



Pathways to Scaling with Governments

The Journey of a Social Innovator



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Published by One Family Foundation, October 2025

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Foreword

“Nobody ever listens to us.”

— Street children

These words shaped my thinking. They became my compass. They remind me that wisdom is not the privilege of the powerful—it lives in every child, every community, every overlooked voice. When we choose to listen, we begin to learn. When we learn, we can co-create. And when we co-create, true collaboration becomes possible.

I have stumbled many times along this path. At times, I moved too quickly with ideas, relied too heavily on evidence, or assumed innovation would be welcomed without fully appreciating the priorities of others that might not be the same. Each misstep carried important lessons. I learned that scaling change is never only about a brilliant idea. It is about how we show up, how we listen, how we build relationships, and most importantly, how we foster trust and mutual respect.

Scaling I learned requires a shift of mindset. A shift from I to we. From small pilots to whole systems. From short-term projects to long-term stewardship. And beyond all of this lies a deeper shift in how we see progress itself: towards what I call a People and Planet Economy, an economy that values not just growth, but equity, dignity, and the survival of our shared home.

This handbook is born of those lessons. It is not a map with fixed routes, but a companion for a journey that is at once deeply personal and profoundly collective. Inside, you will find questions to test your readiness, principles to guide respectful partnerships with governments, and stories—of both success and failure—that can light the way forward.

My hope is that these pages inspire you to listen more deeply, learn more humbly, and to collaborate more boldly. To see yourself not as a lone innovator, but as part of a larger movement embedding social innovations into the government systems that shape people's lives.

Let's walk this path together, with hope and humility. If we do, we can help build societies where people and planet are at the heart of every decision, every voice is heard, and every life has dignity.

Jeroo Billimoria

Founder of One Family Foundation



Introduction

The purpose of this report is to help bridge that divide. It equips changemakers with tools to identify pathways, build partnerships, and embed innovations into public systems. Serving as both a reference and a companion, it is evidence-based yet adaptable to diverse contexts.

This report is structured in four parts. Part 1 explains why scaling with governments is essential for lasting social impact. Part 2 examines collaborative systems change as the foundation for partnerships. Part 3 outlines pathways through which innovations engage public systems. Finally, Part 4 presents models showing how scaling can be operationalized.

At its core is a conviction: transformative scale occurs when governments and social innovators work together. Innovators bring creativity, proximity, and risk tolerance. Governments bring legitimacy, reach, and resources. Alone, each is insufficient; together, they turn promising pilots into enduring public good.

Preconditions for Scaling with Government

This report focuses on contexts where governments are functional, legitimate, and have the institutional capacity to adopt and sustain innovations. In such environments, working with the government can unlock scale, universality, and long-term sustainability.

Where governments are absent or entrenched in corruption and maladministration, the path looks different. In these settings, social innovators may wish to prioritize other routes to scale, such as expanding directly, building coalitions with civil society, or engaging private-sector partners, until conditions allow for meaningful public adoption.

Scaling with governments is demanding. It requires humility to share ownership, persistence to navigate bureaucracy, and patience to withstand shifting political winds. But it remains an important route to legitimacy, universality, and long-term sustainability.

What is Social Innovation?

This report follows the definition of social innovation as first proposed in a working paper¹ prepared by the University of Oxford for the Government Council for Social Innovation and then adopted in the Luxembourg Declaration in April 2025, namely: “social innovation is defined as pursuing novel approaches to tackle challenges facing people and planet.”

Its meaning and application vary widely, depending on the nature of the societal challenge(s), the actors involved, and the innovation pathway(s) pursued.

Five key aspects of the definition of social innovation merit attention:

- Social innovation is directed at tackling challenges facing people and planet.
- Social innovation includes both the processes and outcomes involved in tackling these challenges.
- Novelty depends on the context. If an approach to tackling challenges facing people and planet is novel in the context in which it is adopted, it is social innovation.
- Tackling challenges facing people and planet can involve incremental or transformational changes. Both count as social innovation.
- Social innovation is not limited to a single actor. Social innovations can be created by individuals, organisations, and at a systemic level.

Part 1

Why Scaling with Governments Matters



Scaling with governments can transform promising solutions into systemic impact

Most social innovations begin with small experiments: a curriculum drafted by a teacher, a safe space created by young people, a new care model tested by a nurse. While these small experiments can demonstrate meaningful impact, they often remain limited in scope.

Governments on the other hand, are responsible for core public services, health, education, child protection, and social protection – the things that shape people's lives at scale. While sometimes perceived as obstacles to change, governments can also be the anchors of scale, ensuring equity, reach, and continuity beyond individual projects or funding cycles.

Social innovators play a critical role in proving what works, but the state can institutionalize and sustain those innovations over time. Without government adoption, innovations risk remaining fragmented. With it, they become embedded in the structures that serve millions and endure across generations.

Part 1 explores whether a social innovation should scale, and if so, why scaling with governments may be the right approach.

Scaling the Idea, Not the Organisation

One of the most common misunderstandings in social innovation is to confuse growing an organization with scaling up an idea. Many founders believe that "scaling" means opening new offices, expanding staff, or boosting budgets. Certainly, these moves can create visibility, but they do not guarantee lasting impact. A larger organization may serve thousands more people, but it will still remain limited if its model is tethered only to one institution.

As Mair and Seelos² remind us, real scale is not about expanding organisations, but about embedding ideas into systems. A social innovation shows its true power when it spreads beyond the boundaries of the NGO or social enterprise that created it: for example, when a government ministry integrates the model into national policy, or when a school system embeds it into curricula, or when communities and frontline workers adapt and own it as their own. The most transformative innovations are those that eventually outlive their founders and organizations, becoming public goods rather than private projects.

Considering Whether to Scale

Before pursuing any scaling strategy, innovators should first assess whether scaling is necessary or desirable. Not every social innovation is meant to expand in size or reach, and greater scale does not automatically equate to greater impact. In many cases, "small is beautiful": a single, well-run local initiative may generate as much value as a national program, depending on its objectives and context.³

Some innovations remain intentionally small because they are deeply embedded in local conditions, or because founders choose to prioritize focus over growth. Solutions applied in a limited environment, with high-touch, carefully calibrated programming, will almost certainly be different when scaled across geographic and cultural boundaries. Attempting to replicate context-specific solutions at scale can be ineffective or even counterproductive.⁴ As not all social innovators seek the operational demands that scaling entails, success should be understood as depth as much as breadth of impact.

However, when an innovation has proven its effectiveness and potential to benefit many more people, policymakers and innovators alike should reflect on whether scaling is appropriate. Systemic challenges, from health to education to social protection, require solutions that match their scale. Every proven innovation should go hand-in-hand with a consideration of how it might be shared more widely, even if the ultimate decision is to remain local.

Five Dimensions of Innovation Readiness

Scaling social innovations with government requires more than a good idea. Innovators must demonstrate readiness across five key dimensions:



1. Evidence of Impact and Feasibility

Governments need credible proof that a solution works in real-world conditions and in comparable contexts. This evidence may come from rigorous evaluations or credible monitoring, with transparency around assumptions.



2. Clear and Adaptable Design

A model must be well defined—documented through manuals, training guides, and a clear theory of change—yet flexible enough to adapt to local contexts. Core non-negotiables should be distinguished from elements open to localisation.



