# Strategies for Scaling Impact: Lessons from Indian Non-Profit Organisations | Text Transcript | CIRCLE

This is a text transcription for the recorded event "Strategies for Scaling Impact: Lessons from Indian Non-Profit Organisations" presented by the Canada India Research Centre for Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Guelph. The event was recorded on March 6, 2024, and was moderated by Daniel Atlin. The guest speaker was Aparna Bhasin.

Transcript:

## Daniel Atlin:

I'd like to welcome everyone to this CIRCLE event. It's great to have another webinar for the CIRCLE team. My name is Daniel Atlin, I'm actually a former vice president of the University -- vice president external. In my job I had the great pleasure of being one of the proponents and driving forces for the creation of CIRCLE as well.

Before I begin, I just want to do a quick land acknowledgement; I think it's relevant to wherever we are, and I think it's also relevant to India as well. We recognize that the gathering place where we are today and where we work, learn, and live is home to many past, present, and future First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.

Our acknowledgement of the land is our declaration of our collective responsibility to this place and the people's histories, rights, and presence.

It's wonderful again to have you all join us here for this CIRCLE webinar. CIRCLE was established in February 2020 at the University of Guelph; It stands for the Canada India Research Centre for Learning and Engagement.

CIRCLE aims to be the interdisciplinary nucleus in Canada for cutting-edge research on the Indian diaspora to showcase, advocate, catalyze, and foster an equitable, respectful, and sustained exchange of knowledge between Canadian and Indian scholars on complex, emerging, and unexplored topics related to sustainability and social and economic well-being.

You can find more information on the website, which I'm sure you know. That's how you probably found out about the webinar as well. It's also quite active on social media, on Twitter and Instagram, so I encourage you to follow them as well.

Also, join as a CIRCLE member and that way you will be on a mailing list to be able to get caught up to date on all the events and ways to participate as well. So, very happy today to be able to introduce the webinar for today which is entitled "Strategies for Scaling Impact: Lessons from Indian Non-Profit Organisations."

I know the presenter quite well, I actually introduced her to CIRCLE, her name is Aparna Bhasin as well. Aparna lives and works in Mumbai. In 2015, she founded a social impact consulting firm that provides strategic consulting and coaching services to social purposes organisations.

With the goal of amplifying their impact, she uses a blend of consulting and coaching, working closely with partners to understand their challenges and build customized solutions. Her practice uses an evidence-based approach which stems from her experience in both research and direct practice.

When I was first made aware of the work of Aparna, I thought it was a wonderful topic for a CIRCLE webinar. I'll just briefly describe what her paper was focused on.

Her focus is on scaling actually, on scaling for impact especially with Indian nonprofit organisations. "Scaling what works" has increasingly become a catchphrase in nonprofit ecosystem. However, scaling what works does not necessarily scale the results of an innovation, requiring us to shift focus instead to scaling impact.

Our partner's dissertation aims to identify strategies that nonprofit organisations in India can employ to successfully scale their impact. Aparna took a case study approach that was built on the research of Moore, Riddell, and Bosquiano's multi-dimensional framework of scaling impact for systemic change.

What you'll hear today is the results of that study and Aparna's dissertation; her case study on 5 diverse organisations working across different themes and geographies in India. The findings present strategies that can be adopted from organisations to facilitate scaling impact and cut across all 3 dimensions of scale. And structuring how to better frame an organisation's scale journey also emerges from this research.

So, before I turn the chair and the mic over to Aparna, I just want to provide a little bit about the ground rules and logistics. What I'd like to ask people to do, as they have done so far, is to remain off-camera and muted during the presentation by Aparna.

And I would then ask that we will turn to Q&A after about 20 minutes and if you have a question then, you can either wave your hand or you can wave your virtual hand. I will then endeavor to ask you to mention your question in the order of which you've raised your hands.

I'll ask you as well to keep your comments as brief as possible so we can have more time for interaction. Now, this event is being recorded with the intention to make it available on the CIRCLE website. And with that, and with no further ado, I will turn it over to Aparna Bhasin please for your presentation.

