

A Groupe Initiatives Brief

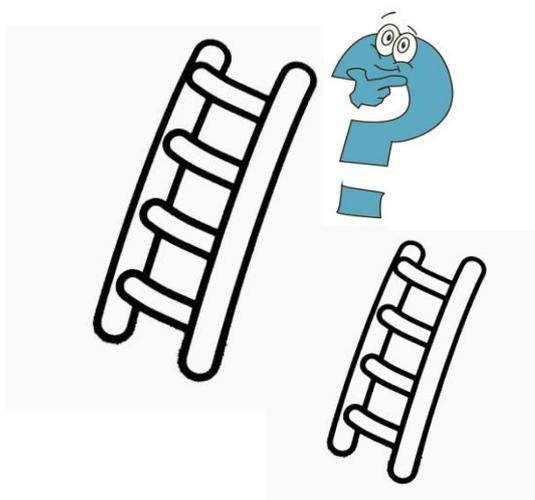
NGOs' Actions in Response to the Challenge of Scaling Up

The Challenge of Scaling Up: Background and Issues

The NGOs that belong to Groupe *Initiatives* are constantly reflecting on the challenge raised by “scaling up” in their intervention modalities and alliances so that interventions have a stronger impact in favor of the inclusive, fair and sustainable development of territories. These innovations (whether social, technical, methodological, institutional or organizational) are usually tested and validated on the scale of projects with limited spatial and temporal scope. The specific responses and alternatives that we test—sometimes successfully—are appreciated locally; they are not always, however, seen by governments, donors or even the private commercial sector as being up to the challenges waiting on national and even regional scale.

Without minimizing either the impact they have had locally and nationally (thanks to the products and services developed, references produced, organizations strengthened, laws passed, etc.) or the potential created in favor of sustainable development on the large scale (thanks to the references and innovative experiments produced), development NGOs' actions are still seen as modest and their innovations are usually under valued. The challenge for our organizations is for these innovations to contribute to **social, economic and policy transformations of great magnitude**.

What Scaling Up Is Not...



One thing is certain: **we cannot be content with the mere “identical replication”** of our know-how and experience to claim to meet the current challenges and needs facing the urban and rural societies with which we work. Indeed, there is no doubt that it is through scaling up, notably in its policy dimension, that we will help ensure that populations are lastingly able to master changes in their living conditions and situations. For NGOs, therefore, the issue of scaling up involves resolving the following paradox: their “profession” and areas of skill are, in appearance, limited to local actions and highly specific, specialized areas, but their ambition is to act on more all-encompassing levels, including local and national policy.

Implementing a change of scale can run into three major stumbling blocks. Scaling up cannot be the simple identical replication of a successful experiment because this mere replication in often different contexts and places has no guarantee of the hoped-for success—far from it. The processes through which change happens in one village do not follow the same principles or involve the same cause-and-effect relationships as those that one would implement to organize the same change in a department, province or country. Scaling up also does not happen through the simple, identical propagation from one person to the next. Indeed, the process by which something new is invented or implemented implies adaptations and technical and social transformations.

~~Identical Replication~~

~~Identical Propagation
from Person to Person~~

~~Steady Upwards Progression
from Level to Level~~

Finally, the word “up” also introduces a risk of thinking that steady progression is possible for a project from a “lower” organizational level (such as a village) to a higher level (such as a large region). Yet, this is not the case: **scaling up implies dovetailing often discontinuous levels of organization.**

The Complementary Approaches to “Scaling Up”

“Scaling up” may be understood in three distinct but non-contradictory ways:

Magnifying the Impact of Local Actions and Proven Innovations

To scale up is to magnify the impact of an action and its direct and indirect effects. For example, it allows one to reach more people, within larger organizations, across larger territories. In this case, it is a change of scale that may be quantitative, social and/or spatial. Scaling up may also be temporal: the effects achieved by an action become sustainable over time and the conditions are created to allow the process of change to repeat itself.

Scaling up must not be limited to a mere shift from “a small to a large action.” It may take the form of diverse, varied and sometimes complex modalities. While an innovation, a product or an especially innovative service may be scaled up through simple replication thanks to outside funding or commercial mechanisms, one must note that to reach stakeholders and territories with distinct socioeconomic, geographical and political conditions, **scaling up often starts with local initiatives that spread through “spin offs”** carried and adapted by the stakeholders in a territory themselves; this **is then consolidated by linking and networking these spin offs over time.**

Intervention at Levels Beyond Local and Public Policy Elaboration

Scaling up may also mean that intervening with new types of organizations (federations of organizations, political organizations such as unions, etc.) at different scales, ranging from the local space to the regional or even national arenas. This shift also implies greater proximity with the arenas in which draft policies are elaborated and set, particularly public policies whether they be local (groups), national (the State), or even regional and international. In this case, it implies multi-stakeholder partnerships able to influence public policy, including by creating the pressure of opinion for noteworthy changes.