3. Scalability and Simplicity

To spread, innovations must be intuitive, teachable, and compatible with existing systems. Readiness means simplifying to essential functions without losing impact, ensuring frontline workers can deliver with available resources.



4. Cost and Resource Requirements

Sustainable financing is critical. Innovators must present realistic costings at scale, outline financing options, and show how personnel, training, supply chains, and technology will be mobilised. Governments will only adopt models that fit within budgetary and logistical realities.



5. Evidence-Based Iteration and Learning

Scaling is not a final stage but a process of continuous improvement. Innovations should embed monitoring and feedback systems, expand in phases, and remain open to adaptation. Governments value models that demonstrate responsiveness and resilience in diverse contexts.

Pathways to Scaling Impact

Once the decision to scale has been made, the critical question is how, and how far, to proceed. Scaling is not a one-size-fits-all process but a strategic choice that must align with the nature of the innovation, available resources, and long-term objectives.

Mair and Seelos² provide a useful framework in their book on Innovation and Scaling for Impact:

- **Scaling Deep** emphasizes strengthening impact within an existing community or ecosystem. By focusing on cultural norms, mindsets, relationships, or more holistic services, innovators can achieve transformative change in a concentrated setting. Scaling deep often creates strong local examples that inspire replication elsewhere, and it can serve as a foundation for later expansion. The model's credibility is strengthened when communities themselves demonstrate its long-term effectiveness.

- **Scaling Out** refers to expanding reach to new communities or geographies. Innovators may establish additional branches, extend programs to other regions, or manage tightly controlled franchises. This pathway allows for greater consistency and fidelity to the original model, which can be critical when quality assurance is paramount.⁴
- **Scaling Up** seeks systemic impact through laws, policies, or institutional adoption. This pathway focuses less on direct delivery and more on enabling others, governments, NGOs, or grassroots organizations, to take the innovation forward. It often involves partnerships, licensing, training, or policy advocacy. While this requires ceding some control and adapting to institutional processes, scaling up can generate the most enduring impact, embedding innovations into the systems that shape millions of lives.

There is no single correct pathway. Innovators may combine or sequence their approaches depending on context and timing. What matters most is deliberate alignment, choosing a strategy that reflects the mission, the strengths of the solution, and the scale of the problem it aims to address.³ The rest of this report focuses on social innovators who are interested in scaling up through partnership with governments.

Six Skills for Scaling with Government

Scaling an innovation with the government requires more than persistence and vision; it requires a distinct set of skills. Early stages reward creativity, speed, and improvisation. Scaling, by contrast, demands discipline, collaboration, and systems thinking. Social innovators must therefore grow from “founders” into “stewards of systems.”²

Key skills for scaling include:



1. **Analytical capacity** – Critically assess whether the model is ready, which scaling pathway to pursue, and what trade-offs are acceptable. Evidence-based clarity avoids unrealistic expectations.



2. **Adaptive leadership** – Scaling often means ceding control to governments or partners. Leaders must practice humility, embrace stewardship, and safeguard values while others deliver.



3. **Systems thinking** – Success depends on navigating broader policies, incentives, and power structures. Systems thinking reframes the challenge from growing a program to embedding lasting change.



4. **Relational skills** – Building coalitions across government, funders, civil society, and communities is essential. Innovators must negotiate, convene, and co-create with empathy and trust.



5. **Organizational capability** – Scaling requires institutional maturity: professionalized operations, stronger governance, sustainable financing, and robust monitoring and learning systems.



6. **Strategic patience** – Government scaling takes time. Innovators must withstand shifting political cycles, bureaucratic delays, and turnover, maintaining persistence and a long-term outlook.

Why Governments Are Essential Partners in Scale

Scaling social innovations requires more than proof of concept. While innovators can demonstrate solutions at the community level, government engagement is what enables them to reach entire populations, sustain their impact, and strengthen public trust. Governments act as multipliers, embedding innovations into systems so that they become lasting features of social and economic life. Governments are indispensable partners in scale because of their reach, infrastructure, sustainability, legitimacy, and accountability.

- **Reach.** Social innovators often start small, piloting solutions in specific communities or regions. Yet, without a pathway to systemic adoption, even highly successful pilots risk remaining marginal. Government partnerships have the potential to turn effective programs into defaults for entire populations.⁵
- **Infrastructure.** Public systems have resources and networks that no single organization can replicate. By leveraging government infrastructure, innovators can scale sustainably and equitably.
- **Sustainability.** When innovations are embedded into public policy and budgets, they move beyond dependence on external funding cycles. This ensures long-term delivery and resilience, even amid political or economic shifts.
- **Legitimacy.** Governments confer recognition and authority that can enhance the credibility of social innovations. When communities see their government backing a model, it often increases trust, uptake, and compliance. This legitimacy is particularly important in sensitive areas such as health or education, where alignment with public institutions ensures broad acceptance and confidence.
- **Accountability.** Finally, government engagement strengthens transparency and oversight. By adopting innovations into formal systems, states introduce standards, monitoring, and mechanisms to ensure equity and quality of service.

Taken together, these dimensions demonstrate why scaling with government is essential.

Why Should Governments Scale with Social Innovators?

Governments face growing pressure to tackle complex social and economic challenges, yet traditional top-down approaches often lack vital agility. Social innovators act as society's research and development labs, testing solutions with communities, adapting quickly, and proving what works. When governments adopt and scale these models, they can deliver impact for entire populations.^{5,6}

Scaling with social innovators also brings efficiency. Many innovations uncover smarter, more cost-effective ways to provide services. A global study ⁷ by Ashoka and McKinsey estimated that scaling such approaches could yield billions in annual economic benefits.

Equally important, social innovations often emerge from co-creation with the very communities they are designed to serve. This process builds trust, ensures relevance, and increases uptake. When governments integrate these community-rooted solutions into their policies and programs, they strengthen both the legitimacy and effectiveness of public action.

Enabling Conditions to Scale with Governments

Scaling social innovations with governments does not happen automatically. It needs a set of enabling conditions that allow innovations to move from promising pilots to institutionalized solutions. Evidence from comparative studies of social innovation and public sector reform highlights five particularly important conditions:

- **Community need.** Many social innovations emerge where state services have failed or proved insufficient. By directly addressing these needs, innovators demonstrate relevance and urgency, making it easier for governments to recognize their value. Research into grassroots innovations shows that alignment with a pressing public problem is one of the strongest predictors of adoption.⁷
- **Supportive ecosystem.** Innovators rarely scale in isolation. Networks, incubators, accelerators, and recognition platforms provide essential infrastructure to test, refine, and showcase solutions. Studies of scaling pathways point to the importance of intermediaries that connect social entrepreneurs with policymakers, funders, and research institutions, providing a bridge into public systems.
- **Catalytic funding.** Donor and philanthropic capital play a distinctive role. As Ashoka⁷ (2015) emphasizes, donor support is most powerful when it is catalytic, helping innovations pilot, generate evidence, and de-risk approaches for government adoption. Donors provide the flexibility to test what governments cannot, and can finance manuals, training packages, monitoring frameworks, and independent evaluations that strengthen the evidence base for policy change.

“Crucially, donor funding should not be a substitute for government responsibility or create parallel systems, as this risks eroding state accountability and generating dependence. Instead, its role is to prepare innovations for eventual handover to public systems.”