## Aparna Bhasin:

Thank you so much Daniel. Good morning for you and good evening for me to everybody. I'm just going to share my screen. Can you see that? Okay. All right. So I'm just gonna get started and jump in.

The research that I'm presenting was actually part of my master's dissertation, which is where I met Daniel. And I had a hard time kind of finding the right direction for my research and the way that I got there was actually, you know, a moment that I was working and I want to start with that story.

So, I was travelling to Rajasthan at the beginning of last year, so February of 2023, and I was working in the district of Dungarpur in Rajasthan. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the district but it has the label of one of the most backward districts of the country. It has a largely tribal population.

I was there on a research project with an organisation that was looking to work towards greater social inclusion for persons with disabilities. In the course of research, I was working with sort of local researchers in building capacity and one of the pieces was doing an exercise of shadowing an interview.

We went to the house of a young lady who must have about been 18 or 19 years old. As we got to her house, we learned fairly quickly that she had no language that she could use. Essentially, she had a hearing impairment but also hadn't learned to sign.

So, her parents sort of shared with us that they haven't found a way to communicate with her beyond sort of a few actions and nods and sounds that they kind of relate from.

We sat down with the parents since we weren't able to actively communicate with her and we learned that they tried to send her to school when she was quite young but after, sort of a few years, she dropped out.

She had a very hard time in the classroom --- there was a lot of bullying. We also found that they had actually sort of a hearing aid device that they'd gotten from an NGO that was working in the area, they were running a medical camp, but the device didn't really work or they didn't know how it worked.

They also shared that the organization that had brought in the device is no longer in the area so they can't really return to them.

Then, the father shared that, you know, it's really hard for him to make ends meet in the house. He has multiple children and a lot of other, sort of, interconnected issues that he was facing. But that his priority was really to try and get his daughter married because he was worried that he wouldn't be able to care for her forever.

And I'll tell you the story; I work in this space a lot, so you hear stories like this, but I tell you the story from an area that's maybe, you know, a 2 or 3 hour drive from the city of Uddur in a state that has one of the largest presence of nonprofits in the country.

In a district where, I myself, know of 3 or 4 organisations that work and yet you find a situation where there's no access to support or help or nowhere to go. That's sort of a strong indication

of all the work that we're doing --- all the development efforts --- are just, they're not quite enough.

That's really where my research started. I was kind of feeling like something needs to change and that's when I started digging a little bit and I found that there are more than 1.5 million nonprofits in India. And that's sort of a conservative estimate. They work across the country and that state of Rajasthan actually has one of the largest numbers – or largest proportions – and yet ¾ of all nonprofits have a maximum of 1 paid staff member.

That means that only a quarter of all the nonprofits in the country have a larger team or even, sort of, any paid staff members. This was interesting to me because working in this space – working with nonprofits – we hear the word "scale" really often. It's sort of a buzz word that people have started talking about; especially in the corporate world, in terms of intentions or hoping to see organisations' scale.

That's what really led me to my research question of "what strategies can non-profit organisations in India employ to scale their impact?" And I would like to stress on this term of "scaling" their impact because I think there's a large difference between the idea of "scaling what works" versus "scaling impact."

I think a lot of the buzz around scaling has been around this idea of scaling what works. You know, which doesn't work and so the idea is that how do you shift that to thinking about scaling impact. So, not scaling the innovation, not scaling the program, not scaling the organisation or the coverage of a policy but really focusing on the idea of scaling the positive change that's being created.

I based the kind of research that I was doing in the framework of scale that looks at 3 different ways of scale. This was important to me because, again, when we talk about scale – especially in India – a lot of people think of sort of the corporate model of scaling where you're replicating the idea out to multiple geographies.

And thinking about it, you know, there had to be different ways to approaching scale when you bring it to the nonprofit world because the goals are different. So, the model is quite interesting where there are sort of 3 approaches to scaling. The first is scaling out, which is similar to what I just described where you're replicating your efforts.

