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Scaling Ingredients Framework

Innovations for Poverty Action

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Executive Summary

Over the past two decades, the development sector has generated a vast body of rigorous evidence about what works to improve lives. Yet relatively few evidence-based interventions ultimately achieve impact at scale. Many promising programs remain confined to pilots or stall once early funding ends. Bridging this gap requires more than demonstrating effectiveness—it requires ensuring that interventions can be delivered, financed, and sustained within real-world systems.

The Scaling Ingredients Framework provides a practical tool to help funders, policymakers, and implementers assess whether an intervention is ready to scale and what is needed to achieve sustainable impact. The framework identifies six essential ingredients: 1) a clearly defined and relevant problem; 2) strong evidence of cost-effectiveness; 3) a model feasible to implement in the target context; 4) organizations with the capacity to deliver at scale; 5) a sustainable funding or business model; and 6) a supportive policy and institutional ecosystem. Together, these ingredients offer a structured lens for assessing readiness, identifying gaps, and strengthening the foundations for sustained impact.

Complementing the framework is a Scalability Assessment Tool, which translates the framework into practical questions that funders and implementers can use to systematically evaluate scaling efforts and prioritize investments.

Ultimately, this document serves as a resource for decision-makers to move beyond pilots and ensure that evidence-based solutions reach the populations they are intended to serve.

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Introduction

Over the last two decades, the development sector has made enormous strides in generating high-quality evidence about what works to improve lives. What some have called an "evidence revolution" has transformed how governments, funders, and practitioners think about policy and programming. Today, more than 10,000 impact evaluations are catalogued in the 3ie Development Evidence Portal— a remarkable shift from just a generation ago.

And yet, for all this progress, only a small fraction of interventions backed by strong evidence have gone on to achieve impact at scale. Too often, promising programs remain trapped in pilot stages or stall when early funding ends. The gap between evidence and large-scale change makes it clear that producing rigorous studies and disseminating results, while critical, are not enough to deliver sustainable impact for millions of people.

Scaling is a complex process. The path from evidence to impact at scale is neither linear nor automatic. It involves navigating a series of challenges that go well beyond effectiveness: adapting interventions to new contexts, ensuring organizations have the capacity to deliver, aligning with funding streams and policy priorities, and building the right coalitions of partners. Without a structured way to address these challenges, even the most effective interventions risk faltering.

The Scaling Ingredients Framework was developed to help close this gap.

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By breaking down the scaling process into six essential "ingredients," the framework provides a practical tool for implementers and funders to assess an intervention's readiness for scale, identify what is missing, and take concrete steps to strengthen the foundations for sustainable impact at scale.

It is intended to inform key decisions: whether to scale a given intervention, how to compare across options, how to balance risk within a portfolio, and when and what kind of external support may be needed. The ultimate goal is to make the path from evidence to impact at scale more systematic, holistic, and achievable.

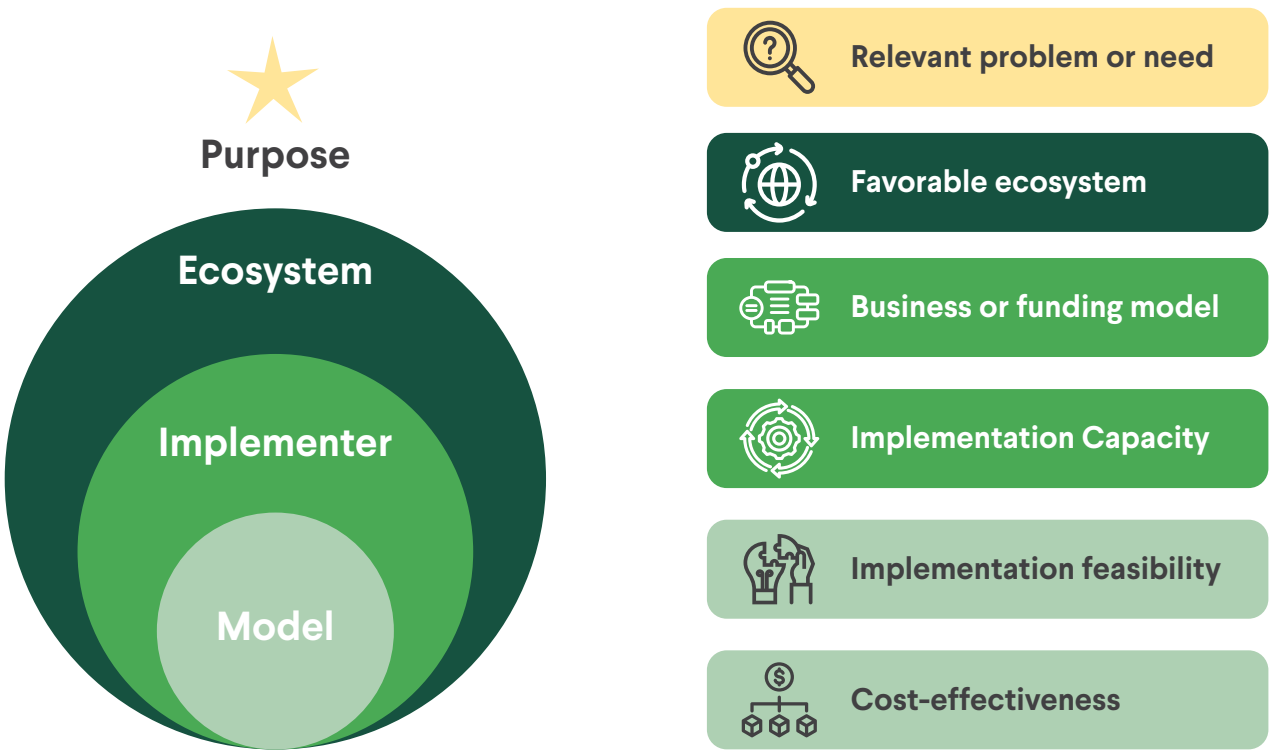
Scaling Ingredients Framework

The Scaling Ingredients Framework identifies six elements that must be in place for an evidence-informed intervention to deliver sustainable impact at scale. Scaling is defined here as reaching a large and growing share of the population in need, while maintaining impact over time. This requires more than replicating a successful pilot: interventions must be delivered with fidelity to the evidence, embedded within existing systems and structures, and flexible enough to adapt as contexts change.

