The Zone Replication Blueprint™ *and the* Zone Readiness Index™

A decision-support framework for selecting and sequencing place-based regeneration sites — before the capital, before the staff, before the goodwill is committed

AUTHORS

Mariyah Acka'a
The Acka'a-Hitchman Foundation

PUBLISHED

21 April 2026

STATUS

Open for review

PAGES

~11 pp.

ABSTRACT

Place-based regeneration programmes are capital-intensive, slow to mature, and politically sensitive. Selecting the wrong site can absorb three to five years of resources and goodwill before the misalignment becomes evident, by which point the cost of withdrawal is high and the option to redirect is largely closed. The Zone Replication Blueprint™ codifies the operational architecture of a successful ACES™ deployment in transferable form; the Zone Readiness Index™ (ZRI) scores prospective sites against six dimensions — Community Readiness, Infrastructure, Local Governance, Social Capital, Risk Profile, and Economic Substrate — to support evidence-based site selection. This paper presents the framework, the scoring instrument, the threshold ranges for go/wait/no-go decisions, and a single-dimension veto rule designed to prevent the all-too-common pattern of strong total scores masking a fatal single weakness.

I. The site-selection problem in place-based regeneration

Programmes that succeed in one place do not, in general, succeed when transplanted to another. The development literature has been consistent on this point for decades: context matters, scaling is hard, and the assumption that what worked in Place A will work in Place B is the single most reliable predictor of programme failure in the sector. Despite this, the practice of formal site assessment before commitment remains thin.

What typically happens is the following: a programme has succeeded in one place. A funder approaches the programme team and asks whether it can be replicated in a new place, often one of the funder's choosing. The programme team, eager to expand and reluctant to refuse a funder, agrees on the basis of an informal site visit and the relational confidence that comes from a senior introduction. Three years and substantial capital later, the team is wondering why the second site is not behaving like the first. This pattern, observed across the sector and acknowledged in the implementation literature,[1] motivates a more disciplined approach.

> *The assumption that what worked in Place A will work in Place B is the single most reliable predictor of programme failure in the sector.*

The disciplined approach we propose has two components. First, a **Blueprint** — a codified articulation of what is actually being replicated, with the elements that are core and the elements that are contextual made explicit. Second, a **Readiness Index** — a scoring instrument that produces an evidence-based readiness judgement on a prospective site before commitment. The two work together: the Blueprint defines what readiness is readiness for; the Index measures it.

This framework draws on multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) traditions, particularly the work on Analytic Hierarchy Process for development programme prioritisation,[2] and on the community readiness model developed by Edwards, Jumper-Thurman and colleagues.[3] It is also informed by the more recent literature on implementation science in low-and-middle-income contexts.[4]

II. The Blueprint: what is being replicated

Before assessing readiness, the team must be clear about what readiness is for. The Blueprint distinguishes *core* elements (which must be present in any ACES™ deployment to retain the integrity of the programme) from *contextual* elements (which must exist in some form but can be substantially adapted to local conditions).

Core elements (non-negotiable across deployments)

- **Resource steward economic model** — individual participants earn for materials brought to the depot; livelihood is the engine, not a by-product.
- **Operational dashboard with audit trail** — every transaction is recorded against an individual and a date; the system is open to inspection by funders and auditors.
- **Local depot infrastructure** — a physical place where materials are received, weighed, paid for, and sold onward.
- **Programme governance structure** — a Foundation-affiliated entity with declared accountability lines for financial, safeguarding, and programmatic oversight.
- **Place-based dignity orientation** — the programme treats the place itself as the subject of regeneration, not only the participants in it.

Contextual elements (must exist; form is adaptable)

- Material categories accepted (plastics, metals, organics, e-waste) and pricing structure.
- Off-take partnerships with local industry or municipal services.
- Relationship with local traditional authority and elected governance.
- Participant onboarding and training pathway.
- Cash management and disbursement model (mobile money, cash, vouchers).

The Blueprint is the article against which the Index measures. A site that fails the Index has, by definition, failed to demonstrate readiness for the Blueprint as articulated; it has not failed to deserve investment generally.

III. The Readiness Index: six dimensions

The ZRI scores a prospective site on six dimensions, each on a 0–100 scale, then combines them into a weighted composite. The dimensions are designed to be substantially independent of one another — a site can score well on one and poorly on another — and each is measured against criteria specific to the place-based regeneration context.

