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**ENABLING
ENVIRONMENT**

Introduction

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When it comes to scaling, resources matter. Evidence matters. But scaling does not occur in a vacuum. The environment in which a program or policy operates can be just as important in contributing to or impeding the process of going to scale. Political, institutional, economic, cultural, and other factors play a critical role in “success” or “failures” in going to scale.

Ultimately, quality learning is the product of a complex, adaptive system, not a single program or policy. As the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s CEO, Patrick McCarthy, notes, “A bad system will trump a good program every time.”¹⁶⁹ Successful scaling efforts are more often

about creating an enabling environment for innovation to flourish than specific action required for an individual program to grow. We focus below on the role of policy, while acknowledging that the enabling environment includes human capital, culture, and other critical aspects that affect scaling prospects.

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13. Supportive policy environment:

Government policy must safeguard every child’s right to a quality education while remaining open to a diversity of ideas and actors to contribute to this common aim.

Evidence from cases and literature shows that government policy space that was open to innovation was key for a number of good ideas to flourish and scale. In many of the more successful case studies reviewed, the government provided a platform for a multiplicity of actors to be involved in the provision or financing of quality learning opportunities, or both. In the cases

reviewed, it was not that the government stepped aside to allow a free-for-all, but that it continued to play a prominent role, particularly in regulating and monitoring any new initiatives. Driven by a commitment to ensure that all children receive a quality education, these governments reached out to a range of partners and considered new ways of improving learning.



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Defending the mission of quality education, not a model or institution

As economist Lant Pritchett writes in *The Rebirth of Education*, “the price of better education is allowing freedom, giving choices and hence ceding power.”¹⁷⁰ Governments that provided space for

innovation to take root and spread did not adhere rigidly to a single educational model but were open to a diversity of possibilities. As educator and author Frederick Hess describes, these are

governments that defend the mission of quality education, as opposed to the institution.¹⁷¹ There are examples of this from all around the world.

Amazonas State Government's Media Center is an example of a program that benefited from a supportive policy environment, where the national government set clear, quality targets, while leaving states and schools free to choose how best to achieve them. As discussed above, SEDUC seized this opportunity and creatively designed a distance-learning model based on the realities of the region. With the space to experiment and iterate, along with clear national standards and regulations, Amazonas was able to ensure that hundreds of thousands of teenagers

had a chance to complete a quality high school education—something that was unthinkable only a few years prior.

Governments that provide a supportive policy environment for scaling quality learning know that they do not have to assume all roles of education delivery and financing. In the case of SAT in Honduras, the government recognized that it needed to expand the provision of secondary school to the rural population while faced with limited resources and capacity. Therefore, as described above, it made the bold decision to allow a local NGO, Asociación Bayán, to recruit, train, and manage a cadre of teachers (or “tutors,” as they are referred to in the program), while the government paid for their salaries as contract teachers.

Regulating education quality and standards with a multiplicity of actors

As governments move to recognize multiple education models, regulating education quality and standards becomes more complex. Schools may vary significantly in terms of student demographics, teaching techniques, use of technology, and other important factors. While the diversity may lead to more rapid innovation and discovery of improved methods, policymakers may struggle to ensure that their regulatory tools—such as standardized tests or curriculums—evolve as rapidly as the sector. This gap has impeded progress in a number of sectors worldwide.¹⁷²

This tension for governments between providing space for innovation while maintaining quality control played out in many of the cases reviewed. In Peru, the

government initially did not allow fellows with Enseña Perú (EP), Teach For All's partner in the country, to be employed as full-time public school teachers on the Ministry of Education payroll, which significantly limited EP's ability to place fellows in the highest-needs schools and communities. This started to change two years ago with the arrival of a new minister of education, who prioritized leveraging human capital in the education sector. In addition, EP's alumni working across regions in the public sector built the right national, regional, and local relationships and helped construct a more complete understanding of the needs and opportunities within the education community. Furthermore, a teacher deficit resulting from the increase of teaching hours in the public school day led to a policy



