



In the **SPOTLIGHT**

# ‘Scale’: A new Development Paradigm

For several years now, Scale has become a catchword in the Development Discourse. While it has always been the goal of State-funded Development Programmes, it is now also an important paradigm in the Giving of private actors too.

Three factors are responsible for this trend. Many Government Programmes have reached Scale in terms of outlay and coverage, but lack impact and sustainability. Secondly, private funding addressing the enduring global poverty syndrome has expanded significantly. Most importantly, while global wealth has grown exponentially, the global poverty syndrome endures.

The combined effect of these three factors has led to a paradigm change in the thinking and actions of civil society Donors, large and small: We want change, they say, intervention is urgent, and it needs to be at scale.

Scale seems an inevitable goal as we realize that even the synergies of a million ‘small-scale’ interventions by hundreds of thousands of NGOs did not yield necessary systemic changes in key areas such

as education, health and housing. Hence the search for synergies. Rather than build a million small projects, why not pool resources, develop common strategies and design large-scale interventions?

## Scaling: necessary but not sufficient

Collaboration and scalability of interventions surely point in the right direction. But let us first ask, why State-led interventions, most of which have been at scale as well, did not yield the necessary impact? Nothing illustrates this better than the Education Sector in India. It has reached near-universal enrollment. Drop-out rates have come down. Retention rates have gone up. And Education is now a constitutional Right.

Yet the results continue to be abysmal, be they functional literacy and numeracy in the Primary schools, or the lack of employability at senior levels. Thus, reaching Scale by increasing outputs and installing infrastructure is not enough. Scale needs to be supplemented by Depth, or to use a more operational word: Sustainable Impact.



## How to achieve Depth? Changing attitudes and behaviours

To look at education in India again, one obvious indicator is the lack of Empowerment at all three levels: Teachers are not empowered due to poor teacher-training. Parents are formally involved through Parent-Teacher Associations. But in a society where a majority of parents are first-generation literates, they are not empowered through robust engagement skills. And students remain largely passive recipients of top-down teaching, fixed on exams and degrees instead of independent thinking and job-oriented skills.

The concept of ‘Empowerment’ describes an activity that does not rely primarily on physical infrastructure, but addresses the psychological infrastructure of attitude and behavioural change. These both need time to grow roots. Deeply held social attitudes are part of the individual and social make-up of a person. Especially a poor person may hold on to the traditional attitudes because they offer a semblance of security in a desperately insecure world.



## Scaling with Depth needs time

This inevitably calls for a different design of intervention, focusing more on Training and Motivation. This deep involvement also demands another time-scale. And given that 20% of India’s population are ‘in school’, this calls for a massive outreach, one that involves a plurality of partners, and that necessarily includes the State.

What does this mean for small Foundations like Dalyan? The first challenge is to reduce the reliance on one-to-one partnerships between Donor and Implementing Agency. As mentioned above, collaboration with multiple Donors and NGO partners could, over time, take centre-stage.

This does not mean that collaborations should replace one-to-one partnerships. Before NGOs can enter into collaborations with multiple Donors, they need to build capacity, in terms of outreach, organisational skills and strategic outlook. Hand-holding remains essential, and small foundations often have the necessary flexibility to be sensitive to the particular context and needs of their partner.

Moreover, while collaborations aim at large-scale systemic change, many Civil Society actors address issues which may be localised and domain-specific, but are none the less crucial and burning. It is necessary to professionalise philanthropic Giving, but it is also true that the fight against poverty must

nurture the countless small efforts from Civil Society actors. In terms of budgets, the year-to-year financial commitments may remain roughly the same. But Programmes focussed on impact-based implementation will have longer timelines. This and the scaling targets will therefore generate higher overall costs.

## Ownership instead of dependency

This will inevitably challenge the philosophy of many charitable organisations (‘We don’t want to create financial dependence, hence support will have a limited timeline’). However, in a collaborative framework a Donor could retain its limited engagement period by inserting a ‘time-out’, during which another partner takes up the financial commitments.

Impact measurement, too, will have to change some of its parameters. For one, the impact of a Programme will take longer to come to fruition, and it will be more complex to measure. Outcomes ‘at scale’ will not be taken at face value, but will be weighted against the degree of ‘ownership’ by the stakeholders. Ultimately, the success of a programme will only be ensured if it becomes ‘self-generating’ within the beneficiary groups.



## Sustainable Scaling: difficult, yet important!

Admittedly, the promise of scale and depth is, for the moment, just this: a promise. It is too early to predict its outcome. There is a necessary time-lag between rapid scaling and long-term impact. One needs scale for outreach, but one also needs time to make scale sustainable.

Ultimately, we do not have a choice but to bite the bullet. This is especially so when engaging with a country the size and ‘scale’ of India, and given the burden of un-kept promises over so many years.



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