

ACHIEVING IMPACT at SCALE

Findings and Further Questions from the
Taking Conservation to Scale Learning Network
September 2023



GORDON AND BETTY
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Summary of Our Findings

Over the past two years, the *Taking Conservation to Scale Learning Network* has been working with six conservation programs to develop and test a framework for systematically taking initial intervention concepts to scale. This framework has combined five scaling approaches with both behavior change and networking theory. Key findings from this work include:

1. Our initial five scaling approaches have generally been validated, but with some refinements,
2. Behavior change theory is essential to our scaling framework,
3. “Systems thinking” is needed to select the right combination of scaling approaches,
4. Network theory can inform scaling efforts, but needs to be practically applied, and
5. We can use our scaling framework to scale its adoption in conservation and beyond.

*Achieving Impact at Scale:
Findings and Further Questions from the
Taking Conservation to Scale Learning Network*

Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
Walton Family Foundation
Foundations of Success¹

September 2023

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For more information about this work, go to fonline.org/scaling.

Our Original Question and What We Did to Answer It

Achieving impact at scale is often an elusive goal of many civil society interventions. In environmental conservation, the magnitude of the issues that we collectively are facing – global loss of biodiversity, land-use change, invasive species, and climate change – means that we cannot simply work site by site. Instead, we need to take systematic action at the scales needed to address these global issues. Similar scaling challenges exist in many other civil society endeavors.

Unfortunately, the conservation community has, at best, a mixed record when it comes to designing and executing interventions ultimately meant to affect change at meaningful scales. Our assessment before initiating this work was that many conservation practitioners lack a fundamental understanding of the mechanisms for getting to scale from smaller units of intervention. Most conservation strategies that aspire to achieve conservation at scale have an implicit theory of change pathway as shown in Figure 1: implement an initial intervention concept in a few small ‘pilot projects’ and then hope that they will be adopted and or add up to outcomes at a greater scale. If we want to achieve impact at a systems level, can we develop far more explicit pathways for scaling our interventions and our outcomes?

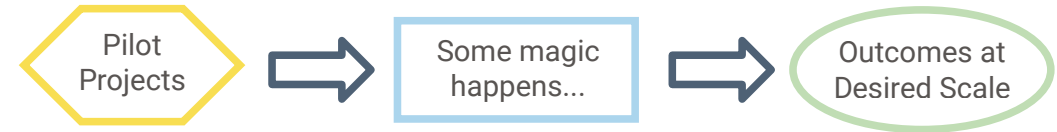


Figure 1. An all-too-common implicit scaling theory of change pathway

To address this question, we set out to develop and test a framework for achieving impact at meaningful scales. The original framework was developed with the Moore Foundation and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), working with Dr. Rosina Birnbaum and her team on Nature-based Solutions. We started by conducting a literature review that led us to develop an initial draft framework that included five scaling approaches (see Annex 1). We then set out to identify a handful of real-world partner programs that could be brought into a learning network to help us test and refine this scaling framework (see Annex 2). In the remainder of this document, we share the vetted framework and key lessons that emerged from this initial test as well as further questions that we need to address going forward. We also summarize the [FOS Scaling Challenge](#) which is designed to help program teams trying to take their work to scale both understand and apply our framework to their situation.



Key Lessons Emerging from the Learning Network

1. Our Five Scaling Approaches Have Generally Been Validated with Some Refinements

Over the past two years, we have invested substantial effort in developing more detailed articulations of the assumptions involved in each of the five scaling approaches in our initial draft framework (Annex 1). We then worked with our partners in the network to apply these approaches in developing their own scaling framework. For the most part, our initial five scaling approaches were applicable to our partners' programs, but we have learned some interesting lessons that further our understanding of the different approaches. For example:

A. Expand, Replicate, Diffuse (Approaches #1–3) – These approaches involve taking the initial concept and trying to replicate it in appropriate locations, primarily by increasing the size and/or number of teams providing direct support for implementation of the concept. These are thus fundamentally linear models and getting to scale requires “doing the math” to calculate the costs, resources, and intermediate results required to get to the desired outcomes at scale. In theory, this type of scaling would benefit from finding “efficiencies of scale” but in practice, we have not found good examples of these efficiencies. For example, in the *Climate Smart Shrimp* program, we found at best perhaps a 10% reduction in costs when replicating the initial concept across provinces in Indonesia.