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adjustment that allowed for non-education professionals to fast-track into open positions. These deficits were prevalent in the highest-need, most remote areas of the country—precisely the communities EP sought to serve. These changes have allowed EP to work with the public school system to scale and serve disadvantaged children in Peru.¹⁷³

Bridge International Academies is an example where the low-cost private school chain was able to initially grow rapidly in Kenya—opening a new school every 2.5 days—in the midst of new regulations being drafted for non-state schools. This process of drafting regulations took place over seven years, creating significant ambiguity over government intent for the sector. In the lead-up to new regulations for the “alternative” or “complementary” education sector being released, the ministry issued new guidelines revoking such schools' registration as testing centers, in a move to ensure that only ministry-registered schools could enroll children to sit for the mandatory national primary exit examinations. In 2015, the Ministry of Education also asked that

nonformal schools, of which Bridge is one, to freeze expansion until new regulations were released.¹⁷⁴

While the ministry was working to create a legal environment that would incentivize registration under the soon-to-be-released regulations and ensure that schools would be measured by examination performance, families were concerned that if their children were enrolled in alternative or complementary schools they would not be able to sit for national exams and transition to secondary school. The Ministry of Education worked closely with Bridge and other alternative schools to find a positive solution. The Cabinet secretary demonstrated his leadership and commitment to the needs of children by ensuring that while waiting for the new regulations to come out, children who had been attending these schools could sit for the exam at public schools, if necessary. As result of the government's leadership, Bridge's first class of 2,900 graduates was able to sit for the national exams. The government released the new regulations in January 2016, allowing Bridge to begin the process of registering its 405 schools in Kenya as “alternative” schools.

Role of civil society in monitoring educational developments

However, monitoring quality and standards is hardly the responsibility of policymakers alone. In many countries, civil society watchdogs, social intermediaries, and

advocacy groups play a pivotal role in validating the quality of education, identifying promising practices, and influencing policy reforms. Their participation can lead to a

richer public dialogue on education and accelerate improvements.

One such example is the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) survey conducted in India each year by the ASER Centre, an autonomous unit of the Pratham Network, which is now replicated in Pakistan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Mali, Senegal, and Mexico.¹⁷⁵ ASER conducts an annual, nationwide household survey of children's ability to read simple text and do basic arithmetic by deploying about 30,000 volunteer data collectors from partner organizations, including colleges, universities, NGOs, and youth groups.¹⁷⁶ The release of the results is timed with discussions about the national budget and shared through various media outlets with simple, easy-to-understand charts and comparisons.¹⁷⁷

A multi-country study by Results for Development in 2015 found that citizen-led surveys, such as ASER, have been extremely effective in making the low quality of education much more visible at the global and national level.¹⁷⁸ They also have successfully generated much more dialogue among key stakeholders about the state of education and, in some cases, have influenced policy or budget allocations. ASER has had an impact on policy in some Indian states and, in general, the surveys have greatly empowered local civil society organizations to target and strengthen their advocacy efforts.

Rather than criticizing or ignoring the findings, government engagement has been particularly important in contributing to the effectiveness of citizen-led monitoring efforts. The Results for Development evaluation found that including key government actors at the national level

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as advisors in assessment activities, such as in the survey design process, helps to increase institutional buy-in.¹⁷⁹ Results from Uwezo, which has administered large-scale, citizen-led household-based assessments in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, have been cited in some government reports as contributing to government's renewed focus on learning outcomes.¹⁸⁰ According to an official with the Kenya Ministry of Education, developing a strong partnership between the agency and other civil society actors such as Uwezo and the Kenyan Head Teachers Association, among others, has been particularly important in addressing learning challenges in the country. The rich information on learning provided by Uwezo has been especially useful in helping the Kenyan government understand the scope and scale of the problem.¹⁸¹

Drawing from cases reviewed, it appears that innovations have the greatest likelihood of successful scaling where policymakers provide space for experimentation and allow for alternative forms of delivery if necessary, while providing the necessary safeguards and regulations to ensure quality for all. Often these are governments that value flexibility, focus on outcomes (rather than on process), and promote information sharing. Ultimately, it is about the government putting in place enough controls to protect its citizens, particularly those most disadvantaged, without stifling innovation or growth.

