UNDP Country Accelerator Labs Network

A PARTNERSHIP FOR A NEW APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT (2019-2021)

UNDP TODAY

MORE THAN

17,500

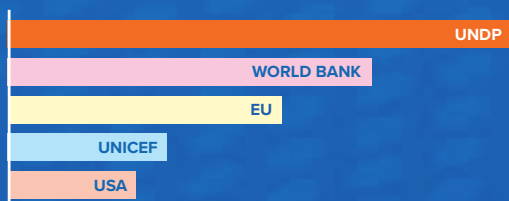## PEOPLE WORKING

ON 4,500+

PROJECTS

UNDP is currently

STRENGTHENING 1 IN 3 PARLIAMENTS

WORLDWIDE and

SUPPORTING AN ELECTION EVERY 2 WEEKS

Ranked

#1 IN VALUE FOR MONEY

IN DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION FOR POLICY-MAKING

in a recent survey of policymakers by AidData[1]

UNDP	
WORLD BANK	
EU	
UNICEF	
USA	

1. AidData is a research initiative of the College of William & Mary, Brigham Young University, and Development Gateway.
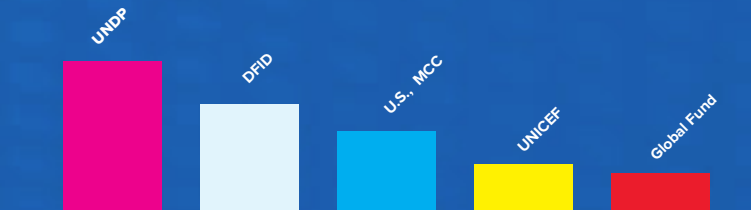
IN 170 COUNTRIES & TERRITORIES

INVESTING MORE THAN $4.63 BILLION IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS

Invested
$3.6 BILLION IN GRANTS for ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVES in 141 COUNTRIES in 2017

Ranked
#1 IN TRANSPARENCY
in the Aid Transparency Index 2016[2]

UNDP

DFID

U.S., MCC

UNICEF

Global Fund

2. Ranking by the International Aid Transparency Initiative of accountability for aid, development and humanitarian resources.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2030 Agenda represents a paradigm shift that requires a different way of framing development issues, responses and solutions. The speed, dynamics and complexity of today's challenges are fundamentally different from previous eras in history. These include not only eliminating poverty in all its forms but also ensuring people don't fall back into it; reducing inequalities between and within countries; decarbonizing economies and changing the way we produce and consume; and building peaceful and inclusive societies at a time of growing polarization and alienation.

The SDGs are mobilizing action - not only by governments, but increasingly by firms, investors and individuals who want to align their actions to a sustainable future. However, moving societies towards sustainability while leaving no-one behind is a complex undertaking, exacerbated by key drivers such as youth unemployment, technological disruption, accelerating urbanization and migration, and growing conflict and extremism.

Therefore, the SDGs cannot be achieved through discrete and incremental actions. Business-as-usual approaches to transport give us better cars but also more gridlock. Focusing on solutions means asking instead how to get people where they need to go quickly, safely and cheaply. We need systemic changes – a new operating system – that embraces complexity and brings such sustainable solutions to bear.

The opportunity

UNDP is already on the frontlines of 21st century development, present in 170 countries and working in concert with partners within and outside the UN system to help countries shape their own paths and future. Having accompanied countries in their development trajectories, UNDP has deep knowledge of local context and longstanding relationships of mutual trust and respect.

According to AidData, decision makers see UNDP as a trusted and reliable source of development information for policy-making, coming out on top in value for money, and among the top three sources that government leaders go to for information about global development policy trends and ideas.

The UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021 embraces the complexity of development and commits the organization to helping countries find faster, and more durable solutions to achieve Agenda 2030. We have an exciting opportunity to transform our collective approach by introducing new protocols, backed by evidence and practice, which accelerate the testing and dissemination of solutions within and across countries. This will enable the global community to collectively learn from local knowledge and ingenuity at a speed and at a scale that our societies and planet require.

The goal

Our objective is to build a network of 60 Country Accelerator Labs as the largest, fastest global learning network on development challenges. The network will surface and reinforce locally sourced solutions at scale while mobilizing a wide and dynamic partnership of actors contributing knowledge, resources and experience.

The outcome will be the beginnings of new approaches to development solutions, embedded within UNDP's global architecture and country platforms. This will be achieved by:

- Building on locally-sourced solutions, finding things that work and expanding on them;

- Rapid testing and iteration to implement what works and go beyond the obvious solutions;

- Combining the best understanding, ideas and expertise to generate collective knowledge;

- Accelerating progress by bringing expertise, creativity and collective intelligence to bear.

This initiative is a new UNDP service offer to governments and one that we can use to transform our collective approach to development. It also marks UNDP's commitment to its integrator function within the UN development system, and to the broader international community.

THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

Overview

Rising inequality, declining trust in public institutions, more frequent and intense climate related events, rising instances of conflict, sectarian strife and political instability, demographic and technological changes, among other issues, will continue to disrupt or reverse development progress unless mechanisms for collective action adapt and improve.

Although some of the problems of today are of similar scale and scope to the emerging issues of mechanized production in the 18th century, electrical power in the 19th century, and information technology in the 20th century - the speed and means of change are fundamentally different. Very few, if any, of our challenges fall neatly within a single sector or field. Most of them manifest themselves in the fuzzy intersection across sectors. They are systemic, structural and interconnected, requiring not just new solutions, but radical new ways of identifying, testing and scaling them.