The six ingredients complement and reinforce one another. The scaling effort must address i) a relevant, well-defined problem with ii) an intervention that is cost-effective compared to alternatives, iii) feasible to implement in the new context, iv) supported by an implementing organization (or coalition) with the capacity to deliver at scale, v) backed by a sustainable funding model, and vi) embedded within a supportive policy and institutional ecosystem.

Together, these ingredients operate at four interconnected levels: the purpose (defining the problem and need), the model (intervention design), the implementer (organization or coalition delivering at scale), and the ecosystem (policy, regulatory, and institutional environment). This structure provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing scalability and identifying the gaps that must be addressed before interventions can expand successfully.

Figure 1: Scaling Ingredients Framework



The framework builds on existing literature (see References) and on IPA's practical experience working with partners around the world to scale evidence-based solutions. It was piloted with internal teams, implementing partners, and funders, and refined based on their feedback to ensure it is useful and actionable in real-world scaling efforts.

The guide is intended for a practical resource for a wide audience: funders and investors making decisions about where to allocate resources, government agencies seeking to integrate proven solutions into public systems, NGOs and social enterprises looking to expand their reach, and multilateral organizations aiming to support evidence-informed policy and practice. For every ingredient, we outline what it means, why it matters, how to know if it is in place, and what steps can be taken to strengthen it. The intention is not to prescribe a single pathway to scale, but to provide a structured lens through which scaling efforts can be analyzed and enhanced.

The guide includes an interactive Scalability Assessment Tool, which translates the framework into a set of practical questions for use by funders and implementers. This tool is meant to help teams reflect systematically on the state of their scaling effort and identify where external support or investment might be most needed.

KEY DEFINITIONS

SCALE
Reaching a large and growing number of people in need with sustained impact. This requires delivering the intervention with fidelity to the evidence, while embedding it into systems and structures so that it can adapt and endure over time.

FIDELITY
The right program components delivered with sufficient intensity, quality and participant responsiveness to maintain the desired impact, according to the evidence that supports the effectiveness of the intervention.

CORE COMPONENTS
Components that fundamentally define the intervention and have been theorized and/or evaluated to be responsible for achieving the desired intervention effects (Sharma et al., 2022, p.6). Core components can be understood as the mechanisms driving impact, and should not be modified during program adaptation.

ADAPTATION
The deliberate and planned process of modifying the content, delivery or implementing mechanisms of an evidence-based intervention in order to improve its fit in a new context, while retaining the original program's core components and approaches critical to achieving its theory-based intermediate outcomes and effectiveness (Sharma et al., 2022, p.6).

SUSTAINABLE
The intervention is embedded in local institutions with reliable resources and sustainable systems in place to maintain its impact over time.

THEORY OF CHANGE
A comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context (Center for Theory of Change).

EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTION
An intervention with a clear theory of change that has been shown to be effective in achieving the intended results through rigorous testing and evaluation.

CONTEXT
The set of conditions in which an intervention is implemented, including the characteristics of the target population, the institutional and organizational arrangements for delivery, and the geographical, cultural, and socio-economic environment.

MODEL
Refers to what exactly is being scaled up (MCSP, 2019, p. 3): the approach's theory of change, its core (non-negotiable) components, and the structure of how it is meant to operate.

INTERVENTION
The context-specific implementation of a model adapted for local culture, operations, delivery channels, local constraints, materials, staff, etc.

A relevant problem or need

DEFINITION

The scaling process should start with a clear idea of the overall goal: What is the problem or opportunity that we are trying to address? Who are the beneficiaries we want to reach? At what level of scale? (Guerrero et al., 2023, p. 33) And how relevant is this problem or opportunity in the specific context where scaling will take place?

To be successful, the scaling process must address a well-diagnosed problem with clearly identified root causes, scope and affected population. The problem should also be in line with prevailing policy priorities and recognized as important to key stakeholders (e.g., beneficiaries, funders, government, among others.). In cases where limited awareness about the problem might exist, additional work should be done as part of the scaling process to raise awareness of the importance of the problem that has been identified and/or influence policy priorities (Hall, A. et al., 2025, p. 22).

Clarity on the breadth and scope of the problem should be followed by a clear target in terms of the level of scale. What meaningful scale means will differ by program and target population, but overall, this requires reaching a large enough proportion of the population in need to generate a significant impact (Hall, A. et al., 2025, p. 15). Tradeoffs between reach, speed, quality, sustainability and equity should also be considered to define the optimal, rather than maximal, level of scale (Kohl & Linn, 2021, p. 8).

