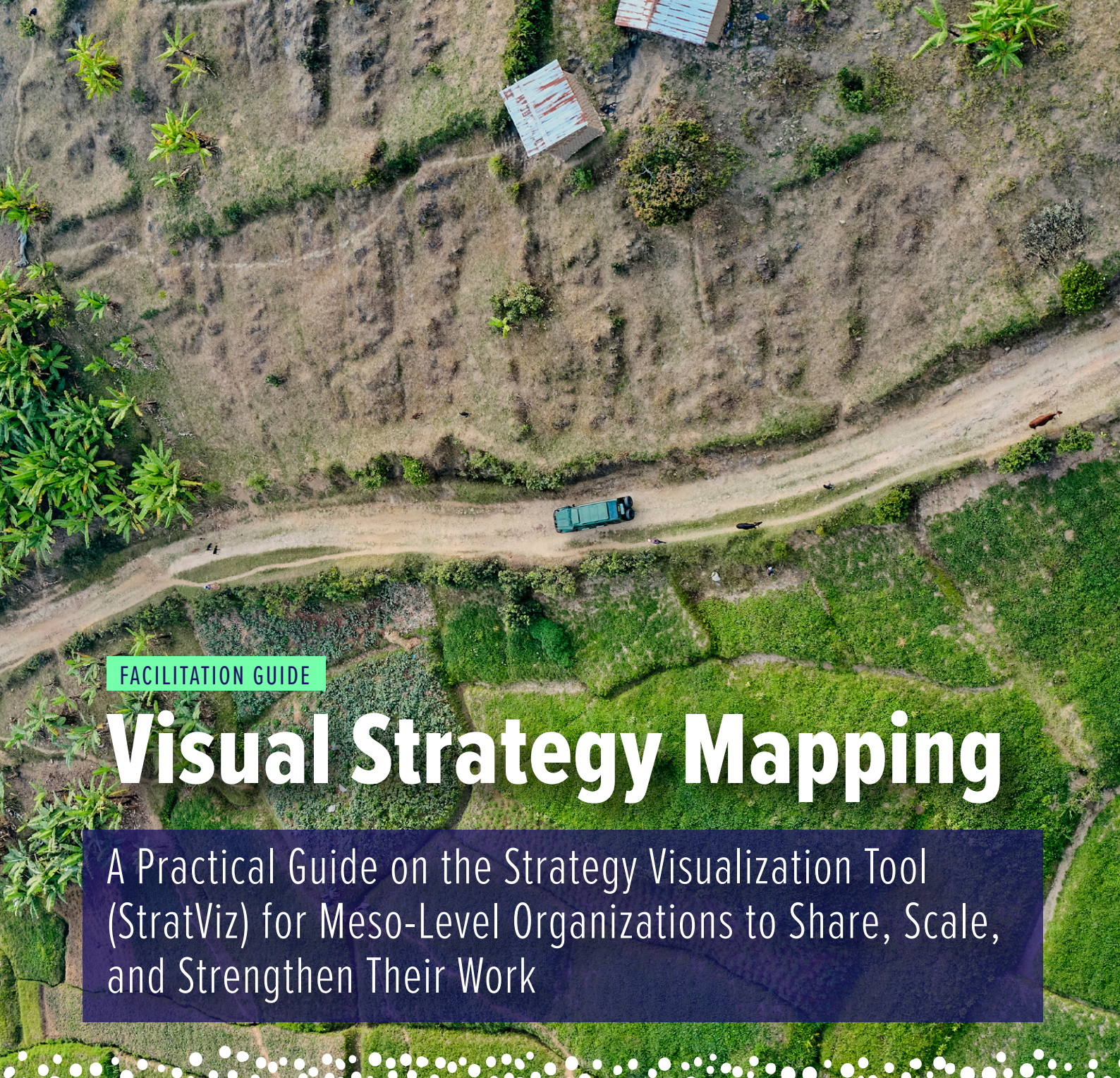




FACILITATION GUIDE

Visual Strategy Mapping

A Practical Guide on the Strategy Visualization Tool (StratViz) for Meso-Level Organizations to Share, Scale, and Strengthen Their Work

ACAMI (Accelerating Climate Adaptation via Meso-level Integration) is a multi-country research and learning initiative implemented in collaboration with over 70 meso-level organizations (MLOs) across Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and South Africa. These organizations serve as vital connectors between national institutions and local communities to deliver climate change adaptation (CCA).

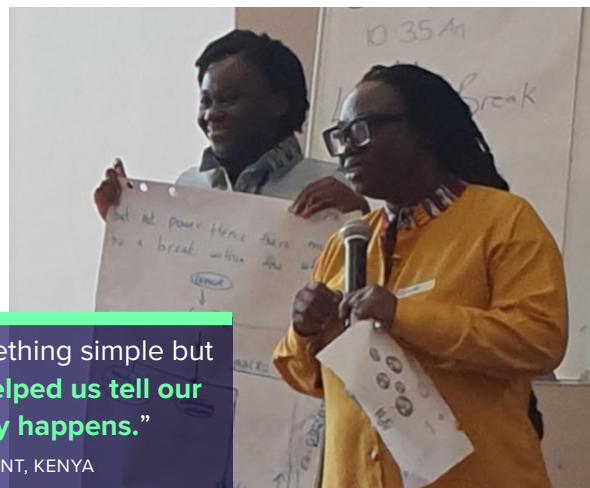
ACAMI explored how MLOs strategize, build partnerships, and foster innovation. A key insight: the most powerful work often happens in informal, relational spaces—and is not captured in formal project documents.

