

SCALING AND IMPACT LEARNING PAPER



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Note

The insights presented in this report are based on a series of qualitative interviews conducted with selected GSMA Innovation Fund alumni and selected mobile network operators (MNOs) from Asia and Africa. While these case studies provide perspectives on how partnerships between startups and MNOs can be forged, they reflect the specific experiences of the organisations involved and the contexts within which they operate. These findings should not be interpreted as universally applicable to all MNOs or startups. Instead, they are intended to illustrate examples of partnership models, benefits, challenges and lessons learned, which may inform, but not guarantee, potential collaboration.

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01

Background and purpose



The GSMA Innovation Fund's (the Fund's) impact strategy is rooted in scaling digital innovations that create positive social impact. The Fund supports small and growing enterprises so they sustain their impact, grow as businesses and are commercially sustainable. Small and growing enterprises refers to commercially viable startups, small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and social enterprises with up to 250 employees that have significant potential and ambition for growth.¹

While the Fund understands how to support grantees to scale commercially, there is less clarity on how commercial growth correlates with scaling social impact and what support might be offered specifically for the latter. The purpose of this work is to provide actionable recommendations for the GSMA Innovation Fund to support grantees in maintaining social impact during market growth, answering the questions:

- 1 To what extent are grantees maintaining, evolving or deprioritising products and approaches that serve economically vulnerable users as they scale?
- 2 Which business models, product strategies or operational choices support the ongoing inclusion of economically vulnerable users?
- 3 What actions or support can help grantees navigate scaling without compromising social impact?

Selected grantee cases at a glance

ATEC 



ATEC

📍 Bangladesh

Electric pay-as-you-go (PAYGo) cook stoves for customers switching from wood and gas-burning stoves, with IoT carbon-credit tracking.

VITARA



Vitara

📍 Ghana

Traceability via software linking smallholder shea nut farmers practicing environmental conservation to global markets for fair trade shea nut and shea products.

KOOLBOKS



Koolboks

📍 Nigeria

PAYGo solar-powered and traditional freezers, marketed to solve gaps in the cold chain for micro- and SMEs.

¹ The GSMA Innovation Fund for Humanitarian Challenges Terms and Conditions, 2025.

02

Methods



We began exploring the learning questions using three grantee cases from the Fund's climate action rounds: ATEC, Koolboks (both part of the Digital Urban Services round), and Vitara (from the Climate Resilience and Adaptation 2.0 round).

We first reviewed documentation and spoke with grant managers and the GSMA innovation Fund team to ensure our understanding of each grantee's business model. We then conducted interviews with the grantees, speaking with:

- Bangladesh Managing Director, ATEC
- Chief Business Officer and Business Development Associate, Koolboks
- CEO and Business Development Manager, Vitara

In parallel, we conducted a rapid literature review focused on social entrepreneurship, social impact and scaling humanitarian innovations. This included academic and practitioner literature on social enterprise business models, social innovations and

the distinctive challenges of scaling with this purpose and in low-income contexts.

From our conversations with grantees and the literature review, we created a few frameworks to test the usefulness of different ways of categorising the GSMA Innovation Fund grantees. We tested these ideas in a workshop with Fund staff, after which we refined more and brought in an additional framework from literature which complemented our own.

Finally, we returned to the three cases of ATEC, Koolboks and Vitara and fully applied the framework created, tested additional cases and scenarios, and refined again into this written report answering the original learning questions.

Limitations

We had originally asked the three participating grantees to share customer-level data, such as specific customer segments and respective numbers over time. Grantees ultimately did not share any additional data with us, so our understanding of their business scaling journey and decision points is limited to the documentation provided by the Fund and the conversations with the grantees. This was a particularly relevant limitation to our ability to fully answer the first learning question, which would ideally be supported with customer profile data over time.

03

Context setting

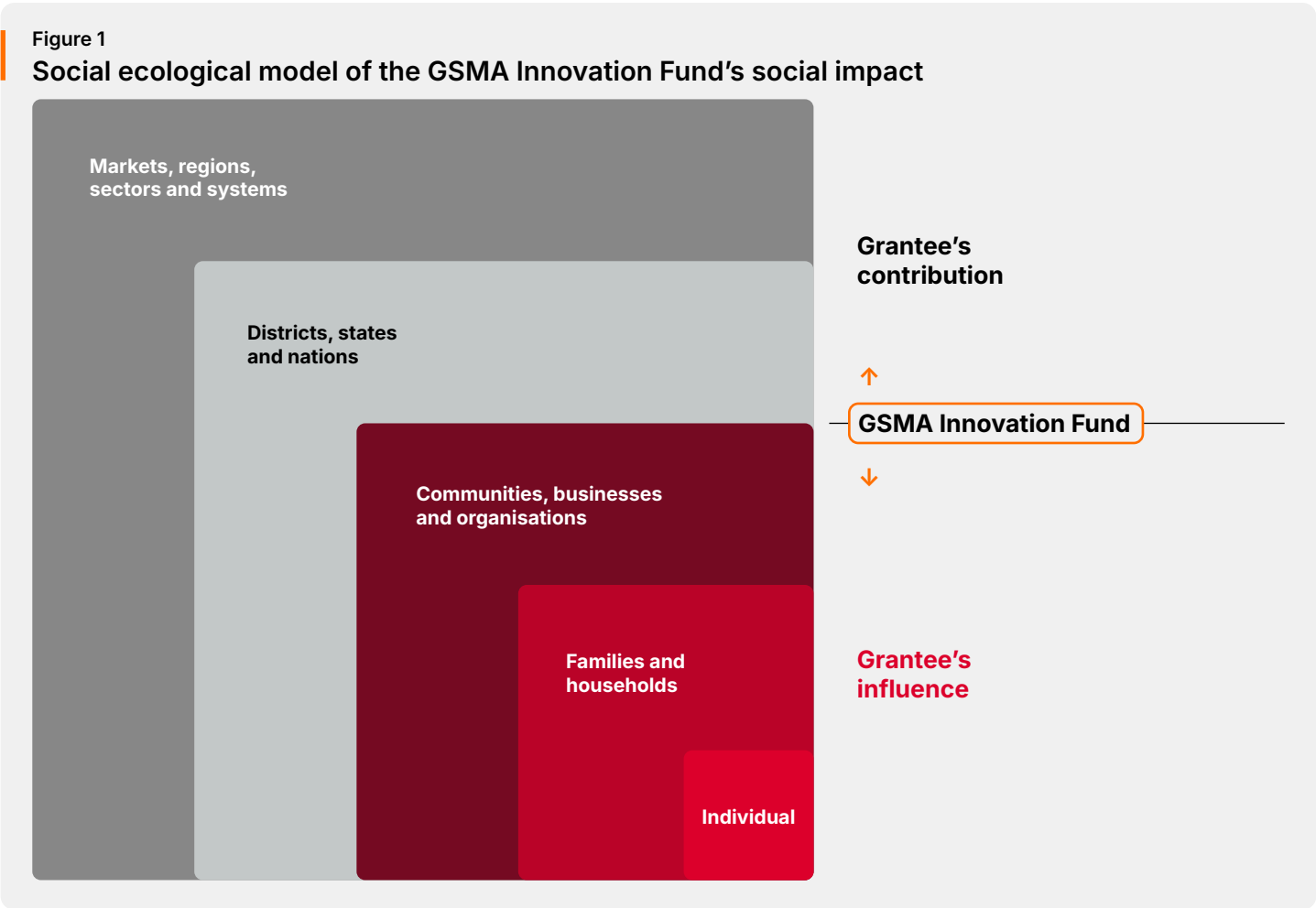


Key definitions

Social impact

In order to understand the scaling of social impact, it's important to be specific about what kind of social impact the Fund seeks to scale. The term is used with the assumption that social impact is beneficial to individuals and a net positive for society; though these are subjective assumptions. Clarifying a clear definition and overarching goal for the type of social impact the Fund seeks is essential because it shapes how we understand and measure that change as it scales.

In staff interviews and the group sensemaking session with the GSMA, we heard some internal variation about the Fund's primary avenue for social impact. These differences can be thought of as levels of social impact and can be mapped to a Social Ecological Model (SEM), see Figure 1 below. The concentric rings, starting with individuals and expanding outward to market systems, illustrate how social impact can occur across these interconnected levels. The Fund contributes to social impact through grantees at all levels of the SEM, albeit in different ways and with different levels of directness.²



² Ebrahim, Alnoor, & Rangan, V. Kasturi. (2014). What Impact? A framework for measuring the scale and scope of social performance. University of California Berkley, California Management Review. Vol 56 (3).

For the purposes of this report, we are **focusing on the first three areas of the SEM, as this type of change is most direct to individuals and most immediate**. In comparison, social impact in the final two areas of the SEM is less causal and therefore less assured.

When considering social impact for individuals, families and households, and communities, businesses and organisations, it is still important to further define what is meant in terms of **what kind of change** and **for whom?** In kicking off this assignment, we agreed with the GSMA to consider social impact as 'serving economically vulnerable customers.'

In this pathway to social impact, grantees serve economically vulnerable customers. Customers use

a product that improves their livelihood or financial resilience in some way, leading to overall greater economic resilience. This social impact pathway is shown below in Figure 2.

Economic resilience covers a lot of grantees' social impact, but not all. The second common social impact the Fund contributes to is in other types of increased wellbeing (e.g. health, education, participation, etc.) This pathway might likely be seen with grantees targeting customers with exclusion criteria in lieu of or in addition to economic exclusion, for example on the basis of gender, disability, age, etc. Products often increase access to services for excluded groups. This social impact pathway is shown below in Figure 3.

