RISE Community of Practice Workshop

Why, What and How scaling science is critical for improving children's foundational learning in the Global South

Wednesday 20 September 2023, 2:30-4:30pm GMT+1

This hybrid workshop featured both in-person participation of RISE CoP members who were in Oxford, UK (alongside the RISE conference) and online participation of additional CoP members.

The session explored the science of scaling effective foundational literacy and numeracy interventions, highlighting four critical aspects – adapting FLN innovations to the daily realities of school systems, catalysing government systems to implement FLN innovations, integrating different actors within the education eco-system and effective practices for scaling FLN innovations.

Chaired by People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network's Armando Ali, the session sought to highlight what it takes to move from a single, innovative, high-impact FLN project to achieving system-wide reform, and from interventions involving a few schools to large-scale implementation.

Four presentations were made, each focusing on a critical area for effective scaling of FLN interventions in the Global South.

- Scaling-up policies meet educational policies and school routines (slide deck). Felipe Hevia (CIESAS-MIA-México).
- Scaling FLN with the government. A case study from India (slide deck). Shaveta Sharma-Kukreja (CSF, India).
- The education eco-system. Scaling FLN through effective collaborations and partnerships (slide deck). Vanessa Francis (Room to Read, South Africa).
- How countries can effectively improve FLN outcomes at scale today (slide deck). Matthew Jukes (RTI International).

This note is a reflective summary of key takeaways from the session.

Four expert panel presentations

<u>Fit innovations into the day-to-day realities of schools</u>: Effective scaling of education innovations requires translating interventions to fit the daily lived realities within school settings. These realities are dictated by formal and informal conditions that can be categorized into five unique elements – space, time, teachers, curricula, and resources. Recognizing the lack of magic solutions to the learning crisis, effective innovations must change/affect aspects relating to one or more of these

elements. By optimizing the elements along a two-dimensional critical resource matrix of time and financial cost, the likelihood of achieving effective scaling of an intervention is greatly enhanced.

Provide catalytic system support for state governments to effectively scale FLN programs: Through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, NIPUN[1] Bharat mission 2021-27 and Foundational Learning Study 2022, the government of India has attached high priority to improving foundational learning for all children. Considering the scale of the challenge facing state and district-level actors however, political and bureaucratic buy-in into the FLN mission may not be sufficient to achieve intended reform objectives. Central Square Foundation (CSF) plays a catalytic system support role by partnering with eleven state governments to integrate four key FLN reform levers – goal setting and assessments, structured pedagogy, system capacity building, and monitoring and data collection. To effectively support at scale on all four levers, CSF adopts a coalition approach by working closely with other technical partners operating across the education ecosystem in India.

Partnerships and collaborations are critical, and government is a prime partner for scaling: Effective scaling of FLN innovations presents both an educational and societal challenge – suggesting the need to partner with both the educational and broader community actors. While the very early stages of an FLN innovation demand innovators to demonstrate impact, achieving scale requires simplification, standardization and institutionalization of the innovation. These three features facilitate transition from a demonstrative ("I do") to collaborative ("we do"), and subsequently expansive ("you do") model of the innovation. They also provide a basis for developing a common framework for implementation across various partners. Through such partnerships and collaborations, lower-level implementation, and support teams (e.g., at district) will develop, providing the expertise needed for the national-level government-led scale up of effective FLN innovations.

Scale through well aligned system and instructional support and effective classroom practice: Eight large scale programs that were successful at improving foundational reading revealed three critical components[2]. First, system support for the innovation needs to be reflected through prioritisation, alignment with other existing government plans, program communication down to the subnational levels, implementation monitoring and ongoing capacity building for key actors at all levels. Second, make teachers' lives easier by providing structured support that is positive and collaborative, involves practicing new skills, provides high quality instructional support materials, includes classroom observations with feedback, leverages peer support through teacher communities of practice, and includes high quality well-aligned student materials. Third, provide a high-quality classroom instructional experience through structured pedagogical approaches that emphasize key foundations, allocate sufficient instructional time, provide students with high quality materials, and foster active student engagement with a variety of instructional activities.