B. Change System Conditions (Approach #4) – This approach involves taking more of a systems approach to scaling. As discussed in greater detail in the next sections, we have learned that this approach requires determining how we change the system conditions to achieve our desired outcomes at scale. Many of the partner programs found that they should start with changing enabling conditions (Approach #4) before they or others could provide direct support to implement the core concept (Approaches #1–3). For example, the *Scaling Indigenous Led Conservation program* and the *Fish Forever* program explicitly stated that key policy frameworks need to be in place for Indigenous Peoples and local communities to be able to manage their lands and waters.

C. Transform System Norms (Approach #5) – This approach, while often referenced in the scaling and systems thinking literature, was perhaps the most nebulously defined approach in our original framework. Through our vetting with partners such as the *Adaptive Management of Protected Areas* program and our work with Dr. Damon Centola, however, it emerged as an explicit networking approach focused on fostering the spread of new norms among actors in the system to achieve outcomes at scale. It seems this approach may make the most sense to apply after some initial set of actors has already adopted the desired behaviors through the other approaches so that the desired behavior becomes a norm adopted by other actors through their networks.

D. Additional Approaches – Throughout our work, we also considered if there were any additional scaling approaches that we might want to add to our original framework. One candidate was the idea of Collective Impact which clearly provides a mechanism for spreading ideas and concepts in the work of the *Illegal Killing of Birds* and the *Adaptive Management of Protected Areas* partner programs among others. Our work found, however, that Collective Impact is not a separate scaling approach, but is instead a cross-cutting lens describing a multi-actor version of implementing each of the five original approaches.

Key Questions Moving Forward

- Can we develop more specific guidance with illustrative examples for applying each of the scaling approaches both by themselves and in combination with each other?
- How can we help teams “do the math” under each approach? Are there specific analyses that will facilitate the selection and use of each approach?

2. Behavior Change Theory is Essential to Our Scaling Framework

At the end of the day, conservation (like other civil society disciplines) fundamentally involves human behavior change – getting key actors in the system to reduce practices that are harmful to our desired conservation outcomes and/or increase practices that are beneficial. To this end, our emerging framework is explicitly integrating behavior change principles and practices across the five scaling approaches. This requires identifying the *primary actors* whose behaviors directly affect the conservation outcomes we want to achieve as well as the *secondary or higher order actors* in the system whose behaviors influence the primary actors as shown in Figure 2. For example, in the *Regenerative Row Crops* program, the primary actors might be the farmers that we want to adopt sustainable cropping practices. Higher order actors might be the decision makers in the firms that produce the equipment needed for sustainable cropping practices or even the investors who might support these firms. In the *Adaptive Management of Protected Areas* program, the primary actors are the protected area managers, and the secondary actors might be the people responsible for developing and rolling out adaptive management systems within a national government park service.

Once we have identified these key actors and behaviors, we can consider how the categories of behavior change drivers may apply in the given context. For example, in the *Regenerative Row Crops* program, we might provide material incentives to the firms to produce the needed equipment or in the *Adaptive Management of Protected Areas* program we might promote cross-country exchanges to help build skills and capacity to implement the desired adaptive management approaches.

Key Questions Moving Forward

- Can we integrate our identified behavior change levers within our standard conservation actions (i.e., the [IUCN-CMP Conservation Actions Classification](#))?
- Can we determine the conditions under which each of these behavior change levers can best be used, especially in a scaling context?
- What human and financial resources do practitioners need to better incorporate behavior change theory into their work?

