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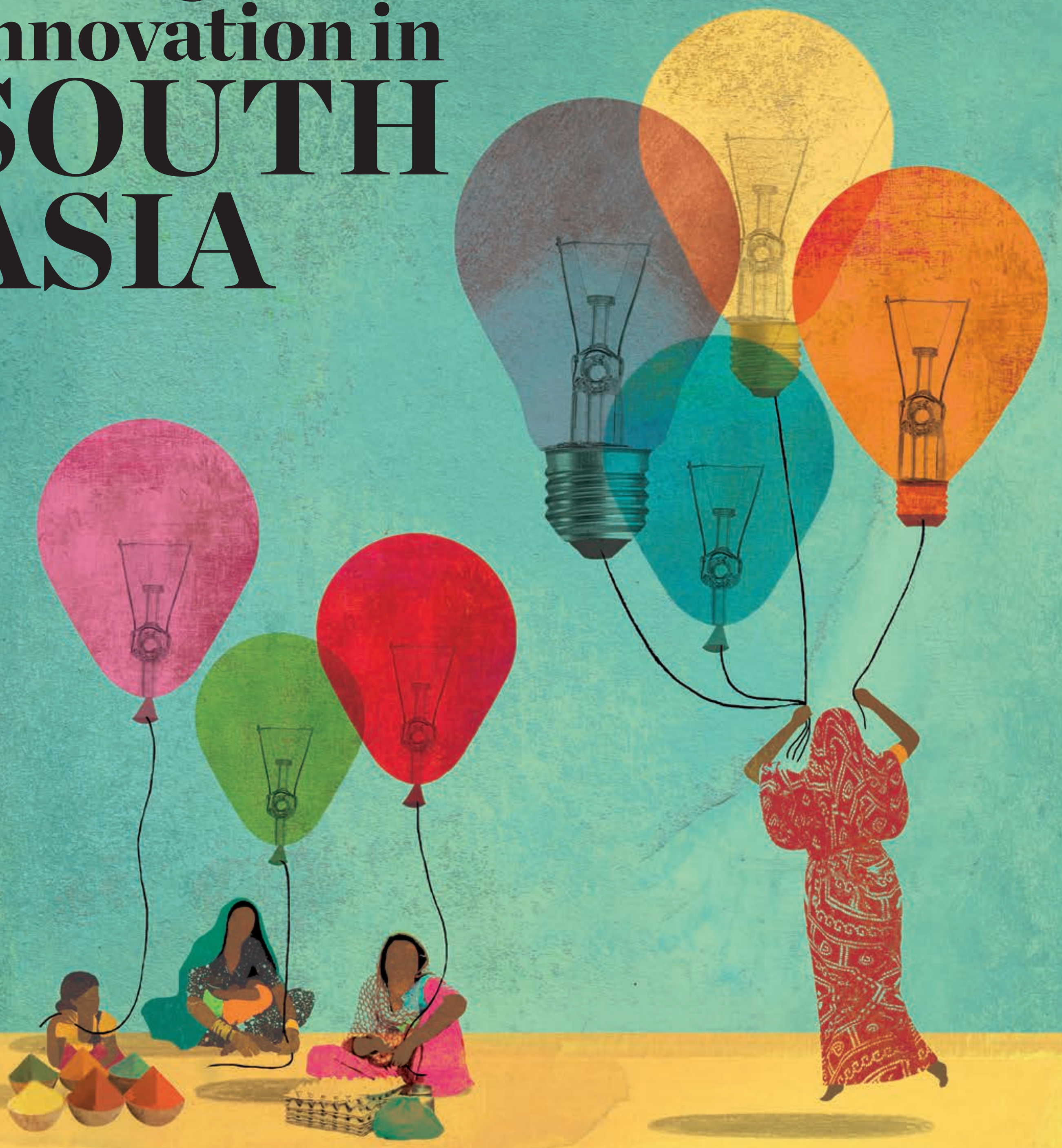
Scaling Social Innovation in SOUTH ASIA



Supplement illustrations by Anna Godeassi

SCALING UP SOCIAL INNOVATION

Innovation is more than a good idea—it's a patient process of iteration, learning, evaluation, implementation, and, importantly, scaling up what works.

BY DR. MUHAMMAD MUSA & JUDITH RODIN

The past few decades have witnessed dramatic gains in attention to global development and investments in finding strategies that can be shown to work. Many of the most creative advancements have come from frugal innovations that grew out of resource-limited settings; necessity motivating creativity in the face of extreme constraints to life, livelihood, and survival.

Now, with a new generation of increasing, complex, and intertwined challenges, ranging from climate change to urbanization, innovation will be crucial for finding solutions that can solve for multiple problems at one time and reach millions, if not billions, of people.

We at The Rockefeller Foundation and BRAC consider innovation part of our DNA. From more than a century of combined experience, we know that innovation done right is more than a good idea or a "eureka!" moment—it's a patient process of iteration, learning, evaluation, implementation, and, importantly, scaling up what works. Organizations like BRAC have shown that it is possible to reach literally millions of people with innovative solutions that save lives and promote social development. The Rockefeller Foundation has been a backer of brains that have led to innovations in new fields, most recently with impact investing and resilience.

We are certainly not alone in this pursuit of innovation. The social impact sector has grown more sophisticated in building the capacities and culture for innovation, and, as a result, holds great promise for transformative breakthroughs. But for a variety of financial, political, and organizational reasons, many effective approaches operate only at a small scale. And too many social sector innovators would love to scale their work but are intimidated by the idea of doing so. Given the pressing nature of our challenges, we believe that now is the time to demystify scale once and for all, and ensure that we put emerging, proven innovations to full use globally, as fast as possible.

To do this, we need to know more about what successful scale looks like across direct service delivery (especially for those who are excluded or marginalized), partnership models, advocacy, and beyond. Four years ago, The Rockefeller Foundation and BRAC undertook a joint exploration of the experiences of South Asian organizations that had successfully taken innovative initiatives to scale. The programs and the pathways were diverse—from networks to public sector service delivery to community organization. Those lessons were the inspiration for this special series of articles. Insightful conversations about the project's findings in Bellagio, Italy, New York City, London, Cambridge, England, and Dhaka, Bangladesh, generated additional learnings that are presented in this publication.

To be sure, South Asia has distinct challenges and opportunities, but we believe that many of the insights presented here are universally applicable. We hope that readers will find these perspectives illuminating, and join us in making the scaling up of innovations a top priority, because doing so is vital to achieve the impact the world needs.

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Tackling "Wicked" Rights and Justice Issues

In a world increasingly focused on measurable impact, human rights inequities are difficult to frame and fight. Yet solving them is key to meeting other social challenges.

BY MARIA A. MAY, FAUSTINA PEREIRA, & ARBIND SINGH

As a field, development is fond of linear approaches to problem solving. But not every social challenge can be codified into incremental, quantifiable goals, as those of us working on rights and justice issues know only too well. Part of the problem is that rights-based issues are "wicked"—that is, they are extremely complex, and their complexities vary by geography and population. (See "Six Characteristics of Wicked Problems That Make Scaling Up Difficult" on page 4.) As such, they defy the increasingly robust models that exist for growing certain development programs, especially those that are designed to scale up in size. And so, although the root cause of poverty is inequity, rights and justice issues often take a back seat to health, sanitation, and education, where needs are more visible and progress is more easily measured.

Several organizations working in South Asia, such as BRAC and Nidan, have had many instructive experiences as they seek to empower the poor. In India, Nidan has helped build some of the largest associations of informal workers in the world, with 621,000 members. Though Bangladesh-based BRAC is best known for its development work, it is also one of the largest providers of human rights and legal aid services in the world. One of its core components is a cadre of "barefoot lawyers" composed of local women who provide information about legal issues to their community. In recent years the program has begun to work on notoriously sticky issues of property rights.

These collective experiences suggest five lessons for other organizations with the same goals.

