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Tipping the Scales: Shifting from Projects to Scalable Solutions in Fragile States

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Abstract This article proposes a new paradigm and management framework for programming in fragile states. Confronted by the root causes of fragility and the pressing needs of hundreds of millions of the world's most vulnerable persons, it argues for focusing on both problems simultaneously. The article singles out four features that distinguish scaling strategies in fragile states and suggests that the most promising interventions for tackling fragility and building resilience only 'kick-in' at scale because of the higher degree of functioning social capital they require. The article cites a number of examples to support the view that scaling-up approaches provide a valuable organizing framework for integrating a focus on social capital into programming and overcoming the piecemeal, one-off and non-strategic character of aid programmes in fragile states.

Keywords Scaling · Fragile states · Social contract · Social capital · Resilience · Wave sequence

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By 2030, an estimated 80% of the world's extreme poor will live in 'fragile states' where global conflict is increasingly concentrated and vulnerability to natural disaster and climate change is on the rise. It is in these volatile settings that actions to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) will face their biggest challenges, especially the pledge to 'leave no one behind'.

Responding to the challenges of fragility will require a paradigm shift focused on a triple bottom line: meeting basic needs for hundreds of millions of the most vulnerable persons, managing shocks and stress that disrupt development, and addressing the root causes of fragility from broken social contracts, institutions and societal relationships. None of these challenges can be properly addressed without working at scale. This is not simply a matter of expanding successful programmes to reach more people. Instead, we argue that the most promising interventions for tackling fragility and building resilience only 'kick-in' at scale because of the higher degree of functioning social capital they require.

While not a panacea, we argue that scaling-up approaches provide a valuable organizing framework for integrating a focus on social capital into programming and overcoming the piecemeal, one-off and non-strategic character of aid programmes in fragile states.

The Special Challenges of Scaling in Fragile States

Fragile states are diverse contexts characterized by what the OECD calls 'the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks' (States of Fragility Report 2016). Scaling-up approaches must deal with complex and interacting risks and find ways

of adapting to fractures caused by conflict, disaster, environmental stress, depleted social capital and hollowed-out workforces.

Despite their diversity, there are at least four major features that distinguish scaling in fragile states from scaling in other countries and settings. The first relates to delivery 'platforms'. With few exceptions, the only platforms able to deliver services sustainably at scale are governments and markets.[1] Significantly, both governmental and private sector capacities are likely to be compromised in fragile states, thereby requiring creative and adaptive workarounds and accommodations. Given the low or uncoordinated capacity of the government and private sector in fragile states, collaborative scaling arrangements often offer more feasible means for going to scale.

The second distinguishing feature of fragile states from a scaling perspective is the tendency for key actors to view all actions through the lens of underlying grievances. This means that seemingly small decisions about branding, sequencing and messaging take on outsized importance. While this reality can easily lead to unintended and perverse results, the reverse is also true. The increased importance of these symbolic aspects of service delivery provides numerous opportunities to address underlying drivers of conflict and discord.

A third distinguishing feature of fragile states is that they are, by their very nature, particularly vulnerable to shocks and stress. Maximizing positive links between scaling and resilience, and minimizing (inadvertent) negative ones, calls for a higher-than-normal understanding of the local context and risk environment; a willingness and ability to think politically and to make frequent course corrections; and a theory of action that accepts second-best solutions to pressing humanitarian and development needs in order to maximize positive effects on specific drivers of fragility and 'do no harm'. At issue are decisions about what to scale, who should be the 'face' of the scaling, how to sequence the roll-out, and how best to strengthen social capital and support for legitimate state actors. This latter set of choices includes seizing options to foster links between formal and informal institutions to strengthen the social contract between state and society.

