



Mainstreaming Scaling in International Funder Organizations

Findings, Lessons and Recommendations

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What we'll cover

1. Motivation, methods and scope
2. Key findings on mainstreaming by funders to date
3. Lessons on good transformational scaling
4. Lessons on mainstreaming transformational scaling practices
5. Mainstreaming of transformational scaling by different funder types
6. Recommendations for funders
7. Next Steps



1. Motivation, method, and scope of the Mainstreaming Initiative



Motivation

Why focus on international development and climate funders?

- Important catalysts for transformational impact at scale
- Responsibility for doing no harm, but often do not help, hinder instead
- Scaling Community of Practice (SCoP) did extensive prior work with individual funders
- But now, opportunity to move the needle for the funder community as a whole



Method

- “Action Research” – help funders mainstream scaling and gather lessons for the funder community as a whole
- Case study approach – collaborative analysis by funder staff, SCoP team, and external experts
- Focused on
 - What are good scaling practices for funders
 - How to mainstream these practices
- Common set of questions adapted to each funder organization
- Cross-cutting analysis complemented case studies



Scope

- A three-year action-research initiative 2023-2025
- 28 case studies of funder partners plus cross-cutting analysis and consultations
- Broad gauged across funder types
- Funders joined because of their interest; sample not representative
- A diagnostic learning experience, not an evaluation for accountability



28 case studies

- **3 MDBs** (AfDB, IDB, World Bank)
- **4 bilateral official** (AFD, GIZ, 2xUSAID-FtF)
- **6 vertical funds** (Adaptation Fund, FAO, GFF, IFAD, SOFF, STDF)
- **6 innovation and research funders** (CGIAR, GCC, HarvestPlus, IDB Lab, SDC Research, USAID-FtF Research)
- **2 INGOs** (CARE, CRS)
- **8 foundations** (Co-Impact, DG Murray Trust, Echidna, Fundación Corona, Gates, Lever for Change, Lincoln Institute, Syngenta Foundation)

[Link to [Case Studies](#)]



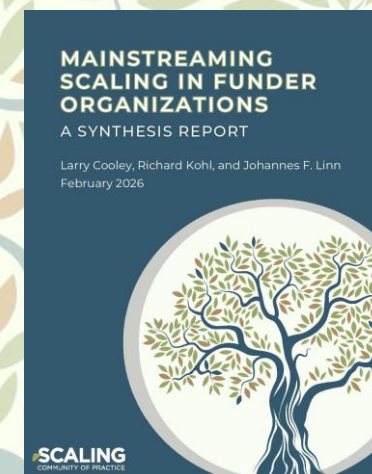
Additional research, consultations and synthesis

1. Cross-cutting initiatives/studies [link [here](#)]

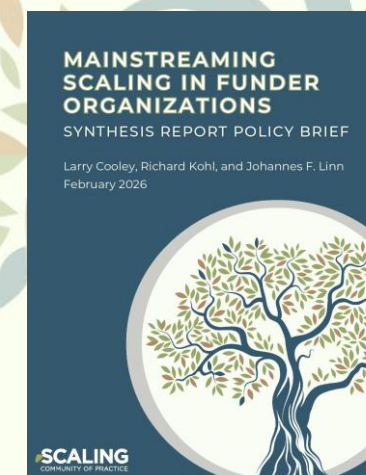
- Stock take of literature and interviews with key experts
- Perspective of recipients
- Scaling and localization
- Scaling and Country Platforms
- Mainstreaming Tracker Tool
- Evaluation methodologies and practices of official funders
- Summary reviews of education funders, ag/food security funders, foundations
- Supported OECD-DACs development of Scaling Guidance document