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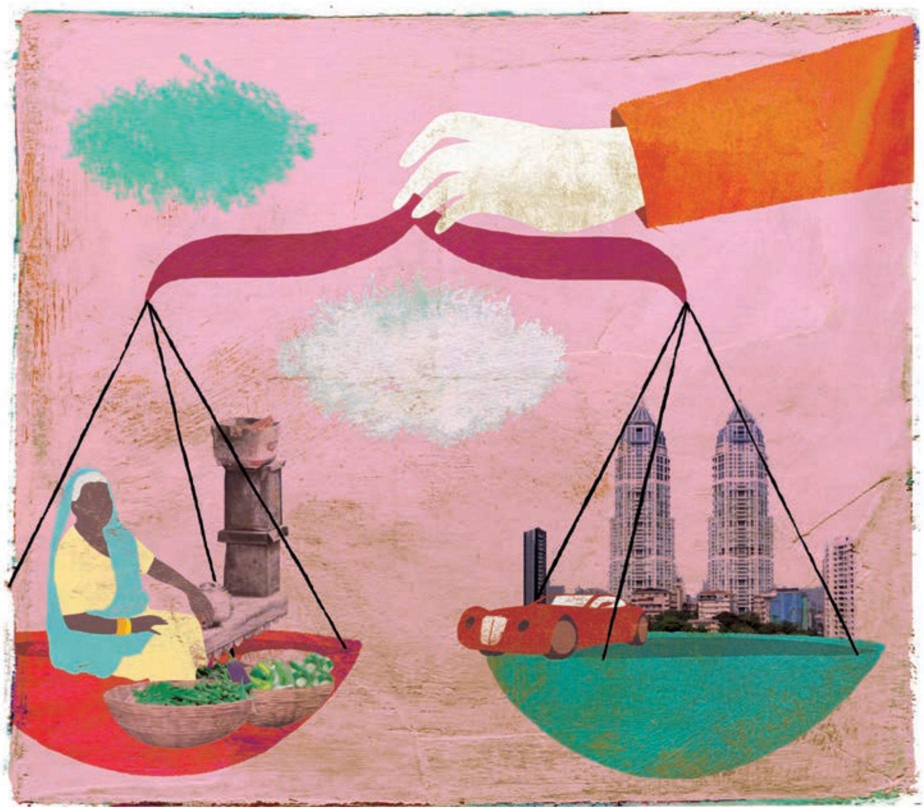
Arbind Singh is founder of Nidan and national coordinator of the National Association of Street Vendors of India.



1. DON'T ASSUME THAT EVERYONE SEES AND FEELS THE PROBLEM

Often, policymakers, donors, and even the affected populations cannot see the relevance of rights to other dimensions of poverty. If that's the case, creating a shared appreciation of this relationship is a critical starting point. Consider the urban street vendors in India who eke out a living by selling vegetables, garments, and other goods in public places. In its early days, Nidan found that many policymakers and donors saw street vendors as a problem rather than as vital service providers, and therefore the organization put a great deal of energy into changing that perception. One of its initiatives was the creation of a "Street Food Festival" in Patna, Bihar's capital city, offering an opportunity for all residents to come together to enjoy and appreciate casual cuisine while fostering an appreciation of vendors' lives and contributions to the city's fabric.

Even the affected community may not be thinking about the importance of their rights. BRAC's work with the poor in the 1970s focused largely on "conscientization," drawing on the work of Paulo Freire and his ideas about empowerment through illumination about the elements of oppression.

2. START BY LEARNING

Develop a deep understanding of the community and the issues that affect it before championing a "solution." Nidan began its work through a simple survey of street vendors in Patna. One major finding was the presence of a complex ecosystem of extortion by corrupt municipal corporation officials, policemen, and private contractors. Learning about this helped Nidan appreciate the depth of the problem and develop local and national activities aimed at developing and implementing better policies and legal protection for street vendors.

In Bangladesh, BRAC discovered through surveys that nearly 70 percent of all instances of violence against women stemmed from property-related disputes, and that women's systematic deprivation of land contributed significantly to poverty and gender inequality. But the organization initially opted not to work on property rights because the cases tended to be complex and could easily exhaust its legal resources. Instead, BRAC focused on land measurement. Local people were trained and certified to provide accurate land measurement at a low cost to settle (and often pre-empt) land disputes. Although BRAC's activities did not directly change the justice system, they were a first move in the right direction. BRAC raises awareness about property rights, legal aid clinics, and measurement services through its barefoot lawyers, who lead community-based education for rural women. It also works with local governments to increase their understanding of the property rights issues facing the poor and to encourage effective delivery of services.

3. FOCUS ON WHAT NEEDS TO BE SCALED *DOWN*, NOT UP

Often when organizations are scaling, the focus is on addition—providing new inputs and additional activities. When it comes to rights, however, the focus needs to be on reduction—taking away the barriers to justice, or scaling down: Ask "What factors cause oppression or denial of rights, and how can those factors be removed?"

For Nidan, a pivotal realization was that bottom-up mobilization at the city or state level would never be sufficient for transformative change. India's street vendors needed representation at the national level. In 2003, Nidan helped its street vendor organizations federate under the umbrella of the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) and helped them gain access to national decision makers.

4. SERVICE DELIVERY CAN BE A VEHICLE FOR RIGHTS

If a community doesn't trust your intentions and believe that you will be alongside it for as long as the struggle takes, it will be difficult to gain traction. Nidan and BRAC both found that it was easier to mobilize people when they provided other services as well. Clearly, this presents a chicken-and-egg dilemma for groups that want to focus on rights, because it suggests that in order to do so effectively, they may need to devote some attention to the "symptoms" of inequality before they can fight the "disease."

Certain services make it easier for people to advocate for their rights. For example, most land cases in Bangladesh relate to inheritance, which means that they reflect conflicts within a family. But taking family members to court creates significant stress. BRAC has found that if family members have important basic services, such as health care, they have more courage and ability to take action when they believe they have been treated unfairly on issues like land ownership.

5. GET DECISION MAKERS TO PAY ATTENTION

Gloria Steinem said, "Power can never be given, it is taken. The process of taking it is empowerment itself." Justice and rights inherently relate to power dynamics, access to resources, and vested interests. Attempts to change the status quo are usually met with great resistance and come with risks, both personal and organizational. The life of an Indian street vendor, for example, is brutal. Private contractors and sometimes police extort daily payments and resort to violence when their power is threatened. Once street vendors began working together and sensed strength in their numbers, they began to fight back. Arbind Singh (co-author of this article and founder of Nidan) recalls street vendors standing outside a political leader's house, or a police station, going beyond mobilization to what he calls *mob-ilization*.

For the final push to pass legislation protecting street vendors, Arbind asked some of the most experienced and vocal street vendor leaders from Nidan's earliest work in Bihar to come to Delhi and participate in a hunger strike. In all, 29 street vendor leaders fasted for four days with support from thousands of street vendors across India. On February 19, 2014, Parliament passed the "Street Vendors Act" (the Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending).[1]

BRAC has chosen to coax and support institutional change on politically charged issues, rather than trying to force it. For many, this is a controversial choice. Nevertheless, given the organization's extensive network of critical social and financial services touching the lives of the poor throughout the country, it has good reasons to be cautious. The organization has also found that effective change is as much about improving the capacity of the public institutions as about generating demand in the grass roots. So BRAC does both. It provides training to local public officials tasked with settling land disputes, and it equips community members with knowledge about the laws and encourages them to demand justice.

Six Characteristics of Wicked Problems That Make Scaling Up Difficult

1. Wicked problems have no definitive formulation—you just know it when you see it.

2. It's very difficult to measure or claim success because they overlap with other wicked problems.

3. You can't solve wicked problems, so the goal is improvement.

4. There is no template to follow when tackling a wicked problem; the strategy is usually made up as one goes.

5. There is always more than one explanation for a wicked problem; individual perspective plays a big role

6. Every wicked problem is a symptom of another wicked problem. No clear boundaries.

Source: Jon Kolko, *Wicked Problems: Problems Worth Solving*, Austin Center for Design, 2012

NO RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

History has shown that rights movements often take decades to gain the momentum and power they need to motivate change. Progress happens in spurts and feels opportunistic, but the reality is that the ability to capitalize on these chances as they emerge requires a deep understanding of the issues, trust from the affected community, and an ability to understand how to push effectively for change.

