



# How to scale your last mile distribution business into a new country using lean startup principles

From our GDC innovation how-to-guide series

# How to scale your last mile distribution business into a new country using lean startup principles

Learn from Bidhaa Sasa's experience scaling their operations from Kenya into Uganda, and use their LEAP tool for your own journey

This publication is part of a series of how-to-guides for last mile distributors that share learnings from the winning ideas piloted by the GDC's Innovation Challenges. This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.



Transforming  
Energy  
Access

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#### **About the GDC**

The Global Distributors Collective (GDC) is a collective of over 200 last mile distribution companies operating in more than 50 countries around the world, that reach millions of underserved customers with beneficial products. The GDC is dedicated to helping distributors improve business performance and grow, and to building a collective voice for the sector.

The GDC is hosted by Practical Action, with activities delivered in consortium with implementing partners Bopinc and Hystra.

[www.globaldistributorscollective.org](http://www.globaldistributorscollective.org)



#### **About Bidhaa Sasa**

Bidhaa Sasa wishes to improve the quality of life of rural families in East Africa. They deliver quality household goods to clients in the rural heartlands on monthly payment plans, thereby making modern products both accessible and affordable.

<http://www.bidhaa.co.ke>



# Why scale in a lean way?

Snapshot of this how-to-guide

## The limitations of traditional scaling methods

When organisations decide to scale, they often start by developing a scaling strategy and a master business plan - usually based on theory or some desk research. While this is encouraged, it is typically very risky because the plan is not backed up by current market data or evidence from real consumers, and this can be very costly in the long run.

## Scaling the lean startup way

To scale successfully, you need to adapt your business model several times as you learn about your new markets, distribution networks, customer segments and other organisational challenges. In this tool we explore the use of lean startup principles such as experimentation, iteration, and learning to ensure your adaptations are based on evidence-based data.

## The LEAP tool

LEAP stands for 'Leadership Enterprise Attraction and Provision', the four principles which make up the core elements of any scaling plan. This tool, developed by Bidhaa Sasa with the support of the Global Distributors Collective, is a unique tool optimised for last mile distributors across the world.

Learnings from Bidhaa Sasa have shown that this tool can help last mile distributors improve how they assess, plan and implement their scaling strategies. We hope that this tool will help the sector move away from traditional linear scaling strategies and use lean startup principles instead.

# What can you expect?

Snapshot of this how-to-guide

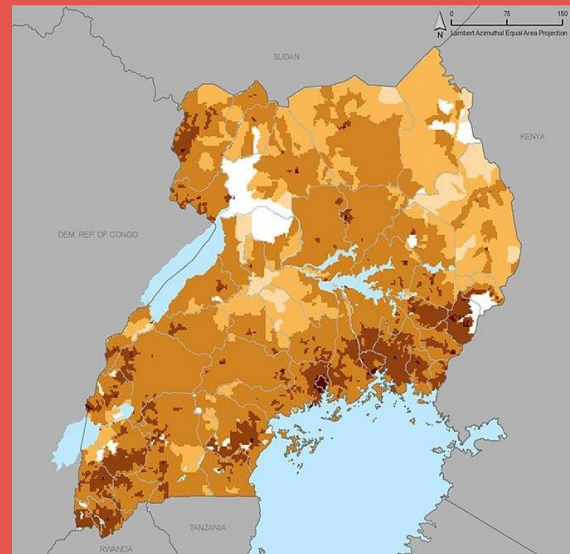
## Who is best placed to benefit from this tool?

Companies that are best suited to use the LEAP tool meet the following criteria:

- You sell products and/or services to underserved households at the last mile, such as FMCG nutrition products or durables like solar lights
- You are thinking about or are in the process of scaling into a new market which is (very) different from your current market
- You want to assess the maturity of your business in your current market(s)
- You want to develop an adapted business model for scaling into a new market using the lean startup methodology

## How the tool can help you

The main purpose of the LEAP tool is to help last mile distributors develop an adapted business model via a set of small experiments, when scaling their operations from one market to the next. We believe this tool can give you the best possible start as you embark on your scaling journey.



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## Case study of Bidhaa Sasa

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[Click here to download the LEAP worksheets as Powerpoint version if you want to start right away](#)

A

## An intro to the LEAP tool



# An intro to the LEAP tool

## Scaling defined

Scaling is often confused with growth. **Growth** refers to your ability to increase revenues as a result of being in business and investing in a bigger team ,or acquiring new technology that will help serve more customers in your current market. **Scaling** refers to the ability to substantially increase your revenues with only an incremental increase in (overhead) costs.

