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ACCELERATOR LABS

Building the world's largest learning network to tackle 21st century development challenges.

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Partners:

ITALIAN AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

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Summary:

- The Big Picture

- Why is the Accelerator Lab needed? Why now?

- What is the Accelerator Lab?

- What is the Accelerator Lab at UNDP?

- Why UNDP?

- How do the Accelerator Labs work?

- What does success looks like?

- How do we all benefit?

- How is this different?

The big picture

21st CENTURY CHALLENGES

Traditional approaches to development are struggling to keep up with today's social and environmental challenges.

These 21st century challenges are difficult to address because they are fast-moving, connected with other challenges, and often getting worse despite our best efforts to address them.

THREE KEY QUESTIONS

1. How do we better tackle complex and fast-moving challenges?

2. How do we find the most relevant solutions that work locally?

3. How do we learn more quickly about what works and what doesn't?

THE ACCELERATOR LAB

Combining UNDP's expertise with this service, we can help government better solve 21st century problems together with people, civil society, and business.

We find and grow local solutions that are already working and speed up the learning process about what works and doesn't by experimenting with many different approaches to a problem.

FOR EXAMPLE...

UNDP is helping government in North Macedonia use a diverse **portfolio of potential solutions** to test out new ways of addressing air pollution.

UNDP is helping the Sudanese government gain real-time and detailed insights about poverty distribution using mobile phone metadata under an approach called **collective intelligence**.
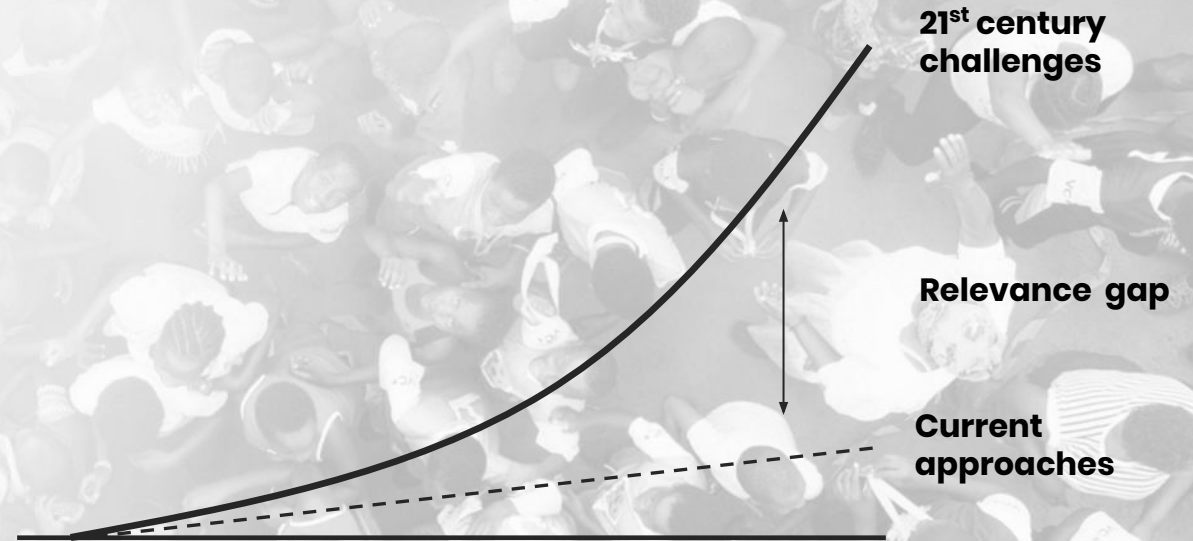
Why is the Accelerator Lab needed?
Why now?