Notes

1 http://innovation.brac.net/images/Doing_while_Learning_materials/how%20nidan%20organised%20street%20vendors%20to%20demand%20legitimacy%20in%20india.pdf

Scaling Up Innovations With Government

How to overcome the barriers that large institutions like the government put in the way of scaling up social innovations.

BY RAHUL NAYAR, ASIF SALEH, & ANNA MINJ

Governments aren't generally known as innovative environments. But although innovation may not always come naturally to these institutions, scale certainly does. So when they do find ways to incubate and support promising social innovations, especially in partnership, the impact can be tremendous. In South Asia, where a great deal of innovation is happening in the development sector, creating mechanisms to connect the vast public sector apparatus with new models for poverty alleviation is of critical importance. The challenge is to strengthen the link between innovation and scale. Doing that begins with a clear understanding of the barriers that innovators in government and other large institutions face in scaling their work and an examination of what's working.

THE "PATHOLOGY OF GOVERNMENT"

Why do governments find innovation so challenging? To answer this question, we must understand what Indian civil servant and innovator R. Gopalakrishnan called "the pathology of government": the causal mechanisms that generate institutional behavior. These mechanisms can collaterally, or deliberately, damage innovation. Consider the following ways the damage can occur:

Democratic governments are typically designed to avoid concentrating power in a single individual or agency. To prevent civil servants from misusing public power for private benefit, government bureaucracies divide and dilute their own powers among various divisions and offices—each watching and counterbalancing the others. For example, bureaucracies often place expenditure approval powers within financial divisions that are at arm's length from operational teams. Civil servants are encouraged (by formal rules and informal nudges) to follow administrative precedent: well-tried branches in the decision tree, tested for safety by their predecessors. What is novel in decision making may be considered rash, even corrupt, and needs verifying; it is institutionally safer, efficient, even responsible, to do what is pre-verified.

Government bureaucracies are driven to avoid and mitigate risk, whereas innovation often requires failures along the way. The very arrangements that assure the responsible exercise of power can restrict the lifeblood of risk-taking social innovation. Innovators explore solutions through aggressive, discretionary decisions; bureaucratic decision chains, by design, protect against whimsy. Innovators need to swiftly channel money into new experimental approaches; bureaucratic financial approval processes deliberately dam and regulate public expenditure channels. Innovators need freedom to strike out and explore new approaches; bureaucracies confine their functionaries to narrow corridors of approved operational procedure, safely paved with precedent. Social innovation, therefore, too often falls into the crack between the organizational interests of governments and of innovators. By conforming to bureaucracies' structural design and following the decision-making priorities that result, civil servants can internalize and institutionalize a risk-averse behavioral culture. This is not conducive to scaling innovation.

Innovators—whether they're working for a government or a large institution, or trying to access support from the outside—thus face a sequence of progressively hardening barriers to scaling their work. As Everett Rogers wrote in his 1962 book, *The Diffusion of Innovations*, innovators depend on a starting group of innovative adopters. Risk-averse government cultures tend not to select such individuals into bureaucracies or encourage those who do get in, thus depressing the supply of innovative adopters. Should a social innovator manage to find any other innovators, she will find it difficult to organize their support: Distributed, diversified bureaucratic decision making makes for more stakeholders—and more kinds of them—to win over, complicating social innovators' marketing within governments. What's more, even if a social innovator succeeds in mobilizing the right civil servants around her idea, she may find her idea excluded from the policy mainstream. The sheer difficulty of negotiating bureaucratic buy-in for any ideas results in a small number of hard-won mainstream consensus priorities and delivery models, which are promptly ring-fenced. Adding new ideas—especially innovative ones—is too difficult, and hence hindered.

Together, these three mutually reinforcing barriers make it difficult for radical innovations to access the scaling machinery of government.

> *For the social innovator within civil society who seeks to scale up through public systems, conversation will be as important as innovation.*

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INSIGHTS FOR SCALING INNOVATION

How can we break this pattern? How can social innovation leverage the vast replicating machinery of government? One important breakthrough has been the efforts of some innovators to design explicitly for scale. When the potential for widespread impact is considered from the initial conception, it can drive important decisions around inputs, activities, human resources, costs, and complexity. These choices lead to innovations that are operationally viable for the government to consider replicating and mainstreaming. Some organizations, including BRAC, have built the ability to design for scale into their ethos and avoid projects that have no possibility of scaling up.

Through our work with, and observation of, BRAC and the Indian government, we have identified several crucial lessons for innovators and governments that make it easier for both to contribute to a faster and wider scaling of social innovation.

Innovators need to speak "government," and vice versa. Rather than celebrating innovations as departures from "business as usual," social innovators should consider framing their innovations as more effective means of achieving the priorities of the development policy consensus. For example, when India's National Innovation Council sought between 2011 and 2013 to establish a government-seeded, privately capitalized venture capital fund to support scalable social innovation, it framed its case differently from traditional approaches. Such funds are typically justified by arguing that risk capital is urgently needed by social enterprise. Instead, the council positioned the fund as a means of mobilizing Indian private-sector talent and resources for inclusive growth—a core thematic policy priority for the government—allowing the council to navigate through the government's policy consensus ring-fence and secure funding approval from the Cabinet in December 2013.

It is equally important to align social innovation with priorities that resonate with local communities. When the National Innovation Council looked for ways to pilot rural public services with digital connectivity at India's elected *panchayat* (village-level) institutions, it learned to stop talking about telemedicine and Internet technologies. Instead, it focused on demonstrating how these approaches helped pregnant women avoid the ten-kilometer walk to the nearest hospital and thus lowered the risk of maternal mortality. This language made sense to local communities and administrations, which helped drive community participation and adoption.

Engage communities in innovation and scale. At the end of the day, governments answer to the people. Community capacity-building is operationally critical. It builds on genuine buy-in from (disempowered) citizens. In doing so, it grounds development initiatives, leaving them less vulnerable to funding reductions and changes in local government. It allows innovations to draw on a wider resource base from within the community, including not just hard assets, but also crucial intangibles such as know-how, influence, and culture—all of which are critical to scaling innovation.

In our experience, if we want the impact (not the project) to be sustainable, building such ownership becomes a crucial part of the early design. When the community decides who are the extreme poor among them, when women leaders become community health volunteers, and when underutilized educated village women are trained to become school teachers, the empathy and social capital that these previously overlooked people bring are crucial components of success.

By engaging the right people, it's possible to create new behaviors and demands in communities, even around public services. In 2011, BRAC received a small grant from the World Bank to raise awareness of the new Right to Information Act (RTI) and enable citizens to benefit from it. Early observations showed that many communities did not know about RTI, and even those that did faced difficulties in applying for information. BRAC built up a cadre of *tothyo bondhus* (infomediaries) who assisted community members in submitting applications. Organizing popular theater shows about RTI, which were followed by RTI clinics where the theater troupes answered questions, raised awareness and catalyzed demand. Independent assessments showed that BRAC's pilot led to a substantial increase in RTI applications over the 18 months of the pilot programs.

Don't underestimate the importance of informal dialog, trust, and relationships. Even in governments working to facilitate innovation, the reality is that most of the administrators will probably continue "business as usual." Therefore social innovators must become savvy at using stealth tactics to deal with bureaucracy when coordination and motivation are lacking. They must answer diversity with diversity, coping with fragmented bureaucracies by making individual policy cases to organizations' specific (usually understandable) consensus interests and networking these stakeholders into "coalitions of the willing." They can muster the support of enough like-minded stakeholders by giving them easy grounds to buy in, enlisting them in the innovation's cause. For the social innovator within civil society who seeks to scale up through public systems, conversation will be as important as innovation.