Of course, there are many different ways to scaling out. It could be through growing an organisation, it could be through the idea of franchising, it could be open-source materials – sort of many ways to think about it.

The other 2 ways of scaling – scaling up and scaling deep – sort of move away from the idea of replication and think of institutional scaling. I see them at sort of 2 sides of the same coin where scaling up is more of the top-down approach to it, where you're shifting policies or you're shifting the rules of how you do things.

By creating that change, you're able to ripple and create greater impact spreading out. While scaling deep, the third, is a similar approach but from the grassroots; a more bottom-up approach where you're working on shifting mindset and culture – which also has ripples – allowing you to scale your impact.

I think what's interesting is the authors, you know, the inventors of this framework found that they're not mutually exclusive, but they actually often work together, so it's not that you either scale out or scale up, but actually the possibility of interlinking and using multiple ways of scaling. That was really the base for where I started my research and then I come to sort of where I went forward. As Daniel had shared with you in the introduction, I did 5 case studies – so I identified 5 organisations that are quite different to each other.

And that was the goal, to bring in as much diversity as possible into the conversation – into the research I was doing. And so, you'll see 5 organisations on the left and I've tried to colour-code it so you can see where they fall on the scaling chart. To give you a little bit of context, I'll start with the first organisation, Stir Education. They work actually across 5 countries now, but they started working in Delhi and their model is very closely interlinked with the government.

So, they wanted to create a change at the government policy system level from the start. They work in, as I mentioned, 5 countries and across 3 states of India in all of the schools in those states. But they have very small teams, so they have a team of about 79 people. They're able to do this because of the method of scale that they decided to use, which was really the idea of scaling up.

The second organisation, Magic Bus, really used the idea of scaling out – where they work in sort of 22 states of the country across multiple districts. They do it through the vehicle of school partnership. So, they work with the government, schools, or private schools and they implement their program in schools. They primarily work on the concept of scaling out, but in recent times, they have been shifting to more scaling up.

And how they did this is by trying to collaborate with other organisations and band together to redefine the idea of life skills and use that as a policy change at the government level – which has been very interesting in this move where they started scaling out and then decided to shift and change kind of the way they approach things – the skills, the methods that they use.

The third organisation, Seva Mandir, they really emphasize scaling deep and the organisation sort of uses Gandhian principles with the idea of how do we shift the way that a community works. And they've been in existence for approximately 60 years, but they work in just 2 districts of Rajasthan. Their goal is to think about how do you focus on building more just and equitable societies by shifting the conversation and the way that people interact with each other. They also did a lot of work on the commons and on governing the commons.

The fourth organisation, Apnalaya – oh sorry, I'll go back to Seva Mandir because you'll see that even though their focus is on scaling deep, they're somewhere in the middle of scaling deep and scaling out. This is because after years and years of focusing on this model of deepening,

they decided that they could probably start expanding and growing and taking that model that they have out.

They did it in a very interesting way where they said because we focus on scaling deep, we cannot necessarily jump geographies but what we can do is very slowly expand to geographies that are adjacent. So, kind of moving out very slowly across villages. They started of course with 10 villages but now at approximately 1500 but all in the same sort of geography or area.

The fourth organisation, Apnalaya – and this is quite interesting because they are even smaller than Seva Mandir in terms of geography – where they've been working in the same slum of Mumbai for over 50 years. When I asked the CEO, "What does that mean? How do people react to that?", he said that he got a lot of push back from funders with this idea of you've been in a slum for 50 years and you haven't moved much – why are you still there? What is happening?

His answer was really around the idea of poverty is generational and it's been built over generations and years. If you really want to make a shift, you need to invest the time and energy to make that shift sustainable, long-lasting and really kind of last for generations as well. That was quite interesting because it was sort of a different way of looking at scaling completely where they kind of push layers going deeper and deeper. Interestingly, as you'll see, they also fall in the middle of the venn between scaling out and scaling deep.