In short, scaling your last mile distribution business means creating a foundation that can serve more customers with the same or similar amount of resources. Scale is typically achieved by targeting new geographies and/or developing new distribution networks. Scaling into a new market, while effectively managing an existing one, is not easy and requires constant business model adaptations.

	Same market	New market
Same or similar offering	Same business model	Adapted business model
New offering		

Scaling defined  
for this tool

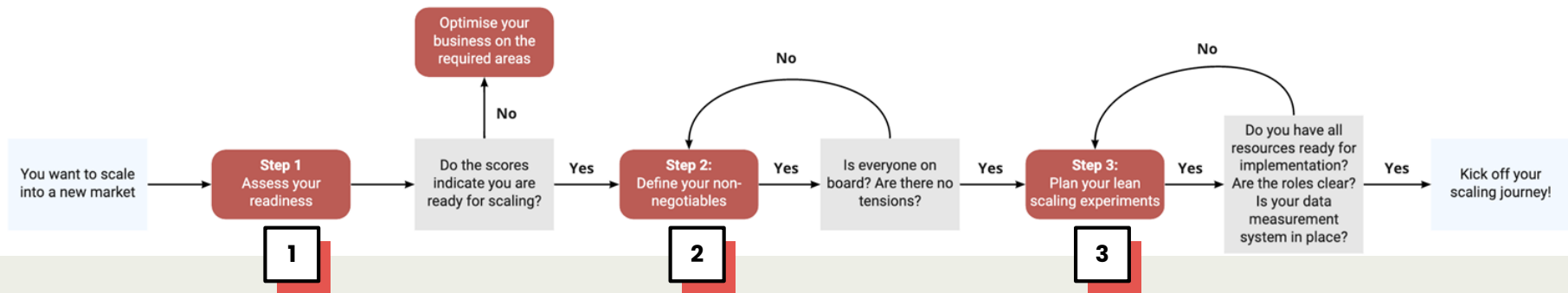
# An intro to the LEAP tool

## Tool overview

The LEAP tool consists of a preparation phase followed by three main steps.

The three steps are: 1. Assess your readiness, 2: Define your non-negotiables, and 3: Plan your lean experiments.

In the visual below, you can see the flow through the different steps. This process does not necessarily have to be linear - you can move back and forth between steps, depending on your needs. When you have completed all the steps, you will have a set of experiments ready for implementation that will help you scale your business in a lean way.



**B**

Using the LEAP tool

## Before you start

The LEAP tool can be used by following the three steps described on page 10. For each step, you will find a corresponding worksheet to guide you through the process, as well as an example of a completed worksheet to provide further clarity.

Before you start with Step 1 of this tool, you may want to assign a ‘scaling coordinator’ to be responsible for the scaling journey and using this tool. It is important that someone keeps oversight, as the team goes through the three-step process in this tool. This can be done in two or three half-day sessions.

The scaling coordinator and their team will be collecting data from interviews with colleagues, interviews with other organisations and real data from customers in the new location/new market. This means the scaling coordinator will be traveling quite a lot. If this is not ideal, you may want to prioritise the stationing of your scaling coordination in the new market.



## Step 1: Assess your readiness to scale

First, assess whether you are ready to scale by reflecting on core strengths and weaknesses in the business model you employ for your current market. This involves looking at four business functions – Leadership, Enterprise, Attraction and Provision (explanations on the next page). You will be adding a score to each one of them.

Select any three members of your team to perform the assessment, with at least one member being from the founding or management team.

After the assessment, use the scores to guide discussions around strengths and challenges and reflect as a team on your next steps. This involves a decision on whether to scale or remain within your current market and taking time to optimise business elements with low scores.

### How to do the scoring

For each assessment area, respond Yes/No to the corresponding question, assigning a value of 1 for Yes and 0 for No. If there are multiple questions in a single area, only assign a value of 1 if the Yes applies to all of them.

Compare the sum of your scores to the total possible score of that business function, noting that a score less than half of the total highlights organisational gaps and a need for growth.

If a certain area is not applicable to your business, skip it.

You can use Worksheet 1A-1D to go through the business functions and apply the scores.

### Description of the LEAP categories



#### L | Leadership

Relates to the company's leadership strategy and approach, including the business mission, team structure and growth, company culture and impact targets.



