WORKING PAPER FROM

SCALING COMMUNITY of PRACTICE

THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF SCALING AND COUNTRY PLATFORMS

in Forging Multistakeholder Partnerships for Transformational Impact at Scale

Comments welcome by 15 September 2026

Todd Kirkbride &
Johannes F. Linn

August 2026

THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF SCALING AND COUNTRY PLATFORMS

in Forging Multistakeholder Partnerships for Transformational Impact at Scale

A Working Paper of the Scaling Community of Practice
Comments welcome by 15 September 2026

by

Todd Kirkbride and Johannes F. Linn

August 2026

From the Scaling Community of Practice
www.scalingcommunityofpractice.com

1. Introduction

Previous chapters in this volume have considered how multistakeholder partnerships can support the achievement of development goals in particular sectors or systems. This chapter crosses sectors and explores how "country platforms," i .e., institutionalized efforts at country level to coordinate the actions of key stakeholders to help achieve shared development and climate goals, can be reinforced by a systematic focus on transformational scaling and conversely, how country platforms can support the effort to achieve transformational impact at scale. Box 1 provides definitions of the terms "transformatonal scaling" and "country platforms." The main conclusion of the chapter suggests that a systematic focus on transformational scaling by the principal development and climate actors is essential if country platforms are to achieve their long-term development and climate goals, and that country platforms, when nationally led and effectively designed and implemented, are an important element of a transformational scaling strategy. But this requires that the organizations and frontline teams within the organizations have the leadership, resources, capacity, instruments and the incentives to pursue transformational scaling and transformational country platforms.

Box 1. Definitions of "transformational scaling" and "country platform"

Transformational scaling: Transformational scaling is a systematic approach to achieving sustainable impact at an optimal scale over time, where optimal scale means addressing a meaningful share of the underlying problem allowing for trade-offs, e.g., between scale and equity. In contrast to "transactional" scaling, which simply replicates one-off interventions, transformational scaling emphasizes sustained action along a pathway with systemic change in policies, institutions, and incentives.

Country platform: Country platforms are nationally-led coordination mechanisms designed to align public, private, and international stakeholders around a shared development or climate vision. They often involve: National governments (as conveners), private sector, civil society, technical experts, and external funders. Such coordinating mechanisms may carry other names but are here referred to as country platforms.

The chapter presents in Section 2 what is transformational scaling and why it is essential for the achievement of the SDGs and beyond. Section 3 summarizes the experience with country platforms, and why they matter. Section 4 explains why and how both scaling and country platforms must be designed for transformational change and not just as instruments for transactional impact. Section 5 explores the challenges that key domestic and international actors face in participating effectively in support of transformational scaling and country platforms. Section 6 concludes with main messages.

The chapter's analysis is based on the decade-long work of the Scaling Community of Practice (SCoP),[1] on the relevant literature regarding country platforms, on the combined 70+ years of development experience of the authors, and on a judicious use of AI to scan the current state of knowledge, especially as regards country platforms. While the authors believe their core conclusions are well founded, more exploration in research and testing via practical application of scaling with country platforms is undoubtedly needed. The

[1] See **www.scalingcommunityofpractice.com**

Scaling Community of Practice is planning further work on this topic as part of its Scaling Campaign 2026-2030.[2]

2. What do we know about scaling?

Over the last two decades, development experts and practitioners have focused increasingly on how to scale successful development interventions and developed practical approaches to support scaling.[3] Their work has been motivated by the recognition that the prevailing focus on innovation and on one-off projects and programs could not effectively address the development and climate changes commonly faced in Low and Middle-Income Countries. They recognized that promising innovations and good project outcomes do not lead spontaneously to wide replication. A systematic focus on and support for scaling were seen increasingly as a necessary complement to the wide-spread push for more financial resources as a means to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,[4] to the frequent calls for more effective development cooperation in international forums,[5] and to the standard monitoring and evaluation criteria promoted for example by the OECD-DAC.[6] Recently the focus on scale has increasingly entered the rhetoric of leading development actors, e.g., the multilateral development banks,[7] driven, among other reason, by the pervasive cutbacks in official development and climate resources in the advanced countries. However, there is a risk that much of the work of the international funder agencies remains "transactional" in nature, focused on one-off projects, rather than "transformational," i.e., supporting longer-term scaling pathways that are locally owned and involve systemic change for sustainability and scalability (see Box 1 above).[8]

Based on the work of the Scaling Community of Practice, we can confidently state that a systematic focus on transformational scaling across all systems requires that development practitioners address seven basic questions as they plan and implement interventions with the aim of achieving sustainable impact at scale (see Box 2, next page).

---

[2] See **https://scalingcommunityofpractice.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/SCoP-Scaling-Campaign-2026-2030-Brochure-Final-Nov-2025.pdf** and **https://scalingcommunityofpractice.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/SCoP-Campaign-Initiatives-Dec-2025.pdf**

[3] See MSI (2021), WHO-ExpandNet (2009), Hartmann and Linn (2008) and the knowledge resources on the Scaling Community's website (**www.scalingcommunityofpractice.com**), especially SCoP (2022) and Cooley and Linn (2024).

[4] See Linn (2023)

[5] Such as the 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (**https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/busan-partnership-for-effective-development-co-operation_54de7baa-en.html**) and the Financing for Development Conferences, (**https://financing.desa.un.org/ffd4/history-ffd-conferences**).

[6] See Linn and Yilmaz (2025)

[7] See World Bank President's speech at the IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings 2024 (**https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2024/10/25/remarks-by-world-bank-group-president-ajay-banga-at-the-2024-annual-meetings-plenary**) and Inter-American Development Bank "IDBStrategy+" (**https://www.iadb.org/en/who-we-are/institutional-strategy**)

[8] See Cooley, Kohl and Linn (2026).