Figure 2

Social impact pathway increasing economic resilience

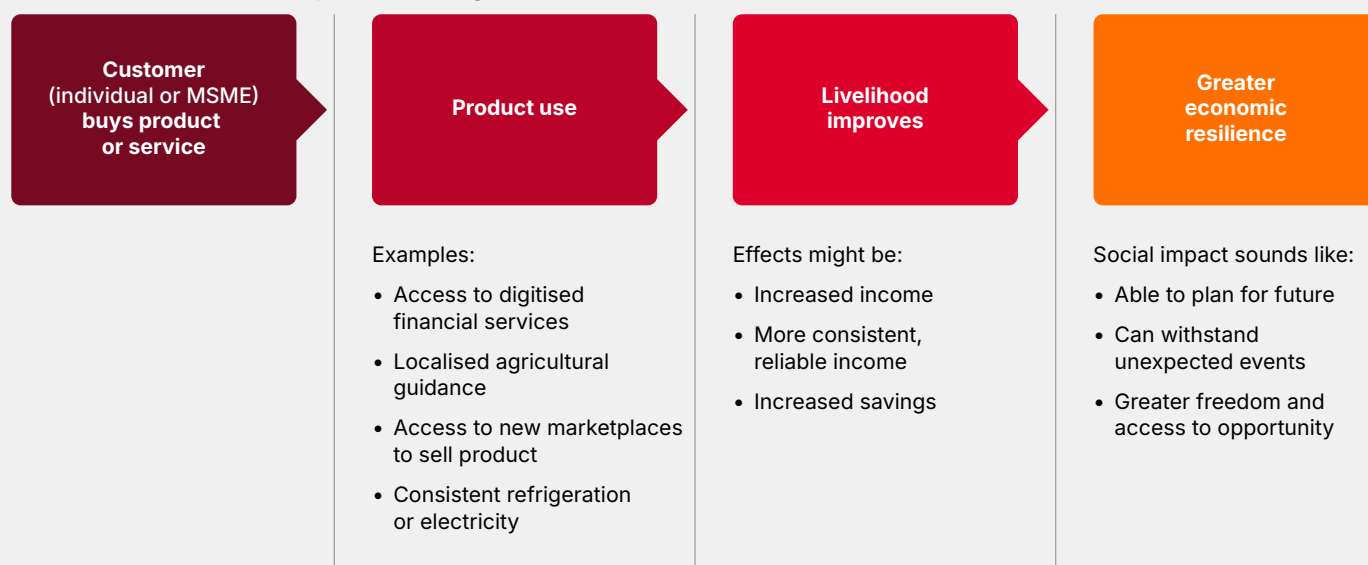
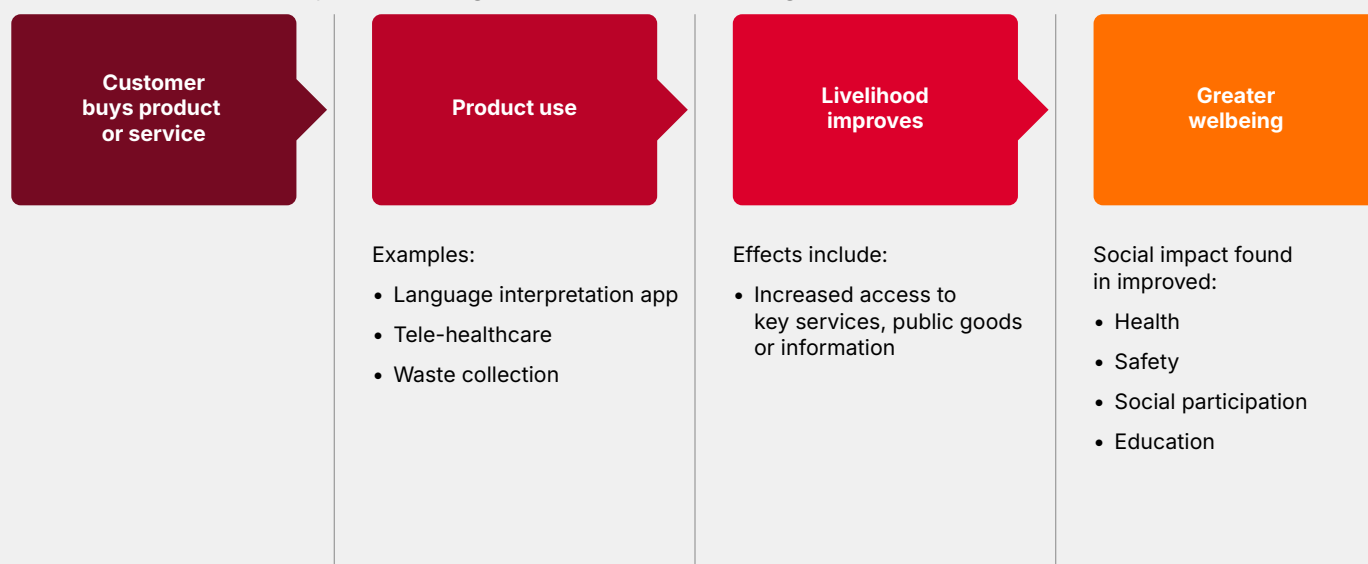


Figure 3

Social impact pathway increasing access and wellbeing



In both pathways, the central questions remain the same: **what kind of change is occurring and for whom?** These must be clearly defined and deemed valuable for the Fund to determine whether a grantee is achieving “social impact.” Charting the social impact pathway specifically for each grantee, which we will do with each of the three cases included here, is necessary to defining a grantee’s social impact and therefore, scaling their social impact.

These questions also tie directly back to the grantees’ business models, because a business cannot sustain social impact unless its model supports both the creation and the delivery of that impact. For the business model to enable this, the product must reach some level of **market penetration** and remain **affordable** to the intended customers. Once in use, customers must genuinely benefit from the product. It must deliver real **value** through **quality, reliability** and **relevance**.³ The table below shows the direct link between key business building blocks and social impact.

Table 1

Drivers of social impact in businesses

Driver of social impact	Definition	Why it matters
 Product quality and reliability	How long a product lasts without malfunctioning, how many issues a customer has using the product.	If social impact is realised through the use of the product, anything that gets in the way of this use also reduces the social impact. If a product breaks, they cannot use and will not realise benefit.
 Product experience and ease of use	Easy customer onboarding and/or customer education, and the experience a customer has with follow-up and product support.	If the product is hard to use or keep using then gaining new or keeping existing customers will be difficult and they will not realise the benefit of the product.
 Affordability	The ability of vulnerable or marginalised customers (target market for social impact) to purchase or invest in the product without jeopardising other needs.	If a product is unaffordable then vulnerable and marginalised customers cannot use it and social impact is compromised for those most in need.
 Market penetration	How many people, of the target customer demographic in a single market are using the product.	More people using the product means more people gaining benefit. Additionally, changing social norms requires a certain momentum – when enough people are using something. Reaching more people means easier uptake and deeper change through shifting social norms.
 Relevance of the product	The target customer perceives the product as valuable and recognises the benefit it provides.	Using market-based solutions means people can choose whether or not to use it. If it is not relevant to them they will not use and will receive no benefit.

3 Dees, J. G., Anderson, B. B., & Wei-Skillern, J. (2004). *Scaling social impact: Strategies for spreading social innovations*. Stanford Social Innovation Review, 1(4), 24–32.
Desa, G., & Koch, J. L. (2014). *Scaling Social Impact: Building Sustainable Social Ventures at the Base-of-the-Pyramid*. Journal of Social Entrepreneurship, 5(2), 146–174.
Drivers of Income. A study of three social enterprises and how they impact earning (2004). Acumen and 60 Decibels.

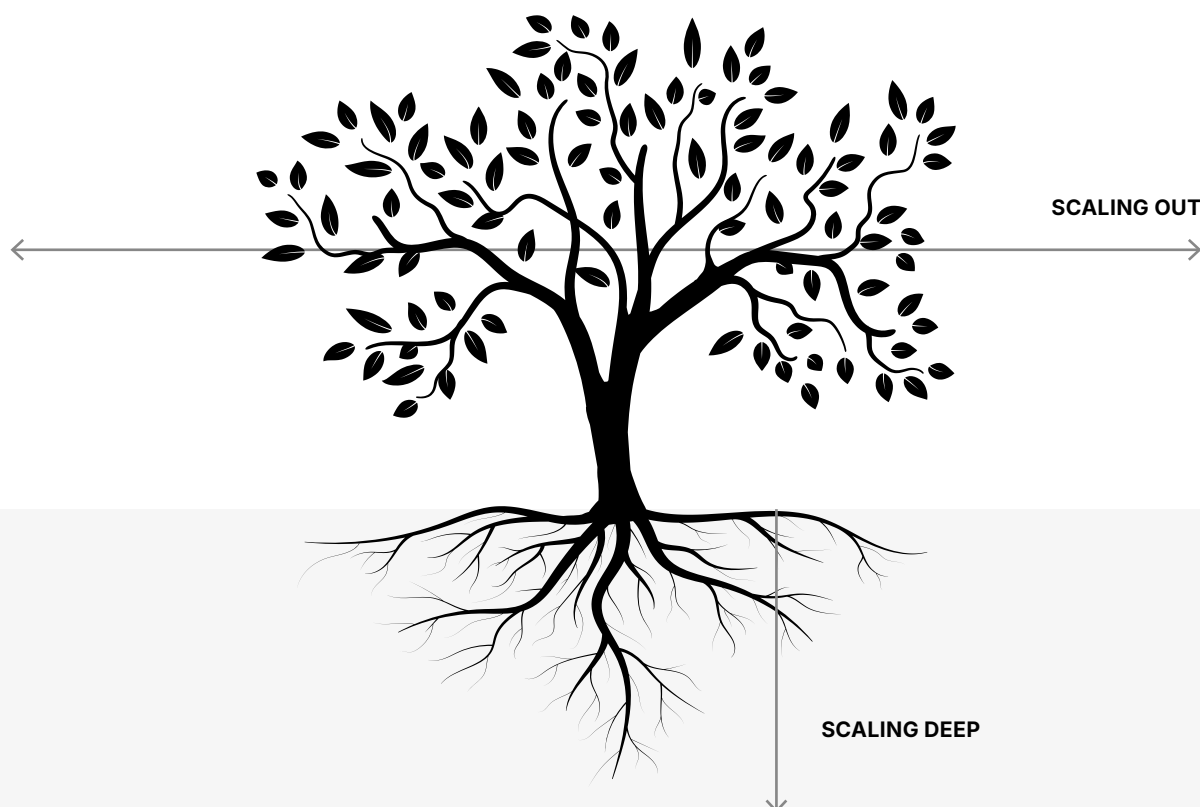
Scaling social impact

The Fund uses a portfolio approach – granting across diverse technologies, early business stages, and market contexts – to balance risk, promote learning, support inclusion, and stay adaptable. As a result, grantees may use different pathways of scaling, which may include expanding to more users, adding new functions, replicating in new contexts, or some combination of these. Commercial scaling metrics include (1) number of users and customers, (2) revenue, (3) cumulative funding secured, and (4) team size, with targets depending on the business and stage of growth.

