs Leadership and Values

More than anything else, scaling up is about political and organizational leadership and values. If leaders do not drive the process of scaling up, if institutions do not embody a clear set of values that empower managers and staff to continuously challenge themselves to scale up, and if individuals within institutions do not have any incentives to push themselves and others to scale up successful interventions, the current pattern of pervasive "short-termism" and fragmentation will continue to characterize national policies and programs as well as the policies and approaches of donors. No scaling-up manual, no checklist, and no compilation of case studies will make a lasting difference.

2. Scaling Up Needs Political Constituencies

Social change needs to be embedded in a society and needs to be supported by political constituencies. These constituencies generally do not emerge by themselves; they need to be created. Far too often, development practitioners believe that the mes-

sage that programs are good will be sufficient to secure support. Building a political constituency involves more than providing information about a successful program. Political constituencies need to become actively engaged in the process, and political leaders need to find that it is in their interest to place the concerns to be addressed by the scaling-up process on their agendas. Often “second-best” solutions have to be accepted in order to be supported politically. Scaling up is not only a technical process but also a political one—it moves an agenda into the public domain and stirs political debate. But care needs to be taken to ensure that the agenda will not be partisan. Political parties move in and out of power, but scaling up is a long-term process, and the agenda needs to be broadly anchored in a political system.

3. Scaling Up Needs Incentives and Accountability

Institutions work best with appropriate incentives, and accountability is the best way to ensure that incentives are aligned between the goals of the individual and the goals of society. Scaling up is a change process, but changes are often stalled by unwilling players. In social delivery programs these players are often public bureaucracies in which inertia, combined with inadequate skills and human resources, prevents change from happening. Scaling-up processes thus need to include incentives for the key actors. One important tool for creating incentives is to plan incremental steps that will yield early results rather than building the perfect program to be rolled out after a long preparation time without intermediate results.

Accountability is important for pilot projects, but its importance increases as programs are taken to scale, systems become larger, and the visibility of and political attention to the programs increase. Accountability is often directed upward toward the organizational and political leadership. But a particular concern related to expanding programs is “elite capture.” As programs’ size increases, political interests become more pronounced and the risk that particular elites will “capture” programs for their specific interests increases. Therefore, accountability downward toward programs’ beneficiaries and participants is equally important. Large organizations are often not able (or willing) to exercise top-down controls effectively. Downward accountability provides for corrective mechanisms and systemic controls. Citizen report cards, beneficiary surveys, and results-based monitoring are all ways to ensure accountability. Good leaders make sure they ground their efforts in constant reality checks at the base.

4. Scaling Up Needs Systematic Monitoring and Evaluation

It therefore comes as no surprise that effective evaluation and monitoring are critical for a sustained scaling-up process. Monitoring and evaluation will be necessary on two levels: first, for the original limited-scale or pilot operation and, second, for the

scaling-up process. The successful scaling up of the BRAC operation in Bangladesh depended crucially on regular feedback from monitoring and evaluation systems. This allowed the programs to be adjusted as they expanded. One of the secrets of PROGRESA's success was the existence of credible impact evaluations undertaken with randomized samples. The evaluations clearly demonstrated the impact of the program and thus played an important role in convincing politicians to maintain and build it through successive electoral cycles. But even simple evaluations can play an essential role in providing feedback on whether scaling up is embedded in the institutional and managerial values of an organization, as in the case of recent evaluations of the United Nations Development Programme's country programs. Unfortunately, this type of evaluation practice remains the exception rather than the rule.

5. Scaling Up Benefits from an Orderly and Gradual Process

The literature on the diffusion of innovations focuses on the spontaneous spread of innovations and observes that some ideas or innovations can spread very quickly, especially when they are market driven (for example, the diffusion of information and communications technologies). However, social process innovations—which rely on political processes, on public-sector bureaucracies, and often on participatory, bottom-up community engagement—generally do not spread instantaneously or spontaneously. An orderly and gradual process, careful logistical planning, a clear definition of partners' roles, and good communication are important ingredients in scaling up development interventions.

Scaling up is a complex and long-term challenge, and it may seem from the literature that it is almost impossible to get right. But many examples of successful scaling-up initiatives show that it is indeed possible—though such examples should be far more numerous. If, for starters, the aid agencies and private foundations were to seriously put scaling up on their agendas, there would be hope for a significant improvement in aid effectiveness. There would also be many more demonstrations of what can and must be done to achieve serious progress toward the MDGs and thus toward reducing global poverty and hunger.

For Further Reading

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