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Implementing Education Quality in Low Income Countries

'GOING TO SCALE'

NURTURING THE LOCAL ROOTS OF EDUCATION INNOVATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Start small but think big. That is an attractive approach to innovation and reform for education in Africa, where available resources often cannot meet expanding demand, schools are under-equipped, well prepared teachers and effective instructional materials are in short supply, and both access and quality remain uneven among different segments of the population.

"Going to scale" has proved difficult to achieve. There are few documented cases of pilot education reforms in Africa that have been effectively scaled up to become nation-wide programmes. Our review of efforts to enlarge the scale of education initiatives and reforms across diverse settings in Africa confirms the importance of (a)charismatic and effective local leadership dedicated to scaling up, (b)strong local demand for the innovation at each site, and (c)adequate (not necessarily high level) funding.

Orchestrated replication, however, often fails. That is so for two major reasons. First, enlarging scale may undermine or destroy promising reforms rather than spread them. Like "appropriate technology," "appropriate scale" may be large, small, or somewhere in between. Second, the importance of the local roots of this process suggests that mechanically replicating the specific elements of a reform in new settings will only rarely lead to a viable and sustainable outcome. Rather than reproducing the specific elements of the reform, what must be scaled up are the conditions that permitted the initial reform to be successful and the local roots that can sustain it. That involves finding ways to generate locally rooted demand for the reform and to support an informed and inclusive local participation in specifying the reform's content and form. That also requires making political space for the reform and protecting it from vested interests who perceive it as a threat and a bureaucracy whose efforts to routinize change often smother it.

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'Going to Scale'

Nurturing the Local Roots of Education Innovation in Africa

Joel Samoff, Martial Dembélé and E. Molapi Sebatane

'Going to Scale'

Start small but think big. That is an attractive approach to innovation and reform for education in Africa, where available resources often cannot meet expanding demand, schools are under-equipped, well prepared teachers and effective instructional materials are in short supply, and both access and quality remain uneven among different segments of the population. Begin with an initial effort in a particular school or district. Prepare the ground well, with careful planning, extensive communication among those involved, and adequate funding. Monitor and assess the results. Modify the practice to respond to local settings and in light of preliminary outcomes. Then, as it becomes clearer what has worked and what has not, expand the pilot to other settings. 'Go to scale.' Eventually the entire education system becomes the site for the reform.

'Going to scale' has been the advice and the injunction in African education for several decades, both within and outside the continent. For national educators, enlarging an effective small scale innovation is an attractive strategy for broader reform. Beginning with a pilot focuses attention and energy, provides a controlled testing ground for trials and assessment, limits the risk should an initiative prove unviable, and establishes the pattern that can subsequently be replicated throughout the country.

In an early and influential paper, Myers explained why going to scale had become of interest to international agencies (Myers, 1984). Those agencies, Myers argued, had committed themselves and thus their public image, to nationwide programmes that reached the poorest of the citizenry and were frustrated that the small scale demonstration or pilot projects they funded seemed to have limited impact on education policy and programming, 'often despite their successful outcomes' (Myers, 1984: 2). The challenge, therefore, was to scale up. That thinking persists. Nearly two decades later, a United Nations panel on girls' education included among the critical next steps 'understanding the importance of scaling up.'[1] A 2004 workshop organized by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) focused in part on enlarging the scale of innovations and reforms supportive of girls' education. More broadly, going to scale was the central theme of the 2001 biennial meeting of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and has regularly been reiterated at subsequent ADEA conferences.

That challenge has proved difficult to achieve. As we shall see, there are few documented cases of pilot education reforms in Africa that have been effectively scaled up to become nation-wide programmes. Indeed, some very promising initiatives proved difficult or impossible to sustain, even at their small scale, after the departure of their initial leaders or the end of their initial funding.

Evidence is problematic here. Anecdotes abound. But determining success requires both time and reliable evidence. Accessible systematic empirical research on scaling up promising education initiatives in Africa is unfortunately quite limited. Uvin and Miller point to the paucity of empirical research on scaling up more generally. Most of the literature, they argue, is normative and

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[1] The ECOSOC High Level Segment on Africa: Girls' Education Panel, convened on 1 June 2001, included senior officials from UNICEF, UNFPA, and WFP and the former Executive Director of the Forum for African Women Educationists.
<http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/know_sharing/flagship_initiatives/ecosoc.shtml> [2004.07.21]

anecdotal.[2] Those involved in the pilot speak enthusiastically of its successes. Participants and commentators offer suggestions for enlarging scale, often with near certitude about what will and will not work. Yet, there is little independent empirical research or comparative assessment. One result is that contemporary discussions of scaling up are eerily repetitive, with little apparent attention to why decades of insistence on the importance of scaling up has not led to more and more effective scaling up.

> Much of the current debate on going-to-scale turns out to be a repetition of earlier, readily available information, without reference to lessons learnt in the first round of replication efforts more than a decade ago. (van Oudenhoven and Wazir, 1998: Note 3)

Until an initiative has survived the departure of its initiators, the depletion of its initial funding, and perhaps a change of government, it cannot reasonably be judged successful.

As well, some initiatives may be viable precisely because they are small. Responsive to local needs and demands, well adapted to a local setting, and guided, managed and perhaps funded by the local community, reforms of that sort flourish where they are nourished and wither where they are not. Attempting to enlarge their scale would be like scattering seeds on sun-baked hard unyielding soil that has not been loosened by rain and plow or planting a crop that requires strong sun in the perpetual shade of a hillside forest.

It is important, therefore, to review efforts to enlarge the scale of education initiatives and reforms in Africa. Our primary concern in this review is not to suggest a right path or correct course of action. Rather, our concern is to contribute to understanding better the complexities of enlarging the scale of promising education initiatives by exploring findings, highlighting major themes, and framing issues for discussion, research, and the negotiations essential to education reform. We begin with an overview of the general literature on 'going to scale' and a clarification of the key constructs and ideas. Next, we consider recent African experiences and what they suggest for this approach—start small, think big—to reform in African education. We turn then to the links and tensions among different development objectives, including going to scale, participatory development, and local ownership and to other dimensions of development that provide the context for efforts to enlarge scale. We conclude with attention to the challenges of nurturing innovation and with the understanding that like 'appropriate technology,' 'appropriate scale' in education may be large, small, or somewhere in between.

Perspectives on 'Going to Scale'

Our first task is to clarify the terminology. Definitions and typologies abound. The profusion of terms and categories reflects both different meanings and, more important, different perspectives on scaling up. Let us review some important distinctions.

'Going to scale' is of course not the only approach to innovation and reform in education. Some reforms begin not as small pilots but as nation-wide initiatives. An education ministry, for example, may adopt a new curriculum at all teacher education institutions, or modify the examination system in ways that affect all learners in particular courses of study, or alter the constitution and responsibilities of school boards or committees at all schools. Initiatives of that sort, which may be an effective strategy for expanding and improving education, generally have a guiding philosophy and management structure that differ sharply from reforms begun as limited pilots in selected locations. Since we are concerned with the challenges of enlarging scale, simultaneous nation-wide initiatives are not our primary focus here, except to the extent that they are informed by prior, smaller scale experiences.

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[2] That is the premise of their instructive overview, which they characterize as 'a first scientific look at scaling up' (Uvin and Miller, 1994). See also Uvin and Miller, 1996.

