

Scaling up social development

Carl E. Taylor

It is apparent that our current models of development are not working, especially when judged by the fundamental criteria of sustainability and equity. Scaling up of social development is our most urgent problem. It is a pleasant task therefore, to share experiences from the health sector about the complex concept of learning to “go to scale” and its possible relevance to the agriculture sector.

A universal process of scaling up

Our Johns Hopkins Rural Health Research Centre was based in the village of Narangwal at a teaching health centre of the Ludhiana Christian Medical College I had started when developing the first department of community medicine in India in the 1950s. In parallel, at the Ludhiana Agricultural University a remarkable team of international consultants was involved in laying the foundation for the Punjab's fantastic success in Green Revolution agriculture. I learned much from agricultural experts in those days of great enthusiasm when they were leaders in doing development at the level of the farm. Then they shifted from the biological growth model to the blueprint and explosion models (see box). Their successes seemed to grow fantastically and rapidly with massive publicity. But, they became more top-down in scaling up. Unexpected consequences and environmental complications followed from problems such as monocropping,

overuse of chemical fertilisers and poorly controlled irrigation. The worst result was that the Green Revolution packages favoured the rich since investments cost too much for the poor. Family farms failed and the rich got richer.

Development experts have wasted many decades of rhetoric arguing whether top-down or bottom-up approaches are best. It is time to declare that the argument is false. This is not an either/or dilemma. We need both, but in a flexible and varying balance depending on local circumstances. There are no universal solutions in development, only a universal process to find appropriate local solutions in a biological growth model.

Three basic principles in building up valid processes of scaling up

Principle One – Three way partnerships are essential to maintain an effective working balance between bottom-up and top-down action.

1. *The community must be treasured and always be in eventual control.* This is the bottom-up component.
2. *In a new role, government and NGO officials must learn to support community empowerment.* This is obviously the top-down component and it is here that most development projects fail because all the reflexes of officials are conditioned to

demand that they be in control. A basic conclusion is that officials need to make a tremendous shift in their attitudes and values. They should realise that nothing will facilitate their success as leaders so much as delegation of control. As people close to the action take over the routine and dull tasks of management, it permits those higher in the hierarchy to focus on policy and innovation that will eventually set new directions.

3. *Experts must guide the process by learning how to synthesise scientific innovation with traditional wisdom.* The key concept is that the experts' responsibility is to bring the outside-in. They store and apply knowledge from around the world and open new horizons applying the best of modern science and simplifying it for rapid general use in improving human welfare. However, changing their attitudes and values is almost as difficult as re-training officials.

Principle Two – Action must be based on locally specific data.

Growing experience with participatory methods of data gathering and decision-making shows that one of the commonest reasons for failure of development efforts has been the long tradition among officials and experts that they deliberately and consistently excluded the people from participating in decisions about

GOING TO SCALE MODELS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Blueprint

- Experts select successful interventions from local or international experience
- Blueprint is designed by outsiders and imposed with regulations and targets
- Community participation becomes top-down community manipulation
- Tight supervision and incentives achieve quick results but lose sustainability

Additive

- Bottom-up comprehensive and culturally adapted development at community pace
- Stimulated and financed by outside donor (NGO) usually works well in local area-great impact of inter-sectoral action
- Phasing over to local control often difficult because of dependency and being accustomed to outside pay and equipment
- Too slow to rapidly go to scale or fit into national system; need a top-down enabling environment for scaling up

Explosion

- Focused interventions selected as national or global priorities
- Tight control and efficiency assured by vertical hierarchy for one purpose but usually duplicating management
- Effective in filling infrastructure gaps if then integrated into whole system
- Social mobilisation can strengthen local system but over-riding local priorities often destructive and not sustainable

Biological

- Existing successful community-based projects are selected which demonstrate self-reliant empowerment
- Healthy communities are not mechanical structures but replicating organisms
- Each community becomes a biological growth node for exponential and rapid expansion with infrastructure for enabling environment, sustainability and standards for equity
- Integrated inter-sectoral development evolves naturally as communities learn to demand services for their priorities

their own future. Officials have learned the rhetoric of community participation, but it has in recent decades mainly been used in a distorted form for community manipulation. Data gathering for social development has been treated as a simplified version of social science research. People have been excluded from the process to ensure scientific objectivity. Modern experience is clear that the best way of promoting community ownership and empowerment is to get communities deeply involved in continuing data collection. The more important result is that when the people know how the data is gathered they trust the findings, feel ownership and are motivated to act.