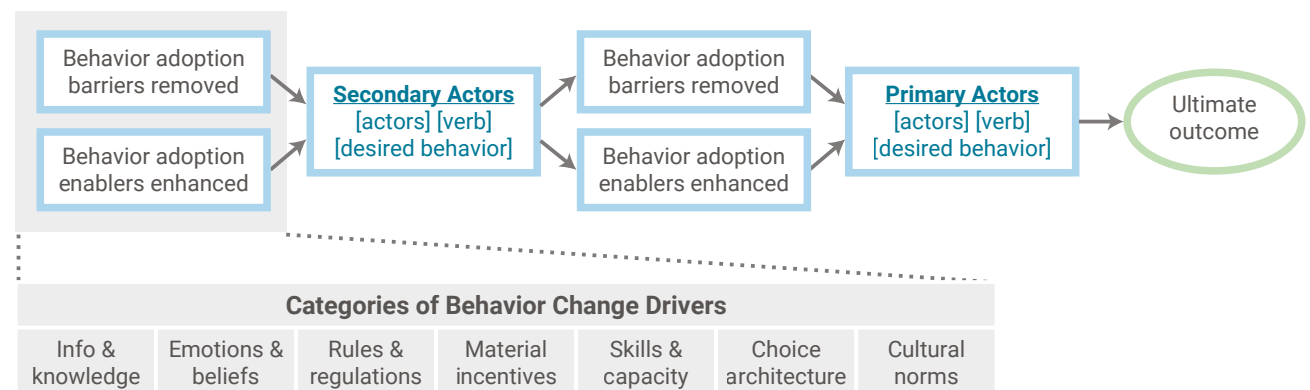


Figure 2. Defining Actors and Behavior Change Drivers

3. “Systems Thinking” Needed to Select the Right Combo of Scaling Approaches

One important finding regarding these scaling approaches is that they are typically not applied independently of one another. Instead, the key to scaling is to find the right combination of these different approaches within a given system over time. For example, in the *Regenerative Row Crops* program, the team’s emerging scaling framework combines different strategy pillars, each with its own scaling approach. *Farmers Leading Change* is a form of **Approach 5: Transform System Norms** whereas the *Markets Pillar* follows **Approach 4: Change System Conditions**. And within the *Innovation Pillar*, although the overall strategy involves developing higher level strategies, within this strategy the team is actually using **Approach 3: Diffusion of Innovation** to influence both the companies that are producing agricultural technology and the investors that back them.

To help practitioners decide which scaling approaches to use, we are developing a decision tree that starts with defining the set of actors and their behaviors that we want to influence as described above. It also requires us to develop a good understanding of the “overall system “tilt” and the “barriers” within the system. Using the

concept of potential energy in physics as a metaphor, if a system has an overall “downward tilt” (Figure 3a) then once any barriers are removed, the system should “inherently” move towards the desired state. In a “flat tilt” system (Figure 3b), then even if the barriers are removed, you still need to put energy into the system to reach the desired goal. And finally, if the system has an overall “upward tilt” (Figure 3c), then you not only need to put energy into the system to move towards your goal, but if you stop putting that energy in, the system will return to its initial state.

As one example, in the *Climate Smart Shrimp* program, the team is estimating that the profitability (net present value) of a farmer converting their operations to the Climate Smart Shrimp model should greatly exceed that of maintaining the current low-intensity production system. If the team can remove the main barrier of access to needed financing, then the farmers should be willing to adopt the new approach indicating an overall downward system tilt. But if a different intensification system that had higher returns proved tractable, then the team would be pushing the adoption of the