The reason for that is now, 52 years later, they've found a citizenship model that they feel is really effective and they're working with other nonprofits – they're collaborating with other nonprofits who already have a hold in the communities that they work and have a relationship and are able to build their sort of citizenship model further.

The last one is an organisation called Dharohar, and they're based, again, in Rajasthan in the city of Udaipur. They're very interesting where they are very clear that they only approach scale from this idea of depth and their approach to depth is focused on building a centre of excellence. So, how can they push the needle and boundary of doing things better – of providing excellence in learning, excellence in engaging community to the point where they're able to shift the way that we think about community.

That's another approach to scaling deep that emerged from my research as well. So, these were the 5 case studies that I worked on and, of course, I found very specific strategies for each type of scale. Most interestingly, I found that there was certain strategies that were cross-cutting or there was approach to scaling that was important regardless of the nonprofit.

I kind of summarized these into a little model of Five Cs of scaling impact which I'm going to take you through now. The first C is this idea of clarity and the reason this was so important is that I found that most organisations are pushed into scale.  So, it's not intentional, it's not planned, it's this idea of "there's an opportunity, we should go for it" or "my funder is pushing me or forcing me in that direction so I should move in that way."

The research showed that there are probably some questions that are really essential, that will really help when thinking about scale – the first being "why do you want to scale?" So, where did the purpose come from? What is your intention? What has shown you that you need to scale?

I think this is missing from a lot of conversations on scale. The second, and this was really interesting because I found there to be a lot of contradiction between stakeholders of how scale is defined. By stakeholders, I mean it could be different levels of staff, it could be people working at the grassroots, people working in research in the same organisation, it could be between the board and the leadership, or even often between the team and funders.

There's sort of this negotiation process and I think that's important then to think of not just "how do you define scale?", but how all of your stakeholders are thinking of scale as well. The third one, which is very interesting, it borrows from Donella Meadows' "Places to Intervene in a System" which is the idea of how do you aim to impact the system? So, your program or your intervention, how is it operating? I think that in itself lends itself to thinking of scale quite a lot.

For example, if you are working on shifting paradigms, which is the bottom end of scaling, you probably need to be thinking about scaling deep. Whereas, if you are providing a service or trying to shift a policy, you probably would look at a different way to scale. I think there's an interaction between the two of thinking about where in the system you intervene and then going back to the model and saying "well, what type of scale would best align to that intervention?"

For me, this is really the starting point of saying we need to build a more intentional strategy for scale – which brings me to the second C, which is this idea of no matter how you want to scale, no matter which method or direction you're going to choose, you need a huge amount of fuel. You really need to have the capacity to scale and when I talk about capacity, I think it's both financial and human resources. I think that's where the clarity comes in because the financial and human resources that you need to scale really differ based on your approach to scale.

I think starting with what are the resources that you need to scale, what type of funding best aligns to your approach – so, for example, in India you see this huge move to the corporate social responsibility world and that's sort of a system that's quite short-term.

It's year on year, it looks at immediate results, it's really focused on outputs, and I think that lends itself quite well to the idea of scaling out and, to some extent, scaling up. But when you look at scaling deep, that sort of funding doesn't work because when you scale deep, you need time, you need consistent effort, you need to be able to fail. And then simultaneously, you know capacities, not just the financial resources, but the skills, abilities, and capacities that are needed as well.

I think that's interesting because, again, you see organization shifting – so saying I started by replicating and scaling out and now I want to scale up, I want to affect policy but my team that

worked on scaling out is not able to lobby the government or work on advocacy so we really need to think about what capacities do I have and if I want to shift and I want to scale a certain way, what type of capacities do I need?

I think identifying those resource gaps is really important in scaling and this takes me back to the first point of clarity where, if you don't have the intentional clarity of how you're scaling, it's very hard to plan the resources for it as well. So, when you push into scale accidentally, that cause a lot of capacity gaps in thinking about scale.

The third piece that came out of the research was this idea of culture and organisational culture. This was really interesting to me because what we find is as organisations grow or organisations become more established, they tend to become more rigid. They build sort of these SOPs, and they focus on how can we gain more efficiency to do this correctly or take this path. Actually, all of the organisations, regardless of how they were scaling, came to the conclusion that you really need more agility and without the flexibility and agility, it's very hard to scale.

