LAND-at-scale

SCALING IN CONTEXT – Towards responsible scaling in land governance interventions

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1 BACKGROUND

LAND-at-scale (LAS) is a land governance support program for developing countries from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, which was launched in 2019. The objective of the program is to directly strengthen essential land governance components for men, women and youth that have the potential to contribute to structural, just, sustainable and inclusive change at scale in lower- and middle-income countries/regions/landscapes.

The central aim of the program is to scale successful land governance initiatives, and to generate and disseminate lessons learnt to facilitate scaling (see for a detailed discussion: Meij and Vintges, 2021). Strengthening land governance, however, is a complex process which requires different approaches depending on the region or country involved, tailored to local, regional or national socio-political, historical and legal contexts. The strong focus of the LAS programme on just and equitable land governance actually seems to require bottom-up and inclusive approaches – the intended beneficiaries need to be involved and endorse the policies and activities (ibid.: 2). At the same time, this results in questions and dilemmas concerning how to scale initiatives which have been designed through bottom-up and participatory approaches, and are strongly embedded in local contexts. These issues were also raised during the first partner consultation organized in collaboration with the Knowledge Management partners of LAS in 2022 in conjunction with the LANDac annual conference (see Chamberlain and Betsema, 2022). In response, the Thematic Knowledge Agenda in the LAS knowledge management programme has made scaling a key area of focus. This concept paper serves as a starting point for the consultation and discussion with the LAS- partners.

The paper is based on a literature review, as well as discussions with a selection of partners involved in the Land-at-scale programme. Much of the literature on scaling in relation to land governance focuses on titling and administration, often in combination with technological innovations (see e.g. Thakur, 2020; Koeva et al., 2021), or challenges related to scaling fit-for-purpose approaches to land administration and governance (see e.g. Mekking, 2021). The latter body of literature is linked more directly to the questions raised by the Land-at-scale project partners. There is also a body of literature on scaling in relation to interventions in food production and food systems, which is also relevant for the exploration of scaling in relation to land. Finally, scaling is an important subject discussed by scholars in the field of (sustainable) transition management. Insights from these bodies of literature were combined for the development of this concept paper.

2 INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty to thirty years, the concept of scaling has gained considerably popularity in the field of development (Körner, Lubberink, Lammers, & Winter 2021; Wigboldus, 2018). The concept is commonly associated with innovations, developed to address (global) societal challenges, which are – often after being tested in a 'pilot' – believed to result in a multiplication of

benefits (Wigboldus, 2018: 4)[1]. Approaches to scaling, however, as well as ideas about what it is that needs to be scaled, have changed over time, moving beyond a predominant focus on transferring knowledge and technology towards more systemic approaches (Schut et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, the promise of scaling, or scaling processes, are hardly ever questioned (McLean & Gargani, 2019). This appears to be the result of a desire to speed up progress in the face of pressing, global challenges such as those related to the SDGs. Scaling, however, appears to be equally driven by notions of efficiency and value for money (Wigboldus, 2018). 'Scaling what works' has become a common catch phrase, and may seem entirely logical. But what may work in one context, may not work in another (Koerner et al. 2021). Faster, bigger and more, is not necessarily better, and may easily result in the return of old scaling ideas, such as the search for a one-size-fits all or blueprint approach (Wigboldus, 2018). Instead, different solutions may have different optimal scales at which they work (Mclean and Gargani, 2019). Scaling may come with scaling risks and negative impacts as well. Furthermore, in the field of sustainability transformations, questions have been raised about solutions developed by researchers and designers from the Global North, and their applicability in other parts of the world (Lam et al., 2020).

The questions raised by the LAND-at-scale project partners, about how to scale locally developed, bottom-up, participatory approaches to increasing security of land tenure, may therefore require thinking beyond 'scaling what works'.

3   SCALING UP, OUT, OR DEEP

There are many definitions of scaling, and many strategies and activities which are referred to as scaling. As Wigboldus (2018) has noted, scaling up has been used interchangeably with dissemination or transfer of knowledge, pushing the use and spread of technology, increasing impact, and the concept has also been used by NGOs when referring to the mobilization of larger and/or broader networks.