To add social impact conceptions of scaling, grantees of the Fund are currently working across two dimensions:

- **Scaling out:** impacting greater numbers, incorporates both adding new users/customers and replication in new contexts
- **Scaling deep:** the degree to which the grantee is changing cultural and social norms, including behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, etc.⁴

Scaling out and scaling deep are two different but interconnected pathways for growing social impact. The context, type of product and market conditions will influence how challenging and at what pace it is possible to scale in either direction (out or deep).⁵ In a 2021 study of more than 20 social innovators, discussing scale was difficult because, “scale is not something which has a uniform definition – at least amongst the practitioners involved in this study. Instead, most of the practitioners understood scale as needing to be contextually defined and as relative to the size of the problem space.”⁶ Similar to how the Fund allows grantees to select their method for commercial scale, it could also encourage grantees to identify whether their efforts are more oriented toward scaling out or scaling deep.



⁴ There are other dimensions of social impact scaling which may benefit the fund, but are outside its current scope. These include scaling up (changing policies and laws), scaling scree (encouraging other innovations toward the same outcome), and scaling infrastructure (improving the initial conditions such as capital and knowledge to support innovation). We would point to Evaluating Efforts to Scale Social Innovation as a place to learn more.

⁵ This conception shows up similarly in The Global Alliance for Humanitarian Innovation (GAHI), *Humanitarian innovation: Untangling the many pathways to scale* (2018).

⁶ Townsend, Neil. (2024). *Failure to scale*. Elrha: London, p. 19.

04

Case studies



With these definitions and framing of social impact in mind, we approach the case studies. As noted in the previous section, we tried to pursue quantitative data on grantee customers and changes over time in the customer base. This was not feasible, so we took a qualitative approach.

As we interviewed both GSMA staff and the grantees directly, we listened for the social impact pathway for each grantee:

- What kind of pathway was being maintained or not?
- How were they thinking about social impact and their business model?
- How easy or difficult was it to maintain reach to certain customers?
- What was affecting their decisions?

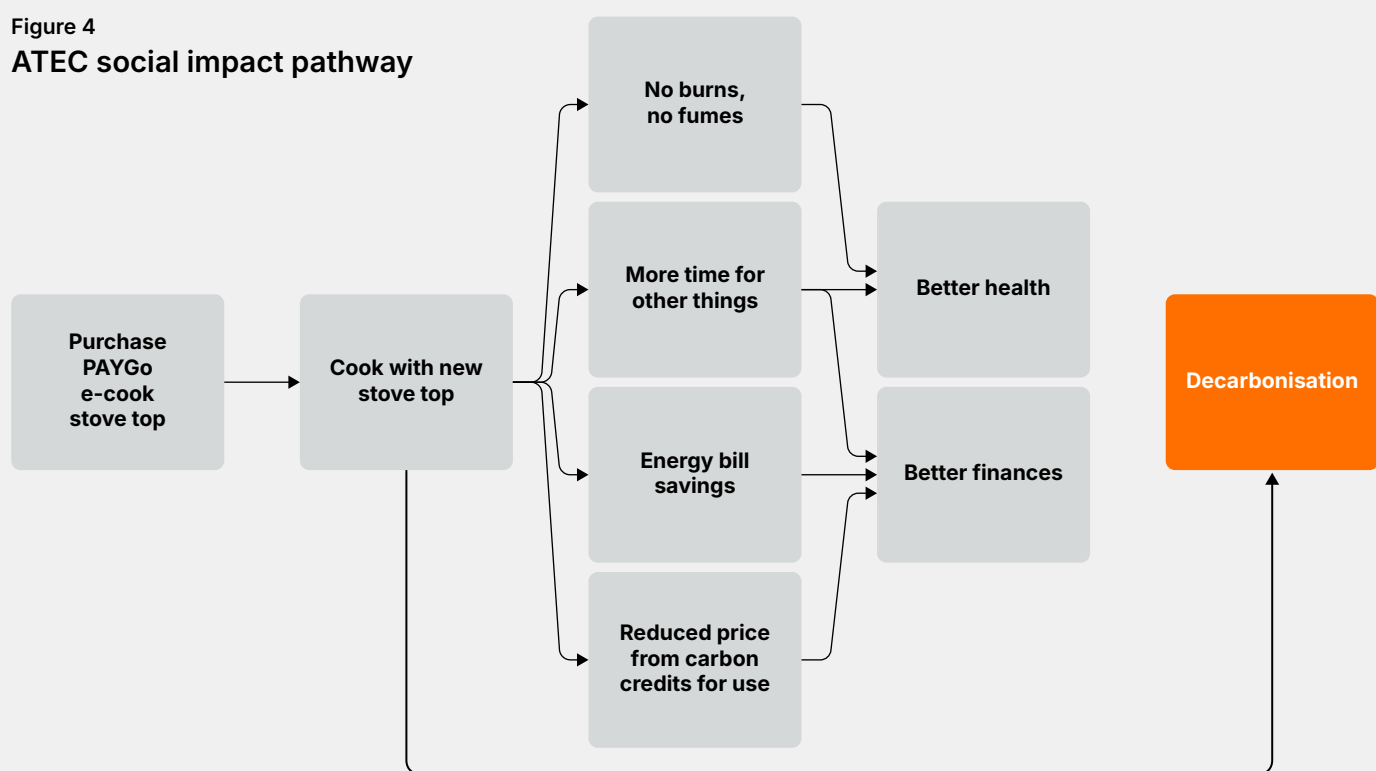


ATEC's core value proposition is '*solving the clean cooking problem*.' The company was founded to solve for dual negative health and climate effects of wood-burning cooking.

We constructed the following social impact pathway for ATEC:

Figure 4

ATEC social impact pathway



Note that decarbonisation impact benefits a different stakeholder from the end user, which is why it is a different colour. However, it is a critical market impact because it enables the carbon credits that make ATEC's business model financially viable.

? Who is ATEC for?

ATEC's target customers are anyone who is currently cooking with wood or gas and has access to the grid. We inquired about what was keeping others from using the cooktop and they were clear that it is not designed for or attractive to higher income households or for commercial use. The stoves use technology to capture carbon offsets created by use of the stove, generating revenue for the user. When registering the product, users are asked which kind

of cooking method they are switching from, which is used to calculate the carbon credits. The company knows they may not be reaching the very bottom of the lowest-income segment – grid access is still required, and they note lowest-income households are often later to adopt new products. Still, the carbon credit system relies on finding what they call "the right user" who is switching from biomass or other less healthy methods:

“

If you want to buy a stove from me, I can't tell you, 'oh no, I will not give it to you.' I can't tell you outright, but I can discourage you. I might say, 'this stove is not designed for you; it's basically for the bottom of the pyramid.' I have to ensure that customers are signing the carbon waiver form and collect information about where they are switching from. I also need to confirm that they belong to that community. All this data is important for verification and auditing purposes, so I have to go through these steps to ensure I've onboarded the right customers.”

? What type of change does adoption and use require?

ATEC noted that their target customers are unlikely to see their traditional cooking method as unhealthy or problematic. Through trial and error, they discovered that it was not enough to highlight that women would have more free time by using the stove. They needed to tie in their affordability solution (carbon credits) and frame it as being paid to cook. For lower income households in their market contexts, easing women's time burden was not enough to sell a stove. However, having women gain monetary benefit directly for the household was sufficient to make sales and encourage use.

“

[The user] doesn't know she has a problem, this is true. But she suffers. She needs more time. She has health issues. The thing that can trigger her behaviour change is saving some cost. She needs money and to save. She can be bothered about saving money, and then, now you can tell her the other benefits.”

ATEC notes that shifting to induction cooking is a substantial norm shift, but they know that if they can reach a certain level of market penetration, there will be a social tipping point at which it will become easier to reach this goal. Thus, ATEC is trying to scale out (reach more people) but with a change that is also somewhat deep (a relatively significant behavioural shift).

? How does social impact relate to the business model?

ATEC's main revenue source is the sale of their cooktop stove, subsidised by carbon offset credits. As noted above, for the carbon credit model to work, they are looking for a very specific customer (i.e. low-income, cooking with high-emission methods) and they need the customer to actually *use* and *continue using* the stove. This is important because the business model relies heavily on the customer using the technology that creates the social impact (improved health benefit and earned income), making business and social impact deeply intertwined.

“

We have three pillars: right customers, right users, and you have to retain that client. So, with [retain the client], you can ensure social impact, you can ensure all kinds of impact, as well as sustainable business as well.”

ATEC does continue to sell biodigesters, an original business idea, but it is not a large portion of their business. They moved on from biodigesters to cookstoves as an idea that would reach a broader population in order to have greater social impact.

ATEC's primary scaling pathway is organic growth and partnerships that accelerate ease of entry to new markets or increase market penetration. They focus on successful marketing for sale and quality to ensure product use.

For ATEC to reach their customer and have their desired social impact, they needed to not only solve the marketing and uptake problem, they also needed to make the solution affordable for this customer while not compromising quality of the product. While they have a 15-year locked in rate for their carbon credits, they still say, “the unit economics is really tight.” Grants and other external funding help them continue to innovate on ways to make the stove affordable. The alternative, they said, would be to create a cheaper product that doesn't last long enough to give the intended benefit. However, again because the product has to be continuously used to generate carbon credits, they have incentive to create a quality product that will last at minimum 15 years, and to improve their carbon-tracking technology.

? How does social impact show up within their company?

For ATEC, their brand, mission and pitch to additional investors centre around the social impacts of decarbonisation, increased health, and reclamation of productive time. They described that while these benefits attract certain investors to the table, at the end of the day profitability was always important.

“

All investors think we can give something back to them in a time. They only invest when they see we are profitable. They have put in the money to get something, that is the ultimate goal. They know that the model itself is built up with social impact. Otherwise I can't earn money. The more they cook, I can earn more carbon credit. And I can only earn carbon credit if all the boxes have been ticked.”

ATEC explained that their main pressures are not about increasing revenue or profitability per se, but about meeting their user targets and carbon-credit commitments. These pressures intensify when market conditions shift in ways that make those targets harder to reach, yet the targets themselves remain fixed.

Internally, social impact is considered critical to ATEC's culture. They strongly identify as a social enterprise, aim to attract talent that understands this mission, monitor key performance indicators for social impact, and incorporate it into leadership decision-making.

“

We have a solid dashboard with every key result and we have KPI's – how many right customers, how many hours they are cooking, what type method they switch from, whether we have talked to them, whether we have trained them.”