The ACAMI interview data provided rich insights into the diverse strategies MLOs pursue to manage their partnerships and relations with sponsor organizations and beneficiaries, to address gender equity, to create impactful agricultural development interventions, and to enable access to climate information and services.



“We wanted something simple but powerful—that helped us tell our story how it really happens.”

— WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, KENYA



Background

ACAMI found that many of the MLO representatives interviewed had limited opportunity to share their insights and the ways in which they were creatively confronting and resolving challenges in improving CCA outcomes, and for scaling their successes. These strategies involved different combinations of **vertical action** – working from the micro to meso to macro-level, as well as **horizontal action** – working through partnerships and networks of other MLOs to accomplish key goals and CCA outcomes.

Further, it was clear that MLOs were often instrumental in scaling their approaches. Currently, MLOs are limited in their ability to effectively capture and communicate their approaches to partners, sponsors or even beneficiaries, or to demonstrate the temporal evolution of their strategies for problem solving to generate sustainable and scalable outcomes. Donors, project partners and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) staff lack the instruments to document strategies to evaluate change, capture novel solutions, and to share innovative approaches to ensure learning across the CCA community for more impactful outcomes.

ACAMI’s Strategy Visualization (StratViz) Tool addresses this gap. The tool is a participatory method for visually mapping strategies, flows, relationships, and scaling. It uses a simple system of icons and arrows to illustrate interactions among macro, meso, and micro-level actors.

The interactions illustrate the agency and influence of actors in the CCA space, for example, how an MLO disseminates knowledge, trains partners, orchestrates co-learning opportunities, or influences macro-level actors to accomplish key goals. To fully capture the range of scaling activities by MLOs, ACAMI classified these efforts into **deep-scaling**, **out-scaling**, and **up-scaling**.

Validation of the Strategy Visualization Tool first in a virtual focus group with selected MLO representatives, followed by workshops with MLO representatives in Kenya, Ghana and Malawi, led to significant improvements of the instrument. Through participatory exercises, **workshop attendees illustrated the utility of the tool as an instrument of storytelling, visualization, and peer-to-peer communication.**

The rich discussions and questions raised by peers through the use of the tool demonstrated its effectiveness in giving MLOs a voice to articulate their experience, their strategies, and, importantly, the ways in which their efforts were supporting changes in norms and mindsets (deep scaling), enabling the wider distribution of critical adaptation assets and knowledge (out-scaling) and influencing policy (up-scaling) to improve CCA outcomes.

The learning and feedback from these sessions played a key role in shaping the final approach presented in this guide. This guide is intended to support MLOs and their partners to begin applying the StratViz approach in their own strategy reflection, communication, and peer learning.

Value of StratViz to different CCA actors



Individual organizations (MLOs)

Train staff, plan new strategies, and document organizational learning.



Learning networks (MLOs)

Host cross-MLO storytelling sessions to spread successful approaches and lessons learned.



Funders and partners

Use during onboarding, co-design workshops, or theory of change development.



Evaluators

Apply during formative evaluations to track emerging solutions and adaptations.



Key terms

Meso-Level Organizations (MLOs)

- Complex heterogeneous organizations involved in the implementation of planned climate change adaptation investments in the form of programs and projects.
- **Role:** Operate between grassroots (micro-level) actors and national-level (macro-level) entities, bridging the gap between practice and policy.
- **Function:** Enable implementation, learning, coordination, and influence within the climate adaptation ecosystem.

Actor levels

- **Micro-Level Actors:** Community-based stakeholders such as farmers, women's groups, and rural households who are the primary beneficiaries of CCA interventions.
- **Meso-Level Actors:** Intermediary organizations (including MLOs) that connect micro-level realities to macro-level decision-making.
- **Macro-Level Actors:** Policymakers, donors, and government agencies engaged in high-level CCA policy and funding. In specific contexts, they may act as MLOs if directly involved in implementation.

Strategy

The set of coordinated actions taken by an organization to achieve its mission, vision, or specific project-related goals with long-term impact in mind.

Directionality of Strategy

- **Vertical Strategy:** Involves flows of resources, knowledge, or influence across meso, macro and micro-levels.
- **Horizontal Strategy:** Focuses on collaboration and exchange between peer organizations (e.g., MLO-to-MLO).
- **Compound Strategy:** Integrates both vertical and horizontal strategies.

Scaling

- **Deep-Scaling:** Shifts in social or cultural norms, values, or mindsets at the local level.
- **Out-Scaling:** Replication of successful innovations or interventions across different locations or populations.
- **Up-Scaling:** Embedding adaptation innovations into policies, institutional programs, or legislation at the macro-level.

Flows

Movements of knowledge, resources, influence, or support between different actors across the adaptation system.

