
GOING TO SCALE: Expansion vs. Association

Going to scale means to increase the coverage of a program, or to address the needs of a population on a larger scale.

SCALE BY EXPANSION The most typical way to conceive of scale in the planning process is to think in terms of expanding one program model to cover all the children in a target population. The target population is taken as all children of a certain age (or all caregivers of these children). Focusing on a single model makes administration easier in a centralized system and facilitates the calculation of coverage, but such a focus does not make it easy to respond to the exigencies of variations in cultural, economic, and geographic contexts. Adjustment and local participation cannot be attained easily if one model is imposed as the sole model and if the vision of scale is the expansion of only one model. Variants are needed. Moreover, trying to provide care to all children may indicate an idealistic or politically useful hope, but the fact is that not all children need the support of official programs, and some children need that support much more than others.

Seeking scale by expanding one approach or model or treatment may serve well when the object is to immunize children. However, ECCD does not lend itself so easily to an immunization approach. If the view of scale for ECCD projects and programs is that of expanding one particular model, experience suggests that:

- A gradual extension is better than an instantaneous one.
- It helps to establish a core of trained people who experience working in the pilot or demonstration project in order to ground knowledge firmly as expansion proceeds. In addition, projects that have worked well in particular areas may become training grounds for new people.
- There is an important need to adjust as the program expands, learning from mistakes. A large scale version of a program will usually not work in the same way as a smaller pilot or demonstration project using the same model. Adjustments must be made. This is made more difficult by placing rigid requirements on the process.

There is a tendency to try to mount large scale programs using one particular model in a very short period of time, in all parts of a country, and with little attention to the need for adjustments. This tendency toward scale by “explosion” is sometimes linked to the pressure imposed by political cycles and desires and sometimes to a desire to move money made available through budget allocations or loan agreements. The tendency toward “bigger and faster is better” can be very positive in the sense of giving ECCD wide exposure and of getting activities underway in many places. One wants to take advantage of political will and/or associated budgets when they

appear. On the other hand, such a strategy is likely to produce programs of low quality, unadjusted to local conditions, and without much local participation. In short, there are important trade-offs that must be taken into account when seeking scale with one model. A program designer and manager must, therefore, seek ways of trying to moderate the possible negative effects of the pressures to go to scale in a hurry.

SCALE BY ASSOCIATION What alternative is there to the expansion view of scale? Another vision of scale exists that may be called scale through “association,” i.e., scale achieved by piecing together results of extending several models, each of which may be relatively small (or medium-sized), each initiated and/or carried out with relative independence, and each approaching the problem in its own way, *but with a common goal or framework*. Scale by association can be visualized as the process of putting together a puzzle. The puzzle has a framework. Each piece of the puzzle may be a different shape and the colors will differ as well, depending on the particular place the piece occupies within the larger puzzle. When all the pieces are in place, a complete and integral picture will appear, and scale will have been achieved. The more pieces that are in place at any one time, the greater the degree of scale.

The process of putting the pieces together must be a collaborative one with some general rules to guide the process and with some incentives along the way to help the picture emerge more rapidly. If a clear framework—an ECCD strategy—does not provide general guidelines and delimitations, it is possible for there to be overlapping efforts at the same time that some groups are being left aside. If, however, such a strategy is present, the vision of scale by association allows room for real local participation in the choice and operation of ECCD models appropriate to their context, something that is much harder to achieve through the extension of one pre-determined model.

Experience suggests that this multi-model approach to scaling up can be a successful approach. As an example, in contemporary Chile, at least three major and a variety of minor center-based program models are being implemented for different populations and in different parts of the country. In addition, at least two significant programs of parental education are operating in parallel. Moreover, programming is being decentralized to the municipal level, allowing the municipal units to bring together childcare and education and health programs in a coordinated way. If any one of the Chilean programs were to be taken alone, it would not cover a large part of the children or families in the country. However, taken together the programs add up to significant and relative large scale coverage. Coordination among these various programs is not forced, but each one deals with a relatively well defined population group and with varying needs for care and education among those groups. Policy guidance and monitoring at a general level is provided by the government’s planning office.

The institutional features of different services or their programs are important as the process moves from defining a goal and purposes to making decisions about specific objectives and activities and about alternative models or modes of delivery. Meanwhile, the initial consultation with stakeholders should produce basic information about existing programs and projects.

For a more complete discussion of this topic see: Robert G. Myers, *Going To Scale*. file name: ac1gsxxi.pdf in the CD-rom Library.

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Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development. CD-ROM. The Consultative Group on ECCD. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1999.