The Country Accelerator Labs are a three-year global initiative with a high level of ambition, driven by an innovative approach built on the best of current thinking. The initiative responds to the widespread recognition that business-as-usual will not take us to the world we want in 2030 and beyond, and that the development community looks to organizations like UNDP to propose new ways of operating that radically reimagine and shape 21st century development.

Past experience

Over the last 10-15 years, the number of social enterprises, impact hubs and innovation labs from the public, private and philanthropic sectors have increased. We are also seeing iterative approaches including design thinking and adaptive management become more widely adopted in the business and social spheres. Whilst these efforts have generated learnings and networks, their collective impact has been hampered by the lack of scale and limited uptake in the places that need them the most – such as local communities in less-developed, conflict-prone or climate-vulnerable regions.

UNDP has for decades helped countries strengthen governance systems around the world. More recently, UNDP has established policy and innovation labs in over a dozen countries, including Albania, Armenia, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Georgia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Serbia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. These Labs have demonstrated their ability to influence policy-making, re-design public services, accelerate the generation of open data, improve evidence-based decisions and help governments interact with citizens more openly.

The next step is to build on the lessons UNDP, the UN development system and its partners have collectively learned, and to generate development breakthroughs at scale, driven by country-led 'missions' that foster cross-sectoral, cross-actor, and cross disciplinary collaboration, and allow multiple competing and bottom-up solutions.

The following sections outline the strategy for the Country Accelerator Lab Network, describes the contents and structure of the individual country Labs and network approach, and finally summarizes management arrangements.
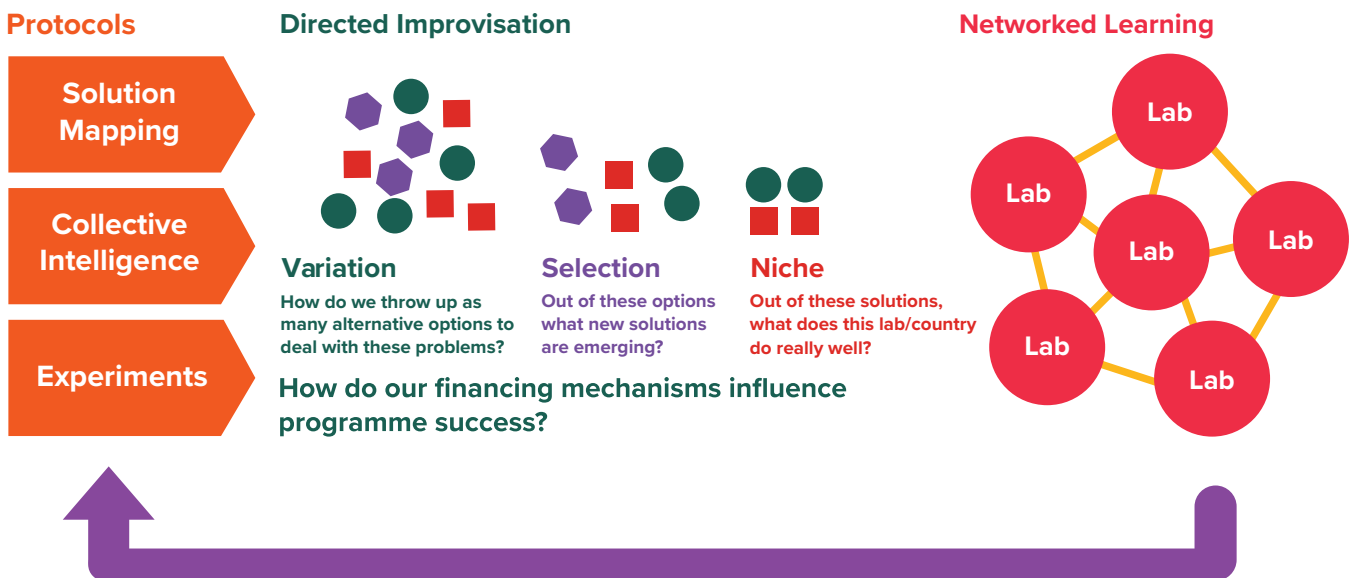
THE STRATEGY

Creating a network of Country Accelerator Labs offers a unique opportunity to test new approaches for addressing complex development issues. Labs offer a 'safe' space where partners can explore unconventional and even radical ideas to inspire change and create new opportunities. The Country Accelerator Lab Network is part of UNDP's broader aim to connect knowledge and solutions, whilst investing in disruptive approaches. The underlying premise of the Accelerator Labs is for UNDP and its partners to be in a position to:

- Take risks and create a highly networked global system of actors capable of managing complex issues in a wide variety of development contexts;

- Harness the resources - knowledge, expertise, ingenuity, finance - from the public, private and social sectors;