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A well-diagnosed problem—one that identifies the underlying drivers, scope, affected population, and relevance to key stakeholders—ensures that the scaling process addresses the right issue, for the right people, at the right level of ambition. As such, it directly informs the other ingredients in the framework:

- **Evidence of cost-effectiveness:** A clear and accurate diagnosis of the problem is essential for selecting an intervention that is well-matched to the need. When scaling to a new context, this reduces the risk of implementing an approach that addresses the wrong drivers or reaches the wrong population. By targeting the core issue for those who most need support, resources are more likely to translate into meaningful impact — a prerequisite for achieving cost-effectiveness at scale.
- **Implementation feasibility:** Clearly defining the settings and populations helps ensure the model can be adapted appropriately to the new context, making implementation more realistic and achievable.
- **Implementation capacity:** The extent of the scale will largely determine the level of organizational capacity required. Without this clarity, it is difficult to assess whether an organization has the capacity to deliver the intervention effectively.
- **Favorable ecosystem:** Defining the need or problem through consensus and socializing it with all relevant stakeholders (see **Favorable ecosystem** for more around identifying and engaging stakeholders) helps align partners towards a shared goal, ensuring that the scaling efforts remain focused and relevant (MCSP, 2019, p. 30).

HOW DO WE KNOW IF THE INGREDIENT IS THERE?

We know if a relevant problem or need is present when all relevant stakeholders have clarity on:

- The problem or need being addressed, including its underlying drivers, scope, and affected population.
- The relevance of the problem for key stakeholders.
- The target level of scale, defined in terms of reach, equity, speed, quality, and sustainability.

HOW CAN WE GET THERE?

Defining a relevant problem starts with a thorough diagnosis to understand the underlying causes of the problem, as well as the size and characteristics of the affected population. This should be followed up by an assessment of the proportion of the population that the scaling process intends to reach, ensuring clarity and consensus on what "meaningful scale" looks like in practice.

Engaging stakeholders early is also essential. Workshops and consultations with relevant stakeholders (i.e., participants, implementers, policymakers, and funders) can help finalize and validate the problem definition, while also building consensus around its importance and overall goal of the scaling process.

EXAMPLE
VOCATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING IN PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

Punjab, Pakistan, faces one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in South Asia, despite having a rapidly growing young population. Many young people—especially women—struggle to secure stable employment due to limited access to quality skills training aligned with market demand.

The Punjab Skills Development Fund (PSDF), with technical support from the International Growth Centre (IGC) and the Center for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP), conducted an in-depth diagnosis that examined the full system around skills acquisition and employment. Through surveys, focus groups, and market analysis, they uncovered a complex set of drivers behind the problem: low awareness of available training programs, cultural norms restricting women's participation, training curricula misaligned with labor market needs, and a mismatch between training delivery models and the preferences of youth and employers. This nuanced understanding of the problem informed the design of a set of tailored interventions—such as digital skills programs, mobile-based outreach for young women, and partnerships with industries to align training with real labor market demand. Without this clear diagnostic, PSDF might have invested in traditional supply-side solutions, such as expanding generic vocational centers or offering more training seats, which would not have addressed the deeper barriers to participation or relevance.

By engaging key stakeholders—including trainees, employers, and government decision-makers—throughout the diagnostic and design process, PSDF built consensus around both the nature of the problem and the most promising strategies for addressing it. This shared understanding ensured buy-in from policymakers and implementers, aligning the interventions with Punjab's broader employment and economic development priorities and setting the stage for sustainable impact.

Full case study available here.

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Evidence of cost-effectiveness

DEFINITION

Clear evidence that the model can deliver the desired outcomes cost-effectively is essential for scale (Kohl & Linn, 2021, p.10). Establishing cost-effectiveness typically involves:

- A well-articulated Theory of Change that explains how the model leads to the intended outcomes
- Evidence that the model has already achieved those outcomes in practice
- Clarity on the core components that are necessary for the model to work
- Demonstrated cost-effectiveness compared to existing approaches and feasible alternatives

Outlining the relationships between the model's components and outcomes of interest is key to assess whether these relationships are logical and robust (Sharma et al., 2022, p. 25). Understanding how impact is produced and delivered can help distinguish the core, or non-negotiable components from other elements which could be beneficial but not necessary for the intended outcomes (Guerrero, et al., p. 39). These core components should also be made clear to all involved in the scaling process (List et al., 2021, p. 116).

Before proceeding with scaling, there must be strong enough evidence of the impact to suggest the Theory of Change behind the model works. This evidence should be based on rigorous studies either from the context of interest or based on findings from a body of evidence that is relevant to this new context. Findings are considered applicable, or "generalizable", when the key conditions required for the Theory of Change to hold, and the characteristics of the target population, in particular, are similar in the study and the context of interest (List et al., 2021, p. 148). The impact and cost-effectiveness of the selected model should be comparable or superior to other evidence-based alternatives.

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A cost-effective model is at the core of the scaling process. Efforts to scale should not proceed without clarity on what is being scaled (i.e., the core components), as well as solid evidence of its effectiveness, and superiority in terms of cost-effectiveness to comparable interventions. Scaling a model without proof of effectiveness can lead to organizations spending significant resources in scaling an intervention that will not yield the desired impact. Lack of evidence behind the scaling effort can also make it harder to rally key stakeholders behind the intervention, and limit fundraising efforts.

A clear understanding of how the model works (Theory of Change) and what is driving the impact (core components) will help guide the adaptation process of the intervention to the new context (see implementation feasibility). Identifying the non-negotiatibles can shed light on other components and activities that could be adapted to local contexts for better fit without diluting the model's impact.

HOW DO WE KNOW IF THE INGREDIENT IS THERE?

We know the ingredient is there when:

- The model is grounded in a clear Theory of Change that has been tested through rigorous and independent evaluations;
- There is clarity on key components driving impact and how they do so;
- Cost-effectiveness is superior to comparable alternatives.

HOW CAN WE GET THERE?

