



# Discussion Paper BRIEFS

Food Consumption and Nutrition Division of the International Food Policy Research Institute

*Discussion Paper 181*

## Scaling Up Community-Driven Development: A Synthesis of Experience

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Community-driven development (CDD) recognizes that poor people are prime actors in the development process, not targets of externally designed poverty reduction efforts. In CDD, control of decisions and resources rests with community groups, who often work in partnership with demand-responsive support organizations and service providers such as elected local governments, the private sector, NGOs, and central government agencies. CDD's potential is increasingly being recognized: studies have shown that CDD can increase the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of projects or programs, making them more pro-poor and responsive to local priorities. However, most CDD initiatives are small-scale, and the potential for wide-reaching impact has not yet been demonstrably realized. No matter how effective a scattering of small-scale initiatives is, the achievement of national and international goals will not be possible without effective large-scale action. In the last two years, there has been an upsurge in interest in how to go from numerous small-scale successes—"boutiques"—to large-scale impact.

### **Purpose of This Report**

The aim of this synthesis is to compare case study findings with those of earlier work to elicit core features, tendencies, success/failure factors for given contexts, and to highlight challenges that need to be confronted to maximize the potential of CDD for large-scale impact. The study asks the following questions:

- What are the key conditions, elements, and processes relating to successful scaling up of CDD?
- What are the main constraints or limiting factors, in different contexts?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study accepts the notion that there are certain basic operational principles related to success that may be effectively applied more widely. These principles broadly relate to the particular set of institutional arrangements, capacities, and processes that underpin and facilitate successful CDD initiatives in given

contexts. These conditions and processes also affect the potential for CDD initiatives to effectively scale up. Scaling-up may occur along several dimensions—quantitative, functional, political, or organizational—often simultaneously. Perceptions differ as to the most important driving forces—universalists, for example, viewing scaling-up essentially as the expansion of a pre-designed project, while, at the other extreme, contextualists see the environment as all-determining.

### **The Case Studies**

The case studies used for this paper are as follows.

**Zambia.** The Program of Support for Poverty Elimination and Community Empowerment (PROSPECT) evolved from PUSH (1992–97) and aims to reduce poverty reduction in peri-urban areas of Lusaka and Livingstone through representative community organization. The main foci are “social empowerment” (institution building), “personal empowerment” (micro-finance), and development and maintenance of infrastructure.

**Malawi.** Scaling up HIV/AIDS Interventions Through Expanded Partnerships (STEPS) is a multisectoral response to HIV/AIDS comprising community mobilization / planning by village AIDS committees aimed at prevention, care, support, and mitigation.

**Kyrgyz Republic.** This is a comparison of two programs, the UNDP-supported Decentralization Program, which is CDD working through strengthening links between

community-based organizations and local government, with the emphasis on local governance; and the DfID-supported Sustainable Livelihoods Program among livestock-producing communities, which is driven by social mobilization through “village working groups.”

***Scaling up community-driven development is not about projects per se, but about certain processes and principles, and how these are anchored in national policy frameworks and embedded within a country's social and institutional fabric.***

**Nepal and India.** A comparison of two approaches to extending microfinance to the poor are considered: Nirdhan Utthan Bank Ltd. (NUBL) in Nepal, which extends group-based loans to targeted clients (a self-proclaimed “Grameen replicator”) and the Self-Help Group Linkage Banking Program of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) India.

**Kerala, India.** Kudumbashree (KDB) is a multisectoral statewide poverty alleviation program based on village-level micro planning, the formation of “thrift and credit societies,” microenterprise, and women’s empowerment through social mobilization and group formation.

### Lessons Learned from the Case Studies

Lessons from the case studies include the need for donors and supporters of CDD, including governments, to think of the *process* beyond the project, and of transformation or transition rather than exit once the project has concluded. Donor push and community pull factors need to be balanced to prevent “supply-driven, demand-driven development.”

Overall, capacity is pivotal to successful CDD and its successful scaling up over time. Capacity is more than simply resources, however; it also includes motivation and commitment, which, in turn, require appropriate incentives at all levels. Capacity development takes time and resources, but it is an essential upfront and ongoing investment, with the capacity and commitment of facilitators and local leaders being particularly important.

A “learning by doing” culture—one that values adaptation, flexibility, and openness to change—needs to be fostered at all levels, with time horizons adjusted accordingly. The building of a library of well-docu-

mented, context-specific experiences through good monitoring, evaluation, and operational research will be useful in advocating for improvements in the contextual environment.

### Conclusions

One World Bank review concluded that since the success of CDD is crucially conditioned by local cultural and social systems, it is best done not with a wholesale application of best practices applied from projects that were successful in other contexts, but by careful learning by doing.

While this synthesis describes some of the more important features of CDD scaling-up, it is not possible to rank them, because some features are more important in certain contexts, others less so. Many interact synergistically. With such interactive systems, it is impossible to make useful generalizations about the relative importance of one factor versus another. Rather than ranking, it is more useful to view these features *in toto* as guidance—in terms of what to strive for (with new CDD initiatives) or what to look for (in evaluations).

The CDD paradigm is about adaptation and learning rather than mere replication. It values diversity over standardization and promotes synergy rather than substitution or competition. Ultimately, it is about processes and principles, not projects per se—processes that need to become anchored in national policy frameworks and embedded within the social, cultural, and institutional fabric of the country.

**Keywords: scaling up, community-driven development, poverty, Zambia, Malawi, Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, India**

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