- Stimulate the creation of new markets by enabling the network to act as lead investor and catalyst in new initiatives.
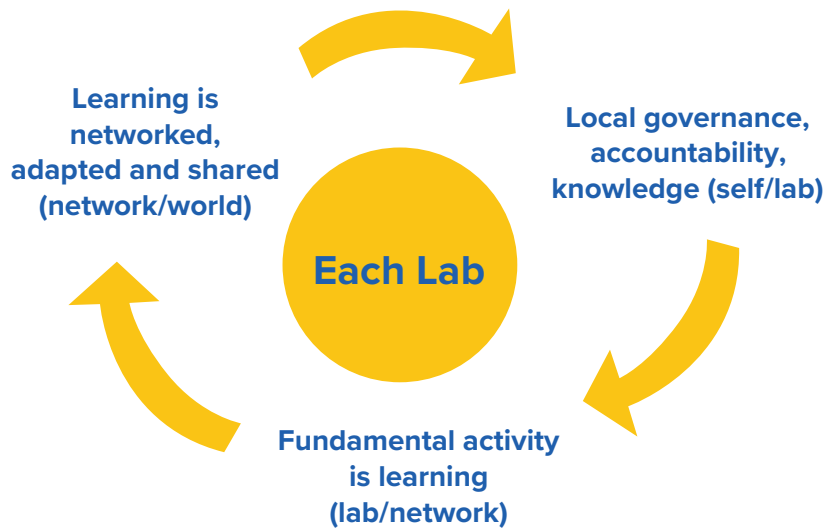
The network of Labs will build on UNDP's extensive global presence and work in nearly 170 countries and territories to create a new operating system for development. Each Lab will operate within UNDP's existing country structure and become an integral part of UNDP's service offering to governments, drawing on the unique knowledge and strengths of the UN system. It reflects UNDP's commitment to tomorrow's way of working today, to fulfilling its integrator function within the UN system, and to accelerating learning by pulling in the best of the best in the world.

The Labs will use three protocols – solution mapping, experiments and collective intelligence - to surface and reinforce locally sourced solutions and to dramatically expand the set of solutions available. Through directed improvisation and network learning, the network of Labs will provide the opportunity to create a variety of paths to address any given goal at scale and in many locations.

Overview of the UNDP Country Accelerator Lab: Methods and Way of Working

Protocols

Solution Mapping

Collective Intelligence

Experiments

Directed Improvisation

Variation
How do we throw up as many alternative options to deal with these problems?

Selection
Out of these options what new solutions are emerging?

Niche
Out of these solutions, what does this lab/country do really well?

How do our financing mechanisms influence programme success?

Networked Learning

Lab
Lab
Lab
Lab
Lab
Lab
Lab

60 LABS, NETWORKED TOGETHER, TO LEARN AND ACCELERATE SOLUTIONS FOR SDGS

Each Lab

Learning is networked, adapted and shared (network/world)

Local governance, accountability, knowledge (self/lab)

Fundamental activity is learning (lab/network)

UNDP will build 60 Labs working as the largest, fastest-learning network to accelerate solutions to complex and emerging development challenges. The Labs will work individually, with strong local governance and accountability. They will build on local solutions, learn from them, and scale learning across the network to accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

The need for this UNDP offering is clear. The emerging demands from Governments and partners show both the changing nature of issues they must grapple with and the need to go beyond incremental or sector-specific approaches. Some examples of such demand include: reforming social welfare systems to consider universal basic income, assets and services in Serbia, China, and Albania; leveraging Islamic finance for public policy in Indonesia, Turkey, Malaysia, and Turkmenistan;

investing public finance through outcomes-buying financial instruments and various forms of crowd investing in Armenia, Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, Moldova and Somalia; and looking for new ways of increasing investment in, and making the best use of, the impact of AI on governance mechanisms in Azerbaijan, Bangladesh and Turkey.

These Labs will be a space to address complex issues in creative ways by prototyping new approaches. As such, UNDP anticipates they will become natural magnets for entrepreneurs across society, including in the private sector through impact investment and venture philanthropy. In more and more countries, many of the key solutions to development challenges are indeed coming from private sector entities. The Labs will help connect them with Government and development actors to leverage greater resources and expertise, and to share and scale solutions rapidly.

KEY PRINCIPLES DRIVING THE LABS

1. A focus on 'missions': The Labs will support Governments' national development agendas by tackling complex development issues. This will be done through concrete and measurable 'missions' that are ambitious, and that foster cross-sectoral, multi-actor and cross disciplinary collaboration. Missions should be broad enough to engage the public and attract cross-sectoral investment; and remain focused enough to achieve measurable success. They should also stimulate a range of different solutions to achieve the objective. Examples of such missions include: eliminating multi-dimensional poverty in sub-Saharan Africa; ensuring safe and affordable housing for all; and turning cities into carbon-neutral places. Such efforts can transcend electoral cycles, motivating and uniting diverse groups in society to work towards a big goal over time.

2. An emphasis on local knowledge: To make the best use of deep local knowledge and creativity, the Labs will be locally governed and operated. They will focus on the solution rather than the problem, and draw on theoretical, empirical and practical insights from the innovation field. Each Lab will operate in a way that is apt for local needs and context, while at the same time being linked to others through the global network - enabling fast adaptation, scaling, peer-to-peer relations and rapid learning. Instead of having external experts devise off-the-shelf solutions, the Labs will focus on identifying and promoting custom local solutions, as these are more likely to replicate and scale within the society.

3. A networked learning approach: The differences between the country Labs are likely to be significant due to political, social, economic, environmental and other characteristics that act as both opportunities and constraints. Therefore, even though the Labs will use the same principles and methods, these will manifest differently in different contexts. The Labs' design will encourage people to experiment and share knowledge across the network. This implies that what gets scaled is the process itself (e.g. methods and approaches) rather than a project, with practical knowledge as the most significant output.

