

II. Using SEED-SCALE as a Method to Guide Grant Making

A donor presumably seeks to maximize their probability of success with a grant. While numerous grant making protocols exist to help clarify what, where, who, when, and why a project will be funded – few protocols help donors gauge whether the proposal will succeed. While the SEED-SCALE methodology usually functions to guide a three-way partnership of bottom-up, outside-in, and top-down actors in how their collective action should best go forward, SEED-SCALE can also be used to advise one partner (or all three) whether their proposed action contains in it a fundamental flaw, a feature that is being overlooked and will lead to project failure.

SEED-SCALE is based on the hypothesis that four principles are necessary for social change. The hypothesis is that these principles provide the necessary conditions, but may not in all cases provide sufficient conditions. Social change will not advance consistently and sustainably without all four. Two are considered to be Foundational Principles; that is, these two are preconditions that should be in place as the project starts. Two are considered to be Implementation Principles; that is, these two are central to operationalizing community change.

The premise is that grant making that supports projects without these four principles will fail to produce sustainable interventions and will lack the potential of going to scale both in quality and geographical impact. These principles provide a framework that can then be used in two ways, as an analytical framework that can be used to evaluate social change, highlighting weaknesses to be avoided and strengths that can be built upon and also as a systematic approach that can guide process-based change.

Foundational Principle: Three-Way Partnership—Bottom-up, Top-down, and Outside-in

Social change occurs in communities; it is not an abstract process. Specific communities move from older patterns of behavior to new. Communities do not move forward alone, but within the context of larger social forces affecting change. Based on a functional analysis of the social change process, a three-way partnership of communities (bottom-up), government (top-down), and change agents (outside-in) is a necessary condition for sustainable change that has the potential for going to scale.

Many involved in development planning continue to debate the issue of who should be in control, a debate sometimes called the question of leadership. On one side are top-down activists, who say: “Development by the people is too slow. Someone with authority is needed to get things going and hold factions together.” On the other side are advocates of grassroots, community-led development, who say: “A community develops only from itself. People’s control should determine all activities, or there will be no sustainable action.” And there are others who emphasize the primary need of developing the leadership capacity of individuals within communities. The debate is artificial; a three-way partnership is needed that enables all participants to collectively engage in the social change task.

Community energy and local ownership of the change process is essential for sustaining and growing momentum just as the enabling environment of policies and financing provided by government is necessary. Social change requires leadership, strong leadership—but this leadership is provided by the partnership because one individual, community, or government does not have the scope to engage the complexity alone. Yet even a genuine two-way partnership between community and government will not accomplish change, not only because communities and officials tend to remain stuck in their separate perspectives, but also because neither of these partners is likely to know the most current ideas and research findings or to have the special skills needed to put them

into practice. All successful development programs that Future Generations has studied closely has included a third viewpoint, that of experts (*EmpowerMentors*) who brought to the process an understanding of local causal relationships and knowledge of a wider range of options. An outside-in perspective is as essential as the bottom-up and top-down.

Every community has its unique set of bottom-up, top-down, and outside-in actors and forces. In most cases, these are working against each other. The challenge of every community change effort is to identify the appropriate actors to fill the necessary bottom-up, top-down, and outside-in functions. Every project must identify the groups and actors supporting these three functions. An analysis of each partner's function will often reveal gaps and opportunities among partners who can be further engaged.

The Role of the Bottom-Up: In general, the Bottom-up is “the people”—the citizens who will do much of the work and reap most of the results. They have many subgroups and often view themselves more by these groups than by their larger community: infants to elderly, races and ethnicities, rich to absolute poor, physical prowess to handicapped. The role of the Bottom-up is to provide the local energy and ownership that sustains the change process in the long term. Often the Bottom-up begins with a small group of women in a village and grows to include more women's groups. Then the men will take notice and want to be involved. At the community level, the SEED-SCALE process engages the Bottom-up participants in seven tasks that mobilize and focus community energy to generate local successes which in turn lead to more participation.

