

Info Note

Scaling agricultural innovations – How to manage institutional change?

Key messages from the CGIAR++ Scaling Workshop, Hanoi 2018

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■ Key messages

- Achieving sustainable change at scale requires a change in the way “we all do our business”.
- CGIAR centers and their partners need to embrace a change management agenda.

It is urgent!

To achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger by 2030, agricultural research for development projects and programs are expected to support 600-700 million small-scale farmers to access and adopt climate-smart agricultural innovations. The CGIAR and partners already achieved a wide range of development outcomes on local, national, regional and global levels. However, mobilizing change at the needed scale is still a challenge. It is urgent to accelerate the cycles of research, learning, action and scaling, which calls for highly effective research and innovation systems.

The CCAFS Southeast Asia Scaling Conference

In November 2018, the CGIAR/GIZ Task Force on Scaling facilitated a Conference on Scaling, organized by CCAFS Southeast Asia. 70 participants of 34 research, development, farmer, policy and finance organizations shared their experiences and learnings. The main take away was:

“Scaling takes place in complex systems and involves all kinds of different stakeholders. Scaling should therefore lead to sustainable change at scale. To achieve sustainable system change, we need to challenge ourselves and to change the way we work.”

CGIAR++ Workshop on Scaling

In the wake of the Scaling Conference, 25 researchers of 9 CGIAR++¹ centers and two partner organizations came together in a Workshop on Scaling, to explore how to drive forward the scaling agenda in their projects, research centers and CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs). The workshop highlighted the need for institutionalizing scaling efforts to achieve sustainable change at scale. Participants presented examples of current organizational structures focusing on scaling among CGIAR centers, and brainstormed about common success factors for institutionalizing scaling efforts in the CGIAR. The following synthesis reflects the main discussions and action points for CGIAR stakeholders and their partners.

Examples for the institutionalization of scaling in CGIAR centers

Several CGIAR centers and CRPs are pioneering ways to accommodate “scaling” in their organizational structures. These range from establishing center-wide Communities of Practice, to mainstreaming scaling in their institutional procedures and practices, e.g. by having integrated or independent structures set up explicitly for scaling innovations. The following examples were discussed:

ICRPE’s Technology Transfer Unit (TTU)

The TTU at ICRPE was set up in 2017 as a support unit of ICRPE’s three main thematic hubs, with the aim to bridge the gap between research and applications. To date, the TTU already scaled out two innovations: the Push-Pull Technology and Bait Production against Fruit Flies by

¹ CGIAR++ includes ICRPE and World Vegetable Center

Kenya Biologics. Hereby, the TTU acts as broker between researchers and the broader stakeholder landscape, including farmers and mainly private sector scaling partners, with the following main tasks:

- Understanding both research processes and the developed technologies, as well as the needs of farmers, private sector partners and stakeholders.
- Breaking down and translating the innovations so that farmers and users can better understand these.
- Packaging the innovations in a way that they are useful for farmers.

The implementing agencies, however, still need continuous advice and TTU's expertise.

The TTU has its own mission, goal and strategy. Its communications team and website are independent, but linked to the headquarter communication structure. The TTU also has its own budget, while at the same time functions as a fundraising unit. Each funding proposal of ICIPE's various departments now includes technical transfer activities, or seeks advice of the TTU before being submitted.

The TTU employs staff with different skill sets. It requires different human resources policies and recruitment practices to prioritize "someone with high motivation for action and change" over someone with a strong academic background, if all other competences are the same. The most needed skills for scaling innovations are multi-disciplinary analytical skills, management and field implementation experience, as well as a combination of both structured thinking and a practical mindset.

The set-up of the TTU as support unit also poses challenges for ICIPE as a whole:

- **Cooperation between researchers and innovation developers:** The TTU staff relies on the new knowledge and innovations of the departments. At the same time, the TTU sometimes needs to "put the finger on the weak spots", e.g. when assessing innovations' scalability. This critical approach can discourage active cooperation of researchers and innovation developers.
- **Evidence for fundraising:** Future independent fundraising for the TTU will require evidence of TTU's contribution to improving scaling of innovations, which in turn calls for the respective monitoring and data management mechanisms. Currently, funding for the TTU is not secured over the long term, and relies on diverting resources from research activities.
- **Contractual conditions for private sector cooperation:** Albeit the private sector partners have already commercialized standardized innovations of ICIPE, the question of paying royalties to ICIPE, and the allocation of the amounts to the different departments and to the TTU, is yet to be resolved.