Box 2: Basic questions for transformational scaling

1. What is the development problem and the vision of sustainable impact at scale that is needed to address the problem?
2. What are the core elements of the innovation, intervention or project, and are they scalable?
3. What is a potential transformational scaling pathway from innovation, intervention or project to the achievement of the scale vision, and who are the principal actors that need to fund and drive the process forward?
4. What are the principal enabling and constraining system conditions that need to be considered or addressed with reforms for transformational scalability?
5. What is the plan for implementing the transformational scaling pathway, what resources are needed to put it in place, and how can one or more intermediary organizations support the process?
6. What evidence is needed to support decision making along the scaling pathway, and how does MEL [monitoring, evaluation and learning] need to be designed to inform the scaling process and its adaptation?
7. And perhaps most importantly, what happens after the current stage in the scaling pathway, or after the current project ends?

Source: *Quoted verbatim from Cooley and Linn (2024)*

There are plenty of examples that demonstrate that a focus on long-term transformational scaling leads to good development outcomes: Among the better known are the Chinese development model, which has been based on a pilot-and-scale approach, as was the Mexican Progresa-Oportunidades program of conditional cash transfer programs. BRAC, the Bangladeshi NGO, has pursued a systematic scaling approach for decades. In the health sector, the African River Blindness Eradication Program serves as an outstanding example of a successful intervention that addressed a serious regional health problem at scale.[9] But there are also many less-well known examples of successful scaling that have been compiled by the Scaling Community of Practice in its member reports and newsletters.[10] And most recently, the Scaling Community published a synthesis report on how 28 international development and climate funder organizations have mainstreamed scaling in their operational practice, noting that a number of smaller funder organizations have made good progress in this regard.[11]

While these examples demonstrate that a systematic approach to transformational scaling is not only possible but also effective in the pursuit of sustainable impact at scale, in general, development and climate interventions remain largely transactional in nature. As international development and climate finance is likely to remain severely curtailed for the foreseeable future, it will be even more critical that the available domestic and international financial resources are invested for maximum possible impact. This will require

[9] See Hartmann and Linn (2008)

[10] See the SCoP member reports and newsletters on the SCoP website (**www.scalingcommunityofpractice.com**)

[11] See Cooley, Kohl and Linn (2026a) and (2026b)

a systematic commitment to scaling the most promising sustainable interventions, especially by advancing the policy and institutional changes needed to scale them.

3. What do we know about Country Platforms?

Country-based coordination mechanisms among key development actors have been created and implemented for many decades focusing mostly on coordination among external development assistance providers. These initiatives were generally known as "consultative groups," often led by the World Bank, involving national governments and other stakeholders to varying degrees, but generally dominated by the funder agencies and usually focused on a narrow set of objectives, mostly aiming at sharing information on government investment and/or policy reform plans and on funder intentions with a view to mobilizing a volume of external financing that matched the estimated short-term (1-3 years) needs of the country.[12]

Recently, the idea of "country platforms" as locally-led coordination mechanisms among relevant domestic and international stakeholders has gained increased attention, especially for health, but also for climate action and in support of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (See Box 3). In the health sector, the Global Fund and Gavi have supported country-level coordination mechanisms in the specific areas of engagement (HIV-Aids, TB and Malaria; vaccination), but the Global Financing Facility (GFF) is of particular relevance, since this multilateral vertical fund has supported the development and implementation of health-oriented country platforms for over a decade. Its experience shows that country platforms are indeed useful instruments for supporting countries' health sector investment plans, but also that in many countries getting an effective alignment among key domestic constituencies and the principal external funders remains a significant challenge.[13] More recently, the development of country platforms has become a major focus of global climate action, especially with the establishment of Just Energy Transition Partnerships in South Africa, Indonesia, Vietnam and Senegal and multi-stakeholder platforms that are focused on supporting Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). COP30 in Belem in 2025 launched the Country Platform Hub.[14] Its purpose is to support

Box 3. Multi-stakeholder platforms for the SDGs

Multiple governance mechanisms, such as ad hoc commissions, institutionalised and mandated multi-stakeholder bodies or collective partnership platforms have taken many forms over the recent years. For the delivery of the SDGs they all fulfil various functions and operate in diverse ways. Transformative multi-stakeholder platforms (MSP) focus on supporting the catalysis and implementation of partnerships by building upon in-country support structures. National SDG advisory bodies can be considered examples of institutionalised transformative MSP-advisory bodies that constructively engage with their governments and create space for action and social acceptance of transformation. Their principles embody a "whole-of-society" approach that aims to build consensus or collective action. In doing so, they can rely on a reciprocal relationship.

Source: *Kirkbride and Figueroa (2021)*

[12] See Linn (2025)

[13] See Linn (2024)

[14] See https://www.financeministersforclimate.org/node/1246?deliveryName=FCP_9_DM268470

countries in developing country platforms "as a critical instrument to align public and private finance with long-term climate strategies, reduce transaction costs, and crowd in investment at scale."[15]

A review of the country platform experience with the assistance of ChatGPT yields the conclusions summarized in Box 4 (next page), demonstrating that country platforms can be found in most sectors and thematic areas of development and climate action, that they can work effectively when they are country-led and based on strong institutional foundations, but that they do not represent a silver bullet in addressing the challenge of development effectiveness.

Box 4: Common characteristics of country platforms

- Country platforms can be found in virtually all sectors and thematic areas.
- They are supported by a variety of funders and partners, including the MDBs, the IMF, bilateral official donors and private funders.
- 16 of 30 country platform cases were government led, 7 were MDB/IFI led, and 7 hybrid.
- Platforms work best when governments lead on vision and reform and MDBs lead on financing, risk mitigation and coordination.
- The impact of country platforms has varied: It has been
    - very high or high for: climate change and energy transition; infrastructure and energy systems; debt restructuring and macro-financial stability
    - moderate or low-moderate for: economic development and structural reform; fragility, conflict and crisis response; urban development; social sectors; agriculture and food systems
    - low for: governance and public sector reform
- Design features that matter for success:
    - Clear national ownership
    - Narrow, prioritized objectives
    - Link between reform and finance
    - Authority over decision-making, not just convening
    - Strong political backing
    - Capacity to mobilize or de-risk large finance
- Transformational impact has occurred—but in a minority of countries; climate and energy platforms outperform general development platforms
- Country platforms are often presented as transformational mechanisms, but in practice they are coordination devices whose impact depends almost entirely on pre-existing political and institutional conditions.