While communities, not officials or experts, are the foundation of sustainable action, they cannot change on their own. Often communities overestimate their capacity, believing that they can do more than in fact they know how to do. Overconfidence in community capacity is especially common when several community members perceive themselves to be experts on a subject and want to press their neighbors forward. Such people can do much to empower their community, but they need partners to create an enabling environment for their commitment and to provide the skills and ideas that they lack.

China's Great Leap Forward in the 1950s was perhaps the most massive demonstration ever that people cannot develop on their own. An erroneous belief that community capacity was present led national leaders to persuade local people to industrialize on their own. The result was a famine that caused over 30 million deaths and set back development for hundreds of millions of people for a decade.

Similarly, local charismatic leaders, though providing inspirational starts, seldom produce more than short-term success. This problem is also found with social change programs set in motion by social entrepreneurs. They may be effective in bringing factions together and in speeding up effort, but they tend to lack the continuity that comes from the transfer of leadership as community's goals are nurtured and sustained. Charismatic leaders and social entrepreneurs are helpful as part of a community team, stepping back as others develop competence.

The Role of the Top-Down: The Top-down is the authority structure—government, international agencies, religious organizations, large corporations, and the like. These provide the environment in which the change process moves forward through passing (or rescinding) laws and regulations and providing funds, trading frameworks, services, and infrastructure; collectively these are termed the enabling environment. The actors commonly include the politicians and administrators who represent government, but often other large organizations may provide a top-down role, such as religious organizations, donors, corporations, or NGOs. This is the group that creates the environment for making change occur. Officials are not the same as leaders who

represent the community. They may live in the community, but their authority comes from outside, and it is this authority that allows them to shape an enabling environment.

Because officials are usually interested in protecting their positions, they often pose great obstacles to real, systematic change. Seeing themselves as the sponsors and conduits of all development services, they may feel threatened by new initiatives that are not under their control. Officials will therefore usually see a balanced partnership with either community or experts as unnecessary—they will see themselves as being in the senior position. Even if they accept the need for partnership, they may try to imbalance the partnership and assume control through directives, detailed control of services, or money. This orientation of officials makes it hard for them to accept the community as other than employees; as a result, *officials are usually the main obstacles to forming an effective three-way partnership*. But attempts to isolate officials ultimately weaken initiatives. Each partner must fulfill his or her role. Where there is weakness, the role or the partner needs to be strengthened, not side-stepped. Where capacity is weak, SEED-SCALE provides an effective way to break the tasks down into doable steps that each partner needs to do.

The Role of the Outside-In: The Outside-in are change agents; they consist of NGOs, academics and researchers, activists, community members who have moved away, business entrepreneurs, private donors, and persons who for various reasons are outside the community but who are interested in it. They bring ideas, technologies, and seed funding, serving as catalysts for the change process, and often helping to defuse polarization between the Top-down and the Bottom-up. They fill several essential roles that neither a community nor officials bring to the partnership:

- Knowledge of development processes (what has worked and in what circumstances)
- Technical skills to simplify and help sustain options and interventions brought in from outside for local adaptation
- The capacity to broker relationships between community and officials to enhance cooperation

Experts bring much that is good, but they may also bring problems: ideas that are inappropriate, outside priorities that override local priorities, an emphasis on professional prestige that distorts local vision, pet hypotheses or experiences that are not transferable, definitions of development or theories that do not fit local realities, and, most commonly, a tendency to prescribe ambitious blueprints for social action. Sometimes experts are engaged because they are available rather than because they have the skills needed. Inappropriate advice by experts is often the reason development efforts fail. Robert Chambers (himself an expert) after decades of field observations has identified three traps that experts must avoid: 1 Professionalism: they become more concerned about their own roles, embedded beliefs, and personal advancement than about local needs. Distance: they often work from offices outside the community, rely on secondary data, and are socially apart and professionally arrogant. Power: their identity as experts leads them to try to control local processes and to exaggerate their own role rather than educating and empowering community members and leaders.

The idea of partnership is not new; nearly all community-assistance documents produced by the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and other bilateral and multilateral agencies now include mandates for partnership. But in practice these projects are structured in ways that make partnerships unequal, and most of the power remains with those providing money. Outsiders (such as the donor) can help to assure a balance by asking the right questions to stimulate community action: Who attends meetings? Who speaks at those meetings? Who makes the decisions?