'Scale' has multiple senses and uses in this literature. Harrington and White point out that scale may refer to the level at which a reform is undertaken (village, district, region), to the analytic perspective from which reforms are assessed (a nation-wide reform may be assessed from the perspective of the village), to the investment strategy (small vs. large investments), to the breadth of the impact of a reform (a reform begun in a village may have an impact throughout a district, while a nation-wide reform may in practice have an impact in only a few villages or may affect particular segments of the population), or to the extent of community involvement (a village-level initiative may have limited or broad community participation) (Harrington and White, 1999). Even for a single organization or institution, 'going to scale' can have several meanings, including expanding the number of people affected (what some authors term organizational scaling) and expanding the number of activities (functional scaling). Some authors understand 'going to scale' to involve changing the focus of a reform, from project replication (undertaking the same activity at multiple sites) to building grassroots movements and community organizations to influencing the policy process. Accordingly, the ostensibly very simple question, what is the scale of that reform?, can in practice be several different questions. A reform focused at the village level, for example, can have large scale investment. That same reform could have large or small scale participation by the local community and could have larger or smaller impact on the society, whatever its primary locus.

Several researchers have sought to categorize efforts to enlarge scale. In his early paper, Myers developed a typology of scaling up that is widely used and that he has subsequently refined (Myers, 1984; Myers 2000). One strategy for increasing scale Myers termed *scale by expansion:* starting small, increasing gradually, and building on success. Often termed *replication,* this has become the most common model for enlarging scale and is our primary focus here. Drawing on Korten (Korten, 1980), Myers associates this strategy with a *learning process approach.* From that orientation, scale by expansion begins with learning to be effective (efficiency and coverage are initially low and problems and mistakes high), proceeds to learning to be efficient (reducing the input requirements per unit of output), and then progresses to learning to expand (recognizing the importance of local fit and pacing the expansion to match organizational capabilities).

Myers terms a second strategy *scale by explosion.* In this approach, the reform bypasses the pilot stage and instead develops a model to serve the entire country simultaneously.[3] Modifications and adaptations to accommodate diverse local settings generally follow rather than precede the initial implementation. A third strategy is *scale by association.* This approach seeks to combine several distinct though not necessarily coordinated efforts, each responding to a particular local setting. That is, rather than replicating a pilot effort, this orientation organizes separate initiatives into an integrated strategy for a country-wide reform. In practice, it seems, the association may be more a function of chance than planning.

Rather than asking *how scaling up is accomplished,* Uvin and Miller characterize *what is scaled up* (Uvin and Miller, 1994). In their typology, scaling up may focus on *structure:* organizations expand in size or constituencies *(quantitative scaling up);* on *programmes:* organizations expand the number and type of their activities *(functional scaling up);* on *strategy:* organizations move beyond service delivery towards empowerment and change in the structural causes of underdevelopment, including its contextual factors and its socio-political-economic environment *(political scaling up);* or on the *resource base:* organizations increase their financial and institutional base *(organizational scaling up).* These are of course not exclusI've categories. Quantitative scaling up, for example, may rest on effective functional and organizational scaling up.

They note that quantitative scaling up, the dimension that corresponds most closely with the common use of 'going to scale,' can have several paths. Effective local initiatives may *spread* to new sites. The national government or other organizations may seek to *replicate* a promising initiative in other settings or to stimulate expansion by using incentives and rewards to *nurture* promising initiatives on an increasingly large scale. Other paths are *aggregation* (separate organizations combine their resources to expand their activities) and *integration* (small programmes are incorporated into existing structures and systems).

Across these typologies empirical grounding remains limited. To reiterate, the most common usage, and our focus here, is to expand an apparently successful small pilot into country-wide program. Let us now explore efforts to enlarge the scale of innovations and reforms in education in Africa.

Innovation and Reform in African Education: Enlarging Scale

As we have noted, there have been many imaginative, exciting, and sometimes dramatic innovations in education in Africa. But apparently relatively few of those initiatives that started small have been successfully expanded into national programmes. Indeed, many have not survived beyond their enthusiastic initiation or beyond their initial, often externally provided, funding or beyond the departure of the initial leader.

We sought, therefore, to survey the literature on education reform in Africa, concentrating on empirical research on scaling up education reform. That turned out to be a far more difficult task than we had anticipated and itself a problem for scaling up education reform in Africa.

The Knowledge Base

Research on education reform in Africa is both rich and poor. It is rich in that it is voluminous, often imaginative and insightful, and continuing. It is poor in that once completed, research on education in Africa often disappears from view. Consequently, even though many people in many places, both African and non-African, are involved in studying education in Africa, it is difficult for anyone

[3] In practice, this approach is similar to a national reform rather than a scaled effort. As we indicated above, our primary focus here is on efforts that begin small and then expand.

anywhere to develop an inclusive, clear picture of that research. It is even more difficult to focus on a particular cross-cutting issue like scaling up. As Maclure notes

> This underscores a common thread that links almost all of the research highlighted in the ERNWACA documents—namely, that the dissemination of African educational research, in whatever form it has been presented, has been exceedingly limited and is thus generally unknown or quickly discounted as lacking credibility. (Maclure, 1997: 117)

The conditions associated with effective education reforms and with successful efforts to enlarge their scale are especially poorly documented.

Note that we distinguish here between participants' and observers' notes and assessments on the one hand and on the other, systematic and thorough empirical research. While reports and commentaries prepared by those most involved in education reforms do indeed provide important insights and understandings, they cannot play the same role as more detached comparative and critical analyses. Equally important, since our review suggests that initial efforts often seem quite successful, careful assessment requires attention to reforms and efforts to enlarge scale after the initial bubble of enthusiasm has passed, and perhaps after the launching leadership has been succeeded and national education officials have changed.

Note too that the very effort to enlarge scale may itself obscure or devalue systematic study. Our review suggests that it is not uncommon for those involved in scaling up to be so enmeshed in their efforts and so excited by the apparent progress that they do not document carefully what is happening and cannot subsequently explain fully how they achieved their objectives. As well, national officials may move so quickly to enlarge apparently successful pilots that they ignore evaluations and other studies in progress.

Development knowledge databases created by external agencies might include relevant research. Most often, however, those databases emphasize the research that the agency has commissioned and generally do not distinguish among observations, commentaries, participants' accounts, and systematic independent research. More broadly, we are not optimistic about the initiatives of external agencies to establish, maintain, and disseminate development knowledge databases and electronic exchanges of development expertise. To date, the process of those initiatives has been fundamentally disempowering.[4]

In sum, we have found that while there seem to be many studies of education reforms in Africa (though few of efforts to enlarge their scale), there is too little critical understanding of what is happening and why. The knowledge that has been developed is difficult to access and not widely shared. As well, information and knowledge—the two are not the same—are significantly tilted towards, and often shaped and managed by, the external funding and technical assistance agencies. Hence, we are not simply adding our voices to the periodic calls for more research, more policy-oriented research, and more databases of studies. Rather, we are arguing that improving the knowledge base on education and reform initiatives requires radical changes in the approach to the generation, storage, and dissemination of knowledge.

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[4] A fuller discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. For a recent overview of what seems problematic in this orientation, see Samoff and Stromquist, 2001. Wilks develops a sharp critique of the World Bank's Development Gateway (Wilks, 2000). Other research offers a more positive assessment of progress to date (King and McGrath, 2000, 2003).