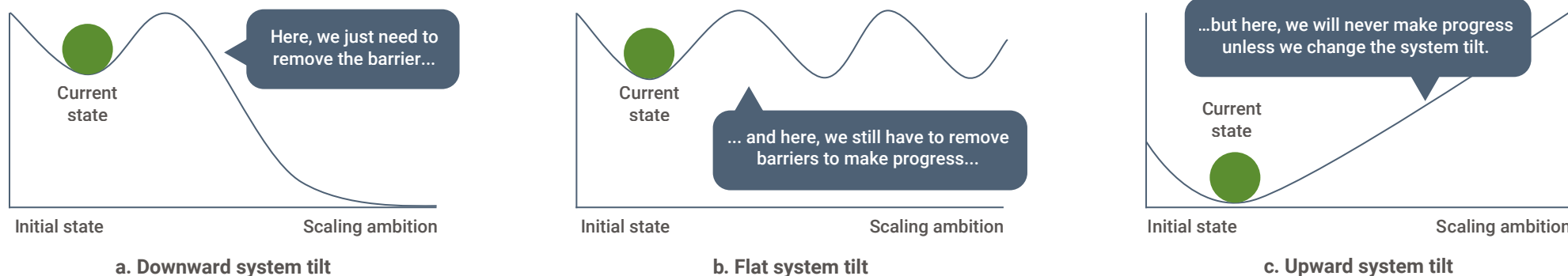


Figure 3. A Metaphor for Overall System Tilt and Barriers

Climate Smart Shrimp model up a steep hill. As another example, in the *Fish Forever* program, it is abundantly clear that their overall community-based fisheries strategy will only work in countries that have a supportive policy framework that enables communities to manage and restrict access to their fishing areas (thus, perhaps, warranting **Approach #4: Change System Conditions**). If this policy is not in place, then the team will be working against the system.

As shown in the decision tree in Figure 4, we first ask what the overall system tilt is. If it is downhill, then we next ask if we can remove the barriers at a system-wide level. If so, we can then use Scaling Approach #4 without ever having to bother with providing direct support to implement the core concept. But if we can't systematically remove the barriers or if the overall tilt is flat, then we are going to need to expand, replicate, or diffuse the core concept via Approaches #1-3 to "push the ball along" even if we can reduce or eliminate the barriers. Finally, if the system is uphill, then before doing any other work, we need to think about changing system conditions to change the overall system tilt via **Approach #4**. If we can't do that, then we need to try to expand our coalition of actors. And if that doesn't work, then we should probably triage the work as it will be highly unlikely we will ever be able to achieve our desired scaling ambition.

Key Questions Moving Forward

- The ball on the hill diagram works well as a broad metaphor to describe the concept of system tilt and barriers. But if we are going to operationalize our decision tree, how do we more precisely define and measure system tilt and barriers? Can we create guidance and examples to enable practitioners to do so in a standardized fashion?
- How do we convey the importance of needing to triage your work if your system fundamentally has a strong upward tilt working against you?