Facilitated workshops can help clarify the Theory of Change and ensure a shared understanding among partners of how the model's components connect to the outcomes of interests. When the model is grounded in rigorous evidence, its core components may already be well defined. If not, there are several approaches to identifying them, which vary in cost, rigor, and time requirements.

At the lighter end, reviewing evidence from comparable programs can help identify common components. A step further involves piloting the model with the hypothesized core components and assessing whether the Theory of Change still holds, either through an impact evaluation or by looking for early outcomes signals. At the most rigorous, and resource-intensive end, a multi-treatment randomized evaluation (RCT) can be designed to isolate the specific components driving impact. Whenever possible, this process should draw on insights from the original designers and evaluators of the intervention to strengthen accuracy and relevance.

For earlier-stage innovations, where rigorous evidence of impact might not yet be available, conducting an impact evaluation is essential to confirm that the model delivers the intended outcomes. If a model has already demonstrated strong results elsewhere, a new impact evaluation may still be needed to verify whether those results hold in different settings or populations. The formative research and needs assessment done when defining the problem (see **relevant problem or need**) can help identify who the new context differs from the original one (Sharma et al., 2022, p. 25), and whether the existing evidence still applies.

When considering comparative cost-effectiveness, an evidence review can help identify existing alternative solutions to the same problem to then compare their cost-effectiveness. Systematic reviews, meta-analysis, and global evidence repositories - such as the **Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP) report** or **IPA's Best Bets: Emerging Opportunities for Impact at Scale report** - offer useful benchmarks by ranking or classifying interventions according to their cost-effectiveness. In cases where direct comparisons are not possible, it is still important to ensure that the intervention demonstrates effectiveness within a reasonable range based on benchmarks from the literature, and that the cost per participant is reasonable when compared to similar programs.

EXAMPLE THE GEEAP "SMART BUYS" REPORT

The Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP) Smart Buys report provides a systematic review of more than 400 studies covering over 150 education interventions. It categorizes programs into Smart Buys, Good Buys, and Bad Buys based on their cost-effectiveness and the strength of evidence. The report was designed to help governments and development partners prioritize limited resources, offering clear, evidence-based guidance on which approaches deliver the strongest learning outcomes for the lowest cost.

A major contribution of the report is that it addresses two common barriers to comparative cost-effectiveness analysis: Limited access to cost data and the time and expertise required to conduct comprehensive comparisons. By consolidating global evidence and cost information in one place, the report makes it easier for decision-makers to weigh trade-offs across different interventions and provides a practical benchmark for assessing whether a given model is cost-effective relative to alternatives. In this way, the report serves as a valuable tool to direct scarce education resources toward interventions that deliver the greatest "value for money".

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Implementation feasibility

DEFINITION

In addition to being well-defined and effective, an intervention must also be adapted and simplified to optimize its alignment and delivery in the new context, without compromising its effectiveness. The purpose of implementation feasibility is to improve fit: how well the model aligns with the cultural, organizational and operational realities of a given setting, while maintaining fidelity to the core components required to achieve outcomes (Hawe et al.; Sharma et al., 2022, p. 11).

Determining what to adapt should follow a systematic and evidence-informed process that: a) sets out the boundaries of what can and cannot be modified, balancing fidelity with fit; b) avoids unintentional or "on-the-fly" changes that could weaken effectiveness; c) continuously assesses how adaptations affect implementation quality and outcomes Sharma et al., 2022,p. 9).

Adaptation can enhance effectiveness by increasing cultural relevance or usability, while simplification makes delivery at scale more feasible. Simplification can target both the model and its delivery. Simplifying the model may involve reducing the number of components while preserving the core. Simplifying delivery may involve standardizing processes, leveraging existing resources and channels, and minimizing coordination needs. Both forms of simplification reduce complexity, cost, and burden on implementers, making the intervention more feasible at scale.

To sustain feasibility at scale, adaptations should be documented and codified. Developing clear operating guidelines and procedures supports the training and supervision of staff, strengthens **Implementation capacity**, and facilitates the adoption of the intervention by other organizations, where relevant. These guidelines act as a blueprint for consistent delivery at scale while preserving the intervention's integrity. Equally important is the development of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches that can guarantee fidelity to the refined and tested model. Fidelity can be measured across several dimensions, including dosage, quality of delivery, and participant responsiveness (Dane & Schneider, 1998). These measures help ensure that, as the model is implemented at scale, its essential components are consistently delivered with quality.

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The simpler and better-adapted the model is, the easier it becomes to implement at scale with fidelity to its evidence-informed design. By contrast, interventions that are overly complex, demand resources not available at scale, or exceed the operational capacity of the implementing organization (see **Implementation capacity**) risk being poorly delivered or even discontinued. Simpler models are also more likely to be replicated and adopted by additional organizations, extending their reach across different contexts.

When the model is not adapted, refined and tested for its new context, there is a higher risk that core components may be diluted (e.g., lower dosage or intensity) or even omitted when implemented at scale. These changes can undermine the effectiveness of the program and threaten its **cost-effectiveness** at scale. Focusing on implementation feasibility ensures adaptations respond to the realities of the new context without eroding the essential components that drive impact.

Implementation feasibility supports sustainability. Models that have been optimized through simplification and adaptation are more likely to align with existing delivery systems, cultural norms, and operational structures, reducing the long-term burden on implementing organizations. This not only preserves outcomes but also builds the foundation for sustainable scale.

HOW DO WE KNOW IF THE INGREDIENT IS THERE?

We know that this ingredient is there when:

- The model has been piloted, tested, and refined in the new context(s) to confirm it can be delivered with quality and effectiveness, i.e., maintaining fidelity to its core components.
- The model has been standardized, well-documented, and accompanied by practical delivery resources (e.g., program manual, training package, monitoring indicators, etc.) specifying acceptable adaptations and guidance for delivery with fidelity.
- The monitoring and evaluation approaches that will be used to measure fidelity at scale have been piloted and streamlined.

