

NGOTips

A Legacy of Strong NGOs and Networks

October 2011

Participating in System-Wide Change: An Introduction to SCALE™

Q. How do you go from measured success in pilot activities to system-wide impact?

A. Across the world, development practitioners are faced with a common challenge: how to scale up activities. For example, how to reach thousands of women instead of dozens or tens of thousands of farmers instead of hundreds or millions of babies instead of thousands. SCALE™—System-wide Collaborative Action for Livelihoods and the Environment—is an integrated approach that brings together people from all sides of an issue to do just that. Rather than looking only at parts of a given system and having limited impact, SCALE recognizes connections, interactions and inter-relationships within the whole. It enables all stakeholders in a system to focus on the bigger picture while still acting locally to achieve meaningful, sustainable change on a large scale.

Rooted in years of field experience, the SCALE™ approach was developed from lessons learned from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Environmental Communication Project—GreenCOM. This multi-country project, implemented by FHI 360 (formerly known as AED) from 1993 to 2006 to support environmental policy and conservation measures, demonstrates that *achieving sustainable solutions to development challenges depends on the quality of the relationships between and among the many stakeholders affected by or affecting the issue.*

This *NGO Tips* paper describes SCALE™, a systems approach for improving collaboration among NGOs and other stakeholders, building social capital and maximizing the effect of development investments.

The SCALE™ Framework

The SCALE framework seeks to generate system-wide change by strengthening effective communication among the stakeholders—individuals, groups, organizations, businesses, and institutions—

involved with a common issue and by helping them negotiate and implement concurrent, sustainable, collaborative action toward a common vision. Figure 1 describes the SCALE framework.

Figure 1: The SCALE Framework



II

*An intensified exchange
of ideas among all
sectors of society can
lead to the greater
involvement of people
in a common cause.*

*This is a fundamental
requirement for
appropriate and
sustainable
development.*

II

Colin Fraser & Jonathan Villet
Communication: A Key to
Human Development
1994

Participating in System-Wide Change: An Introduction to SCALE™

The SCALE™ process begins with the critical step of pulling together collective knowledge about an issue and its context.

1) Start at SCALE™

Identify and engage all relevant stakeholders as early as possible. Then, from that group, enroll a Cross-Sectoral Advisory Committee of stakeholders who know who the important players are, can help define the core issues and champion the effort with prospective participants.

2) Map the Context

This process includes:

- a. Creating system maps to help understand the social, economic, governmental and environmental systems surrounding the issue;
- b. Reviewing research on evidence-based, environmentally-friendly “best” technologies, products and practices relevant to the issue; and

3) Catalyze Coalitions and Partnerships

Because of limited financial and human resources in any given development system, it is crucial to go beyond the Advisory Committee to engage a wider variety of partners. In the process, capitalizing on existing networks rather than trying to reinvent them. This will result in a system-wide exchange of ideas where 50 to 1,500 stakeholder representatives gather to establish shared goals and strategies. This exchange is facilitated during a Whole-System-in-the-Room (WSR) planning workshop, a key event that jump-starts the process of engaging a broad base of people who will take action.² At the end of the workshop, participants formally commit to personal and group short-term (three months) and long-term (three year) collaborative action plans focused on their self-declared common goals.

4) Create Collaborative, Sustainable Solutions

SCALE™ builds stakeholders’ capacity in coalition/partnership formation and group process facilitation—two essential communication skills for successful collaborative action. Stakeholders work together to:

- Generate options that address policy, structural, technological, economic and social aspects of the issue;
- Negotiate and prioritize collaborative solutions and identify specific opportunities to work together as partners; and
- Define objectives and indicators of success.

5) Act

SCALE™ helps stakeholders select and use the most effective combination of communication methodologies in an integrated and coordinated strategy. This may include (but is not limited to) advocacy, social marketing, education, mass communication, participation and mobilization, organizational development and conflict resolution. SCALE seeks to empower people to become the drivers of their own development processes and, therefore, continually seeks to maintain a balance between the “task”, i.e., achieving objectives, and the “process”, i.e., strengthening stakeholder capacity for informed decision making and sustainable, collaborative action.

6) Value

This component’s name was intentionally chosen for its multiple meanings. The SCALE™ process helps stakeholders to value both the resources on which they all depend and other stakeholders’ perspectives, roles and contributions. This is the moment in the SCALE™ process to evaluate what is working and what can be improved. Monitoring and evaluation within SCALE™ helps stakeholders understand the structure of these cross-sectoral relationships and how they change as a result of collaborative efforts.

The SCALE approach does not give greater value or “more voice” to any one stakeholder group. Everyone has a role to play, and all ideas are valid... The perspectives, efforts and achievements of all stakeholders are valued by everyone.

Case Study: SCALE™ Helps Transform Morocco's Medicinal and Aromatic Plant Sector to Compete Globally

In 2006, when a new U.S.-Moroccan Free Trade Agreement resulted in lower prices for Moroccan cereal crops produced by most farmers, the medicinal and aromatic plant (MAP) sector—rapidly expanding but highly competitive—emerged as a promising alternative. Although Morocco at that time ranked ninth in the world in MAP exports, the sector was disorganized and inefficient. The need for transformation was urgent. So, USAID/Morocco turned to FHI 360 (formerly known as AED) to implement SCALE™.