A Shift in Vision, Intervention at Levels Beyond the Local Scale Through Multi-Stakeholder Alliances and Broader Cooperation

Finally, scaling up may be understood as a shift in analysis and vision, and therefore ultimately a shift in cooperation topics. Similar to an analysis of the landscape that suddenly shifts from a single plot to the entire territory, scaling up implies renewing the vision one has of an issue. For instance, for AVSF, an NGO specializing in an area seen as highly specific—rural development—

scaling up also means examining the forms of governance in rural areas, the legitimacy of peasant stakeholders and their place in society, new rural-urban connections, rural activities other than farming and livestock, the interdependency of trade/agriculture and societies, etc. Here too, this vision implies multi-stakeholder alliances involving elected officials, training centers, civil society, the private sector and research, and modalities that are often different from those used in “classic” cooperation programs and technical assistance.¹

Inventiveness Combining Action Modalities

Scaling up requires inventiveness and audacity in combining different practices and modalities for action. It leads us out of simply setting up local actions—even though they very often remain the crucible of detailed experimentation with local innovations, undertaken with local stakeholders, and whose effects and impact are measured with precision. NGOs must therefore modify the ways in which they intervene according to the levels on which they act. Beyond local actions and among the various modalities for action conducive to scaling up, we can notably cite:

- Organizing discussions among stakeholders and territories of their experiences and innovations to promote and facilitate the networking of local initiatives.
- Disseminating innovations and promoting their large-scale spread through vast public programs, cooperation programs, programs with regional and/or national reach, sectoral programs, and sometimes multi-stakeholder programs.
- Direct technical assistance to civil society umbrella organizations on their strategies to define and present their proposals to territorial political authorities and economic and financial stakeholders (including the banking sector, microfinance, international aid, etc.).
- Technical assistance to local governments or even States for engineering and advice services to elaborate and implement local development programs.
- Technical assistance to local and national public authorities, including training, support-advice, experience analysis/documentation and dissemination, as well as cooperation with civil society organizations and local governments. Advice to the central or local governments on public policy elaboration may sometimes have limited impact when it is not part of a dynamic that is carried by civil society organizations or at the very least a dynamic that consults these organizations closely.
- Recourse to commercial sector practices, for example social business, to multiply and spread a product or service that is particularly innovative and suited to a given context and place. In this case, the NGOs themselves may decide to position themselves as stakeholders and shareholders in the social business set up, if only for a fixed period of time.
- Training leaders, technicians, executives and/or engineering support and the viability of training systems for development executives. Training is a powerful vector for scaling up to share, analyze and make known innovations, even the most localized. Training must be accompanied by work analyzing and documenting innovations, knowledge and know-how, and by a very proactive accompanying communication strategy.

Levers for Scaling Up

Starting from the observation that there as many changes of scale as changes of context, are there keys for success or levers for scaling up? Some commonalities that contribute to the success of the actions implemented do deserve to be emphasized.

¹ See also in french: *Traverses* No. 14 "[Renforcement de la société civile : politique d'alliances et partenariat](#)".

Have a Clear Vision of the Change and Therefore... Ambition

The innovation that is the subject of the desired scaling up must have a strong and understandable concept with which all stakeholders can identify because it is anchored in the local fabric and meets their needs. It must offer tangible, clear results for everyone. Scaling up requires a forward-looking vision of the desired change and therefore a degree of ambition. This ambition must be associated with the intrinsic values of the envisaged change, clearly displayed and shared with the stakeholders in the territory.

Open Up to New Professions and Gather the Required Skills

Since scaling up implies combining different ways of acting, it usually leads development NGOs to enter into new—sometimes completely novel to them—professions (communication, public policy advice, business start ups, etc.). However, development NGOs' traditional occupations remains crucial to intervene and bring innovations to the core of their skills in situations of vulnerability where the local structures and funding that are generally present offer only little prospect of improvement.

Be Willing to Adopt New Stances

Scaling up may lead development NGOs—if they so desire and decide to do so—to adopt new stances: stakeholder in a company providing services or products, service provider, public service adviser including in very fragile States, etc. This involves a large capacity for institutional adaptation.