Box 17. Government action to create space for scaling quality learning

Research by Dembélé, Samoff, and Sebatane points to specific roles that national governments can play in order to create space for scaling of learning. These are summarized here and illustrated through the Media Center case study:¹⁸²

- **SET APPROPRIATE TARGETS:** Establish broad objectives and national standards that provide clear targets for the country. In the case of Media Center, the federal government of Brazil established a coherent vision along with clear national goals for learning for all children, while leaving it up to states and municipalities to determine the specifics of what students should know and do at each grade level.
- **PROVIDE A COHERENT SYSTEM OF ACCOUNTABILITY:** This includes tracking how children are faring in regard to meeting national targets and ensuring transparency and availability of results. In the case of Media Center, Brazil established a national assessment system, the Brazilian Education Quality Index (IDEB), using an internationally benchmarked index to measure progress of all schools against a baseline.
- **ENSURE STABILITY AND SET CLEAR RULES OF THE GAME:** Put into place and provide complete information on clear regulations and policies that allow for a stable environment for engagement in the education system. In Brazil, there is a clear division between federal, state, and municipal governments in regards to the enrollment of children. The new state-level mandate for high school education encouraged the Amazonas state government to be creative and experiment with more efficient ways to reach a greater number of rural youth across the region.
- **PROVIDE RESOURCES:** These can include financial, human, and technical resources. In the case of Media Center, the federal government of Brazil has steadily increased its investment in education—from 4 percent of GDP in 2000 to 6.3 percent in 2012¹⁸³—while more equitably distributing funds to resource-poor states.¹⁸⁴ At the same time, the Amazonas State government did not wait for sufficient funding from the federal government and allocated state funds for initiatives, such as Media Center.

While the specifics of these roles vary, what is clear is that without participation and leadership from the public sector, it is virtually impossible to ensure the necessary enabling environment for interventions to scale systematically, sustainably, and equitably.

14. A culture of R&D:

Ensuring that more children learn requires a strong ethos of experimentation, collecting learning data, and using it for continuous improvement.

The cases exhibited an adept use of evidence plus a strong culture of experimentation, collecting learning data and using it for continuous improvement, while iterating without fear of failure. Education lacks the kind of research and development (R&D) culture that many other sectors employ, investing large sums in developing new products or solutions, plus the subsequent experimentation that allows the most successful ideas to adapt and go to scale. Across the case

studies, the key drivers behind creating this culture were to collect and utilize data on learning and other key outcomes to ensure impact. They also were not afraid to take risks and learn from failure whenever possible. On top of that, many of the cases used a strong foundation in research when developing and scaling their approaches. These strategies should be employed across the entire ecosystem of actors to create a shift in education to this kind of culture.

“We still lack a lot of basic information in the education sector, which is particularly shocking when compared with the health sector. The explanation is straightforward, though: there was and there is an underinvestment in data in the education sector. There is also no doubt that the data gap has a negative impact on the level of international funding for education.”¹⁸⁵

– Jean-Marc Bernard, Global Partnership for Education

Strengthening data collection systems on learning

Data, and particularly data on learning outcomes, are the foundation of an education ecosystem that fosters a culture of evidence, research, and

experimentation. This is especially important for systems focused on scaling effective approaches, in order to identify which interventions improve learning

outcomes and ensure they continue to as they scale. Data on learning are especially needed if countries and the global education community wants to shift from scaling access to scaling access plus learning. Actors across the ecosystem need to be able to review and learn from what they and others are doing across a number of dimensions and especially how their actions affect children’s learning.