Breakout group discussions

In-depth discussions in small breakout groups were designed as deep dives into key issues (e.g., comments, questions, insights, observations, experiences) relating to each of the four thematic focus areas covered by the expert presentations.

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[1] National Initiative for Proficiency in reading with Understanding and Numeracy.
[2] The three components are instructional practice (brief#1), instructional support (brief#2) and system support (brief#3).

Scaling in traditional education policy contexts: In many countries, FLN saliency is quite low (sometimes absent) at all levels – community, policy, political, etc. In such contexts, other highly charged education topics are more prominent – such as privatisation, high-stakes exams, etc. For example, little information was shared on learning losses incurred during the CV19 schooling disruptions in Latin American countries. As a result, education authorities quickly returned to pre-pandemic ways after re-opening of schools. In such contexts, successful scaling of effective FLN innovations requires raising the saliency of foundational learning. Ways to achieve this might include changing societal perceptions about the purpose of education, finding and working with FLN champions to promote foundational learning, linking foundational learning to other more salient topics such as performance on end-of-cycle high-stakes exams, and giving teachers a voice to broadly share their experiences of teaching in foundational grades.

Working with government systems to scale innovations: While government is the most important actor for successful scaling of FLN innovations, other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are critical too – they are usually the ones providing the initial evidence to prove the effectiveness of the innovation. Also, recent FLN innovations have demonstrated large impacts working with volunteers to implement remedial foundational learning programs – emphasizing the value of community actors.

In many countries, governments come and go quite regularly and this presents a challenge to scaling and sustaining FLN innovations. However, the technical middle tier of government tend to stay longer and transcend specific governments. Whether an innovation effectively and sustainably improves foundational learning is a key factor in securing buy-in of middle tier technocrats.

The group also shared experiences of scaling FLN innovations from four countries – India, Brazil, El Salvador and Madagascar. In India, the sheer size of the challenge to improve FLN makes it necessary for NGOs to work in partnership with government. Also, non-government technical actors help by pitching-in alongside the government to ease the reform burden carried by the middle tier technocrats. In Brazil, NGOs initially play the role of demonstrating that an innovation works, which helps create momentum for government to invest in the innovation. The NGOs then subsequently play a technical and logistical supplementary role of supporting government to successfully scale the innovation. In El Salvador, the ministry of education has a dedicated team of math experts working on scaling the ESMATE program. In Madagascar, the TaFiTa program was introduced as a post-Covid19 innovation to recover lost learning. This innovation initially sought to work through SMCs, eventually scaling through reliance on community efforts to support remediation of foundational learning.

Effective partnerships & collaborations for scaling: While it may be indisputable that NGOs are more likely to achieve large scale impact on FLN through partnerships and collaborations than working separately, it is important to address incentive structures that seem to position them in direct competition with each other. Factors such as funding, shared vision and goals are critical considerations. Leveraging the strengths of different NGOs, governments can play a role in facilitating collaboration across them towards scaling of FLN innovations. Collaborations between NGOs and government can also be quite fragile at times. Use of an officially agreed document to guide the partnership is recommended.

Effective practices – reflecting on 8 case studies: Whereas one of the key strengths of these highly effective FLN studies is their unified approach, some governments might prefer to integrate only

some parts of the innovation – due to various reasons, be they contextual, funding, capacity, etc. To ensure governments don't adopt this deconstructive approach to scaling effective innovations, it is critical that they are onboarded from the very early stages of initial implementation of the innovation.

While system support is critical for scaling, it is heavily dependent on political economy factors. Understanding and giving due consideration to the incentives and motivations of key stakeholders will likely address these factors and ensure successful scaling of FLN innovations. Finally, understanding what does not work for successful scaling of an effective FLN innovation is as important as understanding what works. This is especially important to avoid circumstances where an effective innovation may fail to achieve impact when rolled out on a large scale but only in process compliance mode.