Some attempts to create more clarity focused on distinguishing types of scales, such as spatial, temporal and institutional scales, addressed by scaling initiatives. The assumption is often that there is a need to combine various types of scales to foster change (Enemark, Mclaren, Lemmen, Antonio, & Gitau, 2016). Others argue that there is a need to distinguish more clearly between different scaling processes. McLean and Gargani (2019) make a distinction between scaling up, and scaling out. Scaling up, according to these authors, refers to an increase of 'output' or 'products' – for instance train more land surveyors, or produce more land certificates. Scaling out refers to an increase of 'production', for instance promoting land registration policies in other places. These two forms of scaling can of course be applied at the same time within a given intervention or programme.

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[1] The PhD-thesis on scaling written by Wigboldus provides a very detailed overview of how the concept of scaling developed over time, both in terms of theory and implementation.

Lam and colleagues (2020) add the idea of scaling deep. Scaling deep is about changing beliefs, norms and mindsets. It is about promoting transformative learning, to ensure the sustainability of change – which was raised as an important requirement by the LAS project partners as well (Chamberlain and Betsema, 2022). Such learning can take place in local, place-based initiatives, but also through communities of practice at higher geographical or institutional scales. In the latter cases, it is also about reframing stories about the nature of the challenges to be addressed.

There is an increasing awareness of the need to look deeper into how change is happening. Lessons can be learnt for instance by looking at literature on socio-technical transitions theory (Geels, 2019) and transition management (Rotmans & Loorbach, 2009), used in thinking about transitions to sustainability. This literature focuses on more systemic approaches to change, and one of the lessons relevant to LAS concerns the importance of interconnecting and simultaneously addressing social, institutional and technological change. These types of change influence one another, which requires an iterative process in which technological change is adapted to local social and institutional contexts, but once implemented, requires renewed attention to the social and institutional situation, as these will (need to) adapt to the changes resulting from the implementation of new technologies. Another important lesson from this growing body of literature is the need to apply this iterative process at multiple levels, manoeuvring between various (social and institutional) levels.

4   SCALING RISKS AND RESPONSIBLE SCALING

Scaling for increased tenure security, especially for the most vulnerable groups in society, requires not only the investigation of how systemic approaches to scaling can be designed and implemented, equally important are ethical questions about scaling processes and the desired or aspired outcomes (cf. Koerner et al., 2021). Land governance innovations can have unforeseen negative social, economic or environmental consequences, for different stakeholders, or over time, which may be amplified by scaling (Meyfroidt et al., 2022); (Debonne, van Vliet, Metternicht, & Verburg, 2021). In other words, scaling may result in spatial, temporal and social trade-offs (Thomson et al., 2019). Furthermore, scaling is not a value-free process. Innovations are embedded in norms, values and beliefs of specific stakeholders about what good innovations are, and often the visions and solutions of more powerful stakeholders become dominant in scaling processes (Pereira et al., 2020). Scaling can thus easily become a strategic tool for powerful stakeholders (Wigboldus, 2018).

Scaling may also entail the risk of reducing response diversity, which may very well result in increased vulnerability of some stakeholders and increased inequality (Koerner et al., 2019; Hendriks et al., 2016). Upscaling pro-poor land recordation, for instance, in some instances undermined existing conflict resolution mechanisms which were more effective in reducing tensions (Hendriks et al., 2016).

According to Wigboldus (2018), scaling risks are associated with distortions created due to simplifications and reductions of change processes and the contexts in which these take place,

and because of limitations in the linear approaches often associated with scaling innovations and change, and what he refers to as a 'misguided pro-scaling bias'. To address these risks, Wigboldus and Leeuwis (2013) developed the concept of responsible scaling, which was further developed by Wigboldus and colleagues in 2016. This is an approach to govern scaling by taking the technical and managerial aspects into account, but equally important, also the socio-economic and ethical considerations. Responsible scaling requires a reflexive approach, posing questions about desirable futures are for various stakeholders, including a variety of stakeholders – also more marginalized and perhaps even 'unconventional' stakeholders. Questions need to be asked about how these different visions for the future inform scaling objectives, and whose norms, values and aspired outcomes are integrated into scaling efforts. Responsible scaling also entails critically reflecting on who really benefits from scaling efforts, and what potentially negative (social, environmental, economic) effects may occur at (which) scale.

