CDA PRACTICAL LEARNING for INTERNATIONAL ACTION

peace direct

Search for Common Ground

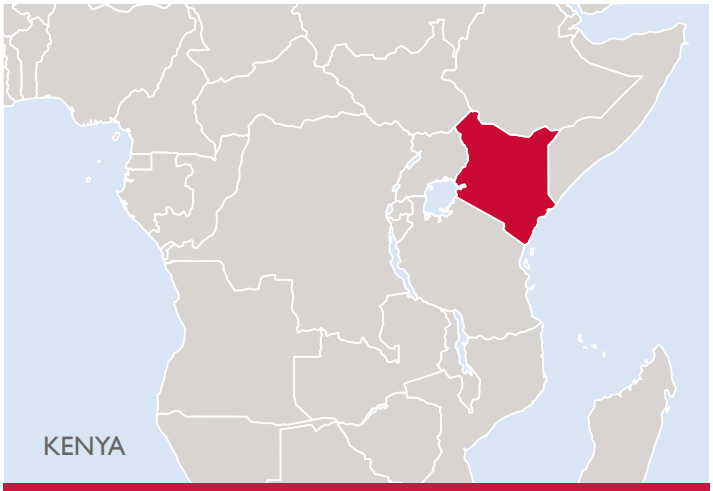
STOPPING AS SUCCESS:
TRANSITIONING TO LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

CASE STUDY: NURU KENYA

August 2018

Haley Dillan, Search for Common Ground, Joel Ouma, Independent, David Yamron, Search for Common Ground

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



ACRONYMS

CBO	community-based organization
CSO	civil society organization
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
INGO	international non-governmental organization
NGO	non-governmental organization
ODA	official development assistance
SAS	Stopping As Success
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

STOPPING AS SUCCESS

This case study was developed as part of Stopping As Success (SAS), implemented by a consortium consisting of Peace Direct, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, and Search for Common Ground, with support and funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). SAS is a collaborative learning project that aims to study the dynamics at play when ending a development program, and provide guidelines on how to ensure locally led development. In doing this, SAS looks beyond the technical aspects of an exit strategy to identify examples that demonstrate a transition toward locally led development. The case studies produced by the project highlight the past and present realities faced by international non-government organizations (INGOs), local civil society organizations (CSOs), and local NGOs, focusing in particular on how partnerships evolve during transitions or devolvement to local entities.

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This report examines the organizational transition planned and implemented by the staff of the INGO Nuru International in Migori County (Kuria West), Kenya, focusing particularly on the transition of the organization's international staff from Nuru Kenya in June 2015. This transition, referred to by Nuru staff as the full turnover to the local team[1] provides a potent example of what is possible when an organization places locally owned and locally led development at the forefront of its organizational strategy and its measurements of success. Over a period of almost a decade, Nuru Kenya collaborated closely with local communities to design, implement, adapt, and ultimately transition ownership of its programming. Nuru International built sustainability into the foundation of its approach, planning the exit of international staff from the outset and developing local capacity to take over management.

TYPE OF TRANSITION

This case study is an example of a phased transfer of ownership and responsibility from INGO Nuru International to Nuru Kenya, including the exit of all international staff. Post-transition, Nuru Kenya is managed entirely by Kenyan staff, although it continues to receive financial support from Nuru International.

2. CONTEXT

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Kenya is a country in the Great Lakes region of East Africa, bordered by Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, as well as Lake Victoria to the west and the Indian Ocean to southeast. Its young, diverse population of 48 million is concentrated around the inland capital of Nairobi, along the Lake Victoria shoreline, and on the ocean coast. Kenya is home to more than 44 ethnic groups, with the five largest of these accounting for almost three-quarters of the total. Roughly 83 percent of the population identifies as Christian and 11 percent as Muslim.[2]

With a nominal 2016 gross domestic product (GDP) of US$71 billion (US$1,455 per capita), Kenya's economy is classified as "lower middle income" by the World Bank.[3] It has averaged 5 percent GDP growth over the past decade and its growth is projected to continue at that pace or higher, driven largely by services and its role as a regional hub for information technology, finance, and transportation services.[4] However, this growth has not been widely shared: about 75 percent of the population is employed in low-productivity agriculture, and in terms of household income Kenya ranks as the 23rd most unequal country worldwide.[5] Kenya is among the lowest-ranked countries for overall human development (142 out of 189), with 36.5 percent of the country living below the poverty line.[6]

Kenyan democracy has experienced political upheavals in recent years. Its new constitution, adopted by referendum in 2010, introduced a series of checks on executive power and reformed the federal system, devolving authority to 47 new counties in an attempt to increase accountability and improve service delivery.[7] The first presidential election under the new system was held in March 2013 and won by Uhuru Kenyatta, son of founding father Jomo Kenyatta, despite lingering allegations of his involvement in violence surrounding the 2007 parliamentary elections. Uhuru won re-election in 2017 in a fiercely contested election that featured the return of widespread political violence.