Social innovators must also be patient. For example, despite the findings showing that BRAC's community-based activities increased RTI requests, the organization could not attract external funds to scale up the program. Nonetheless, convinced that these innovations were highly effective, BRAC continued to scale up incrementally. It now supports 450 active infomediaries and has reached 160,000 villagers through popular theater shows and clinics. Thanks to persistent success and dialog, recently the Bangladesh Information Commission has expressed interest in partnering with BRAC to scale up the program nationally.

BEYOND INVENTION, TO IMPACT

Scaling up social innovation requires all of the strategies we've just outlined, and more. It requires marketing thinking to map and analyze user communities in the field and supporter communities in stakeholder organizations. It requires political engagement to anticipate and build coalitions of support across these communities. It must build on this engagement with a communications effort that listens continuously to these communities and responds to their concerns with purpose-designed mechanisms—from street plays, to start-up prototype trials, to program framing.

In other words, scaling up requires a multifaceted approach, distilled into a single stream of effort that spans the innovation development cycle: preceding, accompanying, and following the innovation design process. If we can scale such systems for innovation, imagine the channel we can create from invention to impact.

A Tale of Two Intermediaries

RSPN and Nesta teach lessons about achieving social impact in the Global South and North.

BY KHALEEL TETLAY, ZOYA SHABIR SIDDIQUI, & GEOFF MULGAN

There are many ways to scale up an approach so that it is widely adopted throughout society. You can pass a law to establish a right, and then hope that the state is competent enough—and civil society assertive enough—to make that right a reality. You can work through a single organization, in the way that Ford, Google or McDonald's grew in the private sector. You can move more organically, through replication and adaptation.

You can also find partners and work together to turn an approach into a trend or a common practice, in the manner of the microcredit movement in 19th-century Europe and late 20th-century Asia. Or you can create well-funded institutions dedicated to scaling up ideas, like Big Society Capital in the United Kingdom, which funds dozens of social-venture intermediaries, which support ventures that are themselves embedded in hundreds of partnerships. These combined-effort methods foster the growth of ideas and models without creating monolithic organizations. They support broad learning, as they enable experimentation and improvement. They also support efforts to tailor successful approaches to local needs.

In this article we look at two social intermediaries—the National Endowment for Science, Technology, and the Arts (Nesta) in the United Kingdom and the Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) in Pakistan. These organizations have taken different approaches as they seek to spread promising ideas and models. Both are exemplars, but their choices—and the contexts in which they operate—offer important lessons to others seeking to foster social change.

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NESTA

Nesta's origins can be traced to its founding chairman, David Puttnam, who believed that the United Kingdom was failing to support innovation and needed to find an effective way to incubate promising ideas. With the support of the Labour government in 1997 and the conviction that a dedicated endowment was the way to provide long-term, politically neutral funding for riskier ventures, NESTA (as it was first known) came into being in 1998 through an Act of Parliament, as a public body funded by the National Lottery with initial funding of £250 million.

Initially, NESTA mainly backed individuals. Then it started investing in new ventures, and later it began influencing the environment for innovation more broadly. Although much of its work was high-risk, there were plenty of successes—people who went on to great creative achievements, investments that delivered high financial returns, and new products and new ideas that entered the mainstream.

In 2010 the government determined that NESTA no longer needed to be a public body; it was well suited to be a charity. So in 2012, with new CEO Geoff Mulgan (co-author of this article) at the helm, the organization transitioned to a charity and changed its name to Nesta. Today, it invests in commercial companies and social enterprises, undertakes research, and supports large-scale programs for social benefit in health and education both in Europe and globally.

With nearly 200 staff and an endowment of more than £350 million, Nesta often partners with others—including city and national governments, foundations, and companies. For example, Nesta led the drive in the United Kingdom to teach children computer programming, by persuading government to introduce computer science into the curriculum, supporting coding clubs throughout the country, investing in educational technology firms, offering online tools through a partnership with Mozilla and Microsoft, and working with the BBC to push "digital making" through documents, soap operas, and Web tools.

To help get its ideas and knowledge out to a wide audience, Nesta makes an effort to be transparent about its work and share it with others. It tries to distill its methods into easy-to-use guides—for example, on how to run challenge prizes or civic labs—demystifying innovation and helping practitioners to achieve more impact.

RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES NETWORK

RSPN, for its part, has become widely known in the Global South, where it and other successful intermediaries in South Asia are beginning to stand out for the sheer range and extent of their recent examples of scaling up social innovations. Some intermediaries have become expert at "shape shifting"—tailoring their work to fit the unique characteristics of the region, including states that don't meet the needs of their large and growing populations, and flows of funds from global development agencies and foundations that have created space for innovation and provided access to highly educated and motivated people.

RSPN traces its roots to Pakistan in the late 1970s, when two visionaries, Shoaib Sultan Khan and his mentor Akhtar Hameed Khan, set up a rural support program (RSP) in the northern mountainous regions through the Aga Khan Foundation. The Aga Khan RSP (AKRSP) had two objectives: to double incomes for the community of roughly one million, and to develop replicable approaches for future adoption in other parts of the country, and maybe beyond.

A World Bank evaluation of the program found that incomes in the AKRSP areas had indeed doubled since the program began, and in 1989, AKRSP replicated the program by creating the Sarhad Rural Support Programme at Peshawar. In 1992, the National Rural Support Programme was set up in Islamabad.

With support from external donors, including the US Agency for International Development and the UK Department for International Development, the organization scaled up rapidly, launching RSPs across the country and formally creating RSPN in 2000 as an official body dedicated to being the mechanism through which the network exerted influence and shared knowledge. Today there are 11 RSPs working in more than 90 percent of the districts of Pakistan, where they have mobilized about 38 million people.

RSPN connects government, civil society, philanthropy, and economic development in the interests of achieving common social goals. As self-governing organizations, the 11 individual RSPs have been allowed to have control over their own finances and decision-making process. Most often, this system works well, but autonomy can sometimes be challenging. For example, the Balochistan RSP enjoyed initial success, but then encountered difficulties when donors and government officials who were on its board encumbered its decision-making processes and caused a period of programmatic decline. With a change of leadership at Balochistan RSP, the program began to recover. Today, it has become the largest civil society organization in the Balochistan province.

SAME DIFFERENCE FOR THE NORTH AND SOUTH?

Both Nesta and RSPN were launched by visionaries who saw gaps in society and rallied to catalyze change. Both managed to secure independent and dedicated funding sources and move away from direct government management, though both have strong influence on public policy. For example, Nesta's Plan I campaign for the United Kingdom and Europe to foster sustainable economic growth by supporting innovation and the growth of creative industries has influenced policy with regard to innovation. And RSPN's campaign is leading to the provincial governments' acceptance of the RSP approach to community-driven development. Governments of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had supported the initial scale-up of RSPs. Now the European Union and the government of Sindh are planning full scale-up in 12 districts of the province.

Beyond those commonalities, there are great differences in the ways Nesta and RSPN operate. Although Nesta has one central core team (along with teams in Scotland and Wales, and a subsidiary in the United States), it has no plans to expand further into regional offices. It is still a frontline organization, looking to link the micro with the macro, whether it is empowering patients to manage and co-manage their health care or asking targeted communities to blog about their progress to funders.By contrast, the RSPN has devolved power to individual RSPs and moved beyond figureheads to recruit talented local players in order to create individual, differentiated, localized organizations that adopt common principles but cater to their unique contexts.

THREE ELEMENTS DRIVE IMPACT AT SCALE

Nesta's and RSPN's experiences, along with the experiences of other social intermediaries working in different areas in the world, suggest that three elements are needed in order to achieve impact at a large scale.

The first is what we call *effective supply*—an approach to meeting a need that actually works and is better than available alternatives. It's rare for any idea to be able to prove its worth immediately. But over time, every successful scaling has involved the evolution of an idea, testing, and proof. Philanthropy has an important role to play here; donors often provide the time, space, and resources that organizations need to turn a promising idea into an expandable form.