- **Political will.** Even the most promising innovations require champions within government who are committed to policy change. Political will can unlock pathways to adoption, providing the mandate to integrate new approaches into official programs.
- **Institutional capacity.** Finally, scaling depends on whether governments have the organizational and financial capacity to absorb innovations. Stronger bureaucracies are better able to embed training, maintain fidelity checks, and ensure equitable access. Where institutions are weak, donor and ecosystem support must focus on strengthening systems alongside scaling innovations.⁸

Taken together, these conditions demonstrate that successful scaling is a shared responsibility. Donors, innovators, and governments must align their roles: innovators to develop and prove models; donors to provide catalytic support and independent evaluation; and governments to adopt, fund, and institutionalize solutions.

Illustrative Journeys of Scaling with Governments

The following five examples illustrate how social innovations have scaled with government support. Their journeys will serve as touchpoints throughout the report



BRAC's Oral Rehydration Therapy (Bangladesh)

In 1970s Bangladesh, BRAC and the Cholera Research Laboratory piloted oral rehydration therapy (ORT), teaching mothers to mix salt, sugar, and water to combat child dehydration. The Bangladeshi government quickly endorsed the approach, enabling mass campaigns. As evidence of its effectiveness grew, WHO and UNICEF codified ORT as global standard health practice. Today, ORT is part of virtually every national health system, credited with saving over 50 million lives. Its scaling journey — from NGO pilot to government adoption to international institutionalization — illustrates how simple, low-cost innovations can achieve global impact when public authorities and global agencies embed them into policy.



Childline India 1098 (India)

Launched in Mumbai in 1996 as a helpline for street children, Childline 1098 scaled nationally by embedding into India's Ministry of Women & Child Development. Over time, the government mandated 24/7 helpline coverage through Mission Vatsalya and integrated it into ERSS-112 emergency services. While the Childline India Foundation now focuses on training, standards, and monitoring, frontline delivery is fully government-run. This trajectory illustrates how an NGO-driven innovation can become a universal public service when political will, budgets, and systems align — transforming a local initiative into a national entitlement for the protection of children.

AFLATOUN

Social & Financial Education

Aflatoun International (India)

Aflatoun had its genesis as small savings clubs in India, teaching children financial literacy and life skills. Its breakthrough came through partnerships with ministries of education, which integrated the program into national curricula. By codifying five core elements while leaving space for governments to adapt content locally, Aflatoun enabled both fidelity and flexibility. Today, it operates in more than 100 countries, reaching tens of millions of learners through public school systems. Its success shows how clarity of mission combined with openness to contextualization can turn a civil society innovation into part of global education policy frameworks, with governments leading sustained delivery.



Housing First (Finland)

Launched through NGO pilot projects in Finland, Housing First introduced the radical principle that secure housing should be the starting point — not the end goal — of rehabilitation. The Finnish government embraced this radical shift, transforming shelters into permanent homes and embedding Housing First within national strategy. Anchored by legislation, long-term financing, and municipal delivery systems, it has made Finland the only EU country where homelessness has steadily declined. Scaling up required NGOs to transfer service delivery to the state while continuing to provide evidence and technical expertise, with government assuming the role of guarantor of rights. The model shows how advocacy, pilots, and political consensus can institutionalize transformation.



mothers2mothers (South Africa)

Founded in Cape Town in 2001, mothers2mothers employs HIV-positive women as peer mentors to prevent mother-to-child transmission. Initially NGO-run, the program partnered with national ministries of health to integrate mentor mothers into public clinic systems. Governments across sub-Saharan Africa adopted the model within their HIV/AIDS strategies, embedding services in public health infrastructure. Today, m2m has shifted toward training, monitoring, and advocacy, while states lead delivery. This partnership has reached over 15 million women and children. The model shows that placing lived experience at the center, alongside government partnership, can transform parallel services into institutionalized public health practice across countries.

Part 2

Collaborative Systems Change



Scaling with governments requires collaborative systems change.

The previous part established why scaling with governments is essential: only through public systems can proven innovations achieve the reach, sustainability, legitimacy, and accountability needed for lasting impact. Yet knowing why is only the first step. The next step is to understand how to engage governments in ways that foster genuine collaboration, preserve the integrity of social innovations, and ensure that scaling strengthens, rather than dilutes, their impact.

This part explores the mindset shift that is required to engage in collaborative change, the non-negotiable values for scaling with integrity and the five principles of operation (Convene, Connect, Co-create, Celebrate, Calibrate) as the workbench of collaboration.

Mindset Shift for Collaborative Scaling

Every social innovation begins with a spark, but sparks only become lasting change when innovators move from *“my project”* to *“our project.”* This shift is at the heart of collaborative systems change. Experience from various contexts points to several lessons.

1. Innovators must recognize that they are one among billions, others are often developing similar solutions, and the task is to connect and learn rather than to claim ownership.
2. Listening must outweigh speaking, particularly to those most affected by challenges and to public servants entrusted with stewardship.
3. Respect is the foundation; without it, trust cannot take root, and without trust, scale remains out of reach.
4. Diversity of perspectives, from policymakers to frontline staff, from funders to

communities, enriches solutions by exposing different facets of the same problem.

5. Above all, ego must be set aside. Scaling's focus is the idea and the people who benefit, not the profile of the social enterprise or founder. People and the planet must remain at the center of every trade-off and design decision.

Adopting this mindset also requires a deliberate shift in leadership and governance. Scaling demands that founders “let go” so that networks and government systems can adapt and deliver at scale. Research shows that distributed leadership and strong collaborations enable systemic impact.⁹

Internally, scaling requires leaders to evolve their role from direct delivery to strategy, fundraising, and relationship-building. This involves empowering new team members, strengthening governance, and cultivating organizational cultures capable of navigating greater complexity.³ Effective delegation is a decisive factor in enabling ventures to move into high-growth phases.⁹ In practice, this means recognizing that innovations will not be replicated exactly as designed in pilot form.

“Practitioners often apply an “80–20 principle”: if 80% of delivery meets core quality standards, then some divergence can be acceptable to enable adoption across diverse contexts.. Safeguarding outcomes, not rigid processes, should be the priority”.

- Jeroo Billimoria, Founder and Board Member, One Family Foundation

Scaling with Governments Requires Patience

Partnership with the government is rarely a rapid process. Public institutions often move slowly through the stages of consultation, compliance, and coordination across multiple agencies. Political priorities can shift with elections or leadership changes, altering timelines and focus. Bureaucracy, competing demands, and uneven quality are part of the journey.¹⁰

For social innovators and donors, this means that patience and persistence matter as much as passion. Adaptability and collaboration are essential, as is keeping sight of the ultimate goal: extending meaningful impact to many more lives. Scaling through government takes time, but the durability and legitimacy it provides make the effort worthwhile

Non-Negotiable Values for Scaling with Integrity

Before a model is scaled, before a law is written, before a budget line is secured, there must be something deeper holding it all together: values. Values are not soft words on paper; they are the bedrock of trust. They are what make collaboration real, what enable innovators and governments to work as partners rather than competitors, and what ensure that as we scale, we do so with integrity.