Sequence Actions as Much as Possible Including Exit Preparations

While it is sometimes difficult—not to mention impossible—to predict every detail, the change envisaged and ambition displayed require one to sequence planned actions as much as possible and draw up hypotheses, notably on the economic sustainability of the envisaged transformations. For example, the groundwork for evolution into a sustainable economic structure that is locally rooted must be laid with the first economic decisions and the involvement of local partners who will need to take ownership of initial project's values. Finally, the exit of our own structures must be accepted and announced if scaling up will be manifest by a takeover by local (public and private) stakeholders or if a new structure will be created, and by the dissemination and transmission of innovations and/or social, economic and policy changes already.

Create Sometimes Unexpected Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

Scaling up usually requires mandatory multi-stakeholder work. It leads to mobilizing new stakeholders outside the traditional networks in which development NGOs exist. For example, this is the case with consumers' associations for agricultural and rural development or commercial economic operators that are not, a priori, their usual partners. These alliances (civil society, commercial private sector, public authorities, research, etc.) are sometimes unexpected; a clear initial expression of the values that underlie the change can bring together stakeholders that are a priori extremely different without them losing their souls. In these coalitions of stakeholders, in addition to their capacity for innovation, NGOs are also among the guarantors of transformations that benefit the most vulnerable and a social solidarity economy. The role of the public authorities remains crucial in setting rules and codes of behavior, or even in financing or guaranteeing risky innovations, alongside NGOs that cannot finance them alone. Involving the public authorities in the actions undertaken may also lead, if they have an interest in doing so, to the mobilization and allocation of national resources or international donors' resources to attain more massive and faster results (equipment acquisition grants, seconding of additional human resources, etc.). Companies are able to bring their own skills in very specific thematic fields, social business or even long-term financing. Research can enrich innovations in action-research processes with the NGOs involved; it helps measure and, in the end, validate with all

stakeholders involved their relevance and effectiveness, and ultimately therefore contributes to their legitimization.

These coalitions are also important to create policy processes: they may be able to shift public opinion and influence public policies, in this way generating sweeping social transformations. Alliances may also be built around shared challenges that go beyond the borders of just the territory considered and around a partnership based on a “community of destiny and vision”: poverty and inequalities, global warming and its practical consequences, civic and democratic demands, the financing of State budgets and fiscal issues, under-employment among young people and migrations, the worsening of labor conditions (decent jobs) and the match between training and jobs, food quality and food sovereignty, corporate social and environmental responsibility, fairness in trade relations, etc.²

While these alliances are necessary, one must nevertheless stay vigilant to avoid creating coalitions of stakeholders that are overly cumbersome and complex, which could ultimately hinder innovation and scaling up.

Also Ensure that the Innovations and their Dissemination Modalities Are Economically Sustainable

Scaling up cannot be disassociated from the search for an efficient and sustainable model, notably on the economic front, hence the many instances of scaling up being integrated in economic commodity chains, value chains and market approaches. The market as such, if it is regulated, is able to promote scaling up as illustrated by the success of urban farmers’ markets and producers’ cooperatives from developing countries on export markets. Creating companies with social vocations can make it possible to ensure the viability of production, R&D, and the dissemination of innovative products and services for populations.

Be Inventive Combining Financing Over Long Durations

Scaling up requires one to mobilize often diverse financing to last over time until a model can be found that ensures the economic sustainability of the transformations and innovations utilized or even the new structures and institutions set up. In this area, innovation is also required, especially when outside public financing is missing or inadequate. Scaling up implies inventing the most relevant and effective combinations to mobilize the required resources: external public resources, national resources, investment funds, commercial mechanisms, etc. Here too, alliances of stakeholders allow each to contribute its own know-how in the subject from its own specific position (groups, businesses, NGOs, research institutes, etc.). However, this combination implies a framework for negotiation resulting in clear contractual modalities shared by the various parties involved (objectives and expected results, distribution of roles, arbitration modalities, etc.).³

Measure and Communicate

Communication is a crucial element in the battle of innovations and ideas whether we want it to be or not. It is not always development NGOs’ strength and primary skill; and the financial means available for this communication are often limited, or in any case incommensurate with those available to other stakeholders, notably in the commercial economic field. This communication must rely on the establishment of monitoring and assessment measures from the start; these will make it possible to adapt the strategy and actions, report, and ultimately show and communicate the results.

² See Groupe initiatives Position Paper "[Seven pledges and proposals in order to renew partnerships and tackle the issues in our intervention areas](#)".

³ See Groupe *Initiatives*’ position paper "[New Coalitions of Stakeholders: Stakes and Practices](#)".