Finally, a fourth distinguishing feature of scaling in fragile states involves the high reliance on, and unpredictable nature of external resources. These resources tend to flow in rapidly in response to crises and flow out when the world's attention turns elsewhere. This puts a premium on innovative means of pooling, planning and sustaining donor resources, and transitioning away from reliance on those resources as quickly as possible.
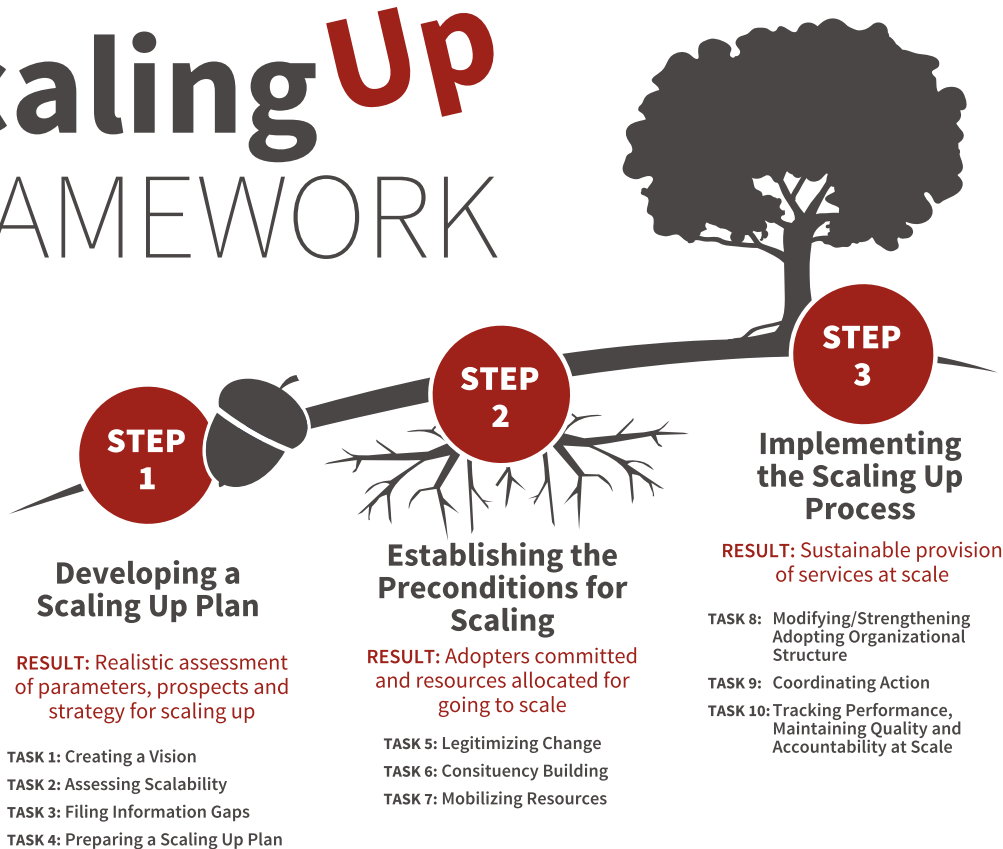
Scaling as an Organizing Framework

There are several frameworks that seek to unpack the process of scaling and to improve the track record of taking valuable interventions to scale. Among the most widely disseminated is MSI's management framework, originally developed with support from the MacArthur Foundation and subsequently applied in more than 40 countries (Management Systems International 2016). That framework (see graphic below) has three objectives—designing interventions with scale in mind, assessing scalability, and enhancing the scaling process—and is organized into three steps and a total of ten tasks. Step 1 focuses on establishing and testing scalable interventions and a viable pathway to scale. Step 2, establishing the preconditions for scaling, focuses on the 'political' tasks needed to support scaling. And Step 3 includes the organizational, coordination and accountability tasks essential for large-scale delivery and quality control.

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[1] Under special circumstances, philanthropy- and faith-based NGOs deliver key education, health or social welfare services sustainably at scale.

Scaling Up FRAMEWORK

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STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

Developing a Scaling Up Plan

RESULT: Realistic assessment of parameters, prospects and strategy for scaling up

TASK 1: Creating a Vision
TASK 2: Assessing Scalability
TASK 3: Filing Information Gaps
TASK 4: Preparing a Scaling Up Plan

Establishing the Preconditions for Scaling

RESULT: Adopters committed and resources allocated for going to scale

TASK 5: Legitimizing Change
TASK 6: Consituency Building
TASK 7: Mobilizing Resources

Implementing the Scaling Up Process

RESULT: Sustainable provision of services at scale

TASK 8: Modifying/Strengthening Adopting Organizational Structure
TASK 9: Coordinating Action
TASK 10: Tracking Performance, Maintaining Quality and Accountability at Scale

Scaling-up approaches such as MSIs have the potential to provide, in our view, systematic frameworks for guiding relief and development activities in difficult contexts and for integrating attention to each of the special considerations noted above. Moreover, we argue that, contrary to the prevailing view, the use of scaling-up approaches embodies an approach to risk that is inherently less risky than reliance on an array of one-off aid projects[2] by investing in contextual analysis, organizational capacity and resource mobilization and by implementing a strategy for gaining and maintaining political and popular support. It is also our view that scaling frameworks can more easily accommodate an intentional focus on resilience by virtue of the fact that many of the most promising responses to shocks and stress work best when applied at scale.