Empirical Research on Enlarging the Scale of Education Reforms

As we have noted, our primary concern was to identify systematic empirical research on efforts to enlarge the scale of education reforms and thereby to go beyond the reports of a reform's initiators and managers and its initial period of enthusiasm and high energy. Broad and energetic searches of several sorts, including databases developed by UNESCO, the International Institute for Educational Planning, the World Bank, and the Educational Resources Information Center identified few empirical studies explicitly focused on enlarging scale in education in Africa.[5]

There have of course been numerous studies and evaluations of education reform in Africa, though notwithstanding the widespread policy attention, only rarely is enlarging scale explicitly addressed as a major research focus. For example, in the collection assembled for the World Bank's earlier Global Education Reform web site, enlarging scale was neither a Key Issue nor a Type of Reform. So too for the major topics and sub-topics on its current education page.[6] There have also been reviews of education sector studies and similar documents for Africa and for particular countries (Samoff with Assié-Lumumba, 1996; Agyeman, et al., 2000; Chikombah, et al., 1999; Ilboudo, et al., 2001; Sebatane, et al., 2000; Tilahun, et al., 1999). Some of those studies and evaluations, which are often difficult to secure, address enlarging scale, more or less systematically. In practice, however, it is difficult to determine which of the many studies address 'going to scale' empirically and critically. That search is even more challenging for the many studies of education reform commissioned and undertaken by African researchers that circulate locally and often remain unpublished.[7]

Many of the innovative education programmes and projects in Africa have been lauded as success stories. Relevant cases have been collected, for example within UNESCO's Cooperative Action Strategies in Basic Education in Africa (CASE AFRICA) project. In 1999 the Association for the Development of Education in Africa solicited national reports and studies in its Prospective Stock-Taking Review of Education in Africa, with special reference to breakthroughs on access, quality and capacity building (ADEA, 1999). One would expect that all or most of these reform efforts would now be much larger in scale. Yet, apparently few are. While some indicate plans to scale up, others do not.

Two recent contributions to the literature on education reform exemplify the challenge for research on enlarging scale. 'Scaling up girls education'—we thought we had found a contemporary paper focused on our major concerns (Unterhalter et al., 2004). The title proved to be the promise, not the premise. In this paper Unterhalter and her colleagues report on an effort to develop a methodology for measuring and assessing progress towards the goal of gender equality in education. Their focus is primarily methodological, drawing on case studies in four African countries. While this paper is a productive contribution to understanding obstacles to equality and how to address them, it provides little empirical analysis of the four cases and neither data nor analysis on efforts to enlarge scale. The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) hosted a

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[5] An important exception that focuses explicitly on the issues addressed here is Schwille et al., 2001.

[6] The World Bank's Global Education Reform web site was archived in as a toolkit in 2005. Major topics on the Education page are: education for all; economics of education; education for the knowledge economy; school health, nutrition, and HIV/AIDS; and science, technology, and innovation: go.worldbank.org/U9VBTV35X0 [2010.07.17].

[7] Maclure's work provides a useful entry point for research on education in Africa, both Maclure, 1997, prepared for ERNWACA (Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa), and Maclure 2006. Another is the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), which commissioned country studies for its 1999, 2001, and 2003 Biennial Meetings (ADEA, 1999; ADEA 2001; ADEA 2003). For an overview of education in Africa more generally that highlights problems and challenges, see Samoff, 2007b.

2004 consultation that addressed enlarging scale.[8] Several papers reported on pilot studies across the continent, with first-hand information on origins, experiences, and progress to date. Following a common format, most papers had sections on lessons learned and implications for going to scale. While these papers help us understand education reform in Africa, they are concerned with recent initiatives that were still in the glow of their initial enthusiasm. Expansion beyond the pilot remained for the most part on the future agenda. Their comments on enlarging scale were prospective and speculative and neither constituted nor reported on empirical research on efforts to proceed beyond the pilot stage. In short, often papers and conferences whose titles suggest they include empirical research on enlarging the scale of pilot programmes turn out to be reports on the pilots with some reflection on what might come next. Excitement and enthusiasm remain unaccompanied by independent and sustained studies.

Maclure makes a similar observation. Even where research, or more often evaluations, focus on activities that are intended to be scaled up, he points out, the study or assessment concentrates largely on the pilot phase, with little or no attention to the process of enlarging scale.

> Regardless of variation on the relative success or failure of reform efforts, evaluations tend to focus mainly on the pilot phases of reform programs. (Maclure, 1997: 102)

The Challenge of Evaluating Outcomes in Education

Evaluating education is always a daunting challenge. People and institutions simply refuse to hold still. Nor should we expect them to. We value adaptation and accommodation, flexibility and responsiveness, self-reflection and self-critique, and the ability to use experience to modify conception, structure, content, and practice. Not only is empirical research on enlarging scale limited, but few of the studies that have been done effectively address these challenges. It is important to note briefly how that further restricts the information base for a review of efforts to enlarge scale.

That education flux is often in tension with the standard evaluation model, which presumes a reasonably orderly progression from initial assumptions to goals and objectives to indicators to measures to observations to findings to recommendations, relying generally on the manipulation and analysis of quantitative data. Distinguishing independent from dependent variables, that approach seeks to identify the factors (inputs) of greatest consequence for observed behaviours (outputs). To the extent possible it does so in a natural (as contrasted with a laboratory) setting, by isolating the elements of primary interest, separating them from confounding influences—other factors, environmental characteristics, and the evaluators' own role. Although a clean dissection is not always possible, that is the common goal.

For education that is particularly problematic. Education is at its core contextual. Learning is the result of connections, interactions, responses, shared experiences, and empathy, not clinical detachment. Consider, for example, curriculum development. There can be no good curriculum independent of the context in which it is used, just as neither a pencil nor a computer is intrinsically good. The best curriculum emerges from an interactive process that involves people with different sorts of expertise and experience, that considers, shapes, tests, and then modifies a wide range of

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[8]The Policy Consultation on Scaling Up Good Practices in Girls' Education, Nairobi, 23–25 June 2004, organized within the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative. For the agenda, see http://213.225.140.43/human_development/agenda.pdf [2004.09.13].

content and ways to use it, and that continues to evolve as it is implemented. It is this understanding of *education as process,* much more than the revision of prior knowledge and the appearance of new textbooks, that requires that the curriculum be continually rewritten and that permits each subsequent revision not to be too tightly bound to its predecessor. The wisdom that is embedded in curriculum is not created by the orderly accumulation of bits of knowledge, like collecting sea shells along the beach, but rather generated by the confrontation of perspectives, experiences, and preferences. It is not scientific consensus but new and enduring disagreements—about what are the core ideas, about how learners can effectively engage those ideas, about the appropriate roles for instructors, students, and materials, even about the learning process—that are the stuff of curriculum development.

Much of the writing on education reform, especially reports and studies commissioned by the external funding and technical assistance agencies, focuses on what are termed best practices. For the funders, that becomes another form of enlarging scale: identify best practices in one setting and apply them in others. Yet, that education is contextual, that it is negotiated, and that it is as much process as outcome makes educators uneasy with notions like 'best practices' and 'lessons learned,' since what makes a particular practice effective in one setting is a function of both the practice and the setting. As well, educators find frustrating the inclination to dissect education from its context in order to study and evaluate it. There are many examples of context-free 'lessons' that become stultifying straight jackets rather than useful guides to action. Education quality, whether in academic content, planning, organization, administration, or management, is also significantly locally contingent. It is of course possible to learn from other settings, understandings, approaches, and practices. That is the driving dynamic of this paper.