DIMENSION	WHAT IT MEASURES	DEFAULT WEIGHT
Community Readiness	Stage of community awareness, prior engagement with similar interventions, presence of local advocates, openness to behavioural change.	0.20
Infrastructure	Physical accessibility, depot site availability, road and transport links, electricity, water, telecoms reliability.	0.15
Local Governance	Quality of relationship with local government, presence of traditional authority, predictability of permitting, absence of active hostility.	0.20
Social Capital	Density of community organisations, trust levels, collective efficacy, presence of existing community groups that can absorb the programme.	0.15
Risk Profile	Security, political, climatic and operational risks; presence of mitigation pathways; recent incident history.	0.15
Economic Substrate	Existence of viable off-take markets, plausible value chains, local consumption patterns supporting circular activity.	0.15

Each dimension is scored using a structured rubric of eight to twelve criterion items, each rated on a 0–5 ordinal scale by the assessment team and normalised to 0–100. The rubric is currently administered as a paper-and-spreadsheet instrument; an in-app version is in development for the operational dashboard.

COMPOSITE ZRI

$$ZRI = 0.20 \cdot CR + 0.15 \cdot IF + 0.20 \cdot LG + 0.15 \cdot SC + 0.15 \cdot RP + 0.15 \cdot ES$$

where CR = Community Readiness, IF = Infrastructure, LG = Local Governance, SC = Social Capital, RP = Risk Profile, ES = Economic Substrate. Default weights reflect our prior on the relative importance of community and governance dimensions in determining programme outcomes; weights may be adjusted with explicit disclosure.

The weighting departs from equal weighting (in contrast to the ACI and RDI) because the implementation literature provides a stronger basis for prioritising community readiness and local governance as predictors of programme success.[3][5] Equal weighting is offered as an alternative formulation and is reported alongside the default-weighted composite in all ZRI assessments.

IV. Data collection: who scores, who reviews

A Readiness Index is only as useful as the assessment that feeds it. The most common failure mode of formal scoring frameworks is rubber-stamping by a team that has already decided on the answer. We mitigate this through structural separation of assessment and decision.

Assessment

The assessment is conducted by a two-person team comprising one Foundation programme officer and one external assessor drawn from the Foundation's Independent Assurance roster. Neither has decision-making authority on the deployment; their job is to score, not to recommend. The assessment takes between two and four weeks depending on site distance, and includes:

- Documentary review (municipal data, security reports, prior assessments).
- Two to three site visits across the candidate catchment.
- Structured interviews with at least: two local government officials, three community leaders, five candidate participants, two existing economic actors (potential off-takers).
- Direct observation of public space, depot candidate sites, and transport infrastructure.

Review and decision

The scored assessment is submitted to the Foundation's Board of Trustees with a recommended decision band (go / wait / no-go) but not a recommended decision. The Trustees deliberate the assessment and reach a decision; the decision and its rationale are recorded in the Board minutes and form part of the audit trail. Where the assessment indicates a borderline result, the Trustees may commission additional inquiry or defer.

V. Decision thresholds and the single-dimension veto

The default decision thresholds are:

COMPOSITE ZRI	DECISION BAND	MEANING
≥ 70	Go	Proceed to deployment planning. Address minor gaps as part of the deployment process.
50–69	Wait	Identify the lowest-scoring dimension(s); commission targeted work to lift them; re-assess in six to twelve months.
< 50	No-go	The site is not suitable for deployment in its current configuration. Do not invest further in development.

The single-dimension veto rule

Composite scores can hide fatal weaknesses. A site scoring 75 overall but 25 on Risk Profile is, in practical terms, not ready — the strength of the other five dimensions cannot compensate for an unmitigated risk that will compromise the operation. We therefore apply a veto rule:

SINGLE-DIMENSION VETO

if any dimension < 30 ⇒ decision band ≤ "Wait"

regardless of the composite ZRI value. The lowest-scoring dimension must be addressed before progression to the Go band is possible. The veto cannot be overridden by a high composite score; it can only be cleared by raising the offending dimension above 30 through targeted intervention.

The veto rule is the single most important element of the framework. It reflects the hard-won implementation experience that a programme deployed into a context with one fatal weakness will absorb capital and goodwill at a rate the other strengths cannot offset.