Principle Three – Changes in community behaviour produce sustainable social change.

The most sustainable social development depends not on outside inputs of money or materials but on behavioural change among the people. The changes in behaviour must include all partners. We find that the most difficult part of social change is to change the attitudes, values and behaviour of officials and experts. Calling for behavioural change seems to have similarities to preaching about religious revival. It is easy to talk about but hard to do. Behaviours are embedded in social norms. They change most readily when people experience practical demonstrations that meet their basic or imaginary needs and self interest in promoting the welfare of their families and friends. Most convincing are messages about successful innovation that are transmitted by people like themselves. Biological models of scaling up work mainly because they systematise the process of learning, community by community, in exponential expansion as people teach each other.

Three dimensions of going to SCALE

Through fieldwork in many parts of the world we have observed the biological approach to be the most common pattern for large-scale expansion. It unfolds in an organic way that appears at first hard to describe. But after analysing numerous examples, there appear to be three clusters of commonalities which we term dimensions and indicate by acronyms: When development is initiated by local people, action typically begins with community-based **SCALE One**: they try a few ideas, see success, then try some more. When a cluster of innovations are worked out, that community-based action becomes a

demonstration for other communities, or **SCALE Squared**, providing formal training to other communities and refining ideas in an on-going way for greater local adaptation. When a larger enabling environment is created to nurture this process, the demonstrations and ideas to spread; the dimension that unfolds then is **SCALE Cubed**.

SCALE One – Successful Change as Learning Experiences

Bottom-up social development has gradually spread throughout the world with successful examples of empowered communities in every country and region. In different places the empowerment process started with varying kinds of projects focusing on innovation, in subjects such as: agricultural extension, income generation for women, education for women, primary health and nutrition care, family planning or small-scale crafts and home industry. A combination of factors that clicked with local culture, available resources and indigenous skills created the synergy to empower the community to continue expansion to a variety of other innovative changes. Each community must start this process from where it is. The challenge is to identify priority issues that are both locally important and do-able. Because community energy grows mostly from success, perhaps the best starting point is a project that can mobilise the greatest energy – perhaps one involving primary health care, credit for women, forestry, emergency services. The starting point need not be an indigenous success. Who initiated the project is not important (for instance, in addition to community, a NGO, university, or government programme could have started the work.) as long as the community recognises the project as a success and accepts it as part of the community. This acceptance cannot be enforced, as then the community will not believe that it has the competence to continue.

Outsiders often press for action to begin with the most needy, but doing so reduces the chances of sustainability. Development is momentum, and momentum cannot be gained when the first step is uphill. Projects should be targetted at the neediest sections only after there is an example of success to build from. The subgroup that can least afford failure, should not be expected to take the lead position of being the first project where the probability of problems is higher and their competency levels are lower for solving those problems.

SCALE Squared – Self-help Centres for Action Learning and Experimentation

Few good interventions can be transferred directly from one setting to another, without some degree of adaptation. People adopt ideas and methods most readily when they see them being implemented in conditions similar to their own by people who are like them.

The central source of power in scaling up comes from a cluster of SCALE One communities which are selected as being representative of a whole region and then the motivation, capacity and resource base is provided to form them into a learning centre. Here bottom-up, top-down, and outside-in functions come together. Control of their future must remain with communities, but the extension function requires more active roles by officials and experts. This is where experts bring in and try out new ideas. A SCALE Squared centre is both a community-based laboratory and a school without walls. One lesson builds upon another; findings from one demonstration lead to solutions for new problems, as capacity is built and the knowledge base keeps expanding. These learning centres have two functions.

1. *The first function of a SCALE Squared Centre is educational but with a new learning by doing orientation. The action learning function moves communities beyond concern just for their own progress to intentional extension of the change process to other communities. The SCALE One communities welcome people from other communities to learn how they can help themselves. In these exchanges and workshops both groups share questions as answers are worked out with mutual benefit. Doubts are cleared when visitors see people like themselves solving problems they struggle with every day. Some development projects spend as much as 50% of their budgets on bringing in consultants to draw up plans and do evaluations. Spending that money on arranging for community members to go to parallel projects and learning centres will almost always yield a far higher rate of return. Taking citizens and policymakers on trips may seem extravagant, but it opens doors to new areas of knowledge and provides role models to help them adapt what they see working.*
2. *The second function of a SCALE Squared Centre is experimentation.*

Experts from many disciplines are brought in to work with community leaders in the new discipline of participatory research. Their synergistic interaction combines scientific understanding with traditional wisdom. Those of us who have had the privilege of doing this kind of research know that usually the most innovative and usable insights come from the village people and we can mainly supply skills and tools which they simplify and quickly learn to use even without our sophisticated jargon.