I should go back and say it's very hard to scale impact. It's possible to scale the program, or the intervention, or scale what worked in the first place but not necessarily to scale impact. Again, these are the questions that emerged. The first is around "how do you define the culture of your organisation?" So, I'll talk about agility again in a second, but how do you define the culture of your organisation and how does that culture align with your scale goals? So, going back to the model, I think culture is quite closely linked to the type of scale you choose.

If you're scaling deep, you need to have that sort of culture of looking at the long-term, have the culture of engaging with relationships and people. If you hope to scale up, you need to have the sort of culture of saying we have the culture that fits with the idea of working with government, of lobbying, and that kind of fits into the organisation culture.

Then, the second piece coming back to the idea of agility and flexibility. So, one is the culture aligning to the type of scale, and the second is how agile and flexible is your organisation and how can you build that to prepare for scale.

The fourth C that emerged from the research was the idea of collaboration. I really like this quote because I think it's so true, in such a diverse country you cannot do everything by yourself regardless of who you are as an organisation. I think it came down to the idea of success and scaling comes from collaboration but also the right type of collaboration. I think starting with who are all the different stakeholders in your system but also who might you collaborate with.

I'll give you the example of one of the organisations who were looking at scaling out. They really looked at, you know, they actually started working in communities and they found that was not a model that they were able to scale because every time they entered a new community, they had to create a new collaborative relationship.

They switched instead to working with schools because it was the idea of if I collaborate with the government school system, I can partner with multiple schools and I can build that collaboration quite quickly to scale out.

Versus, if you're scaling up, of course you want to work at the policy level – at the higher level of government – and we found organizations started off by saying okay we're going to work at the state level but what they found is to actually effectively scale up, you need to partner with different levels of government.

You need to be collaborating with the state level but also the district level and the block level so that the scale up process actually moves smoothly. I think that the other thing we learned is it's easy to talk about collaboration, but in reality, it's very difficult for organisations to collaborate – even in a space like the nonprofit world where your goals might be aligned.

I think that's an important mindset piece that I learned from the organisations I interviewed was thinking about how collaborative is your organisation, how strong is the ability of your organisation to collaborate, and how can you better prepare? I think looking at things like, you know, going back to culture and mindset but also what systems in place do you have for it – how does your funding allow for it? Things like that.

That brings me to the final C of community. I think this really reiterates my starting point of scaling impact and not scaling what works. I think what I learned again is, regardless of how you want to scale, you need to think about how the community features in your scale goals. If you are scaling out, that means you are maybe moving to multiple geographies – you still need to contextualize what you're doing because the community still needs to feature in what you're doing.

If you're scaling deep, the community has to lie at the centre because if you really want to shift culture and mindsets, you cannot go in without understanding the community; there needs to be an acceptance. The third piece, in terms of scaling up, I think that's one where it's quite easy to lose sight of what's happening on the ground.

So, you know, how does your policy match up with the ground reality and what you wanted to actually achieve in terms of the impact that you wanted to create. I think that was one of the learnings from the organisations that I interviewed is how they all focused on understanding, measuring, assessing their impact, and sort of regularly reviewing and publishing it to make sure that they're scaling impact and not just scaling.

Make sure they're focusing on outcomes and not just the sort of outputs or results of their intervention. I'm going to pull it all together to show you the 5 Cs and I think the idea was that the research showed that if you want to think about scale, it's an iterative process and there's sort of a back and forth of thinking of these different elements.

It was really interesting to me because the 5 organisations that I interviewed and worked with, they were so diverse, and they looked things so differently and yet they were able to all focus on these 5 elements in the process of scale.

I think that was a really interesting learning for me. Just briefly, to kind of talk through where I'm going from this before I hand over to Daniel and we move into questions… I think one of my big learnings was the 3 different models of scaling require very different things from organisations and that's the kind of direction of research that I'm taking at the moment.