#### E | Enterprise

Pertains to the company's financial position as well as key internal operations at the last mile, including systems and processes to manage personnel, IT and communication.



#### A | Attraction

Looks at how the business is establishing its position in the market, including understanding and attracting customers, evaluating competition and navigating the business environment.



#### P | Provision

Assesses how the business extends its services across the supply chain, the channels it uses and the partnerships it leverages to reach customers at the last mile.



## Leadership

Consider your own context: How would you rate your leadership, strategy, mission, team structure and company culture based on the considerations below? Scaling is a team effort: you need a committed board with hands-on involvement, coupled with an understanding that scaling takes dedicated time and resources, and relationships with new staff might not be as close as with previous team members.

	Strategic questions	Rating (Yes = 1, No = 0)
Company mission and vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is your decision to scale tied to the long-term vision and strategy of the company?</li> <li>Is your board enthusiastic and willing to be hands-on?</li> </ul>	
Senior leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it clear who in your team has the authority to make crucial decisions for the organisation?</li> <li>Are you investing in leadership at second tier levels such as senior managers that can replace members of the C suite when they are not available?</li> </ul>	
Company culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you defined ways of working together and are the company's values understood and appreciated by everyone in the team?</li> </ul>	
Recruitment and performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have recruitment processes in place and a pipeline of talented professionals internally and externally that makes you confident in your ability to recruit talent quickly?</li> <li>Do you have a performance management system in place? Are key performance indicators defined and understood for all staff? And are their assessments done on a regular basis?</li> </ul>	

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_



## Enterprise

Consider your own context: How would you rate your company's efficiency when it comes to internal operations, processes and systems, and overall financial performance? Internal systems must be able to manage customer data to optimise business operations. You also need effective flow of communication between different business functions for faster decision making.

	Strategic questions	Rating (Yes = 1, No = 0)
Internal systems and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have robust (and automated) data collection processes to collect sufficient data to understand your customers, make key decisions (for example about managing credit risk), and assess organisational performance?</li> </ul>	
Revenues and financial performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have a strong revenue position that allows the business to sustain itself?</li> </ul>	
Financial reporting and regulatory frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you frequently share financial information with your board?</li> <li>Are you compliant with taxes, fees and other statutory requirements in your country of operation?</li> </ul>	
Available financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have sufficient capital to sustain your business operations in the current market?</li> <li>Are you able to access patient capital that allows you to prove the business model in a new market, until it is viable?</li> <li>Do you have sound relationships with existing funders and are they supportive of scale?</li> </ul>	

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_





## Attraction

Consider your own context: How well do you know your current market and consumer preferences? It is important to have an adequate understanding of the current market landscape, eg. target customer, competition, value proposition and positioning, before scaling to a new one.

	Strategic questions	Rating (Yes = 1, No = 0)
<b>Customers and product-fit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In your current market, have you been able to grow your customer base beyond early adopters?</li> <li>Can you define key demographic characteristics of your customer profile(s) such as gender, occupation, geography, and family size?</li> <li>Do you have mechanisms in place to collect and act on customer feedback?</li> <li>Have you optimised your product basket in response to customer demand?</li> </ul>	
<b>Competition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you know the competitors in your current market and have you scoped possible new entrants?</li> <li>Do you understand your competitors' value-add to your target customer and how your value proposition differentiates you in the market?</li> </ul>	
<b>Consumer journey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are you realising continuous year-on-year growth in your customer base that is comparable to your early growth projections?</li> <li>Are your customers generally satisfied?</li> </ul>	
<b>Pricing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you optimised price points and repayment plans based on your understanding of customer segments and their repayment behaviour?</li> </ul>	

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_



## Provision

Consider your own context: How effective is your supply chain from the design or selection of products, to the delivery to end-customers? With an effective supply chain that includes reliable partners, you can provide customers with a seamless experience and a robust consumer finance operation for scale.

