

LAB EVALUATION, RESEARCH, AND LEARNING PLAN

# EVIDENCE BRIEF

SUMMER 2019 UPDATE



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## QUESTION 1

**What are the “best bet” investments for sustained uptake/ integration of Lab and STIP tools and approaches?**



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*This Evidence Brief was produced as part of a series of outputs from the U.S. Global Development Lab's Evaluation, Research, and Learning (ERL) Plan - a utilization-focused learning agenda supporting evidence-informed decision making in Lab operations and science, technology, innovation, and partnerships (STIP) programming. A process and set of products, the ERL Plan facilitated Lab learning and adaptation around four bureau-wide areas of inquiry: uptake of products, services, and approaches; adaptive management tools and practices; support to awardees and partners; and sustainability of results.*

*Insights from the ERL Plan are shared here as a record of emerging opportunities for evidence-based adaptation that could be acted on by USAID and other development actors. This work also contributes to the evidence base for the Agency-wide Self-Reliance Learning Agenda - an effort to support USAID as it reorients its strategies, partnership models, and program practices to achieve greater development outcomes and foster self-reliance with host country governments and our partners.*

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of “scaling and scaling-up” in the development sector is receiving increased attention due to a greater desire to ensure the effective use of development funds and use evidence to design and implement interventions. Scaling offers the potential to increase the impact and scope of development results in a sustained manner without additional, ongoing outside resources while supporting the drive toward self-reliance and local ownership in aid-receiving countries.

The term “scaling” can have different meanings for different audiences. For the purposes of the Lab's ERL Plan, we define it broadly to include: expansion of a particular model, technology, or intervention (through public- and/or private- sector actors); acceleration of that expansion; and/or institutionalization within an organization or ecosystem.

Successful scaling attempts require strong evidence in favor of the scaling model or idea. The type and strength of evidence required to press ‘go’ on a particular scaling approach will likely be a judgment call by relevant stakeholders due to their varying risk tolerances and the diverse array of factors that can influence success. Successful scaling rarely follows an exact formula; it requires careful consideration of many factors in making decisions related to scaling-up efforts.

Due to financial and human resource constraints, the following findings, conclusions, and recommendations are drawn from a limited sample of the academic literature on scaling, as well as select Lab evaluation outputs, including those from the Sustained Uptake Developmental Evaluation (USAID 2018a-e).

## FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### FINDINGS

- **Successful scaling takes time and resources.** Successful scaling normally takes time and resources, no matter what the sector and focus (Hartmann and Linn, 2008; Linn, 2012; Gillespie, 2008). Examples and case studies across the literature support the idea that success takes time to emerge and monitoring and evaluation to provide evidence and proof of success (USAID, 2018a; World Bank, 2012; UNDP, 2011; WHO, 2010).
- **Scaling efforts need clear evidence in favor of the model or approach and address identifiable needs.** At root, scaling requires an approach that either has the prospect to or has been demonstrated to work. As such, the use of evidence to inform decision-making regarding the selection and implementation of a particular policy, program or concept for internal and external scaling is critical (UNDP, 2011; USAID, 2018a; World Bank, 2012; WHO, 2010).

