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# Scaling-up Community Efforts to Reach the MDGs – An Assessment of Experience from the Equator Prize

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**The MDGs will only be achieved community by community, family by family, and individual by individual.[1]**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a guiding framework for development assistance, considerations of the role to be played by communities have increasingly focused on scaling-up. At the environment/poverty interface, a growing emphasis on communities as drivers of sustainable development has been accompanied by extensive discussion of how local capacities might be built and community best practices scaled-up. The reality is, however, that these discussions have not led to an improved understanding of what it means to 'scale-up', and the

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1. Mark Malloch Brown, UNDP Administrator

relationship between capacity development, scaling-up, and MDG achievement remains murky and largely uninvestigated.

At least some of the lack of clarity surrounding the issue of scaling-up comes from the fact that the role of communities in both conservation and development has undergone rapid change over a short period of time. Until recently, conservation and development were frequently thought to be incompatible or, at least, antagonistic activities. It was thought that economic growth inevitably led to environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity while conservation impeded development and limited opportunities for local employment and economic growth.[2] Since the 1980s, however, this viewpoint has softened and conservation and poverty reduction have increasingly been seen as complementary activities.[3]

A major reason for this reassessment of the relationship between conservation and development is an improved understanding of the importance of communities, local participation, and community-led development.[4] It is now increasingly recognised that communities are eager to balance poverty reduction with conservation and are often able to use conservation itself as a means to promote development and income generation. Ecotourism, the sale of environmentally friendly products, and the sustainable harvesting and marketing of natural goods are only a few of the ways in which communities are rewriting the historic conflict between conservation and development. At the same time, however, this relatively newfound appreciation for communities means that some of the most central principles of the community-led development and conservation paradigms – such as the topic of scaling-up – are poorly understood in both theory and practice.

This chapter draws on the experience of 25 finalists for the

**It is now increasingly recognised that communities are eager to balance poverty reduction with conservation and are often able to use conservation itself as a means to promote development and income generation**

2. Brown, K. (2002). 'Innovations for conservation and development'. *The Geographical Journal*, **168**(1), 6-17.
3. Blaikie, P. and Jeanrenaud S. (1997). 'Biodiversity and Human Welfare'. In Ghimire, K. and M. P. Pimbert, (Eds., pp.46-70), *Social Change and Conservation*. London: Earthscan.
4. Hulme, D. and Murphree M. (1999). 'Communities, wildlife, and the new conservation in Africa'. *Journal of International Development*, **11**, 277-285.
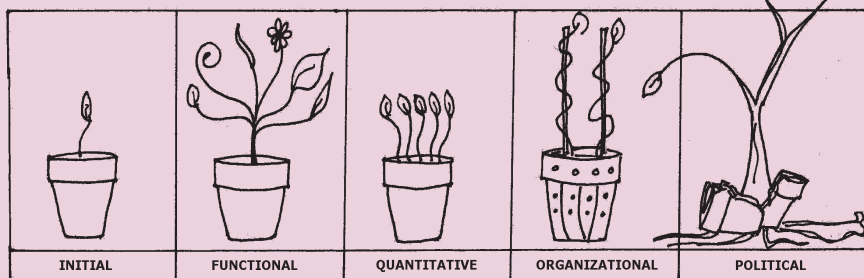
Equator Prize 2002[5] to investigate further the concept of 'scaling-up'and to explore its implications for achieving the MDGs.

## 2. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SCALING-UP?

Limited research has been conducted into the nature of scaling-up efforts undertaken by community groups and initiatives and there is no single definition that clarifies what scaling-up means to, or for, communities. Indeed, scaling-up is typically presented as a single nebulous blanket term covering all forms of expansion, growth and replication. At a broad level, scaling-up refers to efforts 'to bring more quality benefits to more people over a wider geographical area more quickly, more equitably, and more lastingly'.[6] At a finer level of resolution, however, four distinct types of scaling-up have been identified – quantitative, functional, organisational, and political (Figure 8.1).[7] [8]

**Figure 8.1. Graphical representation of scaling-up types[9]**



| INITIAL | FUNCTIONAL | QUANTITATIVE | ORGANIZATIONAL | POLITICAL |

**Functional scaling-up** refers to organisations increasing their scope of activity. Through diversification, functional scaling-up allows grassroots and participatory programmes to add complementary activities to their operational range.