The second is what can be called *effective demand*—the presence of someone or some organization willing to pay enough for an approach to spread. That might be consumers seeking new heating equipment, for example, or it might be government seeking to solve health problems in a particular region. In much of the world, issues such as primary and secondary education depend on governments for aid, given governments' ability to raise taxes. Philanthropy rarely plays a significant role here, if only because its scale is usually very small compared to that of states and markets.

The third element is a *vehicle*. This can be a charity or a social enterprise, or it can also be a federation, a network, or a coalition, coordinated by an organization such as RSPN or Nesta. Our sense is that RSPN and Nesta are the models to look toward as we seek increasing impact, driven by increasing improvement in how intermediaries work, smart combinations of better organizational tools, and creative use of technology.

ROUNDTABLE

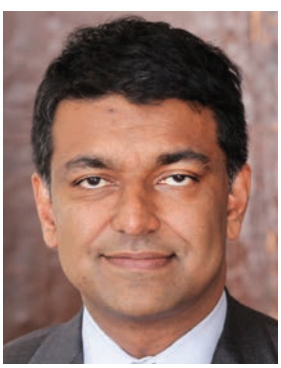
Creating a Funding Environment for Scaling Up Social Impact

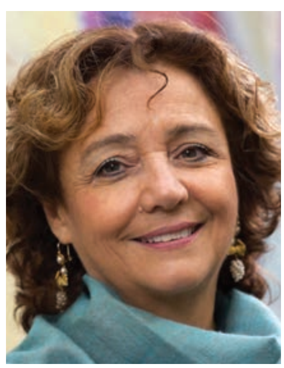
There has been a great deal of discussion about the role of donors in building organizations capable of scaling up their impact. Instead of writing another "open letter" to donors, BRAC invited a group of thought leaders to engage in a lively and open discussion. They shared their valuable insights on how to build ecosystems for scaling up social impact and on where the challenges lie in doing so in the Global South and around the world.

Roundtable participants were **Zia Khan,** vice president, The Rockefeller Foundation; **Isabel Guerrero**, senior lecturer, MIT Sloan School of Management; and **Harish Hande**, co-founder and managing director, SELCO. The roundtable was moderated by **Jeffrey L. Bradach**, co-founder and managing partner, The Bridgespan Group.

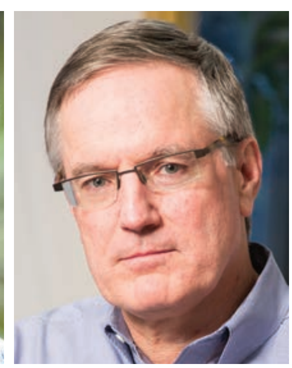
Jeffrey L. Bradach: ***Let me start by asking each of you how you and your organization think about scale.***

Isabel Guerrero: I come to the issue of scale from three points of view. The first is from my experience working at the World Bank, where we managed a $39 billion portfolio in South Asia. From that experience, I define scale as having a large impact on development and poverty alleviation. The second point of view comes from teaching a course on scaling up at the Harvard Kennedy School. And the third point of view comes from working with large grassroots organizations that are in the process of scaling up.


ZIA KHAN


ISABEL GUERRERO


HARISH HANDE


JEFFREY L. BRADACH

Zia Khan: At The Rockefeller Foundation, our goal is to catalyze innovations that get taken to scale. Many of these need to be solutions that are departures from the status quo to address some of society's big problems. Finding an innovation isn't the hardest part. The hardest part is taking advantage of the existing capacities of government, markets, private sector actors, and communities to scale up these innovations without requiring a lot of disruption in how they operate and organize.

Harish Hande: I belong to SELCO, an organization that provides energy to underserved Indians. For me, scale is about replicating processes that address the unmet needs of underserved communities and the development of the enabling ecosystem. It's not about scaling up individual products or individual companies. The best example of scale up is street vending. The concept or process of street vending has scaled up, not a particular street vendor.

What are the barriers to scaling up effective solutions?

Khan: What really fuels scale in the private sector is the ability of a successful company to use its growing revenues to pay for the cost of expanding or to attract investors with a good chance for high returns. That creates a closed and virtuous loop between growing results and growing funding. But in the social sector, driving scale is a little trickier. Growing impact doesn't directly drive additional funds back to the organization, and funders aren't necessarily optimizing for measurable impact. So in the social sector it's a little bit tricky to scale up solutions by simply counting on a single organization's success. And even if you could, the big social challenges require system transformation, which means that markets, the private sector, and communities have to start changing what they do and how they interact. This requires a paradigm shift in how people think about solving a problem and their role in driving the solution. Neither of these is easy, but they are possible. The green revolution and public health are two examples that come to mind of how redefining the problem was essential to creating transformative impact.

What is the role of funders in galvanizing a group of organizations to scale up? Can it be engineered, or does it occur organically?

Khan: In our experience there's a very difficult tension between strategy and implementation. You have to set up a long-term vision and goal, sort of a north star, and then you develop an initial plan for getting there. But then you have to be highly opportunistic, because plans often blow up pretty quickly and you have to work with what actors are actually doing on the ground, how you can help them, and how you can leverage their resources and goals and keep steering toward the original north star. Let me give you an example of an initiative recently launched by The Rockefeller Foundation called Smart Power, an effort to bring electricity and economic development to rural areas using innovative, renewable, off-grid models. We're using solar powered minigrids to provide electricity to households, small businesses, and anchor buyers like the local telecom. In India, we set an initial goal of reaching 1,000 villages. Our original plan was based on a fairly rigid model that we developed in highly managed demonstration projects. We assumed that we had to scale up the original innovation. But as we started to go to scale, we realized that the model had to be more flexible. To attract a large private sector actor, we had to let them experiment to better leverage their existing capacities. So in some ways this was both engineered and organic—we engineered the 1,000-village target to accelerate progress, and we organically adapted on the basis of what we learned from that accelerated progress.

Hande: You need to have numerous examples at the grassroots level of successful initiatives in order to influence the policymakers. But in the Global South there is insufficient risk capital and human resource development at the grassroots level to do this regularly. And when there is, do you know who gets the money? It's the people who are experts in PowerPoint, Word, and Excel! Many of the non-English-speaking social entrepreneurs around the world are left behind. They are the people who created the street vending business and the agriculture sector in India. Until we break those barriers, allocate capital and human resources, and build an ecosystem to develop those types of entrepreneurs, we cannot achieve large scale.

What is the role of government in scaling up solutions, and how important is it, particularly in the Global South?

Guerrero: A great example is the United Kingdom, which has developed the third sector for social entrepreneurs. What they have done in building an ecosystem is quite interesting. As Zia mentioned, not only can you leverage a large player, but you can also think of finding opportunity where the government might actually be interested in developing this ecosystem for the entire sector. So you're not picking those who come with PowerPoint, but you are actually developing the conditions for social entrepreneurs to thrive by lowering the barriers to scale.

The second example is BRAC, the largest NGO in the world and the only one that has been able to reach the kind of scale that we are talking about. From the very beginning, BRAC's founder Fazle Hasan Abed thought, "Scale, scale, scale." That was the only way the government would pay attention. So in a way he was creating an ecosystem within Bangladesh. The government was quite wise to allow an institution like BRAC to grow. One of the reasons BRAC grew was that it was part of an informal ecosystem. It wasn't just BRAC, it was also Grameen, ASA, and many other NGOs that enabled Bangladesh to go from what was called a "basket case" in the 1970s to now, where it has achieved some of the MDGs [Millennium Development Goals] that India or Pakistan did not.

