changing farming for a changing climate

Adam Smith International

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INFORMATION BRIEF:

# Assessing Opportunities for the Scaling Up of Agricultural Projects

This information brief highlights key findings in the Vuna report "Scaling Up and Scalability: Concepts, Frameworks and Assessment," by Pooniah Anandajayasekeram (October 2016). Online: http://www.vuna-africa.com

## Key points

- The process of scaling up fails more often than it succeeds, suggesting a need for tools to help make better decisions on scalability.
- Assessments of scalability should start not after the project has finished but before it begins—in the pilot design stage—and should remain in place as an integral part of each project's ongoing monitoring and evaluation efforts.
- These assessments should account for diverse determinants of a project's success, including its credibility among stakeholders, political support, sustainability of financing, and return on investment.
- To establish rigour in the assessment, a model for assessing scalability is proposed. Although this model includes a numerical "scalability index," Vuna considers the careful and methodical diagnosis of constraints to scaling up to be more important than the score achieved.

## Introduction

Vuna—a climate smart agriculture programme funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development and implemented by Adam Smith International—is investing in a series of innovation model projects designed to improve the climate resilience of smallholder farmers in East and Southern Africa. If successful, these projects may be scaled up in one of two ways: either expanded to cover more beneficiaries or replicated in other locations. This shift from small to larger scale is known as "scaling up," defined by WHO/ExpandNet (2012) as "deliberate efforts to increase the impact of innovations, successfully

tested in pilot or experimental projects, so as to benefit more people and to foster policy and programme development on a lasting basis."

Vuna recognises that while scaling up is the goal of many pilot projects, successful examples of it are difficult to find. Many agricultural development projects appear highly successful on a pilot scale but prove impossible to expand or replicate. Scale-up is compromised by a range of factors, including a lack of political commitment or financing, insufficient technical or management skills on the implementation team, and uncertainty about the return on investment.

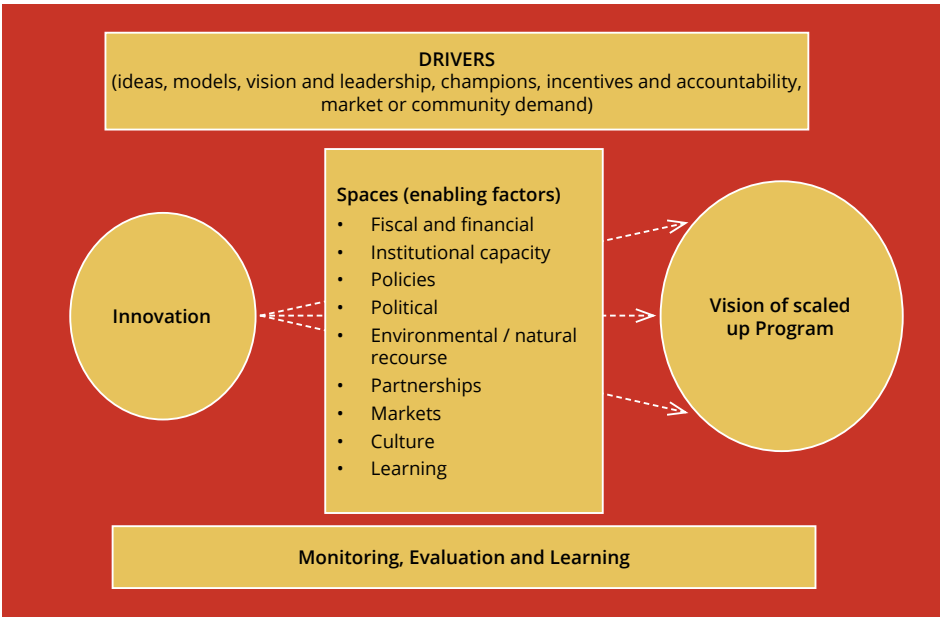
Given the large investments involved, decision-makers need better tools for assessing which projects are good candidates for scaling up. Developing such tools is the purpose of this report. After reviewing the literature on scalability, the author developed a model for conducting such assessments. The model was tested on a sample of Vuna projects in Southern Africa, and the results offer lessons for further application.

