Center for Universal Education at BROOKINGS

An Introduction to Scaling for Impact: Why, What, Who, and How

February 2025

Millions Learning Team, Center for Universal Education,
The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C.

Zoom

Center for Universal Education at BROOKINGS

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We will use slido and the Zoom chat today

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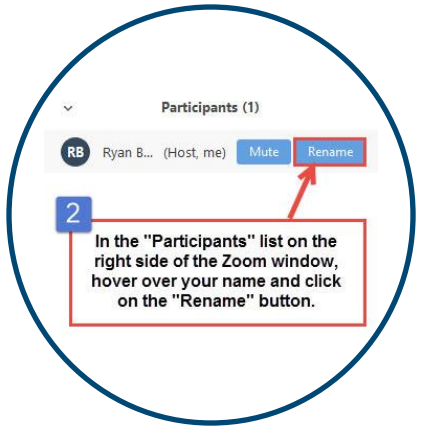
Session is being recorded



Use the “Rename” button to spell out your name, organization, and where you are joining from

AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY
8:30 – 8:33	Welcome and Housekeeping
8:33 – 8:40	Introductions
8:40 – 8:45	*Q: What does scaling mean to you? How do you say scaling in your context or language?*
8:45 – 8:55	Why focus on scaling? What do we mean by scaling for impact?
8:55 – 9:00	*Q: How long does it take to scale impact?* Scaling is …. Scaling is not …
9:00 – 9:10	Scaling research
9:10 – 9:25	Open Q&A about scaling for impact experiences and questions
9:25 – 9:30	Further opportunities to connect

Introductions

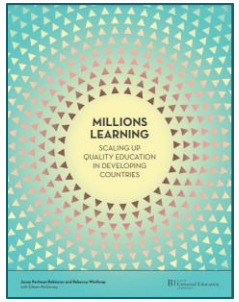
Please share:

- your name,
- organization
- country from where you are joining

... in the chat

Millions Learning

Shared Goal: To generate useful evidence and provide practical recommendations around **processes of scaling in global education** and build stronger links between research and practice.



2016

A study of where and how quality education has scaled in low- and middle-income countries, including identification of 14 core ingredients for scaling and 14 in-depth, retrospective case studies from around the globe.

2018

Real-time Scaling Labs (RTSLs) - 2018-2023

CUE and **6 partner institutions** around the world co-created Real-time Scaling Labs (RTSLs)—a participatory, action-research approach to learn from, support, and document education interventions as they scale in real time. Ultimate goals were (1) to support initiatives as they deepen and expand while simultaneously (2) gaining insight into how policymakers, civil society, and private sector can work together to bring about large-scale transformation in the quality of children's learning and development. The labs offered concrete opportunities for peer learning and exchange through in-person and virtual convenings while also generating knowledge on the "how" of scaling impact.

2020

Research on Scaling the Impact of Innovations in Education (ROSIE) 1.0

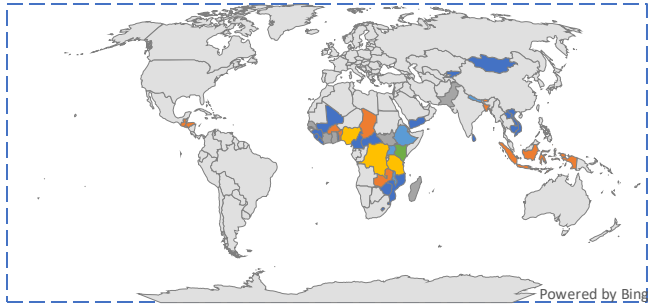
A partnership between the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings and the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX). ROSIE brings together researchers and practitioners working in 29 low- and middle-income countries to study the process of scaling education initiatives for impact. In 2021, **15 KIX grantee teams** joined ROSIE, working alongside the CUE team to think about, study, and deepen the impact of their work.

Research on Scaling the Impact of Innovations in Education (ROSIE) 2.0

ROSIE is working and learning alongside all GPE KIX teams across 5 thematic cohorts: Data systems, GESI, TPD, ECD, OOSC. **43 teams encompassing 91 partner organizations in 51 countries**. ROSIE is a Scaling Course, A Learning Community, and a multidimensional research project on scaling.