So, I'm working with one of the organisations to really understand and study further the idea of scaling deep and build on that. So, working on a deeper case study on scaling deep, if you please. And then, on the other side, I've started the process of coaching organisations through scales. So, you know, how do we have that conversation to make things a lot more intentional? Thank you for listening to me speak at you for the last 25 minutes and I'll hand over to Daniel so we can have more of a conversation and questions from here.

## Daniel Atlin:

Great. Thanks so much Aparna for that great presentation. I think it was very thought-provoking, and I think raised a lot of good findings that are applicable to many different jurisdictions as well. I really like how you brought your research alive as well with your framework and your examples.

So, with that, we'll open the floor to questions if there are any and while people are gathering their thoughts, maybe I'll actually begin to sort of prime the pump to question. That is actually, um, Aparna – how do you think your research may be used in organisations in different contexts and different countries? Do you think it has a broad applicability and how?

## Aparna Bhasin:

Yeah, I that's an interesting question and I started my research to be quite specific to the context of India and I was really digging in and I think there are a lot of pieces that, you know, India has a lot contexts that are quite specific in terms of how large it is, how diverse it is, how inter-connected problems are.

As I found, as I was digging deeper, I don't think it's limited; I think that applicability could go anywhere, and I think it could be applied to different countries and different organisations. I also think there's an idea of… sorry, I'll just gather my thoughts on that a second.

I think that there's also the idea of the system, the organisation, and the program. So, I think it's not only at the organisational level that you can think about scale. If you look at the model of the 3 types of scale thinking at the larger system, can you bring together multiple players who can look at scaling in different ways – and that brings together the change that you want to achieve at the larger level.

And then, at the smaller level, I would say that even within an organisation, you have different interventions and different programs, and I think you can look at scale in different ways. So, I think, yes, there's the context applicability in different countries but I think – even within the development sector – I think we can look at it at different scales.

## Daniel Atlin:

Thanks so much for that. I'm working with a nonprofit right now and I can see this framework being very applicable to their contexts, of course with some tweaks. But very, I think, illuminative – so thanks so much. A question from Andrea… Andrea, please.

## Andrea Paras:

Hi there, thanks for the presentation, Aparna. My kind of question/comment follows nicely from Daniel's in the sense that I'm asking about how this could be applied to different contexts.

In fact, I've spent the last kind of 2-3 years at the tail-end now of a research project that is looking at Canada's NGO sector specifically; looking at small and medium NGOs, and last year we a paper on exactly this question, like, what are the growth aspirations of Canada's NGO sector – in the development NGO sector.

Really focused on the grassroots funds, right, the small ones. I'm happy to provide the link to that paper if it's of interest in the chat but one of the things, one of our big takeaways, and kind of like the punchline of the paper is that small NGOs, when they think about scaling up, it's about doing more of the same thing.

That's what it's about, doing more of the same thing. So, I can also see how disaggregating these different models of scaling can be very, very helpful but, you know, kind of lining up our findings with what you're talking about – to me, the model that probably… is it scaling deep? Or is it scaling down, right? Is just doing more of the same thing.

The other, kind of thing, we found in the research that is a kind of constraint of the micro small organisations is that there's a certain, at that size, there are certain benefits to be small. You can pivot really quickly, that's what we saw a lot during the COVID pandemic. It's the small organisations because they can turn on a dime because they don't have these huge bureaucracies, right.

So, there's this flexibility and you lose that when you scale up because as you talk about, you need human resources, you need infrastructure – maybe you're getting into more, like, funding, diversity and then there's more constraints from funding.

So, it's this series of trade-offs when you think about scaling and scaling up, right. And so, it's kind of a rambling comment but I guess like a question in there is to what extent did your research look at the impact of organisational size on these scaling up decisions? And also, like these trade-offs, how did the organisations grapple with these trade-offs?

## Aparna Bhasin:

Thank you, Andrea. Actually, a lot of things come to mind both from the research but also work that I've been doing with some grassroots organisations. I think maybe 2 or 3 comments that are quite interesting – I think the first is this idea of scale doesn't necessarily mean that the organisation gets bigger.

