

HOW DOES STiR WORK WITH GOVERNMENTS TO SCALE AND SUSTAIN?

SUMMARY

Scaling and sustainability are core to our organisational strategy. It is key that we identify ways in which our work can be successfully embedded into the systems in which we work. This document summarises how we work with governments in order to achieve this. It defines how we understand both scaling and sustainability, and how we have drawn both on our own experience and the wider evidence base to reach these understandings. It then traces how our approach to working with government has evolved over time, before outlining the key features of our current approach

WHAT DO WE UNDERSTAND BY SCALING AND SUSTAINABILITY?

SCALING

At STiR, we have traditionally defined 'scaling' in terms of reach, primarily in terms of the number of children taught by teachers in our programmes, but also in terms of number of teachers, officials, districts, government partnerships etc. This is what [the literature](#) refers to as 'scaling out'. However, over time we have recognised that merely increasing our reach is not sufficient as a way to think about scale. We also realise the need to consider:

- 'Scaling up': ensuring that our work goes beyond programme delivery to become embedded within a system; for instance, through policy change (see below how this also informs our thinking about sustainability)
- 'Scaling deep': this is about going beyond just delivering a programme to ensuring we are changing the 'hearts and minds' of those in the system, including changing how people see themselves and their relationships with other key actors in the system (e.g., teachers changing how they see their roles and the children they teach)

Our organisational understanding of 'scaling' is thus informed by all three types above: scaling out, scaling up, and scaling deep.

SUSTAINABILITY

This view of scaling is inherently also about ensuring any changes we make to the systems in which we work are sustainable. Particularly when consider 'scaling up' and 'scaling deep', we can identify a key cross-cutting theme of ownership. This is at the core of how we see sustainability: how we get to a point where the system ultimately owns and shapes the work with minimal intervention from STiR.

The [education scaling literature](#) highlights two key challenges when it comes to scaling and sustainability. First, education is a messy domain. It is a highly complex endeavour where it is difficult for teachers to successfully adapt promising initiatives to their own contexts. Consequently, as noted by [Larry Cooley and others](#), 'successful scaling depends on striking the right balance between fit with the context, fidelity to a well-structured set of design principles and practices, and flexibility so users can adapt the initiative to their own needs'. Second, governments play a key role in sustaining and scaling education initiatives, and success often varies considerably by the capacity of the system.

HOW HAS OUR APPROACH TO WORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS EVOLVED?

The above resonates enormously with our own experience over the years. We have been particularly focused on understanding and strengthening the role of government in our journey to scale and sustainability. The learnings from the first 5 years of STiR programming led us to the conceptualising our work with governments as '[system learning partnerships](#)'. Core to this idea was that we would work in partnership from government from the outset to design and deliver the programme, gradually transferring ownership to the system over a 5-year period.

An important inflection point came in 2020 with the chaos wrought by school closures across the globe. The disparities in capacities of the different governments we work with to respond could not have been starker. Yet, despite the fact that we had been speaking the language of 'system learning partnerships', our approach hitherto had been remarkably uniform across our geographies: same programme design, same rhythms, same expectations of success. We had not been paying close enough attention to the different needs of our partners, and this needed to change.

This was an enormously important stage in our journey. Many organisations speak the language of working in partnership with governments, but our experience has made us realise just how difficult it is to be genuinely faithful to that commitment. There are many challenges (funding demands and constraints, ever-evolving priorities, high staff turnover in government etc.) but if our work is to truly outlive us, we must face these challenges head on.

CORE FEATURES OF HOW WE WORK WITH GOVERNMENTS

This section outlines the core features of our current approach, several of which have evolved as a result of our realisation that we needed to be more responsive to the needs and capacities of different systems. Our organisational values cut across each of these, and are more important than ever in guiding our approach. Working in true partnership with a system requires humility and recognising we don't have all the answers up front. It requires honest and open dialogue with our partners, even if that means having difficult conversations about what's working and what isn't. It requires a deep sense of purpose and mutual faith.