2024

KIX ROSIE Project Teams



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What does "scaling" mean to you?

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How do you say "scaling" in your context or language?

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Why focus on scaling?

Many effective innovations work at a small scale…

But this often does not translate to the large-scale, systemic change needed to improve learning around the world.

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Why such a low success rate for scaling?

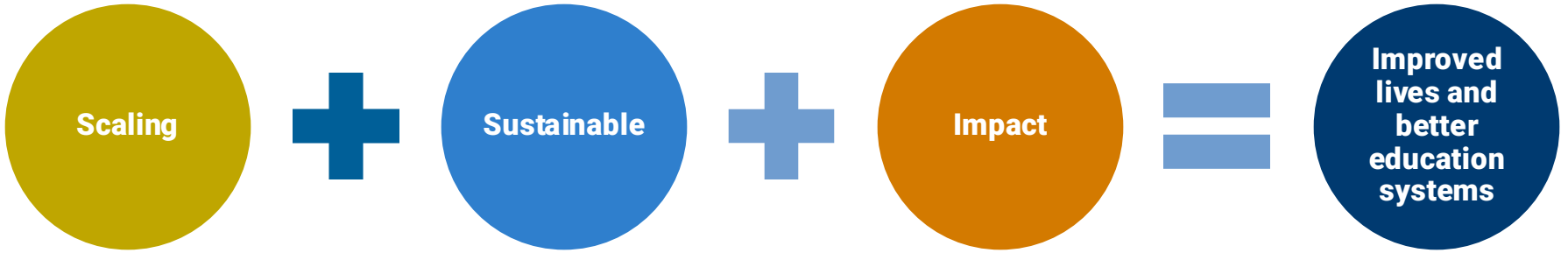
Scaling is not simple. It is a complex, long-term, non-linear process that requires experimentation (and some failure along the way), openness to change, collaboration, patience, data use, and creative thinking.

What is “scaling impact”?

Scaling = a range of approaches--from deliberate replication to integration into national systems--that expand and deepen an innovation, initiative, program, or policy leading to lasting improvements in people’s lives.

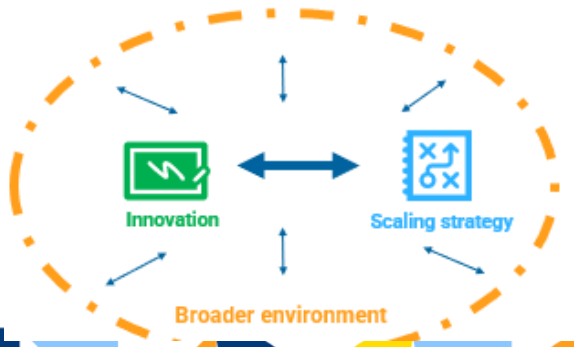
Impact = focus on *sustained results*, not size or reach of the intervention by itself

Systems transformation = the scaling effort should somehow change the system, so it operates differently (to produce better outcomes)



Seven critical factors that influence scaling:

1. Considering scaling and scalability from the beginning
2. Think about the fit between your innovation or approach, your scaling strategy, and broader environment
3. Scaling is collaborative – engage stakeholders and government
4. Practitioners and users are scaling partners
5. Contextualization – surface, deep, and equity-based
6. Subtract, don't add
7. Identifying, managing, and studying tradeoffs



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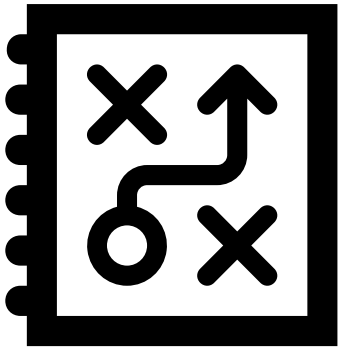

On average, how long does it take to scale a new idea or approach into an existing system?