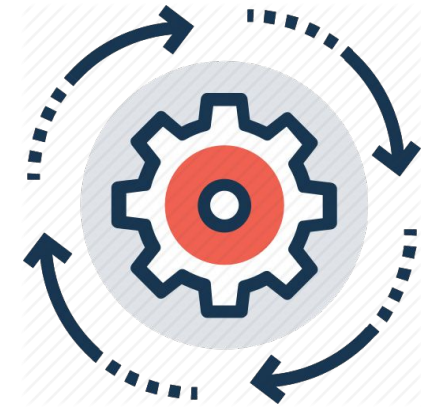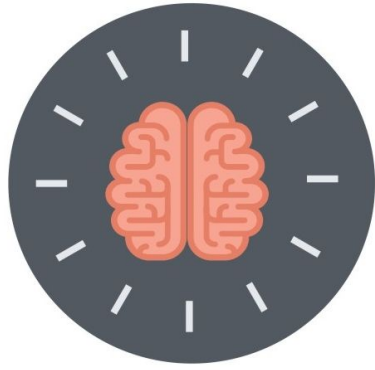# We need to re-imagine development for the 21ˢᵗ century

We are facing a new set of social and environmental challenges. These challenges are more intermingled and fast-moving than ever.

Our current approaches are making progress against 20th century challenges -- but not enough progress against 21st century challenges.

Effectively addressing 21st century challenges doesn't just require new solutions. It requires new strategies for understanding these challenges as they unfold. It requires new approaches to identifying solutions. It requires addressing not just the problem in front of us but the broader environment that led to this problem.

21ˢᵗ century challenges

Relevance gap

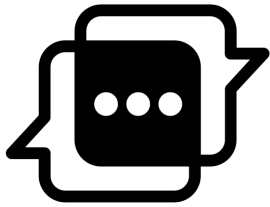**Current approaches**

UNDP is changing to address this gap

At UNDP, we are disrupting the way we **think, deliver, invest and manage** to perform faster, better and at scale.

The Accelerator Labs are part of our effort to inject innovation into our organizational DNA. This network of 60 Labs will create new capabilities for national partners to respond to exponential changes and 21st century challenges.
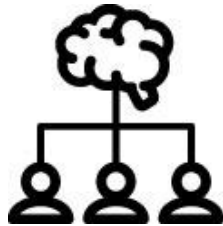
What is the Accelerator Lab?

The Accelerator Lab is a set of services we offer to better tackle complex challenges

Sensemaking

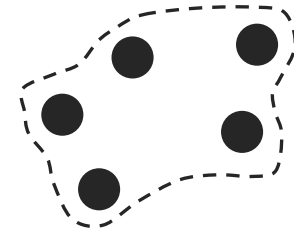Support public sector to be relevant in complex and fast paced environments

Collective Intelligence

Keep the finger on the pulse (what's happening on the ground & potential futures) and design new forms of public accountability

Solutions Mapping

Branch out to discover solutions and workarounds people in local communities have developed to a challenge

Portfolio Approach

Design & execute portfolios of tests

These services are our answers to the key questions behind the Accelerator Labs

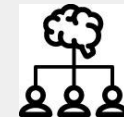**1** What challenges should we be really focusing on?

