

## The Challenge Initiative

Innovators in global development across sectors have been grappling with how to bring programs to transformative scale with sustainable impact. The Challenge Initiative (TCI), funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is a “business unusual” approach that empowers cities to rapidly and sustainably scale best-practice family planning and adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health (AYSRH) solutions for the urban poor. Scale, impact, cost-efficiency and sustainability are TCI’s four interlocking tenets as TCI believes scale without impact is empty scale; impact at scale without increasing cost-efficiencies is not viable; and cost-efficient impact at scale that is not sustained will not produce lasting change.

TCI’s demand-driven model is premised on a shared mindset and commitment to having local players lead, make change and achieve high impact at scale. Other ingredients for success – including political and financial commitment, consensus around which evidence-based interventions to scale, and capacity to implement and institutionalize those interventions – can then come together to realize that impact.

Local governments in East Africa, Francophone West Africa, India and Nigeria adapt, implement and scale TCI’s best-practice interventions, drawing on coaching and support from its four regional hub partners: Jhpiego, Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs (CCP), IntraHealth International, and PSI. TCI is led by the Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Over the past three years (2016-2019), TCI has demonstrated proof of scale for its demand-driven model, and is active in 95 cities as of May 2020.

## WHAT IS TCI’S LEARNING AGENDA?

While The Challenge Initiative (TCI) has a robust program monitoring and evaluation strategy that assesses progress toward achieving goals at a more granular level, its **Learning Agenda** tackles broader, more generalizable learning questions through rigorous inquiry. The twin aims of TCI’s Learning Agenda are to add to the evidence base on sustainable scaling in global health and development, and also to strengthen TCI’s specific strategies and activities at the local government, hub and global levels.

TCI operates in complex and changing environments that require adaptive approaches and continuous learning to improve as TCI expands geographically and into additional health areas. As a result, TCI periodically updates its Learning Agenda to reflect the most pressing questions. The first version of the Learning Agenda responded primarily to hub-level implementation questions as TCI rapidly scaled up during the 2016-2018 period.

This second iteration more firmly anchors the Learning Agenda in TCI’s Theory of Change (TOC) (below) and continues to draw on lessons from the literature and implementation experience to-date. This enables us to test assumptions in TCI’s TOC, unpack connections between interventions and outcomes, and feed findings back to strengthen the design, implementation and impacts of TCI’s model. TCI stakeholders at the local government, hub and global levels iteratively identify key questions to explore, which in turn are prioritized and incorporated in the Learning Agenda.

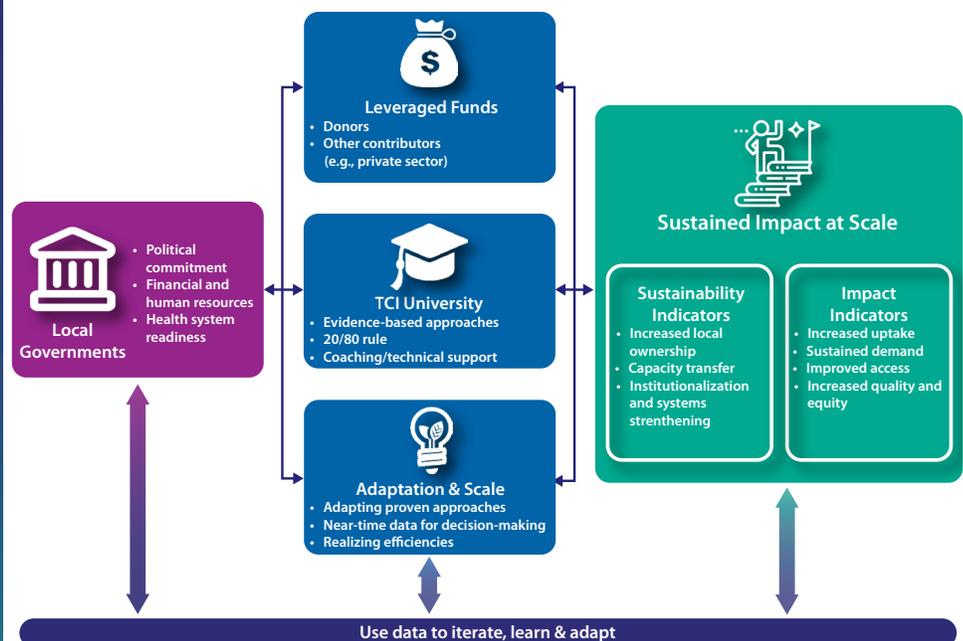


Figure 1: TCI’s Theory of Change.

## WHAT ARE TCI'S BROAD LEARNING QUESTIONS?

Current Learning Agenda questions fall into four overarching domains: demand-driven city engagement; coaching support; data for decision-making; and diffusion and sustainability. Questions of particular interest, arising from program experience to-date, relate to city graduation and impact sustainability.

### 1. Demand-Driven City Engagement

What city features (i.e., political commitment and leadership, infrastructure, policies, practices, and other characteristics such as size) are associated with self-selection, higher performance, and/or greater readiness for graduation?