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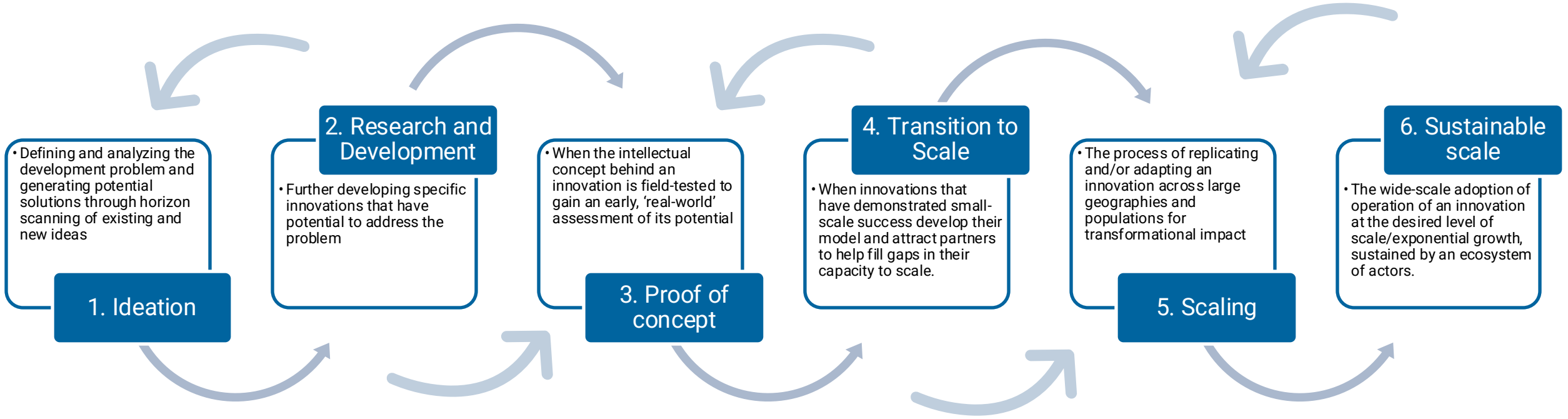
Scaling is a long-term, complex, adaptive process



Scaling is also …

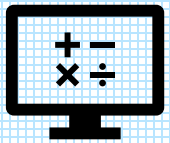
Other activities that you may be doing that are a form of scaling include:

- Establishing networks and community coalitions in support of your approach
- Collaborating to research the impact of your approach, including through second stage pilots and validation studies
- Training other organizations to use your approach
- Institutionalizing or mainstreaming a new approach into the education system
- Policy adoption or integration

Scaling for impact is not …

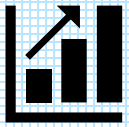
- Replicating the same approach in new places without contextualization or adaptation ('copy and paste')
- A technical process separate from the wider education ecosystem
- A way of growing the scaling organization's funding, status, or visibility
- Something to think about only after years of piloting
- Focused on numbers and growth rather than sustained impact
- Focused entirely on a solution rather than a pressing problem
- One-size-fits-all

The dangers of focusing on reach, not impact

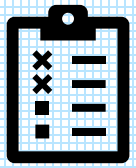


A new organization believes that giving every student in grade 7 access to an online platform will help improve learning outcomes.

An initial pilot with one school in the capital city showed that some students with accounts on the platform used it to supplement their lessons from math class and had higher exam scores at the end of the year.



The organization raises funds and gets support to buy access to the software for every student in grade 7 across the country. A large campaign is launched to encourage students to use the platform.