[15] See https://www.financeministersforclimate.org/node/1288

4. Transformational scaling and country platforms are interdependent and share many common characteristics.

The relationship between country platforms and scaling was explored in a recent working paper by the Scaling Community of Practice.[16] This paper identified the following seven key elements of the relationship:

A. Country platforms and scaling efforts need to be transformational, not merely transactional, in design and implementation.

We noted earlier that scaling has to be transformational, not merely transactional. The same applies to country platforms. Table 1 (next page) summarizes the relevant characteristics of transactional versus transformational approaches to scaling and to Country Platforms. At the heart of the distinction is that a transformational country platform will aim at long-term development or climate goals by addressing the problem(s) at a national scale and will measure success in terms of progress towards these targets. In contrast, transactional country platforms focus on short-to-medium term goals and measure progress against baseline. Projects and programs, partnerships, policy reform and institution building remain one-off, externally driven and not oriented towards self-reliance.

[16] This section is based on Linn (2025)

Table 1. Comparing transactional and transformational scaling and country platforms

	Scaling	Country Platform
Transactional	• Refers to "doing more" with one-off interventions – more resources, larger projects, more co-financiers. • Measures success in terms of the scale of funding and results achieved by a project's or program's end, with impact usually expressed against a baseline rather than relative to the size of the problem.	• Focus on short-to-medium term goals • Measure progress against baseline. • Projects and programs, partnerships, policy reform and institution building remain one-off, externally driven and not oriented towards self-reliance.
Transformational	• Aims to deliver long-term sustainable impact at large scale beyond a project's lifetime. • Emphasizes a locally owned, viable business or funding model and adequate resources for ensuring ongoing delivery of goods and services over time. • One or more implementing organizations have the necessary mandate, capacity and reach to continue to implement at scale when external funders depart. • Is usually accompanied by a significant effort at sustainable systems change to strengthen capacity, the policy enabling environment and, where appropriate, market systems. • Partners are aligned with long-term goals and sustain cooperation and hand off effectively one to another along the scaling pathway. • Intermediary organizations support the scaling process, initially often from outside, but ultimately locally based. • Measures and evaluates progress in terms of results and impact relative to the size of the problem (the denominator), not against baseline.	• Local ownership, sustainable and scalable business models, and effective long-term financing plans leading towards financial self-reliance are key aspect of a transformational country platform. • Aims at long-term development or climate goals by addressing the problem(s) at a national scale • Focuses on policy change and institution building not as one-off actions (such as adoption of a law or setting up of an institution) but as long-term and sustained implementation and adaptation efforts. • Individual programs and projects under the platform are designed and implemented to contribute to pathways towards the long-term goals, rather than as one-off engagements with limited results measured against baseline. • Participants in the platform engage with a view to support transformational programs, integrate action across relevant sectors, form partnerships that stress effective cooperation or coordination and smooth handoff from one to another, and measure their contribution in terms of progress by the country towards long-term scale goals. • Measures and evaluates progress in terms of progress towards these targets.

Source: Adapted from Linn (2025)

B. The same factors determine the effectiveness of transformational scaling and country platforms.

The common determinants of effectiveness include: A long-term vision of sustainable impact at scale; ownership of the agenda by national (local) stakeholders; evidence based and adaptive decision making in implementation; creation of the necessary systemic enabling conditions (esp. policies and institutions); effective partnerships, i.e., collaboration and/or coordination among key actors/participants; leadership, capacity, resources, and incentives to support systematic focus on transformational scaling by the organizations and actors involved in the scaling and country platform processes; and transparent monitoring and evaluation against long-term targets during implementation.

C. Scaling and country platforms are closely linked.

Transformational scaling should be an integral part of the design of country platforms and transformational scaling at country scale generally requires the establishment of a country platform to help coordinate and align stakeholders around a common set of goals and actions. If key organizations or the teams within organizations participating in a country platform do not systematically pursue scaling, then they will focus on transactional interventions focused on stand-alone, one-off project engagement with a short time horizon. Only if the factors mentioned in paragraph b. above are in place, will participants in country platforms support a transformational action. At the same time, the existence of a well-designed and well-managed country platform will facilitate the establishment of common strategic scale goals, the development of shared scaling strategies, and the formation of lasting partnerships and the coordination of activities by the multiple actors involved in a complex scaling process.

D. Country platforms and scaling must be locally owned.

This means that while country platforms and scaling often benefit initially from external funding and non-financial support, they should be domestically designed and locally driven in implementation so they can eventually be managed and funded without external assistance.

E. The institutional infrastructure to support country platforms and scaling has to be developed and supported.

It helps having external/international actors (often funders) support the country platforms and scaling pathways as intermediaries, but ultimately national institutions and intermediaries need to be in the lead. Where global and regional public goods are involved, global and regional organizations can play important supportive roles.

F. The costs of managing country platforms should be transparently accounted for and funded.

The costs of projects and programs as part of scaling pathways and country platforms, as well as the costs of establishing the institutional infrastructure in support of scaling efforts and country platforms, need to be transparently accounted and funded if the transformational scaling and county platform processes are to succeed.

G. The effective functioning of country platforms and of scaling pathways requires that incentives and accountabilities among actors/stakeholders are aligned with shared long-term goals and with each other.

They require that front-line teams in the organizations participating in country platforms and scaling efforts, have the accountabilities, capacity, resources and the incentives to support the platforms and scaling pathways.

