

Major Takeaways

“Scaling for Impact: Improving Lives Through a Systems Approach” Learning Event

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The Scaling for Impact learning event encompassed a two-day Summit with internal and external parties, followed by a three-day interactive training for USAID staff. The Summit component provided a unique opportunity to bring together a wide variety of organizations and sectors, including development professionals, accelerators and investors, researchers, donors and governments, innovators, and private sector partners.

The gathering explored the dynamics of the complex ecosystems in which development innovation occurs and provided a venue to share perspectives on effectively partnering within these systems to source and scale innovations that can help solve global development challenges. The Summit also enabled participants to explore opportunities to strengthen the ecosystem, source innovation and tackle barriers to scale as a collective network. Participants sought to better understand (a) how to evaluate contextual factors that incentivize innovation; (b) how to evaluate the risks associated with innovation; (c) the added impact that nontraditional partnerships can have on a mutual development challenge, and (d) how to recognize pathways to scaling innovation and the choices that can determine success or failure.

The following highlights five key takeaways from the Summit:

Definitions: A lack of common definitions for innovation, scaling, and failure creates confusion among stakeholders when discussing these subjects. Participants generally agreed that at the outset of a project, innovators, funders, and other partners should ensure they are on the same page in terms of definitions of success and what they are trying to achieve. The realization that these terms mean something different in each and every context should encourage us to embrace the complexity of the topics rather than shy away from them.



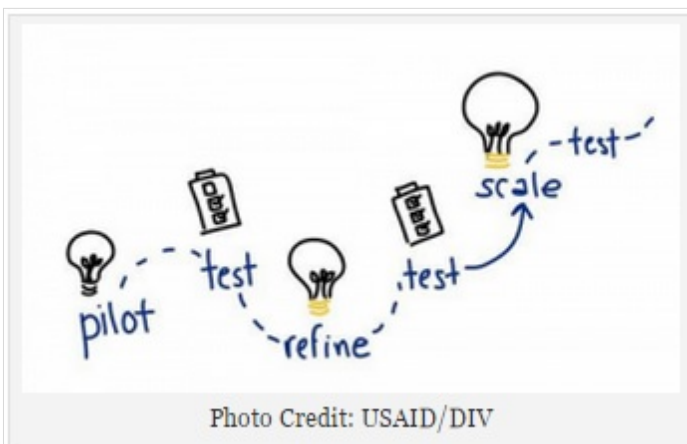
Systems Approach: Systems matter, they are complex and we often fail to adequately account for this complexity in our current approaches to development. Participants spoke about the need to encourage a broader systems thinking methodology that goes beyond linear processes to considering all the players in the innovation ecosystem space. Identifying the interests of different actors and creating space for each to play their role allows us to build approaches that incentivize actions across the entire value chain. Additionally, understanding how other actors behave within

the system and recognizing what they want to accomplish within the system reduces inappropriately duplicative efforts. Finally, we should not try to do what someone else can do better, but rather determine each players strengths and then identify facilitators who can bring it all together. Such an approach allows us to identify leverage points within the system where we can most effectively influence change.

Behavior Change: While innovation is often associated with products or technologies, behavior change is key to achieving development goals. New tools or technologies are not useful unless they are adopted. Participants agreed upon the importance of building behavior change and demand generating strategies into programs from the very beginning. This includes the recognition that cultural norms and contextual variables will impact program design. By building models that incorporate behavioral components into the system we can get ahead of the curve for the adoption of interventions.

Finance as a Development Tool: Innovative finance and approaches to leveraging private capital were acknowledged as critical to sustainability and scale. But these are broad and complex topics, and while many within the development community have some experience, Summit participants felt this domain is not broadly understood among most. It is critical to ensure that respective members of the private sector and the development community can understand the basic fundamentals of the other’s motivations and goals. Metrics linking financial investment and resulting social impact are still developing, but if established and widely used, could help build an evidence base that demonstrates the development gains made possible through smarter, more tactical investments. Lastly, working in partnership with fellow investors was critical to ensuring development impact and mutual learning in a still-new sector in the Asia region.

Test, Evaluate, Adapt, Repeat: Evaluating impact is at the forefront for almost all actors, regardless of their role within the development space. As such, organizations must begin to adopt policies that encourage appropriate risk taking and tolerates ‘failing successfully.’ This includes the ability to rapidly prototype solutions, evaluate their impact, quickly adapt and modify if necessary, and then repeat. By ‘failing fast’, participants felt we could iterate and use contextual learning to more efficiently move development efforts forward.



These five takeaways capture the core themes of the event, although given all of the opportunities for networking and side conversations, they are just a peek into what came out of this year’s Summit.

You can access more information about the Summit from the following links below:

- [Presentations](#) and additional materials from Scaling for Impact
- USAID’s [photos](#) from Scaling for Impact