

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST

“Scaling impact in education to reach the world’s most vulnerable children”

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PARTICIPANTS:

Introduction:

FRED DEWS
Managing Editor, Podcasts and Digital Projects
The Brookings Institution

Hosts:

JENNY PERLMAN ROBINSON
Senior Fellow - Global Economy and Development,
Center for Universal Education
The Brookings Institution

PATRICK HANNAHAN
Project Director, Millions Learning Project
The Brookings Institution or Affiliation

Guests:

GHAITH AL-SHOKAIRI
Research and Documentation Manager and
Scaling Lab Researcher
INJAZ

BARBARA CHILANGWA
Executive Advisor and Scaling Lab Advisor
CAMFED Tanzania

CHANTALE KALLAS
Partnerships and Scaling Advisor
International Rescue Committee (IRC)

FAUSTIN KOFFI
Inspector General for Administration and
School Life, Scaling Lab Manager, Ministry
of Education, Cote d'Ivoire

MOITSHEPI MATSHENG
Co-Founder and Country Coordinator
Young Love

VICKI TINIO
Executive Director, Foundation for
Information Technology Education and
Development (FIT-ED)

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PROCEEDINGS

MATSHENG: The scaling lab has really strengthened our process of scaling as it has key players in the educational field. But also, really a nice way that we could get in the same room together to be able to trouble shoot as well as plan together and problem solve our scaling journey at each step of the way.

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria. The podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. You just heard from Moitshepi Matsheng, and NGO leader from Botswana. She's the co-founder and country coordinator of an organization called Young Love. And they are one of several around the world that partner with the Center for Universal Education at Brookings as part of an action research project that you'll learn more about today.

Today's episode is about improving education in low and middle income countries and the systemic changes needed to reach the millions of children around the globe who are not learning. While this was an urgent priority even before COVID-19, the pandemic is bringing about significant challenges what all countries will need to navigate in the coming years to ensure children receive a quality education.

At this point, it's well-known that we face a learning crisis around the world. Wherein an estimated 263 million children and young people are out of school with the large majority in low and middle income countries. Meanwhile, for those children and adolescents who are in school, more than 617 million are not learning the very basics.

As a result, on current trends it's estimated that by 2030 825 million young people, more than half of all young people in low and middle income countries will not possess the basic secondary level skills needed for work and life. And these shocking figures don't yet take into account the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The encouraging news is that there are many innovative and effective education efforts underway around the world. The challenge, however, is that too often they are small scale unable to be sustained and not reaching the most disadvantaged populations. The question then becomes, how can the international education field best leverage these innovations and effective practices to help bring about sustainable large-scale change in the way education is delivered.

I'm joined on today's show by two colleagues. The first is Jenny Perlman Robinson, Senior Fellow for the Center for Universal Education here at Brookings and author of the report, *Millions Learning: Scaling up Quality Education in Developing Countries*. Also, on the program is Patrick Hannahan, a project director here at Brookings. Jenny and Patrick worked together on the Millions Learning project and they are here to share their research on scaling or expanding and deepening the impact of education initiatives around the world.

Jenny, Patrick, and senior research analyst Molly Curtis recently published a report capturing emerging findings and key insights to date from their work on real time scaling labs in several locations around the world. In addition to hearing from Jenny about their research, Patrick had the opportunity to interview six colleagues, one from each of the real time scaling labs. And you'll hear bits of these interviews throughout the conversation between Patrick and Jenny. The scaling lab colleagues possess deep knowledge and insights on the complexities of scaling and sustaining quality education programs. And they bring fresh perspective on the topic from around the world.

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with the show. Patrick, I'll hand it over to you to guide us through the conversation.

HANNAHAN: Thanks, Fred. Jenny, welcome back to the Brookings Cafeteria. You've been on the show a few times in recent years to discuss your research on scaling and education. To set the context for our discussion today, let's go back to the Millions Learning report. Tell us a bit about why you wrote that report.

PERLMAN ROBINSON: Sure, and it's a pleasure to be back on the podcast and the opportunity to discuss some of our recent work. I wrote Millions Learning back in 2016 with co-authors Rebecca Winthrop and Eileen McGivney. As I mentioned on an earlier show, the motivation for the report was really to explore where and how large scale progress and education had been achieved in a number of low and middle income countries. Looking at where we've seen significant progress in both the number of children going to school and improvements in their learning while there.

The catalyst for the research was a sustainable development goals or SDGs, the Global Development Agenda the United Nations launched in 2015. One of the 17 goals that more than 190 countries committed to achieving by 2030 is SDG four. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Which I would argue is absolutely central to achieving each and every other development goal whether it be progress and health, economic growth or environmental sustainability.