Too few developing countries have the robust and relevant learning assessment systems needed to support evidence-based changes in policy and practice. As discussed earlier, developing countries have a range of snapshot assessments, but what is needed are robust and systematic methods to collect relevant learning data that can be regularly used by all actors across the education ecosystem. These systems include classroom-level learning data that teachers can use to help each student all the way up to national-level assessments

that provide a picture of what students know and can do.¹⁸⁶

The cases reviewed provide good examples of how different types of actors collected and used data. For example, in Brazil, significant improvements in the country’s overall learning outcomes have been attributed partly to systemic monitoring of progress and greater accountability.¹⁸⁷ The federal government’s IDEB, which sets targets for schools based on each school’s trajectory, evaluates a school’s performance against its past performance and not against arbitrary targets for all schools. The public nature of the index provides a real incentive for states to use effective strategies and improve student achievement.¹⁸⁸ In the case of Amazonas, SEDUC had the mandate and freedom to develop initiatives, such as Media Center, as students test score and pass rates were monitored and held accountable to national targets.

Prioritizing education R&D

R&D has been identified in many sectors as a key driver of innovation and improvement. In comparing the scaling of education to health, Colette Chabbott, professor at George Washington University, argues that, “Early investments in science enable faster scaling up later. The education sector has not made necessary investments in the types of basic research that can improve the conventional, slow-expanding model of primary school and/or provide the scientific foundation for simple, game-changing innovations. That sort of

research may require research centers—not program evaluation—embedded in countries with the farthest to go to meet EFA [Education For All] goals and with close ties to research centers of excellence in other countries.”¹⁸⁹ According to 2008 data from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, public R&D spending in the sectors of health and defense is 15 times the level of spending on education.¹⁹⁰ Hungary, for example, earmarks 73 times as much of its public research budget for health as it does for education.¹⁹¹



Some of the most impactful R&D processes occur at the local level through micro-studies and systems that collect and feed data immediately back into the system.

Similarly, sustained investment in agriculture R&D was found to be vital to developing country's agricultural development. As the *Millions Fed* study identified, "The critical role of long-term public investment in science and technology plays out across the entire developing world, from Asia to Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa and a range of successes from major food crops such as rice, wheat...to livestock and fisheries."¹⁹²

One theory as to why sectors such as health receive more investment is that the outcomes are more easily measured and the impacts are more apparent to decision-makers, unlike the results of poor education investment.¹⁹³ Educational researchers Nora Sabelli and Dede suggest a combination of efforts to increase educational research and make it more practical. They emphasize that reform is an iterative process, requiring long-term investment and also an "interplay between theory and experiment"—particularly involving practitioners in the process.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, a culture of R&D must be present in research institutes, as well as

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within each critical component of the education system, among practitioners, policymakers, and funders.

When considering R&D in education, the key is that it be undertaken on a systematic basis and used to devise new applications. Cases reviewed effectively translated research discoveries into improved practices. This has been seen in the partnership over the past decade between MIT's Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) and Pratham in India. As results are gathered by J-PAL, an organization devoted to rigorous impact evaluation, from experimenting with different variations of the teaching at the right level model, these lessons have been incorporated into Pratham's work and the menu of options available for state governments as they consider adopting the approach. Bridge International Academies invested large sums of capital into R&D before its first pupil was even admitted. The company found that it was "imperative to continue this rigorous development process until the highest levels of academic performance and operational effectiveness are achieved so that the 1st, 100th and 1000th pupils receive the same level of education as the 100,000th and the 1,000,000th."¹⁹⁵

Some of the most impactful R&D processes occur at the local level through micro-studies and systems that collect and feed data immediately back into the system. Room to Read, for example, has invested in research, monitoring,

and evaluation officers in every country in which it implements its direct services. Initial investments in research contributed to the development of tools and training for school-level implementers to collect strategic information about program implementation and outcomes in ways

that implementers can work immediately and directly with schools on program improvement. This approach also allows some information to feed up into the larger country-level monitoring system to explain trends and modify program content or implementation strategies as necessary.¹⁹⁶