5. The Equator Prize is an international award that recognises local efforts to reduce poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The biennial prize is awarded by UNDP's Equator Initiative. Further information on the work of the Equator Initiative and the prize may be found at http://www.equatorinitiative.org.
6. International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (2000). *Going to scale: Can we bring more benefits to more people more quickly?* Cavite, Philippines: IIRR.
7. Uvin, P. and Miller D. (1996). 'Paths to scaling up: Alternative strategies for local non-governmental organizations'. *Human Organization*, 55, 344-353.
8. The four-part characterisation of scaling-up presented in this chapter draws broadly on the work of Peter Uvin and co-authors, and interested readers are directed to their body of work for further investigation of the topic.
9. Drawing by the authors based on the textual typology of Uvin and Miller, (1996). *op.cit.*

For instance, an initiative specialising in agricultural development may evolve beyond this initial activity and create nutrition, health, or even literacy programmes to better to serve the need of its community.

**Quantitative scaling-up** occurs when a programme or organisation expands its size by replicating itself or increasing its membership base, its constituency, or its geographic influence. As a structural expansion, quantitative scaling-up can take five different forms: spreading, replication, nurturing, horizontal aggregation, and integration.

**Organisational scaling-up** takes place when an initiative is strengthened to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its activities. Communities can achieve this objective financially through new sources of support, through promotion of economic independence (by, for example, creating activities that generate more income), or through reliance on public funds. Institutionally, initiatives can also work to establish external links with public and private agencies to improve management capacity, staff training, and personnel development in ways that will improve long-term effectiveness and sustainability.

**Through political scaling-up, community-based organisations can work towards greater empowerment and attempt to change the fundamental roots of underdevelopment**

**Political scaling-up** refers to efforts to engage in the political process and forge relations with the state. Through political scaling-up, community-based organisations can work towards greater empowerment and attempt to change the fundamental roots of underdevelopment. By operating in the political, contextual and wider socio-economic realms, initiatives can effect real political and institutional change that brings significant benefits for community actors in general.

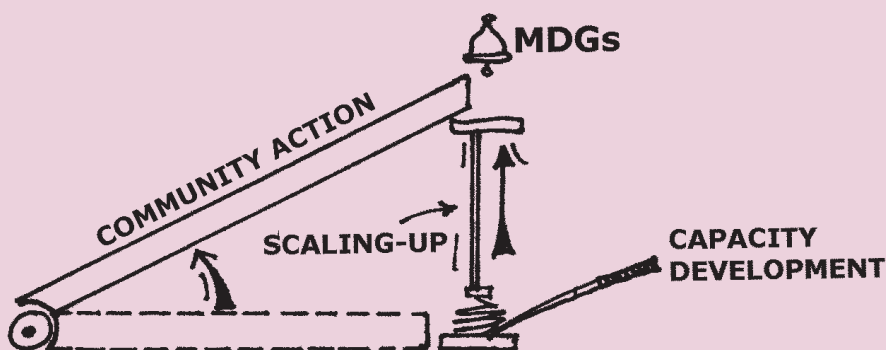### 3. SCALING-UP AND THE POLICY LANDSCAPE: TAKING A LOCAL APPROACH TO THE MDGS

To understand better the variety, nature and extent of community scaling-up efforts, we must first answer several important questions regarding the role scaling-up is expected to play in the development and conservation

agendas. The first question asks why the issue of scaling-up has taken on so much importance at the present time. The second question develops this avenue of enquiry further to ask how scaling-up fits into the policy landscape and questions whether some forms of scaling-up are likely to be more important to the MDG effort than others.

It is useful to note that communities are seen as increasingly important to international policy-makers, in part, because their development and conservation activities are expected to contribute to achievement of the MDGs, among other global targets. Indeed, the rising focus of development and conservation agencies on both capacity development and community scaling-up is, to some extent, intended to ensure that the MDGs are achieved (Figure 8.2). This raises important questions about the extent to which communities themselves have similar interests and whether they are able, or willing, to scale-up their activities in ways that would facilitate achievement of the MDGs and other higher-level sustainable development targets.