A final potential benefit from the application of scaling as a framework for organizing interventions in fragile states is the opportunity to address head-on the challenge of boom–bust volatility in the flow of external assistance by incorporating devices such as trust funds, social impact bonds, remittances and crowd-sourcing. It should be noted in this regard that—contrary to popular myth—foreign direct investment tripled in fragile states between 2005 and 2012, faster than in any other market, albeit from a lower starting point (White and Griffin 2014).

To better understand the challenges, strategies and innovations that have made for successful scaling in multiple sectors, MSI and R4D launched in 2015 a global community of practice (CoP) on scaling-up development outcomes. Within the CoP, World Vision and MSI established a group of experts from multilateral institutions, bilateral donors, business, think tanks and universities to explore and elaborate the application of scaling approaches in fragile states. This Fragile States Working Group complements an existing partnership between MSI and World Vision on adaptive scaling in fragile states, using as a point of departure MSI's scaling-up management framework and World Vision's large global footprint and over four decades of operations in 39 of 56 OECD-designated fragile contexts.

Choosing What to Scale

While programmatic priorities and roll-out plans should, wherever possible, reflect the greatest and most urgent humanitarian and development needs, scaling efforts in fragile states can and should also be informed by, and

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[2] For similar arguments, see Chandy and Linn (2015).

seek to address, the underlying drivers and consequences of fragility. This implies an iterative and adaptive process for learning and adjusting to changing circumstances. It often also calls for an initial context-sensitive review of how actions will be interpreted by various local stakeholders. For example, when scaling health services in a country such as Afghanistan, it is important to ask how much importance citizens place on health relative to other priorities and to consider how the process of scaling health outcomes could help strengthen (or, inadvertently, further undermine) the prospects for collective action and the social contract between government and citizens.

Other important questions include: Can the phasing of implementation be designed to avoid impressions of favouritism? Can service delivery be branded and managed in ways that add to the legitimacy of the local or national government? Can community mobilizers, supply chains and infrastructure be chosen in such a way as to make it easier to introduce related development interventions? How might basic social services improvements across the country be messaged and phased to suggest a peace dividend and sign of normalcy? Achieving these diverse outcomes in the face of limited capacities, complex threats and entrenched root causes requires a heightened and strategic focus on developing social capital.

Incorporating a Focus on Social Capital and Resilience

The concept of 'social capital' includes three interdependent and inextricably linked elements each of which has major implications for the relationship between scaling and resilience (Woolcock and Narayan 2000; Aldrich 2012; Frankenberger et al. 2013; Bernier and Narayan 2014):

- *bonding* efforts within like-minded communities to strengthen social ties, promote self-help approaches, share information and assets, pool together funds and provide psycho-social support;
- *bridging* efforts to bring together different communities with less shared interests to maximize capacities in the face of shocks and stress, as well as to mend divisions that can lead to conflict; and
- *linking* efforts to connect communities and local networks with formal institutions and governments to receive services, share information and strengthen trust and responsive action in the face of crisis.

Bonding, bridging and linking activities are most effective as a joined-up approach and not *a la carte*. Bonding without bridging can lead to insulated communities that strengthen inter-communal divisions and undermine wider capacities to cope with shocks; bridging without bonding

leads to shallower forms of cooperation without broader community buy-in and participation; bonding and bridging without linking confine resilience efforts to the grassroots level without higher levels of financial support, leadership, information sharing, or state legitimacy. A focus on linking without bonding or bridging can lead to patterns of clientelism and patronage without inclusion or benefits for wider communities.

The goal of achieving a functional level of social capital can be materially advanced by adopting a scaling-up approach to reach across and between many communities and geographies, and to connect communities to formal institutions through governance, financial and regulatory reforms. This social capital, in turn, plays a central role in augmenting traditional governments and market delivery of needed goods and services, and in adapting to shocks and stress.

Recent studies have shown that when governments provide basic services to populations, these efforts do not automatically boost the state's legitimacy, if they do at all (Nixon and Mallett 2017). Far more important than service delivery is the relationship between state and society, captured in part by local perceptions of the state and political and historical narratives of fairness, inclusion or exclusion. Scaling-up approaches such as MSI's incorporate tasks focused explicitly on legitimation, narrative, alliances, campaigns, social accountability and popular support as central components of strategies to scale delivery of particular services or products. The focus on political economy and 'linking' social capital implied by these approaches incorporates particular attention to the importance of enhancing state legitimacy and strengthening social contracts through information exchange, dialogue, narrative shaping, financial support and service delivery informed by risks or underlying grievances (Schaaf et al. 2017). Unlike direct political efforts to reach accords or settlements between conflicting parties, these types of scaling-up efforts offer a complementary development pathway to large-scale cooperation, confidence building and incentives linked to the provision of tangible goods and services for all parties.