## Model for assessing scaling up

There are two broad approaches to scaling up: through the market and through the public sector. Successful market programmes require profits to justify further investment, whereas successful public-sector programmes require long-term political commitment, with an expectation that a strong public benefit will be delivered. In both cases, an appropriate cost-benefit analysis should guide the investment. Sustainability and scalability are deeply intertwined, so there should be a long-term strategy for achieving sustainable financing.

The literature makes clear that planning for scaling up should be built into the design of a pilot project (Cooley & Kohl, 2006; Linn, 2012; Simmons, 2007; Holcombe, 2012; IFAD, 2013). Moving through the stages of a project—from an innovative idea in a small pilot to a large-scale intervention—is an iterative process, and

**Figure 1:** Proposed framework for analysis




*Source: GLEE Synthesis Report, 2014*

the agency responsible must reconsider the question of scaling repeatedly during the course of implementation and evaluation.

To ensure that this iterative process takes place, a systematic approach is required. The report proposes a three-step process for assessing the scalability of a given innovation.

First, address the nature of the innovation or project strategy. Questions include: Has the innovation or strategy been tested and proven in the local setting? Does it provide an advantage over existing practice? Is it compatible with the culture and production systems of the end users?

Second, analyse the preparedness of key partners to expand the application of the strategy using a tool such as the SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). Establish what is expected of each partner and whether they have the competency and budget to deliver on these expectations.

Third, calculate the scalability index. Developed for this report, this numerical index is based on ten conditions necessary for scalability to be successful:

1. A clear vision, strategy, and pathway for scaling up exists.
2. Target group and end-users are actively engaged in piloting and prepared for scaling up.
3. Drivers of change – usually leaders within the society – exist and are effective.
4. The enabling environment – finances, policy, markets, etc. – is conducive to scaling up.
5. The innovation is aligned with larger societal goals and embedded in local culture.
6. The necessary partnership exists, and the partners are fully engaged.
7. Coordination with partners is smooth and decision-making process is relatively simple.
8. A plan for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and learning space exists and is functional.
9. Lead agency and partner organisations are identified and ready for implementation.
10. An ex-ante cost benefit analysis is complete and favourable.

The report outlines a score-sheet for each of these 10 conditions. The totals from each are added up to achieve an overall scalability index, with a maximum possible score of 100.

> **“The most important aspect of the proposed model is its ability to identify likely constraints to scaling up.”**

## Lessons learned in applying the model

The proposed approach was used to assess the scalability of two Vuna-supported projects: electronic voucher systems in Zambia and the Zimbabwe Super Seeds Project in Zimbabwe. Partners involved in the projects considered the model to be logically consistent and technically sound.

Though the application of the model was largely successful, some caution is in order. First, the numerical index score should not be viewed as carrying mathematical precision, because the scoring is based on subjective assessments. To minimise bias, the leader of the assessment as

well as some members of the assessment team should be outside experts with no vested interest in the outcome.

To facilitate the diagnostic review, the assessment team should also include members of the organisation implementing the pilot project. The team may also include representatives of the organisation most likely to lead any possible scaling-up, as well as other stakeholders, including the ultimate beneficiaries.

The most important aspect of the proposed model is its ability to identify likely constraints to scaling up. Careful analysis of each constraint will allow a project-design or evaluation team to develop strategies for resolving each constraint. This analysis, in turn, should be incorporated into any revised or scaled project plan.

The analysis also will highlight threats to the viability of a scaled project that need to be monitored. Planners need to acknowledge that many successful pilots are unlikely to be scalable. The process should help reduce investment losses by facilitating recognition of initiatives that should not be scaled up.

The proposed model now needs to be tested more broadly. Vuna encourages further refinement of this initiative.

# References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