During the 15 years leading up to the SDGs, the world experienced rapid growth in the number of children who attended school which was certainly cause for celebration. At the same time, one out of ten children were still inexcusably being left behind. And what has become increasingly clear and the point that Fred made at the beginning of this episode is that going to school does not guarantee learning in school.

A shocking one out of two children in low and middle income countries cannot read or understand a simple story by the end of primary school. And now we have COVID-19 which is exacerbating these challenges. If we are to achieve our global commitments to children in the next 10 years, we must learn how to effectively identify, scale and sustain initiatives that can rapidly accelerate progress.

So, the report was really written to help policymakers, practitioners and funders do just this by understanding essential scaling principles and how they could apply these in their own context.

HANNAHAN: So, let's stay on this topic of scaling. To set the stage for today's conversation, what do you mean by scaling?

PERLMAN ROBINSON: That's a good question and one I think that if you ask 10 different people, you'd likely get 10 different answers. At the Center for Universal Education, we use the term scaling to represent a range of approaches that expand and deepen the impact of efforts that lead to lasting improvements in people's lives.

So, for us, it's really about scaling impact, not growing a particular model or brand. The expansion of schooling is a great example. It's really one of the world's great scaling success stories. Over the past 200 years, access to school has rapidly expanded from only half of the world's children being in primary school in the 1950s to today, prior to COVID-19, more than 9 out of 10 children attend primary school. But again, we know that learning outcomes and education quality have not kept pace with this expansion.

And so, this question of scaling impact is really what our work looks at. We're currently investigating this question by a company, actual education related initiatives that are in the process of scaling. In order to learn from, support and document their experiences with an

intention to bring research and practice closer together. We conduct this action research through what we call real time scaling labs.

HANNAHAN: Could you tell us a bit more about these real time scaling labs.

PERLMAN ROBINSON: Sure. During research conducted for the Millions Learning report, we had the chance to meet with many education leaders around the world. Policymakers, NGO and community leaders and many others. Despite coming from different parts of the world, these education leaders shared several scaling related challenges.

For example, these include pursuing growth in a linear fashion instead of allowing for the necessary experimentation and iteration based on new data and insights. An overemphasis on the technical design of initiative rather than considerations of the broader enabling environment from the start.

And finally, a feeling of working in isolation. These education leaders expressed they wanted more opportunities to exchange insights and lessons learned with others working on similar scaling related endeavors and education. Based on these insights, we at the Center for Universal Education, began looking into how we might create a participatory action research approach that responded to these shared challenges. And provided a structured space for collective learning and peer to peer engagement among key stakeholders as a scaling process unfolds in real time.

This was how the ideal of the real time scaling labs came about. The scaling labs have been operating for about two years we're continuing to learn about scaling together with lab partners in several locations around the world. The ultimate goal is to support these initiatives as they scale while simultaneously sharing deeper insights and lessons as to how policymakers, civil society and the private sector can most effectively work together to bring about large scale

transformation and the quality of children's learning and development.

Real time scaling labs are currently operating in Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire, Jordan, the Philippines and Tanzania with a new lab being explored that spans three countries in the Middle East. The approach is also being adapted if we work with a new set of partners that are part of the knowledge and innovation exchange. Which is a joint endeavor between the global partnership for education and Canada's international development research center. This past June, I published a report along with you, Patrick, and our colleague Molly Curtis detailing emerging findings and key insights from the initial work of the real time scaling lab.

HANNAHAN: Thanks for that background, Jenny. Just before we move to the interviews with our colleagues, could you tell us a bit more about the report.

PERLMAN ROBINSON: Yeah, I'm happy to. Through our research, we had the privilege to learn alongside our partners in the process of scaling education initiatives. While there is much diversity across the labs, some initiatives have been originated by NGOs while others are fully led by government. Some focus on early learning while others support young women transitioning from school to the work force. They all share the same vision of greatly expanding and sustaining their impact.

The labs are grounded in a learning by doing approach. And central to this is the notion of ongoing experimentation, data driven reflection and continuous sharing of insights. In this spirit, we put together some emerging findings in the report from the initial phase of the scaling labs as well as next steps for the research in the years to come.

I encourage listeners to download the report on the Millions Learning page at the Brookings website. I look forward to discussing three of these emerging findings with you on the show today, Patrick. And hearing directly from our lab colleagues in each of the countries from where

we work. Their perspectives are especially important as they're on the front lines working tirelessly to ensure that many more children and young people receive a quality, safe and relevant education.

HANNAHAN: So, this brings us to the heart of the episode today. As Jenny mentioned, I had the chance to interview six people, one representative from each of the real time scaling labs. And during these interviews, we explored three insights about scaling and education that are emerging from the labs to date which Jenny just alluded to.

These insights are one, leading with the problem and not a predetermined solution. Two, taking a systems approach to scaling and three, the importance of strengthening adaptive capacity. Jenny, I really look forward to our conversation about these themes together with our colleagues in the labs. We're going to begin with this notion of leading with the problem. Could you help our listeners understand what your research is demonstrating related to this?