SCALE Squared centres should resist the temptation to become showcases. Communities understandably want status, outsiders want to take credit for having a “good” project, and activists in the community want affirmation. But making SCALE Squared centres look spectacularly good often make unreplicable, both them and the lessons they are trying to teach. As SCALE Squared centres become established in regions, it is useful to form a network for sharing among them; here modern technologies can help extend the reach of traditional experiential learning.

SCALE Cubed – Systems for Collaboration, Adaptive Learning and Extension

Expanding social development successes to all communities in a region requires systems for extension based on a network of SCALE Squared Centres. Experience shows that communities left to their own resources usually do not spontaneously learn from each other. The systems needed for bringing about wider impact resulting in regional change include:

1. *System for sustainable collaboration and partnership* using approaches such as: seed grants; opportunities for communication between and with SCALE Squared Centres; objective critiques of ideas and experiences between communities, officials and experts; and special regional events such as fairs, competitions, concerts, festivals and formal workshops to create a sense of being part of a larger, expanding movement.
2. *System for adaptive learning.* The purpose is to provide opportunities for step-wise learning as communities learn about themselves using annual self-evaluation surveys. They develop an annual work plan and evaluate each year’s achievements to do better

incrementally. The SCALE Squared Centre provides the framework for testing new approaches to learning.

3. *System for extension of innovations.* I have been repeating the theme that the main difference from the blueprint approach is that in scaling up, the expansion of innovations grows biologically not mechanically in radiating ripples around SCALE Squared Centres. Officials and experts should not try to “remote-control” this extension, but let people do it themselves. However, growth will not happen by itself. Officials and experts are needed to create an enabling environment. They need to change their policies, laws, regulations and administrative infrastructure. People must be given control and very small incentives to change by providing simple resources not available locally. They need to change financing mechanisms, which mainly are designed to favour and suit the convenience of the people with money not those who use the money. They need to change basic relationships with the main service agencies: agriculture, health, education, public affairs, etc. Problems of inter-sectoral cooperation disappear when the communities have the right to ask for help. When communities build up capacity to know who can help and how to ask for it, then cooperation is sustainable.

Scaling up must start with successful communities and ensure a systematic process of replication to permeate a whole region so that all communities become SCALE One in being empowered to solve their own problems of social development. Some SCALE One communities will become SCALE Squared Centres. Other SCALE One communities will simply continue to build on their success, supported by demonstrations from SCALE Squared centres and the enabling SCALE Cubed environment.

If a government is out front trying to nurture the rapid spread of change, this community energy can mount very quickly. Expectations soar, people are ready to sacrifice (and others move in to take advantage) but the exponential potential is obvious. This energy can be quickly sidetracked if people begin to see leaders taking advantage of the momentum they have created.

Six criteria are needed to measure progress in social development.

Modern management emphasises the need for indicators to measure progress. We have found that seeking universal indicators is unrealistic. Since every situation and community is different the specific indicators should be chosen to fit the local time and place. However, to have a rational framework, six criteria (within which local indicators need to be sought) must be defined.

1. *Collaboration around a Shared Vision.* Communities need to agree on the direction they want to go and a shared vision helps internal collaboration. This can evolve from immediate concerns or from underlying causal influences over time as observed in annual reviews.
2. *Equity is defined as reaching out to those in greatest need and in providing opportunities to those who have been deprived in the past.* The only way a whole community can improve overall welfare is when the groups, which have the greatest concentration of priority problems are helped to get better living conditions and lifestyle. In most communities local patterns of discrimination are deeply entrenched and outside pressure is needed to make the elite share. This can be done efficiently when top-down standards are set for communities that can be met only by improving conditions for those who have the greatest problems.
3. *Sustainability is where most social development has failed and it requires measuring from the beginning for benefits that will last.* Is development exhausting water, forest, and energy sources or increasing pollution? Are debt loads being incurred that cannot be repaid and will be passed onto future generations? Is change undermining treasured cultural values? There are always trade-offs that must be carefully, unselfishly and pragmatically evaluated.
4. *Interdependence not dependency is essential for a just and sustainable process.* Dependency produces victimisation and vulnerability to control by outsiders. In many instances outside assistance has been great in satisfying the egos of givers but has been terrible for the self-reliance that happens when capacity building is a primary goal. Development cannot be bought. Donors often want to pay start up costs to accelerate action but this will fail if this creates expectations both

in the community and in neighbouring communities. Outside resources are certainly needed but they should be accepted only if they do not remove control from the community—except for the criterion that assistance must give priority to promoting equity.