Scaling without values risks becoming a purely technical exercise, efficient perhaps, but brittle and soulless. Scaling with values becomes a movement rooted in dignity, legitimacy, and shared purpose. Three sets of non-negotiable values must underpin every effort to scale with governments:



Equity and Inclusion. Scale means little if it leaves people behind. True systems change prioritizes those most excluded, whether by gender, geography, disability, or circumstance, and embraces diversity as a strength. Equity ensures universality is not only about reach, but also about fairness.



Humility and Stewardship. Innovators must be willing to let go of control, shifting from “my project” to “our shared public good.” Stewardship is about protecting the essence of an idea while enabling others, especially governments, to carry it further. Humility replaces competition with collaboration and prioritizes legacy over ownership.



Respect, Trust, and Transparency. Respecting the knowledge of communities, valuing the expertise of frontline workers, and trusting public servants as allies create the relational glue for collaboration. Transparency, through open sharing of data, intentions, and risks, turns respect into action and builds the trust on which scaling depends.

Alongside these universal principles, organizations should articulate their own personalized values that align closely with their mission and identity. For some, this may mean emphasizing environmental stewardship, for others youth empowerment, gender equity, or community self-determination. Naming and embedding such values provides a compass for navigating difficult trade-offs during scaling. As models are adapted within government systems, these values ensure that the innovation retains its integrity and continues to reflect the vision and commitments of those who created it.

The Five Principles of Collaborative Systems Change

Collaborative systems change is not a slogan. It is a practice, a shift in mindset. It is not powered by single heroes or brilliant strategies, but by relationships. At its core, collaboration is not a method but a recognition that no actor, no matter how visionary or well-resourced, can shift systems alone. Governments, civil society, communities, funders, and businesses each hold part of the solution. What turns those pieces into a coherent picture is not control, but connection, trust, and shared purpose.

Systems change does not begin with strategy documents or frameworks, but with the act of sitting with people and listening to their stories. Communities and frontline workers carry lived knowledge of what is broken and what works. When innovators, governments, and donors listen, genuinely and without agenda, they begin to see the world through the eyes of those most affected. This is where legitimacy starts.

Listening is not only about collecting insights; it is relational. It communicates: "Your voice matters. Your perspective is respected. We will build this together." In that exchange, trust is born. And trust is the currency of systems change. Policies and budgets may scale programs, but only trust and mutual respect allow them to take root, to be owned, and to endure. Listening builds relationships, and relationships build systems. Without it, even the best-designed programs unravel. With it, even the most ambitious dreams can take flight.



Childline 1098

Childline did not start as a policy; it started as a voice on the street. A child called; a volunteer listened. That act of listening shaped the helpline's scripts, protocols and partnerships. Years later, because the model kept people at the center and built trust with the state, India integrated the child helpline into Mission Vatsalya and the national emergency architecture (ERSS-112), moving operations to state systems while civil society focused on training, quality and adaptation. The government's own notices make the logic explicit: core services must be state-run, with the helpline integrated into the emergency number 112 for universal access and accountability.^{11, 12, 13} During COVID-19, the value of listening showed again: Childline 1098 rapidly adapted operations, coordinated with district administrations, and fielded surges of calls on violence, migration and distress, documented in UNICEF briefs and Childline reports. The collaborative habits formed pre-crisis made rapid recalibration possible.^{14, 15, 16}

Case Study:

The five principles of collaborative systems change, Convene, Connect, Co-create, Celebrate, and Calibrate, are not sequential steps. They are interwoven threads, strengthening one another and building the trust that systems change requires. They remind us that transformation is as much about how we work together as it is about what we design.



Convene: creating safe, inclusive spaces Change begins when people who do not usually meet come into the same room. Convening is about creating neutral, inclusive spaces where ministries, communities, innovators, funders, and businesses can sit as equals. Done with humility, convening helps soften power imbalances and turn adversarial dynamics into shared ownership. It signals “We are in this together”. Convening is not a one-off event but the starting point of trust and a foundation for collaboration.



Connect: building bridges across silos Once people have convened, the next task is to connect them in meaningful ways. Connection breaks down silos, enabling flows of knowledge and resources across sectors, geographies, and levels of power. It is about linking local practice to national policy, pairing community leaders with decision-makers, and weaving networks where ideas and standards can spread faster than any one actor could achieve alone. Strong connections create a web of relationships that sustain collaboration over time.



Co-create: designing solutions together True systems change cannot be imposed; it must be co-created. Co-creation means designing with — not for — communities and stakeholders. It requires acknowledging that policymakers, frontline workers, innovators, and funders each bring a different piece of the solution. Co-creation shifts the emphasis from ownership to stewardship, from ego to ecosystem. The outcomes are solutions that carry legitimacy, resilience, and greater potential for adoption at scale.



Celebrate: sustaining coalitions through recognition Scaling is hard work, and coalitions risk fracturing without moments of recognition. Celebration honors progress, however incremental, and keeps relationships alive. It highlights the contributions of partners, shines a light on frontline successes, and fosters a culture of gratitude. By celebrating together, we move from competition toward collective achievement, shifting mental models and reinforcing coalitions for the long journey of systems change.



Calibrate: learning, adapting, institutionalizing Systems change is never a straight line. Calibration is the discipline of learning, adapting, and institutionalizing improvements over time. It involves looking honestly at evidence, listening to feedback, and asking: “What is working? What must we change together?” Calibration ensures that policies and practices evolve to remain effective, embedding resilience into public systems. It deepens trust by showing that all voices matter and that collective insight shapes the path forward.

Together, these five principles form the **workbench of collaboration**. They are not just techniques but habits of practice that enable governments, innovators, and communities to work side by side in scaling solutions with integrity and impact.

Healing Systems: When Collaboration Repairs What History Broke

Some systems are not just inefficient, they are wounded. Legacies of exploitation, segregation, authoritarianism, and violence leave behind fractured trust that technical reforms alone cannot mend. In such contexts, collaboration must do more than deliver services; it must help repair relationships and restore legitimacy. Healing-centered practices, whether through community engagement, transitional justice, or inclusive service delivery, make systems change possible where ordinary reform has repeatedly failed.

Healing is not a detour from scale; it is often the precondition for it. By rooting collaboration in dignity, identity, and justice, governments and social innovators can transform programs into acts of repair. When wounds are acknowledged and communities feel seen, scaled solutions can truly take root, carrying not just efficiency but also reconciliation and renewal.

Part 3

Pathways to Scale: From Local Sparks to Global Frameworks



Scaling with governments is not a single road upward but a choice between pathways; local, national, regional, and global.

The previous part explored *the mindset and values* needed for collaboration, how integrity, humility, and shared principles enable innovators, governments, and funders to work together with trust.

Building on this foundation, the next step is to consider the *pathways* through which scaling with governments actually happens. Scaling social innovations is a weaving of multiple upward pathways. Each level of governance, local, national, regional, and global, offers distinct opportunities and challenges. Choosing the right pathway depends on the stage of the innovation, the nature of the problem, and the political and institutional context.

Across all four levels, **local, national, regional, and global**, two main routes are available:

- **Route A:** Plugging into an existing scheme or structure
- **Route B:** Creating or shifting a new policy, law, or standard

Each route carries distinct advantages, drawbacks, and strategic considerations. The following sections explore how these play out at different levels of governance.