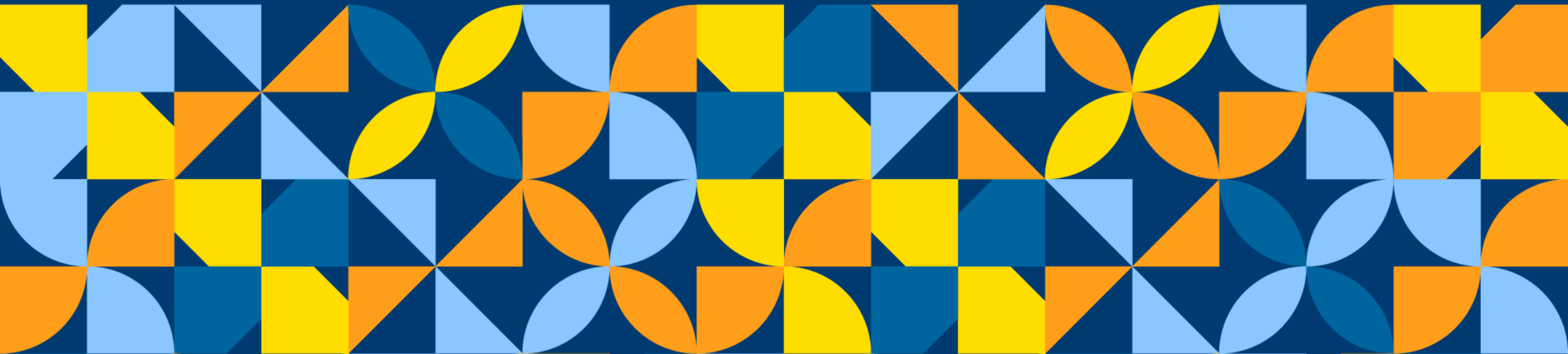


However, user data suggests that uptake is limited and largely concentrated in a few schools in urban centers. A year later, there is no change in grade 7 student exam scores.

This is an example of scaling reach without impact – an approach that focused on expanding to everyone before assessing if impact could be maintained at scale. What worked in one small school in the capital was not true for schools in different contexts across the country. It is true that this program has tried to scale, but it has not created impact at scale.

Not everything needs to or should scale!

Continuous learning and research are essential to understand and assess if scaling should be pursued at every stage of the journey



Why focus on research on scaling?

RESEARCH *FOR* SCALING

- Using data will allow you to “see” and improve your scaling work
- Sharing project data and ongoing research with stakeholders helps them understand and support your work

RESEARCH *ABOUT* SCALING

- KIX wants to better understand (and generate research on) “under what conditions "scaling” works?
- The global knowledge base is currently small and rarely built on systematic documentation from *scaling teams themselves*

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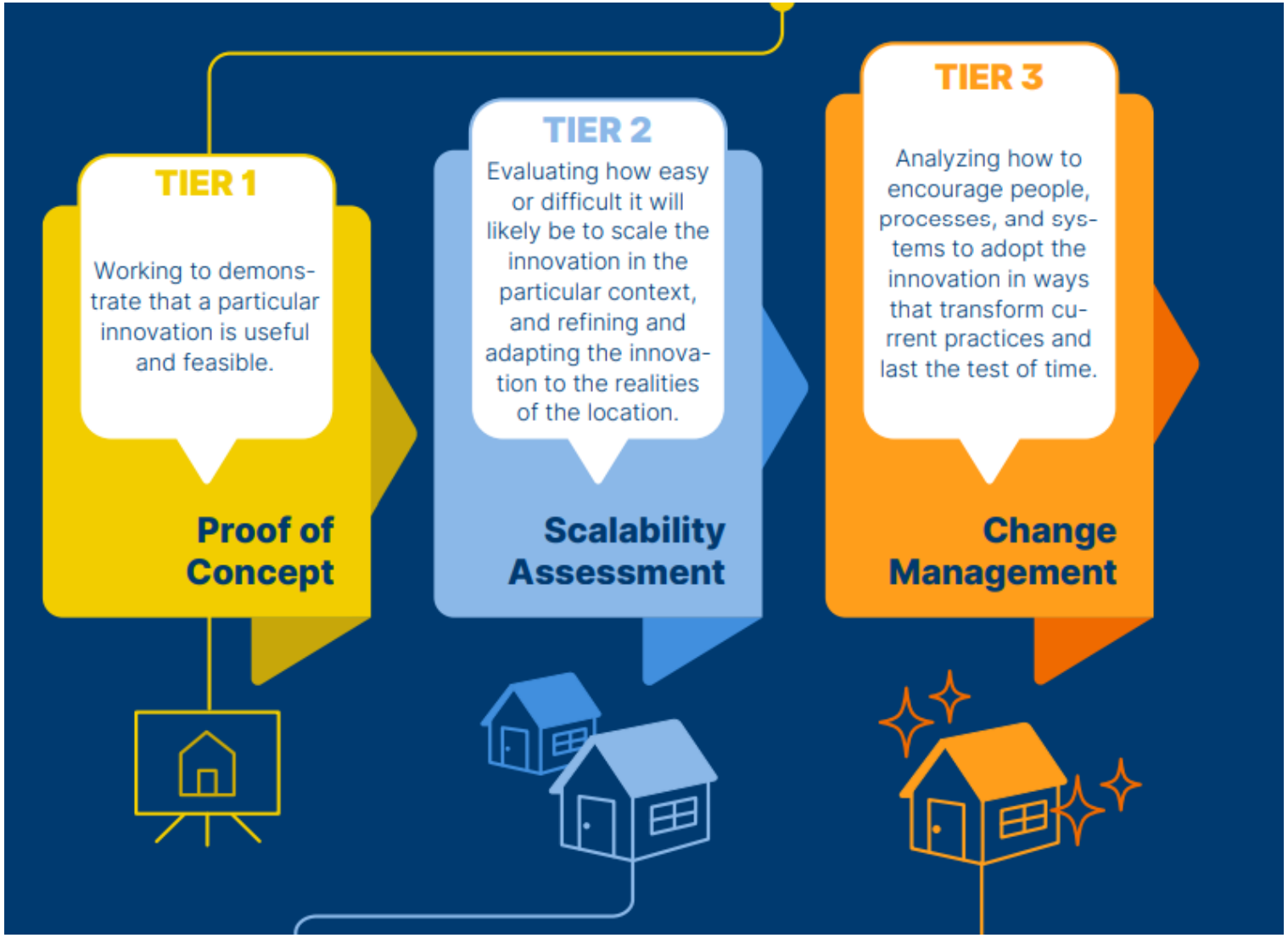
Tiers of scaling research