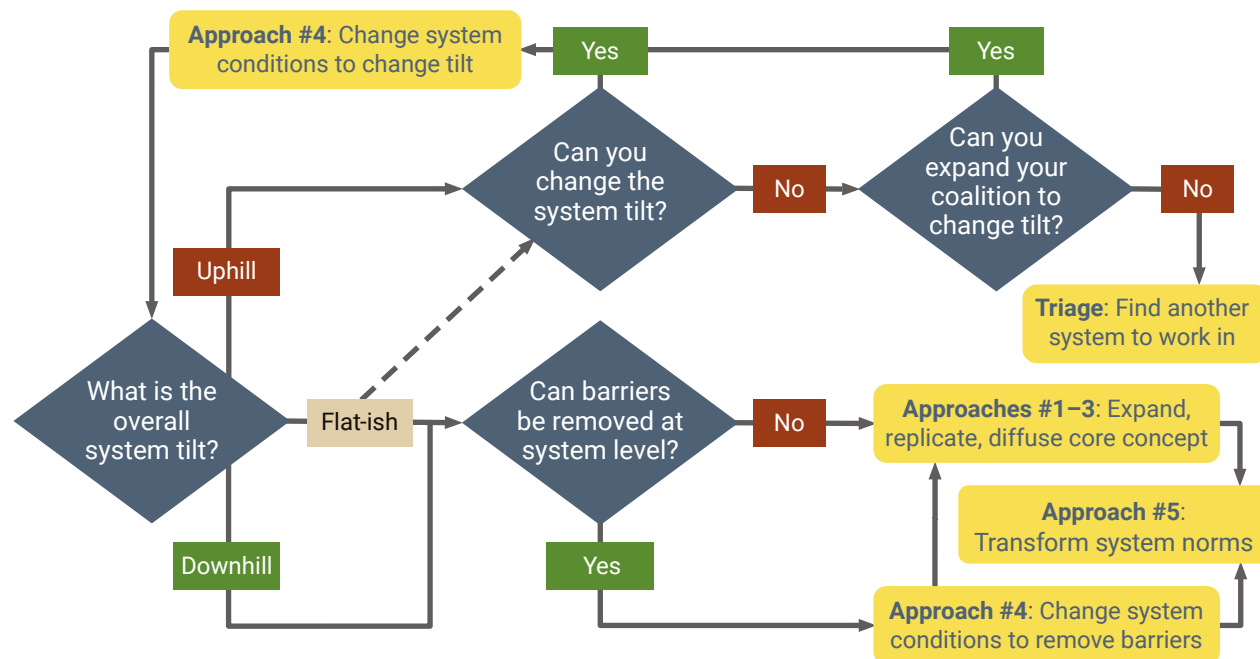


Figure 4. A "systems thinking" decision tree to help select which scaling approaches to use

4. Networking Theory Provides Scaling Potential But Needs to be Put Into Practice

As discussed above, **Scaling Approach #5: Transform System Norms** is an explicit networking strategy focused on fostering the spread of new norms among actors in the system. In particular, once a desired behavior change has begun to be established, then our model holds that existing and/or new networks can be used to spread this new norm throughout the remainder of the population. Following Damon Centola's theory from his book [*Change: How to Make Big Things Happen*](#), this spread generally takes place from initial locations in the periphery of the networks across 'wide-bridges' to the remainder of the nodes in a given network.

The partner programs in our learning network have found Damon Centola's concepts to be very intriguing in principle. Several of our partners including the *Adaptive Management of Protected Areas*, *Illegal Killing of Birds*, and *Regenerative Row Crops* programs worked

with Damon to attempt to apply these concepts to their scaling plans. However given that Damon's findings were based on retrospective analysis, we have struggled to figure out how to apply the concepts proactively to actually facilitate changes in norms among networks at scale. In particular, we need to figure out how to identify and map existing networks and how to then influence these networks so as to get the desired spread of key behaviors.

Key Questions Moving Forward

- How can we help conservation programs understand how to do effective network analyses at the right time during the life of their program?
- How can we facilitate the spread of key behaviors within networks to effect change at scale?

5. We Can Use Our Scaling Framework to Scale Its Adoption in Conservation and Beyond

Finally, a key goal of our Learning Network was not just to create an analytical framework to think about scaling, but also to develop a plan for getting this framework widely considered and adopted by the conservation community – in effect to scale our own scaling work. Figure 5 presents a high-level overview of how we can use our own scaling framework to help scale its adoption in conservation and other areas of civil society. As part of this work, we have created the [FOS Scaling Challenge](#) which is designed to introduce our scaling framework and help teams apply it to their programs.

Key Questions Moving Forward

- Who should our key audiences be for this work? Specifically, should we focus primarily on conservation, or should we try to reach out more broadly?
- How do we most effectively reach these audiences?
- How do we apply our framework to scale this work?
- How do we continue to adaptively improve this framework over time?