- For both internal and external scaling efforts, there was a recognition that beyond evidence, there needs to be a clear understanding of the need for a particular intervention to ensure that a potential model is applicable and useful (Hartmann and Linn, 2008; Linn, 2012). Program evaluations, including impact evaluations, can yield particularly useful evidence (Duflo, 2013). The use of evidence by stakeholders and the importance that decision-makers are included and their needs addressed in generating evidence also proved integral (Nutley et al, 2013).
- While there were suggestions to avoid short-term activities, there remains **little research or literature on an ideal timeframe**. Relatedly, the most appropriate pathway for a scaling initiative to select will depend on the contextual factors of the scaling effort (IDIA, 2013; USAID, 2015; USAID, 2016).
- **Successful scaling takes place in conducive enabling environments such as those that feature aligned incentives and supportive motivations.** Successful scaling approaches focus on the context in which the scaling occurs (Hartmann and Linn, 2008; USAID, 2018a). This well-rounded understanding of the external enabling environment promotes thoughtful decision-making and increases the likelihood of successful scaling (Biswanger-Mkhize and Spector, 2009; USAID, 2018a). Several key factors contribute to an enabling environment for scaling: accountability processes, incentives and political motivations to foster commitment to scaling, as well as professional development, internal policies and a mission-focused culture that support scaling efforts (Hartmann and Linn, 2008). One finding notes that good design work, including community participation, can overcome certain structural and organizational impediments to scaling (Khwaja, 2006).
- **Organizations need to monitor, learn and adapt during scaling implementation.** Successful scaling requires the integration of learning and adaptation processes into implementation (GTZ, 2009; IFAD, 2012). The evidence underlines the importance of having the capacity to understand and adapt to local contexts when pursuing scaling efforts in complex environments. Part of that capacity relies on the development of systematic, intentional and well-resourced efforts around monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) processes (GTZ, 2009; Hartmann and Linn, 2008). The literature suggests that these efforts should be integrated into the implementation process itself (USAID, 2018a).
- **Vision and supportive leadership are key to inform and lead scaling efforts.** While the literature emphasized evidence and processes, it also appears to recognize the need for the scaling team to be appropriately formed and led (WHO, 2007). This includes exhibiting certain characteristics, such as being adaptive and task-oriented (USAID, 2018) and willing to take risks (Christen et al, 2004).
- **Scaling requires strategic collaboration and effectively managing key relationships.** Often, efforts to scale up require working with other stakeholders inside USAID or with development partners (USAID, 2015; USAID, 2016; USAID, 2018a). The literature emphasized the importance of strategic collaboration and the development of ongoing relationships to ensure successful scaling. In many cases, scaling requires the active buy-in, engagement and use of the model or approach by other actors (USAID, 2015; USAID, 2016). In the scaling process, the most commonly mentioned audiences to target were champions of the scaling model or approach as well as political elites (Hartmann and Linn, 2008; Gillespie, 2003; Billings et al, 2007). Elites, however, can be responsible for diverting resources from target beneficiaries through corruption and capture (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2006). For external scaling, multisector partnerships were often mentioned as a common modality (USAID, 2015).
- A key success factor is the presence of a strong leader, or leadership team, to manage internal staff and external relationships (WHO/ExpandNet, 2007; Moreno-Dodson, Blanca, 2005). Strong leadership was often associated with the development of internal capacity to address knowledge and skill gaps on the team and improve team members' capacity over time (Bhusan, 2004; Hartmann and Linn, 2008).

## CONCLUSIONS

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### Initiation of Scaling Venture

During the initiation of the scaling venture, it is critical to assess the evidence in favor of the model or approach.

**Scaling initiatives that have clear evidence in favor of using them and have identified the intended need are more successful.** Decision-making on whether and how to scale a particular idea or approach requires the collection and analysis of robust evidence. It is critical to understand the needs of decision-makers and what evidence would help inform their decisions. The use of evaluations, including impact evaluations, as a means to surface evidence are important. Such evaluations often involve a longer gestation period for scaling since evidence generation and analysis takes time. The process of using evidence and continually assessing needs must occur on an ongoing basis.

### Enabling Environment for Scaling Venture

A conducive external environment and the appropriate time and resources for the effort are critical to success of the venture.

Firstly, **successful scaling is more likely with a conducive external enabling environment**, including aligned incentives and supportive motivations; in their absence, scaling design is key. Understanding the context in which the scaling takes place through careful analysis is critical. This may include determining that both ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ for the scaling effort have mutually reinforcing enabling environments and are well balanced. Political economy analysis, as well broader approaches such as Thinking and Working Politically (TWP), can be helpful in informing improved design if conditions are sub-optimal. Analyses conducted prior to implementation can save precious resources. When the analysis shows a non-conductive environment, more time and resources should be expended on the design of the scaling effort to increase the chances of success.

Secondly, **scaling efforts will be more successful when implemented with sufficient time and resources.** USAID activities are typically planned to take place over a time frame of 3–5 years. Attempting scaling requires sufficient time and resources to sustain the effort over a longer, and potentially undetermined, time period. Leveraging local resources and ensuring that budgets are able to support longer-term efforts will support a scaling effort with greater chance of success. Additionally, the success of scaling efforts depends on the consistency of resources (namely human capital) and the ability to iterate (ask for more time if needed, adjust resource allocation, etc.)

### Implementation of Scaling Venture

The venture must be implemented with adaptive management, strategic collaboration and the right internal team/leadership.

