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SCOP WEBINAR · RESPONSIBLE SCALING & THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE WOMAN FARMER 2026

# Responsible scaling starts upstream

FAO’s ecosystem approach to develop capacities for inclusive, mission-oriented innovation systems

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4 November 2026

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THE SCALING PARADOX · WHAT A DECADE OF AIS STRENGTHENING TAUGHT US

# What makes a community innovation work is what standard scaling erodes

FARMER FIELD SCHOOLS

### Reach up, ownership down

Mainstreamed into national extension (Uganda, Kenya), FFS gained scale but lost community ownership.

CDAIS · TAP-AIS

### Niches scale by changing the system

Niches did not scale by being absorbed into the regime, but by transforming the support system around them.

GENDER

### Visibility can re-marginalise

Commercialising community seed via cooperatives shifts control from women (who hold seeds selection & knowledge), to men (who control commercial relationships) – Ethiop case




Tools applied to an innovation come too late. **Responsibility has to be a capacity of the system.**

Sources: Toillier et al. 2020; CDI Learning Agenda evidence review (TAP Common Framework 2016, CDAIS 2016–2019) · 2

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FAO'S LENS

# Responsible scaling principles are capacities we can develop

| Responsible scaling asks... | ...the capacity to (TAP, CDAIS) | For women farmers |
|---|---|---|
| Anticipate | Navigate complexity | Foresee who gains, who loses |
| Include | Collaborate | Women co-design, not just take part |
| Reflect | Reflect and learn | Question whose knowledge counts |
| Respond | Adapt, respond, engage politically | Change norms, rules and budgets |

**Developed at three levels:** Individuals | Organisations | Enabling environment

150 innovation niches
+
30 countries ++
10 years of partnership
250+ organizations




Sources: Stilgoe et al. 2013; Wigboldus & Brouwers 2016; TAP Common Framework 2016; Ewell et al. 2026 · 3

HOW MAINSTREAM DEFINES SCALING

# From scaling as reach to scaling as system change

| | Scaling as reach | Scaling as system change |
|---|---|---|
| What scales | One finished innovation | Portfolios of bundled innovations |
| Success | Number of adopters | Change that lasts beyond the project |
| Capacity | A precondition | The strategy itself, and the exit |
| Driver | Business-led, start-up logic | Community-driven, socially oriented |
| FAO's role | Funder, replicator | Broker, ecosystem orchestrator |

*" MAINSTREAM does not scale innovations; it builds the ecosystems and capacities through which community-driven innovations scale themselves."*




Source: MAINSTREAM Briefing Note, "What is innovation scaling in MAINSTREAM?" · 4

# A mission-oriented ecosystem architecture

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## MAINSTREAM

**Mission-oriented agrifood innovation systems for sustainability transition through agroecology**

FAO and EU Partnership | DeSIRA+ initiative | 2025–2030

Funded by the European Union

Global scope, with Regional Innovation Scaling Hubs in **Senegal**, **Kenya** and **Zimbabwe**.

**HOW IT WORKS**

### A MULTI-LEVEL, SYSTEMS APPROACH

**BOOSTING INNOVATION SUPPORT SERVICES**
THROUGH LABS AND HUBS

**NEW INNOVATION MODELS**
COMMUNITY-DRIVEN, OPEN AND RESPONSIBLE INNOVATION, OPERATIONALIZED THROUGH OUR GLOBAL THINK LAB

**POLICY INNOVATION AND INNOVATIVE FINANCING MECHANISMS**
EMBEDDED IN INNOVATION POLICY LABS, LINKING DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING TO SUSTAINABLE TRANSITIONS

**NEW CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AREAS**
TRACKING GRASSROOTS INNOVATION, PORTFOLIO SENSEMAKING, ALIGNMENT, ANTICIPATION AND FORESIGHT

### Regional Innovation Scaling Hubs (WEST AFRICA, EAST AFRICA, SOUTHERN AFRICA)






MORE ON MAINSTREAM

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# A mission-oriented ecosystem architecture

**Innovation Policy Labs**
National: pilot new policy and finance arrangements

**Regional Scaling Hubs**
Dakar · Nairobi · Harare, run by permanent partner organisations

**Global Think Labs**
Co-create tools on community-driven innovation

## 1 · ENVISION

Make community-driven innovations visible; bundle them into transition portfolios

## 2 · EMPOWER

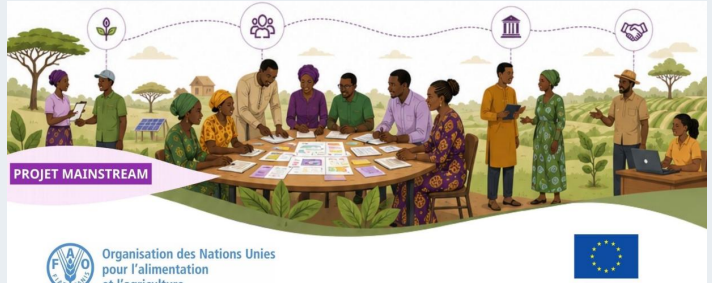
Train innovation facilitators, managers and leaders, using a shared competency framework

## 3 · UNLOCK

Connect portfolios to policy and finance, without capture

## 4 · ACCELERATE

Route innovators into existing incubation, across countries




Responsibility built in: who is seen (ENVISION), who facilitates (EMPOWER), who gets finance (UNLOCK) · 5

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GREEN ROOTS WOMEN'S FARM LABS · BANGLADESH & UGANDA · 2026–2027

# Women co-design the ecosystem that supports their green enterprises

BANGLADESH · PIROJPUR

## Collective model: bioenergy

Anchored in women's cooperatives; cases include solar drying and floating gardens

UGANDA · KABERAMAIDO

## Entrepreneur model: agroecology

Builds on existing incubators, adding green technology depth

### Orchestrate, don't duplicate

Connect FFS networks, cooperatives and incubators

### Gender-transformative

Diagnose norms, household dynamics and providers' gender capacity

### Close to women

Decentralised satellites, given mobility constraints



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WHAT IT TAKES

# Three shifts for leaving no one behind

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| From reach | → | **to who benefits and who decides** |
| From scaling partners | → | **to partners in scaling** |
| From project tools | → | **to capacities that stay in institutions** |

“Partners in scaling” vs “scaling partners”: Wigboldus et al. 2023 · 7

OPEN CHALLENGES · OUR LEARNING AGENDA ON COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INNOVATION

# The questions we are taking to the MAINSTREAM Think Labs

***From grassroots to systems change: new frameworks for supporting community-driven innovation in agrifood system transitions toward sustainability***

### Scale without standardising?

Scale the conditions for innovation to emerge, not the innovation itself

### Visible without being captured?

Safeguards against IP, market-dependency and data capture

### Who holds power after the project?

Territorial governance that does not revert to male-dominated structures

### Do we measure what matters?

Track agency and who benefits, not only adoption rates

**Gender lens, in every module:** who leads · whose knowledge counts · who controls assets · who bears the cost of failure

JOIN US

# Two ways to connect with MAINSTREAM

IN THE REGIONS

## Regional Innovation Scaling Hubs

Dakar (West Africa) · Nairobi (East Africa) · Harare (Southern Africa)

Share a community-driven innovation · partner with a hub · join an EMPOWER facilitator cohort

GLOBALLY

## Think Labs on community-driven innovation

Bring a case, including one that failed · join a 3–6-month module working group · co-author Learning Briefs

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