Khan: It's a mix of all the above. First, I do believe that the government is a critical ingredient of achieving large scale. Unfortunately, their role is often invisible. When people point to Silicon Valley as a model of entrepreneur-led scale, they ignore the massive investments by the federal government that enabled scale, such as building the Internet infrastructure and funding the research at Stanford University that sparks entrepreneurial ideas before they're even ready for angel investments. So I do believe that the government plays an important role in scale, and it needs to be recognized. When I think of the Global South, it's a really interesting mix. In our rural electrification work in India, we have been able to identify some of the critical things the government can do. Part of the challenge is that they may not know what is needed to help a market grow. That's where an intermediary like ourselves, which has a system perspective, can play a useful role by ensuring that the government doesn't just respond to the loudest voice, but instead responds to all perspectives—communities, small-scale entrepreneurs, corporations, and nonprofits—to achieve multiple goals.

Harish, in what way was the government a critical player in enabling SELCO to scale up in India, and in what way did it get in the way?

Hande: Government should listen to practitioners about the barriers they confront and create policies that actually remove them. But too often they just create subsidies to try to get around the barriers. For example, when the solar home lighting system subsidy was implemented in India, the market did its part, but then it suddenly collapsed. The subsidy was there, but the industry stopped financing it because they were not getting reimbursed by the government. In fact, that subsidy destroyed the market. Unfortunately, I think government is often a big barrier in many ways.

Guerrero: I can see why Harish is very cautious about the role of government. When you have a non-enlightened government, things can go really, really bad, even if they started with good intentions. We need to stop thinking about government as being a donor to the poor. Instead, the government needs to create a climate that encourages entrepreneurship. If we do this it will allow potential social entrepreneurs to thrive who know the locality or community well. One example of a successful entrepreneurship program is SEWA's rural enterprise network of women. They have millions of women involved in producing spices, and they have been developing a distribution channel where the same rural women go to villages to sell their products.

What are some of the most notable things happening around scaling in the Global South that might be relevant in the Global North or in the world more broadly?

Guerrero: There are amazing things happening in the Global South that can be used in other parts of the world. The moment for reverse innovation is here. Take, for example, what is happening with Bridge International Academy. It has a "school-in-a-box" program in Kenya that is now being taken to other African countries. In addition, many social entrepreneurs in South Asia have created very, very large-volume, low-profit, and high-quality solutions that can be used in other parts of the world. I think technology is making this possible in a way that we never imagined.

Are enough social entrepreneurs and funders thinking from the beginning about how to get to massive scale?

Khan: I'm not seeing it enough, unfortunately. It's a skill set that I haven't seen widely among the social entrepreneurs who talk about scaling their ideas. When I encounter entrepreneurs in the for-profit sector, they are constantly thinking about and driving the mechanisms that will exponentially grow their business. You see serial entrepreneurs in the for-profit sector who have worked in a range of industries. They know how to think about an idea, how to coordinate resources, how to operationalize for scale, and so on. But I don't see that in the social sector. I'm waiting to meet a social entrepreneur who had a huge impact on education, then went on to create a huge impact on health, and then had a huge impact on maybe water security, using some kind of common approach to get to scale. I recognize that it's much more complex and maybe not even possible to systematically scale up in the social sector, and most social entrepreneurs have their hands full just trying to keep running. So it's an open question whether a set of scaling practices can be developed within the social sector and replicated across different organizations and problems.

Guerrero: One organization that does approach things this way is BRAC. They started with a vision of scale. They had development programs, like education and health, which they were scaling up, and they built many social enterprises over time, like Aarong and dairy. At each of these enterprises, 50 percent of the profits are reinvested and 50 percent go to subsidize the development programs. This has allowed BRAC to be mostly self-sustained. Initially 60 percent of their budget used to be funded by external donors, and now it has come down to just 30 percent, thanks to the social enterprise side of BRAC.

Khan: BRAC is a great example. I'm glad that you raised it. It would also be interesting to think about how mergers and acquisitions could be applied in the social sector, because that is a very important way to get to scale in the for-profit sector. There are all sorts of reasons why that doesn't happen in the social sector, but I think it has potential. If you think about it as an ecosystem, the big organizations could take some of the good ideas of social entrepreneurs who are good at innovation but are having a hard time growing organically, and give them an operational platform for scale. I have been thinking a lot about that lately—how large international NGOs might partner with small social entrepreneurs on the ground.

> *What if we thought even more ambitiously about what it would take to scale up an organization or an intervention that is making a real, but small difference?* —Jeff Bradach

Hande: I would be a little careful using the example of BRAC and Grameen, because the amount of grant and soft money that went to build both organizations was large and may be difficult to replicate.

About $8 billion has been invested in Uber. If it takes that much capital to take things to scale, the simple answer, but incredibly challenging answer, may be that we need to convince more funders, philanthropists, and governments to make that kind of massive investment. What if we thought even more ambitiously about what it would take to scale up an organization or an intervention that is making a real, but small difference?

Khan: The goals of a venture capitalist and the CEO of Uber are aligned because both want Uber to become as valuable as possible. One of the tricks with grantmaking is that the outcomes of social change are not so readily measurable or comparable, and sometimes people get as invested in the methodology and approach as they are in the results. There are also cultural differences. For example, if something is really successful and a funder has provided early support, the more that funder claims the original success, the more they risk losing funders who are prioritizing support for something new rather than something that works. I think it's the same for government programs. Funders, governments, social entrepreneurs, and all entities trying to scale up need to be aware of the need for leadership and brand building among different funders and political actors. What we need to figure out is: How do you create multiple opportunities for leadership? How do we start to create a sense of pride in scaling up good ideas versus being the one who spotted the great innovation at the early stage and jumped on it?

Guerrero: I'm thinking of the World Bank, and I wonder whether foundations have the same constraint in terms of risk aversion. The fact is, the reward system will not work if people are worried about failure. Therefore you will always need leadership in the willingness to take a risk when it comes to new initiatives, or to bet on a team that has the potential to do amazing things.

How do we change these dynamics? How do we encourage more risk-taking, more attention to building an ecosystem for social change, and more focus on scaling up?

Hande: One way to do this is to elevate the role of practitioners. Practitioners are always at the bottom of the feeding chain. Even at conferences, you hardly see practitioners on panels. It's mostly the policymakers, funders, banks, and multilaterals who get the visibility. If you look at due diligence teams, successful teams have practitioners who had experience in the field. It's not about somebody who has an MBA from a branded institution, it's about who knows what it takes to actually create one branch in a rural area. I encourage funders to include practitioners in the due diligence process. Not necessarily large players, because they are already two or three generations away from what is happening today at the ground level. Rather, they should get small NGOs that are working at the ground level.

Thank you all for your thoughts. As you have said in various ways, addressing problems at scale will take thinking and acting in new ways. The insights and work you all bring is pushing us in these new directions. We look forward to continuing this conversation and learning alongside all of you.

Scaling Up Inclusive Markets

More poor households benefit when the private and social sectors work together to build better environments for inclusive business.

BY HARVEY KOH & JAIDEEP PRABHU

Lately, more people have begun to expect the private sector to expand its efforts to improve the welfare of the poor—not only by creating jobs, but also by developing affordable and beneficial products for less fortunate populations in sectors such as financial services, health, education, energy, and housing. And in many ways, South Asia is at the forefront of such efforts. Working with social enterprises in the region, established corporations are creating business models that aim to achieve both social impact and financial return.

Donors, investors, and governments alike are increasingly interested in the potential of these "inclusive businesses" to improve lives and reduce poverty while driving economic growth. The reality, however, is that few of these new models have truly scaled up to meet the needs of the millions who need them. That's because they often face a plethora of scaling barriers, both internally and in their surrounding ecosystems.

As Harvey Koh, one of the co-authors of this article, explained in a 2014 report: "Think of the *value chain* barriers facing firms trying to deliver new pharmaceutical products to rural areas that lack cost-effective logistics providers and pharmacy outlets. Or consider the *public goods* barriers faced by firms offering clean cook stoves to customers who have little awareness of the health hazards of indoor smoke from cooking, much less the value of a product that reduces this smoke. There may also be *government* barriers that potentially inhibit the growth of these new industries, such as countries where solar lighting products bear a significant tax burden while kerosene benefits from a generous public subsidy."[1]

As they grow, inclusive businesses already face the considerable challenges of developing their products and refining their strategies, building out their teams, and securing funding and investment capital. Expecting them also to assemble the missing pieces in the value chains around them, fill in for absent public goods, and influence policy and regulation is unrealistic.