Motif

A visual combination of symbols (actors and flows) that illustrate how MLOs implement. Motifs help illustrate strategies — what MLOs do to create impact.

Understanding StratViz

— MAKING RELATIONSHIPS, FLOWS, AND IMPACT VISIBLE

Storytelling as translation: communicating scaling strategies

StratViz is a visual storytelling method that helps MLOs to:

- Map how they work through relationships, flows, and influence.
- Reflect on invisible strategies and tacit knowledge.
- Show how strategies lead to deep, out, and up-scaling.

- Foster peer learning and cross-organizational exchange.

StratViz works best when stories are honest and specific. It can be used in learning exchanges, planning sessions, partner dialogues, formative evaluations.

What are visual strategy maps?

Each motif uses simple symbols to represent key actors: the focal organization, other meso-level organizations (peers and partners), macro-level actors (such as sponsors and policymakers), and micro-level actors (such as farming communities).

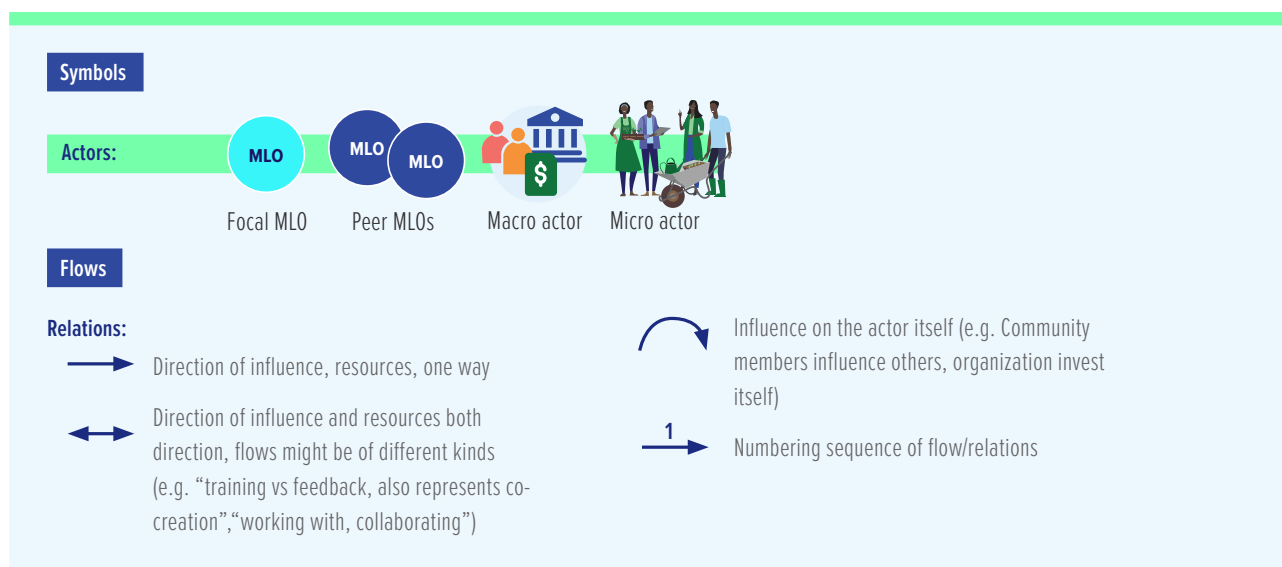
Arrows indicate the flow of resources, knowledge, information, or influence that the focal organization mobilizes, either independently or in partnership, to achieve specific goals relevant to its mission or the specific project.

Directionality articulates whether the primary effort/influence of the focal MLO in the strategy described is focused on the micro or macro-level (vertical strategies) or towards other organizations directly

and indirectly involved in the implementation of the CCA interventions (horizontal). The evolution of the process can be made visible by adding **numbers** to the arrows which helps to convey the sequence of interactions.

By organizing these elements (symbols, arrows and numbers) into a **visual story**, organizations can clearly communicate how their strategies work and how they create impact in complex systems and governance constellations.

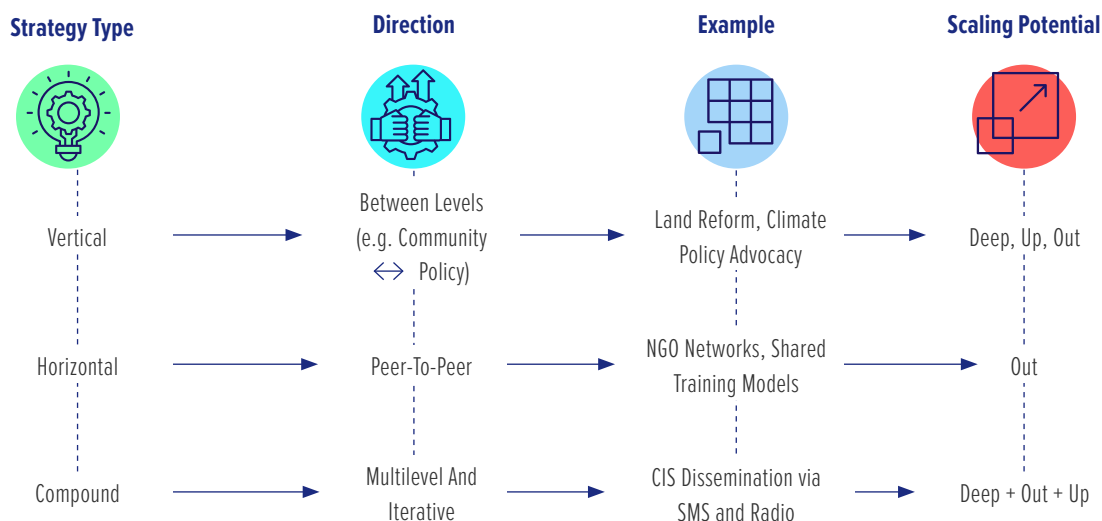
StratViz maps emphasize process, not structure—they reveal how change happens, not just what was done.