Social capital has also been shown to increase the resilience of households and systems to shocks and stress (Frankenberger et al. 2013) in the form of conflict, disaster and the slow-burn stress of demographic bulges, unemployment, rapid urbanization and underdevelopment. The World Economic Forum's '5 R's' (Global Risks Report 2013)—resourcefulness, redundancy, robustness, response and recovery—are useful in understanding this dynamic. Robustness, resourcefulness and redundancy are concerned with the extent to which failsafe mechanisms and backup capacities are incorporated into delivery mechanisms to support front-line operations that may be compromised by

conflict or disaster. Response and recovery are focused on ensuring flexible decision-making that can be centralized or decentralized as necessary, and can operate quickly and efficiently. These principles underscore the observation that, given more fluid conditions, scaling frameworks in fragile states must focus on diverse, and often decentralized, means of achieving outcomes, not necessarily on uniform application of specific models or innovations. Each of these dimensions of resilience is facilitated by working at scale since these strategies require solutions that deliver services across widespread geographies, encourage participation across multiple districts and communities, and link local networks with government institutions.

A Few Examples

The following accounts illustrate, in our view, the potential utility of adopting a scaling mindset and incorporating an emphasis on social capital in fragile contexts.

Enhancing Effectiveness

In a game-changing move, USAID and its partners employed a 'wave sequence' (Massoud and Mensah-Abrampah 2014) approach to meeting primary healthcare needs in diverse fragile contexts, including Afghanistan, Uganda and Gaza. Unlike conventional programmes that move from a pilot to scale, the wave sequence approach established multiple pilots across wide geographic areas, linked formal and informal health sectors, encouraged adaptive and continuous learning, and empowered high performing teams to lead second, third and fourth waves of scaling.

From the pilot to the first wave of scaling, results were modest despite intensive efforts by local and international partners. But from the first wave to the second and onwards, gains were more rapid and dramatic, resulting in 80% rates of impact across diverse contexts and widely uneven systems and capacities. The success was largely attributed to better peer-to-peer networks for knowledge transfer and social mobilization beyond the pilot. Peers with shared social status, worldviews, beliefs and language could more easily translate and adapt technical interventions into local culture, context and practice. They were also empowered to innovate and actively share experiences in nested learning and adaptive communities of scaling agents. Had the programme been evaluated based on its success from the pilot to the first wave of scaling, it would have been deemed far less impactful than at higher levels of scale where impact was surprisingly more rapid and impressive.

In 'social capital' terms, the widespread use of teams to bond and bridge capacities across several districts and link local health workers and community groups with the formal health system is notable. The possibility exists to increase the impact of this approach even further by layering into this scaling approach an intentional effort to address root causes of fragility and adapt to shocks and stress, thereby further enhancing the impact of 'wave sequence' and similar strategies in fragile states.

Scaling Through Hybrid Ecosystems

Since fragile states, by definition, lack sufficient capacities for dealing with risks and meeting basic needs, scaling in fragile states immediately raises the question of how scaling efforts can accommodate or overcome weak capacities to deliver in these contexts. One promising avenue is the creation of what could be called collaborative, hybrid 'ecosystems' in sectors such as health, food security and social protection that link formal, informal and international capacities. This approach compensates for inherent weaknesses in both formal and informal institutions, including markets, and augments strengths which may exist in either or in both to develop linking, bonding and bridging social capital.

Afghanistan's Basic Package of Health Services (Newbrander et al. 2014) is a powerful example of how a collaborative scaling effort helped create a hybrid health 'ecosystem' between the government, international implementing partners, and local communities and healthcare workers. This effort scaled primary health solutions across the country and was critical in helping Afghanistan meet its Millennium Development Goal of halving infant and maternal mortality by 2015. The Ministry decided on the priorities and provided oversight while contracting with implementing partners to reach provinces that were beyond the Ministry's delivery capacity, building 'linking' social capital in the process. The effort similarly built 'bonding' social capital by training and empowering community healthcare workers and communities.

