

# Evaluating Scaling Efforts: Measuring What Matters

Summary of the EvalForward discussion

JANUARY 2025

**Hezekiah Agwara, PhD**, agricultural and development economist and policy expert at OGIVES Ltd. in Kenya submitted this discussion in the context of the CGIAR's efforts to improvement scientific and practical approach to evaluating scaling efforts within research for agricultural development.



The following guiding questions were posed to stimulate discussion and reflection:

1. **What is your professional experience with scaling, particularly scaling innovations?**
2. **What have you learned about evaluating efforts to scale impact?**
3. **By what criteria should efforts to scale impact be judged successful?**
4. **Are current monitoring and evaluation methods sufficient to judge the success of scaling efforts? Do we need new methods to meet this new evaluation challenge?**
5. **How do we consider the complexity of scaling in systems with multiple collaborators across diverse contexts?**

## BACKGROUND

The Evaluation Function of the CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES), collaborating consultants, and the EvalForward team supported the in-depth and lively discussion on the importance and methods to evaluate scaling within agricultural research for development. The online discussion gathered 23 contributions. Participants come from diverse professional backgrounds and many regions of the world.

Participant profiles included monitoring and evaluation (M&E) specialists, evaluation leads, evaluation specialists, founders, researchers, consultants, and government representatives, among others. The discussion was dynamic, reflecting a wide range of perspectives and fostering a constructive exchange of ideas.

## KEY SUBMISSIONS

Key contributions that arose in the discussion are summarised below. You can access [the full discussion here](#).

- There is agreement amongst participants that scaling is **under appreciated in evaluation** and pathways to scaling require more research, evaluation and attention from donors. Further, evaluating scaling efforts is a complicated and messy task. The discussion reflects a diversity in experiences and approaches to evaluating scaling, including an observation that it is often over simplified as merely replication of a smaller pilot project to other contexts (e.g. undertaking the project in another region or country) or linear pathways to adoption that rely on ambitious assumptions about the market or government policy, rather than reconceptualised as a new kind of program that requires questioning of assumptions.
- Participants agree that **the principles of good evaluation generally apply to evaluation of scaling efforts as well**: participants emphasised participatory design and implementation with local partners and recognised that scaling requires traversing different contexts with different needs and capacities to adopt innovations. However, there are no consistent and off-the-shelf tools for evaluating scaling.
- **Sustainability of scaling was identified as a key** challenge and therefore metric, ensuring that interventions persist beyond implementation phases of scaling programs. This reveals the persistent challenge of how to measure sustainability. This also connects with the need to engage in systems thinking to ensure that innovations are integrated into market, policy and farming systems. This links to examples outlined by participants such as the **Scaling Readiness** approach, undertaken within CGIAR.

- The wealth of knowledge of those in the discussion reveal numerous distinctions in scaling efforts that are worthy of consideration. For example, discussing some basic concepts of different approaches to scaling one can distinguish between: **Scaling Up**, increasing the size or scope of an intervention to reach a larger population; **Scaling Out**, expanding to new geographic or demographic areas; and, **Scaling Deep**, changing underlying cultural, social, or systemic norms to sustain impact. Another interesting example is distinguishing between **adopters** of an innovation (e.g., farmers who use a new seed); those who **provide and benefit from the use and adoption** of the innovation (e.g., seed shop, agribusiness); and those who are **impacted by diffusion the innovation** (e.g., families, local governments, research centres). It is recognised that scaling efforts and actors can cross these categories as well.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, scaling efforts as an explicit focus of evaluation is an emerging area, although much of the experience and expertise in MELIA professionals still apply. There is broad agreement that there is currently a lack of current explicit attention given to scaling in practice and implementation. The IAES recognises the importance of building frameworks and methods that target scaling.

### Way Forward

The results of this discussion will provide a key input into the work the IAES's Evaluation Function is undertaking to prepare for the evaluation of scaling efforts within the new Portfolio of CGIAR. A methods note is under production that we invite you to engage with upon **publication**.

### Acknowledgements

The EvalForward team and the Evaluation Function of the CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES) would like to sincerely thank all participants once again for their great contribution to the discussion.

Discussion moderation and results curation and collation: Ibtissem Jouini (CGIAR), Svetlana Negroustoueva (CGIAR), Matt Armstrong, John Gargani and Innocent Chamisa.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Here is a short summary of some resources shared by participants throughout the discussion:

McLean, R., & Gargani, J. (2019). *Scaling impact: Innovation for the public good*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group ; International Development Research Centre.

Sartas, M., Schut, M., Proietti, C., Thiele, G., & Leeuwis, C. (2020). Scaling Readiness: Science and practice of an approach to enhance impact of research for development. *Agricultural Systems*, 183, 102874. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2020.102874>

Wigboldus, S., & Brouwers, J. (2016). *Using a Theory of Scaling to guide decision making. Towards a structured approach to support responsible scaling of innovations in the context of agrifood systems*. Wageningen University and Research.

Woltering, L., Fehlenberg, K., Gerard, B., Ubels, J., & Cooley, L. (2019). Scaling – from “reaching many” to sustainable systems change at scale: A critical shift in mindset. *Agricultural Systems*, 176, 102652. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2019.102652>.

Above publication from the special Issue on Science of Scaling: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/special-issue/108MNQ3QF2N>