Discussion Questions:

Many of you are already thinking about deepening, expanding, or sustaining the impact of your initiatives, even if you don't call such work "scaling."

1. How does what you are already doing fit with the idea of "expanding or deepening impact"?

2. What research are you doing that can inform the global community's shared understanding of scaling?

3. What questions, concerns, or examples do you have about “scaling for impact?”

Some Available ML Research and Resources

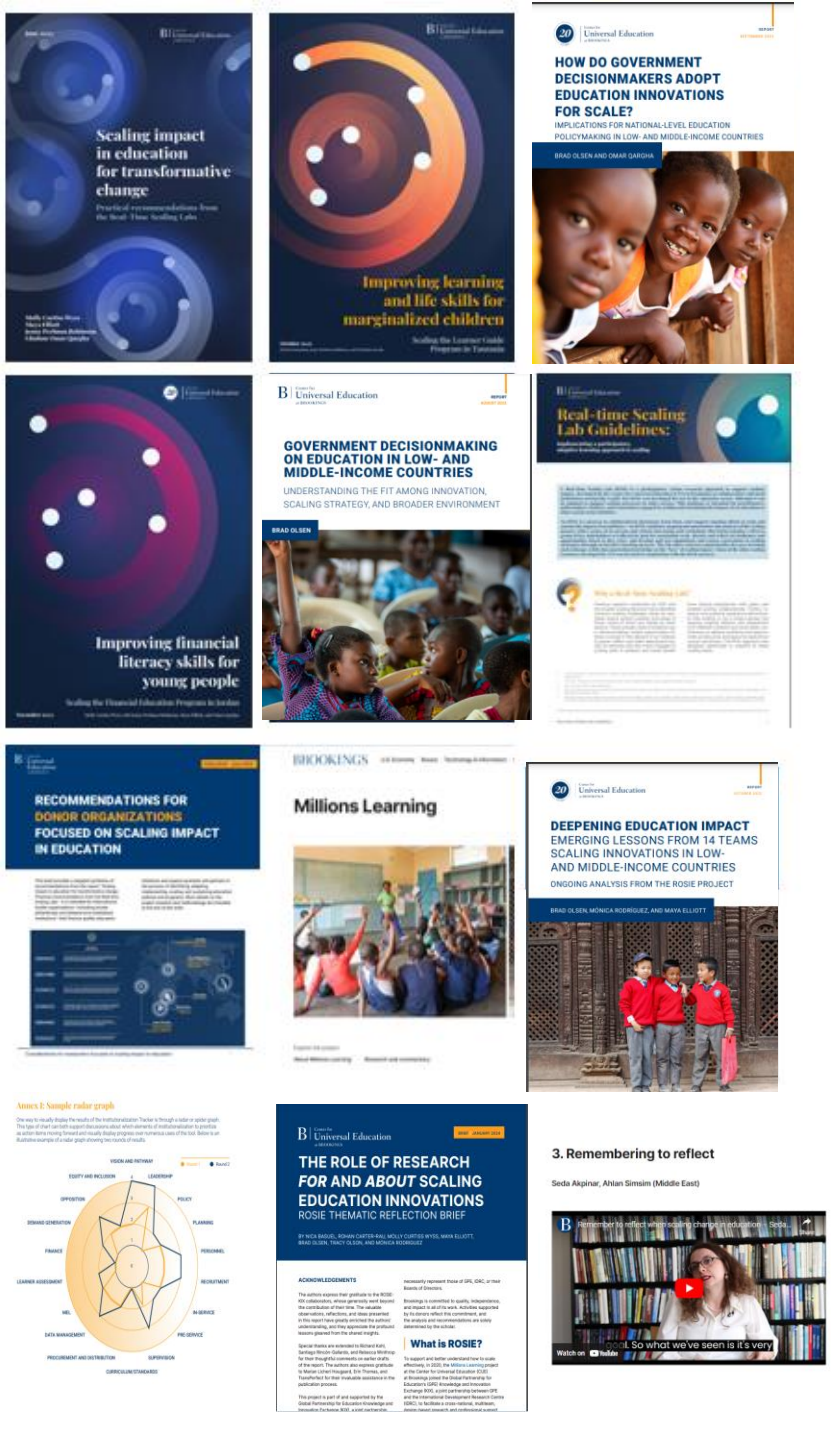
- **Scaling tools and worksheets**
  - **Scaling strategy Worksheet**
  - **Adaptation Guiding Questions**
  - **Institutionalization Tracker**
  - **Real-time Scaling Lab Guidelines**
  - **Education Scalability Checklist**