The first steps involved identifying, selecting and inviting stakeholders—representing all links in the value chain from growers, processors and regulators to buyers, suppliers and retailers—for a Whole-System-in-the-Room (WSR) planning workshop. Over the course of three days, these stakeholders arrived at a common understanding of the sector's past, present and future, developed scenarios, identified a list of common goals and developed short-term (three-month) and long-term (three-year) action plans. As part of the process, participants stood in front of their peers and made commitments—personal and organizational—as to what they would undertake. For example, farmers committed to form the September 22nd Farmers Spokesperson Association to promote MAPs and share information with other farmers. A university researcher committed to training university students in MAPs. International buyers committed to promote the MAP sector in journals and other publications, create a MAP Web site and train trainers in MAP organic certification and marketing. Others worked to create awareness of best practices in wild harvesting and sustainable management of local harvest areas, as well as organic certification processes and value-added product production and marketing.

With participants activated, the SCALE™ staff focused on: 1) strengthening capacity along the MAP value chain to apply the best practices needed to achieve organic certification, and 2) strengthening communication, collaboration and networks among all MAP sector stakeholders and actors at a national level. To achieve these goals, the SCALE™ team used a combination of social change methodologies, including social marketing, education, organization development, conflict resolution, mass communication and advocacy.

Results included increased social capital, an increased MAP network of stakeholders, increased workdays, increased quality and price of products, more and stronger linkages in the value chain and better information flow to and dissemination through the media.

The SCALE™ framework seeks to generate system-wide change by strengthening effective communication among the stakeholders (individuals, groups, organizations, businesses, and institutions) surrounding a common issue and by helping them negotiate and implement concurrent, sustainable, collaborative action toward a common vision.

Building Trust to Transform Pilot Initiatives into Large-Scale Impact

The key to strong relationships is trust, and trust depends on good communication. Thus, the underlying strategy of SCALE™ is to use communication techniques and methodologies to drive a participatory process that enables all stakeholders to agree on a common vision for the future and to create and implement collaborative and sustainable solutions towards this shared vision.

While the process identifies the leverage points within the system, the SCALE™ approach does not give greater value or

“more voice” to any one stakeholder group. Everyone has a role to play, and all ideas are valid. This principle is at the heart of all collaborative relationships. NGOs, engaged representatives of the private sector and media and government entities are regarded as equally qualified to address the issue. The perspectives, efforts and achievements of all stakeholders are valued by everyone, creating an environment in which social capital is built as the work and aspirations of many “behind the scenes” players (such as NGOs) are revealed and credited.

Strategic Communication Is Key to Success

Keeping stakeholders focused on their common goals is no easy task. It requires juggling many agendas and using multiple channels to keep everyone connected. Strategic communications plays a huge role in every phase of SCALE™. It is critical to helping organizations achieve “real collaboration” within any given system, sector or value chain. That means diffusing information in appropriate, attractive formats through multiple, integrated and accessible channels, often by harnessing the resources within stakeholder groups and taking advantage of distribution networks that are already in place.

For example, in Egypt, the common goal of creating better Environmental Educational materials led several stakeholders to pool their resources in an effort to create educational supplementary materials for schools in three governorates. These partnerships were fostered by SCALE™, and the resulting educational materials responded directly to system demands. In addition, Environmental Education NGOs learned first-hand how celebrities can provide the necessary “hook” to engage youth in social development. When Youssra, one of Egypt’s leading actresses, accepted an invitation to open Environmental Education events, she attracted a lot more attention to the issue than anyone had expected. Where celebrities go, the media follows. Increased involvement of “stars” can lead to more newspaper, radio and television coverage. There is nothing like having influential personalities on your team to help you take your activities to scale.

In Morocco, local cooperatives held information days about proper techniques for harvesting medicinal and aromatic herbs. With the help of the SCALE strategic communication techniques, their printed materials were designed with the target in mind.

And, in Kenya, strategic communication techniques were used to ensure that the message and delivery system of education and awareness tools were on target before being produced. Leveraging the generosity of private dairy companies, seed dealers were then able to distribute the information to the intended population of farmers.

Ready for SCALE™

SCALE™ can contribute to the transformation of a system from one with many scattered individual pilot initiatives to one that is more cohesive, where linkages among development practitioners generate large-scale solutions and system-wide impact. SCALE™ helps everyone in the system better understand the perspectives and aspirations of others, trust in each other and realize the benefits of partnerships focused on a common purpose. By exposing and showcasing the value that all stakeholders bring to a development issue, the SCALE™ process reveals the importance of contributions from NGOs and civil society organizations, allowing them to assume a position of increased influence.

System-wide change depends on partnership development and the type of strategic communication interventions that are outlined in the SCALE™ methodology. By following the steps and trying the communication techniques, a development practitioner can become effective at catalyzing systemic change so that “going to scale” will no longer be as daunting as it once seemed.

SCALE™ helps everyone in the system better understand the perspectives and aspirations of others, trust in each other and realize the benefits of partnerships focused on a common purpose.

References

- ¹ Since 2003, USAID has employed the SCALE methodology to add value and increase the impact of development efforts in many countries. SCALE was applied in agricultural programs in Morocco and Kenya and in an environmental education project in Egypt. It has been used to design and implement sustainable tourism initiatives in Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Mali, Ethiopia, Montenegro and Albania, and is being fully integrated into C-CHANGE, the global USAID Health Communications program.
- ² GreenCOM has adapted the Whole-System-in-the-Room (WSR) technique from Future Search (Copyright 2004 by Future Search Network, A Program of Resources for Human Development, Inc. and used with permission). However, there are many other types of WSR techniques that may be used.

NGO Tips

For more information:

This NGO Tips brief is available online at www.NGOConnect.NET.

This dynamic and interactive site is dedicated to connecting and strengthening non-governmental organizations (NGOs), networks, and support organizations worldwide.

For more information about SCALE™, including an educational video and case studies from Morocco and Kenya, visit the FHI 360 Web site at <http://aed.org/News/Multimedia/SCALE.cfm>.

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