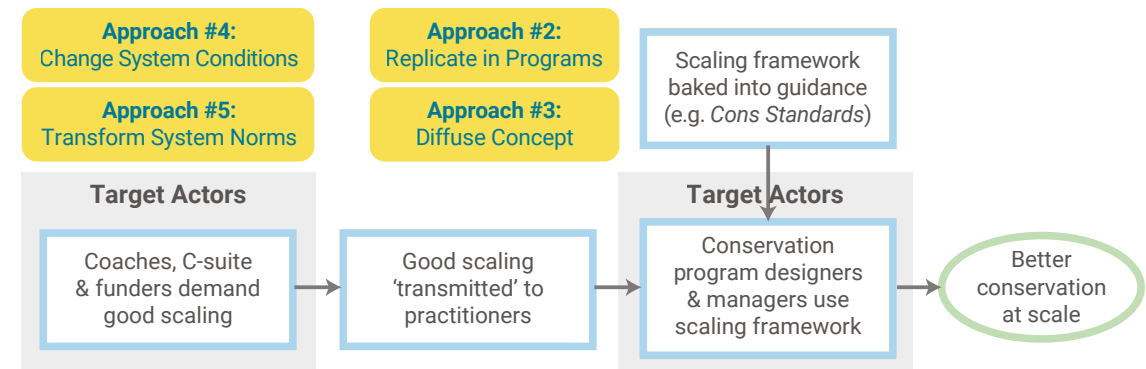


Figure 5. Scaling Our Scaling Framework

Annex 1. Overview of Our Five Scaling Approaches

Based on our review of the literature, we proposed the following five scaling approaches across three main types. The text, graphics, and examples in this Annex are adapted from Salafsky & Margoluis (2020), but now represent the final version of each approach as refined through the learning network's experiences.

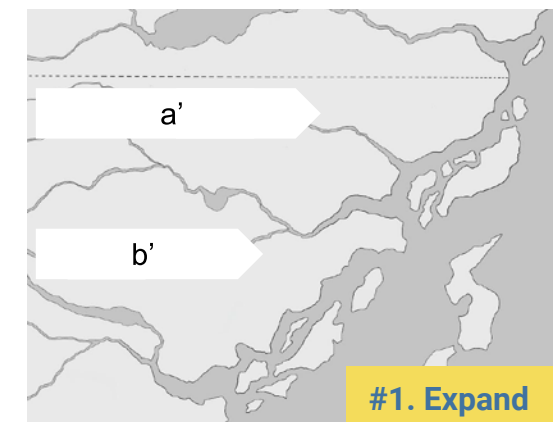
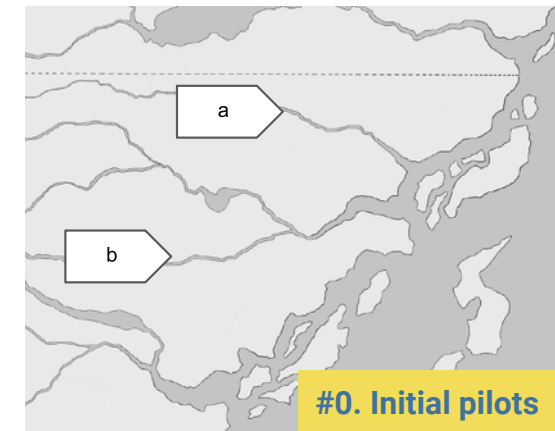
Most program teams when thinking about scaling up a given strategy will instinctively propose initial pilot concepts that they then plan to take to scale over time. These pilots can be either deliberately 'designed' by the program team or they can be *bright spots* developed by other actors in the system that the program team has 'discovered' and would like to replicate. Either way, it can be helpful to think about five distinct approaches to taking these pilots to scale, each with its own set of activities to ensure success at the larger scale. These approaches, described below, can be used either on their own, or in combination, depending on the situation.

This example starts with piloting implementation of a promising concept at a limited scale. For example, restore wetlands in two small test areas (as shown in the diagram) or work with selected restaurants to promote sustainable seafood consumption in one part of a city. Key implementation activities involved in a pilot include deciding on the strategy, planning the pilot, getting key stakeholders on board, recruiting the pilot team, implementing the pilot, and monitoring, documenting, and sharing results.