From (how the development system currently solves problems)	To (how Labs build solutions)
Focusing on what external experts think the problems are	Focusing on locally-led solutions that actually work
Managing risk (probability)	Dealing with uncertainty (possibility)
Updating outputs on logframes	Exploring and uncovering the best ways to delivering outcomes
Centralised, linear planning & control	Influencing and directing outcomes with local accountability
Equal targets for development	Local variance in targets, depending on niches (expertise, assets, problems)
Logical, machine-like operations that don't adapt	Biological adaptation, growing around barriers

THE 'METHOD': THREE PROTOCOLS GROUNDED IN EVIDENCE AND PRACTICE

Complex problems require complex solutions and the best way to address them is through solutions that adapt. This means moving away from complicated solutions (imagine a clock, with a thousand moving parts, the failure of any one of which will freeze the entire system), towards solutions that may be complex (imagine here a tree, which adapts to grow and flower as best it can with available light, soil and water). The core protocols that we will use to spark this shift are solutions mapping, experiments and collective intelligence.

Solution mapping

PROTOCOLS
Method to find out what works

Collective intelligence

Experiments
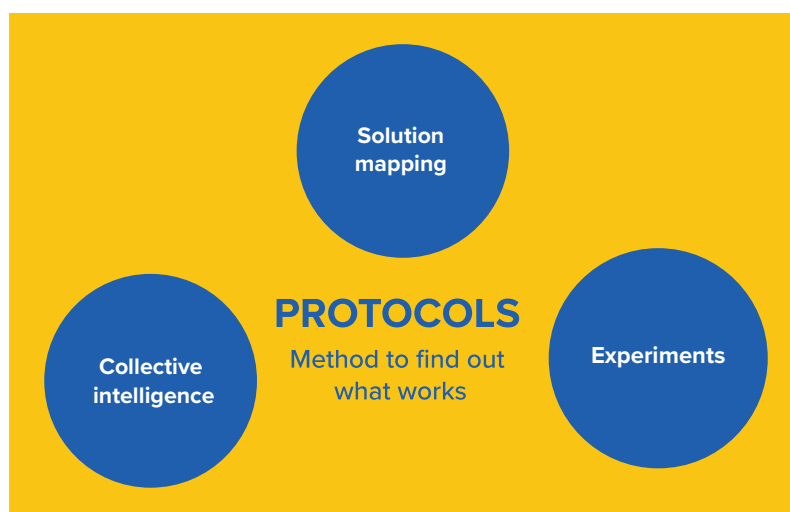
1. Solution mapping: 'Find out what is already working and do more of that'

Solutions mapping consists in finding things that work and expanding on them. It works by seeking out and making use of local assets, and identifying positive deviants, i.e. people whose uncommon but successful behaviours or strategies enable them to find better solutions to a problem than their peers, despite facing similar challenges and having no extra resources. Also, treating local innovators as "research and development teams" and building the skills of local partners to map and acknowledge their own assets can augment and amplify positive local dynamics, as opposed to resorting to sectoral experts who are more likely to approach any issue from a narrower perspective. Counter-intuitively, solutions mapping involves focusing on the solution rather than the problem. By using such a technique, a farmer in Indonesia found an eco-friendly technique to reduce flood-inducing organic waste using a local insect, the Black Soldier Fly, while at the same time producing high-calorie farm animal feed that came from the flies' larvae.

There are two ways to do solutions mapping:

Directed discovery of need and solution pairs. For instance, the innovation walks promoted by the National Innovation Foundation in India. These walks take place in rural areas and are aimed at documenting local innovative practice. Finding local solutions can also address multiple problems, as in the case of Indonesia's garbage for health insurance initiative, in which citizens traded recyclable garbage for health insurance - thus addressing both healthcare and environmental issues. In this case, need and potentially useful solutions came "packaged together".

Positive deviance and lead user innovation, two innovation methods that are still relatively new to international development, are premised on the fact that when public services fail, citizens come up with coping strategies to solve their own problems. The role of development organizations or the public-sector changes drastically, focusing less on importing solutions from outside and more on identifying these citizens (lead users or positive deviants) and their home-grown solutions to provide mechanisms for scaling them. An oft-cited example of positive deviance is Save the Children's effort to combat child malnutrition in Vietnam, inspired by families who introduced brine shrimp from rice paddies and other proteins into their children's diets.

2. Experimentation: 'Test, and test again, to get beyond the obvious, expert solutions to understand what actually works'
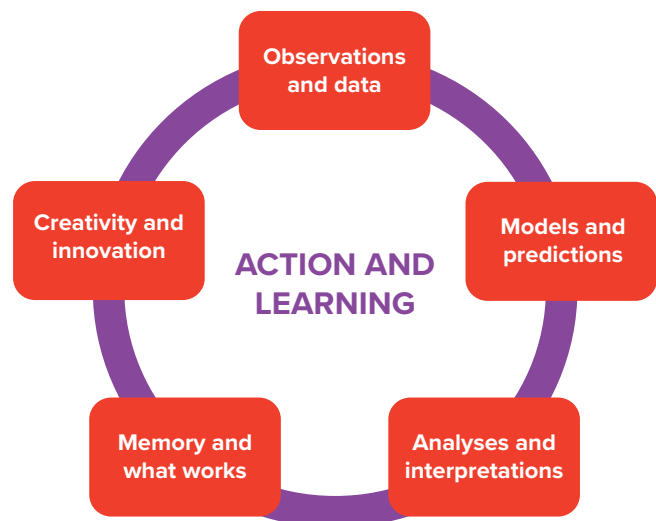
Experimentation involves testing solutions that aren't obvious in a scientific way. For instance, the United Kingdom's Alliance for Useful Evidence has advocated for a more systematic approach to experimentation, including the launch of multiple "What Works" Centres to improve the way government and other organisations create, share and use (or 'generate, transmit and adopt') high quality evidence for decision-making. In the United States, companies are deploying vast amounts of data and social psychology techniques to try to persuade people to use less electricity in their homes. Comparing a customer's electricity use with their neighbours is an effective way to spur action and a stronger motivator than environmental concerns, or even the promise of money saved.