	Strategic questions	Rating (Yes = 1, No = 0)
End-to-end logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are your channels optimised for efficiency and transparency? Are customers happy with the time-to-deliver?</li> <li>Have you established clear channels of communication with the customer regarding delivery expectations (time of delivery, mode of delivery or pickup, etc.)?</li> </ul>	
Distribution partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you evaluated and validated the reliability of your suppliers and, if applicable, their after-sales support, through your first-hand experiences?</li> </ul>	
Customer acquisition & credit assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have a system for recognising creditworthy customers that is built around your specific business and lending model?</li> <li>Do you have an experienced underwriting team, or a reliable credit assessment process?</li> </ul>	
Customer repayments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have streamlined processes for repayments which are clearly understood by your staff/agents and customers?</li> </ul>	

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

## Step 2: Define your non-negotiables





Things can change massively when your business is growing and scaling. To be prepared for that, it is important to safeguard your business values - which must not be allowed to suffer. Non-negotiables refer to principles or practices of your business that you are not willing to change or compromise on, when adapting your business model for scaling.

After you complete the assessment in Step 1 and you decide you are ready to scale, develop a list of non-negotiables for each of the business functions. Use Worksheet 2 to go through the four business functions and fill in your non-negotiables for each.

To get started, please refer to the case study of Bidhaa Sasa at the end of this guide, and take inspiration from the non-negotiables their team added to worksheet 2.



One of the non-negotiables for Bidhaa Sasa is their target customer: women in rural households

LEAP category	Non-negotiables
 <b>Leadership</b>	
 <b>Enterprise</b>	
 <b>Attraction</b>	
 <b>Provision</b>	

## Step 3: Plan your lean scaling experiments


Now we get to the most exciting part of the LEAP tool. With your scaling readiness confirmed (Step 1) and non-negotiables listed (Step 2), it is time to start planning your lean scaling experiments to gather data to inform your business model adaptations. In this step, you will write down how you will experiment at a small scale with each business model activity in the new market. Because you cannot run all experiments at the same time, you will need to set priorities based on what you need to establish or learn first. For example, you may want to start by verifying your biggest assumptions, or confirming your most important non-negotiables. By carefully thinking about the sequence of your experiments, you can save time and resources.


Use worksheets 3A-3D to go over each LEAP category one by one. Make sure to look back at what you've written for each category in Step 1 and Step 2.


**Want to know what experiments Bidhaa Sasa came up with? See the case study at the end of this guide for their worksheet 3.**




**Bidhaa Sasa experimented with prospective customers who voluntarily tested products at home and shared feedback based on their experiences with the products**

LEAP category	Business element	Learning objectives	Data to collect	Lean experiments	Priority level
 <b>Leadership</b>	Company mission and vision				
	Senior leadership				
	Company culture				
	Recruitment and performance management				

LEAP category	Business element	Learning objectives	Data to collect	Lean experiments	Priority level
 <b>Enterprise</b>	Internal systems and technology				
	Revenues and financial performance				
	Financial reporting and regulatory frameworks				
	Available financing				

LEAP category	Business element	Learning objectives	Data to collect	Lean experiments	Priority level
 <b>Attraction</b>	Customers and product-fit				
	Competition				
	Consumer journey				
	Pricing				



LEAP category	Business element	Learning objectives	Data to collect	Lean experiments	Priority level
 <b>Provision</b>	End-to-end logistics				
	Distribution partnerships				
	Customer acquisition and credit assessment				
	Repayments				



## Case study of Bidhaa Sasa



## Case study of Bidhaa Sasa

### How Bidhaa Sasa used the LEAP tool to scale from Kenya into Uganda

Bidhaa Sasa is a last mile distribution and finance company that seeks to improve the quality of life of rural families in East Africa, by making a range of home and farm goods more affordable and accessible. After operating in rural Kenya for five years, Bidhaa Sasa was ready to explore scaling options - starting with Uganda as a new market to set foot in.

In early 2020, Bidhaa Sasa set up a pilot in Uganda to learn how to adapt their business model, which worked well in Kenya, to the Ugandan context. Using the LEAP tool, they defined their non-negotiables (see their worksheet 2 on the next page) and have been conducting a series of experiments since then. The data from the experiments provide evidence of the market opportunity in rural Uganda and a basis for the adapted business model of Bidhaa Sasa.





*“Implementation and management of Bidhaa Sasa’s scaling into the Ugandan market felt smooth, due to the fact that the guidelines were laid out so well in the LEAP tool.” - Brian Kaswa (Project Manager, Uganda)*



One of the first groups of customers in Uganda receiving the solar home systems they purchased

## CASE STUDY: EXAMPLE OF WORKSHEET 2

Bidhaa Sasa listed the following things they want to hold on to when scaling from Kenya into Uganda.