“

The whole business model relies on social impact. We always always, always focus on those things.”

ATEC noted that building a social enterprise can be exhausting and challenging. They credited their ability to persevere to a clear mission and a disciplined, structured way of operating – bringing in the right people and maintaining consistent practices that kept problem-solving for their customers as the north star.

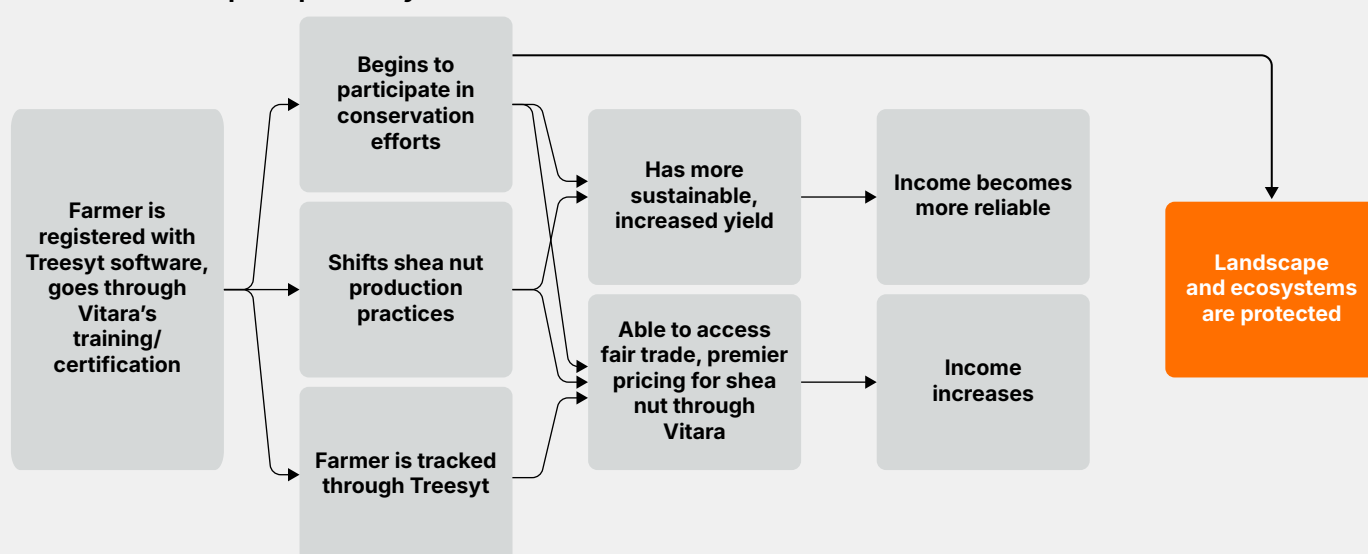


Vitara's core value proposition is providing high quality and traceable products that reduce rural poverty. The company was founded to improve livelihoods for farmers and the shea value chain.

We constructed the following social impact pathway for Vitara:

Figure 5

Vitara social impact pathway



As with ATEC, Vitara's model has a positive ecosystem impact, which benefits farmers but is also part of the business model that is supported by a separate customer, in this case largely shea nut buyers (producers) in European markets.

? Who is Vitara for?

Vitara provides a high level of traceability in the shea nut value chain. They sell raw shea nut to producers in largely European markets for a premier price based on the high level of traceability provided by their Treesyt software, as well as their training and conservation practices. Vitara works with micro and small shea nut farmers in Ghana.



Our model is to target specifically vulnerable farmers. Usually produce small-scale farmer (not commercial) it is aimed to target the very remote part of Ghana or northern Ghana. These are [places] that most people would rather not go. Road networks are very poor, there's no electricity, the social and economic challenges to the extreme. That 's where we want to go. That's a core value in our model as a business...These are farmers farming on two acres or less.”

We asked Vitara what kept them from reaching larger-scale farmers and acting as a more traditional middle man. They were clear that this was not a path forward for their particular business model, but noted they would be interested in having a similar impact working with aggregators.

“

We haven't considered commercial farmers and we don't want to. It represents another type of business that we do not want to be.”

Because of the micro nature of each individual farm, Vitara largely works more holistically with communities, rather than just ad hoc with individual farmers.

? **What type of change does adoption and use require?**

Vitara requires farmers participate in sustainable farming and labor practices, use the Treesyt app and engage in conservation efforts of shea nut trees. They recognise this requires deep behaviour change. They have agents from communities that help onboard and train farmers, advance conservation efforts and aid in the use of the Treesyt app. They entice farmers with this training, as well as a better price for shea nuts, and access to loan financing. They noted that the conservation efforts have become a selling point for farmers, creating loyalty to the brand.

“

No one before was interested in conservation and saving trees. People were not aware of conservation, but now most farmers are committed to shea trees, taking care of seedlings, and growing more.”



? **How does social impact relate to the business model?**

Vitara's main revenue source is the sale of shea nuts to high end buyers who are willing to pay a premium price for transparency in the supply chain and high quality linked to sustainable practices. Vitara is pursuing a few other revenue sources. They have been researching and piloting applying their community-based method and Treesyt software tracking to other commodities, such as maize. This pathway to scale would leverage their existing infrastructure and relationships within communities with minimum additional investment, taking advantage of the depth of their involvement. They are also experimenting with adding value with shea butter products.

“

Our core value as a business is to create value for the farmers. The impact also creates value for us as a company on the commercial end of things. We are attracting investors that are interested in social impact. It is a catalyst for our ability to scale.”

The challenge is one of working capital and cash flow for providing support to farmers during the growing season before harvest and sales. The upfront costs can be substantial – infrastructure and capacity community by community is needed in order to get to the production practices that meet market demands.

“

We have big orders, we have enough farmers, but not enough capital to reach the farmers. It's a cash problem. And maybe secondarily a logistics problem... You need to design a system that engages all the farmers in a community and is cost efficient.”

The additional revenue source closest to launch is the white labeling of their Treesyt software for others' use in monitoring conservation efforts. They plan to license it for use to others on a monthly subscription basis. This source of revenue is less directly tied to livelihoods of communities and individual farmers, as organisations using the Treesyt software may or may not follow similar practices / social impact pathways as Vitara.

? How does social impact show up within their company?

Social impact was the main impetus for Vitara's origins, with the founder having grown up in the western region in Ghana and having "a bold determination" to improve livelihoods in the region. They are clear about their positioning as a social enterprise:

“

[Social impact] shows up everywhere. Whether it's in partnership acquisition or negotiations at an investor level. It's a very integral part of our brand as a business and we are proud of that. We make it front and centre of most engagements. We put it out there to serve as a catalyst for others to make a social and economic impact in the region. It speaks to the kind of investors that we attract, same with manufacturers.”

When asked what pressures they face, or where there may be tradeoffs between social impact and other values, Vitara said the pressures were more implicit than explicit, noting that if they fail to secure

an investment or partnership, this is when doubt can creep in about the business model being too focused on social impact, rather than commercial success. They said the temptation to read into these decisions is greater if the company is struggling, and that much of the antidote comes in the success of the partnerships and investors they do have, as well as an inherent commitment to the company's mission.

“

We really don't think about it along those lines [social impact being a tradeoff or disadvantage]. We just know it's who we are. It's just us. This is us, we are on our bus. We are getting people to support us on our bus. We are hardly having a meeting to analyse if we would be better if we were less of a social impact company.”

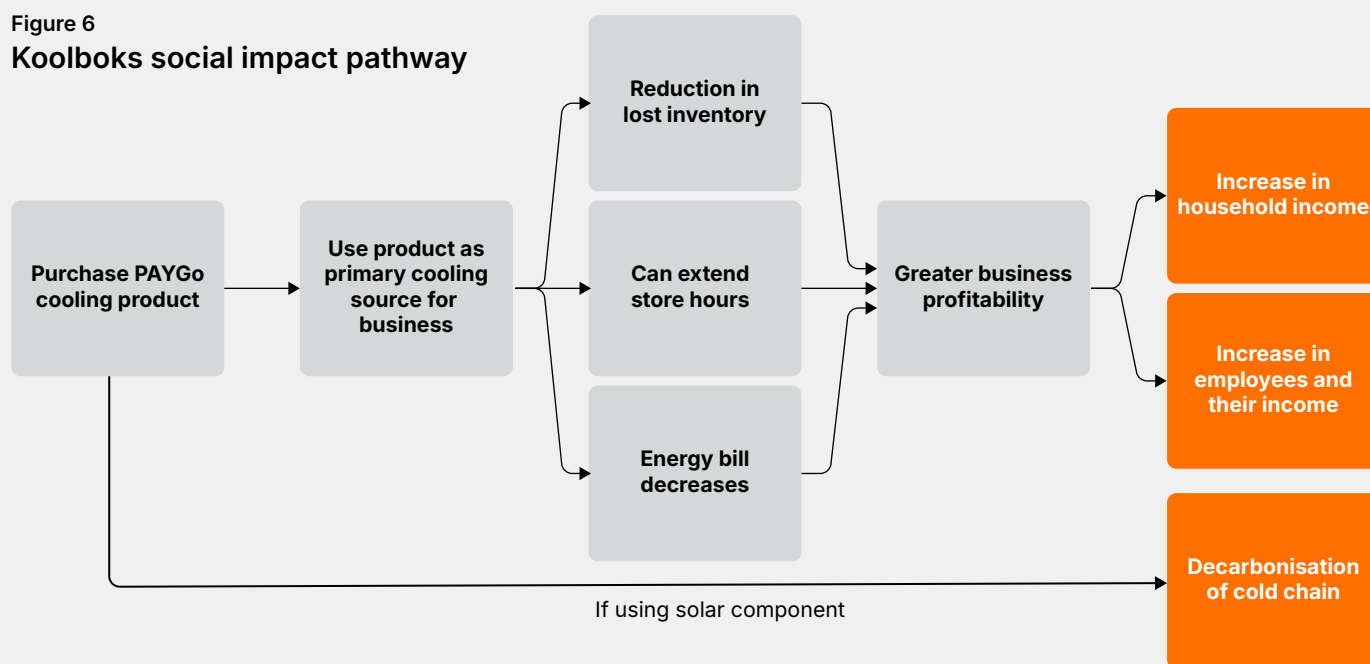
Vitara does not have a specific social impact team, but rather it is embedded in all aspects of their operations. They said they would encourage companies seeking to have social impact to develop feedback mechanisms from and with those they are seeking to impact, and to “make sure it's part of the company DNA.”