5. Common challenges for transformational scaling and country platforms

The establishment and implementation of transformational scaling pathways and country platforms face a number of difficult challenges that need to be recognized and tackled to the extent possible if sustainable impact at scale is to be reached.

To start with, the multiplicity of national and international actors involved in country platforms creates a complex web of interactions and important trade-offs in their design in terms of scope, inclusiveness, costs and political feasibility. The fragmentation of the international development assistance architecture[17] and of national political, economic and social actors have long been recognized as a serious obstacle to effective development policy and implementation, and one which country platforms are supposed to address.[18] However, in light of the complexity of actors and interactions, it helps to focus country platforms on a narrow set sectors or subsectors. This reduces the number of actors that need to be brought together and facilitates coordination and collaboration in country platforms for transformational scaling. But a narrow scope may result in a multiplicity of overlapping, yet stove-piped platforms in a country and in isolated scaling efforts, and thus in insufficient integration of interrelated aspects of the economic and social ecosystem. This has been a problem noted in the health sector regarding the operations of the various vertical funds supporting health sector action in specific areas (esp. the Global Fund, Gavi, etc.).[19]

In any case, it is essential that all actors participating in a country platform have the incentive to align with its goals and strategies. This includes not only incentives for the organizations involved, but also incentives for the actors inside the organizations charged with making the country platform process work. In further exploring the challenges of transformational scaling and country platforms, it helps focusing on key categories of actors that need to work together to address them. We look at each of these actor categories in turn.

A. The challenge for government

Government is a multifaceted organizational structure, consisting of national ministries and agencies as well as subnational authorities that each are subject to potentially diverging interests at the institutional level as well as in terms of individuals and groups of individuals within each public entity. At the same time, government needs to consider the interests of the other stakeholders in the political arena, whether winners or losers from investment and policy action in support of long-term scaling pathways. Bringing these potentially divergent interests together in support of transformational scaling and transformational country platforms requires a determined and sustained leadership that provides clear direction for the

[17] See World Bank (2022)

[18] See Linn (2025)

[19] See Witter et al. (2023)

scaling process and for country platforms. But leaders change, and hence constitutional, legal and institutional guardrails may have to be established to help ensure the survival of scaling efforts across political cycles and resulting changes in political leadership, as was done in the case of the Mexican national program of conditional cash transfers, Progresa-Oportunidades.[20]

To be effective, government needs the institutional capacity to analyze the costs and benefits of action, and to plan and implement scaling pathways. It also needs to interpret the political economy of how action impacts different interests and how to bring potentially divergent interests into alignment with long-term development objectives and implementation strategies. It must find ways to monitor implementation and adjust interventions in light of an evolving experience. Unfortunately, this capacity is in short supply in many countries, but it can be built up over time with external support. Ultimately, it should be domestically developed and sustained.

Many developing countries have constrained public budgets to support long-term scaling efforts and country platforms. External finance is therefore needed to complement the limited national resources. However, external financial resources are limited and fragmented and often have policy conditionality attached. Some international programs, such as the Global Financing Facility in the health sector, have focused rightly on supporting enhanced domestic resource mobilization (DRM) and strengthened fiscal planning as part of their scaling strategies and country platform development initiatives.[21] Ministries of Finance are critical players not only in developing DRM, but also in ensuring the available financial resources are prioritized in a way that supports transformational scaling strategies and their country platforms.

Fiscal resources and instruments are critical not only to cover the cost of scaling action and of country platforms, but also to incentivize public and private actors to align themselves with national goals. Taxes and public expenditures (including outright subsidies) are essential tools, along with laws and regulation and with information sharing and support for capacity building, for getting private actors to support socially desirable scaling pathways and to engage constructively in country platform processes.[22]

Another important set of public actors are the national public development banks that provide financial intermediation services as well as advisory and capacity building services for their clients. These public banks have often been seen in the past as problematic due to possible abuses by political interests and as potentially distorting capital markets with inefficient resource allocation decisions. However, more recently they have had a renaissance, especially after the 2008 financial crisis, in channelling financial and advisory resources to priority sectors of the economy in support of broader social goals.[23] From the perspective of the scaling and country platform agendas, national public development banks can be important

---

[20] See Levy (2006)

[21] See Linn (2024)

[22] See Linn (2025)

[23] For contrary views on the PDBs see – overview: **https://publicbanking.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2025/01/EB-2025_01-1.pdf**; **https://rightsindevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/securepdfs/What-are-PDBs-1.pdf**; pro: **https://momentus.global/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/White-Paper-NDBs-as-Unsung-Heroes.pdf**; **https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9781000802795_A43683836/preview-9781000802795_A43683836.pdf**; for a summary of critical views, see **https://www.people.brandeis.edu/~aldom/papers/The%20Role%20and%20Impact%20of%20Development%20Banks%20-%203-9-2017.pdf**

"intermediaries", i.e., institutional anchors, for transformational scaling pathways and country platforms.[24] However, if they are to play this role, they need to mainstream the transformational scaling approach into their operations, just like external funders that are discussed further below.

B. The challenge for the private sector

In a well-functioning competitive market system, the profit motive provides an effective incentive mechanism that leads to efficient private decisions about when and how to grow a business in response to market demand. Capital markets provide the financing for capital investments and the necessary financial discipline. Impact investors support the growth of innovative solutions. Consulting firms provide advisory and capacity building support as well as help meet the information requirements that allow for needed coordination and partnership formation among market actors.

However, market failures are widespread, especially in developing countries, as goods and capital markets are frequently poorly developed, monopoly power prevails in some sectors, infrastructure is unreliable or lacking, information access is limited for some if not all market participants, and high perceived risks discourage investors. Add to this the existence of externalities and public goods, and the often-prevailing inequalities and social exclusion of parts of the population, then the market forces on their own do not generally support optimal development outcomes. Governments therefore are expected to intervene and regulate markets for more efficient and socially acceptable functioning.