VI. Validation: against the Adikpo baseline

The framework was developed in two stages. First, a retrospective scoring of the Adikpo deployment as it was at site selection, using the team's contemporaneous assessment notes and subsequent operational data. Second, prospective application to two further candidate sites currently under consideration by the Foundation.

The retrospective Adikpo score was 72 on the composite, with the lowest-scoring dimension (Infrastructure, at 58) reflecting real operational challenges experienced in the first six months of deployment — specifically, intermittent road access during the rainy season and a six-week delay in establishing reliable electricity to the depot. These were precisely the operational difficulties the framework would have flagged in advance, which we read as encouraging.

What the retrospective scoring did *not* predict was the strength of the community uptake (Community Readiness scored 70, which proved to be conservative against the realised behaviour), or the speed at which the off-take partnerships matured (Economic Substrate scored 65, also conservative). The framework appears, at this early stage, to be appropriately cautious rather than over-confident.

The two prospective sites have been scored but are not yet decided; the Foundation will publish the post-decision case studies once the deliberation is complete.

VII. Limitations and open questions

Single-context calibration. The thresholds (Go ≥ 70, single-dimension veto at 30) are calibrated against a single deployment context. They will require empirical revisiting once the framework has been applied to and observed in at least three to five distinct deployments. Until then, the thresholds should be read as *defensibly reasoned* rather than *empirically validated*.

Subjectivity in scoring. The rubric uses ordinal ratings (0–5) by human assessors. Inter-rater reliability is a concern we address through the two-assessor design and the structured rubric, but residual subjectivity remains and is unlikely to be eliminable in this kind of qualitative-quantitative hybrid instrument.

Ex-ante prediction is hard. The framework attempts to predict programme suitability from pre-deployment data. The literature on prediction in development contexts is humbling.[6] We expect the framework to fail in

particular cases, and we expect it to fail more often than its proponents (including the authors) would like. The honest defence is that any disciplined framework outperforms no framework, even when the framework's predictions are imperfect.

The framework is for our work, not all work. The ZRI is calibrated for ACES-style place-based regeneration programmes with the specific Blueprint characteristics articulated in Section II. Programmes with materially different operational architectures (e.g. mobile-only models, single-village models, microfinance-led models) will need their own readiness instruments. We offer the ZRI as a worked example rather than a universal tool.

What we will revisit in v2.0. The weighting structure, the threshold values, the rubric items, and the veto threshold are all candidates for empirical revision once two or three further deployments have completed at least one operational year. We will publish a v2.0 of this paper following those data.

HOW TO CITE THIS WORK

SUGGESTED · AUTHOR–DATE

Acka'a, M. (2026). *The Zone Replication Blueprint™ and Zone Readiness Index™: A decision-support framework for selecting and sequencing place-based regeneration sites* (Methodology Paper v1.0). The Acka'a-Hitchman Foundation. https://vheritage.online/methodology/zone-readiness-index.html

SUGGESTED · FOOTNOTE

Mariyah Acka'a, *The Zone Replication Blueprint™ and Zone Readiness Index™*, Acka'a-Hitchman Foundation Methodology Paper No. 3 (v1.0, 21 April 2026), https://vheritage.online/methodology/zone-readiness-index.html.

REFERENCES

1 Pritchett, L., Woolcock, M., & Andrews, M. (2013). "Looking Like a State: Techniques of Persistent Failure in State Capability for Implementation." *Journal of Development Studies*, 49(1), 1–18.

2 Saaty, T. L. (2008). "Decision making with the analytic hierarchy process." *International Journal of Services Sciences*, 1(1), 83–98.

3 Edwards, R. W., Jumper-Thurman, P., Plested, B. A., Oetting, E. R., & Swanson, L. (2000). "Community readiness: Research to practice." *Journal of Community Psychology*, 28(3), 291–307.

4 Bauer, M. S., & Kirchner, J. (2020). "Implementation science: What is it and why should I care?" *Psychiatry Research*, 283, 112376.

5 Damschroder, L. J., Aron, D. C., Keith, R. E., Kirsh, S. R., Alexander, J. A., & Lowery, J. C. (2009). "Fostering implementation of health services research findings into practice: A consolidated framework for advancing implementation science." *Implementation Science*, 4(1), 50.

6 Tetlock, P. E., & Gardner, D. (2015). *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction*. New York: Crown.