HOW CAN WE GET THERE?

Even after a model has demonstrated effectiveness, it is important to continue adapting, refining and testing it to ensure it is as simple and aligned to the new context as possible while preserving its effectiveness. Formative research and needs assessment (see **A relevant problem or need**) and the model's core components (see **Evidence of cost-effectiveness**) can help define the adaptation parameters and guide deliberate adaptations that increase fit with the new context without compromising fidelity.

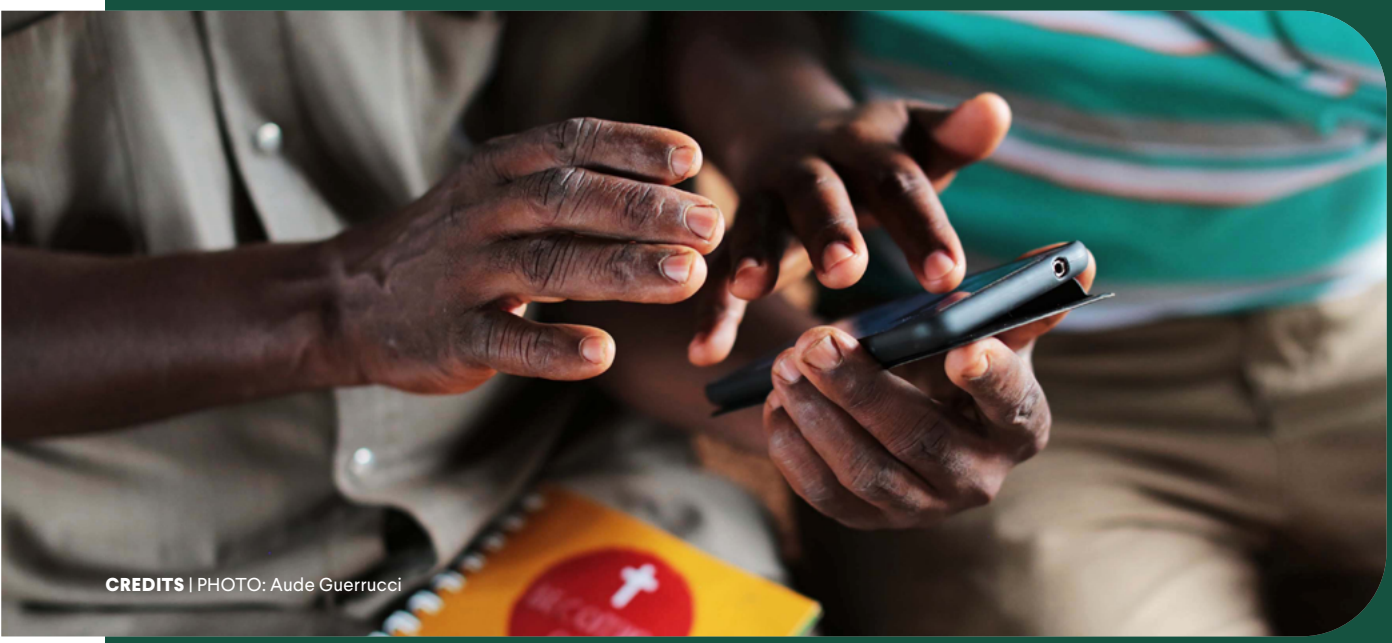
Piloting the adapted intervention is critical to determine whether fidelity to the core components is preserved, and whether it can be implemented with quality and effectiveness. Pilots also provide an opportunity to test and refine key aspects of delivery, such as participant recruitment, and mode of delivery. Embedding these cycles of testing, refinement, and adaptation into the scaling process increases the likelihood that the final intervention design will be feasible and deliver sustained impact at scale. These cycles also allow for the trial of monitoring and evaluation approaches that will be used at scale to measure fidelity.

EXAMPLE
BECOMING ONE IN KENYA

Becoming One is a 12-session couples counseling program designed to prevent intimate partner violence (IPV) by building skills in communication, emotional regulation, shared financial decision-making, and sexual consent. The program is delivered by faith leaders, who use videos and illustrated workbooks to guide couples, drawing on Biblical principles to reinforce behavior change. One of the core components for implementing Becoming One effectively is that it takes place in contexts where Christian religious values are strong and religion plays a central role in daily life of the people.

After demonstrating strong impact in Uganda, where an IPA-led randomized evaluation showed reductions in IPV and improvements in relationship quality, the program is now being piloted in Kenya in partnership with World Vision. Adapting the program to the Kenyan context has required ensuring the model fits the cultural, operational, and organizational realities of a new setting while preserving fidelity to its core components. Early modifications have included updating illustrations and character names in program materials to reflect Kenyan cultural references and testing new recruitment and support strategies for faith leaders. IPA and World Vision are also piloting the Becoming One Champions model, where senior faith leaders provide hands-on mentorship and support to strengthen implementation fidelity across multiple cohorts. In addition, the pilot is exploring opportunities for digital or hybrid delivery formats that may make the program more scalable in urban areas, where couples face scheduling constraints and prefer flexible modes of engagement.

Looking ahead, IPA is supporting World Vision Kenya to further codify program adaptations and refine delivery resources—such as facilitator manuals, training packages, and monitoring indicators— while developing monitoring and evaluation systems to track fidelity and outcomes. These pilots will inform the implementation at scale of Becoming One in Kenya and will generate lessons to guide future replication in other countries.