But what are often termed 'lessons learned' must be adapted and tuned to the local context. That is so for several reasons. First, the education ground rules differ and may change frequently and unexpectedly. For example, differences in where responsibility for curriculum development is lodged may make decisions in one setting neither comparable nor achievable in another. Second, a particular mix of its multiple components gives each education system a unique character. Simplifying assumptions about what matters that are appropriate to one setting may exclude from consideration what are determining influences in another. Third, small differences may escape observation and yet have profound impacts. Note that better measurement techniques cannot solve this problem, since there will always be differences that the measuring instruments cannot detect. Fourth, countries differ in their priorities. Fifth, those involved in education reform, as well as the broader education community and national policy makers, often have widely different understandings of appropriate evaluation measures and indicators of success. Sixth, much of what matters in education—that is, that affects access, learning outcomes, and management—is continually negotiated and renegotiated. Seventh, education reform commonly has long time horizons, while assessment is generally expected to be relatively rapid. A reform that is deemed successful shortly after its initiation may prove not to be sustainable. The early assessment, or other short-period assessments, may come to very different conclusions from a longer-term evaluation.

Further complicating efforts to monitor education reforms and enlarge their scale is an inclination towards what has been termed 'innovation overload' (Hopkins et al.1994: 12). When a reform initiative seems not to produce desired results immediately, the tendency is to introduce a new change, often without adequate implementation and monitoring of the previous initiative or efforts to sustain it beyond its early difficulties. There are also pressures to generate quick rather than long-term solutions, a situation sometimes encouraged by demands of the funding agencies. As Shaeffer puts it, 'Such pressure can make it difficult to adapt to local circumstances and therefore tempt a ministry to finish a project, declare it a success, and move to yet another rather than reinforcing the operations, maintenance, and sustainability of the first' (Shaeffer, 1992: 16).

Another challenge for research on enlarging scale is that education innovations may also have a short political life and may be more pronouncement than practice. Throughout the world education

reforms often have explicitly political origins, commonly to win votes. That in itself is not necessarily problematic, since in a democracy electoral participation should influence public policy. Still, it is not uncommon to find that education initiatives have been imposed on schools that are already under-resourced or overburdened. All too frequently, teachers and others learn of major changes on the radio news or by word of mouth from colleagues at the school house door. Unfortunately, what appear to be studies of education reforms regularly confuse announcement with implementation and turn out to be commentaries on proposals, not research on implemented programmes. In these circumstances, as Obanya notes, policies and intentions can be regarded as successes because their announcement is more important than their implementation, which remains unmonitored (Obanya, 1989).

The analytic challenge here is formidable. Little of the empirical research on education innovation and reform in Africa focuses explicitly on enlarging scale. Innovations proliferate, some well planned and supported but many with inadequate preparation, political support, and funding. Education is a moving target. Since education is contextual, locally contingent, and regularly renegotiated, and since education outcomes always have multiple origins and causes, it is difficult to determine whether scaling helped, hurt, or made no difference.

These caveats are important to our effort to explore attempts to enlarge the scale of education reforms. They caution us that the determination of 'what works' and what is 'successful' is itself in part, perhaps a very large part, contextual and contingent. They require us to distinguish between informed commentaries and systematic, independent critical research. Consequently, we must be careful not to generalize beyond the reach of the empirical analyses of scaling up and to recognize that the generalizations that seem well grounded must be interpreted in the context of specific initiatives and settings.

Going to Scale: Analysis and Implications

What do we learn from our review of efforts in Africa and elsewhere to enlarge the scale of innovations and reforms in education and other spheres of development? What are the common patterns and striking divergences?

Successful Scaling Up

In their critical overview of support to education reform, Healey and DeStefano argue that most school reform initiatives are in one way or another demonstrations or pilots or models (Healey and DeStefano, 1997). They point out that pockets of good educational practice can be found almost *anywhere,* suggesting that what is deemed good education is not primarily a function of esoteric knowledge (Healey and DeStefano, 1997: 2 [original emphasis]). Rather, innovative teachers, initiative-taking and perhaps politically influential parents, risk-taking and non-conformist headmasters, and progressive communities can all be sources for effective innovations in education. Imaginative reforms can thus be found throughout the world, often amidst poverty and other very trying circumstances. At the same time, good educational practices cannot be found *everywhere.* Indeed, reform initiatives are pilots precisely because the mix of ingredients that lead to school improvement varies in time and place and because notwithstanding years of research attention to approach and strategy, the most effective learning results from creative interactions among teachers and learners, that is, more from interactive process than from prior planning.

> if school reformers really did know how to create good schools, the scale-up problem probably would not exist. . . . there are no magic bullets . . . . (Healey and DeStefano, 1997: 7)

The pilot character of education reform is particularly clear in Africa, where education has become heavily dependent on external assistance. Since that assistance is predominantly focused on technical improvements (including teacher education, curriculum development, materials design and production, examination reform, assessment, education planning), and since external agencies commonly envision limited duration funding for specific activities, nearly all projects are pilot or demonstration or experimental. Unfortunately, Healey and DeStefano report, evaluations indicate that at best half, or perhaps as few as one out of ten, reform initiatives have been sustained.

With that sobering statistic, let us consider what seems to work. As we have noted, success in enlarging small scale innovations and reforms may be due to elements specific to a particular setting and time and may not be readily generalized to other times and places. The common wisdom in many studies is that three factors are critical to enlarging the scale of an education reform: (a) a charismatic leader dedicated to the reform and committed to its expansion, (b) strong interest and demand in the communities at the sites targeted for expansion, and (c) sufficient funding, which may in practice be limited resources available from local sources. In the absence of one of those factors, scaling up is far less likely to succeed.

It is useful here to elaborate and extend that list by summarizing other factors that seem to be associated with successful scaling up. For that, we combine the findings of a wide range of studies, both primary and secondary,[9] and our own observations on the cases reviewed. Note that since unsuccessful reforms are poor candidates for scaling up, there is necessarily some overlap between factors associated with effective reform and factors associated with successful scaling up.

Especially important are (a) a clear, explicit, visible, and reiterated political commitment to support both the reform and efforts to enlarge its scale and (b) clear accountability for outcomes. Also significant are: (c) significant and sustained local involvement in decision making and implementation and as a result, (d) local ownership of specific elements of the reform; (e) organizing pilots as learning experiences; (f) expectation to enlarge scale from the outset of the pilot; (g) flexible, iterative planning; (h) strong links among community and other organizations; and (i) effective infrastructure, including availability of facilitators, trainers, animators, and support staff.

A context supportive of effective enlargement of scale generally also includes a simple information system that can provide rapid and focused feedback, continuity in leadership and participation, recognition that resolving the tension between teacher and school autonomy on the one hand and external direction on the other must be continually negotiated rather than achieved once and for all, and opportunities to reflect on and celebrate accomplishments during the scaling effort.

Why Scaling Up Fails

As we have noted, Healey and DeStefano estimate that at most half, or perhaps only one out of ten, education reform initiatives have been sustained. Scaling up apparently has a similar record. Why is that?

To explain unsuccessful reform and scaling, most research and evaluations focus on antecedents and inputs, with much less attention to the process of implementation and almost none to the

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[9] As we have noted, there have been very few systematic empirical studies of the process of enlarging scale that focus on what has occurred over a period of five or more years after the pilot or original reform. Accordingly, in addition to those few studies, we have drawn on the much broader education reform literature. The references listed below thus include both explicitly cited studies and other sources relevant to this discussion.

longer term effects, whether positive or negative, of the efforts to innovate and enlarge scale. As Maclure notes in his synthesis and review of education research in west and central Africa:

> In terms of content, ERNWACA research has focused heavily on the antecedents and conceptual weaknesses of reform policies and on the contingencies that result in less-than-expected outcomes. Yet there is little analysis of the *process* of implementation. Likewise, there appears to be little understanding of the impact that educational innovations and reforms have on the key actors charged with implementing them, and on the school populations and local communities that are the targeted beneficiaries of educational change. The residual effects of *efforts* to generate positive change, and perceptions of relative success or failure at different levels of educational bureaucracies and in local communities, still remain largely undisclosed. (Maclure, 1997: 105; original emphasis)

Seeking to explain unsuccessful efforts to enlarge scale, nearly all commentators point to the absence of one or more of the three major factors we identified earlier: *leadership, local interest and demand,* and *funding.* The common stories are that while particular activities could be replicated in new sites, the dynamic leadership that made those activities effective in the pilots was not available and could not be reproduced in the new sites, that the perceived local need that mobilized and energized participation in the pilots did not emerge in the new sites, and that funding, often available for the pilots from external sources, was not sufficient to sustain the expansion. That is, the energy, intensity, and resources focused on the initial setting are not accompanied by corresponding attention to efforts to expand the successes to new sites.