(Scaling Out)

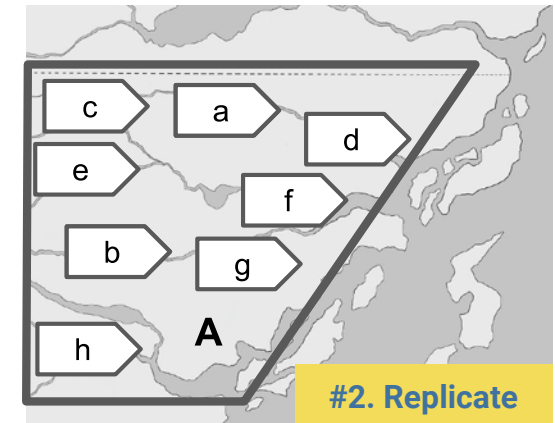
Scaling Approach #1. Expand Initial Concept – This approach involves increasing the spatial and/or conceptual scope of the initial pilots. For example, you might expand the wetland restoration from the pilot sites to the entire watershed or the sustainable seafood promotional work to all restaurants in the city. This approach is most often limited by the scope of the work a given implementation team can manage.

Additional activities needed to take the pilot concept to scale under this approach include convincing key stakeholders to expand the work, finding the resources and additional team members to work at scale, and adapting methods as needed to operate at larger scales.



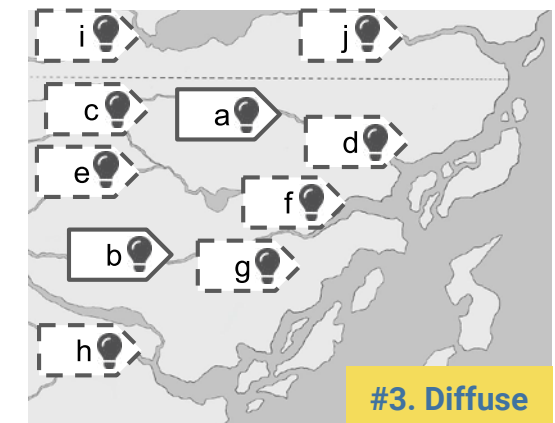
Scaling Approach #2. Replicate in Programs – This approach involves developing and managing a suite of related implementation teams that follow the same basic template of the original pilot. For example, you might bring on new wetland restoration teams to new sites in the same or adjacent watersheds or expand the sustainable seafood promotional work to other cities. This approach allows you to jumpstart new work that builds on the staff and lessons learned from your original pilots. Replicated interventions can be either fully owned by the implementing organization or they can be operated under a ‘franchise’ model. Either way, it’s important to include resources for program-level management and maintaining quality across teams.

Activities needed to go to scale under this approach include convincing key stakeholders to expand the work, finding the resources and new team members to implement the projects, and developing the program staff and processes needed to train and manage the new projects and ensure quality control.



Scaling Approach #3. Diffuse Concept – Rather than develop new direct interventions yourself, this approach involves capturing and communicating what you have learned and then getting other organizations to adopt your concept in their work. For example, publish your methods in an online library and provide consulting services to other organizations that want to replicate your watershed management work. Or you might share your outreach materials so other organizations can use them to set up similar sustainable seafood promotion work. As shown with Sites h and i, this approach can even extend beyond the borders of your jurisdiction. The key is to understand how conditions vary in each site so that you can adjust the strategy as needed to succeed in these conditions. This approach benefits from understanding the extensive literature on ‘diffusion of innovation.’

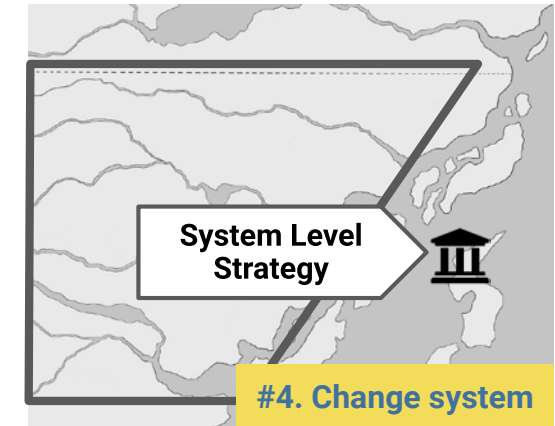
Activities required to go to scale under this approach include investing more in documenting the results of the pilot work, determining the conditions under which your strategy will be effective, and figuring out the right messages and messengers to ensure diffusion of your innovations.