There are at least three good reasons to use experimentation:

Accelerate learning and explore the non-obvious: Experimentation helps identify and fill knowledge gaps without spending too much time or resources and enables actors to accelerate the discovery of new potential solutions. Introducing a culture of experimentation expands the policy options available by creating a political environment that can test non-linear approaches to 'wicked' problems. By carrying out experiments in which solutions that aren't obvious or straight forward are tested, practitioners can explore radical solutions in a safe-to-fail context.

Turn uncertainty into risk: Uncertainty and risk are two notions often used interchangeably. Yet they are very different concepts. While risk is the probability that a solution will generate a certain outcome, uncertainty represents a lack of probabilities. In this context, experimentation can provide a frame for turning uncertainty into risk— or rather—dealing with uncertainty while minimising risk.

Reframe failure and KPIs: According to Harvard Business School's Amy Edmondson, we should draw a distinction between bad and good failures. "Good failures" help to increase knowledge about what we know to be true about the potential real-life effects of a hypothesis. For example, Finland's Design for Government programme is strategically introducing experimentation into policy-making and public innovation initiatives to learn from failures as much as to expand success.

3. Collective intelligence: 'We as a species know how to fix all our problems if we could just harness our own assets'

Collective intelligence involves combining knowledge from citizens, big data from the private sector and governments, and human expertise to create solutions. It also involves combining wisdom, ingenuity, and creativity from those actors to create better solutions. Collective intelligence is the glue that binds experimentation and solution mapping and is an effective building block to create a network through which the know-how, tacit knowledge, wisdom, and experience will be shared for learning. It is the newest of the protocols with the least global expertise available, but it is essential if we want to succeed.

Collective intelligence implies a shift from information management (the cornerstone of traditional, mainstream knowledge management efforts) to organisational learning. It implies using 'sticky', local knowledge to increase the ability of large groups - a community, region, city or nation - to think and act more intelligently and effectively than the sum of their parts.

Collective intelligence is helpful in at least four ways:

• Better understanding of facts and experiences: The explosion of new digital tools enables governments to gather data from many more sources, some generated proactively by citizens and groups (as in Metasub, where scientists track the health of cities through microbes in metros), some deriving from businesses (e.g. mobile phone networks revealing travel patterns or economic activity) and some generated automatically, e.g. through sensors.

• Better development of options and ideas: Governments can tap into the collective brainpower of citizens to come up with better ideas and options for action. These methods can be very inclusive (for example, consulting residents on major decisions relating to urban planning in their area) or focus primarily on people with specific expertise. They tend to work best with active curation since most ideas start their life relatively unformed and are ill-suited to government action as a result.

• Better, more inclusive decision-making and action: Decision-making, problem-solving, and implementation are usually left to experts, yet citizens are often well placed to make decisions on issues that affect them the most. New digital tools make it easier than ever for governments to involve citizens in policy-making, planning and budgeting and action. This can come in surprising ways, such as the research to integrate robots into insect communities, 'training' insects to search for trace chemicals like explosives in the ground.

• Better oversight: From monitoring corruption to scrutinising budgets, open data and digital tools allow broader oversight of government activity, helping to increase accountability and transparency. For example, the group AMEE gathered publicly available company data to determine the carbon footprint of every business and organisation in the UK. Or Integrity Action, which encourages citizens to monitor the progress of public and NGO projects, advocating for better services and ensuring fewer public funds are wasted.

COUNTRY-BASED ACCELERATOR LABS

Functions

The approaches outlined above will be deployed through a network of 60 Country Accelerator Labs. The Labs will be a niche UNDP offering, engaging with, but not directing local actors.