Private sector actors should in principle value government efforts designed to support commercial scaling pathways and hence they could be expected to offer support for coordination, partnership formation and information sharing through country platforms. But, from a private sector perspective, government action too often adds to distortions rather than removing them by imposing laws and regulations that are seen as excessive, burdensome and/or biased against private entrepreneurship or towards a favored few; by taxing away resources and stifling incentives for scaling; by providing insufficient and poorly maintained physical infrastructure; by failing to develop a capable labor force through an

Box 5. Private sector engagement in Costa Rica's multi-stakeholder advisory board

The government of Costa Rica's multi-stakeholder advisory board is a role-model in successfully integrating the private sector within its country platform. The SDG Advisory Committee has selected the Business Alliance for Development (AED) to champion the interests of the private sector and act as the local network of the UN Global Compact in Costa Rica. Its mandate is to promote the SDGs, raise awareness and organise trainings for private sector organisations. The AED is currently leading a cross-sector data partnership for the SDG working group to ensure effective planning and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda.

Source: *Figueroa and Harrison (2022)*

---

[24] For Brazil, the national public development bank BNDES serves as secretariat for the Brazil Climate & Ecological Transformation Investment Platform (BIP). BIP connects projects and financiers and aims to address challenges such as limited governance and institutional capacities, fragmented project pipelines, low diversification, and insufficient private sector engagement…Its objective is "To support the advancement of Brazil's ambitious climate goals, increasing transition investment from all sources." GCF (2025) **https://www.greenclimate.fund/sites/default/files/event/gcf-readiness-information-session-country-platforms-june-2025.pdf**

effective public education and health system; and by creating risks with inconsistent, frequently shifting and hence unpredictable policies.

However, when effectively organized, country platforms offer private sector participants an opportunity to learn about and influence government priorities, investments and policy reforms and conversely allow governments to learn how their policies impact the private sector and how private action can be incentivized to pursue efficient and socially acceptable scaling pathways. (See Box 5)

In practice, as the experience of the GFF demonstrates, getting effective private sector participation in country platforms is not always easy. Trust is often weak on both sides of the public-private divide, expectations about what each side can contribute to and expect from a country platform may not be realistic, and the potential for abuse by "connected" parties may be difficult to contain. But perhaps the greatest challenge is that potential private sector participants regard the country platforms as performative rather than as serious efforts to change the systemic conditions under which business operates and hence see no incentive to engage in a sustained and effective manner.

Where well-organized representative private sector umbrella organizations exist (e.g., chambers of commerce, farmer cooperatives, banking and trade associations, etc.), their participation in country platforms can significantly help in developing a process that creates a sense of mutual trust, inclusion and information sharing between the public and private representatives. These organizations have the mandate, the capacity and the time to represent private sector interests in country platforms, where their individual members generally do not. However, such umbrella organizations do not always exist or function well in less developed countries and fragile states. In any case, whoever are the private sector participants, they need to have an incentive to actively and constructively participate in country platforms. The more transformational country platforms are in their design and implementation, i.e., focused on creating the enabling conditions for effective scaling pathways, the greater an incentive private partners have in joining them in a load-bearing manner.

Box 6. CSO engagement in the SDFG Secretariat in Uganda

As a critical component of Uganda's SDG Secretariate (country platform), the CSO SDG Core Reference Group has worked together to implement the 2030 Agenda since 2018. It is not a registered organisation, but a coalition of organisations working on the SDGs, and it brings together over 100 member organisations at national and local level that include women, youth, people with disabilities, faith organisations, cultural organisations and mainstream CSOs. The Uganda NGO Forum convenes the Group and represents it in the SDG Secretariat and the office of the Prime Minister. While having a role in a government SDG task force, it also undertakes independent action, such as the rejoinder to the 2020 VNR Report published by the Group.

Source: *Figueroa and Harrison (2022)*

C. The challenge for other domestic actors

Besides government and private business, there are other domestic actors that scaling initiatives and country platforms have to involve in cooperative action for transformative change. These include CSOs and communities affected by public action, as well as academia and think- or do-tanks.

CSOs are mostly organized in pursuit of specific economic, social, environmental or political goals and in many countries represent a vibrant institutional fabric that can influence public and private action for the

> **Box 7. Community engagement in the Kenya SDG Forum**
>
> A strong example of community engagement is demonstrated by the Kenya SDG Forum, which illustrates how a multi-stakeholder platform can bring community-based organizations directly into the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process. In Kenya, the Forum partnered with local CBOs to convene more than 25 community dialogues across all 47 counties, using those consultations to channel grassroots perspectives, especially from under- represented groups, into SDG follow up and VNR reporting.
>
> ***Source:*** *Kirkbride and Figueroa (2021)*

greater public good. For an inclusive process of decision making in scaling pathways and country platforms, NGO representatives can play an important role. (See Box 6) However, much depends on the readiness of the government and private sector participants to listen to and take on board the NGO voices and seriously factor their concerns as potential winners or losers from public and private action. At the same time, organizing this input into a scaling and/or country platform process is not easy or costless and much depends on whether or not the CSO community has an effective governance structure that allows it to speak with a clear and unified voice. If not, then the CSO voices can easily be ignored, fueling in turn a lack of trust among the CSOs in the scaling and country platform process. The question, once again, as for all actors, is what incentives exist for CSOs to participate constructively and effectively in these processes.

Communities can be positively or negatively affected by public action and, as importantly, community input into the design of public action and support for its implementation is often a critical prerequisite for effective scaling pathways. Therefore, for interventions that affect communities directly (e.g., in major rural or urban development programs) bringing in community voices early into the scaling and country platform processes. (See Box 7) But as for other stakeholder groups, communities must be organized to make their voices heard and to serve as effective participants to in these processes. From the perspective of governments, organizing such participatory or inclusive approaches are often seen as costly and time consuming, and potentially disruptive for the pursuit of publicly championed development interventions. These tensions make for difficult choices and in practice often mean that community input is proforma, which in turn means that community representatives have little incentive to participate constructively.