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Implementation capacity

DEFINITION

Implementation capacity refers to the resources, willingness and operational capabilities required from the implementing organization(s) to deliver the intervention as designed, for the target population, and at the envisioned scale. The selection of the implementing partner should therefore consider a broad range of factors, including (Hall, A. et al., 2025, p. 15):

- The purpose, the capabilities in place and the regular ways of working of the potential implementer;
- The existence and type of potential partners;
- Other ingredients of the framework: the requirements of the intervention to ensure high fidelity in implementation (see **Evidence of cost-effectiveness** and **Implementation feasibility**); the funding model (see **Business or funding model**); and the broader policy landscape (see **Favorable ecosystem**).

There are different pathways to achieving implementation at scale (Guerrero et al., 2023, p. 58; Hall, A. et al., 2025, p. 15). For instance, the original developer of the intervention (NGO, or other) may expand its own resources to deliver directly at a larger scale; a new organization may be established to deliver the program; the intervention may be integrated into an existing organization's or government's systems; or delivery may be shared with partners who provide complementary skills and assets. This latter option should be carefully considered before any single organization invests heavily in expanding its own capacity.

A successful scaling process requires working closely with the identified implementing partner(s) to establish the right infrastructure and skills to deliver and sustain the program at the intended scale. Implementation capacity involves (Guerrero et al., 2023, p. 71;Hall, A. et al., 2025, p. 19):

- Human resources, including organizational leaders, with the skills, knowledge and motivation to deliver the intervention;
- Operational expertise, e.g., legal, technical, financial, policy advocacy;
- Policies, procedures and protocols for the delivery of the intervention well incorporated into the implementer's routine operations;
- Financial resources to fund the delivery of the intervention (see **Business or funding model**);
- Capacity to implement and use robust data and MEL systems for monitoring delivery and fidelity, and to apply the findings for program refinement.

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Implementation capacity is often one of the greatest constraints to scaling (Hall, A. et al., 2025, p. 15). While an organization may demonstrate success in a pilot, scaling requires a very different level of infrastructure. Without the right protocols, procedures, and resources in place, the leap from small-scale delivery to sustained large-scale implementation can compromise both the reach and the quality of the intervention. Building capacity at scale frequently involves new operating and financial systems, as well as robust processes for recruiting, training, and supporting the workforce that will deliver the intervention (Guerrero et al., 2023, p. 63).

Strong implementation capacity is also critical to preserving impact as the intervention expands. Poor implementation can dilute the quality and intensity of delivery, leading to lower effectiveness. Organizations that invest in the right capacity, including systems to address deviations quickly, are better positioned to maintain outcomes at scale.

Insufficient implementation capacity not only undermines the intervention being scaled but can also have wider consequences. Stretching an organization's resources too thin can divert attention and funding from other programs, weakening their performance and negatively affecting their beneficiaries (ExpandNet, 2011, p. 5). Ensuring the implementing organization has the necessary capacity is therefore essential to both the sustainability of the scale-up and the integrity of the broader ecosystem in which it operates.

HOW DO WE KNOW IF THE INGREDIENT IS THERE?

We know if the ingredient is there when:

- The characteristics and requirements of the implementing organization(s) to deliver the intervention with fidelity at the intended scale are clear to relevant stakeholders;
- The decision about which organization(s) will be responsible for implementation has been made, including whether delivery will be led by a single implementer, shared among partners, or integrated into government or other third-party systems
- The implementing organization(s) has the necessary financial management, policies, procedures, protocols and human and other resources to sustain the delivery of the intervention with fidelity at the intended scale;
- The implementing organization(s) has the capacity to implement and use data and MEL systems to monitor fidelity, review findings regularly, and refine delivery as needed.

HOW CAN WE GET THERE?

Identifying the right implementing partner is the foundation of implementation capacity. The choice should align with the organization's purpose and capacity, the intervention's requirements, the funding model, and the broader policy and institutional context to ensure fidelity and sustainability at scale.

Once an implementer is in place, the focus should be on strengthening its capacity for scale. This begins with identifying the specific changes and investments needed in systems, staffing, and processes, and then supporting the design and adoption of new policies, procedures, and protocols, including those for financial management, recruitment and training, and data collection and monitoring. These systems should be embedded into routine practice to safeguard fidelity while fostering a culture of continuous improvement that supports sustainability at scale.

EXAMPLE GHANA DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING (DL)

Differentiated Learning (DL) is a pedagogical approach that groups students by ability, instead of grade or age, to provide level-appropriate instruction, with the goal of improving learning outcomes.

To strengthen the Ghana Education Service's (GES) capacity to deliver DL with fidelity, IPA provided technical assistance across several dimensions. IPA worked with GES to design and integrate DL monitoring tools into the national Education Management Information System (EMIS) to improve delivery quality. IPA also supported the creation and training of DL Focal Persons at the district level to validate data and supervise classroom practice, building their skills in implementation support, data use, and supervision to strengthen leadership within the system.

Ghana DL is now implemented in over 10,000 schools nationwide, reaching approximately 2.4 million learners, and is poised to scale to an additional 6,000 schools. Looking ahead, IPA is working with GES to strengthen present-day implementation fidelity in classrooms, and improve the quality and use of DL monitoring data in program management.

CREDITS | PHOTO: IPA 2024

A business or funding model

DEFINITION

A successful scale-up depends on the full costs of implementation at scale being covered by a sustainable source of funding. This, in turn, calls for budget implications to be clear, predictable, and justifiable (MSI, 2020, p. 14). Broadly speaking, there are two main sources of funding: the market and the government (Guerrero et al., 2023, p.41).