Is a three-way partnership operating, or has one or two of the partners taken over? Have weaker partners taken refuge in local cultural traditions and passive resistance? If so, the claims of partnership are false.

Foundational Principle: Action must build from success, and all successes necessitate continued action

Building on a community's existing achievements is not the usual approach. Indeed, this positive emphasis runs counter to what is normally done. Professionals, government officials, and communities themselves typically focus on the problems: poverty, bad roads, poor schools, ineffective politicians, corruption, ethnic, or religious factions. Every community, even the wealthiest, can produce a long list of problems or needs. But such lists put attention on failure and imply that the community is incapable of solving problems on its own. Communities that perceive themselves as deficient are less likely to believe they can solve their problems and see how. The conventional "needs analysis" of professional development workers is demoralizing and nearly always results in proposals for outside gifts to be given.

Building from success transforms latent energy in the partnership into active change. Seeking successes immediately sets in motion a positive momentum of social change. Energy and creativity expand as people realize that they are capable of rising to the challenges in their lives rather than surrendering to them. A success becomes a stepping stone for subsequent successes. When there is a feeling of success, community confidence accelerates this forward momentum, as each mounting success causes further action in an aggregating cycle.

Building from success focuses on strengths and capacity and mobilizes assistance by the people and their partners rather than from the outside. Building on successes points a community toward using what it has. It empowers a community to create plans to improve on those successes. A success focus turns attention inside, to resources that are already there—rather than turning attention outward in what very likely will be a futile if not frustrating effort to get gifts. Forward motion is driven by recognizing assets rather than what is absent. Using this approach, costs are much less and the likelihood of continued success is much higher. Activity that could have been seen as going backward are looked at differently when this perspective is applied and is viewed instead as going forward.

As momentum builds data on needs must addressed, but now these needs will be engaged as challenges the partnership can overcome. Every community has needs. SEED-SCALE does not pretend that needs do not exist or that they should be ignored. But to start with needs when the partnership is first forming creates a self-portrait emphasizing weaknesses rather than capabilities. A needs emphasis will only lead to more complex understanding of the needs; the complex global environment will appear overwhelming. Simplified understanding of needs is necessary for effective answers to those needs where partners can view them as challenges for action not as barriers stopping their momentum.

Working from a positive approach may be hard at first for professionals as well as for people since most of us take successes for granted and are irritated by problems. Moreover most paperwork and financing frameworks professionals work within stipulate starting with a needs analysis that must be addressed by a resource acquisition and allocation budget. And if outsiders are open to seek success, they typically do so in large ways—they need to go back to their superiors and report a major achievement, not a simple event with some children. But any community has successes, and though these are often harder to notice, they are very much the self identity of the people.

There are many other possible successes that are simple starting points for further action. Defining success can simply be changing how something is viewed: mothers save their children from dying is a success, organizing a community volleyball tournament is a success, overcoming twenty years of war is a success. The starting point is most often tasks the community already knows how to do. Subsequent action also builds on existing skills and knowledge. New ideas and training come in from the outside, but what really accelerates the momentum is a process that enables communities to use their existing resources more fully.

Implementation Principle: Decide Using Evidence from the Local Situation; Avoid Deciding Based on Opinions, Power, or Dogma.

Decisions about people's lives are increasingly made at a distance from the places where the decisions will be implemented, by people who inadequately understand that local situation. The result is decisions that often are late, wrong, or inappropriately influenced by the lobbying of particular interest groups.

To make consistently accurate decisions requires a different framework from the one customarily used in "development" projects. First, decisions need to move close to where they will be implemented instead of the present practice of being made in distant places. Second, decisions need to be based on objective evidence, not opinions of persons who have the power or who decide according to political or religious dogma. Third, decisions need to have input from those in the partnership who will live with the consequences. Many types of evidence can be used (scientifically collected survey data, photographs, input/output measures, key indicators) but what differentiates evidence is that its facts can be independently verified. The word evidence equates with consistent accuracy, a characteristic that opinions, power, and dogma usually do not achieve.