Government is not a single structure

Governments are made up of both transient political leaders and enduring administrative institutions. Political champions — ministers, elected officials — can propel an innovation forward when windows of opportunity open.¹⁷ Yet political winds shift with election cycles, while civil services and implementing agencies persist.

For innovators, success means working on both fronts: securing high-level champions for momentum while embedding solutions within bureaucratic structures that outlast individual leaders. Different ministries and agencies may respond differently, so building coalitions across silos is essential. Anchored in both politics and administration, innovations are more resilient when leadership changes.¹⁸



Local Pathways: Cities and Districts as Living Laboratories

Local governments are where citizens experience governance most directly. Cities and districts often serve as nimble “living laboratories” that can test new ideas and adapt them to community contexts. For social innovators, local scaling provides a crucial proof of concept, generating evidence, legitimacy, and trust within communities.⁶ Local pilots often provide the data and buy-in that later persuade higher levels of government to adopt innovations.

- **Route A:** Plugging into local structures. Innovations integrate into existing municipal services — such as clinics, schools, or councils — lending stability and resources.
- **Route B:** Creating new local policies or standards. When an idea does not fit existing schemes, innovators may persuade authorities to adopt new bylaws or norms, often driven by community demand.

Advantages. Local scaling allows for flexibility and close proximity to communities. Local authorities face fewer bureaucratic hurdles than national governments, making them quicker to test and iterate. Implementation can be tailored to cultural and social needs, strengthening trust and engagement. Successful local pilots can act as “positive deviants”, demonstrations of what is possible, that inspire others and lend credibility to innovators.

Drawbacks. By nature, local initiatives have limited reach. A pilot may serve thousands when millions are in need. Local adoption is also vulnerable to political turnover: a change in mayor or council priorities can end programs overnight. Many innovators risk the “pilot trap” — running successful local pilots without a pathway to system-wide adoption.¹⁹

When to choose. The local pathway is most effective in early stages when innovations are untested or highly context-specific. It is particularly suited to people-centered interventions such as community services, youth programs, and grassroots cooperatives where legitimacy, trust, and adaptation are critical. Local scaling should be seen as a stepping stone that generates the evidence and stories needed to unlock broader adoption.

Case Study:

myAgro (West Africa)

myAgro, a social enterprise helping smallholder farmers save for inputs through mobile layaway, anchors its work in local government structures. Before entering a new region, the team seeks permission from village chiefs, mayors, and regional officials, framing them as partners in the solution. Demonstration days are often hosted at mayor's offices, signaling government ownership.

By aligning with local priorities and building trust at the municipal level, myAgro gained legitimacy and community buy-in without rushing to national agreements. This local-first approach has provided the political and social foundation for broader expansion, showing how respectful engagement with local authorities can pave the way to scale.

National Pathways: From Pilots to Policy

If local pilots spark innovation, national adoption is the bonfire that sustains it. Embedding innovations into national programs or laws provides scale, legitimacy, and continuity.²⁰ By integrating into public budgets and systems, innovations can reach millions and endure across generations. However, achieving national adoption is politically and administratively complex, requiring navigation of power, policy, and bureaucracy.

- **Route A: Integrating into existing national schemes.** Pilots align with ongoing government programs in health, education, or social welfare, and are expanded within them.
- **Route B: Creating new national policy or law.** When no program exists to host an innovation, innovators may advocate for new legislation, budget lines, or policy frameworks.

Advantages. National scaling allows for population-level reach and institutional embedding. Integrating into existing schemes enables governments to expand innovations quickly by leveraging existing budgets and delivery channels. Creating new national policies or laws provides structural transformation, allocating dedicated resources and reshaping systems. Once institutionalized, innovations are far more likely to survive leadership transitions and funding cycles.²⁷

Drawbacks. National adoption is politically sensitive. Innovators may face compromises when aligning with existing schemes, which risks diluting the model's integrity. Creating new laws or policies often requires long advocacy, political champions, and strong evidence. Political turnover and bureaucratic inertia can stall or reverse progress.

When to choose. Integrating into an existing scheme (Route A) works best when pilots are evidence-rich and align with government priorities. This route is pragmatic, lower risk, and often quicker. Creating new policy or legislation (Route B) is warranted when an innovation requires changing "the rules of the game" or addressing structural gaps. Though slower and riskier, it can lead to transformative change. Seizing windows of opportunity, such as leadership changes, crises, or public demand, is crucial for Route B success.

Case Study:

Brazil's National School Feeding Programme (PNAE)

Brazil's National School Feeding Programme (PNAE) is a powerful example of scaling a local innovation to the national level. For decades, municipalities had experimented with school meal schemes to improve children's nutrition and educational outcomes. Instead of creating a brand-new model, the federal government recognized the success of these local efforts and chose to unify and scale them.

Launched nationally, PNAE made meals mandatory for all public school children and provided federal financing to municipalities for delivery. Today, the program reaches over 40 million students, one of the largest school feeding initiatives in the world. By building on existing practices rather than replacing them, Brazil ensured both legitimacy and continuity. This model demonstrates how governments can transform scattered local pilots into a universal entitlement, embedding innovation into law, policy, and budget for sustained impact.

Regional Pathways: Scaling Beyond Borders

Many challenges, including migration, pandemics, or environmental shocks transcend national borders. Regional institutions such as the African Union, ASEAN, or European Union can amplify innovations, providing platforms for cooperation, pooled resources, and shared norms. Regional scaling lends legitimacy, especially in fragile states where governments may act more confidently if reforms are regionally endorsed.²¹

- **Route A: Using existing regional schemes or funds.** Innovations plug into established frameworks or funding programs.
- **Route B: Creating new regional policies or standards.** Regional bodies establish new agreements, frameworks, or common norms.

Advantages. Regional frameworks mobilize pooled funding and economies of scale. They enable peer learning, as countries exchange knowledge and adopt successful practices from neighbors. Regional endorsement can also legitimize action, creating a sense of collective responsibility (“everyone in our region is doing this”). Regional pathways can speed diffusion and create common standards across borders.

Drawbacks. Regional agreements are often slow, requiring consensus across many stakeholders. The lowest common denominator may dilute ambition. Added bureaucracy can create compliance burdens, and weak enforcement risks commitments not being followed through. Regional mandates can also feel externally imposed, leading to weak local ownership and shallow implementation.

When to choose. Regional scaling is effective when issues are inherently cross-border, when countries face common challenges, or when regional endorsement can unlock funding and legitimacy. It works best when paired with strong national and local roots to ensure genuine ownership.

Case Study:

European Competence Center for Social Innovation

The European Competence Centre for Social Innovation, anchored in the ESF+ Social Innovation+ initiative, aims to scale tested national social innovations across Europe. Rather than inventing new programs, it supports transnational calls, mutual learning, capacity building, and networking among EU member states and national competence centres.

Its scale lies not in executing programs directly, but in orchestrating diffusion and capacity across borders. Through its role, national innovations gain visibility, cross-country learning, and a pathway to influence EU policy and funding structures.