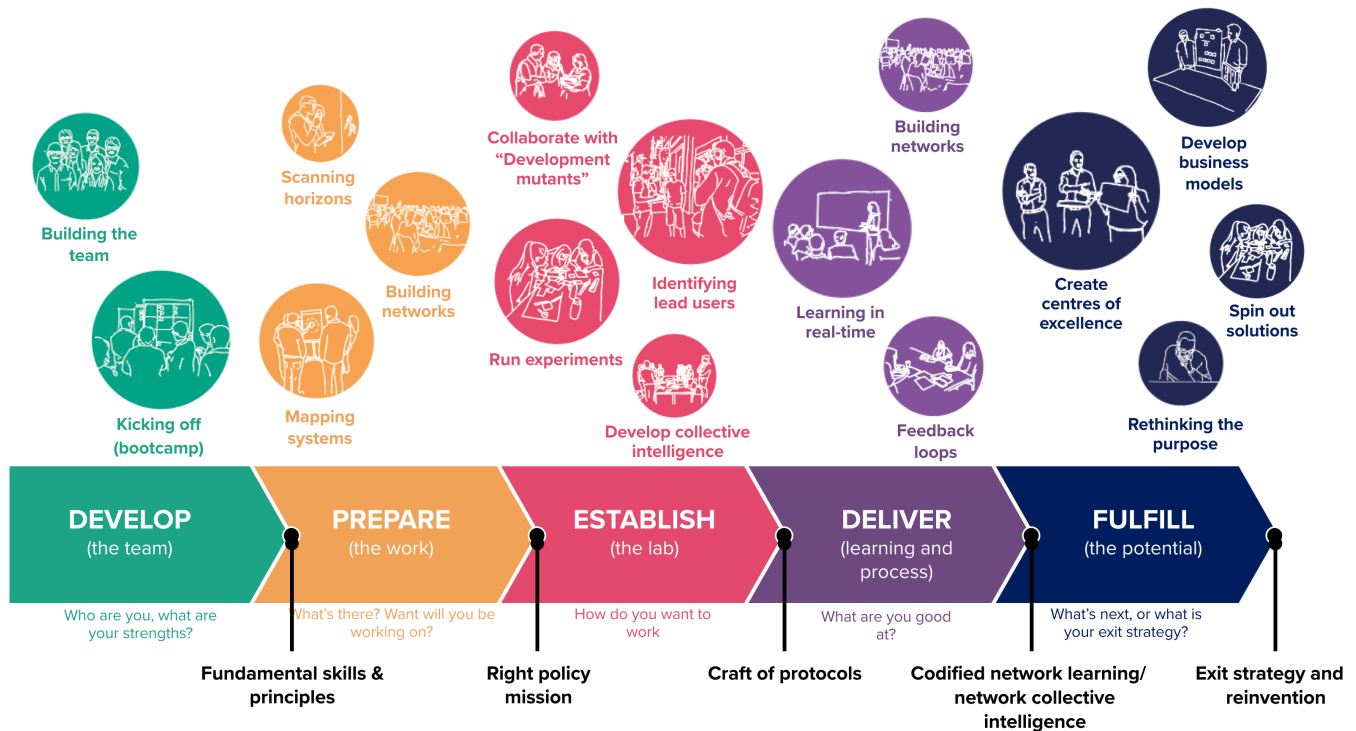Country Labs will provide support in four different dimensions:

1. Improving the enabling environment (e.g. a better policy and regulatory space for innovation);
2. Developing skills (innovation methods, learning behaviours, outcomes-focus, action-orientation), including understanding what makes local solutions work and reverse engineering them into different contexts to ensure scale and spread;
3. Growing networks of partners;
4. Improving access to funding for development solutions.

Each Lab will work on the basis of sprints with regular rapid evaluation of:

• The Lab's commitments;

• Progress on those commitments;

• Whether commitments need to be adjusted or modified;

• What actions from other actors progress depends on.

The Lifecycle of a Lab

We expect each Lab will go through five stages in their lifecycle. These phases are not always sequential. Some Labs will proceed more quickly than others, while others may not make it beyond the third phase.

DEVELOP (the team)	PREPARE (the work)	ESTABLISH (the lab)	DELIVER (learning and process)	FULFILL (the potential)
Who are you, what are your strengths?	What's there? Want will you be working on?	How do you want to work	What are you good at?	What's next, or what is your exit strategy?
	Fundamental skills & principles	Right policy mission	Craft of protocols	Codified network learning/ network collective intelligence	Exit strategy and reinvention

Develop

A Network Support Team (see below) will collaborate with 60 UNDP country offices to contract key staff for the Labs - applying a hands-on, experiential recruitment process to identify well connected and capable local change agents. The Lab teams will then attend one or more initial training programs ("bootcamps") to learn how to work as a team locally, and as a 'team of teams'. At the end of this phase, all Lab teams should understand fundamental ways of working and the skills involved in the protocols. **Timeline: January-April 2019**

Prepare

As the teams establish the Lab, they will use horizon scanning to build networks and map their local eco-systems, and consult with partners on what the initial 'missions' will be. At the end of this phase, the Labs will be ready for launch. **Timeline: April-June 2019**

Establish

After the launch and during the first few months of operation, the Labs will get to know lead users, and start with experimentation, solution mapping, and initial work in collective intelligence techniques. Labs will also kick-start their communications activity and engage with the network to share their learning. The result expected from this phase is the application of the protocols to the local context.
Timeline: July-September 2019

Deliver

In this phase, we expect to see early results coming from collaboration with partners both in-country and across the network. Skills and crafts are going to be more developed and Lab members will begin to teach and mentor others. The crafts of collective intelligence and real-time learning are developed, and feedback loops created. Learning within the Lab will be codified and initial evidence generated. During this phase, the networked learning practice will also be developed.
Timeline: October-December 2019

Fulfil

During this stage, we expect to see the accelerated emergence of local solutions to the SDGs. We can also expect to see significant variation among the Labs in terms of focus. Some Labs may diverge from their initial approach: they may reinvent themselves, shut down, spin off successful products or services, or explore other business models. All Labs should have an exit strategy. **Timeline: January 2020-beyond**

Each Lab's exit strategy and outcome set may be differently, but will include some of the following:

– Transformation of the local development system (through learning);
– Significant projects (spun out);
– Partnerships & community developed;
– Labs continuing on with alternative funding;
– Labs developing a commercial offering;
– Methods, research and guidance published.

Expected Results

Country Labs are intended as catalysts for change in the way development problems are addressed locally. Through shared learning and experimentation, they are designed to help transform the local development system's ability to accelerate solutions for the SDGs. Their most important output will be networked learning and the sharing of protocols and processes to identify solutions, experiment and generate collective intelligence.

Other specific results that can be expected during the three-year timeframe include:

– New cohorts of engaged individuals skilled up in latest approaches;

– New, broader networks of diverse partners established locally;

– Innovative ways of financing for development solutions identified;

– Knowledge management and sharing: methodology, research and guidance published.