**Figure 8.2. The relationship between capacity building, scaling-up, and community action – defining the policy landscape for communities.**



It is perhaps not surprising that the issue of scaling-up has risen to prominence in conjunction with the ascendancy of the MDGs. There is, after all, now a growing sense that the MDGs will only be achieved with the full participation of

One of the most important lessons of the last several decades of development assistance is that progress is much more readily achievable when the needs and interests of beneficiaries guide aid delivery and when communities are active participants in conservation and development

local people.[10] There is also a sense that – as the target date for the MDGs draws closer – there is a need to find areas for progress that could be considered 'low hanging fruit'. The scaling-up of community successes is one area where it is hoped that progress towards the MDGs might make great headway. This is because community engagement and participation are not only important at the local level, but are also vital to successful regional and national progress towards the MDGs as well. Indeed, one of the most important lessons of the last several decades of development assistance is that progress is much more readily achievable when the needs and interests of beneficiaries guide aid delivery and when communities are active participants in conservation and development.[11] The result has been increasing calls by policy-makers at the international level for widespread community capacity development, an increased focus on community action, and the scaling-up of successful community practices.

Despite a growing consensus that scaling-up is desirable, little discussion has occurred around what types of scaling-up might be best suited to advance the MDG agenda or how desired levels of scaling-up might be achieved. Considering the urgency of the MDGs, it is reasonable to assume that the most important forms of scaling-up will be those that yield the greatest gains – according to the terms by which the goals are measured. Any effort to scale-up successful community initiatives is likely to produce *some* positive movement towards the MDGs. However, since the MDGs are measured broadly – at the national level and according to relatively coarse measures – some types of scaling-up are likely to contribute more to the MDG effort than others.

The most intuitive and commonly held understanding of the term scaling-up relates to the simple replication of projects and activities – this is quantitative scaling-up. In terms of achieving the MDGs, this conception of scaling-up will clearly be among the most important of the four types.

10. Sachs, J. (2003). 'An Interview with Jeffrey Sachs'. *Between the Lines, Issue 3*, 3.
11. Malik, K. (2002). 'Capacity and Development'. In Fukada-Parr, S. et. al. (Eds., pp.24-42), *Capacity for Development, 8 New Solutions to Old Problems*. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd.

The multiplication of successful community initiatives will be a necessary component of any push to reach the poverty reduction and sustainability targets of the MDGs, since progress will only be achieved if more successful initiatives are added to existing efforts.

However, the simple replication of community initiatives alone will be insufficient to achieve the MDGs since, to have maximum impact, this replicative process cannot be undertaken in a vacuum. For this reason, the most important form of scaling-up is likely to be political scaling-up. By striving to reduce and eliminate the vacuum in which community initiatives operate and by working to create fertile ground for new endeavours, political scaling-up will be vital to the success of the MDG agenda and a necessary precursor to significant gains achieved through other forms of scaling-up.

Political scaling-up is especially important to the MDG effort since it allows for a unique form of expansion. It facilitates the growth of community initiatives by building a power base for addressing the underlying causes of underdevelopment. Instead of simply providing and replicating services, political scaling-up allows communities to engage in political and social efforts to combat sources of poverty and environmental degradation at the most

**Box 8.1: Political Scaling-up in Cameroon**

The Waza Logone region of Cameroon is home to a 170,000 hectare national park and extensive floodplain biodiversity. It is also a zone of intense fishing and agricultural activities, livestock production, and - increasingly - tourism. The region was disrupted ecologically, socio-economically, and hydrologically in 1979  by the installation of a hydro-agricultural dam that damaged productive systems and natural habitat in Waza National Park. Through a participatory partnership, the Cellule d'Appui à la Conservation et aux Initiatives de Développement Durable (CACID) brought together government organisations, traditional and administrative authorities, and the private sector to restore, conserve, and manage the Waza Logone floodplain in a sustainable manner.