PERLMAN ROBINSON: Sure. A critical lesson emerging from the scaling labs is a need for a mindset shift around the ultimate goal of scaling. But this, I need not simply to expand a particular project but to sustainably address a challenge in the system. It sounds straightforward, I know. But all too often, we find well-intentioned institutions and organizations arriving with a predetermined solution and then basically searching for a problem to solve that fits a solution.

Undertaking scaling efforts with a problem to solve at the forefront requires scaling without ego. Namely, an openness to building on the work of others, letting go of fidelity to the original model or branding and instead, focusing on the best way to address the underlying causes of a problem.

And we found this is certainly true in our research as well. In the case of the scaling labs, taking a problem driven approach has meant for us positioning the labs not as a removed

research project that will require participants additional time and attention but as a new way of working to address existing challenges and advance local priorities.

HANNAHAN: That's great. So Jenny, I had a chance to catch up with our colleague, Chantale Kallas, to discuss this as it relates to the scaling efforts of the Ahlan Simsim program, a joint initiative of the international rescue committee or IRC and Sesame Workshop. It is currently the largest early childhood development or ECD intervention in the history of humanitarian response.

Ahlan Simsim which means welcome sesame in Arabic is bringing critical ECD programs to the Syrian response region. Aiming to transform the language, early reading, mathematics and social emotional skills of crisis affected children. I'd like to bring Chantal into our conversation now so that she can help our listeners understand more about the initiative and how leading with the problem has helped bring about ownership among key stakeholders and ensure that Ahlan Simsim response to the needs of communities.

KALLAS: My name is Chantal Kallas. I'm originally from Lebanon. I work with the regional team for the Ahlan Simsim team which is a big project that IRC has started working on. And I currently support the team as a partnerships and scaling advisor.

The Ahlan Simsim project is a project that's regional. And when we say regional, I mean the Middle East region. It covers four countries, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Jordan. And it tends to transform the humanitarian response. Like its biggest aim is to refocus and need to place an emphasis on early childhood development and put that at the center of any response. What we want to see at the end of this project is a positive change in the early development of children. Especially, those who are the most vulnerable and affected by conflict and crisis.

HANNAHAN: Chantal helped us understand how for Ahlan Simsim, leading with the

problem is helping different stakeholders coalesce around a shared vision for early childhood education and development. And she alludes to the ah ha moments or mindset shifts that she has observed in this work. Chantal also introduces the notion of a project mentality which we'll turn to later in the podcast.

KALLAS: Something else that was very interesting for me is shifting from focusing on the solution to focusing on the problem. So, scaling helps us to see like you don't fixate in a way on the solution because otherwise you're back to the project mentality where you're very vigilant and you want the solution to work out. But rather put all of your focus on the problem and try to identify other solutions if the existing one is not the best one to go through.

And it's very interesting when you start saying it to people. Like through the discussion, through everything, I think we will have this amazing wow moment of yes, it's true and this like the shift in mindset you see with colleagues, with different actors as something that also was very interesting for me to perceive. And when you focus on the needs of the communities rather than the objectives of the project and you see like this is where you can make a real change.

Every day we have amazing news. People taking ownership over the project. I'm not saying people from the IRC and the Sesame Workshop but local organizations, governmental partners, partners and governmental organizations, academic institutions. When we talk about all these stakeholders and partners who take lead on the project is something that is very interesting because that gives us back a common vision that is very interesting for us to look at.

One of the examples that came to my mind is our first meeting with (inaudible) entity in the Ministry of Education. And when we started the meeting they came and they're like what are you offering and we're like, what are your needs? And this took us then to 15 minutes to really start the conversation and for them to realize that indeed we're not coming to say we're offering

one, two, three, four and this is all we're going to expect from our work. But rather we're coming here to build with you a project based on the needs.

HANNAHAN: It's really wonderful to hear from Chantal about the critical work of Ahlan Simsim and how taking this problem driven approach has helped to build partnerships with key stakeholders. Sticking with this concept of building a project based on the needs of government and communities, I had the opportunity to connect with another scaling lab colleague, Moitshepi Matsheng. A passionate NGO leader from Botswana whose organization Young Love is working closely with the government to adapt a remedial education approach that originated in India known as teaching at the right level or TARL.

Moitshepi helped us understand more about the TARL approach. The importance of aligning the goals and priorities of TARL with those of government and how working shoulder to shoulder with government to help them address priority issues in Botswana opens the door for impactful sustainable change in education. Here's Moitshepi.

MATSHENG: My name is Moitshepi Matsheng. I'm the co-founder and country coordinator for an organization called Young Love based here in Botswana as well as the chairperson of the Botswana National Youth Council. Teaching at the right level is an evidenced and learner focused approach that helps students develop basic skills in literacy and numeracy. It is developed by an organization in India called Pratham and has been rigorously tested by the Demille poverty action lab and related researchers for over 15 years across six randomized trials.