Finally, academia and think- and do-tanks, such as the African Center for Economic Transformation and Spark Health Africa, can play important roles in supporting scaling and country platform processes. They can generate the evidence and provide technical and advisory inputs necessary to assess development problems and their solutions, propose appropriate scaling pathways and enable systemic conditions that need to be put in place of to achieve transformational impact at scale. (See Box 8) They are essential partners in designing and implementing monitoring, evaluation and learning processes for scaling and country platforms, and can serve as champions and intermediaries for transformational change.

> **Box 8. Integrating academia in the Nepal SDGs Forum**
>
> The Nepal SDGs Forum - established in 2016 as a common platform for networks, civil society, the private sector, cooperatives, media, development partners and other groups that seek to contribute to the SDGs - offers perhaps the clearest example of academia being integrated into an SDG related multi-stakeholder platform. From its inception, the Forum included academia and researchers as part of its core constituency, and this role was later reinforced through a Science and Technology thematic grouping linked to Nepal's broader SDG and VNR architecture.
>
> ***Source:*** *Figueroa and Harrison (2022)*

Developing countries have growing domestic academic and think/do-tank capacities, but international academic and think/do-tank world can often serve as partners and supporters, ideally serving as forces that strengthen, rather than substitute for national capacity. However, whether domestic or international, the academic and think/do-tank input to scaling and country platform processes is not cost-free and must be transparently and sustainably financed. The promise of cost-covering funding and of influence in the way development decisions are made, serves as the incentive for these actors to participate in the scaling and country platform processes.

D. Challenges for international funder organizations

International funder organizations (bilateral and multilateral official funders, foundations and large international NGOs) have played a significant role in many developing countries in supporting development and climate action, especially among lower-income countries. The recent crisis brought about by severe cutbacks in bilateral official development assistance is creating new challenges for recipient countries as well as for funder organizations, but it may represent opportunities for recipient countries to take greater control over their own development. It is also an opportunity for funder organizations to reorient what assistance they do provide to focus more effectively on transformational scaling and country platform processes can play an important role in this regard.

The Scaling Community of Practice recently completed a three-year action research initiative on Mainstreaming Scaling in Funder Organizations drawing on the experience of 28 funder organizations from across the spectrum of international funders (official bilateral and multilateral funders, vertical funds, innovation and research funders, and INGOs).[25] It found that many of these organizations are now beginning to address how they can support scaling by their clients. This requires funders to overcome two fundamental challenges inherent in their traditional transactional approach: First, they have to overcome the legacy of the traditional project model that most of them have employed for decades: time-bound, one-off projects, focused on specific outputs to be achieved by project end, but paying little if any attention to what happens after the project is completed and to the creation of the enabling factors (institutions, policies, country ownership, finance, partnerships, etc.) for sustainability and scalability. Second, they have to overcome the tendency to focus exclusively on identifying and testing innovations without considering how successful solutions can and will be scaled – this has been referred to as the "pilots-to-no-where" syndrome.[26] Both of these challenges have a common underlying institutional weakness: magical thinking that the successful project or innovation will be replicated and scaled spontaneously, that "you build it and they will come," and that "somebody, anybody will pick it up."

For large official funders, front-line staff and their managers face the challenge of too many "unfunded mandates" that they have to deliver on in project appraisal and supervision (including meeting social, environmental, fiduciary requirements, to mention just a few) while their performance are evaluated on narrowly defined deliverables targets in terms of project numbers, commitments, disbursements, population reached, etc. This makes them averse to taking on what they regard as an additional task of worrying about scalability of their projects.[27]

---

[25] See Cooley, Kohl and Linn (2026a)

[26] See Larry Cooley's video on YouTube: "'Pilots-to-nowhere on the rise in recent years."
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iF97Sv773tA

[27] Based on interviews with funder staff and managers as reported in Cooley, Kohl and Linn (2026a)]

Innovation and research funders face the challenge that their own resources are too limited to support the scaling process of successful innovations, even when they recognize increasingly that without scaling the innovations they have supported, they will not achieve lasting impact on the ground. The problem is compounded by the fact that those funders that support early stages of the scaling process (innovation and testing) have little incentive and opportunity for hand-off to the larger national or international funders, while the larger funders have no incentive or capacity to seek out the innovations piloted by the smaller funders.[28]

These challenges in scaling also affect how international funders engage with country platforms. Since their focus tends to be transactional rather than transformational, they tend to view their engagement in country platforms – if they engage at all – from the perspective of coordinating and partnering in connection with one-off projects focused on limited outputs, rather than supporting on a sustained and coordinated basis the institution building, policy reforms, and country ownership. For GFF, the case study on mainstreaming scaling noted that the country platforms that were developed with GFF assistance encountered difficulties in getting the funder community aligned in support of the government and GFF developed long-term health sector country platforms and scaling strategies.[29] For examples of how incentives for official funder managers and staff and their clients and partners work in practice, see Box 9.

Box 9. Incentives in action – two examples from the World Bank

The following examples demonstrating both negative and positive incentive effects in action in the World Bank.

World Bank #1: One of the authors of this chapter (Johannes Linn) served as Vice President for the World Bank's regional operations in Europe and Central Asia from 1996-2003. The performance metrics under which he operated generally prioritized (a) the delivery of the largest possible amount of lending commitments for approval by the Bank's executive Board, on time and within a tight budget; (b) the prompt disbursement of committed loan funds; and (c) fewest possible number of "problem projects," i.e., projects with delays in implementation, problems with fiduciary requirements, and/or failure to deliver on promised project results. As one of the consequences, Johannes asked the project managers to minimize the extent to which they sought partnership with other funders, and in particular partnerships involving co-financing, since this would cause processing and implementation delays for projects, along with greater appraisal and supervision costs and reduced certainty of project results delivery.