Sensemaking

Collective Intelligence

2 How do we get real time data & find the most relevant solutions that work locally?

Solutions Mapping

Collective Intelligence

3 How do we learn quickly about what works and what doesn't?
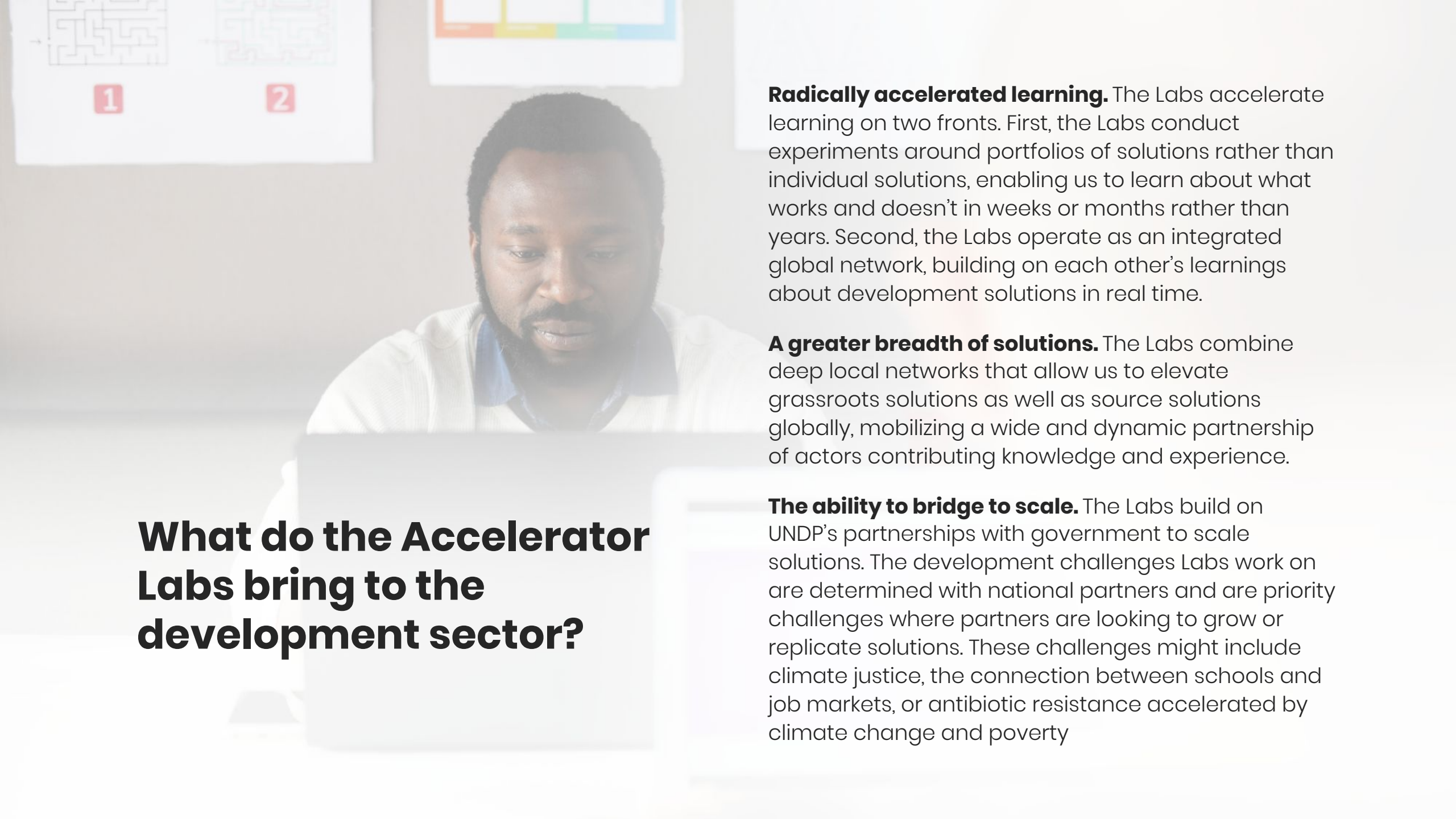
Portfolio Approach

The Lab is part of the world's largest and fastest learning network around development challenges

60 Labs around the world are testing not just new solutions but new ways of working to address social and environmental challenges.

Being part of a globally integrated network, each lab can draw inspiration from both local solutions and solutions identified by the global network.

If multiple Labs are working on a challenge in parallel, they benefit from each others learning in real-time, creating a powerful collective learning effect.

What do the Accelerator Labs bring to the development sector?

Radically accelerated learning. The Labs accelerate learning on two fronts. First, the Labs conduct experiments around portfolios of solutions rather than individual solutions, enabling us to learn about what works and doesn't in weeks or months rather than years. Second, the Labs operate as an integrated global network, building on each other's learnings about development solutions in real time.

A greater breadth of solutions. The Labs combine deep local networks that allow us to elevate grassroots solutions as well as source solutions globally, mobilizing a wide and dynamic partnership of actors contributing knowledge and experience.

The ability to bridge to scale. The Labs build on UNDP's partnerships with government to scale solutions. The development challenges Labs work on are determined with national partners and are priority challenges where partners are looking to grow or replicate solutions. These challenges might include climate justice, the connection between schools and job markets, or antibiotic resistance accelerated by climate change and poverty

A DIFFERENT KIND OF ACCELERATOR

The Accelerator Labs accelerate learning about what works and what doesn't in development so that we can get faster results on the ground.