In Botswana, we are working with the Ministry of Basic Education to scale the program to all primary schools in the country. And in our lessons, children are grouped based on their learning abilities rather than age or grade. And they receive a targeted instruction based on their learning needs. Teaching at the right level classes use simple materials like sticks and stones and

engaging activities to ensure learning is targeted, relevant and fun.

HANNAHAN: Moitshepi went on to articulate the specific steps Young Love took to dive into this work with the government. Including assessments and analyses that Young Love conducted to deeply understand the issue of low literacy and numeracy levels in Botswana. And ensure that TARLs goals are aligned with those of the Botswana Ministry of Basic Education in these areas. A recurring theme throughout her comments was focusing on the problem being addressed, informed by data and ensuring teaching at the right level responds to these needs.

MATSHENG: At Young Love, we see our role as the right hand of government in supporting and improving learning efforts throughout the country. We are not particularly invested in any particular model or approach. But ways in which we could learn together on which model best works so that we could inform our scale of strategy. In the coming years, the ministry's vision is to see the teaching at the right level methodology infused into everyday teaching practices among all primary schools in Botswana.

So, the government of Botswana has identified a need to assess and improve learning. The results from doing our situational analysis are basic literacy and numeracy in regions found that there's a gap in learning with 90 percent of (inaudible) students are unable to do basic division and 40 percent of students unable to read a simple story. And we're finding that really aligned to the government strategy.

So, whilst we also are seeing the results on the ground and as well as confirmed by our situational analysis that we conducted with the ministry. We are seeing a huge need to be able to really focus on remediating students so that they can be able to catch up and meet the curriculum expectations. We also have the national education policy, the education and training sector's strategic plan which calls for the country to improve quality education, remedial education and

learner focus and competency based education approaches.

HANNAHAN: Well many thanks to Chantal and Moitshepi for these insightful reflections on leading with the problem. Jenny, any thoughts on what they've shared?

PERLMAN ROBINSON: First, it's wonderful to hear from both of them and I feel fortunate to be engaged in this research on scaling with such passionate and inspiring colleagues such as these two. What Moitshepi just described is what we found to be fundamental to scaling. Getting a sound understanding of the nature of the problem based on data. Identifying any relevant evidence based practices to adopt and ensuring alignment with government and community priorities.

HANNAHAN: Their comments make me think about the project mentality that we speak about often in our work, Jenny, and how it can be a real obstacle to the collaborative approach that Chantal and Moitshepi have just outlined. I wonder if you might reflect on this and how taking a systems approach could be a more effective way to bring about sustainable change.

PERLMAN ROBINSON: Yeah. A key question that's emerged through our research is how to move from a project mentality of incrementally growing an individual education project to instead focus on how to achieve large scale sustainable systems change. This requires not solely focusing on the technical aspects of the intervention or the institutions delivering it but, on the system, more broadly. Or by that I mean the people, the policies, the institutions and the relationships between them.

The real time scaling lab has underscored the need for any scaling effort to consider political economy factors, power dynamics, incentive structures and social and cultural norms in the existing system analyzing how these all might enable or in hinder scaling. It's easy to get caught up in perfecting an intervention and not turn to considering the broader context until

something is considered ready to scale.

However, this consideration of the system we found really needs to happen from the outset and be part and parcel of the scaling process. This includes developing targets and metrics that measure not only people reached but also the depth of change. Tracking progress in more intangible areas such as the types of capacity strengthened or the extent of government ownership or partnerships created.

The scaling labs have also surfaced an important yet often neglected piece of the systems puzzle. The role of intermediaries in the scaling process. Drawing on work from our colleagues at Management Systems International and NESTA, we like to think of these intermediaries as the bees of a system. Cross pollinating between innovations and the broader system delivering education at scale.

The work of the real time scaling labs can be thought of as playing this intermediary role, working with diverse stakeholders to explore how to bring an effective practice, whether initiated by the government or outside to many more children.

HANNAHAN: Let's explore this idea of taking a systems approach further and hear from colleagues in Tanzania and Jordan. We'll kick it off hearing from Barbara Chilangwa, the scaling lab manager in Tanzania. And then we'll here from Ghaith Al-Shokairi, the scaling lab researcher in Jordan. Barbara is well positioned about taking a systems approach.

She is a former secondary school teacher who rose through the ranks to the top civil service position of permanent secretary at the Ministry of Education in Zambia. Barbara has also served as Zambia's ambassador to Angola. These experiences have given her a deep understanding of how to work within government structures and systems to sustainably scale education initiatives.