### 2. Coaching Support

How can local governments be supported in the design, implementation and monitoring of proven approaches to increase impact, with the aim of long-term sustainability? How and when can coaching evolve in intensity/dose as cities move from start-up to surge to graduation?

### 3. Data for Decision-Making

How and in what areas (data reporting, data review, use of data for programmatic decision-making) have governments begun to use data to enhance performance to most effect? How does data inform adaptation of TCI proven approaches, key processes/interventions (enrollment, coaching, graduation, etc.) and TCI's model?

### 4. Diffusion and Sustainability

Where and in what ways have TCI's model and proven approaches diffused beyond TCI-supported cities? How can diffusion be further accelerated? What is the connection between diffusion and sustainability, particularly in areas where TCI's model has been diffused?

## WHAT ARE THE LEARNING AGENDA'S DOMAINS?

The first three domains relate primarily to the challenges of achieving scale and aim to uncover associated mindsets, practices and structures, thus eventually enabling codification of processes by which TCI can aid cities in scaling impact, as well as to provide evidence to others grappling with similar challenges. The last domain relates to the duration and spread of impact. Some questions will be explored across regions, while some may be better examined within particular country or city contexts.

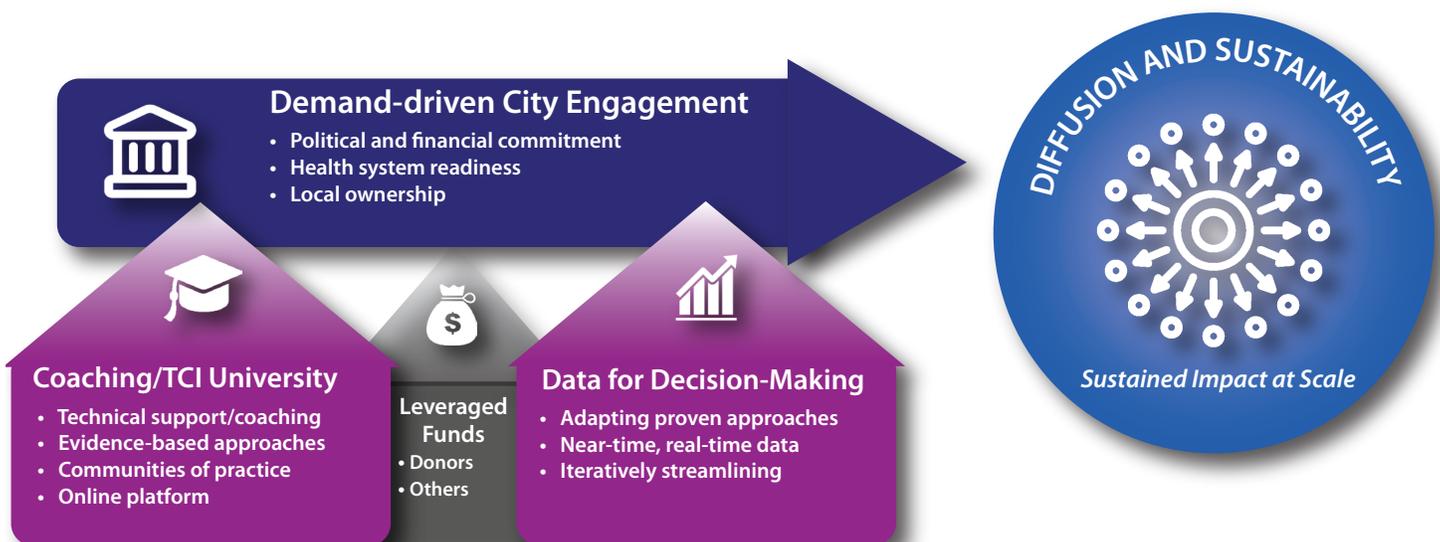


Figure 2: TCI's learning agenda as it relates to the Theory of Change.

As with all learning agendas, TCI's will undergo periodic refinement and will be carried out in concert with partners at all three levels of TCI as well as with external collaborators. Findings will be shared through a variety of products and channels. Illustrative products, audiences, and data sources are mentioned on the below.

### Products

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- External conference panels and presentations
- TCI program planning
- Webinars
- TCI's PAtHways to Scale and Sustainability (PASS) Learning Series
- Case studies, technical briefs, infographics and other multimedia outputs
- TCI Coaches' WhatsApp Groups
- Hub & Global biannual 'Pause & Reflect' meetings

### Audiences

Global development actors seeking to rapidly and sustainably scale up access to services and impact

#### External

- Governments
- Donors
- Technical assistance providers

#### Internal

- Local and national government partners
- TCI hubs
- TCI global

### Data Sources

#### Routine

- Health Management Information Systems (HMIS)
- Most Significant Change (MSC) stories
- Annual tracking surveys (women of reproductive age: 15-49 and 15-24)
- Facility assessments
- Program records, reports and analyses
- TCI University platform user data

#### Additional

- Key informant interviews, focus group discussions with local government leadership and hubs, TCI and non-TCI sites
- Surveys at non-TCI sites
- Gray literature review and other secondary data



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