2. Consultations and outreach (2024-2025): Annual Forum 2024, Washington, Nairobi, Paris, FFD4, Abidjan; webinars

3. Final Synthesis Report and Policy Brief



Synthesis Report



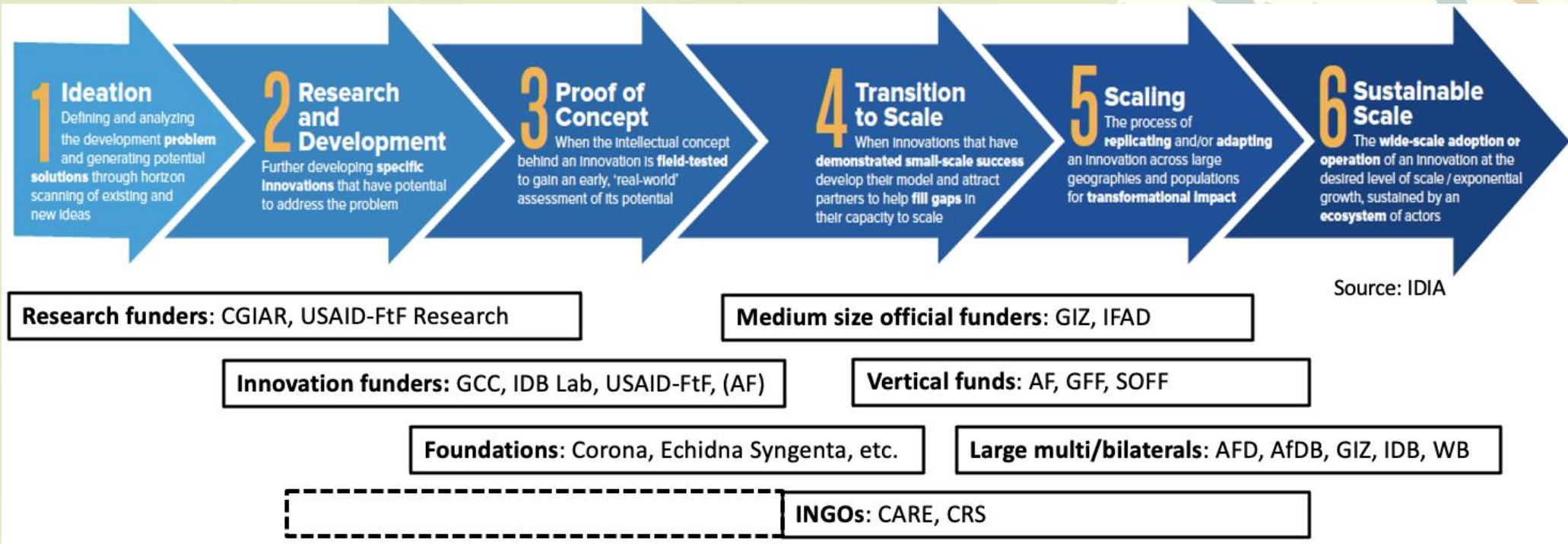
Policy Brief

2. Key findings on mainstreaming by funders to date



Key findings

- Funders cover all scaling phases from innovation to operation at sustainable scale; but systematic hand-off remains weak; still Valley of Death



Key findings (ctd)

- Many funders have made progress in mainstreaming scaling, but unevenly across types of funders
- Larger funders often work at scale, but scaling largely transactional – a short-term project model
- Smaller funders (innovation, foundations) made more progress but often lack resources
- Key gaps:
 - partnerships/handoff between small and large funders
 - dedicated funding for scaling
 - effective localization
 - internal incentives, culture, and resources for staff
 - MEAL of/for/after scaling



**3.
Lessons:
What are good
transformational
scaling practices?**



We need transformational scaling, not just transactional

Transactional scaling

- Measures scale in terms of people/places reached within a pilot or project; almost any incremental impact is seen as scaling
- Uses short-term (3-5 year) projects, with limited attention to LT issues (funding, implementation, sustainability and scalability).
- Project success defined as timely Board approval & disbursements, achieving project defined outcomes
- May include systems change, but limited to project time frame



We need transformational scaling, not transactional (ctd)

Transformational scaling

- Targets long-term sustainable impact (10-15+) years, measured relative to the scale of the problem
- Considers long-term scaling pathways to scale, which generally require a phased approach
- Focus on creating pre-conditions for scaling from the beginning, i.e., scalability, systems change and capacity building to support scaling.
- Financial and implementation sustainability are critical components



What are good transformational scaling practices?

- Incorporate scalability and sustainability from the beginning with a long-term horizon
- Integrate systems change
- Make explicit the tradeoffs between reach and scale versus sustainability, equity and inclusion
- Double down on localization
- Invest in partnerships with other funders
- Build support for scaling into MEAL
- Elevate and strengthen the catalytic role of intermediary organizations