I'll turn it over to Barbara in a moment for her reflections on the importance of taking a

systems approach to scale CAMFEDs learner guide program in Tanzania. CAMFED is a pan-African movement that provides education opportunities for girls and empowers young women from marginalized communities to become leaders of change. The real time scaling lab in Tanzania is exploring the potential for the Tanzanian government to gradually assume ownership of the learner guide program. And now I'll hand it over to Barbara.

CHILANGWA: My name is Barbara Chilangwa. I work for CAMFED International as executive advisor but I'm attached to be real time scaling lab to support Tanzania's real time scaling of the learner guide program.

HANNAHAN: I asked Barbara to help our listeners understand a bit more about the learner guide program which CAMFED has been implementing in partnership with the government in Tanzania since 2013. It is also implemented in Ghana, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. During the past seven years in Tanzania, 2051 learner guides have delivered critical life skills instruction to more than 93,000 secondary school children in 410 secondary schools.

CHILANGWA: The learner guide program was actually designed to improve learning outcomes for marginalized children. And mobilizing community engagement, also supporting young women in transition from school. It is implemented by young women who are recently completed secondary education with CAMFED support and have chosen to volunteer in their schools to deliver life skills program on voluntary basis which is called My Better World. My Better World compliments academic learning and builds self-confidence, communication skills as well as problem solving.

HANNAHAN: I asked Barbara if she might comment on the role she sees projects playing in contributing to large scaled government led change.

CHILANGWA: My reflection on the project mentality is that really projects are there just

to demonstrate the efficacy of an intervention. It may be useful for governments to learn lessons from what the project results into. But at the end of the day, sometimes it appears as a waste of resources and time when the project ends and the government simply says thank you and waits for another project.

What I think is the best approach is to begin your initiatives with government from the beginning and with the intention of scaling or integrating your ideas into the government systems. So, my advice would be from the very word go, when you have a good idea that you think will help support governments problems, work with the government from the beginning. Ensure that you're fitting into the systems of government so that the government can pick up your idea almost immediately. And then there's now aspect, there's a lot of learning that has happened but also, it's sustainable because the government has its own.

HANNAHAN: Really interesting insights from Barbara on how working closely with the government can help ensure sustainable impact of scaling efforts. Systems approach can sound quite jargony. Therefore, I asked Barbara what taking a systems approach means to her and how the Tanzania scaling lab embraces this type of approach by working through existing structures instead of creating new ones and involving representatives from several different ministries to collaboratively plan for scaling the learner guide program in a holistic way.

CHILANGWA: Taking a systems approach to me means that we look at the structures of government, for example, and how they operate and position the lab into these structures of government rather than working as a project. And I think what has helped us that we manage to bring together stakeholders of (inaudible) in nature which sort of creates an equilibrium of expertise to rally behind an issue that has a common thread running through several sectors.

And for the learner guide, this opened the program not just as a project fitting in the

ministry of education but a system wide program with tentacles in several ministries. So, that direction of the lab and the lab convenings brought out the interrelated measure of the government systems and how they can converge the support and the institutionalization of the learner guide program. So, I think in a nutshell, that's what I think a systems approach is.

HANNAHAN: In our conversation, Barbara raised a really good point about how working side by side with government on the research as part of the scaling lab has been a really effective way to help build a system wide approach to scaling the program.

CHILANGWA: The most useful element of the lab for government would be the research component. And why I'm saying this is that the research that is going on in the scaling lab is sort of jointly pushed with stakeholders and it's also providing real time information. And compared to the common practice of researchers that are conducted independently and then just brought and assimilated to government and telling the government this is what we have found we think this will work.

I think the joint nature of the research component of the scaling lab is a very attractive approach to any government. Because governments want to work very closely with evidence that is being generated for a problem.

HANNAHAN: We are grateful for these remarks from Barbara which illuminate how the lab is taking a systems approach to scale the learner guide program in two important ways. First, by authentically engaging government from the start, including around identifying several research questions of importance to their work.

In this way, the government is not a passive recipient of research findings but rather they play a real leadership role in defining the research objectives undertaking research activities and working together with other lab members. To determine how the program can most effectively

strengthen the whole system of life skills in Tanzania. Second, Barbara highlighted the importance of bringing together diverse lab members from several different ministries each with their own priorities that the holistic learner guide program helps address in some way.

Next, I'd like to turn to our colleague, Ghaith Al-Shokairi, the scaling lab researcher in Jordan. Ghaith helped us understand how the real time scaling lab in Jordan is taking a systems approach by aligning with the government priorities around financial inclusion. And including diverse actors that represent various parts of the system in Jordan. I'll now bring Ghaith into our conversation to introduce himself and the financial education program in Jordan which his organization INJAZ helps deliver.

AL-SHOKAIRI: My name is Ghaith Al-Shokairi. I am the documentation and research manager at INJAZ and I am as well the researcher of the real time scaling lab in Jordan focusing on the financial education program. The financial education program was launched in 2015. It is one of the five pillars of the financial inclusion strategy set by central bank of Jordan.