IITA's Partnership for Delivery (P4D)

In 2016, IITA set up the P4D Directorate as a separate structure, replacing partnership and capacity development directorate, to enhance delivery of IITA innovations and increase sustainable use of IITA innovations at scale. The P4D Directorate combines the five units Business Incubation Platform, Delivery and Development Office, Capacity Development Office, Youth in Agribusiness Office, and the Mechanization Office. Each unit has its own organizational structure and support units at project level. In addition, two commercial agricultural consulting - and farm management services, and three non-profit industrial companies are established, which operate more than ten countries. The P4D department hosts 39 staff members (e.g. CEOs of the companies, business managers, communication staff and innovation delivery experts) that are working on the different aspects of scaling, and interact daily with the researchers.

The P4D innovation pipeline has three major sections:

- An initial phase for research and innovation development projects;
- A second project phase for innovations that have higher scaling potential, engaging with innovation delivery partners;
- A possible third phase for incubating the organizations working on the most promising innovations, connecting these with investors from the private (non-profit) sector or governments ("institutionalization").

This set-up guides donor and private sector investments to identify innovations that align with their respective innovation development and scaling programs. The P4D Directorate is further based on three strong partnerships: Wageningen University, specialized on capacity building and science on scaling, provides state of art knowledge and tools for scaling. IITA's R4D structure supports research on and development of innovations. The link to the CGIAR CRP Roots, Tubers and Bananas provides access to global learning on scaling innovations, and strategic investments through its Scaling Fund Initiative.

Key messages for institutionalizing scaling

The discussed initiatives are only two of many examples how the CGIAR++ centers currently approach and explore scaling within their structures. The following key messages of the workshop's participants can help the wider R4D community in institutionalizing their scaling efforts:

- Scaling is not an expenditure – it is an investment!

"Scaling needs money, but also attracts money." Some donors and development initiatives already explicitly fund scalable innovation development, while private sector, investors and government partners look more into massive adoption. However, both need to have evidence to prove that the innovations are worth investing in.

- Be responsive to the multiple demands of users.

“Farmers don’t think in silos, so we should not work in silos.” Researchers propose innovations with specific uses, but farmers need innovations that answer their multiple challenges. Therefore, it is crucial to cooperate with multiple disciplines, and to invest in understanding, translating and repackaging the innovations.

- Build management capacity for scaling

“The scaling mindset is different from the research mindset” New leaders will need to be managers, with business perspective and skills. This will require different human resource policies, with other forms of performance evaluation criteria than for traditional research.

- Allow for failures – but document for learning

“Our reality is constantly changing, we need to go with the flow and sometimes step aside to advance.” In dynamic systems, it is difficult to plan long-term processes. Arising opportunities might imply risking failure at times. Built-in learning loops can help to cope with an uncertain future.

- Learn from the private sector’s instinct for business.

“If private sector people see a business case, then there is energy behind, there is money behind; it takes off nearly by itself!” This is because private sector actors are used to assess the demand and potential returns. An example of a CGIAR initiative to support business case development is the ICRISAT Agribusiness and Innovation Platform. Donors increasingly launch calls for projects directly developed in partnerships with the private sector.

Getting ready for institutional change

Changing the work routines requires changes at multiple levels of the CGIAR centers and CRPs. At the same time, many innovative forms of partnerships or business opportunities arise at project levels. These opportunities bear large potential for learning and documentation, thus building up the needed institutional experience.

Navigating new contexts can be challenging. The discussion among the CGIAR++ Scaling Workshop participants provided some insights on how to manage change on individual or project level:

- Seeing is believing – also for CGIAR centers

When the context is not suitable for investing significantly in scaling, it might help to provide evidence in the frame of small initiatives. One way of using small budgets efficiently can be to cooperate with agencies that can translate research results into scalable innovations and/or use these to create impact at scale. This in turn can attract more donor and investors’ money.