5   IMPACT OR OUTCOME SCALING

Acknowledging negative and/or unintended impacts of scaling efforts, a number of researchers and practitioners are calling for a new approach to scaling. 'Scaling what works' often does not work, hence Mclean and Garani (2019) propose to start at the other end of scaling processes, from the intended impact. Others refer to this approach as outcome scaling (Koerner et al., 2022).

This approach, in combination with the concept of responsible scaling, offers perhaps possibilities to address the question of how to scale community-based, bottom-up and locally embedded land governance projects. This approach starts with an in-depth understanding of the problems to be solved for a specific context, as well as the constraining and enabling factors and conditions. Rather than opting for a single solution, the focus is on identifying or designing portfolios of the best suited (social, institutional, technological) innovations, as well as identifying the strategies and partnerships that are likely to bring about the desired outcome (Klerkx and Begemann, 2020). This approach requires an iterative process, involving continuous feedback and learning with interlinked networks of stakeholders and partners. As such, this approach also speaks to the trend of increasing attention to processes of (transdisciplinary) co-creation of knowledge to address societal challenges (see e.g. Chambers et al., 2022).

Once portfolios have been identified or designed, Mclean and Gargani (2019) caution against seeing scaling as an imperative. Instead, it should be justified by asking a few fundamental questions – in line with the responsible scaling approach developed by Wigboldus and colleagues (2016). The first question that needs to be asked is: *can* an innovation be scaled? This question needs to be answered in relation to the portfolio of responses. The second question that needs to be asked is based on values: *should* an innovation or response be scaled? This requires a reflection on the purpose of scaling, and on the question who benefits from scaling.

Another issue to consider is the magnitude of scale. Scaling may result in changes in trade-offs between the diversity of response options, as well as in terms of sustainability (including affordability for citizens and states (Hendriks et al., 2016) and equity. Optimal scaling balances

these trade-offs, but stakeholders may disagree in how to balance these (Mclean and Gargani, 2019).

Identifying and creating networks of stakeholders and partnerships is crucial for the coordination of outcome or impact scaling. Scaling often takes place in complex systems and governance contexts. Coordination of scaling hence requires the participation of an evolving set of actors, whose role may change over time. These actors may furthermore be cooperative, competitive or competitive (Mclean and Gargani, 2019). Civil society organizations can play a role in mobilizing and safeguarding the inclusivity of these networks ((Frantzeskaki et al., 2016). Such a diverse network renders scaling complex, but is important in weighing changes in trade-offs and impacts that may occur in scaling. Avoiding conflict can result in backlash, and hence needs to be taken seriously (cf. Cuppen, 2018). A diverse set of stakeholders and partnerships also adds to the understanding of the context and system in which scaling occurs, which is crucial for scaling processes (Mclean and Gargani, 2019).

Scaling in turn affects the system in which it takes place (Wigboldus, 2018; Mclean and Gargani, 2019), and hence the impacts need to be evaluated continuously. The important question here is how, why, for whom and under what conditions does scaling change impact. It is equally important to consider that scaling is a pathway, not a one-off activity, and hence both change and scaling are context-dependent – each step, but also historical pathways shaping socio-economic and governance contexts affect the impacts of interventions and the scaling of these.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Approaches to and ideas about scaling have changed over time. While in some policy circles there is still a strong belief in technological development as the single most important driver of change – especially in a context of rapidly evolving AI techniques – there is a growing recognition that change and interventions to bring about change are context dependent. At the same time, the magnitude of societal problems, such as poverty and inequality, foster a desire to move from a multitude of small-scale initiatives that seem to work to promoting large-scale improvements. A review of the literature on scaling, drawing also on lessons learnt in the studies of sustainability and food systems transitions, however, cautions us against viewing scaling as automatically desirable and possible.

Responsible scaling takes time and calls for a reflexive approach, including posing ethical questions about scaling. What is the purpose of scaling, what visions of the future are at stake, whose visions, and who ultimately benefits? Such questions are also imperative in designing impact or outcome scaling. This approach to scaling starts at the local level, with a collaborative exploration of the problem at hand, the way the context impacts the problem, to develop a diversity of response options to address the problem. It is the start of an iterative process in which locally-based interventions are evaluated, as well as the changes occurring when interventions are scaled – when scaling is deemed possible. This approach directs our attention to the possible unintended/negative impacts of scaling, and emphasizes the need to establish interlinked, but also inclusive networks of stakeholders and partnerships to coordinate scaling.

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