Types of strategies and interactions

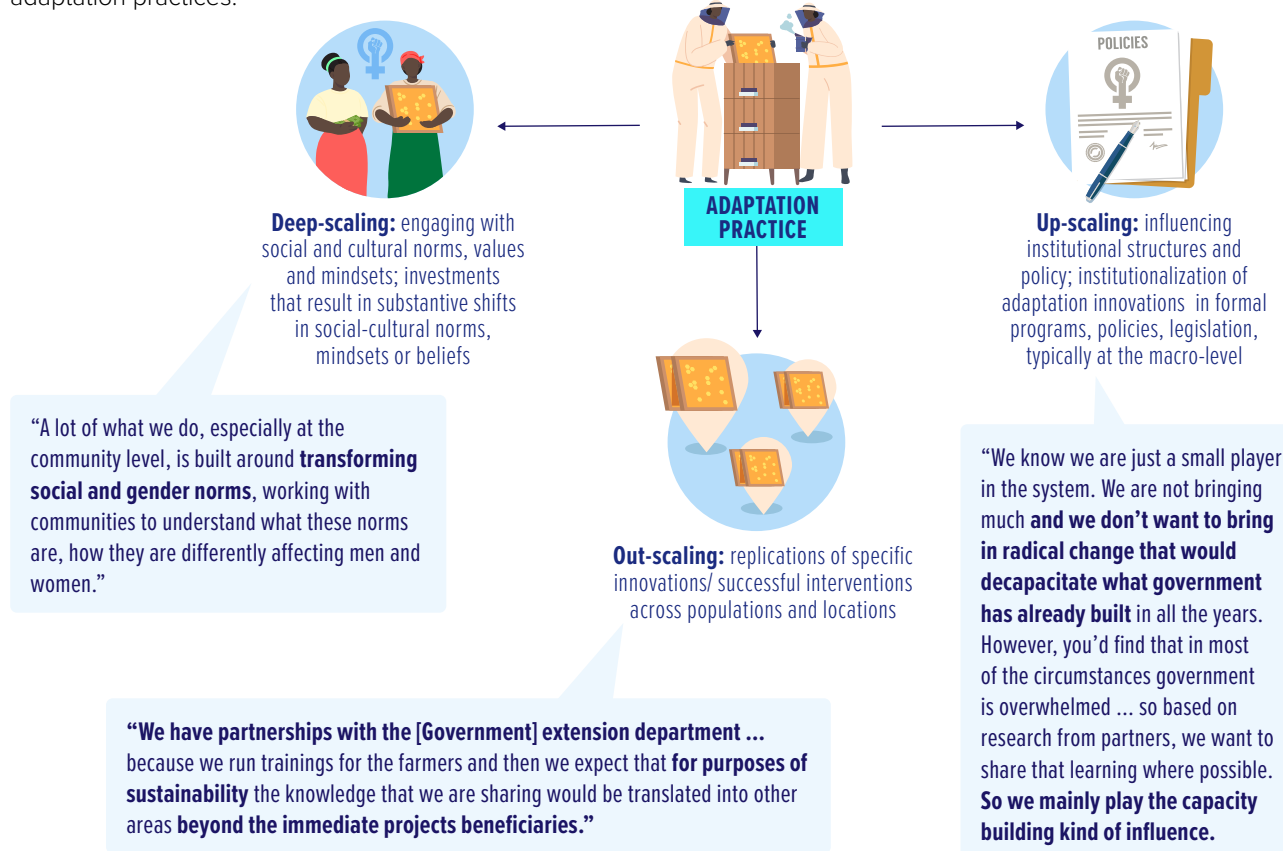
All MLOs pursue strategies: different sets of intentional activities and partnerships to pursue their missions and achieve specific and longer-term goals. These strategies can illustrate innovative ways of

achieving impact but are often **invisible** to sponsors and other stakeholders. **By making these strategies visible, they can be shared with others to foster learning and open the potential for scaling impact.**