Participatory evidence gathering is difficult. Nonetheless, measurement criteria that untrained people can use, while hard to find, are available. People tend to rely on their own wisdom and intuitive understanding—but that is not evidence. Moreover, communities tend to enjoy anecdotes of highly variable reliability, and often these are passed around because doing so is easy and fun. Evidence gathering in traditional ways by professionals is not only difficult, it is also hard to understand. Participatory evidence gathering that is comprehensible, however, can be learned. Especially early on, it will not have the rigor that scientific evaluations often expect, but it is still evidence, and with it evidence-based decisions can be made.

A wide spectrum of issues affect communities: ecology, health, education, agriculture, religion, economics, culture, and the list can easily get longer. To research the full scope of areas using traditional means would require biologists, agronomists, sociologists, economists, anthropologists, and health professionals, to name only the starting list—and it would require massive time, cooperation, and money. If a baseline survey was required before community efforts began that would delay starting the work—and starting social change is the real objective, not research. Moreover, it is difficult for an evaluation to integrate detailed information *and* explain it in terms understandable to those outside the respective professions. It is equally improbable the evaluation would be finished on schedule, and more unlikely that anyone would have the energy to repeat it the next year to see the impact that action had made. Hence professional standards of evaluation are basically not feasible. SEED-SCALE proposes an alternative, participatory evidence gathering.

To illustrate, the remote community of Palin in the Northeast India state of Arunachal Pradesh, conducted a participatory assessment to understand the source of their cholera epidemic. This assessment led to more accurate answers than a cursory statistical survey conducted by epidemiologists from the state health department. The community's data was more accurate because it easily achieved total coverage and took advantage of intimate acquaintances to get more accurate answers. More importantly it empowered the community, and that led to further evidence that pointed to more than just cholera cures and fixed water pipes.

Despite a great deal of lip service about community benefits from research, the people who benefit most are usually the researchers. This is because the research methodologies are designed for and by professionals rather than communities. Shifting to community members as partners increases the chance that the community will benefit. With a few years of persistence, the community can be educated sufficiently so that the participatory evaluation is useful to the professionals as well.

Numerous methodologies of participatory research are available. SEED-SCALE is one. Common to all is that cooperative evidence gathering requires different skills from those in which researchers are commonly trained, the most important new skill being sensitivity to knowing how to ask questions and facilitate discussion. In Palin, the people possessed all the facts that were brought forward by the Future Generations team, but they did not know what to do with their knowledge. It was a partnership with change agents that brought out the community knowledge—making their answers so concrete and understandable that they pointed to the solution.

It is vital to build action from evidence, but the data should not be controlled by outsiders. This is difficult for professionals to accept. Funding and prestige in the peer-reviewed world are based on taking credit. Hopefully new understanding of participatory research will change this. Conversely among NGOs very little professional advancement comes from good data. For the Outside-in change agents taking the extra time and effort for evidence provides little added benefit for their advancement. They get their money and prestige usually based on vivid stories that come from their fieldwork.

Evidence based action is important chiefly because it consistently leads to on-going successful action, and in the long run that is in the interest of all parties. Evidence-based decision making becomes easier the more it is done. With time, the evidence base expands. With practice, the operations become more rapid and more accurate. With rising sophistication, the research may become noteworthy and acquire input from professionals in different fields. As the people learn to agree on using evidence, which increases as the collection process becomes objective and inclusive, they find they can work together, and factionalism declines.

Implementation Principle: Workplans Resulting in Behavior Change

At its most fundamental core, social change is when individuals modify how they behave. The centrality of behavior change is easy to overlook as discussions raise the importance of poverty alleviation, improving health status, promoting female education, protecting biodiversity, maintaining intellectual property rights, and so on. Such output measures are not determinative. But all of these objectives are best achieved by behavior change, and behaviors can change in a systematic way through the prioritization and reinforcement of workplans.

Project documents of donor agencies specify results that are more easily measured than behavior change: building schools, running immunization campaigns, saving wetlands, or starting microcredit schemes. But even if these outputs are clearly documented in project evaluations, they do not necessarily indicate achievement in the projected outcome, nor do they result in changing the fundamental condition of society. Outputs that projects must deliver, even though they may be

clearly written in project documents and local communities have agreed to them, are results that respond to the expectations of external agencies not to priorities that communities will mobilize behind. When communities change their behaviors, then they are truly moving forward.