> None of the research reports covered in the ERNWACA papers provides any indication of fundamental reforms that have been disseminated and institutionalized effectively in national education systems. Instead, educational reform appears as a parade of piecemeal innovations that often create a flurry of activity for short periods of time in a limited number of schools within fairly restricted geographical areas. Unfortunately, as the ERNWACA documents attest, without strong institutional and resources bases, efforts to reform and innovate are usually abandoned or relegated to perpetual pilot status. (Maclure, 1997: 102)

As above it is useful to combine the findings of a wide range of studies and our own observations on the cases reviewed to summarize other factors associated with ineffective reform and unsuccessful efforts to enlarge scale. Especially important are (a) limited public involvement in the reform; (b) insufficient political commitment; and (c) little or no direct accountability for outcomes. In some settings (d) initiatives are hijacked, commandeered, or redirected by local or national government or other institutions. Also significant are (e) organizational, management, and implementation problems; (f) obstacles rooted in applicable laws, statutes, and regulations; (g) inadequate communication, especially between the organizations charged with implementing the enlargement of scale and local communities; (h) insufficient relevant knowledge; and (i) decision making focused on immediate crises rather than longer term developments, on distributive politics rather than education and learning, and on regulating behaviour rather than on encouraging change.

That list could be longer. Most problematic, however, may be not specific factors but rather the core assumptions about commitment to and support for enlarging scale. Indeed, some observers argue that scaling up, especially in the form of efforts to replicate or reproduce effective reforms in multiple settings, is an inherently flawed approach. Malvicini and Jackson develop that critique

forcefully (Malvicini and Jackson, nd., who cite Gustavsen, et al., 1996). First, they address the specific experiences of the Swedish Working Life Fund:

> The Swedish Working Life Fund (SWLF) invested more than one billion US Dollars in over 25,000 local projects. Between 1990 and 1995 these projects touched over half the country's workforce supporting significant changes toward popular empowerment and increased productivity. Surprisingly, *no blueprint approach* was applied here—just the opposite. The theory underlying the effort refuted the effectiveness of replicating pilot projects, successful models, or what Gustavsen et al. (1996) call *star-cases.* . . . . The role of the fund's staff was to support the projects (organizations) internal 'infrastructure of change,' opening up space, an *environment where people create their own change.* . . . . It was only after the project began that the key idea of *learning networks* emerged. *[original emphasis]*

They then address scaling up more generally:

> *Pilots rarely go to scale.* While designers hope that government or local people will replicate successful model programs, scaling up remains rhetoric particularly in large donor-funded initiatives, where there is little budget or interest after the donor withdraws. Why? Communities with thriving pilots usually have a great measure of social capital invested and created by program processes. There are high degrees of local creativity, enthusiasm, pride, and trust present in the process of designing and implementing innovative programs. After the 'awards are given' or the 'book is published' or the 'conference held' to celebrate the accomplishments of the pilot, it is perhaps *less likely* to be replicated. *[original emphasis]*

There is No Blueprint

Let us summarize, sensitive to the risks of generalizing. Put sharply, there is no general blueprint for enlarging scale. Success depends on responsiveness to the local setting and strong local organization. Successful transition from project to programme is associated with a learning process. That requires organizations that embrace error, plan with the local community, and link knowledge building with action.

Some education reforms are much more amenable to national initiation and management than others. Reforms that are seen as largely technical and that do not threaten local interests (for example, modifying the curriculum and pedagogy for teaching basic science) can be more readily led by education officials than reforms perceived as potentially destabilizing and threatening to the local community (for example, increased access for girls or religious or ethnic minorities), which may be initiated by national officials but which are ultimately more dependent on local leadership and community involvement.

From the perspective of enlarging scale, decentralized management has a dual edge. On the one hand, local management and control may be essential for a reform to take root and expand. On the other hand, local management and control risk strengthening the influence of local opponents to the reform, encouraging programmes in particular areas to lose sight of the larger goals of the reform, and permitting orientations in different settings to diverge so widely that they overwhelm central management and support capacities.

As well, scaling up, especially in the form of replication, may be, and perhaps often is, in tension with participatory development and local ownership of development initiatives and programmes. (We return to this point below.)

When is Scaling Up Inappropriate or Likely to be Unviable?

We began with the notion that scaling up—start small, think big—is widely thought to be an effective strategy for experimenting with new ideas and extending the reach of education reforms. In some circumstances, that is surely so, though perhaps far less often than has been anticipated. In other circumstances, however, scaling up is inappropriate or likely to be unviable.

Scaling up may so increase costs or so reduce revenue that the reform becomes unsustainable. It is often assumed that enlarging effective pilot programmes will be associated with economies of scale. Yet, the evidence on that is unclear.

> While many planners 'intuitively feel' that economies of scale exist with respect to their particular projects, there is no conclusive evidence on this topic. (Gaspari, 1980, quoted in Myers, 1984: 12)

Initial economies of scale may be superseded by rising unit costs as expansion includes those who are more difficult to reach. As well, the communities involved in the pilot efforts may be unwilling to fund activities elsewhere, while at the new sites there may be insufficient local support or involvement to generate needed funding. Consequently, exploring the longer term cost implications of scaling up, and thus the sustainability of the reform, must occur early and must be based on sound cost projections.

Scaling up risks distracting key leadership and spreading managerial and other capacities so widely that they can no longer cope. A strong and persisting thread of the education reform literature is the importance of leadership. School heads who are effective in mobilizing their communities and energizing their staffs will not necessarily do equally well with district, regional, or national responsibilities. Indeed, some of the attributes and behaviours that made them effective—ability to take the initiative in initially unsupportive circumstances, willingness to challenge authority, persistence in the face of criticism and adversity—will be unwelcome in the national education system and may be severely curtailed or sanctioned. So too for enlarging scale. Managerial and administrative systems appropriate to a province or a country are not simply large versions of village level oversight. Those who are competent in supervising and paying, say, one hundred teachers may be overwhelmed if they are expected to supervise and pay one hundred thousand teachers. At the same time, national managerial and administrative systems may not be sufficiently sensitive to the content and the form of the reform to sustain the initiative developed at the pilot sites.

Scaling up may outpace the expansion of the needed support infrastructure. Enlarging the scale of pilot programmes requires extending their support infrastructure, including the knowledge and skills not available in local communities. Where that infrastructure is not available, or cannot cope with the demand, scaling up may collapse in a disorderly heap, discouraging all involved and perhaps depleting the fertility of the education soil for further reforms.

Scaling up risks undermining the initial reform. Whether by distracting its leadership, or overwhelming its managerial and administrative capacities, or severing its ties to its local communities, or reducing its revenue base, or exposing it to new political controls, efforts to enlarge the scale of the initial reform may instead kill it. While some of those risks can be mitigated

or managed, decision makers will need to assess carefully whether the promises of going to scale outweigh the risks to the initial reform.