World Bank #2: During the same period, Johannes and his regional management team were placed in charge of a special multi-donor program of reconstruction for post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina following the Dayton Peace Accords. This was a high-visibility program involving a broad contingent of funders under the joint leadership of the European Union (EU) and the World Bank. It was regarded of great urgency at the political level of the funder community as the quick reconstruction of the country was seen as necessary to shore up a fragile peace. With a clear mandate from the top for effective and speedy delivery of a comprehensive effort, the EU and World Bank teams developed quickly and with inputs from country representatives a multi-year, multi-sector reconstruction program – in fact, a country platform – that was offered to funders and the country for funding and implementation, with delivery coordinated and monitored jointly by

[28] Ibid.

[29] See Linn (2024)

the EU and World Bank. The Bank itself mobilized its reconstruction financing and its internal staff and budget resources to support the program at exceptional levels and developed special project appraisal and disbursement procedures to cut short processing times significantly. A subsequent evaluation of the reconstruction program showed overall a successful implementation outcome. This example demonstrates that when incentives are aligned throughout the funder community and within funder organizations the usual barriers of lack and fragmentation of resources, ponderous processes and lack of incentives for frontline managers and staff can be overcome.

The main conclusion of the Scaling Community's mainstreaming initiative is that funders need to mainstream scaling systematically into their operational practice if they are to support rather than hinder transformational country-led scaling processes and country platforms. This means in practice that there has to be clear leadership from the top of the funder organizations (the governing boards and chief executive officers) for transformational scaling which in turn means anchoring scaling in the organizations' vision, mission and strategy, in its operational and human resource policies, in its financing instruments, budgets and the resources supporting front-line teams, and in their monitoring and evaluation practices. Without consistent and persistent action along these lines, the organizations and their line managers and staffs will not have the incentives to support transformational scaling and country platforms.

6. Conclusion

Transformational scaling and country platforms are key elements of a long-term development strategy aiming to achieve sustainable impact at scale in the sectors covered in this volume. As international development assistance is expected to shrink even further from the already reduced levels of 2025,[30] the effectiveness of development interventions will become even more pressing than in the past. While it is uncertain whether and how the Sustainable development Goals will be pursued beyond 2030, there is no doubt that the transformational scaling agenda and with it the role of transformational country platforms will rise in importance. The key messages for their implementation can be summarized as follows:

- **Scaling and country platforms should be transformational, not transactional in design and implementation**. They must focus on long-term development challenges and support scaling pathways that address these challenges.
- **Transformational scaling and country platforms are mutually interdependent**. Country platforms need to be underpinned by systematic transformational scaling efforts of the main participants; and transformational scaling needs the support of country platforms to ensure an effective, aligned and coordinated pursuit of shared goals by the participants.
- **Transformational scaling and country platforms share the same success factors for transformational impact**. A long-term vision of sustainable impact at scale; ownership of the agenda by national (local) stakeholders; evidence based and adaptive decision making in implementation; creation of the necessary systemic enabling conditions (esp. policies and institutions); effective partnerships; leadership, capacity, resources, and incentives to support systematic focus on transformational scaling by the organizations and actors involved in the scaling

[30] See OECD: **https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/official-development-assistance-oda.html**

and country platform processes; and transparent monitoring and evaluation against long-term targets during implementation.

- **Implementation of transformational scaling and country platforms face common challenges.** Key participant groups face barriers, resource constraints and disincentives for participating in longer-term scaling pathways and country platforms. These challenges need to be addressed transparently with a special focus on creating the incentives for effective participation.
- **International funders have a special responsibility to support rather than hinder transformational scaling and country platforms, not just individually but as a funding community.** International funders, and in particular their governing boards and leaders, need to internalize the transformational scaling agenda in their own operational mission, policies, internal incentives and monitoring, evaluation and learning processes. This will help them also in supporting transformational country platforms. However, it is not enough for selected funders to mainstream transformational scaling. The entire funding community needs to do so if scaling transformational scaling pathways and country platforms are to become the rule, not the exception.

Text References

- Cooley, L. and J. Linn (2024). “Scaling Fundamentals.” https://scalingcommunityofpractice.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Fundamentals-Updated-11.2024.pdf

- Cooley, L, R. Kohl, and J. Linn (2026a). “Mainstreaming Scaling in Funder Organizations: The Synthesis Report.” https://scalingcommunityofpractice.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/FINAL-Mainstreaming-Initiative-Synthesis-Report.pdf

- Cooley, L, R. Kohl, and J. Linn (2026b). “Mainstreaming Scaling in Funder Organizations: Policy Brief.” https://scalingcommunityofpractice.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/FINAL-Mainstreaming-Initiative-Synthesis-Policy-Brief.pdf

- Figueroa, D. and T. Harrison (2022). “Pieces of a puzzle: further steps on a journey.” https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Global-Forum-Study_Pieces-of-a-Puzzle_March-2022.pdf

- Hartmann, A. and J. Linn (2008). “Scaling Up: A Framework and Lessons for Development Effectiveness from Literature and Practice.” https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/10_scaling_up_aid_linn.pdf

- Kirkbride, T. and D. Figueroa (2021). “Pieces of a puzzle: towards national sustainable development advisory board.” chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://sdgglobalforum.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Studies/EN_Global_Forum_Study_Pieces_of_a_puzzle_July_2021.pdf

- S. Levy (2006). “Progress Against Poverty: Sustaining Mexico's Progresa-Oportunidades Program.” Washington, DC: Brookings Press. https://www.brookings.edu/books/progress-against-poverty/