Global Pathways: From Practices to International Norms

Global pathways embed innovations into international norms, standards, or campaigns. They elevate solutions onto the global stage, mobilizing resources, visibility, and pressure for adoption worldwide. Global endorsement can also reinforce local and national scaling by tying innovations to international commitments.²²

- **Route A: Embedding in existing global platforms.** Innovations attach to ongoing UN, OECD, or multilateral initiatives.
- **Route B: Establishing new global norms or targets.** New international standards or agreements enshrine innovations within global agendas

Advantages. Global scaling can mobilize significant funding, attract widespread attention, and foster knowledge exchange across diverse contexts. International frameworks (such as the SDGs) provide legitimacy and protect innovations from reversal, as governments may be more reluctant to abandon programs linked to global commitments. Global campaigns can also unite disparate actors like governments, civil society and business, around common goals.

Drawbacks. Global agreements risk being more rhetorical than substantive. Standardization can overlook local realities, while negotiations are slow and consensus language often diluted. Global campaigns are resource-intensive and do not guarantee domestic implementation. Ultimately, national capacity and politics will determine success.

When to choose. Global pathways are appropriate when innovations have proven successful across multiple contexts and when international endorsement adds value, by mobilizing global funding, creating standards, or raising political visibility. They work best when rooted in strong local and national examples that can be showcased globally.

Case Study:

Global Money Week

Global Money Week began as a grassroots campaign led by Child & Youth Finance International (CYFI) to promote financial literacy among children and young people. By mobilizing schools, NGOs, and policymakers, the campaign created a global moment each year to spotlight the importance of equipping the next generation with financial skills. Its playful yet impactful model gained rapid traction across borders, engaging millions of young people.

Recognizing its growing influence, the OECD formally adopted Global Money Week and institutionalized it as a recurring global event. Today, more than 170 countries participate annually, with governments aligning national activities and policies around it. This has elevated financial literacy from a campaign issue to a recognized public policy priority, providing a powerful example of how social innovation initiatives can scale through government adoption and multilateral stewardship.

The Art of Choosing the Right Pathway

Scaling is not about making a project bigger in isolation, it is about making impact “sticky” by embedding it into larger systems. The right pathway depends on the **stage of maturity** of the innovation (early pilot or proven model), the **political windows of opportunity** available (whether alignment with an existing scheme is possible or policy reform is on the agenda), the **nature of the issue** (community-based, nationally mandated, or cross-border), and the **strength of evidence** and resources (from cost-effectiveness data to trusted champions).

A new community idea may need to prove itself locally before policymakers take notice. A proven model might plug into a national program if timing aligns with a new government plan. A cross-border challenge may require a regional framework because no single country can act alone. Mature solutions with broad evidence may benefit from global endorsement, both to accelerate adoption and to protect reforms through international commitments.



Part 4

Models of Collaboration: Who Does What at Scale

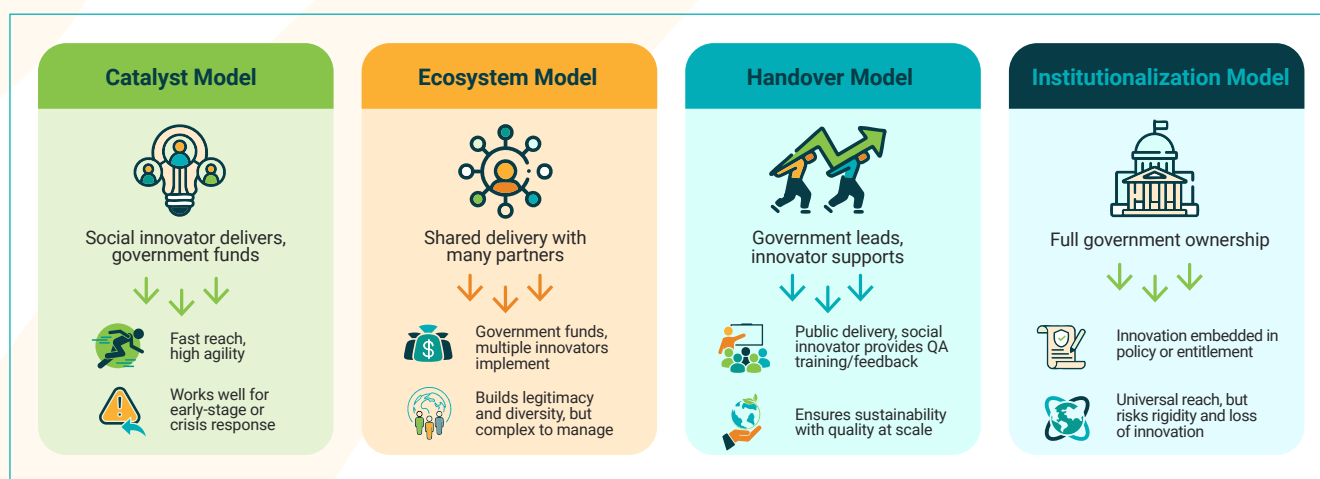


Scaling with governments works when roles are clear. Four models explain how funding, delivery, and accountability are shared as innovations enter public systems.

By this point, the report has established why governments are essential anchors of scale, how collaborative systems change requires a mindset shift, aligning values and principles to work with integrity, and which pathways — local, national, regional, global — innovations can take (Part 3). The question of this Part is who does what when scaling with governments: Who funds? Who delivers? Who safeguards quality? Who is accountable?

It's important to note that while many social innovators choose to partner with government to achieve widespread impact, others deliberately separate themselves and play a watchdog or advocacy role to hold institutions accountable.²³ Both roles are legitimate.

What follows are four collaboration models. They are stages on a journey, not rigid categories, and many innovations evolve through several models over time.



Steps to Effective Engagement with Government

Scaling with government requires clarity, preparation, and respect for the realities of public systems. The following steps can help social innovators engage effectively:

- **Do your homework** — map existing schemes, budget cycles, KPIs, and the political context before approaching decision-makers.
- **Engage at multiple levels** — build alliances with mid-level champions, senior officials, ministers, and community stakeholders simultaneously.
- **Speak with clarity** — avoid jargon; focus on what the innovation changes “on Monday morning” in practice.
- **Offer brevity** — use concise formats (two-page memos) rather than overwhelming slide decks.
- **Frame for integration** — anticipate how the innovation will fit into workforce structures, management information systems (MIS), and procurement processes.
- **Show scalability** — provide a clear roadmap (e.g., a 10-step plan) that demonstrates how the model can expand sustainably.

Effective engagement is not about persuasion alone—it is about helping governments see how an innovation strengthens their mandate, systems, and impact.

Model 1:

Social Innovator Delivers, Government Funds (Catalyst Model)

In this model the government provides the funding through grants, subsidies, service contracts or tenders, while the social innovator delivers services directly. The public sector effectively outsources implementation to the social innovator while footing the bill, using the proven model to reach people quickly.

When it works. This model is often effective in crisis situations or fragile contexts where governments lack the capacity for a rapid response. In emergencies or humanitarian crises, for example, governments may finance social innovators to deliver aid. Model 1 is also common in the early stages of scaling an innovation. A government might use this approach to pilot or test a promising social innovator-led model at a larger scale before deciding to institutionalize it.

Advantages. The primary advantage of this model is speed and agility in reaching target populations. Because the NGO is running the program, it can typically move faster and adapt more freely than government bureaucracy might allow. The NGO can bring innovation and risk-taking to the table that governments might shy away from. Indeed, NGOs are often nimble and can try things that governments cannot easily do, whether due to political constraints or capacity limits.²³

With government financing, the NGO-led program can rapidly scale its reach and demonstrate proof of concept at a larger level. This creates a real-time “learning lab” as the model essentially buys time and evidence: the NGO has room to innovate and deliver services, and if successful, the government gains confidence in the model’s impact without having directly implemented it.