LEAP category	Non-negotiables
 <b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>We are not willing to compromise on our social impact goal, which is ‘to serve poor rural households’.</i></li> <li><i>We would like to keep a flat hierarchy with decentralised decision-making, regardless of how big we become.</i></li> <li><i>We must not change our current male/female staff ratio of 50/50.</i></li> </ul>
 <b>Enterprise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>We are not willing to incorporate borrowed funds into our finance structure.</i></li> <li><i>Our business does not set up tax havens and include “free money” (grants) in financial projections. We focus on commercial viability instead.</i></li> <li><i>We would like to maintain our existing software solutions to collect and manage consumer data.</i></li> </ul>
 <b>Attraction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>We are not willing to change our brand. Customers should be able to know who we are across markets.</i></li> <li><i>We want to maintain our target customers: women in rural households.</i></li> </ul>
 <b>Provision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>We want to keep the use of mobile money as a payment avenue rather than cash.</i></li> <li><i>Our business will continue to rely heavily on the group credit lending model.</i></li> </ul>



# Case study of Bidhaa Sasa

## Experiments conducted in Uganda

Although Covid-19 negatively impacted the scale-up plans, Bidhaa Sasa managed to carry out a few important experiments from the ones they intended to conduct (see the next pages for their worksheet 3). They hired a Ugandan project manager who coordinated the experiments on the ground, which reduced the need for the Kenian team to travel (this was largely restricted during the Covid-19 crisis).



### Experiments to inform “Attraction - customers and product-fit”

- Baseline survey among 92 customers to determine the most pressing problems to solve and currently available solutions.
- In-home product tests with 53 prospective customers to understand their experience with six products considered.
- Launch of a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) with limited features, including some that are far from perfect. Initial sales was carried out with a small range of products, with deliveries by the branch team, and mobile money payments were not automated.



### Experiments to inform “Attraction - consumer journey”

- Customer feedback surveys with first 58 people, one or two months after their purchase.


## Results achieved with the first experiments

The sales pilot based on Bidhaa Sasa’s MVP for Uganda started in February 2021 and, as of end of June 2021, 260 customers have been served. This pilot led to the following insights with regards to how the Ugandan market is different to the Kenian market.


- **Product bias based on gender:** In Uganda, men want solar home systems, women want cookstoves. In Kenya, women want “solar”.
- **Distribution of preference across product categories:** In Uganda, 33% want solar energy products, 50% want agricultural products, and 17% cookstoves. In Kenya agricultural and cooking solutions dominate the demand.
- **Adoption of mobile money:** In Uganda this is a barrier that requires more attention than in Kenya.
- **Motivation of group sales leaders:** The leaders that are responsible for coordinating group purchases are mainly driven by their desire to help their communities (which is the same as in Kenya).

## CASE STUDY: EXAMPLE OF WORKSHEET 3A


Bidhaa Sasa came up with the following lean experiments.

LEAP category	Business element	Learning objectives	Data to collect	Lean experiments	Priority level
 <b>Leadership</b>	<b>Company mission and vision</b>	<p><i>How have others dealt with the risks of 'mission drift' when scaling into a new country?</i></p> <p><i>Can we hold on to the intended impact?</i></p>	<p><i>Testimonials from other last mile distributors.</i></p> <p><i>Impact indicators from our new customers.</i></p>	<p><i>Interview three GDC members and hear if they deviated from their mission or not.</i></p> <p><i>Customer surveys.</i></p>	<p><i>Medium</i></p> <p><i>High</i></p>
	<b>Senior leadership</b>				
	<b>Company culture</b>	<i>What are different organisational structure models for scale?</i>	<i>Testimonials from last mile distributors.</i>	<i>Interview three GDC members and learn if they were able to maintain culture as they scaled and how.</i>	<i>Medium</i>
	<b>Recruitment and performance management</b>	<i>[same as above]</i>	<i>[same as above]</i>	<i>[same as above]</i>	<i>Medium</i>

## CASE STUDY: EXAMPLE OF WORKSHEET 3B


LEAP category	Business element	Learning	Data collected	Lean experiments	Priority level
 Enterprise	Internal systems and technology	<i>Can our current IT system and partners cope with the required changes in the new market?</i>	<i>Processes maps</i>	<i>Carefully map all processes in the new market and document any deviations in processes and tools, as compared to our current market.</i>	<i>Medium</i>
	Revenues and financial performance				
	Financial reporting and regulatory frameworks	<i>How do we comply with new legal frameworks?</i>	<i>Advice and templates for contracts (if we need those)</i>	<i>Collect pro bono legal advice.</i>	<i>High</i>
	Available financing				