FOUR THINGS THE ACCELERATOR LABS ARE <u>NOT</u>

1. The Accelerator Lab doesn't accelerate startups or particular technologies. Unlike other accelerators, the accelerator lab is not focused on taking any single solution to market or to scale. The Lab approach tests portfolios of potential solutions. A portfolio will contain multiple solutions, each using a different strategy to address a challenge (e.g. policy, behavioural approach).

2. The Accelerator Lab is not an SDG Accelerator Lab.. The Labs address fast-moving social and environmental challenges, they do not invest in individual SDG accelerators.

3. The Accelerator Lab isn't a technology lab. The portfolio of interventions that the Accelerator Lab tests might include technology, policy interventions, coalitions of nonprofits delivering a service, or even business interventions. We don't limit ourselves to working with any particular type of intervention.
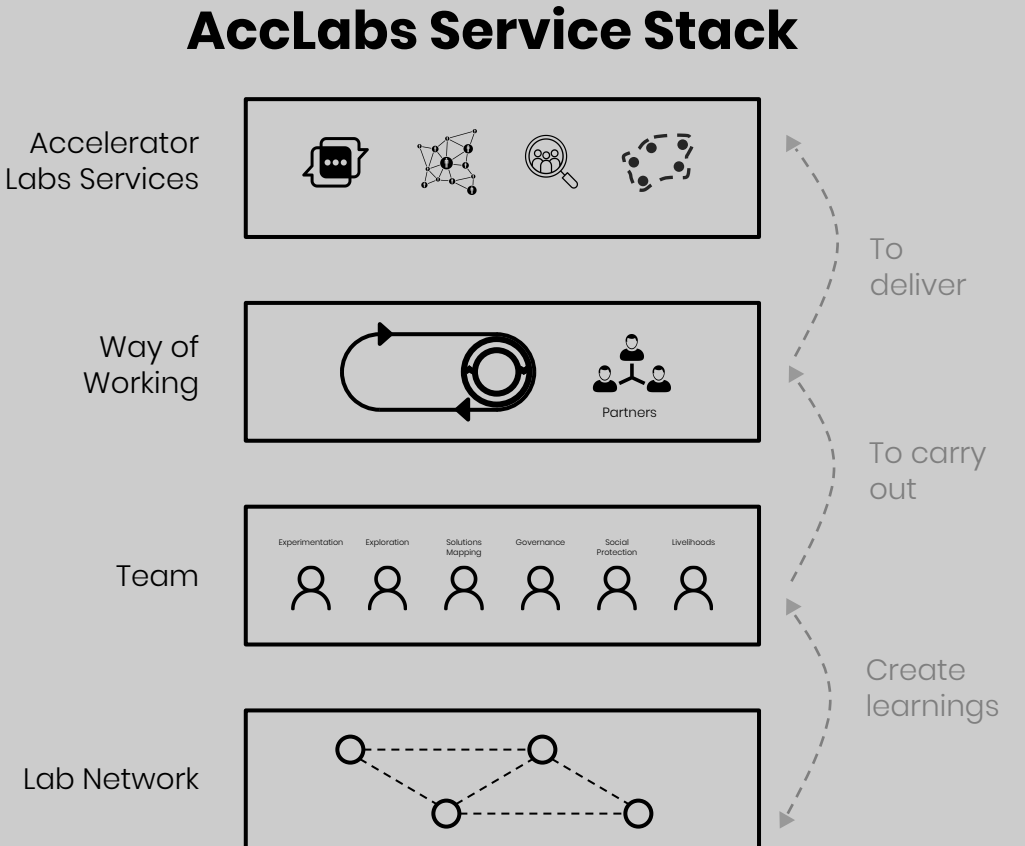
4. The Accelerator Lab isn't a think tank. The focus of the Lab isn't on research and publication. It is generating learning through taking action on challenges and by conducting quick tests or experiments.

What is the Accelerator Lab at UNDP?

How Accelerator Lab services are delivered

The Accelerator Lab service enables service delivery:

- The Accelerator Labs **way of working**, including three protocols and an approach that brings in new kinds of partners
- A **team** of people drawing on the full capability of UNDP in country, enhanced by the Heads of Exploration, Experimentation and Solution Mapping
- An Accelerator Lab **network** where learnings are shared to strengthen the work of all Labs.