https://www.brookings.edu/projects/millions-learning/

- Scaling story videos

- 4 country case studies about scaling in education
- 3 cross-cutting reports with lessons about scaling
- **3 thematic briefs about equity, champions, and scaling research**

- Blogs:
  - **3 myths about teacher agency and why they hold back scaling education innovations**
  - **5 strategies for cultivating champions to scale education initiatives**
  - **The power of mistakes: 10 lessons to leverage learning in scaling**



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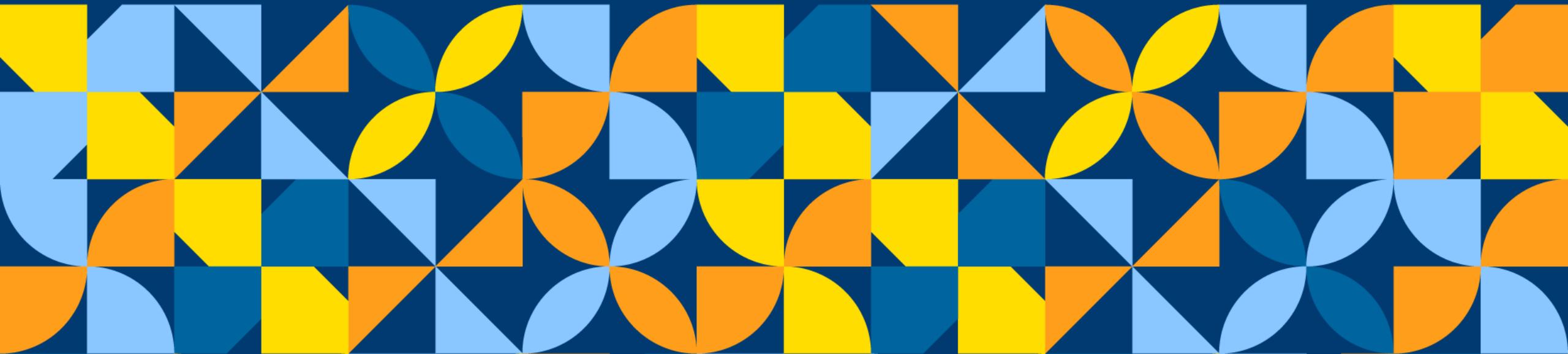
Thank you!

Now let's talk a bit…

Contact: Brad Olsen, Senior Fellow, bolsen@brookings.edu