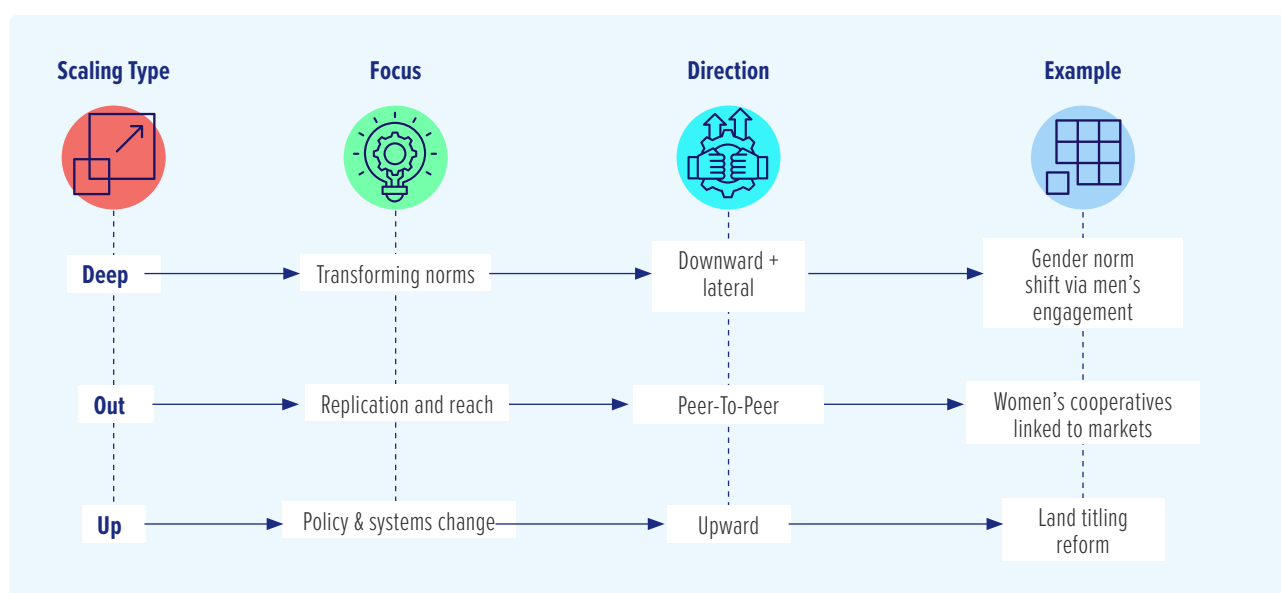


Understanding scaling with StratViz

MLO networks intrinsically facilitate the scaling of adaptation practices:



StratViz surfaces these dynamics and enables organizations to reflect on how scaling happened—intentionally or emergently.



Facilitating the StratViz Exercise

SETUP AND MATERIALS



Printed icons for micro, meso, macro actors



Flipcharts, markers, sticky notes



Slide deck or posters on flows, scaling types



Optional: phones/cameras for recording

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1: Choose a Strategy Story

Prompt participants: “What is a specific strategy your organization used to solve a challenge, scale an idea, or influence others?”

Step 2: Identify the Actors

Use symbols to identify: Micro: communities, households, women’s groups - Meso: your MLO, partner organizations - Macro: ministries, funders.

Step 3: Map Flows and Sequences

Use arrows to show flow of: - Resources (funding, tools) - Knowledge (training, climate info) - Influence (policy advocacy, trust). Number arrows to show order of events.

Step 4: Annotate and Reflect

Add sticky notes with insights: - Turning points? - Scaling outcomes? - Barriers or missing actors?

SUGGESTED STRUCTURE

This section supports the step-by-step StratViz exercise. Use this script to structure your facilitation and enhance participant engagement.

15 mins

Pre-Session Setup - Prepare icon kits and materials on each table
- Display slide/poster of sample visualization map

10 mins

Opening - Explain purpose: “We’re here to map how your strategies really work.”
- Introduce StratViz with a real example

45 mins

Group Work

- 1. Choose a story
- 2. Identify actors and levels
- 3. Draw flows and add arrows
- 4. Annotate and sequence
- 5. Reflect as a group

Facilitator prompts:

- “What helped this strategy succeed?”
- “Was any part unexpected or emergent?”
- “Where did influence travel up or down?”

30 mins

Sharing and Learning - Each group presents (5 min each)
Invite reactions: “What patterns do we see?”

10 mins

Wrap-Up - Discuss potential uses of the maps
Invite feedback: “How might you use this in your own work?”

GROUP SHARING AND PEER LEARNING

Groups share their maps and discuss:

- What was surprising?
- Could the strategy be scaled or adapted?
- What made the strategy work?
- What type(s) of scaling were achieved?

Facilitator prompts:

Encourage feedback, empathy, and curiosity.