AccLabs Service Stack

Accelerator Labs are in one third of the world's countries

- Algeria
- Angola
- Argentina
- Azerbaijan
- Benin
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Burkina Faso
- Cambodia
- Caribbean (Based in Barbados)
- Cape Verde
- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Colombia
- Congo
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Dominican Republic
- Ecuador
- Eswatini
- Ethiopia
- Ghana
- India

- Iraq
- Jordan
- Kenya
- Lao PDR
- Lebanon
- Lesotho
- Libya
- Malawi
- Malaysia
- Mali
- Mexico
- Morocco
- Namibia
- Nepal
- Niger
- Pacific (Based in Fiji)
- Pakistan
- Palestine (PAPP)
- Paraguay
- Philippines
- Rwanda
- Serbia
- Sierra Leone
- Somalia
- South Africa
- South Sudan
- Sudan
- Tanzania
- The Gambia

- Timor Leste
- Togo
- Tunisia
- Turkey
- Uganda
- Ukraine
- Uzbekistan
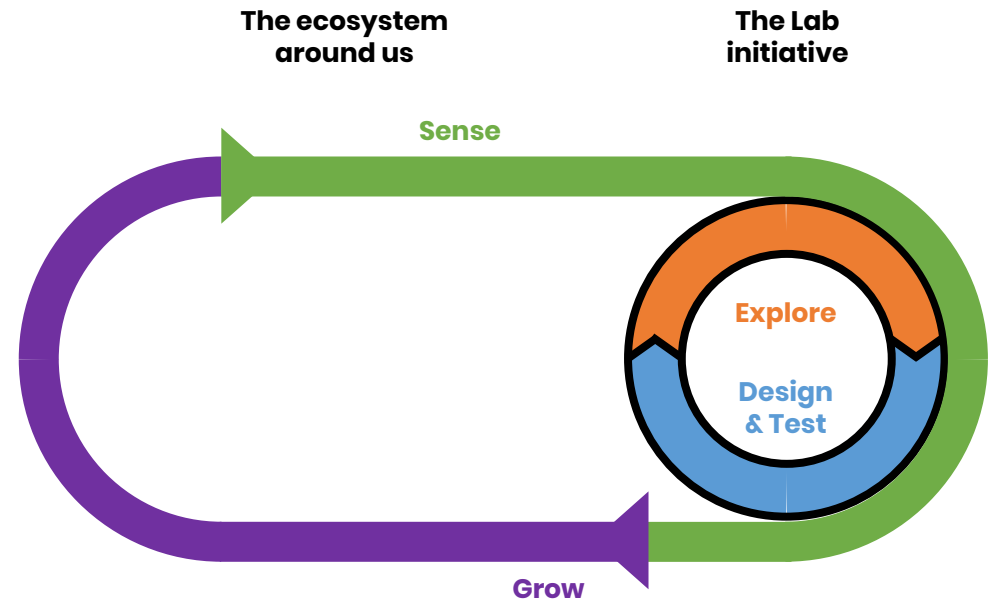- Vietnam
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

How do the Accelerator Labs work?

The Accelerator Lab cycle

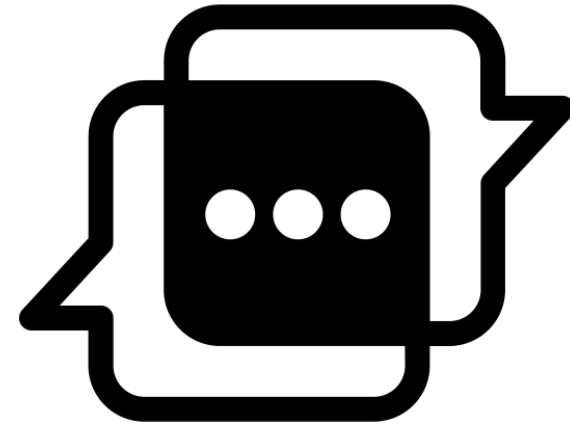The Accelerator Lab continuously loops through four key activities:

1. **Sense** is about understanding what are emerging challenges and opportunities in the local context and determining where we need to focus our attention.
2. **Explore** is about looking for solutions, particularly by looking at how citizens are already addressing these challenges and opportunities.
3. **Design & test** is about assembling a portfolio of potential solutions and continuously testing them until we are confident they can work.
4. **Grow** is about handing over the portfolio of solutions, advocacy for policy change or spinning solutions off as private ventures..