1. FOCUS ON PRINCIPLES, NOT PROGRAMMES

We wanted to ensure that we still had a clear focus on fostering intrinsic motivation in the system, but we realised we would need to be more flexible in how we do so. Consequently, we have identified a set of core principles which we believe should inform all of our work globally:

- *Focus on autonomy, mastery and purpose:* Any work we do in a system must be explicitly designed to develop these three core tenets of intrinsic motivation (unchanged from previously)
- *Embrace 'mechanisms' of change, rather than 'forms':* The evidence on successful professional development suggests that we should distinguish between 'mechanisms' and 'forms' in delivery. A 'form' is the particular way in which something is organised (e.g. a monthly network meeting of 25 people). A 'mechanism' is the driver of change within that (so in this example, peer learning). The key thing is that 'mechanisms' can take many forms'. So by focusing on 'mechanisms' we can be flexible in how these things are delivered in practice. An example from the programme is observation and feedback: we believe the key mechanism is the space for someone to get to think about and reflect on their work, but the person who does it, how often it happens etc. (the 'form') can vary according to the system
- *Flexible staffing:* Previously, our programme uniformly had 1 STiR member of staff attached to a district. Working more flexibly allows us to vary our staffing model according to local need and capacity, and adapting their role focus according to the situation. For example, in Karnataka we have moved to a regional

model where 1 staff member supports multiple districts, with their role more focused on providing strategic support and facilitating cross-learning between senior district leaders

2. CREATE SHARED PURPOSE

A key advantage of our focus on intrinsic motivation and the flexible approach to its achievement mean that we can meaningfully co-create visions with government based on their priorities. We recognise that good education is holistic, and there is merit in many diverse areas of focus (e.g. academic learning, character education, social emotional learning etc.). Meaningful focus on our government partners' priorities is crucial in helping us gain buy-in, so we are careful to ensure that this is not a 'tick box' exercise where we end up simply pushing our own agenda. We invest considerable time in this stage in listening deeply and understanding.

3. EMBRACE CO-DESIGN

In each geography, we have 'co-design' groups at state or national level that are responsible for the creating the programme on a quarterly basis and overseeing its delivery. Groups are made up of a range of stakeholders in the delivery chain – teachers, district officials, policy makers and STiR staff – to ensure the programme is designed to meet the needs of teachers and students but also be successfully delivered through the system's channels. Our staff members play an important role in facilitating the group to ensure it is conducted in the spirit of listening and openness, in order to foster strong relationships and mutual understanding across the different levels of stakeholder.

4. IDENTIFY KEY LEVERAGE POINTS IN THE SYSTEM

Each system we work with is different, in terms of structures, capacities and norms. We therefore have to identify where at each level in the system we can find the key 'movers and shakers', and find ways to work with them accordingly. For instance, in Uganda, for our secondary programme we work through the Association of Head Teachers Union (ASSHU) to deliver the programme rather than through the local government office, as the former have considerably more influence on secondary schools than the latter.

This also includes finding the right places to 'embed', from finding the right budget lines for the programme to right 'home' department (or whether we need to help create a new one, such as the Lifelong Learning Unit in Delhi).

WHAT'S NEXT

- *Advocacy/profile-raising*: One of the things we regularly hear is that we need to be more proactive in talking publicly about our approach, as there is scope to contribute to the learnings of the sector. To that end, we are presenting on the approach at UKFIET and hoping to publish a thinkpiece with Brookings this summer
- *Assessing progress*: We currently use two tools to help us assess progress, firstly our progress pathway which helps us to identify milestones at different stages of our journeys with government and secondly our learning framework enables us measure behaviour change of different stakeholders. But we want to ensure we are much more systematic in tracking our progress in scaling and sustainability. To that end, have been working on a sustainability institutionalisation assessment tool which we will pilot in the coming months.
- *Adapting*: As we continue to align with (often changing) government priorities and needs and to take into account the structure of systems in different geographies (e.g. decentralised government in Indonesia, working through Project Management Units (PMUs) in India), we will need adapt our approach even more. We will need to develop our understanding of what scaling looks like and what we want to sustain, why and how.

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