A business model is needed when scaling through the market. It should describe the main sources of income, expected revenues, key expenses, potential cost savings, and the path toward positive cash flow and growth (Guerrero et al., 2023, p. 40). In market-based scaling, the people reached are clients or customers, so pricing should reflect their willingness and capacity to pay (Tinsley et al., 2018, p. xi). Assessing whether the pricing strategy remains viable over time is especially important in settings where many people face economic constraints (Hall et al., 2025, p. 25). Social enterprises—organizations that combine social purpose with business principles and revenue generation (Guerrero et al., 2023, p. 178)—can play a vital role in areas with limited public provision or where high risks deter traditional businesses (Tinsley et al., 2018, p. xi).

In the case of the government, making the intervention financially sustainable will require that the costs be absorbed within the budget or covered from other sustainable sources (e.g., international organizations, multilaterals, donors, etc.). This requires a deep understanding of the budgetary process, as well as the main stakeholders to engage with (see Favorable ecosystem) to make sure the costs of implementation are accurately budgeted for and included in the government budget.

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Having a clear financing model is essential to sustaining an intervention at scale and over time. Without a predictable and reliable source of funding, even well-designed interventions risk stalling once initial pilot or donor funding ends.

Identifying the right financing pathway—whether through the market, government, or a hybrid—early in the process helps shape other ingredients. Understanding the funding model informs decisions about how to simplify and adapt the intervention for delivery at scale (**Implementation feasibility**) and guides the development of the organization's operational, financial, and human resource systems needed to implement and sustain the intervention (**Implementation capacity**). A weak or undefined financing model, by contrast, often leads to fragmented implementation, dependence on short-term funding, and limited ability to reach the goals of the scaling process.

HOW DO WE KNOW IF THE INGREDIENT IS THERE?

We know this ingredient is there when:

- The budget implications are clear to those expected to bear the costs;
- There is a clear and sustainable funding pathway, either through a market-based business model with a credible path to positive cash flow and growth, or through government financing with costs fully absorbed in the budget or committed by a reliable funding source.

HOW CAN WE GET THERE?

The decision to scale through the market, through government financing, or via a hybrid approach should be informed by the local context, the policy and institutional environment (see Favorable ecosystem), and the feasibility of sustainable funding sources.

When scaling through the market, it is essential to develop and test a business model that ensures both financial viability and accessibility for the target population. This involves analyzing the full costs of delivering the intervention at scale, and designing a pricing strategy aligned with clients' willingness and ability to pay. For contexts with disadvantaged populations, pricing strategies must be carefully tested to avoid excluding those most in need.

For government-financed scaling, the focus shifts to aligning the intervention with existing budgetary cycles and policy priorities. This requires engaging key stakeholders early in the process—including policymakers, funders, and implementing agencies—to ensure that costs are clearly articulated, accurately budgeted, and formally committed.

Across both pathways, integrating financial planning and monitoring into routine operations enhances long-term sustainability and supports the organization in maintaining quality delivery at scale (see **Implementation capacity**).

EXAMPLE
SMALL-QUANTITY LIPID-BASED NUTRIENT SUPPLEMENTS (SQ-LNS) IN ZAMBIA

Small-Quantity Lipid-Based Nutrient Supplements (SQ-LNS) are nutrient-dense products for infants and toddlers that provide energy, protein, essential fatty acids, and a wide range of micronutrients. Designed to complement infant diets without displacing breast milk or local foods, SQ-LNS are given in small daily portions (about 20g, 110–120 calories). With stunting affecting 35 percent of children in Zambia (DHS 2018), SQ-LNS presents a promising intervention to improve child growth and development at scale.

To assess the financial viability of scaling, IPA conducted a willingness-to-pay study with caregivers in Zambia. Caregivers were offered sachets at randomized prices to test demand across different cost points. While nearly all (95 percent) accepted SQ-LNS when free, 50 percent were willing to pay ZMW 0.5 per sachet, and about 20 percent were willing to pay the full production cost (ZMW 2–3). These findings suggest that a purely market-based model is unlikely to reach the poorest families most affected by malnutrition, but that families may be able to contribute partially. This opens the door to hybrid funding approaches where subsidies, government financing, or donor support reduce costs, while partial household contributions can enhance ownership and sustainability.

Building on this evidence, IPA is working with partners to identify feasible hybrid funding pathways for SQ-LNS in Zambia.

This includes exploring options such as government cost-sharing, donor support, and leveraging existing distribution channels to lower costs. By combining rigorous evidence on willingness to pay with insights into policy and funding landscapes, the next stage will focus on developing a sustainable business model that ensures accessibility for the most vulnerable while maintaining financial viability at scale.

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A favorable ecosystem

DEFINITION

The ecosystem refers to the wider political context in which the scaling process is taking place. A favorable ecosystem is one where the broader context supports the scaling process through aligned policies and regulations and high stakeholder buy-in (Hall, A. et al., 2025, p. 22). Some of the elements to consider when analyzing the ecosystem are (Guerrero et al., 2023; MSI, 2020; MCSP, 2019):

Policies and regulations

- What are the characteristics of the policy environment, in terms of political stability, level of centralization, decision-making authority, corruption?
- Is the intervention in line with the existing regulatory and policy framework? If not, what policies need to be changed or developed? How difficult would it be to enact those changes?

Stakeholder buy-in

- Who are the key stakeholders and decision-makers that are likely to affect the prospects of scaling the intervention? What are their motivations and incentives, decision-making power, resources and capacity?
- What is the level of external support for the intervention? Are there potential detractors we should be particularly mindful of?