1. Sensemaking

Looking for patterns, identifying the relevance gap

Together with partners, the Labs will analyse the local context challenges to identify connections and patterns to anticipate new avenues of work and act effectively to accelerate development.
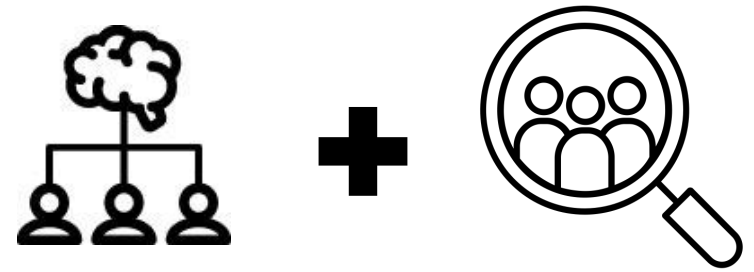
2. Explore

Tapping into uncommon data sources and inputs to find potential new solutions

Solutions Mapping: The Labs will identify grassroots solutions together with local actors and validate their potential to accelerate development. Solutions can come in many different forms, from a farmer discovering a new way to prevent floods to other grassroots innovations in health, energy or water management.

Collective intelligence: The Labs will also harness the potential real time and citizen generated data for better decision making to solve development problems.

What challenges should we be really focusing on?

How do we find the most relevant solutions?

FOR EXAMPLE

USING SOLUTIONS MAPPING TO FIND APPROACHES TO FLOOD PREVENTION
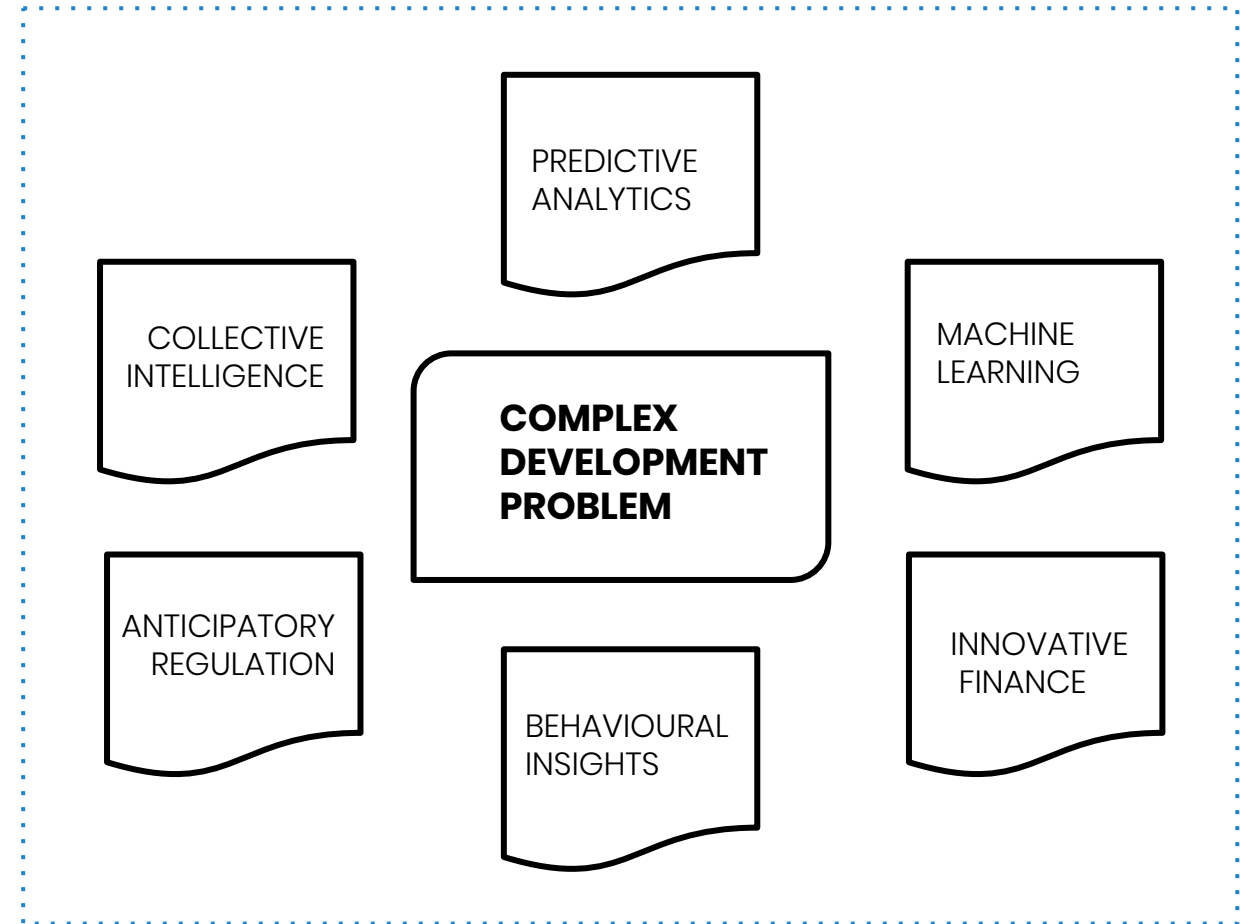
Solutions mapping is one of the services provided by the Accelerator Labs. The solutions that are most likely to work in a particular context aren't always imported – they're the solutions that people have already developed locally to cope with their challenges.