- Linn, J. (2023). “Scaling Up the Impact of Development Programs Must Complement Other Approaches to Achieve the SDGs and Climate Goals.” https://globalsummitryproject.com/special-issue-2023/scaling-up-the-impact-of-development-programs-must-complement-other-approaches-to-achieve-the-sdgs-and-climate-goals/#elementor-toc__heading-anchor-0

- Linn, J. (2024). “Mainstreaming Scaling in Funder Organizations Case Studies: The Global Financing Facility.” https://scalingcommunityofpractice.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Mainstreaming-Scaling-at-GFF-FINAL-1.pdf

- Linn, J. (2025). “Country Platforms and Scaling: An Exploration of Key Issues.” https://scalingcommunityofpractice.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/FINAL-Revised-Note-on-Country-Platforms-and-Scaling.pdf

- Linn, J. and E. Yilmaz (2025). “Evaluation Guidelines and Practice of Official International Development Funders.” https://scalingcommunityofpractice.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/FINAL-Evaluation-Guidelines-of-Official-International-Development-Funders.pdf

- MSI (2021). “Scaling Up: Tools for Practitioners.” https://www.msiworldwide.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ScalingUp_toolkit_2021_v5_0.pdf

- SCoP (2022). "Scaling Principles and Lessons." https://scalingcommunityofpractice.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Scaling-Principles-and-Lessons_v3.pdf

- WHO-ExpandNet (2009). "Practical guidance for scaling up health service innovations." https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/939b53fe-faf7-40aa-9ce3-bb6da82ccd9c/content

- Witter S., Palmer N., James R., Zaidi S., Carillon S., English R., Loffreda G., Venables E., Habib S., Tan J., Hane F., Bertone M.P., Hosseinalipour S-M., Ridde V., Faye A., Blanchet K. (2023). "Reimagining the Future of Global Health Initiatives." (2023) Research Report, Queen Margaret University, Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies, Aga Khan University, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Stellenbosch University https://d2nhv1us8wflpq.cloudfront.net/prod/uploads/2023/08/FGHI_final_report_designed.pdf

- World Bank (2022). "Understanding Trends in Proliferation and Fragmentation for Aid Effectiveness during Crises." https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/ef73fb3d1d33e3bf0e2c23bdf49b4907-0060012022/original/aid-proliferation-7-19-2022.pdf

Additional country platform references

- G20 Reference Framework for Effective Country Platforms (2020) https://www.mof.gov.cn/en/Cooperation/mulid/202011/P020201104581749367491.pdf

- "Country Platforms for Climate Action MDB: Statement of Common Understanding and Way Forward" (2024) https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Brief-on-Country-Platforms-for-Climate-Action_V12_11112024_FINAL.pdf

- ODI Country Platform Webpage. https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/country-platforms/

- "County Platform Development Note" (ODI 2025) https://media.odi.org/documents/CountryPlatformDevelopment3.pdf

- "Designing and Guiding Country Platforms: What role for the MDBs?" By Archie Gilmour, Josué Tanaka and Sarah Colenbrander (ODI, 2024) https://media.odi.org/documents/Designing_and_governing_country_platforms_OE5SVfw.pdf

- "Some Thoughts on Country Platforms" by Mark Plant (CGD 2020) https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/Plant_Country%20Platforms_note.pdf

- "Are 'Country Platforms' the Key to Delivering Green Growth at Scale?" By Melanie Robinson and Crispian Olver (WRI 2025) https://files.wri.org/d8/s3fs-public/2025-02/technical-perspective-country-platforms-delivering-green-growth-scale.pdf?_gl=1*1m4tc5l*_gcl_au*NjgzNDkwNDMuMTc1NTgxMTQwMA

- CPI Climate Platform Webpage https://compass.climatepolicyinitiative.org/themes/country-platforms/country-sector-platforms

- Brazil Climate and Ecological Transformation Investment platform https://www.gov.br/fazenda/pt-br/acesso-a-informacao/acoes-e-programas/transformacao-ecologica/bip/brazil-climate-and-ecological-transformation-platform

- "The Realities of Country Platforms For LDCs And SIDS: Ten Key Lessons" By Mohsen Gul, Ebony Holland, Anaa Hassan, Liam Upson (IIED, 2025) (PDBs) https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2025-04/22630g.pdf

- "Country platforms: Green Climate Fund Approach, Available Support and Impact" By GCF (Slides, 2025) https://www.greenclimate.fund/sites/default/files/event/gcf-readiness-information-session-country-platforms-june-2025.pdf

- "Making the Global Financial System Work for All: Report of the G20 Eminent Persons Group on Global Financial Governance" (2018) (p.33) https://us.boell.org/sites/default/files/10-3-18_report_of_the_g20_eminent_persons_group_on_global_financial_governance.pdf

- Comment on LinkedIn by Bastien Bedossa (World Bank 2025) https://www.linkedin.com/posts/bastien-bedossa-48677b4a_c3a-ffd4-ecological-activity-7347917019268243457-X2WL?utm_source=social_share_send&utm_medium=android_app&rcm=ACoAAAlxaQsBw5Io0JwHtDzzpisUYWrif-1J0xg&utm_campaign=gmail

- "Realizing the Potential of Country Platforms" by Pepukaye Bardouille and Sara Jane Ahmed 2025) https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/how-to-ensure-that-country-platforms-deliver-tangible-development-outcomes-by-pepukaye-bardouille-and-sara-jane-ahmed-2025-07
- "Country platforms for economic transformation and climate action." By Sandra Martinsone (2025) https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2025/05/country-platforms-for-economic-transformation-and-climate-action/
- "Country platforms in the context of rising sovereign debt levels." By Archi Glimour et al. (ODI 2025) https://findevlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Country_platforms_in_the_context_of_rising_sovereign_debt_levels.pdf
- "Appraising country platforms: Aligning climate finance with development in developing and emerging economies." African Climate Foundation (2026) https://africanclimatefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/801152-ACF-Country-Platform-WEB.pdf