By design, the initiative does not predetermine specific result targets for each Country Lab, but allows these to be determined by local stakeholders in response to specific country needs and opportunities, within the overall "Directed Improvisation" model of fostering innovation.

Staffing Individual Labs and Location

1. The Ambassador: builds and maintains political/institutional relationships. This should be the UNDP Resident Representative or Deputy, liaising with strategic partners and ensuring the work of the Lab advances national development goals.

2. The Machinist: leads the work with technical specialists on content design and execution, provides hand-holding to team and liaises with cutting edge partners externally. (S)he is well-respected in the local social innovation community, with links to entrepreneurs in the private sector.

3. The Community engager: responsible for watching and learning from other programs and engaging with the local social (innovation) communities, identifying 'under the radar' organizations and individuals with potentially disruptive solutions and insights.

4. The Storyteller: responsible for communicating within and outside the country about learnings, outcomes and failures, and for engaging with the Lab network.

5. The back-office wiz: ensures seamless administration of the effort and of emerging business models, making it efficient and transparent.

6. Subject matter experts (as needed): these should be drawn from the local ecosystem if possible to take advantage of local knowledge.

Labs should be unique to ensure variation in the processes and results. We will seek a range of countries to generate evidence of what works based on: (a) different contexts – LDCs, LICs, MICs, crisis settings, and (b) the strength of local innovation ecosystems. We will aim for a diverse geographical spread but prioritize the creation of many Labs in Africa. Criteria for locating a Lab will include: (a) Potential for impact. Risk will not be a factor, but potential will be. We are willing to accept failures if there is a strong potential for impact; (b) Strong support from the Government and UN Country Team; and (c) UNDP team with strong willingness to embrace new ways of working.

THE NETWORK HUB

As mentioned earlier in this proposal, a vital feature of this initiative is the creation of a network among individual Country Accelerator Labs. This will require effectively building the network using directed improvisation and networked learning.

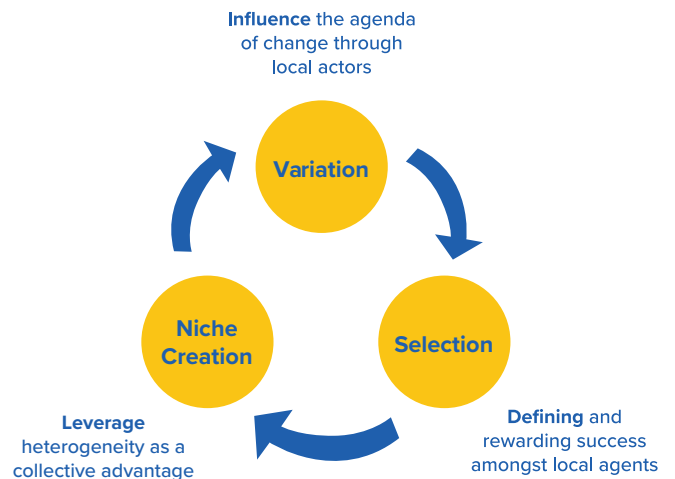## 1. "Directed Improvisation" to Foster the Network

The application of protocols and their local manifestation will vary greatly across the 60 Labs. This is what we mean by scaling the process (e.g. protocols) and not the project (e.g. off the shelf solutions).   Scaling the process requires a new way of working, called 'Directed Improvisation'.

This is a shift away from designing specific, pre-packaged development programs, towards fostering experimentation based on predefined protocols to better understand what solutions are the best local 'fits'.

Directed improvisation answers three key questions: How do we throw up as many alternative options to deal with problems? Out of these options, what new solutions are emerging? Out of these solutions, what does this country/Lab do really well?

Directed improvisation is about influencing results by surfacing and valuing local knowledge, ingenuity, execution, and local accountability. It is a codified framework to accelerate progress toward the SDGs through balancing top-down direction with bottom-up improvisation.

With its global network and international reach, and local presence and expertise, UNDP is well placed to encourage directed improvisation, so that work is supported from the top-down but owned from the bottom-up.

Influence the agenda of change through local actors

Variation

Niche Creation

Selection

Leverage heterogeneity as a collective advantage

Defining and rewarding success amongst local agents

The following elements of directed improvisation are key:

– Through variation (resulting from applying the three protocols across 60 different development contexts), we generate many possible alternative ways of addressing issues, providing a menu of potential options for governments and other partners;

– The selection process involves identifying patterns around what works and what doesn't in a given context, as well as defining and rewarding success; and

– Each Lab may then create niches, as they find and grow areas of excellence. Through this process we can turn heterogeneity (disparate results and Labs) into collective advantage and knowledge.

The directed improvisation approach has been proven to work, for example in social impact bonds, and outcomes-based commissioning of services. These often use more flexible funding and obtain better results than traditional development assistance.