Solutions mapping was used by IFRC and the University of Hamburg to locate local solutions to flood prevention in Indonesia. Satellite imagery revealed on village managing floods better. Upon digging deeper, the IRFC team found a farmer with 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.

Photo: Su Kamran

3. Design and test

Design and run experiments to find out what works and what doesn't

The Labs will design and conduct experiments around portfolios of solutions rather than individual solutions, enabling us to learn about what works and doesn't in weeks or months rather than years.

How do we learn quickly about what works and what doesn't?

4. Grow

Growing solutions: The ability to bridge to scale

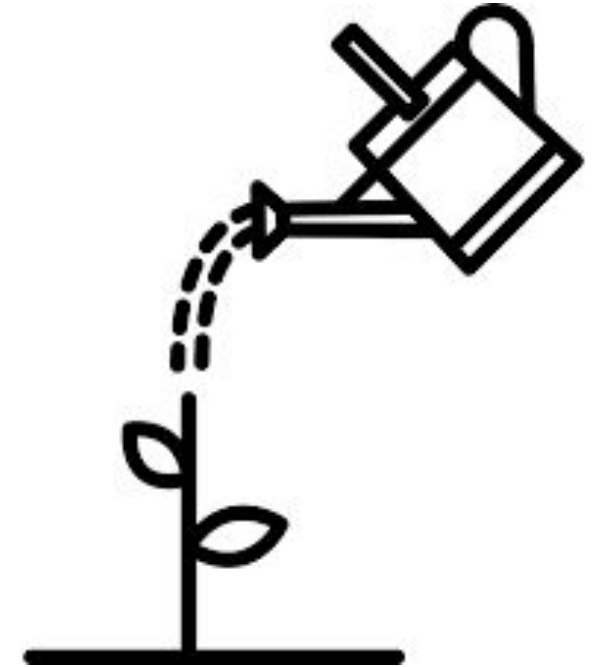Within the each of the country labs, scale will be targeted in three ways:

Influence on **development programming**

Influence on **government policy**

Spin-offs of Lab initiatives into **independent ventures**

What combination of solutions can be used by UNDP and partners?

What does success look like?

How do we know whether the Accelerator Labs are successful?

Outcomes   Leading Indicators

Impact
There are three avenues in which we might expect to see impact from Lab work:

- Influence on development programming
- Influence on government policy
- Spin-offs of Lab initiatives into independent ventures

Action & Traction
The CO/Lab is carrying out initiatives that address complex challenges and partners want to provide resources for these initiatives

Perceptiveness
There is capability in the development system to better see and articulate emergent and intermingled (complex) challenges that are not yet being addressed

How do we all benefit?

How do the people of ==your country== benefit from the Accelerator Labs?