Although ever-greater amounts of capital flow into impact investing funds, enterprise challenge funds, and accelerators—all of which are focused on the firms themselves—efforts to work systematically with and alongside these firms to overcome external scaling barriers are disappointingly thin on the ground. Where inclusive businesses have scaled up, they have done so because governments and NGOs worked with and alongside them to remove those barriers.

SCALING UP SOLAR HOME SYSTEMS

Consider the growth of the solar home systems (SHS) industry in Bangladesh. Solar home systems have great potential to bring clean electricity to rural, off-grid communities. Yet in such communities in Bangladesh before 2003, only an estimated 7,000 households out of a total of 27 million were using solar home systems.[2]

That year, however, the state-owned Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL) began a program to help scale up SHS solutions to reach off-grid rural populations, as part of the government's vision of ensuring "Access to Electricity for All" by 2021. Backed by the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility, the US Agency for International Development, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and others, IDCOL addressed critical scaling barriers faced by SHS companies by providing flexible refinancing, as well as grant support and technical assistance.[3] As a result of IDCOL's support, 58 SHS providers were able to extend appropriate credit to many more households at an affordable price point and to provide effective after-sales and maintenance support.

IDCOL's efforts have resulted in more than a decade of exponential growth for SHS, which had installed more than 3.7 million systems by 2015, serving about 17 million people (about 11 percent of the total population of Bangladesh). By 2017, IDCOL aims to have facilitated 6 million installations, generating 220 megawatts of electricity for communities that were previously unserved.[4]

SCALING UP MICROFINANCE INSTITUTIONS

The microfinance industry in India provides another example. Microfinance institutions (MFIs) offer loans to micro-entrepreneurs who are not able to access mainstream bank financing. In 1999, MFIs were a nascent industry in India, with about 60,000 borrowers. By 2007, however, MFIs were serving nearly ten million borrowers, and leading lenders such as SKS and Bandhan became well known—and rightly—as the stars of the industry. Nevertheless, the importance of industry facilitators in this growth story has been much less well understood.

Central to this story is the seven-year-long partnership between SIDBI (a local development finance institution) and DFID. In addition to funding and building the capacity of the MFIs themselves, the partnership worked to create a growth-friendly market infrastructure. For example, SIDBI created a specialist MFI credit rating agency, Micro-Credit Ratings International Ltd. The agency provided independent ratings on MFIs, building banks' confidence in lending to the fledgling industry.

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Another good example is Sa-Dhan, an industry association founded by MFI and other community development finance institution leaders. Sa-Dhan successfully advocated public policy changes such as the removal of interest rate caps, which jeopardized the sustainability of the microfinance model, and the inclusion of MFIs in the government's Priority Sector Lending policy. Without these efforts, it is unlikely that the industry ever would have become viable as a market-based model, much less have scaled up so dramatically.[5]

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Governments can also be a significant actor in facilitating the growth of these new business models, particularly when they recognize the potential for the models to help them achieve their public policy objectives.

In India, municipal governments in Delhi and Pondicherry, for example, have encouraged the development of decentralized water kiosks by issuing official tenders that give selected providers access to the land and water sources they require. These new kiosks provide affordable safe drinking water to low-income communities that previously had unreliable access to costly—and mostly contaminated—water sources. Meanwhile, state governments in Odisha and Madhya Pradesh are working on policy changes that would make it easier for private developers to move into low-income housing projects without drawing on the public purse or compromising quality standards.

In Bangladesh, the Access to Information Program (a2i), operating under the aegis of the Prime Minister's office, has brought about a revolution in how government services are delivered to citizens in remote areas. The most revolutionary aspect of the program is its use of local for-profit businesses to bring government services to citizens. To do so, a2i has set up one-stop service outlets in all 4,547 Union Parishads (the lowest tier of local government) of Bangladesh. These centers, which are run by local entrepreneurs (whom the a2i program selects, trains, and supports), use ICT to bring government information and services as close as possible to the homes of citizens in rural areas. In the process, the program ensures that service providers and users save time, money, and visits to government offices.

LESSONS FOR CREATING INCLUSIVE MARKETS

The private sector, through market-based solutions, can make a huge difference in the fight against poverty. The challenge, however, clearly extends beyond the companies and business models themselves into the ecosystem that surrounds the products and services they wish to offer. On the basis of our experiences and observations, we believe that those attempting to scale up inclusive markets should take three important lessons to heart:

- Take an ecosystem view from the outset. Before you jump into developing and implementing your particular inclusive market solution, think about all the stakeholders you will need to involve in order for the market to work.
- Identify ways in which you can bring essential stakeholders on board to create the environment that's needed to create and scale up the market. Forming these partnerships early on will be crucial to ensure the long-term sustainability of your efforts.
- Be proactive about supporting and managing the ecosystem of essential stakeholders and partners. Keeping all the partners engaged and happy with the performance of the ecosystem and the market will require regular and proactive communication, interaction and stakeholder management.

Understanding the importance of these ecosystems, and learning how to build them, will go a long way toward global efforts to scale up inclusive markets. Our focus in this short article has been on South Asia, but we believe that the lessons we offer here apply equally in other parts of the developing world, such as Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. We also believe that these lessons can be applied in principle by businesses and governments seeking to serve low-income communities in more developed contexts, such as Eastern and Southern Europe, and even potentially in parts of Western Europe and North America.

Notes

1 Harvey Koh, Nidhi Hegde, and Ashish Karamchandani, "Beyond the Pioneer: Getting Inclusive Industries to Scale—Executive Summary," Deloitte India, 2014.

2 "Bangladesh, Lighting up Rural Communities," The World Bank, 2013.

3 J. R. Siegel and Atiq Rahman, "The Diffusion of Off-grid Solar Photovoltaic Technology in Rural Bangladesh," Tufts University, 2011.

4 "Solar Home System Program," Infrastructure Development Company Ltd., http://idcol.org/home/solar

5 Arguably, these industry facilitators could and should have gone further to help MFIs mitigate the financial and political risks that plunged the industry into crisis after 2007. For more, see Koh et al., "Beyond the Pioneer," chapter 5.

Lessons in Scaling and Failing

The challenges of scaling up programs aimed at empowering adolescent girls in Bangladesh and Uganda.

BY ANJALI SARKER, SHAMERAN ABED, & CHRISTIAN SEELOS

It is one of the few established truths in the development world that effective poverty reduction must target women and girls. Not only are women and girls disproportionately affected by poverty, but the positive spillover effects of investing in women and girls are greater than for men and boys. This became clear to us in the 1970s, and ever since then we have been learning and adapting how best to target women and girls in the new and evolving places that we work in.

When development workers find a model that works the temptation is to spread it as far and wide as possible to increase the impact. Yet the drive to maximize social impact can sometimes blind us to the need to go back to the drawing board when entering a new environment. In this article we explore several challenges that BRAC encountered in its efforts to empower adolescent girls in Bangladesh and Uganda. Then we show how analytical frameworks may help us to do a better job in designing interventions that reflect contextual differences and to learn more effectively from past successes and failures in varied contexts.

EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS

In its early days, during the 1980s, BRAC realized that organizing communities was a powerful means of empowering the poor because it helped those who were most deprived find their voices and their peers, advocate for themselves, and participate more fully in local decision making. Subsequently, BRAC began to help poor adult women form community groups, using them as a conduit for service delivery. The results were dramatic: With basic financial support, these groups were able to realize dramatic improvements in their financial and social well-being.

In 1993, BRAC launched its first initiative tailored for adolescent girls, named Adolescent Development Program (ADP), in Bangladesh. ADP focused on social empowerment. BRAC set up *kishori kendros* (girls' clubs), which were designed to be safe spaces where girls aged 10 to 19 could read, socialize, play games, sing, and exchange views about social and personal issues.