CACID used their Equator Prize 2002 award money to undertake a comprehensive and strategic management planning process.  The strategic planning process focused on information and awareness-raising for local elected representatives and local and provincial administrative authorities.  It also incorporated an evaluation of current community initiatives and identified pilot communities for future work and assistance.  The process involved workshops at the community level and the monitoring and evaluation of the status of planning and awareness among local and regional communities and policy-makers.

Political scaling-up activities on the part of communities will be an important component of any effort to create a supportive policy environment for the growth and replication of successful local initiatives

comprehensive level. This not only furthers immediate goals, but also helps achieve wider results by gaining support for local action from political actors and policy-makers (Box 8.1). Political scaling-up is also extremely important because there is an important connection between local scaling-up and national political action, and both are required to create an enabling environment for achievement of the MDGs. For example, in a study of scaling-up in agroforestry, it was found that 'local policy makers [are] at least as important for promoting scaling-up…as national policy makers based in the capital city'.[12] Political scaling-up activities on the part of communities will be an important component of any effort to create a supportive policy environment for the growth and replication of successful local initiatives.

## 4. AN ANALYSIS OF SCALING-UP EXPERIENCES FROM THE EQUATOR PRIZE 2002

A study of community initiatives actively working to reduce poverty and conserve biodiversity at the local level conducted by the Equator Initiative, found that the majority of community initiatives in the study were interested in scaling-up. Of 25 communities surveyed (Table 8.1), 19 were actively engaged in some form of scaling-up – meaning that they spent all or most of their Equator Prize capacity development funds (valued at US$ 30,000) on scaling-up activities. Most initiatives focused on organisational and quantitative scaling-up (Box 8.2), with only two initiatives pursuing political scaling-up and only one pursuing functional scaling-up. Underlying differences in the nature of the community initiatives may partially explain these differences in scaling-up behaviour and suggest possible improvements – particularly important in the push to achieve the MDGs – in the way that funds and resources are directed toward community initiatives.

Several possible explanations exist for the differences in community approaches to scaling-up observed in this study

12. Franzel, S., Cooper P., and Denning G. L. (2002). *Development and agroforestry*. Oxford: Oxfam Press.

| Table 8.1: Community Initiatives involved in the Equator Initiative Study | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Name of the Initiative** | **Country** | **Type of scaling-up employed** | **Direct/ Indirect** | **Leader-ship** |
| Association of Manambolo Natives (Fitema) | Madagascar | F | D | C |
| Cananeia Oyster Producers Cooperative | Brazil | N/S | D | C |
| Empresa Forestal Integral de Bayamo | Cuba | N/S | D | G |
| Hashi Soil Conservation Project | Tanzania | N/S | D | G |
| Suledo Forest Community | Tanzania | N/S | D | N |
| Toledo Institute for Development and Environment | Belize | O | D | N |
| Fiji Locally-Managed Marine Area Network | Fiji | O | D | N |
| Couro Vegetal da Amazônia Project | Brazil | O | D | Pv |
| Honey Care Africa | Kenya | O | D | Pv |
| CBIRD Centre, Sub Tai | Thailand | Q | D | C |
| Moheli Marine Park | Comores | Q | D | C |
| II Ngwesi Group Ranch | Kenya | O | D | C |
| Associação Vida Verde da Amazônia | Brazil | O | D | C |
| Tribal Communities of the Jeypore Tract of Orissa | India | O | D | C |
| Ese'eja Native Community of Infierno | Peru | O | D | C |
| Kerala Kani Samudaya Kshema Trust | India | O | D | C |
| Uma Bawang Resident's Association | Malaysia | Q | D | C |
| Medicinal Plants Conservation Centre | India | N/S | I | N |
| Iniciativa Talamanca | Costa Rica | N/S | I | N |
| Bolsa Amazonia | Brazil | O | I | Pv |
| Cellule d'Appui à la Conservation et aux Initiatives de Développement Durable (CACID) | Cameroon | P | I | N |
| Inter-Institutional Consortium for Sustainable Agriculture on Hillsides/River Cabuyal Watershed Users Association | Colombia | Q | I | C |
| Asociacion de Comunidades Forestales de Peten | Guatemala | Q | I | N |
| Café de la Selva | Mexico | Q | I | Pv |
| Mosquitia Pawisa Agency for the Development of the Honduran Mosquitia | Honduras | Q/P | I | N |