Scaling up may generate new and ultimately fatal political opposition. Precisely because education is so central to contemporary society, efforts to change it often challenge vested interests. The national political system may be able to accommodate those challenges when they remain localized and limited in number. Scaling up risks, indeed may require, generalizing those challenges. Feeling threatened, political elites and organizations may shift from cautious tolerance of the reform to implacable opposition. If so, then rather than extending the reach of the reform, scaling up may terminate it.

The conditions conducive to reform may be specific to its initial setting and absent elsewhere. Consider an analogy in another domain, power generation. Historically, power generation has been a story of 'going to scale': developing new ways to produce power (from small scale wood or dung burning to larger scale coal-burning steam and power generation [whose scale keeps increasing], to large hydroelectric dams, to nuclear power) and then increasing their capacity. With that history, imagine the development of a very effective strategy for producing power that has emerged in one corner of the country. Evaluation finds that strategy to be cost-effective (modest investment, low unit cost), sustainable (recurring costs can be met; limited or no negative environmental impact), and a boost to the local economy (generates jobs, encourages people to learn new skills and upgrade them, increases the demand for ancillary products and services). There would seem to be a clear argument for 'going to scale,' that is, replicating that power generating strategy to other parts of the country. But suppose that the innovative power generating strategy turned out to be windmills, which require a particular sort of local setting (regular strong winds) in order to be viable, let alone cost effective, sustainable, and economy boosting? 'Going to scale' might then be a very poor idea. The original innovation worked precisely because it was locally appropriate, carefully tuned to the circumstances of its setting. That very promising innovation will fail elsewhere because it will not have those local conditions.

The general point here is that the *enabling conditions* of effective reforms are often not universal or universally reproducible. Indeed, an effort to spread windmills over the entire country might kill that approach entirely—failures elsewhere will drain resources and expertise, lead decision makers to reject the strategy, and lead investors (both local and foreign) to refuse to risk further investments in that technology. The diseconomies of scale could be enormous.

Instead of windmills, our example could have used solar power, or power produced from the methane generated by decomposition in large refuse dumps, or other examples of innovations in power generation that require particular local conditions. Specialists in power generation refer to the importance of micropower generation—not solely or even primarily more and larger power plants to serve a large power grid, but also and especially small scale, local power generation that requires modest investment, that is well suited to local needs, that can respond quickly to changing local circumstances, and that can be managed locally. The most useful scale may be the smallest scale. So too in education.

Broadening the Focus

Thus far we have been concerned with why replication fails and when replication may be an inappropriate strategy for enlarging education initiatives. For that, we, like most of the available research, have concentrated on the reforms and efforts to expand them. We need now to broaden our explanatory frame. To understand the strikingly limited success of enlarging the scale of promising education initiatives in Africa, we need to consider the roles and capacity of the national government, the expectations and influences of the external funding agencies, and the interactions between the two. We need as well to consider the troubling tensions between 'going to scale' on

the one hand and development objectives and strategies on the other. Extended analysis of those domains is beyond the scope of this paper. We address them briefly here, therefore, both to highlight them and to help to frame studying and discussing them.

Roles of the National Government

What are the appropriate roles of the national government in efforts to scale up education reforms? Linear and technical responses are common. Education reform requires planning, organization, management, and monitoring. Education reform requires knowledge and expertise. Education reform requires funding and a supporting infrastructure. Education reforms must be integrated into the national education system. Scaling up requires all of those as well as communication, coordination, and evaluation. The government can and should, runs the common argument, assume most or all of those responsibilities. After all, expanding access to education and improving its quality offer benefits to those in power. Spread throughout the country, education can be the most visible public service and therefore the clearest manifestation of what the government is doing for the populace. But a response of that sort ignores the disorderly nature and political character of reform initiatives and sees reform as outcome rather than process.

The challenge for the national government is to provide direction and support without impeding a process that must have strong local roots and participation. As we have noted, that challenge may prove difficult for governments to meet.

Consider, for example, a national initiative on an issue for which there may not have yet emerged strong local demand. In many countries, efforts to improve girls' access to high quality, non-discriminatory education encounter hesitant support or explicit opposition locally. Over time, however, success in that initiative requires not only expanding access but also developing the local roots that will support and sustain that expansion. As FAWE notes, particular initiatives seem effective and very promising. Yet, enlarging scale involves far more than replicating in new sites specific measures designed to expand access. Scaling up requires as well nurturing and spreading the enabling conditions for those measures.

The literature and experiences we have reviewed suggest that the appropriate roles for the national government in enlarging the scale of education reforms are: specifying broad objectives and providing resources; bringing programme planning and implementation together—establishing appropriate institutions, appointing key personnel, and then providing discretion to leaders; participating in monitoring progress and performance; providing stability (continuity and commitment may be more important than charisma); and curbing the power of local elites, especially through institutionalizing democratic decision making, ensuring accountability, and strengthening local institutions.

We must not be naive. Education reform, and therefore scaling up, is as much political as it is technical. However brilliant the idea, its implementation requires creating and maintaining a supportive political environment. Its advocates will need to build coalitions, nurture allies, and find ways to deal with opponents. Vested interests, perhaps important elements of the education ministry and national government, may feel threatened by education reforms. Indeed, those in power have periodically shown themselves to be more apprehensive about a literate and articulate citizenry than about the incapacities induced by illiteracy and persisting poverty. Governments are unlikely to take actions that jeopardize their security of tenure.

We must not be naive in another sense. Whatever their politics, some, perhaps many, African governments simply do not have the capacity—institutions, personnel, resources—to launch, nurture, sustain, and protect education reform. In part, that has to do with the disempowering legacies of colonial role. In part, that reflects the limited vision and self-aggrandizing concentration of post-colonial power-holders. And in part, the incapacities of African states stem from their

continuing dependence on external support. Ironically, that dependence has been deepened and institutionalized by several international programmes ostensibly designed to reduce debt. These observations often breed unbridled cynicism and pessimism. Why talk about education reform if the government cannot even maintain a solid basic education system, pay its teachers, provide instructional materials, and reduce regional and other inequalities in access to school? That despair, we think, is misguided. Yes, government incapacity is a serious obstacle to education reform at both smaller and larger scale. Transferring responsibility for education to NGOs or companies may be attractive as a short-term fix but ultimately further undermines public accountability for the provision of education as a public good. Far from unachievable, serious education reform, we believe, is itself a strategy for increasing government capacity and accountability. While developing that argument more fully is beyond the scope of this analysis, the recognition of government incapacity is not a rationale for inattention to the details of education reforms and efforts to enlarge their scale.

There are two important implications here. First, the general commitment to democratic deliberation, participation, and accountability, including the enabling conditions that permit all citizens to influence policy and decisions, are important for education reform at smaller and larger scales. Second, a government genuinely committed to education reform must create space for it. That includes tolerating creative deviance and periodically sharp criticism. Societies that cannot tolerate citizens who stand up and say (often in a loud voice and unpleasant tone) 'The old way is wrong. Here is a better way.' cannot learn or develop.

Roles of the External Funding and Technical Assistance Agencies

As we have noted, education in Africa has become heavily dependent on external finance, education reform even more so. In some African countries external funds provide most or nearly all of the development budget; in some there is direct or indirect support for recurrent expenditures.[10] Hence, since external role in education reform in Africa is extensive and deep, our review of efforts to enlarge the scale of reform initiatives is indirectly also a review of development cooperation. What, then, are the appropriate roles of the external funding and technical assistance agencies in efforts to enlarge the scale of education reforms? While everyone agrees on the importance of self-reliance and sustainability and everyone recognizes that both are in tension with continued dependence on external funding, it would be naive to assume that in the near future African countries will forego foreign support to education.