Koolboks's core value proposition is providing accessible, affordable cooling. They provide pay-as-you-go (PAYGo) solar and electric refrigeration with a focus on small businesses and reducing food wastage.

We constructed the following social impact pathway for Koolboks:

Figure 6
Koolboks social impact pathway



Koolboks's model includes decarbonisation as an ecosystem effect when the refrigeration used is solar. For some customers who have reliable grid access, Koolboks provides financing (PAYGo) for units that do not have the solar component.

? Who is Koolboks for?

Koolboks' target market is Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Enterprise owners, many of whom are women, experience economic vulnerability but Koolboks is intentional in selling to those who already have income sources. They had made access to cooling more affordable through PAYGo, but not substantially enough to reach a certain level of economic vulnerability in a responsible manner.

While Koolboks operates a B2B model, their business customer is often a one-person shop, or at least a one-person decision-maker. This means while they sell to businesses, they must design for the needs and behaviours of individual consumers, including requiring flexible financing.

“

We never had a company objective to serve [the bottom of the pyramid]. We focus on small business owners who already have income. It could be considered predatory behaviour to offer a loan to someone who can't make those payments.”

? What type of change does adoption and use require?

If their customer has the means to invest in a Koolboks product then it is a relatively easy sale – the promise of flexible financing and decreasing food

wastage are big motivators for customers to adopt a new but familiar appliance. Koolboks also began a programme to take away old fridges.

Koolboks has significant geographic reach, with expansion it is paying customers in over 25 countries and expansion to other countries is planned with the most recent round of investment. Fridge and freezer design is not typically context-specific, thus the behaviour change/product adoption looks relatively the same across different cultural contexts.

? How does social impact relate to the business model?

Koolboks had the most diversification in their revenue streams, which included:

- Solar and non-solar cooling using PAYGo direct to micro, small and medium enterprises
- Solar and non-solar cooling using PAYGo direct to consumer through distributors
- PAYGo and IoT software to other cooling device manufacturers and carriers
- Partnerships with food and beverage industry suppliers to enable product sales and short-term inventory financing

What ties their revenue streams together is their key value proposition of making a more affordable cold-chain.

“

It's always been related to making cooling affordable and accessible. Any of the new products, new business models, [they're] centered around the cooling need that we identified.”

Unlike ATEC and Vitara where the business model relies on users who are economically vulnerable, Koolboks products might appeal to a range of individuals and businesses. They do target MSMEs, but they also use distributors to get directly to other customers. The model raises questions about the inherent value judgments of deeming some individuals economically vulnerable. How vulnerable? Compared to whom? Partnerships with food and beverage distributors raises other questions, too about what “counts” as social impact. If Koolboks is increasing soda sales, for example, even for a small business, is this a social benefit? It may well be a necessary part of the business

model, but may not be as explicitly linked to the impact pathway and includes other ripple effects.

Still, Koolboks primarily serves female headed MSME. According to Acumen, 63% of its customers fall into this category. Acumen's recent study showed that Koolboks had greater impact for customers making less revenue to begin with.

? How does social impact show up within their company?

While Koolboks makes decisions about new revenue sources based on its relevance to solving for the cold chain, they identified social impact as key to their business in many ways. They cited their work to make their credit model more suited to women and gender sensitive. They felt that social impact was an important part of strategy and fundraising with like-minded investors and mentioned how important measuring and tracking social impact is to their ability to negotiate and partner with governments and nonprofits.

“

During partner negotiations with NGOs and governments and when you are entering partnerships, you need to explain your social impact. With officials they want you to bring numbers to the table... And NGOs, too, they need to show a grant has achieved a purpose.”



05

Framework for social impact and commercial scaling



Visualising differences in the cases

Each of the three cases experienced different scaling challenges both for commercial growth and different factors for growing social impact. These variations business by business and have implications for the type of scaling strategy, time frame for scaling, and support that is helpful for boosting or maintaining social impact scaling.

We have categorised these differences as two continua – trying to develop a framework for understanding these intersecting variables and how they might apply to other cases.

CONTINUUM 01

Ease of social change

Question: How difficult is the social or behaviour change required of customers to uptake the products or solutions?

Why it matters: This impacts the timeframe, strategy, and challenges involved in scaling.

CONTINUUM 02

Revenue sources' relationship to the social impact pathway

Question: How intertwined and/or direct are the primary revenue sources to the social impact pathway? Can they grow revenue without growing their social impact?

Why it matters: Internal decision-making, business strategy, and how social impact can be maintained alongside commercial growth will be different depending on this. Social enterprises and mission-driven companies most often have highly intertwined revenue sources and social impact pathways.

Both of these variables – **ease of the social change** and **how intertwined the revenue sources are with the social impact pathway** – interact to create unique circumstances. We found that when you overlay them in a 2x2 grid, the four quadrants created help to define likely challenges in scaling and the related support that might aid in addressing those challenges. The axis of the frameworks are continua and the placement of any given case within the quadrants is descriptive of what the journey of scaling social impact alongside commercial scaling might involve. All four quadrants are legitimate (value-neutral) places for business with an added social impact focus to be.

Figure 7

Commercial and social impact scaling matrix



Framework overview by quadrant



QUADRANT A

High challenge, intertwined revenue

In this quadrant, social impact and commercial viability inherently scale together because the primary or only revenue sources are directly responsible for delivering the value that drives social impact. However given the difficulty of the social or behavioural change represented by uptake or use of the product, the main challenge in this quadrant to scaling, is customer acquisition and customer use. There are two main aspects to behaviour change that companies may need support addressing: motivation for the new behaviour and the time and intensity it takes to address issues of capability (skills) and opportunity (logistical barriers, social pressures).⁷



QUADRANT C

High ease, intertwined revenue

In this quadrant, similar to quadrant A, social impact and commercial viability inherently scale together because the primary or only revenue sources are directly responsible for delivering the value that drives social impact. The product in quadrant C tends to be something that optimises a current practice and/or creates increased access to a current service or item – the value proposition is easily understood by potential customers. In this quadrant, supporting business basics will also, simultaneously, support social impact. Focusing on social enterprise imperatives of affordability, quality, and product delivery will yield results.⁸



QUADRANT B

High challenge, separate revenue

This quadrant is rarely funded by the GSMA Innovation Fund, which is not surprising because products in this quadrant require significant social change and have alternative revenue streams that are easier to pursue and not tied to driving the social change or impact. These businesses have clear trade-offs, where reaching vulnerable customers may be cost prohibitive and require constant subsidy and other offerings to more mainstream customers prove profitable. A social innovation in this quadrant is likely to become an offshoot, potentially part of a business's corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts or as a side commitment, requiring subsidy from other revenue streams to maintain it (perhaps a non-profit model required).



QUADRANT D

High ease, separate revenue

This quadrant has products easily understood by potential customers that optimise current practices and/or create access to a current service or item. These businesses also are likely to have several different revenue streams, not all of which *directly* generate strong social impact to underserved and vulnerable populations. In other words, it is possible to grow this business without also growing social impact. To support keeping commercial scaling in tandem with social impact scaling, it is useful to help business put in place soft structures, leadership and culture practices that work to (a) keep social impact core to business decision-making, (b) make achieving social impact a shared responsibility, (c) include social impact in key metrics and accountability practices, and (d) establish social impact as core to brand and image.

⁷ The most used and well researched model for behaviour change is the **Com-B model**, which states the behaviour is a product of the interaction between three factors: motivation, capability, and opportunity.

⁸ Dees, J. G., Anderson, B. B., & Wei-Skillern, J. (2004). **Scaling social impact: Strategies for spreading social innovations**. Stanford Social Innovation Review, 1(4), 24–32.

Applying the framework to the cases

ATEC

↑ VERTICAL AXIS

Ease of social change

ATEC's product targets something everyone does – cook – but represents a substantial, almost fundamental change to this daily practice. It requires new cookware, it changes cooking times and therefore recipes, it changes the rhythm of a household. ATEC must overcome existing social cooking norms and practices, not just to make a sale, but to get consistent use of their cookstoves (which is key to their business model since carbon offset subsidies which make it affordable are linked to it).

↔ HORIZONTAL AXIS

How intertwined the revenue sources are with the social impact pathway

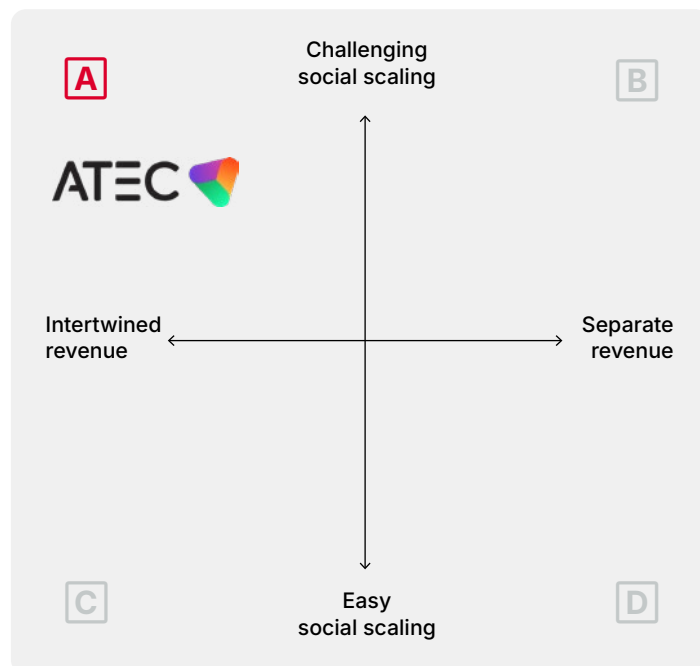
ATEC's revenue sources (cookstoves and biodigesters) are all directly linked to their social impact pathway. If they successfully sell and support the use of their products then their revenue grows and their social impact grows simultaneously. Further intertwining their social impact with revenue is how they have achieved affordability of their product. In order to receive discounted pricing, the owner of the cookstove has to "earn" the money back by using the cookstove to log the carbon offset credits. It is not possible for ATEC to earn money and bypass their social and climate impacts.

Support to maximise social impact scaling alongside commercial scaling

Their main challenge to scaling is convincing customers that their innovation responds to a problem. This is true for any market in which they sell and the social messaging that is effective is likely to be very context specific. Support for social marketing message development and contextualisation of the product for new markets or any UX product/experience design to help eliminate any barriers to use of the product would be most helpful.