Sample case write-ups

BASED ON REAL STRATVIZ MAPS

VISUALIZING VERTICAL STRATEGIES



VISUALIZING HORIZONTAL STRATEGIES



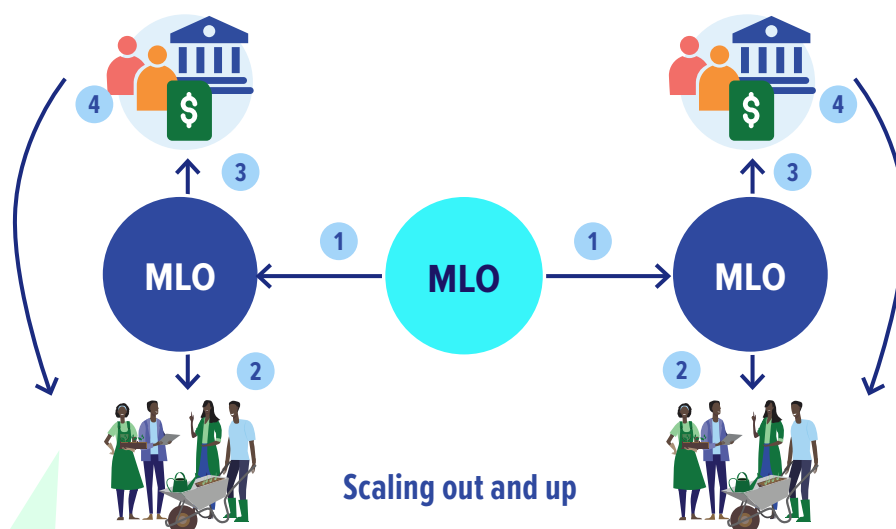
“We look at **who has expertise, which organization** is more knowledgeable about a topic and do they have farmers that they represent. So like **if they go on the ground and they have cooperatives with farmers** that they present, we easily work with them because we know they would get the message across to the farmers on the ground.”

VISUALIZING GENDER EQUITY STRATEGIES



“So, in this case, the men were a little bit uncomfortable with our work and would occasionally appear in our meetings and demand to know what we are training their women. We managed to handle that through incorporating the men and women through a model called men for women champions’ model. This model is also part of our **champions model of engaging men** and **using them to engage federal men** in the community.”

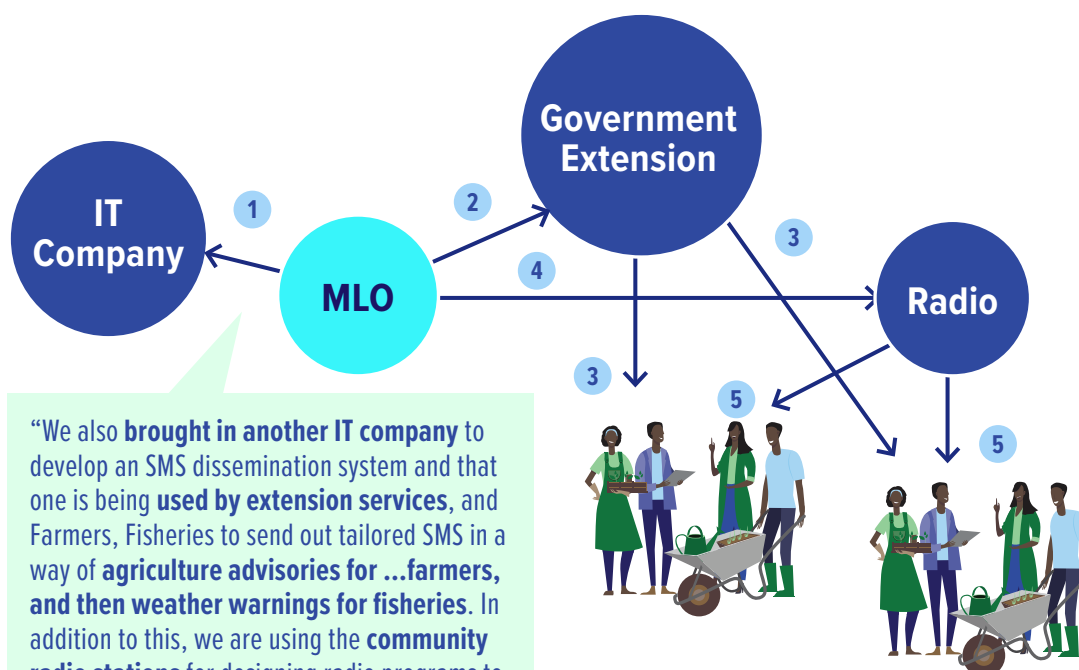
VISUALIZING GENDER EQUITY STRATEGIES



“...the work around **supporting and capacitating women led organizations**... contributes to their agency not just as individuals, but even as the organizations.

Through enhanced capacity, they are able to **participate in decision making spaces in the locations where these organizations are based**. They are able to **influence local policy in favor of women**.”

VISUALIZING STRATEGIES INVOLVING CLIMATE INFORMATION SERVICES (CIS)



“We also **brought in another IT company** to develop an SMS dissemination system and that one is being **used by extension services**, and Farmers, Fisheries to send out tailored SMS in a way of **agriculture advisories for ...farmers, and then weather warnings for fisheries**. In addition to this, we are using the **community radio stations** for designing radio programs to talk about weather warnings, and agricultural advisors so that we generate interest amongst the farmers.”

Gender-related strategy example: ABANTU – Nature-Based Solution Project

STRATEGY GOAL	Integration of gender mainstreaming into a Nature-based Solution Project
STRATEGY TYPE	MLO strategies within a project context, in which an MLO takes strategic actions to achieve specific project objectives.
SCALING DIMENSION	Out-scaling and Up-scaling
STRATEGY DIRECTIONALITY	Compound

DESCRIPTION OF THE ABANTU STRATEGY

The MLO (ABANTU) is part of a consortium of civil society actors receiving funding from Global Affairs Canada through consortium lead organizations (WUSC and CECI).