## CASE STUDY: EXAMPLE OF WORKSHEET 3C

LEAP category	Business element	Learning	Data collected	Lean experiments	Priority level
 <b>Attraction</b>	<b>Customers and product-fit</b>	<i>Which problems do people have and how do they solve them today?</i>	<i>Qualitative data from 1:1 interviews with randomly chosen households. List of current problems and how they solve them, including insights on time and expenses required.</i>	<i>Carry out a customer baseline survey to collect self-reported data.</i>	<i>High</i>
		<i>What is the user experience with the products we are considering for our basket?</i>	<i>Qualitative data from 1:1 interviews: which benefits are derived from using product X, which problems are faced when using product X, and how does product X compare to current solutions?</i>	<i>Recruit prospective customers to voluntarily test products in their own homes and collect their feedback.</i>	<i>High</i>
		<i>How do we get to a product-market fit quickly and refine the features of our Minimum Viable Product (MVP)?</i>	<i>MVP features tested: adoption rate (conversion rates, sales); length of loan; repayment (late repayments, frequency of repayments, amounts repaid), role of leader (motivations, incentives.)</i>	<i>Conduct a lean sales pilot with the MVP and test demand from early adopters, before launching sales more widely.</i>	<i>High</i>
	<b>Pricing</b>	<i>What are price points for the target market?  How do we balance instalment amounts and length of loans?</i>	<i>Total price vs. length of loan vs. instalment amount.</i>	<i>Run A/B tests with prospective customers to learn about pricing and terms of conditions.</i>	<i>Medium</i>



## CASE STUDY: EXAMPLE OF WORKSHEET 3D

LEAP category	Business element	Learning	Data collected	Lean experiments	Priority level
 Provision	<b>End-to-end logistics</b>	<i>What is the logistics landscape in Uganda, and can logistics be effectively outsourced to the last mile?</i>	<i>Costs, efficiencies and customer service quality</i>	<i>Test different logistics partners, central vs distributed warehousing and transportation options.</i>	<i>Medium</i>
	<b>Distribution partnerships</b>	<i>Who are possible vendors, service providers and product suppliers to work with?</i>	<i>Costs, efficiencies and customer service quality e.g. warranty service from suppliers</i>	<i>Test different partners.</i>	<i>Medium</i>
	<b>Customer acquisition and credit assessment</b>	<i>Is our Kenian model of using community group leaders also the most effective way to acquire new customers in Uganda?</i>	<i>Leadership indicators including leaders motivators</i>	<i>Survey prospective group leaders and run A/B tests to test different incentives schemes for leaders.</i>	<i>High</i>
	<b>Repayments</b>				



## Case study of Bidhaa Sasa

### Reflections on the LEAP tool

As opposed to traditional linear scaling approaches, Bidhaa Sasa always opted for iterative processes to test their hypotheses. Having the 3-step LEAP tool gave the team structure to these processes and it helped engage the whole team, from leadership to sales managers and agents. Most importantly, it gave guidance to the new team in Uganda to effectively run the priority experiments as part of Step 3, leading to important learnings to inform the adapted business model for Uganda. Making the scaling decisions became much more of a data-driven and participatory process.

Because selling on credit requires more data and longer experiments (as compared to selling on cash), Bidhaa Sasa's experiments are still ongoing at the time of publishing this guide. More evidence is needed, especially around customers' ability and willingness to pay their instalments and the effectiveness of the group liability.

### Top-tips when scaling the lean way

Bidhaa Sasa has learned a lot when scaling from Kenya into Uganda. When scaling into new markets, it is important to consider the following.

- ✓ **Run experiments, quickly and cheaply, to learn fast.** The LEAP tool and approach allows for faster learning, more control and reduced costs as compared to linear approaches.
- ✓ **Invest in data collection and analysis tools on day one.** Running experiments also needs a very clear IT and data strategy as well as infrastructure which can be costly and misunderstood.
- ✓ **Train staff on lean approaches on day one.** Running experiments requires a mental approach from staff that has to be embedded in the company culture for it to work. Unless staff are comfortable with the idea of failing (for the sake of learning), the experiments will not yield important learnings.
- ✓ **Engage with donors** that are doing research in the same field and who are familiar with learning through experimentation. Investors might want to see a master plan set in stone, which is the complete opposite of what lean scaling is all about.