Meaningful social impact scaling metrics for ATEC

- **Reach:** Numbers of stoves sold (customers/beneficiaries)
- **Value:** Quality measure, are stoves performing and lasting?
- **Uptake:** Percentage of customers using stove
- **Uptake:** Percentage of cooking time customers use stove
- **Coverage of the problem:** market share in each country (of wood cooking households with grid access)
- **Sustainability of solution:** can they continue to offer cookstoves at affordable prices to vulnerable customers?



↑ VERTICAL AXIS

Ease of social change

For Vitara, their ability to deliver value to the farmers (a higher price for shea nuts) rests on both their ability to meaningfully engage and reach the farmers, as well as the farmers' willingness to change farming practices. They are also bringing new mindsets about natural resource management to communities. Mindsets which require a change in perspective, as well as action. Vitara is asking farmers for substantial behaviour change in terms of resource and time investment. Substantial community engagement and time are necessary to achieve this.

↔ HORIZONTAL AXIS

How intertwined the revenue sources are with the social impact pathway

Vitara's primary revenue stream – the sale of high quality shea nuts and shea products – is directly linked to their social impact pathway. They cannot do one without the other.

They are, however, pursuing a new revenue stream by white labeling their farmer engagement software – Treesyte. Charting a new social impact pathway related to this revenue source would be helpful in understanding if and how this revenue source helps them benefit economically vulnerable farmers. Due to Vitara's strong identity as a social enterprise and mission statement, they are likely to use this revenue stream as a way to subsidise and/or ease cashflow challenges involved in their primary model for change: aggregating smallholder shea nut farmers. But, this is a choice they can make.

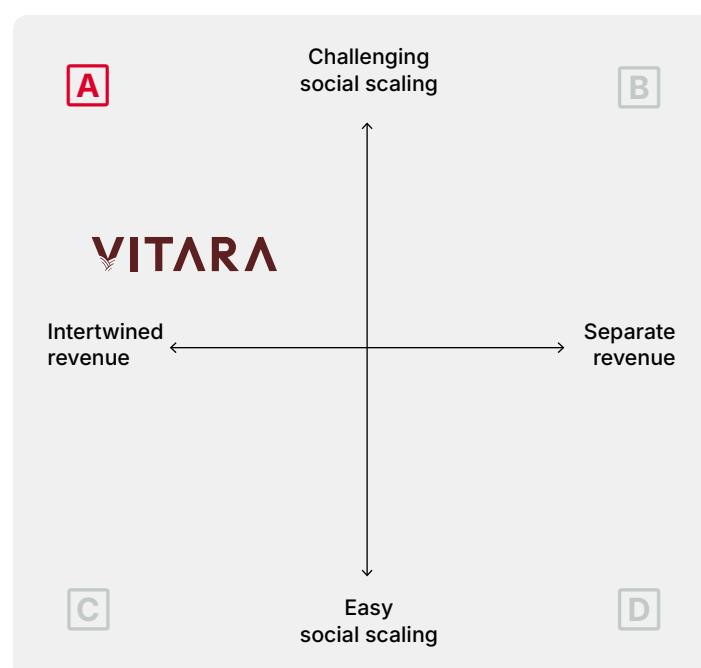
Support to maximise social impact scaling alongside commercial scaling

For Vitara, characteristics of their target market make it a substantial investment to serve them; they are geographically remote, have lower digital and general literacy, need financing for changing farming practices, etc. The investment has to be rewarded by reaching a certain saturation within a given geographic area and by consistent farmer participation over time. Too few farmers and it is too expensive to pay an agent for such intensive engagement in a specific location.

Vitara needs support honing the profitability of their model so they can continue to drive social impact in their communities. This involves support like the investment, already made, in the Treesyte software, and other innovations in their delivery model to find efficiencies. It also would come in the form of cashflow assistance to bridge the timing challenges inherent in both the agricultural timeframes of their business, as well as the trust-building and community engagement involved. Their timeline to profitability is not as simple as sales. They have a growing season lag between investment and payment and relationship-building to get to full enrollment in an area to realise unit efficiency with their rural staff members.

Meaningful social impact scaling metrics for Vitara

- **Access and Reach:** Number of participating shea nut producers
- **Uptake:** Percentage of producers increasing their production and/or quality of product
- **Uptake:** Number of new trees planted
- **Value:** Increased revenue for participating farmers
- **Coverage of the problem:** Number of geographies/ areas and percentage of participating farmers.
- **Sustainability of solution:** brand and sales position with high-end buyers of shea nuts



↑ VERTICAL AXIS

Ease of social change

Koolboks has a product that is easily understood by their target market of MSMEs, refrigeration is not new technology and the value to the businesses is obvious and often immediate. The addition of pay-go technology and/or solar technology solves accessibility problems (affordability and reliability, respectively) that are obvious and painful to their target markets. Adopting and using Koolboks is not a substantial behaviour change for customers.

↔ HORIZONTAL AXIS

How intertwined the revenue sources are with the social impact pathway

Koolboks has more diverse revenue streams, which is a major part of their strategy for commercial scaling. Their revenue sources are centered around the goal of solving for gaps in the cool chains. At times this goal will overlap with positive impact to economically vulnerable MSMEs, and other times it may not. While many of their revenue streams are directly involved in their social impact pathway, others are less direct.

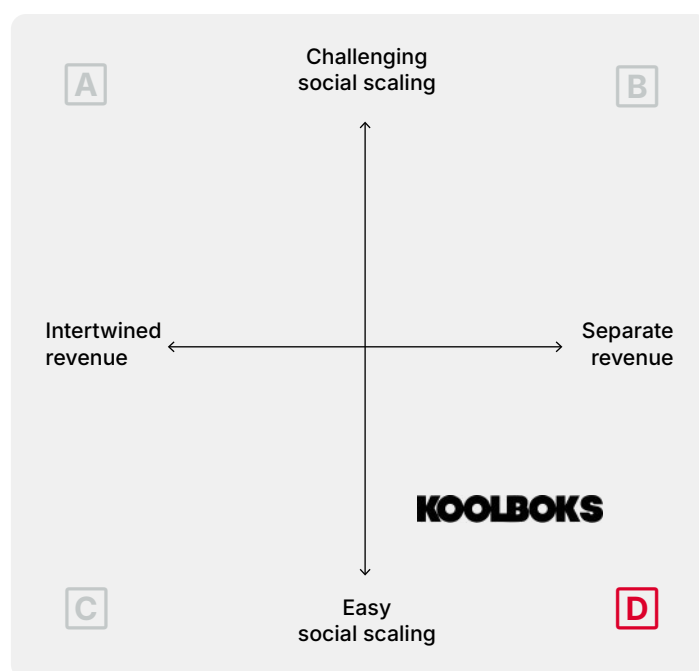
Type of support to maximise social impact scaling alongside commercial scaling

Koolboks, in their commercial scaling journey, is pursuing income streams that solve the same or similar problem of cooling but for different target markets (beverage and food companies, appliance companies, etc.). With revenue generation that can potentially grow separately from social impact in order to scale social impact, Koolboks could benefit from support to intentional internal processes and practices to keep social impact central.

This involves creating and updating social impact pathways associated with each revenue source so that if trade-offs are being made regarding maximising profit and commercial growth versus reaching vulnerable customers or achieving climate impact then these are surfaced and can be addressed. Often explicit decision-making frameworks are useful to have ahead of time because they provide leaders with principles to use for assessing new opportunities. Developing principles – which, hopefully, would include social impact with some level of specificity – helps make options and trade-offs clear and brings the strategy behind decisions to the forefront.

Meaningful social impact scaling metrics for Koolboks

- **Reach:** Number of micro and small business customers
- **Value:** Quality measure, are cooling products functioning past time of full payment?
- **Increased access:** Number of new owners of cooling assets
- **Ripple effect:** Money saved on energy costs; change in earned income; reduced product spoilage
- **Coverage of the problem:** Number of markets/ countries, particularly areas with limited grid access.
- **Sustainability of solution:** Percentage of customers completing payments on-time.



06

Discussion



The original hypothesis, or framing, for commissioning this learning paper was an idea that as companies scale commercially they will be faced with trade-offs and hard decisions about continuing to serve economically vulnerable customers, who are more likely more expensive to reach. What we found, however, was that the three grantees involved in this learning exercise do not frame things or think in this way. Here are some of the themes from across interviews regarding how grantees are approaching commercial scaling vis a vis social impact scaling.

Identity

For ATEC and Vitara one of the biggest factors was their sense of identity as a social enterprise. Their mission, or purpose for the business, is centred around the primary social impact pathway and reaching economically vulnerable users. They were clear that as a social enterprise, their business was designed to serve economically vulnerable users. Whether or not they choose to use the term 'social enterprise', the key idea they expressed was that they could not move away from serving these users and remain the same company. This identity, in each case,

was tied up with the founding story of the company and carried forward by leaders who are personally very invested in making their company a solution to the social problem(s) they are targeting.

Koolboks, on the other hand, does not identify as a social enterprise, but does strongly promote, pursue, and feel pride in the social impact and mission of their business. Their founding story is tied first to entrepreneurship (testing out a leisure-product), then aims of having a larger social impact.

Social impact as strategic asset

All three companies leverage social impact, substantially, for engaging partners, investors, and employees. Each of them found value in being able to quantify their social impact, track it and report on it. The many angles of social impact – decarbonisation, ecosystem restoration, women-owned business and farmer growth, better health, financial inclusion, etc.

– create natural points of engagement for a variety of stakeholders and so reaching these economically vulnerable users is incredibly strategic for the business. They found it useful for pitching to certain investors, partnering with governments, selling their products and services, onboarding distribution partners and advertising.

Scaling pathways and timelines

The scaling pathway available to each company relates to their social impact and has a different pace that would be expected. The way in which social and behaviour change happen, and the nature of the value proposition, have ramifications for how fast growth can happen and where growth opportunities are most available.

ATEC's scaling journey is potentially grand, because their product is applicable all over the world. Additionally, saturation in a single market will help shift social norms to make sales much easier after reaching the tipping point socially. ATEC is about reaching numbers – more markets and more within a single market. They need to overcome initial customer reticence, but have the ingredients to fulfill their mission “to solve clean cooking and climate change”. Their timeline for growth can be relatively rapid once they have affordability (carbon offsets purchased) and social marketing messaging in place.