A successful scaling process requires strong alignment between the intervention and the broader ecosystem, recognizing that policies and regulations, priorities and stakeholders change over time. This means alignment is a dynamic process, which involves adapting the program to fit a changing ecosystem, while also engaging with key stakeholders to influence the broader context (Hall, A. et al., 2025, p. 22).

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

An intervention cannot be subtracted from the broader context in which it operates. Failing to acknowledge the obstacles and levers in the broader ecosystem can prevent the intervention from taking off the ground or risk its continuity. Even though some factors (such as corruption or political instability, for instance) might be out of our control, it is important to identify them and develop mitigation strategies. Identifying champions and engaging with stakeholders with decision-making power and/or influence since the early stages of the scaling process is an example of a mitigation strategy. Stakeholders who have been involved in the identification of the problem, the design of the intervention and its subsequent piloting and testing are more likely to support its scaling up.

HOW DO WE KNOW IF THE INGREDIENT IS THERE?

We know if this ingredient is there when:

- The intervention is in line with the policy and regulatory framework;
- All relevant stakeholders with decision-making power and/or influence related to the intervention have been identified;
- There is agreement among stakeholders with strong decision-making power or influence about the value of the scaling effort.

HOW CAN WE GET THERE?

Building a favorable ecosystem demands a strong understanding of the actors and dynamics shaping the broader political and institutional environment. Mapping relevant stakeholders—both for the immediate scaling process and for sustaining implementation in the future—is essential. Early and continuous engagement ensures that stakeholders are actively involved in shaping and supporting the intervention. Identifying and nurturing champions who can generate political will, mobilize resources, and advocate for the intervention is critical to increasing visibility and ownership among decision-makers.

A favorable ecosystem also requires alignment with the policy and regulatory framework. This involves assessing what changes in policies, norms, or regulations may be necessary to sustain the intervention at scale and engaging early and consistently in policy dialogues to understand the processes, timelines, and levers for enacting such changes. Building constructive relationships with policymakers can smooth the pathway for reforms and ensure that the intervention is embedded in long-term institutional structures.

Engaging in national and international forums, alliances, and partnerships that are relevant to the intervention can also contribute to a favorable ecosystem. These platforms not only provide opportunities for advocacy and visibility but also foster knowledge exchange, legitimacy, and alignment with broader system priorities. Active involvement in such networks can amplify demand, strengthen credibility, and create the momentum needed for sustained implementation at scale.

EXAMPLE STARS RWANDA

The Supporting Teacher Achievement in Rwandan Schools (STARS) program aims to improve teaching quality and student learning by linking teacher performance evaluations to learning outcomes. It builds on an earlier pilot evaluation by IPA and Georgetown's gui2de, which found that pay-for-performance (P4P) contracts increased teachers' classroom presence, improved pedagogy, and led to better student results.

The program aligns with Rwanda's broader education reform efforts. Following the creation of the National Steering Committee on Foundational Learning (2022) and the launch of the Foundational Learning Strategy (2023–2024), a Task Force was established to adapt teachers' annual imihigo (performance contracts) to include learning outcomes, informed by the P4P evidence.

This Task Force brings together key government ministries and agencies—NESA, REB, MINEDUC, MINEFOTRA, and MINECOFIN—along with development partners such as USAID, the World Bank, and UNICEF. IPA and gui2de actively contribute as members, supporting the design and institutionalization of a scalable P4P imihigo model.

Working closely with the National Steering Committee, IPA and gui2de have helped integrate STARS into Rwanda's Foundational Learning Strategy (2024/25–2028/29), positioning the program for national scale-up in late 2025. STARS illustrates how strong government leadership, aligned institutions, and evidence-based collaboration can create the right conditions for education reform at scale.

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How IPA supports scaling

Scaling is a complex process, and without the right guidance there is a real risk of partners investing in interventions that are ineffective, or scaling them in ways that compromise their impact goals. IPA brings a unique combination of methodological rigor, grounded local presence, and cross-functional expertise to help partners move cost-effective interventions towards sustainable impact at scale. Our work supports that resources are directed toward interventions with proven or promising cost-effectiveness, and that scaling processes are designed to deliver meaningful, lasting impact for the populations they aim to serve.

IPA supports partners along the scaling process by:

- Identifying the right evidence-based solution—Leveraging global knowledge of the evidence and a clear understanding of the local problem and context to select the most cost-effective intervention to address it.
- Diagnosing readiness for scale—Combining rigorous evidence, local insights and expertise in scaling to assess the ingredients needed for sustainability at scale are in place, and where additional investment is needed.
- Adapting and optimizing interventions—Working with partners to refine, simplify, and codify interventions for delivery in new contexts, while maintaining fidelity to core components for effectiveness.
- Strengthening implementation capacity—Building the skills, systems and monitoring practices to deliver at scale, embedding adaptive learning and continuous quality improvement.
- Developing sustainable funding pathways— Supporting partners in designing funding models, estimating costs, and engaging the right funders to sustain delivery at scale.
- Fostering enabling ecosystems—Convening and engaging stakeholders, nurturing champions, and providing policy and regulatory support to embed scaled interventions into systems for the long term.

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IPA's Scaling team

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IPA's Scaling team works closely with partners to support them across the full scaling journey — from identifying the most promising, cost-effective interventions to designing and implementing scaling strategies that deliver lasting impact. With hands-on guidance at every stage, the team helps partners build the evidence, capacity, and systems needed to scale successfully, in ways that align with their objectives, resources, and risk appetite. Drawing on deep expertise in the scaling up of evidence-based interventions, the Scaling team ensures partners have the rigorous, practical support they need to turn proven interventions into sustainable impact at scale.

To learn more about how IPA's Scaling team can support your impact objectives, reach out to policy@poverty-action.org.