First, **organizations that use adaptive management practices**, including MEL systems and processes, **to adapt scaling approaches during implementation are more likely to be successful at achieving scale.** Implementation approaches need to be adaptive since the contexts in which scaling takes place often change. Taking time to pause, reflect, and adapt based on data can help address challenges and opportunities arising from these changes.

Second, **scaling design and implementation requires the identification and cultivation of key relationships as well as ways to strategically collaborate.** Scaling requires the active participation and engagement of stakeholders, making it imperative to take the time to identify the right ones. Strong stakeholder relationships can be built and maintained by using stakeholder mapping processes and techniques to better understand the target stakeholders and develop appropriate engagement plans. Because these analyses may shift due to changes in the local context, plans should include the flexibility to make updates and revisions in implementation and collaboration over time.

Lastly, **scaling efforts are more likely to be successful if led by the right leader or team.** As relationships matter in scaling, it is critical to identify the right leader to spearhead the initiative. This person will need to lead a team, build team members' capacities as necessary, and strategically manage external relationships. In addition, the leader will need to be comfortable taking calculated risks, even if there is strong evidence in favor of a particular approach. Finally, the leader must be able to make judgment calls along the way based on the evidence and information at their disposal. Recruiting and retaining such leaders will support successful scaling efforts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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Our review of the evidence suggests that the Agency and other development actors should consider the following recommendations. As Question 1 activities were delayed and abridged, these recommendations were not part of the Lab's original September 2018 prioritization and action planning exercise.

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**Design scaling with appropriate time frames and resources.** Scaling efforts should only be attempted when funding over a longer time horizon is possible. The exact time horizon will depend on the nature of the scaling effort, including its size and scope and the length of time needed in the start-up phase.

X

**Base scaling efforts on clear evidence and identifiable needs.** Build in time and resources to gather evidence and conduct assessments prior to decisions regarding scaling efforts are made. If barriers are identified, there needs to be a clear mitigation strategy that is similarly resourced and systematic. Assessments should review the applicability of the scaling model or program. In addition, assessments should explicitly review the system and context in which the scaling effort will be implemented to determine the right fit and dependencies; this can be done through system thinking tools including political economy analysis and stakeholder analysis. Build in time and resources to revisit the evidence and plan for regular assessments to revisit assumptions and adjust approaches accordingly.

X

**Focus on careful analysis and scaling design.** Build in time and resources at the beginning to assess the enabling environment, including the internal environment of the organization or group that plans to support the scaling effort. If barriers are identified internally, these should be addressed prior to a scaling effort. If external barriers are identified and are able to be mitigated, ensure that resources and time are set aside to mitigate these barriers.

X

**Integrate adaptive management practices, including MEL systems and processes, into implementation to foster continued learning.** Integrate monitoring, evaluation and learning efforts into implementation efforts starting with design and planning documents, including budgets and workplans. For instance, if the scaling approach is new and has little supporting evidence, a developmental evaluation may be appropriate. Integrating a systems theory of change approach into a MEL system can allow the approach to understand the progress made towards ecosystem level change. Scheduling semi-annual (or more frequent) pause and reflect sessions to review context and performance data is a useful approach to apply learning to improve the scaling approach. Build in the time and resources needed to analyze, interpret and use monitoring, evaluation and learning data to help ensure that context is considered throughout implementation. Ensure that internal policies and incentives are aligned to encourage this process. If this is not possible, consider possible mitigation strategies.

X

**Focus during design and implementation on strategic collaboration and cultivating important relationships.** Use stakeholder mapping processes and techniques to understand the target audience and develop appropriate engagement plans. Revising these analyses at regular intervals can also enable you to best leverage external resources and support scaling beyond your manageable interests and scope through relevant partners.

X

**Recruit and retain supportive and visionary leadership.** Spend resources and time to identify the correct team leader who can bring individuals with the right skills, knowledge and attitudes to address the scaling initiative. In addition, both the leader and staff should share common characteristics, including being learning oriented, supporting an adaptive culture, and making time for systems thinking. In cases where this is not possible, consider delaying the effort until the right leader and team can be brought on board.

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*Opinions presented in the document do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the U.S. Government. Feedback and questions may be directed to the Lab's Office of Evaluation and Impact Assessment at [LabEIA@USAID.gov](mailto:LabEIA@USAID.gov).*

# FURTHER READING

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