

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AgriPath Scaling Framework



Scaling Digital Agricultural Advisory Services in the Global South: What It Really Takes

Introduction

Digital Advisory Services (DAS) are digital—often mobile-based—solutions that provide agricultural advisory content to help farmers make informed decisions. Traditionally delivered face-to-face, these services are increasingly **integrating digital tools**, enabling providers to reach far more farmers.

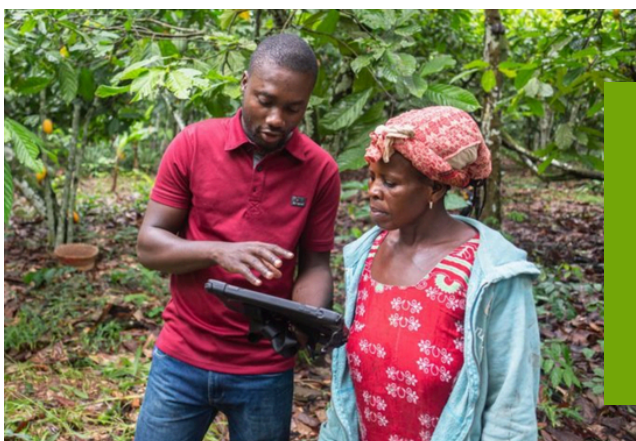
DAS tend to follow two dominant orientations, with most aiming to achieve both outcomes to varying degrees:

- **Commercial-oriented models** focus on increasing the quantity and/or quality of agricultural outputs to boost smallholder farmers' revenues and their own.
- **Public good-oriented models** are designed to achieve broader societal or environmental benefits, such as the adoption of Sustainable Land Management (SLM) practices amongst smallholder farmers, climate resilience, or food system transformation, often supported by governments, NGOs, or donors.

In practice, some DAS actually include both orientations within their approach and combine both revenue-generating features with public good objectives to deliver benefits.

As with any new product or service, DAS are typically launched as **pilots**. These are initial **testing phases** in which the solution is deployed on a small scale — in a limited geographic area, with a restricted number of users, or focused on a single value chain — to trial the concept, gather feedback, and iterate until it achieves the desired user engagement and/or impact. **Initial funding** is usually secured to run the pilot, with the expectation that, if successful, additional funding can be raised to scale the solution.

“At scale”—meaning **widespread** use across farming populations and/or **institutionalization** through strategic planning, financing frameworks, and education policies—DAS can significantly improve farmer livelihoods at relatively low cost (commercial model) and catalyze systemic agricultural transformation (public good model).



Why this AgriPath Scaling Framework?

Many DAS thrive in pilot phases but fail to scale, limiting their impact. This framework helps providers and partners—development agencies, NGOs, and governments—overcome the most common barriers and unlock DAS' full potential.

Priority Pillars for DAS Providers to scale

Three priority pillars critical to scaling DAS, have been identified.

Pillar n°1: Community-Based Agents (CBAs)

Many assume that well-designed Digital Advisory Services (DAS) can eventually replace Community-Based Agents (CBAs), but in practice CBAs remain essential for building trust and maintaining direct engagement with farmers. As a result, scaling DAS successfully depends on having strong CBA strategies that clearly articulate the agents' evolving role and the implications this has on operational models and cost structures. Yet in many settings, finding qualified and motivated CBAs is difficult, and meaningful investment is required to identify, train, and retain them. Ensuring greater gender balance among CBAs adds another layer of complexity, one that cannot be achieved without focused efforts and tailored support mechanisms that enable more women to take on—and thrive in—these roles.

Additional insights on managing CBAs network can be found in the [AgriPath Toolkit](#).

Pillar n°2: Business Model and Financing DAS Scaling

A major obstacle to scaling Digital Advisory Services (DAS) is the limited availability of financial resources. Funding can come from external sources such as grants, equity, or loans provided by donors, investors, banks, or even friends and family. Alternatively, revenue may be generated directly from clients willing to pay for the value DAS provides — through advisory services (whether standalone or bundled), access to farmer data, or connections to the DAS farmer network. There is no one-size-fits-all financing model: while some DAS can rely on external funding for extended periods, others must generate revenue early in their growth journey. Crucially, scaling efforts can still falter without appropriate financial support for vulnerable farmers; even the most robust business model and adequate funding will not succeed if these users are unable to afford, access, or implement the advisory services offered.

The full Agripath
Scaling Framework
report is available here:
www.agripath.net



Pillar n°3: Content

Access to a wide-range of quality content is critical for scaling Digital Advisory Services (DAS), as it enables providers to expand their user base into new crops and geographies, maintain farmer engagement with dynamic and context-responsive advice, and limit costly investments in creating new material from scratch. However, DAS providers cannot simply apply scientific databases to their target regions and expect effective outcomes. True localization begins with identifying the most relevant practices for each area by assessing local priorities and combining scientifically sound recommendations with contextual knowledge such as climate and soil conditions. Beyond this, content must be delivered in ways that are actionable and inclusive — aligned with farmers' priorities, easy to understand, and suited to their constraints around literacy, time, and resources — to ensure it drives meaningful impact in the field.

Other Enablers for DAS Partners

Five key enablers—that is, **favorable conditions** or factors that support the scaling of DAS within a given environment—have been identified. DAS partners—development agencies, NGOs, and governments—can help foster these enablers, creating a more supportive environment for DAS to scale.

Enabler n°1: Infrastructure and Assets

Reliable electricity supply, mobile network coverage, affordable and stable internet, and internet-enabled devices are available to farmers, and data infrastructure and payment systems are well developed.

Enabler n°2: National Agriculture Vision

An inclusive national agriculture strategy, backed by resources, promotes transparent regulation and revenue-generating agriculture. It acknowledges the impacts of climate change, encourages SLM practices, and strengthens farmers' capacity, notably through the active promotion of DAS.

Enabler n°3: Business Environment

A supportive ecosystem for investment and business creation attracts capital and enables the development of DAS and other key players in the agricultural and digital sectors (e.g., financial services start-ups).

Enabler n°4: Human Capital

Human capital across the DAS ecosystem is strengthened by providing foundational skills to all stakeholders (e.g., farmers, CBAs, DAS entrepreneurs, researchers).

Enabler n°5: Users and Communities

A large number of farmers with similar economic, socio-cultural and farming profiles have common needs that DAS can address and are ideally organized into farmer collectives.