Risks. Despite its short-term advantages, this model carries significant risks and limitations. It can be fragile and unsustainable if not intentionally transitioned. The scaled program

becomes heavily dependent on the NGO’s capacity and continued presence and risks a collapse of services if the NGO faces funding or staffing issues. Moreover, this arrangement may create parallel systems that bypass or duplicate government services, rather than strengthening the public system. Over-reliance on NGOs can also lead governments to neglect building their own capacity.

Case Study:

California: GetCalFresh

The California Department of Social Services partnered with Code for America to address barriers to accessing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, known in California as CalFresh). Historically, enrollment was burdensome, with long forms, multiple office visits, and high dropout rates. Code for America, a nonprofit civic tech organization, developed GetCalFresh, a user-friendly digital application and support platform designed around the needs of residents.

Recognizing its effectiveness, the state government contracted Code for America to deliver and scale the solution across California. The program has dramatically reduced application times, increased completion rates, and made food assistance more accessible to millions of low-income Californians. This collaboration shows how governments can outsource delivery to social innovators, scaling solutions quickly while improving efficiency and equity in public services.

Model 2:

Shared Delivery (Ecosystem Model)

In Model 2, the government provides the financing, but instead of implementation by a single NGO, multiple NGOs or civil society partners deliver services under a shared governance structure. This model can be thought of as co-governance or a consortium approach. The government might set up a framework or program in which many NGOs participate, often with a formal mechanism for coordination and quality control. Crucially, the government and NGOs co-create the innovation and its scaling strategy in this model – they work together from design through delivery.

Unlike Model 1 (a bilateral partnership), Model 2 is multilateral: a network or ecosystem of NGOs is involved, usually to cover different regions or aspects of the program. The government's role is to finance and often to convene and oversee, while NGOs bring local knowledge and execution. They usually operate under common standards or agreements, and a governance board or coordination unit (with representatives from government and NGO sector) guides the overall effort.

When it works. This collaborative model works best in contexts where there is a strong civil society and a culture of trust between government and NGOs. Pluralistic democracies with vibrant NGO sectors often adopt this approach, especially if the problem is too large or diverse for any single entity to tackle. It is effective when the innovation needs to be tailored to different communities. Multiple NGOs can customize the implementation while the government ensures overall cohesion.

It also works when innovation and service delivery need to be co-owned by the community. By having many NGOs (often community-based organizations) as partners, the program can achieve broad reach and grassroots buy-in. The precondition for success is sufficient trust and coordination capacity. The government must be willing to share power and information, and NGOs must be willing to align with a common

framework. When those conditions exist, Model 2 can harness the strengths of both sectors on a large scale.

Advantages. Model 2 leverages ecosystem strength. By funding many NGOs, the government can activate a whole network of providers, each with their specific expertise, community relationships, and innovative ideas. This often leads to greater local adaptation and cultural relevance of services. Each NGO can tailor the implementation to its community's needs, which might be a challenge for a central government.

A shared governance structure (e.g., multi-stakeholder steering committees or periodic coordination meetings) keeps everyone aligned on goals. This model can achieve large reach relatively quickly, scaling out via existing civil society infrastructure. It also distributes ownership among stakeholders, which can enhance legitimacy: people see NGOs and government working together, and thus may trust the initiative more. Put simply, Model 2 is powerful in contexts where “it takes a village” to scale an innovation – multiple players aligning toward a common mission, under government leadership but not monopoly.

Risks. Model 2's strength can also be its greatest challenge. Managing a large, diverse network requires strong coordination, otherwise the system risks fragmentation and uneven service quality. Without robust quality assurance, some communities may receive excellent services while others are left behind. Politicization is another concern: NGO selection and funding can be biased or spread too thin, undermining fairness and effectiveness.

For NGOs, heavy reporting demands and bureaucracy can reduce agility, turning partners into contractors rather than collaborators. Tokenistic governance, where NGOs are “included” but lack real influence, erodes trust, while unclear roles may lead to duplication in some areas and service gaps in others.

Ontario: Hamilton-Niagara Employment Services

As part of its employment services reform, the Government of Ontario shifted from a fragmented system to a consortium-based delivery model. In the Hamilton-Niagara region, the province selected Fedcap Inc. to serve as the system manager, coordinating a network of local nonprofits and social enterprises. This approach leveraged the specialized strengths of multiple organizations to provide tailored employment supports, ranging from job-readiness training to wraparound services for vulnerable groups.

Through this model, government funding flows to the consortium, with NGOs carrying specific delivery responsibilities under a unified management framework. The structure allows for risk-sharing, reduced duplication, and local adaptability, while ensuring accountability through provincial oversight. By enabling a coordinated coalition of service providers, Ontario has been able to scale more responsive and efficient employment services, demonstrating the value of consortium approaches in public-sector partnerships.

Model 3

Government leads, Social Innovator supports (Handover Model)

In Model 3, the balance of roles shifts significantly toward the government. Here, the government takes over direct delivery of the program (or integrates the innovation into existing public services), and NGOs step into supporting roles such as quality assurance, training, technical assistance, and community engagement. In other words, the innovation becomes largely state-led in implementation, but NGOs are not completely out of the picture – they are retained as partners to bolster the program's quality and responsiveness.

Common functions for NGOs in this model include: providing training to government staff based on

their specialized expertise, developing manuals or curricula, monitoring and evaluating the program independently, ensuring community feedback is heard, and helping adapt the innovation to different local contexts through technical advice. The NGOs no longer deliver the core service day-to-day; that responsibility has been assumed by government agencies or departments. But the NGOs act as a critical friend – supporting and sometimes gently auditing the government's work to ensure the innovation does not lose its effectiveness or equity focus as it scales nationally.

When it works. Model 3 arises when an innovation is proven and requires national adoption as a public entitlement. At this stage, the government leads delivery for scale and legitimacy, while NGOs shift into support roles, providing training, technical assistance, monitoring, and community feedback. Success depends on a collaborative partnership: government provides stewardship while valuing NGO expertise, and NGOs contribute knowledge while respecting the state's mandate. This model is effective when governments have reach but need capacity building, and when ongoing innovation and adaptation are required. It represents the handover phase, embedding the program in public systems while NGOs safeguard fidelity and quality through continuous support.

Advantages. The core strength of Model 3 lies in sustainability and public ownership. With government leading delivery, programs are anchored in public budgets and policy, ensuring durability and nationwide reach. Unlike Model 4, NGOs remain actively involved, safeguarding quality and fostering continued innovation. They train government

staff, monitor fidelity, and provide feedback, preventing the stagnation often associated with large bureaucracies. This partnership reflects stewardship rather than ownership: the idea becomes public, while NGOs guide its evolution. Communities benefit from universal access backed by government legitimacy, coupled with NGO-driven responsiveness and care. The arrangement allows each actor to play to their strengths. Together, they merge efficiency with values, embedding an innovation as a public good while maintaining adaptability and equity.