In view of the disabilities of dependence and the persisting demand for foreign funding, it is tempting to assert that the appropriate role for the external agencies is to provide the funds and step aside. But that, too, would be naive and short sighted. It would be naive because the external agencies and the organizations and governments to which they are responsible have their own interests and agendas. International cooperation and development partnership require that all partners recognize and respect the interests of the others. It would also be naive to ignore the education for all campaigns, the successive efforts to modify the ways in which external assistance is provided, and the international agreements to reduce debt, to improve aid effectiveness, and to set standards for aid practice. Since that cluster of activities both is nurtured by the liberal ethos that underlies much of development assistance and at the same time is part of the global process of setting the terms for and managing the integration of poor countries into the global political economy, it will remain active and prominent for the foreseeable future. It cannot be simply wished away. Nor is there the political will to reject or significantly reorganize that role. Ignoring that

[10] The literature on aid to education in Africa grows steadily. For an overview of the consequences of persisting reliance on that external support, see Samoff, 2007a.

external role would be short sighted because even when locally rooted, and perhaps especially so, education reform benefits from external inputs of several sorts.

The challenge for the external funding and technical assistance agencies, therefore, is to provide financial and other support without dominating the policy agenda or becoming the arbiter for acceptable practice and thereby stymying local initiative and impeding national ownership and management.[11] That challenge may prove difficult for external agencies to meet, a function primarily of their structural roles and organizational values and styles, not of the imagination, or good will, or dedication of their staffs.[12]

The implications for the funding agencies from this perspective are several. Since their funding carries political influence, they must address explicitly the risk that setting objectives, methods, and assessment measures, however valuable and defensible in their own terms, will effectively block local initiatives and undermine local authority and accountability. The record to date suggests that agencies should view pilot projects like venture capital investments—with great optimism, continued funding through initial adversity, and likely a high failure rate. Because there can be no standard blueprint and because each effort must be tuned to local contexts, circumstances, and timing, support programmes must permit flexibility. Effective assistance to education reform must go beyond technical inputs to include explicit and energetic support for democratic and participatory decision making and to insist on transparency and accountability to the local community. Funding agencies must find creative ways to deal with large numbers of small scale activities (both block grants to intermediary organizations that disburse funds more widely and small grant programmes have proved effective).

While we believe there is a continuing role for external agencies in the process of scaling up education reform, we do not accept uncritically some agencies' claims that their development expertise and advice is more important than their funding and that their primary role should be that of a development advisory service. Indeed, we think there is a strong case to be made for separating the funding role from the advisory role and for locating the advisory role outside the funding institutions. Developing that case, however, is beyond the scope of the discussion here.

Locus of Authority and Responsibility

As we have noted, development advisers, decision makers, and practitioners commonly assume that education reforms must 'go to scale.' If learning is fundamentally a local process, and if local participation and ownership are essential for effective reform, where should authority and responsibility for enlarging scale lie?

Everyone favours alleviating the consequences of poverty and reducing and eliminating poverty entirely. Everyone—national governments, funding and technical assistance agencies, NGO, local community organizations—claims to be the most effective advocate for the poor, not infrequently as against the others. It is not uncommon for external agencies to insist that they protect the interests of the poor and disadvantaged more effectively than their own governments. So do some

[11] We do not address here external organizations whose goal is to influence directions and priorities in the development of education in Africa. Their funding has explicit expectations and often formal conditions. Africa's education communities (and national decision makers) must decide whether or not the value of their advice, technical assistance, and funds exceeds the cost of their influence and authority.

[12] (Samoff 2009) explores further the dysfunctions of foreign aid.

NGOs. Those governments of course disagree. While it is often asserted that 'the poor know best'—a claim that at its core is quite reasonable but in specific circumstances may be technically incorrect and may romanticize poverty—often the non-poor who make that assertion are unwilling to accept its implications. In some circumstances, each of those claims is accurate. But in others, each of the advocates may do more to perpetuate than alleviate poverty. With everyone claiming to be the most effective advocate for the disadvantaged and at the same time insisting on local initiation and local ownership, where should the locus of authority and responsibility lie? Our review of efforts to enlarge the scale of education reforms confirms that there is no general or right answer to that question. In some circumstances, central government (or even foreign agencies) can protect the disadvantaged against interests, pressures, and authorities in their own local setting, while in other circumstances central government and foreign agencies are the problem, not the solution. Several related themes that have emerged from our analysis warrant noting briefly here.

The appropriate balance between central direction and local autonomy is likely to vary over time and circumstances, perhaps even within the same setting. Many years of discussion about decentralization make this point. Systematic study suggests that where it is implemented, decentralization accomplishes different things in different places, often in very different forms. Put positively, the appropriate balance between central direction and local autonomy is specific to particular places, times, and circumstances.

Notwithstanding laws and regulations, the location of authority and responsibility are often negotiated. That is especially important where the reform objective is social transformation and where the mode of reform incorporates a learning process. Like decentralization, effective scaling up reflects on-going negotiations about where authority and responsibility for specific activities should lie. An approach that is successful in one setting may or may not be applicable in another. More generally, effective scaling up is likely to require multiple poles of activity with inclusive deliberations and periodic modifications that determine how responsibility and authority will be organized, rather than unvarying adherence to a prior formal plan.

Like education reform, scaling up is necessarily a political process. At its most effective, it is also a learning process. While plans emphasize discrete inputs, systems, responsibilities, participants, and expected outcomes, the practice is far more fluid. Reform advocates must construct supporting coalitions, which requires negotiation and compromise. Responsiveness and adaptability are requisites for learning. When reform and scaling up are understood and implemented primarily as a technical or mechanical process, they are unlikely to proceed much beyond their infancy. As we make this point, we do not romanticize local participation. As we have noted, local communities can be serious obstacles to change, and there are certainly circumstances where strong central leadership is required to initiate and scale up a reform. But that too is a matter of politics and learning. Even in circumstances where strong external intervention seems warranted, it is most likely to be effective and its accomplishments are most likely to be sustained when it understands reform and enlarging scale as a process that rests on dialogue, negotiation, and learning.

While detailed prior plans and clearly specified lines of authority are attractive to national governments and external agencies, they may in practice impede education reform and efforts to enlarge its scale. Planning can be organized as an opportunity for local engagement and participation. Required transparency and accountability can strengthen local participation. Clear guidelines and externally set standards and assessment measures may assure conformity to national objectives and consistency of evaluation. At the same time, the detailed planning and management that are commonly required can easily become so constraining that they undermine the reform or prevent enlarging its scale. As well, they can so overwhelm local capacities that only outsiders are deemed capable of understanding and leading the reform. When that occurs, the reform becomes unsustainable and certainly not scalable. The challenges here are to organize each stage in the reform and scaling as a process that engages those who must bear responsibility for it over time and to enable them to be the reformers rather than the subjects or recipients of the reform.

Non-governmental organizations can clearly play important roles in education reform and enlarging its scale. They cannot, however, replace government, external funding and technical assistance agencies, or local communities. In recent years there has been increasing attention to the roles and responsibilities of non-governmental organizations of all sorts, often termed 'civil society.'[13] Democratic participation depends on a healthy and active organizational infrastructure. External agencies have sought to nurture that infrastructure and at the same time have attempted to reduce the burden of managing assistance by channelling funds through selected non-governmental organizations. In some settings that has proved effective and efficient. But that expanded NGO role does not and cannot replace the important roles of either government or the external agencies and certainly cannot substitute for direct participation by local communities.

Cumulatively, these themes emphasize the importance of understanding both education reform and scaling up as processes rather than events or outcomes. Indeed, the most important outcome of education reform is a learning process, both within and outside schools.