BRAC spotted a potentially rewarding connection between the two efforts. Inspired by the experience of empowering adult women by providing financial services and the potential for using girls' clubs as a strong platform, BRAC leaders wondered: If adolescents were taught to save and invest their savings in income-generating activities early in their lives, wouldn't they increase their chances of becoming socially and financially empowered? Using as a model the network of girls' clubs, in 2003 BRAC started a separate program, Employment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA), which offered credit and saving services to adolescent girls, developed skills training necessary for self-employment, and facilitated forums where participants could discuss social issues.

In 2008, BRAC launched ELA in Uganda with funding from the Nike Foundation (and later funding from the Mastercard Foundation). ELA in Uganda put even more emphasis on helping young women become financially literate, engaging them in livelihood training, and helping them to use microfinance effectively. The results in Uganda exceeded expectations: The likelihood of girls to engage in income-generating activities increased by 72 percent after two years of participation.[1] Teenage pregnancy rates declined by 26 percent and rates of early entry into marriage or cohabitation fell by 58 percent. As of March 2015, the program had 71,686 club members in Uganda, making it one of the country's largest youth organizations.

Meanwhile, back home in Bangladesh, where BRAC had much higher levels of experience, trust, and resources than in Uganda, ELA wasn't a success. Despite having a more than 160,000 adolescent girls as members—and despite the organization's efforts to popularize its program—the program struggled. In December 2014, ELA closed its activities in Bangladesh.

The differences in program success between Bangladesh and Uganda left BRAC wondering: Why has this financial empowerment model had a huge impact in Uganda but not in Bangladesh? What can we learn from these experiences?

THE FACE OF POVERTY FRAMEWORK

Often when organizations see one of their programs falter while a seemingly identical program succeeds, they are quick to blame the service providers and the people who deliver the programs. After all, it seems logical to expect the same outcome for apparently similar poverty-related challenges even in slightly different contexts. The problem is that this logic is flawed. It is grounded in the desire to replicate and scale up standard solutions quickly in order to speed up progress.

The Face of Poverty framework, developed by Christian Seelos (one of this article's authors), offers a potential remedy for the problem. The framework is a diagnostic tool designed to help organizations conduct a robust analysis of the similarities and differences between poverty-associated problems and needs by breaking them down into four distinct categories: economic, cognitive, normative, and power and politics.

As Seelos explained in a Dec. 18, 2014, *Stanford Social Innovation Review* article: "Economic and cognitive barriers have closely related implications for innovation and

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scaling. I thus refer to them as technical problems or needs. Similarly, I group normative and power/politics barriers into relational problems or needs. Often a mix of technical and relational barriers defines problems."

USING THE FRAMEWORK

We recently explored the reasons behind the differences in outcomes of ELA in Bangladesh and Uganda. We applied the Faces of Poverty framework to see what insights it could reveal that would help us better understand the contextual differences between the two areas. Working with the framework, we saw that if the people designing the programs considered just one of the four dimensions, they might believe that one design could serve both areas. But considering all four dimensions concomitantly revealed less obvious differences—the hidden dimensions of the challenge of adolescent empowerment in each location. (See "Adolescent Girls and Financial Empowerment in Bangladesh and Uganda" below for more detail.)

In Uganda, girls have access to some business opportunities, but they often lack skills and capital. Those who do engage in business are able to control their own finances and make decisions about marriage and pregnancy. Thus technical barriers more than relational barriers seem to define the problem space for ELA Uganda. And so in Uganda, training and access to financial services are readily adopted by girls who worry about unemployment. This makes a big difference fairly quickly and efficiently.

In Bangladesh, women face much steeper relational barriers. Most women get married young and have very little power within the family. Normative barriers restrict women's participation in the social, economic, and political spheres and prevent their mobility outside their homes. Strong family bonds offer women some security, even if they do not work; nevertheless, girls are unable to take advantage of training and financial services because of the formidable normative and power barriers that they face. Programs that seek to help girls achieve financial empowerment in Bangladesh, then, must focus explicitly on changing gender norms in order to succeed. Of course, Bangladeshi girls also face economic barriers and Ugandan girls are not completely free of normative barriers. But the relative magnitude of the types of barriers is vastly different in the two countries.

FROM FRAMEWORK TO ACTION

This analysis of BRAC's adolescent empowerment programs in Bangladesh and Uganda suggests some central lessons:

Don't mistake the symptoms for the cause. Symptoms are often easy to spot. Technical issues are often readily visible as well, perhaps because we intuitively look for them. But unless an organization is aware of the causes of problems and the barriers to progress, achieving long-term positive change is unlikely.

Recognize that some barriers are easier to overcome than others. The majority of social problems are sustained by a complex blend of interrelated barriers to progress and change. Surmounting each of these barriers requires particular strategies. It makes sense to design a roadmap that addresses all barriers, taking into account their relative difficulties, and also the order in which solving them will have the desired outcome.

Build programs that can evolve as the barriers change. All barriers change over time, and as a result, previously successful approaches may become ineffective. To stay relevant, the programs addressing those barriers need to evolve with the changes in environment. Having a shared understanding of the face of poverty among program staff helps map these changes more systematically.

Looking from the outside, it would be easy to surmise that BRAC handled the management, resourcing, and delivery of its ELA program in Uganda better than it did in Bangladesh. But we believe that the ELA model effectively eliminated the barriers facing adolescents in Uganda in a way that it did not in Bangladesh. As BRAC continues to experiment with empowering adolescents through financial services in Bangladesh, the ELA experience affirms an obvious but all too often neglected lesson: Though poverty may look similar in new environments, development professionals must first disentangle what is *different* before applying lessons from past successes.

Adolescent Girls and Financial Empowerment in Bangladesh and Uganda

	TECHNICAL BARRIERS Characteristics: Change is perceived as beneficial, benefits materialize quickly, and solutions are easy to replicate.		RELATIONAL BARRIERS Characteristics: Change is perceived as a threat, benefits take time, and solutions are difficult to replicate.	
	Economic Barriers	**Cognitive Barriers**	**Normative Barriers**	**Power Barriers**
Bangladesh	For example, most young girls don't have access to savings or credit facilities. Adolescent girls in school get government stipends, but fewer than 20 percent of girls reported saving any of that money.	Though girls outnumber boys in primary and secondary schools, they don't learn employable skills.	66 percent of girls are married before age 18 and 58 percent are pregnant by age 19. Married women are expected to stay home, do housework, and raise children. 64 percent of rural women are not part of the labor force.	Household decision-making and spending are controlled by men. Women, especially adolescent girls, are perceived to be incapable of making decisions.
Uganda	Girls lack access to the resources they need to be self-employed, such as land and capital. Many cannot afford school.	The hidden costs of education keep Ugandan girls away from schools. 60 percent of girls worry that they will not find a job in the formal economy as adults.	Fewer than 50 percent of girls are married before age 18. Women face fewer restrictions to their mobility outside the home. 76 percent of women are in the labor force, and 72 percent are involved in small-scale farming.	Women and adolescent girls are more involved in the time-consuming aspects of farming (e.g. weeding and planting) and men dominate the remunerative activities (e.g. selling produce). Therefore men have more control of money.

Note

1 Oriana Bandiera, Niklas Buehren, Robin Burgess, et al., "Women's Empowerment in Action: Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial in Africa," http://www.povertyactionlab.org/publication/women%E2%80%99s-empowerment-action-evidence-randomized-control-trial-africa

BRAC is a development organization dedicated to alleviating poverty by empowering the poor. From 1972, over the course of its evolution, BRAC has been playing a role of recognizing and tackling the many different realities of poverty. It has forged a highly successful development model that is comprehensive and hinges on effectively expanding grassroots innovations to create large-scale impact. With its evolution, BRAC developed support services in the areas of human rights and social empowerment, education and health, economic empowerment and enterprise development, livelihood training, environmental sustainability, and disaster preparedness. Born in Bangladesh, BRAC is currently operating in 12 countries in Asia and Africa.
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