Key: [ Pv = Private Sector-Led / C = Community-Led / G = Government-Led / N = NGO-led]
[Q = Quantitative Scaling-Up / N/S = No Scaling-Up / O = Organisational Scaling-Up /
F = Functional Scaling-Up / P = Political Scaling-Up]

**Box 8.2: Quantitative scaling-up of organic coffee production in Mexico**

La Selva Café is a chain of cafés that sells organically-grown coffee at locations in Mexico City and in the United States and Europe. La Selva Café supports, and works with, indigenous communities in the state of Chiapas and, together with Union de Ejidos de la Selva, has developed an effective strategy for improving the natural environment of Chiapas while increasing incomes and living standards for coffee workers. The sale of coffee through shops – made possible through a partnership between peasant organisations and private sector entrepreneurs – has brought increased income to members of the Union de Ejidos.

La Selva Café used their Equator Prize 2002 award money to form – together with their local partners – a new corporate entity, La Selva International S.C. This organisation was created to promote the commercial expansion of La Selva Café nationally and internationally and to develop new operations, outlets and café locations.

– and notably for the preference for quantitative and organisational scaling-up. The first possible explanation is that quantitative and organisational scaling-up can, from a community perspective, be **undertaken more immediately and bring more immediate results** than can either political and functional scaling-up. One reason for the relative 'immediacy' of quantitative and organisational scaling-up is that they require fewer new resources and skills on the part of communities. As a consequence, they are likely to have the most direct and visible impact on the day-to-day operations of local initiatives and yield the greatest short-term rewards for community members. For example, when a community with limited resources is assessing needs, the impacts of expanding and replicating existing activities (quantitative), or building and strengthening institutional skills and resources (organisational) are likely to be more immediate than launching a programme in a new field (functional) or effecting policy change (political). Resource constraints – both financial and human – faced by community initiatives and a need for immediate results may, therefore, help to explain why organisational and quantitative scaling-up are most likely to be undertaken by the emergent initiatives in this study.

Across all of the community initiatives, immediate needs appear to take precedence over longer-term needs. The general reluctance of the study initiatives to engage in functional scaling-up indicates that few are at a stage of development where formulation of new programmes can

take priority over maintaining existing activities and trying to enhance core impact. The reluctance to engage in political scaling-up may, in a similar fashion, indicate that few of the study initiatives are ready to begin focusing attention on the quality of the enabling environment for local action, no matter how helpful this might be in the long run. When existing needs are great, it will be difficult to justify engaging in forms of scaling-up that divert attention – at least in the short term – from the most immediate issues facing the community. Thus, it appears that capacity development funds were dedicated by initiatives to those forms of scaling-up that can meet the needs of community members without compromising existing activities or diverting resources from core activities.

A related explanation for differences in scaling-up across the study initiatives may be connected to the relative **risks** associated with the different forms of scaling-up. For instance, it is likely that both organisational and quantitative scaling-up are less risky to emergent community initiatives, given that they focus on existing activities, and that communities are, therefore, more likely to devote scarce capacity development funds to these forms of scaling-up. Political and functional scaling-up, by contrast, involve the development of new activities and thus present considerably more risk.[13]

The tendency toward risk aversion is not surprising. Certainly with regard to political scaling-up, the climate in many developing nations means that actively engaging in political manoeuvring could bring considerable financial, personal, and livelihood risks. Efforts to promote an enabling environment, by engaging with political functionaries and by becoming involved in politics and policy formulation, have the potential to undermine and jeopardise the hard-fought gains that initiatives have made at more basic levels. The risks associated with functional scaling-up are more basic – simply, that directing energies

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13. Uvin, P. (1995). 'Fighting hunger at the grassroots: Paths to scaling up'. *World Development* 23(6):927-939.

**The willingness of community initiatives to scale-up, and the form of scaling-up pursued, may also reflect to a large degree the priorities of the community initiatives' core constituencies**

to new areas may compromise existing operations. While the potential gains from both of these types of scaling-up activities may be great, their lack of frequency may indicate that the risks associated with each are simply higher than can be accepted.