'Going to Scale' and Participatory Local Development

Both systematic analysis and practical experience are clear on the importance of local participation in and ownership of development activities. Put simply, programmes without significant local participation cannot be maintained or sustained, however imaginative their conception and however well funded their initiation. At least rhetorically, participatory local development has become the development community's order of the day. The importance of local participation and ownership pose important challenges for efforts to enlarge the scale of initially successful education reforms. Put sharply, (1) education reforms that flourish because they have strong local roots may wither after the departure of charismatic leaders to assume other roles and the exhaustion of the initial funding, and (2) 'going to scale' often involves launching programs in new settings with neither local participation nor local ownership. Where the reform is externally driven or more responsive to foreign funders than to the local communities, it is likely to be more incapacitating than capacity building, to be poorly integrated into national development strategies, and unlikely to secure the political support necessary to see it through challenge and adversity.

The most common notion of going to scale, replicating pilots or small initiatives, risks undermining the local participation essential to the reform.

> How can a development initiative move beyond the local level and make a larger impact while continuing to foster participation? Can a participatory, bottom-up program, or the organization managing it, scale up while avoiding the problem of cumbersome and overstaffed organizations, detached from their grassroots bases, becoming mere sub-contractors of the foreign aid system or of the state, unaccountable to the communities who they claim to represent? (Uvin and Miller, 1994: 3)

Note that the nearly universal affirmation of the importance of *local participation* masks the multiple meanings assigned to that term. As Uvin and Miller note, local participation can mean little more than target population for a reform, or can refer to varying levels of involvement, from limited

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[13] To simplify and focus the discussion, we use the term 'non-governmental organization' literally, that is to include all groups and organizations that are not formally part of the government—small and large, local and foreign, nationally based and community based, multi-issue and single-issue, formal and informal.

consultation, to direct roles in preparation and implementation, to managerial and financial responsibility, to engagement in conception, planning, and policy and decision making, to primary authority and control over activities and resources (Uvin and Miller, 1994: 4). It is responsibility and accountability for process and outcomes, not simply limited or worse, formalistic but empty, consultation that are required for effective reform.

Thus the tension. Replication is expected to involve planning and careful management and to produce economies of scale, commonly with a central coordinating institution, which may be governmental or non-governmental. Participatory local development and local ownership, however, assume a locally generated dynamic, which may differ from place to place and which is likely to be, at least in some places, a very slow process. Going to scale, which emphasizes planning, coordination, and management, may in practice undermine participatory local development, which emphasizes flexibility, responsiveness, and adaptability.

Indeed, some of the programmes widely regarded as effective education reforms and successful scaling up began outside the national formal education system (among the most commonly cited are the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, Lok Jumbish [India] and Escuela Nueva [Colombia]). Their founding mission was to address gaps in that system or to challenge its premises and practices. At their inception education officials were inclined to regard those programmes as problems, not solutions. They were participatory. They met local needs. They had local support and over time local funding. They survived, in large part because they remained so local and resisted central control and direction. Poor candidates for nationally-led replication, their organic connections with local communities, including strong local participation in management, enabled them to spread.

We must not romanticize that process. Communities and local organizations can also be obstacles to change. Just as much of the writing about going to scale is uncritical of its own core idea, so indeed a good deal of the writing about participatory local development is only infrequently self-critical. Local communities are often portrayed in romantic terms as always and fully aware of their needs and very clear on how best to meet them, less affected, distracted, and confused by poverty, politics, and personality than people elsewhere. Abraham and Platteau challenge the current passion of the development community for participatory development and community-driven-development (Abraham and Platteau, 2001). That orientation is popular, they argue, because game theory predicts and (naive) anthropologists claim that communities are the most effective agency for allocating resources, enforcing rules, and targeting the poor and because funding agencies assign high priority to disbursing large amounts of money quickly in ways that distinguish their current activities from the now discredited past of large development projects. Yet, Abraham and Platteau argue, success is rarely attained on these terms. Local communities are dominated by rent-seeking, self-aggrandizing, unaccountable local elites who can invoke a host of sharing norms and other redistributive mechanisms to ensure that their status is not challenged. Their conservative political base is protected by the shortage of change agents to work with communities over the long term, thereby thwarting efforts to bring about lasting transformations in local organizing structures and procedures, and by the general inclination of funding agencies to judge their own success by the size and rapidity of funds disbursed, not lasting organizational change.

Strong local participation is not a magic formula. Clearly, there are important roles for outsiders in education reform and enlarging its scale. The infusion of new ideas and analytic tools may both fuel and sustain reform. Since closeness with practice can not only enhance understanding but can also constrain perspective and limit alternatives, informed and committed outsiders can help to analyse, critique, and thereby improve practice.

What is to be Scaled Up?

Scaling up in education is intended to expand access and improve quality for more people over a wider geographical area, and to do so in ways that are efficient, equitable, and sustainable. Given education's critical role, the strategies adopted to promote education reform by enlarging the scale of effective pilots must address the broader development objectives of empowerment, equity, social transformation, and sustainable change.

Both the general literature and the studies of African experiences emphasize that scaling up success stories rest on both systemic and specifically local elements. The initial reform addresses a well-understood local need and responds to significant local demand. The reform itself is largely locally derived and is led, nurtured, and often protected by leaders who are charismatic, forceful, inventive, and able to build political coalitions to support and shelter the reform. The reform is adequately financed, which means either a long-term commitment by government or other agency or, more often, significant continuing local funding. Most important, there is significant local ownership of the reform.

Along with enlarging the scale of effective pilots, national initiatives are also important tools of education reform. The national coherence of the education system is surely a reasonable objective. Local communities and their leaders, however, as well as teachers, students, and parents, can and do oppose change. Thus, for national initiatives to survive, they must develop local advocates and supporting constituencies. Strong authoritarian leaderships may impose reforms, but that approach is neither desirable (learning necessarily involves challenging authority) nor sustainable.

The importance of the local roots of this process suggest that mechanically replicating the specific elements of the reform in other settings will only rarely lead to a viable and sustainable outcome.

> BASICS thinking about scaling up its community programs should go beyond the identification of specific programs that can be replicated; rather, *the focus should be on institutionalizing a system for supporting community programs at a scale appropriate for given target groups and settings.* . . . . The goal then is to implement a coordinated package of complementary strategies to achieve maximum impact on a broad scale. (U.S.A.I.D., *BASICS II:* Chapter 3 [emphasis added].

> Attempting to replicate the reform itself (i.e., take it to scale) *inevitably* violates some of the very conditions that render certain innovations successful in the first place. The fact is that people's educational aspirations, needs, and contexts differ from place to place. Accordingly, what works in one location won't necessarily work in another. And even in those instances where an 'outside' innovation addresses some of the specific needs and aspirations of a particular location, its fate is still precarious, for unless there is widespread ownership of the innovation (a factor largely engendered through the development of local solutions), chances are that it will not become a permanent feature of that location's educational landscape. (Healey and DeStefano, 1997: 11)

Accordingly, rather than replicating the specific elements of the reform, *what must be scaled up are the conditions that permitted the initial reform to be successful and the local roots that can sustain it.* That challenge involves finding ways to generate widespread and locally rooted demand for the reform and to support an informed and inclusive locally-based deliberation over the content and form of the reform. That challenge also requires finding ways to make political space for the reform

and to protect it from vested interests who perceive it as a threat and a bureaucracy whose efforts to routinize change often smother it. At the same time, those directly involved in the reform must understand reform as a continuing process rather than a specific outcome and must structure it to embed learning at its core.

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