INJAZ has over 20 years of experience in financial literacy for students and schools and universities. So, we were the natural partners to implement this program and since 2015, it has mainstreamed in all schools in Jordan teaching the national curricula from 7th grade until the 12th grade.

HANNAHAN: I asked Ghaith to help our listeners understand the learning by doing approach used in the scaling labs. Including how this approach includes different actors from the financial inclusion ecosystem in Jordan. And what they have been working on as part of rolling out the financial education program or FEP across all secondary schools in Jordan.

The approach used in Jordan is the same one labs have taken in each country. Whereby the lab acts as a neutral space that brings together diverse stakeholders for systematic and

structured planning, reflection and data driven learning around the scaling process.

AL-SHOKAIRI: The real time scaling lab in Jordan is focusing now on the financial education program. We have a set of 20 lab members who we are identifying at the beginning of the process. Most of them are members of the two committees governing the FEP in general. In addition to educators, academia and NGO representatives who are also part of the ecosystem and part of the stakeholders of the FEP in general.

The whole idea is that after we did our initial research, the field research, we gathered this group for the first time to set up five focus areas that we identified based on our research and our lessons learned from the past five years. And ever since, we have been working with them on the cyclical approach of digging deep into the problems and challenges that we face in the FEP and inviting them back to discuss these challenges and how we are tackling them and so forth.

HANNAHAN: Ghaith stressed the importance in Jordan of working closely with senior actors in the system. And using timely data and scaling related insights to strengthen the implementation of the FEP across all secondary schools.

AL-SHOKAIRI: Jordan has a newly appointed and new minister of education who is pro this methodology of trial and error, let's say, and learning from our mistakes and reflecting on the plans always. And he's not rigid at all, he's very progressive. So, he is considered one of the new champions of FEP.

Building this winning coalition has definitely benefitted the implementation of the FEP and to jumpstart the FEP into schools and into the ministry of education curriculum.

HANNAHAN: This is an important that Ghaith raises. This idea of building a winning coalition. Jenny, what does building a winning coalition mean to you and could you help our listeners understand what your research is finding out about why this is such an important aspect

of scaling in the education sector.

PERLMAN ROBINSON: This notion of a winning coalition is critically important to taking a systems approach when it comes to scaling. And our research in the scaling lab to date has really underscored this. While national governments are ultimately responsible for ensuring the right to a quality education for all children governments can't do it alone.

Sustainable scaling requires a coalition of diverse actors from across the system to drive the change process forward. This involves cultivating and sustain champions at all levels of the education system. Including engaging with educators and those who might not typically have a seat at the table. Initial findings from the scaling labs have also underscored the need to engage early with potential opposition or those who might stand to lose from changes to the status quo.

HANNAHAN: In their comments, Barbara and Ghaith also touched upon the important role that data and evidence should play in decisions around scaling. And this provides a nice segue to our final theme around strengthening adaptive capacity for scaling. By which we mean strengthening key stakeholders' ability to adjust, modify or change elements of both the model being scaled and the scaling strategy in response to new data and learning. As well as challenges faced, opportunities arising and changes in the enabling environment. A key principle underlying the scaling labs is that scaling is an iterative process that requires ongoing adaptation based on new data and changes in the broader environment.

PERLMAN ROBINSON: That's right, Patrick. And while being flexible is increasingly recognized as an important scaling principle, our work in the labs is demonstrating that putting this into practice is much easier said than done. Making ongoing adjustments to the scaling approach and strategy is especially challenging requiring timely data, a thorough understanding of the local context and space for reflection as well as willingness and capacity to act on this

learning and make changes accordingly.

The work of our colleagues in the scaling lab in Cote d'Ivoire is a great example of using data and information to guide decision making and adaptation during the scaling process. And we'll be hearing shortly from our lab colleague Faustin Koffi in Cote d'Ivoire with more details on this.

As a brief introduction, the Cote d'Ivoire scaling lab is accompanying efforts related to the transforming education in cocoa communities or TRECC initiative. Spearheaded by the Jacobs Foundation, UBS Optimus Foundation and Bernard van Leer Foundation. And working in partnership with the Ivorian government and a number of national and international civil society organizations, research partners and leading players in the cocoa and chocolate industry.

TRECC in this winning coalition of diverse partners are working together to implement, adapt and expand evidence based early childhood development, primary education and youth learning interventions. All with a particular focus on rural cocoa communities in an effort to improve the learning conditions of all children and youth in Cote d'Ivoire by promoting quality education and leveraging the contributions of the private sector.