Vitara's scaling journey is less about reaching everyone and more about maximising the niche that they have. Vitara does shea really well and they do community engagement really well. They have potential for scaling to the other 15 shea producing countries, which is sizeable, but not on the same scale as ATEC. Replicating to more and

more communities without going deep in each community breaks their model – both in terms of achieving meaningful behaviour change and in terms of aggregating enough product to make the outreach investment pay off. Their social impact takes time to spread throughout a community, farmer to farmer, and to grow and conserve the natural resources, and to boost incomes across an entire growing season consistently. Vitara's scaling will be slower and is likely to grow within each existing community (not across market after market) through supporting other crops, doing post-harvest value creation, and building on conservation efforts (all strategies the company is currently piloting).

Koolboks' products – refrigeration, solar-power enabled appliances and pay-go technology – are easy to use for customers and require little to no behaviour change. They're also widely used in most markets. Of the three cases Koolboks has the most pathways to scale and as much potential to scale as ATEC. As such Koolboks' scaling strategy is through both revenue/product diversification and replication across markets – using their social impact as a tool for unlocking partnerships, distribution channels, advertising, and investment. Maintaining their social impact is a strategic choice that is helping them reach scale.

Social impact team or no team?

All of the cases were measuring social impact, but Koolboks had a separate position dedicated to this, while the other two companies had the measurement and responsibility more integrated throughout the business – all of them put resources toward it. While investing resources toward social impact is positive, having a specific person or team can sideline the function within a company.⁹ Social impact too often becomes only the responsibility of the specified team and is much easier to cut when things become tight. It also cues the separation of social impact from business procedure and strategy.

Building a company culture aligned to social impact as a value¹⁰ through soft structures can have a stronger effect:

- Social impact metrics embedded in every functional team's goals and dashboards
- Social impact representation at the executive level (e.g., Chief Impact Officer with real authority)
- Cross-functional social impact councils that review major decisions
- Social impact criteria incorporated into strategic planning processes
- Customer insight teams that keep the organisation connected to customer experience.

⁹ Organizing for sustainability success: where and how leaders can start. (2021). McKinsey.

¹⁰ Eiselein, P. & Dentchev, N. A. (2021). Scaling social impact: what challenges and opportunities await social entrepreneurs. *Social Entrepreneurship*, pp.145–172. DOI:10.1108/S2514-175920220000005007; Bacq, Sophie & Eddleston, Kimberly. (2018). A Resource-Based View of Social Entrepreneurship: How Stewardship Culture Benefits Scale of Social Impact. *Journal of Business Ethics*. 152. DOI:10.1007/s10551-016-3317-1.

07

Recommendations



01

Know the social impact pathway(s)

It is worthwhile to map a social impact pathway to be specific about who the company is reaching and what benefit they are realising. As businesses pivot, adapt, and rapidly experiment to refine their models and respond to changing conditions this is something that needs to be regularly revisited. **Charting this social impact pathway is necessary** because it provides the basis for both **understanding how the business's social impact relates to its business model**, as well as **identifying possible metrics** for measuring social impact scaling and outcomes to evaluate against.

A social impact pathway can be regularly used in strategy, decision-making, and team discussions as a touch point for understanding or intentionally choosing:

- Type of social impact scale to pursue; out (numbers) and/or deep (degree of change), which in turn can surface
 - Company specific metrics of social impact scale
 - Potential levers for scaling social impact
 - New revenue streams and their potential to contribute to or detract or be neutral to social impact scale; how does this revenue stream relate to the social impact pathway? Does it have its own social impact pathway?
-

Place companies on the commercial and social impact scaling matrix

Assessing both the pathways of social scaling and the revenue models relative to social impact will place a company on this matrix and possibly help identify the type of support to offer for scaling social impact alongside commercial scaling. To place a company, assess both continua through discussion.

↑ VERTICAL AXIS

How challenging is social scaling likely to be?

Consider the following in your discussion and placement along the continuum:

- **For whom?** Describe the target customer and place that customer in their context – what is contributing to their marginalisation compared to others? Are there other customers benefitting from the solution who are not marginalised or underserved?
- **What?** Describe the nature of the benefit, what is being solved or made better for each customer? How big/detrimental is the problem? To what extent does the innovation solve it?
- **How big is the change?** To adopt the product, how much change is required of the customer? Does this optimise their status quo and it's a small change? Or is this a brand new practice? Are there lots of barriers or intermediary steps involved? Does the customer realise this is a problem they need solved?
- **How quickly?** What's the expected or reasonable time frame for realisation of the benefit?
- **How directly?** Is the benefit realised directly through point of sale? Is the connection between product use and the financial or wellbeing benefit obvious to/understood by the user?
- **How many?** How many target customers are there in the current market? How many could there be through expansion of markets?
- **How much** customisation would be needed to spread to new demographics or new contexts?

↔ HORIZONTAL AXIS

How intertwined are revenue sources with the social impact pathway(s)?

The questions to examine for placing a grantee on this continuum are:

- **What is the core identity of the company?** Do they consider themselves a social enterprise? What is their stated purpose or mission of the business? How do they describe the solution/product they are offering? Social enterprises most often have highly intertwined revenue sources and social impact pathways.
- **What is the core value proposition?** What are they trying to provide and to whom? Is this tied to the social benefit or impact pathway in every instance? Most instances? Some of the time?
- **Can they earn revenue without having the stated social impact?** If so, how much of their revenue? How many diversified streams are separate from or tangential to the primary identified social impact pathway?
- **Is the direct paying customer key to the social impact pathway?** Similar to the impact pathway above, how direct is the realised benefit vis a vis product purchase and use?
- **What is the company's competitive advantage?** Does their differentiation come from the capacity to reach underserved/vulnerable populations? Their affordability for these populations? Their deep engagement with these populations? Or is it something else?
- **How does scale impact the value of their offering to the target customer?** Sometimes an increase in scale can either increase the value of a product through network effects that favour inclusion and/or scale in numbers can be crucial to reaching affordability for target beneficiaries.

03

Based on placement, consider different types of support for the specific scaling journey

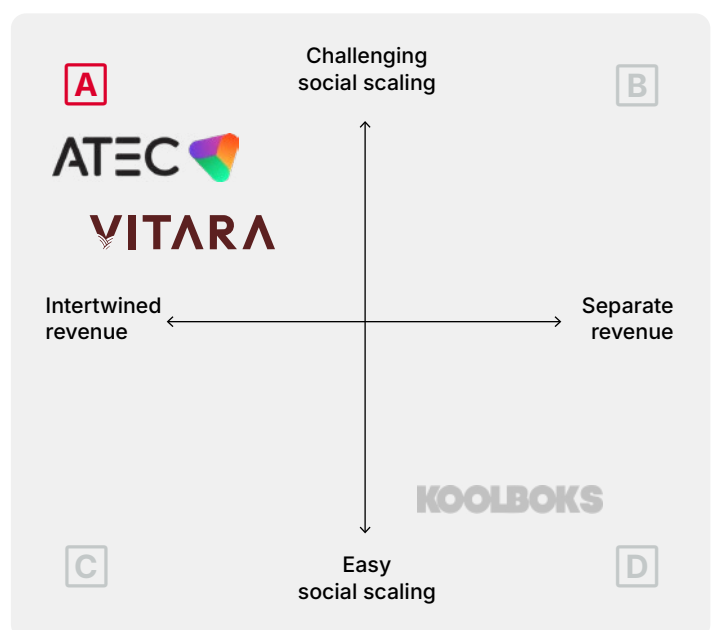
Quadrant A High challenge, intertwined revenue

In this quadrant social impact and commercial viability inherently scale together. However given the difficulty of the change, the main challenge in this quadrant to scaling is likely customer behaviour change in the form of customer acquisition or uptake of the product. There are several places where behaviour change can become difficult; motivation, capability, and opportunity.¹¹ Spend time getting to know the business, customers and product to best diagnose which portion is most challenging.

Companies may **need help motivating customers to purchase and/or use their product**. In this case providing support for **social marketing** message development and other contextualisation of the product for new markets can be helpful. This often begins with light customer research to understand drivers of the current behaviour, who the decision-makers are, what emotional hooks may be involved, and appropriate cultural messaging. This can all be done adhoc, but can be accomplished with focused effort by **behaviour change specialists, public health professionals, and/or international development professionals**.

Both capability (skills) and opportunity (logistical barriers, social pressures) can be influenced directly by companies, but they are often **expensive per user and can take a long time to change**. Expense and time can be detrimental to a new business model. For issues like customers are missing critical digital literacy skills to take advantage of the product's benefit (capability) or potential customers have a low risk tolerance and need to see others in their community using it (opportunity) then a few different support strategies may be useful:

- **Patient capital**, having realistic timeline expectations for reaching a certain scale of user base or realised benefit to customers. When behaviour change is more challenging it can take longer.
- Investment in **UX design** that eliminates any barriers to use of or experience of the product. This includes before and after care of a product and all interactions with a company as well as product design and interface.
- Time and investment to **innovate the product delivery methods** (community-member promotion, customer education or training, partnering with known brands, etc.). This means innovating both to meet customer realities and to meet real resource and sustainability constraints to a long-term model.



¹¹ From the **Com-B model of behaviour change**. **Motivation**: internal processes that influence decision-making and behaviour. **Capability**: knowledge, skills, and abilities to engage in a behaviour, and **Opportunity**: external factors that make the execution of a behaviour possible

Quadrant D **High ease, separate model**

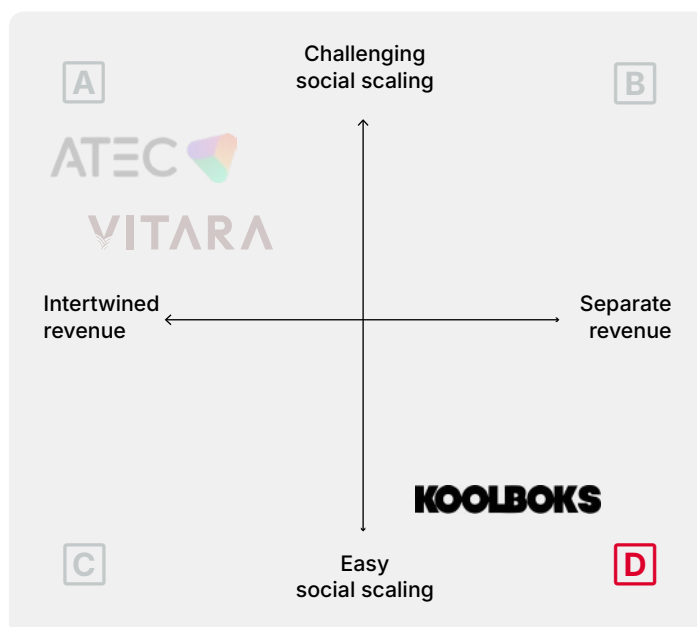
This quadrant has businesses likely to have several different revenue streams, not all of which directly generate strong social impact to underserved and vulnerable populations. It is possible to grow this business without also growing social impact – but business and social impact scaling do not *have* to diverge.¹² These businesses can put in place soft structures, leadership and culture practices that work to keep them growing in tandem.