Risks A challenge for NGOs shifting from direct delivery to a supportive role often means loss of visibility, funding, and even identity. Many struggle with becoming advisers rather than doers. Governments, in turn, may under-resource quality assurance, marginalize NGO input, or slow innovation through bureaucracy, risking program stagnation. Friction can emerge if NGO advice is ignored or if staff resent external oversight, while blurred roles may cause NGOs to keep "doing" where they should only advise. Conversely, governments may over-rely on NGOs for training or monitoring rather than institutionalizing these functions.

Case Study:

Glasswing International – Embedding Mental Health in Public Systems

Glasswing International partners with governments across Latin America to strengthen public institutions by embedding trauma-informed care and community resilience into their services. Through initiatives like SanaMente, Glasswing has worked with Ministries of Health, Education, and law enforcement agencies in countries such as El Salvador and Honduras to equip frontline staff with tools for addressing violence, trauma, and mental health needs. While Glasswing initially designs and implements the interventions, its focus is on building capacity within existing government systems rather than running programs in parallel.

Over time, government partners adopt these practices and begin to integrate them into their own policies, training protocols, and service delivery. For example, ministries have institutionalized Glasswing's training modules and practices into national curricula for teachers and police officers. Glasswing's role then shifts from direct delivery toward technical assistance, coaching, and monitoring, ensuring sustainability while freeing the organization to expand into new thematic areas or geographies. This handover model illustrates how social innovators can seed systemic change by strengthening state institutions to carry forward effective approaches.

Model 4:

Full Public Ownership (Institutionalization Model)

In Model 4, the government moves beyond just leading – it has fully institutionalized and taken over all aspects of the innovation. The government finances the program entirely (through its budget or mandatory funding mechanisms), delivers services directly through its departments or staff, and monitors and regulates the program on its own. The original innovator NGO may exit or reposition itself in an external advocacy/watchdog capacity. At this stage, the idea has become a public sector program or policy, and any NGO involvement is now from the outside looking in. This model often corresponds to an innovation becoming a legal entitlement or standard practice nationwide, such that it is no longer seen as an “NGO program” at all. The government may still consult experts or NGOs occasionally, but the day-to-day work belongs to public institutions. NGOs that stay involved typically do so as independent monitors, accountability agents, or advocates for further improvement – ensuring the government “walks the talk”. Some NGOs may pivot to focus on complementary innovations or underserved niches left out of the government program. But in terms of the scaled innovation itself, the government is the full owner.

When it works. Model 4 is appropriate and desirable for core entitlements and services that every citizen should have access to, such as education, healthcare, or social services. Once enshrined in law or policy, programs gain durability and universal reach, sustained through public budgets and civil service systems. This model requires sufficient state capacity, political will, and broad consensus to survive leadership changes. NGOs and donors may actively facilitate the transition, eventually stepping back. Accountability then relies on watchdog institutions such as media, civil society and auditors, thus ensuring equity and quality as the innovation becomes a permanent public good.

project into part of the social contract, financed through public budgets and accessible nationwide. This brings clarity of responsibility, as citizens can demand accountability directly from the government. Embedding innovations in policy also enables stronger equity, ensuring inclusion criteria and resources are mandated rather than optional. Public ownership often improves cost-efficiency through economies of scale and reduces duplication by consolidating delivery under one system. For NGOs, stepping back facilitates further innovation or advocacy, while the original idea continues as a durable public good. Model 4 thus represents lasting institutionalization and is a true legacy of scale.

Model 4 is the endgame for many social innovations: the point where the innovation “graduates” into the government system fully, ideally ensuring universal reach and long-term durability.

Advantages. The greatest strength of Model 4, full government ownership, is legitimacy, universality, and scale. Once an innovation becomes law or policy, it transforms from a

Risks. The main risk of Model 4 is loss of innovation, flexibility, and accountability. Once fully government-owned, programs can become rigid, overly bureaucratic, or drift from their original spirit. Without NGO partners, blind spots in equity may emerge, excluding marginalized groups or reducing community participation. Political shifts or budget cuts can undermine continuity, while transparency may decline if governments do not welcome external audits or civil society monitoring. Red flags include the absence of independent evaluation, dismantling feedback mechanisms, or politicization of benefits. NGO staff may also struggle with the transition, losing identity or purpose. While Model 4 ensures scale and legitimacy, it requires safeguards including watchdog voices, independent oversight, and accountability, to maintain quality, inclusion, and trust.

Case Study:

Partners In Health – Designing for Exit Through Government Ownership

Partners In Health (PIH) has long worked hand-in-hand with governments to provide health services and strengthen public systems. From the outset, PIH designs programs not only to meet urgent needs but also to embed within government structures, training public staff, aligning with national protocols, and investing in infrastructure that remains under state control. This deliberate design for handover ensures that services are not dependent on PIH indefinitely.

In Lesotho, PIH initially delivered HIV care in partnership with the Ministry of Health. As capacity grew and thousands of patients were enrolled in treatment, the government assumed full responsibility for the program. PIH then pivoted to new priorities such as tuberculosis and maternal health. Similarly, in Rwanda, PIH's early focus on primary care transitioned into government hands, allowing PIH to concentrate on emerging challenges like non-communicable diseases and cancer. While PIH often maintains a presence as an advisor or technical partner, its model is fundamentally oriented toward institutionalization: ensuring that life-saving services become fully government-financed, delivered, and sustained.

Beyond Model 4:

Diffusion Beyond Government Institutionalization

While the first four models describe structured ways that social innovators and governments collaborate, diffusion represents what can happen after Model 4 succeeds. When an innovation has been fully institutionalized in one country it may begin to spread far beyond its original borders. Other governments, civil society organizations, or professional networks notice the success, adapt the approach, and make it their own. The original innovator may step back entirely, change focus, or even dissolve, yet the idea continues to diffuse globally.

This diffusion is not a formal model of collaboration, but rather the **afterlife of a successful Model 4**: the idea outlives the organization and becomes a shared public good.

Mechanisms include replication, policy transfer, training-of-trainers, open-source toolkits, or adoption into international guidelines. Over time, the innovation no longer “belongs” to one actor — it becomes common practice or even a global norm.

The opportunity is vast: diffusion can achieve impact on a scale that no single government or organization could reach alone, resulting in a durable legacy of public value. The risk, however, is that without custodianship, quality may erode, equity may falter, and opportunistic actors may distort the idea. Communities of practice and watchdogs therefore remain important to keep diffusion aligned with the innovation's original purpose.

Conclusion

Scaling with governments is not simply a strategy; it is a commitment to transforming innovation into shared public good. Around the world, countless pilots have shown what is possible. The task ahead is ensuring that these sparks do not fade, but instead take root in institutions capable of carrying them to every community.

The journey demands patience, humility, and persistence. It requires innovators to let go of ownership and embrace stewardship, governments to open space for collaboration, and funders to invest not just in projects but in systems. It means shifting from celebrating isolated successes to building movements that embed respect, trust, equity, and accountability into the very fabric of governance. This is the work of collaborative systems change. It is rarely linear and never easy, but it is the best way to ensure that innovations last beyond political cycles, leadership changes, or organizational lifespans. When governments and social innovators act together, they can create solutions that are not only effective but legitimate, inclusive, and enduring.

The challenge now is not whether scaling with governments is possible, it is whether leaders across sectors are ready to choose it. The invitation of this report is clear: to move beyond islands of success, to embrace collaboration as strategy, and to anchor innovations where they can achieve their highest purpose: in the lives of the many, not the few.



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