HANNAHAN: I'd like to invite our colleague Faustin Koffi into the conversation. He leads our work in Cote d'Ivoire as the scaling lab manager. I'll turn it over to Faustin to introduce himself, provide some background on the TRECC program. Including the different actors working to support it and how the scaling lab is working with the ministry of education and other actors to experiment with this iterative approach to scaling that uses evidence and data to drive decision making. Faustin is a French speaker who agreed to conduct the interview in English and we are very grateful to him for this.

KOFFI: I am Faustin Koffi. I am right now working at the Ministry of Education in Cote

d'Ivoire as general inspector. And I am also the director of our scaling lab in Cote d'Ivoire. Transforming Education in Cocoa Communities, TRECC I mean, started in 2015 when the board of the Jacobs Foundation decided to invest in this innovative incentive. And we (inaudible) aimed at improving the living condition of children and young people in Cote d'Ivoire by promoting quality education. So, TRECC strives to realize the full potential of every child.

In our lab in Cote d'Ivoire, we are working together with cocoa and chocolate industries. We are also working with organizations like UNICEF, World Bank and let's say private persons, individual persons who can help us. So, around the table it's not only education for (inaudible) but all those organizations and (inaudible) are also around the table with us to discuss about education now. It's one of the main things I can infer about our lab.

HANNAHAN: Faustin underscored how the scaling lab has helped lab members plan for scale from the start. So, not just planning for a pilot and then assuming that if it goes well it will automatically scale. But really thinking about issues related to scale from the outset.

In Cote d'Ivoire, TRECC has worked closely with government and various NGO and academic partners to experiment with adapting a number of evidenced based education and early childhood development programs to the Ivorian context. And then they used assessments and data from these pilots to determine which programs or which elements of which programs could be further adapted and expanded to reach more children.

This notion of iteratively testing different models and approaches using data and evidence to drive decision making is an important component of adaptive capacity for scaling. Faustin walked us through the adaptive learning process he has led through the real time scaling lab in Cote d'Ivoire. Including the real prioritization on learning during the pilot phase of an initiative to inform the broader scale up.

Faustin also remarked that being a part of the scaling lab has helped his colleagues in the Ministry of Education really embrace this adaptive learning mindset and see value in it. This notion of experimentation is really central to the real time scaling labs.

Working with governments, NGOs, funders and various other partners to recognize the iterative nature of scaling, really testing things to see what works and pausing to reflect on the experience using data and information gets to the very heart of the labs. Let's hear from Faustin.

KOFFI: The Minister of Education has to remember that when we talk about a pilot phase in a project it means already that we have to begin to have the groundwork for scaling up. So, we had to conduct pilots here in Cote d'Ivoire but we never think about scaling up. But now I think it is necessary to have it in mind.

When we talk about pilot, we have to think about scaling lab. This will require constant monitoring and evaluation activities that we then do any time. So, now we have to think about it also but it's also important to note that we have to build a big documentation of our processes now.

When the lab is going to end, I'd like that our ministry have it in mind that we have now to begin a pilot phase thinking about scaling lab. We have to go through an evaluation and monitoring activities and we have also to have a good documentation of the process we are going to go through.

HANNAHAN: Great insights from Faustin about the importance of timely actionable data and robust monitoring evaluation and learning activities to inform any scaling process. And his desires to see this iterative learning approach embedded into the Ministry of Education's work going forward. Jenny, I wonder if you have any other examples that can be shared about this type of ongoing adaptation from the other scaling labs.

PERLMAN ROBINSON: In fact, I think the recent disruption to education systems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgency for rapid responses really underscores the need to be adaptive while doing so in an informed way as possible.

Since the pandemic began, the scaling lab in Botswana has been experimenting with low tech distance learning approaches, included SMS and phone based instruction. To continue delivering the TARL approach to students while schools are closed. And at the same time, they've been gathering data to analyze the efficacy of these digital approaches.

Young Love, in partnership with the government, are also considering how these digital elements might be incorporated into the delivery of the remedial education approach in the long term beyond the pandemic. At the same time, Young Love has also had to recognize that the school closures may significantly delay their scaling plans for TARL and Botswana and adjust their strategy in response to this reality.

They've continued to partner closely with the government during this time of COVID-19 response efforts even when not directly related to TARL to support the continuing of education and learning opportunities during the crisis.

HANNAHAN: Great, thanks for that, Jenny. Our colleague in the Philippines, Vicki Tinio and I spoke about the reality that while most would agree that adaptive learning is a good practice it doesn't always happen as planned and there is understandable reasons for this.

We know that bureaucracies and large systems are not necessarily known for their agility or ability to experiment with approaches and use data and evidence in a timely manner to inform necessary adaptations. Let's meet Vicki and hear why strengthening adaptive capacity across and education system is important and sometimes is easier said than done.

TINIO: I'm Vicki Tinio. I am the executive director of an NGO in the Philippines called

Foundation for Information Technology Education and Development. And we are running a program in the Philippines that's part of the Millions Learning program of Brookings.