2. Networked Learning


NETWORKED LEARNING
Scale what works
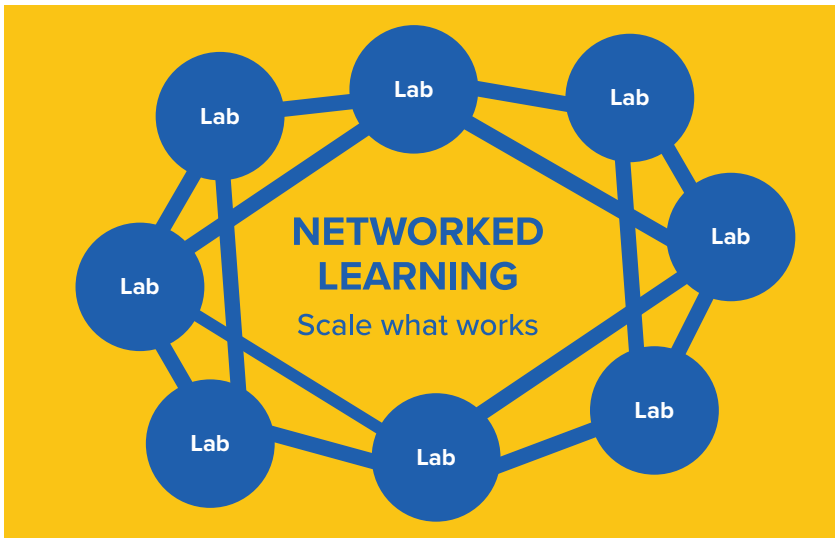
The ability of the network to accelerate progress toward global goals hinges on its capability to rapidly surface and signal approaches that work in different contexts and thus improve the collective intelligence of the entire system.

Networked learning is about learning what works, in what contexts, for whom, and how – within each Lab and between the Labs. There is no simple way to do this: organisational learning is difficult but without it, we will not be able to accelerate progress toward the SDGs.

For this initiative to work, the 'connective tissue' ensuring the transmission of learning needs to be strong on four levels:

– **Local:** regular processes within each Lab to know what they know – through testing hypotheses, action, observation and recognition.

– **Horizontal learning:** Labs share knowledge internally and with other actors in the ecosystem.

– **Vertical learning:** Labs feeds back knowledge gained locally by sharing it with UNDP and the wider UN system in country as well as with other government institutions.

– **Networked learning:** The spread of knowledge across the network as inputs to solutions-mapping, experimentation and collective intelligence elsewhere.

Four channels of learning

Networked (all Labs)

Vertical (Govt & UN)

Horizontal (projects)

Local (Lab)
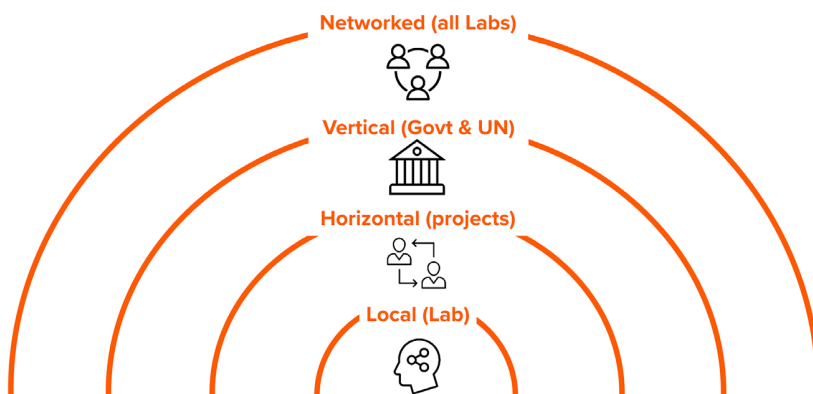
3. Expected results

– Strengthen acceleration and innovation efforts through a range of peer-to-peer learning in which Lab participants surface, analyse and dissect lessons learned, and develop strategies to address challenges faced during their experiments;

– Provide ongoing evidence-based guidance to other Labs and stakeholders, including practitioners and policymakers, on how to identify, adapt, and expand effective approaches to accelerating the SDGs. Guidance will be drawn from private sector and civil society experience, and ongoing learning inside the Labs;

– Document participants' experiences in real-time to feed back into a rapid and iterative learning cycle, as well as into the development of global public goods;

– Study, create and test modes of communication and collaboration among Labs as a potential model for reflective exponential learning and knowledge sharing generally;

– Identify mechanisms and approaches to connect those innovating around the SDGs with those designing and implementing policies and programs; and

– Identify gaps in the evidence base and areas for further research and experimentation.

4. Structure of the Lab Network

Some 60 unique Labs will be networked together with support coordinated by a Network Hub, with a support team, which will be directly connected to the UNDP Administrator and his senior leadership team.

Functions of Network Support Team

The Network Support Team will develop the strategy, propose and execute the criteria to select countries, coordinate the initial learning programme, develop the networked learning process (drawing on the process of Brookings CUE outlined here), and manage strategic communications, strategic guidance and the interface between the Labs network and the rest of UNDP.

Another key role of the Network Support Team will be to ensure peer-to-peer learning – especially in the initial phase. It will be important to ensure that teams build strong networks, without policing or controlling channels of communication. The Network Support Team will also study the communication and collaboration among Labs as model for reflective learning & knowledge sharing.

The Network Support Team will document and make publicly available in real time all insights into SDG acceleration and encourage decision-making autonomy on the local level and help with direction and sense-making through the learning programs.

Staffing Network Support Team

The initial team for the Lab network support will be lean and include the following roles:

1. The Architect - a senior lead who creates the mandate and is responsible for overall vision and strategy, and who can build political/institutional/entrepreneurial relationships.

2. The Orchestrator - the person who turns strategy into action, building solutions, troubleshooting any challenges in the relationships with the Labs, and finding and managing technical experts.

3. The Educator - a critical role, responsible for designing and delivering learning programmes, which will constantly be expanding.

4. The Storyteller - a community engagement lead and next generation communications expert.

5. The back-office wiz - responsible for the administration that keeps the team functioning.