Behavior change is both easy and difficult. On one hand, each individual is capable of changing his or her behavior—doing so requires little money, infrastructure, or special expertise. In contrast, organizing *collective* behavior change in a shared direction is perhaps the most difficult challenge of a social organization. Thus, it is overlooked precisely because it is so difficult and is often replaced with other objectives: opening an office and hiring staff, getting grants and starting pilot projects, building buildings, writing reports that catalogue problems, or sending people off for training. However, all these actions, even when done perfectly, will not help people as much as changing collective behavior. Thus, rather than avoiding behavior change because it is difficult, it is imperative to develop approaches that make it easier and to do.

Telling people to change seldom achieves much. Instead, a support system is needed that helps people change. Fortunately, knowledge is growing about the components of that support: getting innovators to lead, educating about benefits, building from success, highlighting incentives, and at times applying disincentives through peer pressure or raising difficulties for those who do not comply. Disincentives, in particular, when applied by a partnership are much stronger than when applied by a control-oriented outside body such as government or an NGO. For example, the community groups in the village of Palin in Northeast India, for whom money is scarce, now fine members who miss a training session or they fine members who serve unboiled water to another family's child. Using incentives and disincentives just once is usually not enough; behavior change needs repetition to take effect, and this is something that communities can do.

The key is that the system must be developed and implemented with the people rather than being imposed. Support comes through having the foundation of partnership. Then, through building from success and taking actions based on evidence, momentum grows. Individuals are convinced one by one, and as numbers aggregate, they grow into mutually supportive, collective behavior change. In Palin, the emphasis was on behavior change from the outset. Momentum began with a change people were able to do—sitting in neighborhood groups to discuss the cholera outbreak. Actions did not tell everyone to come to a meeting or require practice in making rehydration solution, as might have been the case with a traditional government or NGO approach.

The more empowered the women of Palin became, the more willing they were to tackle oppressive customs, and the more creative they became in how to adjust former practices to retain culture without its oppressive aspects. The extent to which this has happened in Palin is visible in the skits the community now puts on for visitors. Women such as Amko describe their earlier situation, public disclosure that would have been rewarded with beatings only a few years ago. Even more remarkable is how Amko's husband now acts out his former abusive self in his group's skit, mocking his former cruelty and strutting with pride in what he has become. Another impressive example of such change is Rocket (who when he realized how he had changed adopted this new name, discarding his former name which translated as "charcoal"). Rocket is now so committed to wider change that he ran for and won a seat on the regional *panchayat* or governing council.

Making behaviors change is in many ways the key strength of SEED-SCALE. A process is provided that allows action to be taken at each point where progress is easiest, and to build over time into results that would have been difficult or even impossible if attempted at the beginning, a process that is separated into the steps of causal analysis, functional analysis, and role reallocation in SEED-SCALE. Coming out of the role reallocation step every member of the partnership receives jobs in

the community's workplan. Objectives are agreed to, discussion examines what must be accomplished to achieve these objectives, jobs are allocated and needed resources are itemized.

Workplans also work to modify behavior among the top-down, bottom-up, and outside-in partners. As development goes forward, roles are reallocated through the workplan process. Allocating roles appropriate to both the community's needs and people's capacities can be difficult if partners see role reallocation as a threat to their status or livelihood. Not surprisingly, leaders are almost always the persons who find it hardest to adjust to changes in their roles. After all, they may be asked to surrender control of legal, financial, personnel, or other decision making powers and perquisites that reinforce their status. Some of these requests they may simply not be able to grant in the way being asked, but to meet the participatory objective they should seek to find a way. In the general uncertainty about how to modify behavior, leaders will continue to try to tell others what to do. Experts will think that only they understand the problems and the solutions, and community members may think that all they need is enough money to spend as they see fit. Yet the *expectations for each partner must change as development goes forward*. To guide this adaptation, a functional analysis helps to reassign roles for carrying out workplan tasks. Regularizing behavior change in this way not only reduces the risk that one party will grab a dominant role; it also encourages people to achieve a balance between what is best for them and what is best for the community.