I think that was one of the things that I had to adjust my mindset as well, is to say you can scale your impact without necessarily growing your organisation to that extent. I think that was one that I think was very important to reiterate and think about. The second one was like kind of the concept of what you're saying is what do you lose.

I think that first question that I asked, an organisation turned around and said to me "why are you scaling?" right. Why have you got to the point of talking about scale? Is it that you know you've done everything you can where you are at? Is it that you do something really well? Is it that you want to grow your reputation? What is it that's getting you to the point of scale?

I think that's the first conversation of saying what does that even mean? Sorry, I'm almost rambling through it to kind of respond to you, but the third one – and this was interesting as well – where scaling deep is not necessarily doing more of what you are already doing, it's saying "what I'm already doing is taking me from here to here, but if I really want to deepen my impact – if I want to go to make this change long lasting, have more ripples, I need to do something else."

So, it might not be replicating what I'm doing, it might be saying that I need to approach this from another lens. I take the example of one of the organisations that I think does this really beautifully where they've been working in communities for years with the idea of using a constructivist approach with the idea of saying "we want to build more just and equitable communities, and we do that through working on the commons."

They reached like a point where they couldn't go any further and they said "okay, we need to take another in to approach the same thing." So, they said, "okay, let us now go into the early childhood education system and do the same thing but the education system is just an in to creating that same sort of change – how the community is coming together."

I thought that was really interesting to say, you know, by doing the same thing further and further, are you really achieving more or not really? Another example which I found really interesting is this idea of pushing the boundary of excellence.

I'll take the example of working with disabilities in the organisation that works in Mumbai in the slum. Today, we want to achieve this, but can we do so much better and as an organisation, rather than growing my size, can I push that boundary in terms of what is possible – and almost like a demonstration effect of what is possible.

So, I thought this was really interesting as a different way of looking at scale and what you want to achieve. I think the challenge is that the world doesn't really recognize it as scale, so your funder is going to be like "okay, you know, do it in 10 more places and I'll give you more." You know, so how do we change that ecosystem of looking at what scale means as well.

And thank you for the paper! I'll download it. I'm not sure I really answered your question, but I think there's a lot more work on that and the last one I would say is thinking about grassroots organisations. We've been working a lot with the idea of collaboratives, so grassroots collaboratives, and different ways of achieving scale.

That's why I brought up that idea that I don't think that everybody needs to be doing everything – but how can you come together to look at scale differently together? I think that's another really interesting space for me, especially for grassroots organisations; can I contribute to someone else who's scaling out or scaling up without scaling myself, so I stay small, agile, and effective.

## Andrea Paras:

Yeah, thank you.

## Daniel Atlin:

Sounds like there might be a great opportunity for another seminar, perhaps with a Canadian and Indian sort of contrast and compare as well about experiences. Any other questions that we have?

So perhaps, and I think you got into this a little bit, Aparna. Perhaps, maybe I'll ask a question as well – could you talk a little bit more about the limitations of the model and what do you think needs to be explored or perhaps developed further as you conduct more research?

## Aparna Bhasin:

Yeah, absolutely. I started off with the model as an interesting way of looking at scale and a lens. I think, you know, the original research looks at that intersection point of scaling up, scaling deep, and scaling out as the ideal place to be in terms of if you want to create impact – like that middle section – and I think the first limitation is I think that's actually impossible.

I think it's really not feasible for an organisation. I think often if an organisation aims for that, they'd find that they're not using their resources effectively at all. That was interesting for me, in India at least, because resources are such a struggle.

I was really interested by, you know, the other – sort of – side pieces of two methods of scale or organisations that are willing to focus on one direction and using the model more as a starting point of discussion and thinking in a different way – but not necessarily aiming for that centre point. I think that would be definitely one of the limitations.

The second I think, as I said to Andrea, this idea of the world needs to recognize it and that's one of the big pieces in scaling deep that we struggled with. Three of the organisations I worked with were working on scaling deep and I chose them intentionally because I wanted to learn more about that space.