The willingness of community initiatives to scale-up, and the form of scaling-up pursued, may also reflect to a large degree the priorities of the community initiatives' core constituencies. The Equator Initiative study found, for example, that only those initiatives that work indirectly with community members appear to engage in political scaling-up. These initiatives also demonstrate a greater preference for quantitative scaling-up. This is an interesting observation since those community initiatives that happen to work indirectly with communities also nearly always work with multiple communities. They are also almost always directed or led, in part, by government, NGOs, or the private sector. It appears that something about this group sets it apart from those initiatives that work directly with community members. It is posited here that this difference lies in the constituency of these community initiatives. Indirect initiatives have less direct responsibility to community members and tend to serve as networking agencies, bringing together entire communities as their units of interest. As a consequence, both political scaling-up and quantitative scaling-up are less of a challenge for this group. It is not a great extension from their current programme of work to engage in the political or policy-making processes or to try to expand and replicate their efforts. Since communities as a whole are frequently their unit of interest, rather than individual community members, these initiatives are less geographically constrained and therefore face fewer barriers to political and quantitative scaling-up.

Those initiatives that work directly with community members primarily engage in organisational and quantitative scaling-up, with a particular preference for the organisational variant. While these initiatives work across both single and multiple communities, they are mainly led

and initiated by communities themselves. Consequently, the way in which these initiatives choose to scale-up reflects a heightened responsiveness to community needs and a focus on satisfying the core goals of community members. The closer the individual needs and personal concerns of community members are to the leadership of the initiative, the less likely the initiative is to engage in riskier, longer-term forms of scaling-up, namely political or functional.

It is interesting to observe that only two cases in this study were found to engage in political scaling-up and that both are found in the category of indirect initiatives. This finding is similar to wider research on the nature of NGOs and community organisations, which has found that 'higher generation' organisations are more likely to 'look beyond the individual community and seek changes in specific policies and institutions on local, national, and global levels'.[14] The direct initiatives in this study can be considered similar to what Korten[15] describes as 'lower generation' organisations, which often provide direct relief or support to community members and may be restricted in scope. Conversely, the characteristics of the indirect initiatives in this study – working across multiple communities and being led, at least in part, by NGOs, government, or the private sector – parallel traits others have associated with a tendency towards political scaling-up.

## 5. THE WAY FORWARD

There are clearly considerably different abilities and interests in scaling-up among different types of community initiatives. The Equator Initiative study indicates that community initiatives that work indirectly with community members may be the best situated to engage in political and quantitative scaling-up. Given that we have identified political and quantitative scaling-up as critically important to achievement of the MDGs, these findings could have important policy ramifications. This study suggests that

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14. Korten, D. (1990). *Getting to the 21st Century, voluntary action, and the global agenda.* West Hartford: Kummarian Press.
15. *Ibid.*

**An important role for conservation and development agencies will be to assist community initiatives in overcoming the challenges associated with political scaling-up, forging links to policy-makers and the political process in ways that minimise risk and interference with the delivery of essential short-term deliverables**

achievement of the MDGs may be advanced if initiatives with certain traits – working indirectly with community members, working with multiple communities, and having leadership elements drawn from the private sector, government, or NGOs – are targeted with appropriate resources and funding. While these findings may not be statistically conclusive, they support the outcomes of previous research into community scaling-up, and suggest a possible course of action to better ensure achievement of the MDGs.

To maximise progress towards achievement of the MDGs, special efforts should be taken to encourage political scaling-up amongst community initiatives, particularly those with traits lending themselves to this behaviour. An important role, then, for conservation and development agencies will be to assist community initiatives in overcoming the challenges associated with this form of scaling-up, forging links to policy-makers and the political process in ways that minimise risk and interference with the delivery of essential short-term deliverables. Experience from the Equator Initiative suggests that one way to do this effectively is by linking local community leaders, serving as ambassadors and advocates, with policy- and decision-makers in facilitated situations that put community, national, regional and global leaders all on an equal footing. In numerous and diverse instances this approach has proved to be highly effective at speeding the rate of political scaling-up and is something which, itself, warrants greater replication and expansion.