A global example of a hybrid ecosystem for scaling in fragile states is the Core Group Polio Project.[3] The Project maintains a global secretariat responsible for cross-country coordination, shared technical services, quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation, and learning. In partner countries, operational secretariats drive solutions at scale with governments, local communities and international partners. There are double reporting lines for community health workers to both the Project and local government to ensure 'linking', legitimacy, 'bonding' support and national

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[3] Core Group Polio Project: https://coregroup.org/our-work/programs/core-group-polio-project/.

ownership. There are campaigns for polio that help ensure political and popular support and help, during crisis, to clear bottlenecks and red tape to keep cold chains moving, to access contested areas, and to socialize evidence about the benefits of vaccinations.

Scaling Coordination

Identifying the entry points for bringing about these collaborative and hybrid ecosystems for going to scale requires a scaling coordinator to broker alignment between innovators, funders and scaling agents. In fragile states, the coordinator must not only manage this alignment process but also consider how to make scaling efforts multi-purpose to meet basic needs, help address the root causes of fragility, and increase the adaptability of partners to cope with complex risks and crisis. As argued above, this multi-purposing of scaling approaches requires a heightened focus on strengthening social capital and organizing fragmented domestic and international assistance. This must include rallying expertise in the sector (e.g. health, education) and in thematic specialties like peacebuilding, disaster risk reduction, climate, conflict reduction, state-building, community empowerment and adaptive management. The scaling coordinator is critical to these multi-purpose efforts and in solving collective action problems. The coordinator role can be carried out by an individual, organization or association, but is often best placed within the public institution most relevant to the scaling effort, like the Ministry of Health in the case of Afghanistan, or a Ministry of Planning. If placed in the office of the president or prime minister, it can add greater political support but can also overly politicize the effort in contexts where the legitimacy of the state is in question, if not direct contestation.

When host governments are unable to anchor this coordination, there is a need and special challenge to ensure that any such arrangements contribute to, rather than additionally undermine, the legitimacy and credibility of indigenous governmental and non-governmental institutions. The Somalia Resilience Program (SomReP)[4] is an example of collaborative scaling run by international partners but closely supporting local partners and aligned to government and donor priorities for resilience and food security outcomes. Responding to the need for programmatic coordination and financial predictability in the face of a weakened central government, the programme is implemented by a consortium of seven partners who share a common secretariat that supports local assessments, provides technical expertise, and coordinates partner

geographic coverage, monitoring and learning. SomReP has a donor advisory group that promotes open channels on progress, evidence and programme financing. SomReP's resilience focus helps communities and government institutions build social capital to anticipate and manage risks, like droughts and conflict, and more durably provide food security and livelihood support.

Looking Forward

Unfortunately, the application of scaling frameworks in fragile states is relatively under-examined. And in more conventional settings, case studies of scaled initiatives place more focus on the technical intervention than on the underlying strategies, tactics and adaptive learning that made collective action possible and thereby allowed the technical intervention to go to scale. More work is necessary to properly compile, study and learn from successful cases of scaling-up in fragile states, as well as to chart the way forward.

Host governments and donors should look to build scaling approaches into compacts, like those created through the New Deal for International Engagement in Fragile States, and the US Millennium Challenge Corporation. Strategies for scaling should become more explicit elements of multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms (Papoulidis 2011), and of pooled funds like Global Funds for Food Security, TB, vaccinations, maternal and child health and country-specific multi-donor trust funds. The World Bank's IDA fund, which has dedicated more than half of its funds for fragile situations, could usefully look at creating a 'last mile' scaling consortium similar to the Core Group Polio Program to help eradicate poverty in the hardest places.

For this to be successful, donors will need to address at least three obstacles reflected in their current policies and procedures. First, they will need to recognize that scaling in fragile states requires flexibility and adaptive management that are at odds with the current need for pre-specified targets and rigid work plans. This includes a willingness and ability to think politically, iterate, learn and make frequent course corrections. Second, they need to find concrete ways to acknowledge that investments in service delivery in fragile states need to address, and be measured against, their contributions to meet a triple bottom line of reducing root causes and adapting to shocks and stress, as well as more conventional metrics associated with service delivery outcomes—three objectives, not one. And finally, they need to overcome their aversion to pooling or at least aligning funds with other donors.

Scaling-up frameworks offer a particularly promising approach to realizing the SDGs in the hardest places while

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[4] Somalia Resilience Program Brochure, 2015: http://www.somrep.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/somrep-brochure.pdf.

strengthening the capacity of those countries to address key drivers and consequences of fragility. But urgent attention needs to be placed on advancing these approaches in fragile states where over one billion of the most vulnerable people in the world need the scales to tip in their favour.

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