All of them are struggling with the funder interactions and are being pushed and encouraged to scale out more and more because they are getting these opportunities of funders saying "okay, but." Then that's interesting because there's this dynamic of yes, my goal is to scale deep, but can I stay alive if that's the direction I go in? I think those are both interesting limitations of the work, yeah.

## Daniel Atlin:

Thank you. A very interesting dynamic as well. About funders, you know, sort of taking you off mission as well or perhaps off course and what you define as impact and what you want to create. So, um, Leonard – over to you, you have a question.

## Leonard Buckles:

Yes, hi. In terms of… I had done a bit of research on sort of the NGO ecosystem in India and one of the things that I found out is that, you know, there are – as you said – 1.5 million plus in terms of local NGOs and there's also quite a few sort of international affiliates that work in India.

I know that those relationships are not the best because I think a lot of Indian NGOs are critical of affiliates like Oxfam, Save the Children, World Vision, many others in the sense that they have created India-based affiliates where the funding goes often to them and not to India-based NGOs.

I'm just wondering, in your research, what have you observed in terms of that dynamic?

## Aparna Bhasin:

Thank you. I think that's a good question and some of it will be from my research and some of it from just my experience working in the space. As you would have seen, I actually chose to work with all 5 that are not international counterpart organisations but are sort of locally grown NGOs.

I think there is an interesting dynamic between international NGOs and Indian NGOs, but I think there's actually more between large and small. So, we have a few very large NGOs that are also local – you have Apnalaya or Magic Bus – or you know, there's a few of them and I think that them, along with the international NGOs are really where all the money goes.

You have a lot of more starved grassroots or smaller organisations and that divide is growing bigger and bigger. So they've been, this is personal opinion – also, hearing from the research of

one of the most challenging times in decades for nonprofits in terms of funding. And there have been a few changes to regulations.

I think the first was the government changed the rule where international funding coming into the country can no longer be dispersed. So, if I fund an NGO, that NGO can not fund further NGOs and that's been a really big change between international NGOs and local NGOs because a lot of international NGOs in India used to work with grassroots partners but that has stopped.

So, actually a lot of grassroots organisations are starting to shut down because that was a major way of getting them access to funds. I'm not sure if I'm really answering your question – sort of just sharing experience – I would say that the previous dynamic was actually quite positive because NGOs had the opportunity to actually support grassroots NGOs.

It was far superior to funding coming in from outside to the grassroots because they were present, they had staff who were Indian and they were able to actually connect with the organisation. That shift, I think, actually has created a significant issue for being able to scale deep for the larger organisations.  I'm not sure if I fully answered your question.

## Leonard Buckles:

Absolutely. No, I think it gives me some insight into the dynamic for sure. Thank you.

## Daniel Atlin:

Great. So I think we have time for one more question if there is one. Okay. Well, and I know we look forward to hearing your further work in this space, Aparna, and seeing where you will take it as well. I think's it's a very exciting topic, and as people have indicated, it's a global topic as well that has applicability – I think broadly as well beyond India as people are trying to determine their real impact and being able to find ways to scale.

With that, I'd just like to thank everyone, thank Aparna, for your thoughtful contribution this evening. I think this was a small but mighty group. I think that people will be able to view the webinar shortly on the CIRCLE website. You can share that with your network as well, Aparna, but encourage everyone to pay attention this space and be able to see how this actually does translate and evolve in the future as well.

Thank you for sharing your contact information, Aparna, in the chat so people can reach out directly with her. And with that, I'd just like to thank everyone for joining us this morning and again remind people to keep checking the website or subscribe and be a CIRCLE member to be able to stay tuned for more seminars in the future and ways to engage as well.

I think, as well, that you can send an email directly to the CIRCLE website as well and that's indiaresearch-L@uoguelph.ca. So again, thanks everyone and thank you for your time this morning. I hope you have a great rest of the day. Bye now.

[End of transcript]