

Breaking Barriers to Scale: Insights from FAO’s Pathways to #ZeroHunger Forum



Figure 1 - Session's digital scribing by Cristoph Kellner

At the Science and Innovation Forum on October 18, 2024, FAO’s session entitled “From Start-up to Scale: Pathways to #ZeroHunger” sparked vital conversations on scaling innovation in the agrifood sector. Held at FAO’s headquarters in Rome, the event was a powerful convergence of minds from academia, government, UN agencies, the private sector, and NGOs—all committed to accelerating agrifood solutions to achieve zero hunger.¹

Dr. Hlami Ngwenya, a dynamic facilitator, opened the session with a powerful call to action. “Scaling innovation isn’t just about expanding reach; it’s about reshaping entire systems,” she asserted. “To achieve SDG2², we need every actor—policymakers, farmers, scientists, and entrepreneurs—contributing from their respective backgrounds to the same scaling pathways.”

In an engaging theatrical presentation at the start of the session, the audience witnessed two stories of innovation brought to life on stage. The first focused on the experience of the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India³, an organization whose mission is to empower woman through grassroots innovation. “We believe that women’s economic empowerment is foundational to community resilience,” shared Megha Desai, SEWA representative. “Scaling our initiatives means amplifying the voices of millions of women farmers who are transforming their



Figure 2 - Mr. Juan Moreno from PROCASUR, Chile

¹ Moore, M.-L., Riddell, D. and Vocisano, D. (2015) ‘Scaling out, scaling up, scaling deep: Strategies of non-profits in advancing Systemic Social Innovation’. *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, 2015(58), pp. 67–84. doi:10.9774/gleaf.4700.2015.ju.00009.

² Sustainable Development Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

³ Rose, K. (1995) *Where women are leaders the Sewa Movement in India* Kalima Rose. London: Zed Books.

families' lives." SEWA's narrative showcased how scaling grassroots innovation can uplift marginalized communities and bridge financial divides.

The second story came from PROCASUR in Chile⁴, a knowledge-sharing organization working with rural communities across Latin America. Juan Moreno of PROCASUR emphasized the transformative power of local wisdom: "Rural communities know what they need. Scaling is about making that knowledge accessible and actionable. By translating experiences into tools, we empower communities to create lasting change." A backdrop video underscored their journey, featuring images of farmers innovating against a landscape of both challenges and successes.



Figure 3 - Conversation between Mr. Desai and Mr. Moreno in a theatrical format

Following the theatrical segment, Dr. Ngwenya opened a collective reflection phase, inviting the audience to delve into the enablers and bottlenecks of scaling innovations. Contributions came from all sectors, underscoring the event's collaborative ethos. Isabel Guerrero, Director of IMAGO Global Grassroots, captured the spirit of inclusion, saying, "Scaling isn't just replication; it's adaptation. We have to shape each intervention to fit the unique needs of each community."

A lively panel discussion followed, bringing perspectives from five prominent speakers. Each expert weighed in on the importance of building pathways to scale that prioritize inclusivity and resilience. "We need investments that are not just financial but grounded in local realities," remarked Ivan Stefanic from the European Innovation Council. "It's time for innovation to be tailored from ideation to impact, from lab to land." This theme of context-sensitive scaling echoed across the panel.

⁴ Massler, B. (2018) *Strengthening Knowledge Management for greater development effectiveness - procasur*. Handle Proxy. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11766/8455> (Accessed: 11 November 2024).



Figure 4 - Panel discussion, from the left: Megha Desai, Iddo Dror, Hlami Ngwenya, Ivan Stefanic, Adesuya Ifedi, Paul Harrison, and Juan Moreno.

Dr. Iddo Dror of CGIAR highlighted the risks inherent in scaling innovation, underscoring the need for a tolerance of failure. “Innovation without risk is stagnation,” he said. “We have to foster an environment where learning from failure is just as valued as success. That’s the only way to drive meaningful, scalable change.”

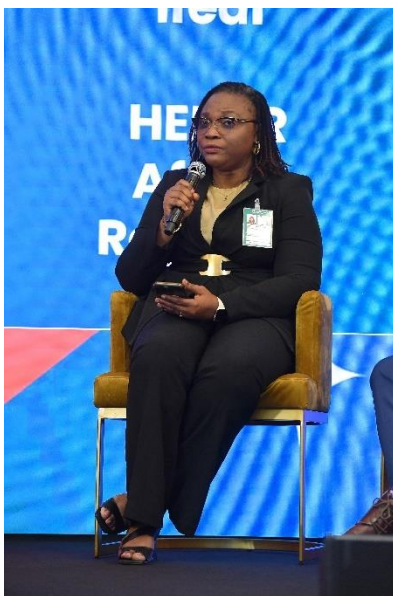


Figure 5 - Ms. Adesuya Ifedi from Heifer International

Ms. Adesuya Ifedi from Heifer International brought to the fore the role of the private sector, stressing the importance of partnerships. “No single actor can solve the scale equation alone. Collaboration is our strongest asset,” she said. “The more we break down silos, the more we’re able to build up resilient systems that can truly meet the needs of those we serve.”

The session concluded with a call to action. “The knowledge and insights shared today must lead to concrete outcomes,” urged Paul Harrison from the US Department of State. “FAO’s global leadership and convening power can catalyze joint pathways to ensure that agrifood innovations reach those who need them most.”

The forum provided a potent reminder that scaling innovations isn’t just an ambition; it’s a necessity. FAO’s three-pronged approach—integrating science, innovation, and knowledge—was praised as a unique lever in the journey toward zero hunger. By highlighting initiatives like PROCASUR’s learning programmes and SEWA’s financial inclusion programmes, the

Science and Innovation Forum has brought to the attention of participants that scaling innovation from the grassroots is key to reshaping lives and futures.

“Small is beautiful, but large is necessary,” remarked Mohamed Manssouri, Director of the FAO Investment Centre in his closing remarks. “The impact needed to achieve the SDGs is vast. Innovation must be backed by a supportive ecosystem, including significant investment, to truly scale and make a difference. Yet, it also must be tailored to the local context—where real change happens. Scaling requires large efforts, and we need to align resources and commitment accordingly.”⁵

As FAO looks to the future, the message was clear: the fight against hunger requires all hands on deck. By fostering a culture of innovation, the adoption of a systems transformation approach, a culture of risk-taking, and relentless collaboration, FAO and its partners are committed to transforming the agrifood landscape, one scalable solution at a time.

The complete session recording is available for viewing at the following link: [From Start-up to Scale: Pathways to Zero Hunger](#)



Figure 6 - Ms. Megha Desai from the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), India

⁵ Kramer, Mark R., John Kania, and Peter Senge. "[The Water of Systems Change.](#)" Report, FSG, May 2018.