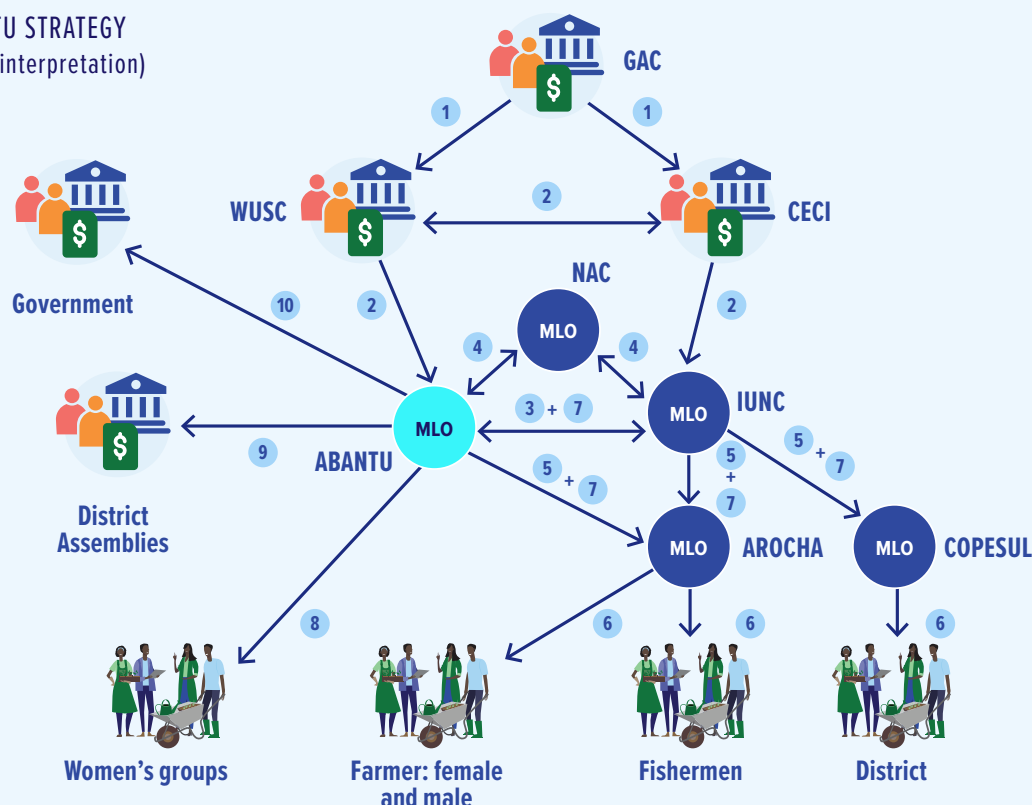
ABANTU implements the project alongside another organization, IUNC, who are both responsive to a National Advisory Committee. The NAC is composed of local leaders/experts, government officials, and sector leaders in the regions where they are working.

In order to access farmers, ABANTU and IUNC work through local MLOs in the field (COPESUL and AROCHA).

ABANTU's efforts focus on:

- Capacity building for women's groups
- Capacity building for implementing partners (IUCN, COPESUL, AROCHA) in women's empowerment
- The inclusion of women's groups into land restoration programs by providing trees through nurseries
- Working with farmers and fishermen (men/women) within and outside the project boundaries
- Working with District Assemblies to integrate gender dynamics into development plans
- Supporting the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Ministry of Env., Sci, and Tech to integrate gender into National Determined Contributions

VISUAL OF THE ABANTU STRATEGY (based on storytelling interpretation)



KEY INSIGHTS GAINED FROM THE STORYTELLING WITH ABANTU

1 Empowerment and capacitating of women (vertical strategy, deep-scaling, outscaling)

- **Mapping and formalization of women's groups:** ABANTU began with mapping existing women's groups (both registered and informal) and supported unregistered ones to gain formal status via local business advisory centers.
- **Economic empowerment:**
 - Women's groups were trained and supported to establish nurseries and grow seeds for the restoration sites.
 - The project purchases tree seedlings from these nurseries, creating income-generating opportunities.
 - Technical support was provided so women could apply for sub-funding or grants.
 - Additional livelihood interventions like business opportunities and market access.
- **Improving access to land:**
 - Although women do not always have ownership, the project leverages Ghana's Land Act of 2020 to improve access.
 - Collaborations with the Forestry Commission allowed women to use designated land areas beyond what is allocated by chiefs.
 - Small land parcels were used efficiently by introducing modern nursery techniques.

2 Gender related capacity building for the other implementing partner organizations (horizontal strategies, deep-scaling – changing mindsets)

- Build internal understanding of gender concepts and mainstreaming through:
 - Quarterly or every six months capacity building training for the partners.
 - Regularly assist partners to assess and review their gender policies, and see how they are doing.
 - Emphasis was placed on shared project objectives which helped to align partners with gender goals.

3 Engagement with government and policy integration (up-scaling, vertical strategy)

- The project worked with district assemblies, leveraging the ongoing development of Medium-Term Development Plans, to integrate gender dynamics into these official planning documents.
- The project supported the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Ministry of Environment, Science, and Technology to integrate gender into Ghana's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to climate action.