(Scaling Up)

Scaling Approach #4. Change System Conditions – This approach involves thinking about how you might change the system conditions to operate at a higher and more leveraged scale. For example, instead of doing wetland restoration yourself, you might work to implement a national policy that will incentivize key landowners to restore wetlands that they manage, or develop a genetic technology that will enable better control of weeds in wetlands across the region. Or you could develop a market-based strategy and partner with major seafood companies to implement sustainable seafood production.

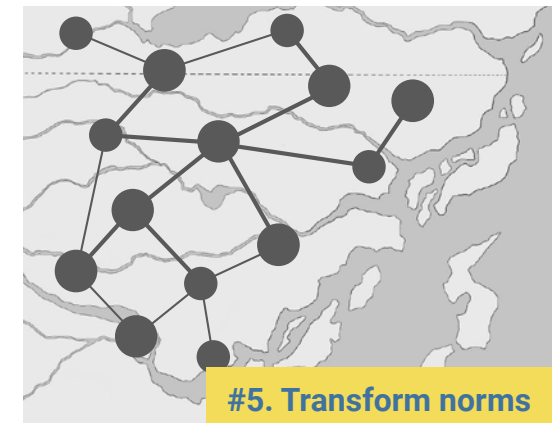
Activities needed to go to scale under this approach include using what you have learned in the pilot to credibly change system conditions as well as raise the necessary resources and build the team needed to implement these strategies.



(Scaling Deep)

Scaling Approach #5. Transform System Norms – Finally, building on Meadow's (2008) and Abson et al.'s (2017) systems approach, the most powerful leverage points involve changing the underlying values, goals, and mental models of key actors in the overall system. These changes can then propagate across the actors' social networks. For example, you might build a stewardship ethic among all landowners and managers to conserve and restore wetlands. Or you might work to make it socially unacceptable to consume non-sustainably harvested seafood.

It is usually difficult for any one program to develop specific and intentional strategies to make deep transformation happen. However, activities needed to go to scale under this approach might include using what you have learned in the pilot to develop and communicate the stories needed to reach and influence the hearts and minds of key influencers and stakeholders within a social network.



Annex 2. Summary of the 6 Partner Programs + Overall Network

Partner Programs	Strategies Being Scaled	Location	Organization(s)
US Regenerative Row Crop Systems	Sustainable farming practices across the Upper Mississippi River Basin	USA	The Nature Conservancy
Climate Smart Shrimp Aquaculture Program	Intensification of shrimp aquaculture that incorporates mangrove reforestation	Indonesia Philippines Ecuador	Conservation International
Fish Forever	Networks of managed access and reserve areas enabling communities to sustainably manage coastal fisheries resources	Indonesia / Philippines Palau / FSM Mozambique Honduras / Guatemala Brazil	Rare Local partners
Network for Scaling Adaptive Management within Protected Area Systems	Adaptive outcomes-based management of protected areas and networks across Latin America and beyond	South America Central America Global	WCS Peru RedParques WCPA
Partnership Reducing the Illegal Killing of Birds in the Mediterranean	Integrated strategies for reducing killing of birds in countries in the Mediterranean region	Croatia, Cyprus, Montenegro, Greece Mediterranean region	Euronatur Vulture Conservation Foundation Birdlife International BIOM
Scaling Indigenous People and Local Community (IPLC) Led Conservation	Using the Conservation Standards / Healthy Country Planning to enable IPLC-led conservation efforts	Australia Canada Global	Conservation Management Network of IPs
Taking Conservation to Scale Learning Network	Scaling approaches	Global	Above partners Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation Walton Family Foundation Foundations of Success