The ELLN digital or the early language literacy and numeracy digital program actually started from the ELLN program of the department of education of the Philippines. It's their flagship early literacy and numeracy program for the whole country, the basic education system.

And they brought in FIT-ED around 2015 to help them develop and test an alternative model of delivering the teacher professional development component of ELLN. And so, the result of that after a pilot phase of about two years was ELLN Digital. And that pilot was evaluated by a third party and the results were quite favorable.

And so, in 2019, the department of education decided to scale up the use of this model, a blended model of teacher professional development on a national scale. So, right now, we're in the middle of really seeing how well the model is being adopted and improved upon at the school level and the division level across the country.

HANNAHAN: I asked Vicki how their program is working with the government to embed an adaptive learning mindset and why it can be challenging.

TINIO: When we started scaling up ELLN digital in August of last year, we were working directly with the officials from at the regional level, the divisional level and the school level led by all the central office officials. In other words, we were working at all levels of the system.

I would say that the approach has been generally accepted and the response to it has been quite favorable. The difficulty really is in operationalizing the method given all of the other demands on their time and all of the other existing structures and processes. So, that has been sort of the biggest challenge.

I would say it's not that they don't get it and they don't get how valuable it is. In fact, they would be the first to say oh, this actually makes so much sense. But there's always competing demands on their time. And so, the question is will they actually be able to do it in the systematic and rigorous way that is required for them to really reap the benefits of the approach.

HANNAHAN: Jenny, I wonder if you have any reflections on Vicki's comments.

PERLMAN ROBINSON: Yes. Just to add that it's been quite remarkable how the department of education in the Philippines is strengthening its own adaptive capacity through implementing a plan, do, study, act system as part of this ELLN digital program. Which Vicki's NGO we heard about, FIN-ED, is supporting.

As Vicki described, this includes cycles of implementing this new blended teacher professional development program gathering just right data at timely intervals and using quick feedback loops to inform ongoing adaptation and course corrections to implementation of the program at the individual school level.

Meanwhile, data is also being aggregated across schools, divisions and regions to inform future stages of the rollout to more teachers than in more schools. At the same time, as Vicki pointed out, it's an ongoing learning process and one that's been severely interrupted by the global pandemic. But also, well positioned to help the education system respond to a rapidly changing environment.

HANNAHAN: Thanks, Jenny. We've covered a lot of ground today but I wonder if you have any concluding comments as we wrap up our show.

PERLMAN ROBINSON: Sure, a lot to try and summarize here. I guess reflecting back on the conversation, four things in particular stand out to me that will inform our research moving forward. First, and it should go without saying, that the role of government is essential.

If we're trying to sustainably affect positive change in an education system, the government must be engaged from the outset and a partner throughout the process.

And this includes in setting research agendas and collaborating throughout the learning process. Any lasting change requires ownership of that change by those who will be responsible for delivering its scale.

Second, a deep understanding of the root causes of the challenges faced will help to ensure that initiatives are effectively designed to address problems that are identified as urgent by local communities.

Third, this notion of adaptive learning and the importance of ongoing experimentation informed by timely data and regular reflecting is an essential part of the scaling process. This is critical in global education, especially during these times when COVID-19 is demanding rapid innovation.

And finally, the importance of learning communities to support scaling such as what we are building with the real time scaling labs. If ever there was a time to learn from one another and avoid repeating mistakes, it's now. For example, countries working to respond to COVID-19 have much to learn from the experiences of communities that have previously coped with massive displacement and other crises such as the devastating Ebola outbreaks.

As Michael Fullen, an expert on education reform has argued, the best ideas flourish when people learn from each other. And what we found through the real time scaling labs and what I think this discussion really speaks directly to are the tangible benefits of peer to peer learning. Bringing together diverse education stakeholders to share scaling experiences, undertake critical reflection based on new data and shifting environments and collectively problem solve to address common challenges and opportunities.

Our hope is that by unpacking these scaling principles and providing concrete guidance and insights and to how to apply them across diverse context, we might expand the impact of effective education initiatives and introduce new ways of working within our education systems. To ultimately provide quality learning opportunities for millions of children around the world.

HANNAHAN: Thanks so much, Jenny. Before we sign off, I'd just like to express our gratitude and appreciation to our scaling lab colleagues for their willingness to participate in this podcast and for bringing their perspectives into it. Specifically, thank you to Ghaith Al-Shokairi, Barbara Chilangwa, Chantale Kallas, Faustin Koffi, Moitshepi Matsheng and Vick Tinio. We feel very fortunate to engage in this work with each of you and with the organizations you represent.

DEWS: To learn more about Millions Learning and our upcoming research on scaling and global education, to the Center for Universal Education on the Brookings website, [brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu). The Brookings Cafeteria podcast is possible only with the help of an amazing team of colleagues.

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