4 Utility of the StratViz tool

This was an excellent example of how interactions in the workshop setting and storytelling fosters learning and knowledge exchange among workshop participants. Key issues discussed included:

- How to strengthen the commitment in peer organizations to gender sensitive approaches.
- Illustrative examples for connecting women's groups to economic opportunities and ensuring project activities make use of women's group capacities.
- Translating field experience to macro-level policy in climate change action for Ghana.
- How to navigate land tenure issues.
- How to get community buy-in and make sure they are benefiting.



Do you want to use StratViz in your work? We want to hear from you and learn from your experience.

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About ACAMI

The Accelerating Climate Adaptation via Meso-level Integration (ACAMI) project was a two-year collaborative initiative focused on enhancing the role of meso-level organizations—public, private, and non-profit entities that act as intermediaries between small-scale agricultural producers and broader policy and investment communities—in advancing effective climate change adaptation strategies across Africa. ACAMI identified leverage points and bottlenecks affecting the capacity of these organizations to facilitate equitable and effective adaptation for small-scale producers. By co-creating tools and metrics that capture the attributes and strategies of meso-level organizations, the project supports partnership opportunities and improves risk management and sustainable livelihoods under climate change. The project was conducted in four African countries: Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and South Africa.

Project team: Awula Abby Apuryinga, Darlington Sibanda, Ekua Semuah Odoo, Eric Welch, Hallie Eakin, Jinghuan Ma, Joanes Atela, Mark New, Mauricio Bellon Corrales, Nadine Methner, Ruth Magreta, Tim Johnson, Washington Kanyangi, Yamini Yogya

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For more detailed information, please contact the ACAMI project leads for access to academic publications and working papers.

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KNOWLEDGE SERIES



Framework for Conceptualizing MLO Dynamics



MLO Self Assessment Tool



Mapping MLO Attributes and Diversity



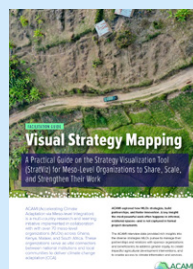
MLO Landscape Across Four Countries



MLO Innovations for Gender Equity



MLO Roles in Climate Information Services



A Practical Guide on Strategy Visualization Tool for MLOs to Share, Scale, and Strengthen Their Work



Guidance on Engaging with MLOs



What's your Strategy? Organizational Learning Game (Prototype)

Available here:

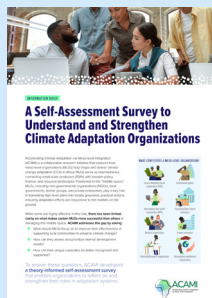


Accelerating Climate Adaptation via Meso-level Integration (ACAMI)

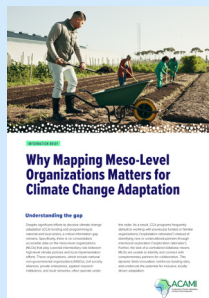
Enhancing the Role of Meso-Level Organizations in Advancing Climate Change Adaptation Across Africa



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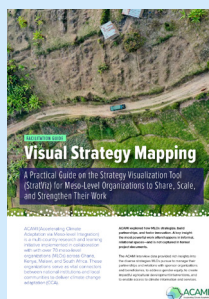
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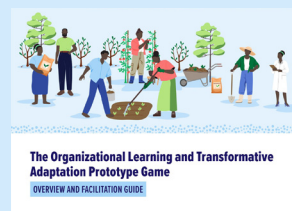
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What's your Strategy? Organizational Learning Game (Prototype)

About ACAMI

Despite growing momentum for locally led climate change adaptation, systemic barriers continue to limit its effectiveness. As top-down aid models recede, there is consensus that locally led adaptation is both more just and more effective. Yet, its potential is hindered by uncertainty over who the key local actors are, what roles they play, the capacities they hold, and how they can be meaningfully supported.

Co-production in climate change adaptation has traditionally focused on the micro-level, amplifying the voices of vulnerable communities in project design and delivery. However, co-production, co-design, and deep engagement must extend beyond communities to include all entities involved in planned adaptation, especially those that connect, broker, and translate knowledge across the system. One such actor, consistently under-recognized, is the meso-level organization (MLO).

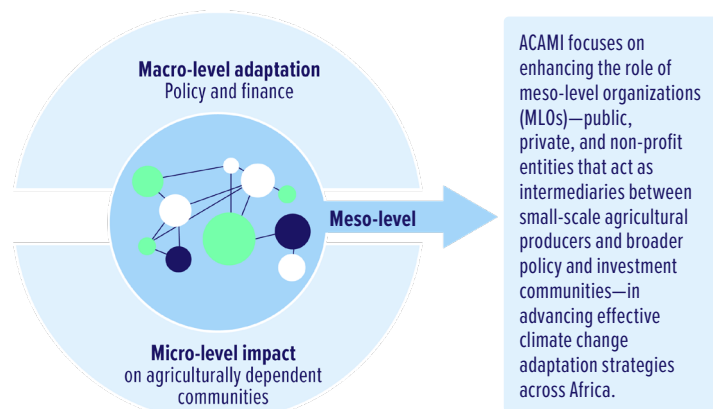
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