- Recognize and respond to researchers’ needs and priorities

“Scientists prioritize publishing and are skeptical about using their time and resources for non-research activities. But they are also happy to see the results of their research on the ground, and to gain visibility towards the donor!” Recognize how difficult it is for scientists to make decisions for scaling, which always carry an element of risk and might require compromising technical efficiency for use at scale. Promoting “best bet options” is not very compatible with researchers’ instincts. On the other hand, the emerging science on scaling also provides for publications in high-ranking journals, incentivizing researchers’ interest in investing time and resources on scaling.

- Manage conflicts and different interests

“The beauty is to bring worlds that are hard to match.” There can be organizational conflicts, e.g. competitions between departments, or between the people on project, unit and headquarter levels. Stakeholders can have conflicting needs, e.g. immediately tangible benefits pursued by business managers and long publishing processes in the scientific domain. Managing these conflicts requires negotiation skills, and an understanding of the different “languages” of the stakeholders.

- Get buy in at multiple levels

Convince people with influence, e.g. the ones who communicate and engage directly with donors. Technicians that worked on the innovations at the field level can be natural allies, as well as colleagues working in communications and at strategic levels.

- Help people to own the change

It can be exhausting to spearhead change. It can be more rewarding to engage with existing change initiatives within an organization, helping these to become more effective. At times, it might also help forge alliances outside of the organization, which can influence research for development projects to become more sensitive to scaling: *“At some point, I just stop talking and get other people in – so that my colleagues hear it from someone else!”*

Towards new forms of collaboration

Scaling takes place at and across multiple levels: from evidence to action, from local to national and global scales and back, from simple to more complex. This calls for strengthening the collaboration between researchers and a wide set of stakeholders. While there might not be a blueprint on the best way of institutionalizing scaling, participants of the CGIAR++ workshop identified shared issues that CGIAR centers and partners can benefit on exploring together:

- Scaling projects are different from research projects - the implementation part is necessary!

- Consider equity for marginalized groups and social inclusion to translate scaling work to different contexts and users' understanding.
- “Smart tasks”: Share ownership in planning and implementation, clearly define and map roles, specialized inputs and responsibilities of each partner, and transparently share each other's agenda.
- Open the door to new relevant partners and explore new methods of collaboration. Areas of cooperation span the process from initial research to critical impact studies, including innovative ways of data sharing.

Joint advocacy for scaling

The participants of the CGIAR++ Scaling Workshop found that the commitment of each center's management to support scaling thinking and activities was crucial. At the same time, funding- and institutional set-ups processes and pose structural challenges, e.g. if they are not favorable for cooperation between CGIAR Centers, or among stakeholders. Donor-driven target numbers are not always realistic. Trade-offs between quantity and quality are likely. What is the optimal scale? Often, there is a gap between what projects and programs can offer, and what is expected. At the same time, CGIAR centers and CRPs need large grants and longer project or program duration “to be able to live”.

Participants saw a strong role for the CGIAR centers, its partners and the wider scaling community to equip and facilitate an expert dialogue with donors and financiers, for joint learning and advocacy on scaling:

- Team up with scaling scientists and practitioners of the different CGIAR centers to develop a shared understanding on innovation development and scaling. Details of framing and working definitions can still be different for the different centers, but need to align with a shared understanding and language.
- Harmonize and/or complement the tools to identify scalable technologies and practices, scaling pathways and approaches, and challenges.
- Learn from each other to build capacity within scaling partners and CGIAR scaling practitioners and -experts. Also learn from outside the CGIAR, e.g. from

external experts on communications, finance, marketing. Join think tanks to develop new inspiration.

- “Speak with one voice” to raise awareness on these issues towards donors and financiers.

Further reading

Koerner J, Woltering L, Uhlenbrock S, Ohmstedt U, Zeiske F, Sartas M, Theissen A. 2019. The why, what, who and how of scaling agricultural innovations - Key messages from the CCAFS SEA and -cross CRP Scaling Conference, Hanoi 2018. CCAFS Info Note Series

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