- **Valuing local expertise**. The Labs leverage expertise from everywhere, especially by valuing those in communities facing social and environmental challenges as experts.
- **Elevating and co-designing with new problem solvers**. The Labs create a constructive way of working with local experts in communities, particularly local problem-solvers who are not normally visible, alongside more formally recognised experts to address social and environmental challenges.
- **Greater impact on 21st century challenges**. Ultimately, these approaches to problem solving lead to portfolios of solutions that are more effective at tackling complex and fast-moving challenges.

A few ways the Accelerator Labs support the innovation ecosystem

The Accelerator Labs contribute to the work of existing players in the ecosystem in three ways:

1. **Strengthening legitimacy**. The primary partner for the Accelerator Lab in country is government. The Lab helps bring government to the table and creates legitimacy for innovative ways of working. It can also help legitimise existing initiatives and social innovators with government and more traditional organisations involved in social and environmental challenges.
2. **Convening across sectors**. The Accelerator Lab can convene parties that might not normally collaborate and that might need neutral ground to start collaborating, such as government, private sector, and startups.
3. **Elevating new problem solvers**. By finding and tapping individual problem solvers in local communities, the Accelerator Labs identify out a new set of innovators that can help address social and environmental challenges.

How government can benefit from the Accelerator Labs

1. **Co-investment in tackling critical challenges**. The services and manpower of the lab are UNDP's investment in better tackling the most critical and challenging risks facing the country, such as inequality, unemployment, or technological change. We look to government to commit expertise and human capital to work alongside the Lab in tackling a particular complex challenge.
2. **Become better at tackling unknown or complex challenges**. The Lab provides the capability to learn about what works and what doesn't in an uncertain policy space in weeks or months rather than years. This creates the unique ability to tackle uncertain and rapidly shifting problems.
3. **Build on what works locally**. The labs identify people who have addressed solutions locally in addition to tapping into the collective knowledge of the 60 Labs globally.

How people at UNDP benefit from the Accelerator Labs

1. **Relevance**. The Labs help ensure the work you are doing is relevant to addressing today's complex, cross-cutting social challenges while also being relevant to government.
2. **Learning**. The Labs are a professional development opportunity that enables you to explore and learn more about difficult and cross-cutting challenges in your domain of work.
3. **Collaboration**. Working with the Lab makes it easier for you to try new and more holistic approaches to social and environmental challenges by connecting your work across other specializations in the office.
4. **Expanded partnerships**. The Labs incorporate new kinds of partners and "unusual suspects" and renew existing partnerships in ways that support novel approaches to development work.

How is this different?

How do Labs change the way we work at UNDP?

TODAY

TOMORROW

Disconnected pilots without adequate learning and scaling

Faster learning through experiment-driven testing

Pursuing "unicorns" – invest in a single solution for complex problems

Learning from existing, local solutions that are closer to reality

Best practices lag behind challenges that are constantly shifting

Collective intelligence through a globally integrated network

Development actors working in isolation "re-learn" what other offices have already learned

Bringing in new sources of data to real-time evolving challenges

Looking at the usual data sources leads us to the usual answers

Portfolios of potential solutions allow us to consider multiple solutions in parallel

How does the Accelerator Lab build on the lessons of other Labs?

Learnings from Labs

Selecting a challenge, developing prototypes for a solution, and attempting to build political buy-in for those solutions through the prototype often didn't succeed in building buy-in.

Sometimes labs end up siloed from each other, slowing down their collective learning or limiting to occasional conferences.

Importing external solutions and good practices created development solutions that were often mismatched with the local context.

Labs that developed proofs-of-concept for new ideas and then attempted to scale them often found there were too many challenges in scaling from scratch.

Accelerator Lab

The Accelerator Lab reverses the process, starting from issues that are top-shelf concerns for national partners and already have significant political buy-in.

In the Accelerator Lab network, 60 Labs work as an integrated, global network so that when one Lab learns, all Labs learn.

The Accelerator Lab focuses heavily on identifying local and grassroots innovators as a source of solutions to development challenges.

Accelerator Labs look at what is already happening and find ways to accelerate the impact on development, rather than transplanting new concepts.

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