Additionally, **leadership and culture**,¹³ from the founding story to the company's identity, deeply influence the importance, presence, and realisation of social impact. Some leadership and cultural practices¹⁴ that strengthen a company's likelihood of maintaining social impact while pursuing revenue sources that less directly correlate to impact are:¹⁵

- **Explicit decision-making frameworks.** Leaders need clear principles for how to weigh trade-offs as they arise.
- **Mission-embedded incentives.** If sales teams are only rewarded on revenue, they'll follow the path of least resistance – which often excludes more vulnerable customers. If impact metrics (number of vulnerable households served, depth of poverty reached) are equally weighted in compensation and promotion decisions, behaviour follows.
- **Customer representatives in leadership.** Having board members, executives, or advisors who personally understand the vulnerable population's experience keeps that perspective in the room when growth decisions are made.

- **Cultural rituals that reinforce mission.** Storytelling that celebrates impact over just revenue wins, all-hands meetings that lead with impact metrics before financial ones. These shape what people believe "success" means.
- **Transparent impact measurement.** Publishing impact data publicly creates accountability. It's harder to quietly shift away from vulnerable populations when you're consistently reporting those numbers to stakeholders.

Within a cohort round, or even across rounds, the Fund has an opportunity to encourage peer-to-peer sharing and support on these subjects, creating webinar and/or in-person workshop content, and curating learning products and exemplars to highlight.



¹² Bruder, I. M. (2025). From Mission Drift to Practice Drift: Theorizing drift processes in social enterprises and beyond. *Organization Studies*, 46(3), 385–407. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406251314591> (Original work published 2025)

¹³ Eiselein, Philippe & Dentchev, Nikolay. (2021). Scaling Social Impact: What Challenges and Opportunities Await Social Entrepreneurs. 10.

¹⁴ Ometto, M. P., Gegenhuber, T., Winter, J., & Greenwood, R. (2018). From Balancing Missions to Mission Drift: The Role of the Institutional Context, Spaces, and Compartmentalization in the Scaling of Social Enterprises. *Business & Society*, 58(5), 1003–1046. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650318758329>
 Battilana, Julie & Sengul, Metin & Pache, Anne-Claire & Model, Jacob. (2015). Harnessing Productive Tensions in Hybrid Organizations: The Case of Work Integration Social Enterprises. *Academy of Management Journal*. 58. 10.5465/amj.2013.0903
 Ebrahim, A., Battilana, J., & Mair, J. (2014). The governance of social enterprises: Mission drift and accountability challenges in hybrid organizations. *Research in organizational behaviour*, 34, 81–100.0

¹⁵ These practices will strengthen a company that self-identifies as a social enterprise, but they are particularly necessary for those who do not.

Quadrant C **High ease, intertwined revenue**

This quadrant has a social solution that is also a primary revenue source of the business and so they are likely to scale together. The social solution tends to be something that optimises a current practice and/or creates increased access to a current service or item. None of the cases applied in this learning paper fell within this quadrant, however the GSMA does fund in this quadrant. Deaftawk and Ensibuuko are two grantees of the Fund who may fall within this quadrant. For some of their target customers adopting the service is challenging due to digital literacy, but for many that is not the case. Both organisations are optimising existing practices (translation and VSLAs) and both have primary revenue streams that are immediately generated from providing their primary social benefit; increased access and communication for deaf people and increased financial inclusion for VSLA members.

Because social behaviour change is not the main challenge in this quadrant and because the business revenue is intertwined with social change, focusing on strengthening the overall business basics will also strengthen social impact. For social enterprises we found a few key business model elements and leadership skills highlighted in the literature that are worth noting and strengthening for businesses in quadrant C, but also the other quadrants.¹⁶

Key business model elements that matter to social impact and social enterprise success

- **Affordability** ensures that underserved and vulnerable potential customers can purchase the product, increasing the potential number of users. The Fund is well-versed in helping entrepreneurs leverage technology to get to affordability, look to resource mobilisation via diverse revenue streams or creative financing, and acting as patient capital while scaling creates greater affordability.
- Ensuring **product quality and product use** is key to consistent delivery of social impact. A substandard product is not just an unhappy customer, stopping use or being unable to use the product also limits

social impact scaling.¹⁷ Social impact fails, as will the business without renewing customers or positive peer promotion. Quality means fit-for-context, not just specifications – reality testing with the target customer is key here. Having built-in feedback loops with meaningful and reliable data is also a huge asset. Having feedback allows for grantees to attend to post-sale support infrastructure so the full customer experience, not just the product, is high quality. This means that investments in training, troubleshooting, repairs, upgrades all ultimately contribute to social impact. Lastly, margin structure can get in the way of quality. Grantees should have a clear understanding of trade-offs between sufficient margins and quality for achieving maximum social impact. Reaching more people with greater affordability may not be a net positive if the quality is lacking.

- **Consider the delivery model another area of innovation.**¹⁸ Distributing and driving adoption of a product may require as much attention as the product itself. This means innovating both to meet customer realities and to meet real resource and sustainability constraints to a long-term model. Delivery models can be everything from experimenting with peer-to-peer distribution to finding the right value proposition frame for marketing messages in a particular context.

Key skills and leadership competencies that help social enterprises succeed

Research in 40 countries on social entrepreneurship trying to reach “bottom of the pyramid” customers shows that the skills of resource mobilisation, operating routines, and entrepreneurial adjustments “play mediating roles in the relationship between venture capabilities and social outcomes.”¹⁹ Leadership practices and skills include:

- **Resource mobilisation** is the direct role of the GSMA Innovation Fund and the Fund already tracks and strongly supports preparing for follow-on investment and forming meaningful MNO partnerships.

16 Dees, J. G., Anderson, B. B., & Wei-Skillern, J. (2004). *Scaling social impact: Strategies for spreading social innovations*. Stanford Social Innovation Review, 1(4), 24–32.

17 *Drivers of Income. A study of three social enterprises and how they impact earning* (2004). Acumen and 60 Decibels.

18 Ramani, S. V., Sadreghazi, S., & Duijsters, G. M. (2012). *On the diffusion of toilets as bottom of the pyramid innovation: Lessons from sanitation entrepreneurs*. Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 79(4), 676–687.

Silvestre, B. S., Silva Neto, R. (2014). *Capability accumulation, innovation, and technology diffusion: Lessons from a Base of the Pyramid cluster*, Technovation, 34 (5–6), 270–283.

19 Desai, G., & Koch, J. L. (2014). *Scaling Social Impact: Building Sustainable Social Ventures at the Base-of-the-Pyramid*. Journal of Social Entrepreneurship, 5(2), 146–174.

- **Operating routines** are behaviours that are learned, highly patterned, repetitive or quasi-repetitious and vital to business success. They can be anything from hiring kiosk managers to technology maintenance to community engagement. Operating routines can be ostensive (rules based, consistent, codified) or performative (with creativity to meet needs/situations). Both can work really well. The trick is finding what works best in context and with efficiency.
- **Entrepreneurial adjustments** are business-model adjustments in response to political and cultural contexts that influence the venture's strategy. This skill is about the ability of leadership to incorporate new information rather than relying on past experience when making decisions about their business. Developing this skill likely comes most easily through the form of leadership coaching and robust tracking and monitoring for making evidence-based decisions possible.

Support to these kind of items can look like:

- A checklist to discuss with the company and assess company needs in each area
- Facilitating peer-to-peer learning in certain areas that are more artful than prescriptive, such as operating routines or entrepreneurial adjustments
- Paying for targeted consultants to shore up specific items such as customer research, professional marketing and message development, customer experience design, customer feedback, and product-specific subject matter
- Continuing to offer professional development for company leaders and/or teams in key entrepreneurial, leadership and soft skills.



Quadrant B

High challenge, separate revenue

This quadrant is rarely funded by the GSMA Innovation Fund, which is not surprising because social solutions in this quadrant are slow and difficult to get adopted and do not have social scaling tied to commercial viability. A social innovation in this quadrant is most likely implemented through nonprofits because it requires subsidy for the target

customer, or there is no market for it. Alternatively it may be a corporate social responsibility (CSR) effort, with charitable dollars used from other revenue sources for a purely social good. While these models are appropriate for solving certain social problems, they are not social enterprises or market-based solutions in the purview of the GSMA Innovation Fund.

Appendix



Social impact pathways create specificity of the subject matter/content of the needed metrics, for whom, and which connections are important to look at if metrics are not being met. But that can quickly turn into traditional monitoring and evaluation of social impact. While important, this is different from assessing the progress in scaling said impact.

There are a lot of different ways to look at what is meaningful or indicative of social impact scaling. Here are some things to consider:

- Returning to some of the **drivers of social impact**; like quality or value of the solution, or product use
- Traditional aspects of social impact scale—**scale up** (policy or ecosystem changes), **scale out** (reach), and **scale deep** (shifts in behaviour)
- Issues **related to the social impact pathway** like **increases in access to new customers**.

Here is a list of potential metrics for consideration:



Access and reach

- Number of products sold
- Number of customers and/or users (particular income quintile, age group, geography or other characteristic known to be a source of marginalisation. Gender disaggregation of metrics at a minimum)
- How many new users, people who previously were lacking in access or skills
- Percent of market share



Affordability and retention

- Number of users able to complete payments on time
- Active use: percentage of customers using the product, time using the product, consistency of use
- Affordable product for area incomes
- Customer drop off or retention rates



Quality/value

- Percentage of repairs or service issues across time
- Net promoter score and/or other brand reputation measures
- Metrics specific to social impact pathway, e.g. increased income, saving behaviour, confidence, connection, health, etc.
- Ripple effects: measurable add-on effects for customers; benefits that are unrelated to specific products such as number of new employees hired, numbers accessing loans or other financial products and services, higher educational attainment, etc.

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