

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION^{Review}

Sponsored Supplement
Scaling Up Social Innovation
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SCALING UP SOCIAL INNOVATION

Innovation is more than a good idea—it's a patient process of iteration, learning, evaluation, implementation, and, importantly, scaling up what works.

BY DR. MUHAMMAD MUSA & JUDITH RODIN

The past few decades have witnessed dramatic gains in attention to global development and investments in finding strategies that can be shown to work. Many of the most creative advancements have come from frugal innovations that grew out of resource-limited settings; necessity motivating creativity in the face of extreme constraints to life, livelihood, and survival.

Now, with a new generation of increasing, complex, and intertwined challenges, ranging from climate change to urbanization, innovation will be crucial for finding solutions that can solve for multiple problems at one time and reach millions, if not billions, of people.

We at The Rockefeller Foundation and BRAC consider innovation part of our DNA. From more than a century of combined experience, we know that innovation done right is more than a good idea or a “eureka!” moment—it's a patient process of iteration, learning, evaluation, implementation, and, importantly, scaling up what works. Organizations like BRAC have shown that it is possible to reach literally millions of people with innovative solutions that save lives and promote social development. The Rockefeller Foundation has been a backer of brains that have led to innovations in new fields, most recently with impact investing and resilience.

We are certainly not alone in this pursuit of innovation. The social impact sector has grown more

sophisticated in building the capacities and culture for innovation, and, as a result, holds great promise for transformative breakthroughs. But for a variety of financial, political, and organizational reasons, many effective approaches operate only at a small scale. And too many social sector innovators would love to scale their work but are intimidated by the idea of doing so. Given the pressing nature of our challenges, we believe that now is the time to demystify scale once and for all, and ensure that we put emerging, proven innovations to full use globally, as fast as possible.

To do this, we need to know more about what successful scale looks like across direct service delivery (especially for those who are excluded or marginalized), partnership models, advocacy, and beyond. Four years ago, The Rockefeller Foundation and BRAC undertook a joint exploration of the experiences of South Asian organizations that had successfully taken innovative initiatives to scale. The programs and the pathways were diverse—from networks to public sector service delivery to community organization. Those lessons were the inspiration for this special series of articles. Insightful conversations about the project's findings in Bellagio, Italy, New York City, London, Cambridge, England, and Dhaka, Bangladesh, generated additional learnings that are presented in this publication.

To be sure, South Asia has distinct challenges and opportunities, but we believe that many of the insights presented here are universally applicable. We hope that readers will find these perspectives illuminating, and join us in making the scaling up of innovations a top priority, because doing so is vital to achieve the impact the world needs. ✖

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