**4.
Lessons:
How to mainstream
transformational
scaling practices in
funder organizations?**



Enablers of mainstreaming

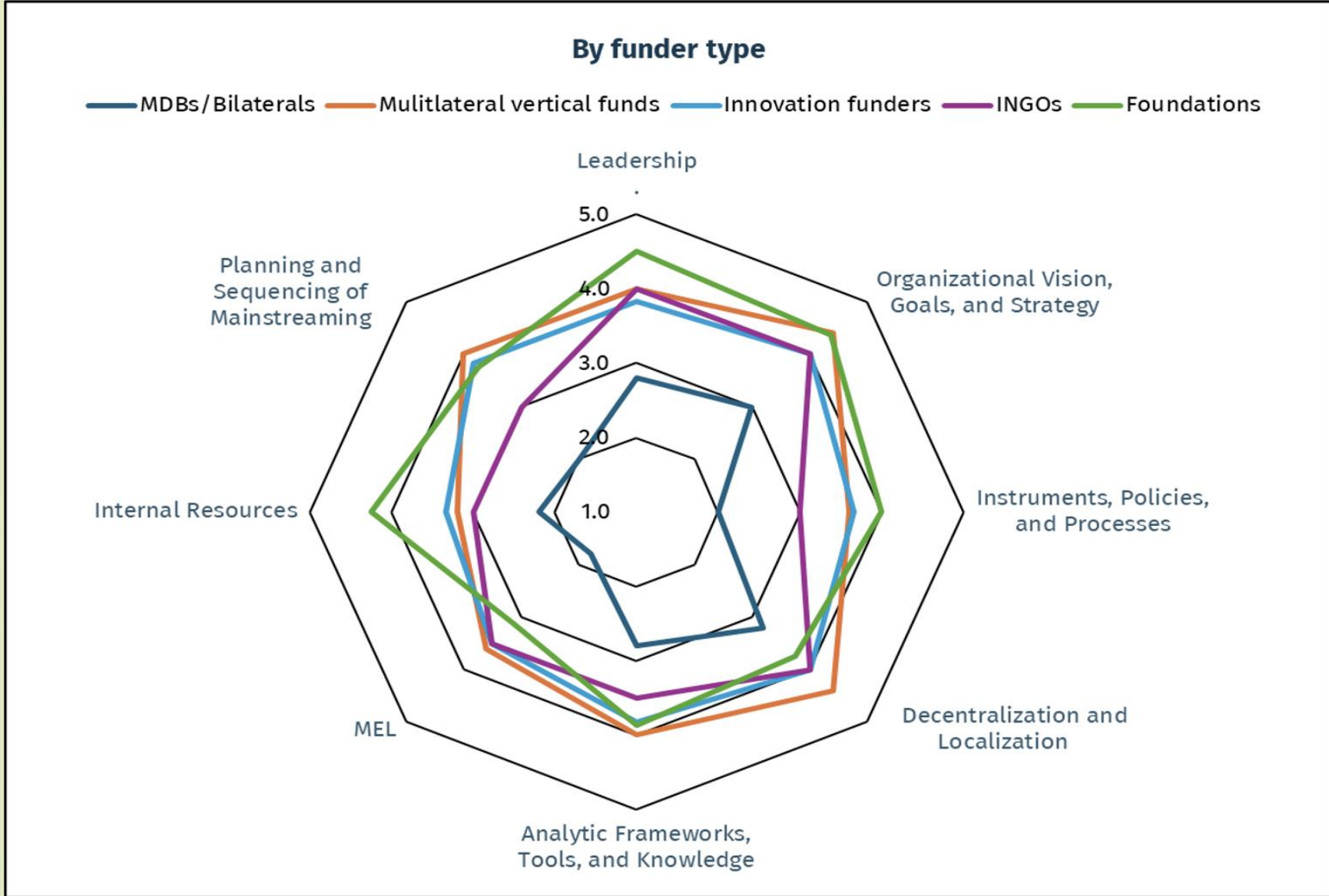
- Provide strong, vocal, sustained leadership from the top for transformational scaling
- Integrate transformational scaling into mission, values, goals and common, shared definitions of scaling (based on transformational scaling)
- Ensure financial and operational instruments, policies and procedures
- Provide dedicated staff, budget resources, tools
- Integrate scaling into KPIs and HR policies; into org. culture
- Evaluate and adapt the mainstreaming process
- **Bottom line: Create internal incentives and buy-in for middle management and staff**



5. Mainstreaming experience by different funder types



Comparing mainstreaming across funders



Observations for smaller funders

Smaller funders (innovation funders, foundations, and vertical funds)

- Strong mandate, culture and incentives for transformational scaling but limited resources and stove piping risk
- Greatest and increasing use of scalability criteria
- Moved into Transition to Scale stage; with non-financial support (capacity building, coaching); and MEAL focused on scaling
- Serving intermediary role, esp. brokering next stage financing, convening, advocacy
- Better able to absorb risk and adopt a portfolio approach, invest in derisking



Observations for large funders

Large (often official) funders

- In principle, have the resources to support transformational impact at scale, but gap between rhetoric of scale as a goal and operational practice
- Often use one-off project model and ST transactional approach
- Invest in systems change, but one-off, incomplete, or not linked to scaling pathways
- Phased LT programmatic approaches exist but rarely used
- Primary emphasis on accountability leads to risk aversion, deters ambitious scaling



6. Recommendations for funders



What is to be done?

Funders need to focus on

- scaling to help **close SDG and climate gaps**; not just more funding, bigger projects
- **sustained leadership** for institutional change focused on changing internal incentives for management and staff
- long-term, sustainable impact at large scale **proportionate to the problem**
- program design **aligned with systemic constraints** and/or support for systemic change
- for **large project funders**, shifting from short-term, transactional project model to **focus on transformational scale** in their support for investment and system reform
- creating **effective scaling partnerships** between small/innovation funders and larger actors for handoffs
- integrating **scaling into MEAL** to help create organizational and internal incentives

7. Next steps



Next steps in working with funders

- Dissemination (publications, webinars, presentations)
- Additional case studies (on demand)
- Supporting mainstreaming by individual funders (assessments, strategy, implementation)
- Scaling Campaign 2026-2030 (initiatives)
 - Health, agri-food and climate funders
 - Scaling via Country Platforms
 - Public development banks for scaling
 - Integrate scaling in MEAL methods and practice
 - Engagement with global forums/initiatives on rethinking development cooperation
- Partners and funders



THANK YOU



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23 Feb 2026