5. **Holistic action at community level is automatically inter-sectoral.**

Breaking development indicators into the bureaucracies' use of agriculture, health, education, etc. destroys the basic need for holism in action. Solving combinations of priority problems leads communities to awareness of underlying causes. Synergistic entry points emerge as each activity opens understanding of new potentials. Together they strengthen the fabric of community and family life to produce a "rising tide" of progress, in which the big boats should not swamp the little and leaky boats.

6. **Iterative action leads to sequential learning and continuing adjustments in interlinked relationships.**

Using annual surveys a community tries one idea, the next try makes it work a little better, more people bring in their own improvements and behaviour

changes to produce new social norms. Iteration gives opportunity to identify those loose ends and fix them incrementally until all fit together with growing precision. Action should not wait for precision to be imposed from external quality standards; instead quality control should depend on internal building of capacity. Once people have agreed on starting a do-able action, it should start while interest is high. Then the emphasis should be to recognise that failures will be frequent. But getting the action right is not as important as getting action going and then improving the process. The amazing thing is that in community development this is what succeeds because people learn from each other and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Conclusions

Bottom-up social development has gradually spread throughout the world with successful examples of empowered communities in every country and region. These examples have convincingly shown that bottom-up social development does work. However, efforts to bring them to scale in large programmes invariably failed: the spark that produced the initial empowerment

was lost in moving from an exclusively bottom-up to an exclusively top-down approach. What is needed is an approach, which systematises the process of a learning community. Each community becomes a node for exponential and rapid expansion. Healthy communities are replicating organisms. Integrated and inter-sectoral development evolves naturally, as communities learn to demand services for their priorities. ■

Carl E. Taylor, John Hopkins University, 615 N-Wolfe St., Baltimore NED 21205, USA.
Email: ctaylor@jhsph.edu

Shortened version of a paper presented at the International Workshop on "Going to Scale: Can we bring more benefits to more people more quickly?" held at the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), Silang, Cavite, Philippines, April 2000.

Reference

Taylor-Ide DC and Taylor CE, **Just and lasting change: when communities own their futures**. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. (to be released in Autumn 2001).

On Social Capital and Partnerships

SOCIAL CAPITAL means "trust" and "cooperation networks". As a form of capital, it is possible to invest on it to save and to stock it – but it is possible to lose it, too. The principal strategies for "investing" in social capital are:

- Create a "common space" among different institutions (social organisations, NGOs, public sector, entrepreneurs) to identify common goals as stakeholders.
- Make transparent the interests of the different institutions in negotiating common goals.
- Identify the "added value" of cooperation through the different types of support coming from each of the stakeholders. The added value is like the interest rate of social capital.

The main OUTPUTS of social capital are:

- Reduced "transaction costs" among institutions
- Increase in the "cooperation values" in a community or region
- Increased competitiveness of the stakeholders in the market.

How Social Capital Influences Scaling Up Efforts

Technical aspects

- Creates environment for farmers to reach agreements in their organizations to support an "inter-learning process" e.g. in sharing successful technologies
- Allows for agreements to be reached among farmers organisations, NGOs and the public to promote watershed management and forestry programmes and other natural resource management/protection strategies and programmes.

Political aspects

- Makes way for defining and implementing common policies that promote sustainable agriculture in a local/regional context (e.g. tax reduction for NRM projects, laws to punish pesticide use, etc.)

- Facilitates designing and implementing common programmes for sustainable agriculture in a watershed and mobilising institutional resources (human, financial, physical). For example, the "round table" in the Cajamarca project permitted the municipality to multiply its resources through social and private resources by a ratio of 1:3 (three-fold).
- Demonstrates to the national government the importance of cooperation in a region to raise more funds for the decentralisation process.

Economic aspects

- "Social Capital" makes possible new loans from banks to farmers organisations (social guarantees among farmers can serve as replacement/alternative to collateral requirements in the absence/lack of property rights to land).
- Makes it possible to design and implement new strategies to "reduce the risk" of markets (new roles among municipal governments, farmers organisations, NGOs, local banks and the private sector can increase the efficiency of institutional resources and to create "cooperative guarantees" to attract investments and loans).
- "Social Capital" among social, public and private institutions can increase the competitiveness of a region in the country (competitive advantages instead of comparative advantages).

Juan Sanchez