Migori County, where Nuru Kenya has focused its efforts, is in southwestern Kenya, on the border with Tanzania. Its poverty rate of 41.2 percent in a population of slightly less than one million places it in the poorer half of Kenyan counties.[8] Within Migori County, the sub-counties where Nuru Kenya operates (Kuria West, Kuria East, and Migori) are composed of small farming communities, with citizens mainly planting maize, beans, and cassava as food crops.[9] Cash crops include coffee and maize – grown for both food and cash – which have over time have replaced tobacco as primary profit sources. The Kurian people also keep cattle. Given that this region is on the border with Tanzania, cattle rustling and other inter-clan and/or inter-tribal clashes related to cattle theft are commonplace.

> LET'S GO THROUGH THE THING TOGETHER … WHEN WE GET RAINED ON, WE ARE TOGETHER IN THE RAIN."

AID CONTEXT

Official development assistance (ODA) in 2016 totaled US$2.2 billion, with a majority of this funding earmarked for health, population, and infrastructure programming. The US is the largest bilateral donor, contributing roughly a third of total ODA, followed by the UK, Japan, and the European Union (EU). The World Bank, African Development Bank, and Global Fund all provide significant aid as well.[10]

Aid from the US over the past 50 years has focused on access to education, health care, infrastructure, and governance.[11] From 2000 to 2015, Kenya received an annual average of US$956 million in aid from multilateral donors including the EU, the World Bank, the United Nations (UN), and various regional development banks. Over the same period, Kenya received an annual average of US$1.8 billion in bilateral aid from its top donors, including the US, the UK, Germany, Japan, and France.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN KENYA

CSOs in Kenya date back to the 1920s, when Kenyans set up "welfare associations" to advocate for their rights and express dissatisfaction to the British colonial government. Since the country's independence, the government has encouraged the development of local NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) to promote peace and security, fight disease, and assist with service provision. Today, Kenya, and Nairobi in particular, is the primary hub for INGOs working in East Africa.

Different acronyms and registration processes for CBOs and NGOs disguise the fact that the distinction between the two types of organizations is unclear, making it almost impossible to discuss NGOs without talking implicitly about CBOs. Many, if not most, NGOs in Kenya now implement their work through CBOs. One example is an NGO that trains adults in agriculture, livestock rearing, and income generation. It organizes its trainings through CBOs: it has six programs in six zones, with six CBOs of 25 members in each zone. NGO–CBO relations often appear in this nested form: a large foreign-based NGO will fund the programs of a Kenyan-based NGO, which then distributes its funds via registered community groups.

NGOs began to be registered in the early 1990s, after their numbers began growing noticeably. The sector now comprises more than 8,500 registered organizations, employing more than 300,000 people full-time.[12] This represents 2.1 percent of the economically active population, and 16 percent of non-agricultural employment.[13] Most NGOs in Kenya are involved in one or more of the following eight types of activities: agriculture; education; environment; general development; peace and governance; health; emergency or refugee relief; and programs directed at disadvantaged communities (specifically, women, children, youth, the disabled, and the elderly).[14]

Locally led development has been important to Kenyan governance, especially following the devolvement measures included in the 2010 constitution, with government offices often distributing services through NGOs and CBOs. For example, the Njaa Marufuku

(Kicking Away Hunger) program, under the Ministry of Agriculture, provides local groups up to 120,000 Kenyan shillings (approximately US$1,200) per project for food security programs.[15]

Despite this history, Kenyan civil society faces numerous challenges. In a speech delivered to the Constitution and Reform Education Consortium, Member of Parliament and civil society activist Millie Odhiambo described these challenges: high community expectations and mismatched goals; hostility and non-cooperation by some government agencies and individuals; gender inequality; ineffective networking with international NGOs; an unstable financial resource base; a society divided on urban–rural society lines; and undemocratic organizational structures.[16]

In terms of political rights and civil liberties for its citizens, Kenya is listed as "partly free" by Freedom House's 2016 rankings.[17] The government has long been suspicious of the independence of the NGO sector, and since the early 1990s, has sought to extend control over the sector with new legislation. Kenyan NGOs are increasingly reluctant to undertake lobbying and advocacy because of the potential risks, and while Kenya is still home to a vibrant civil society, these NGOs report an increasingly hostile local context as the government treats their actions with suspicion, in part because of their foreign connections. During the 2017 elections, for example, news outlets accused the government of cracking down on local NGOs critical of the vote leading to President Uhuru Kenyatta's electoral victory.[18] Methods used by the government included accusations of money laundering and freezing of financial accounts using ambiguous laws regulating NGOs.[19] International rights groups, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, have noted a subsequent pattern of targeting critical NGOs and pressuring civil society actors.[20]

The relationship between INGOs and the Kenyan government has been strained. Many INGOs criticized the government's response to the 2007 post-election violence, pressuring the International Criminal Court to pursue President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto. The Kenyatta administration has responded with a crackdown on NGO activity, including threats of deregistration, attempts to limit NGO hiring of international employees, and portrayals of INGOs as part of a "foreign plot" to take control of Kenya.[21] Given this context, NGOs focused on economic development, rural development, and service delivery typically have significantly less difficulty accessing funding and government assistance than those focused on human rights, government accountability, and public policy.[22]

ANALYSIS OF RECENT MAJOR TRENDS IN AID EXITS

The 2016 USAID CSO Sustainability Index has noted a distinct change in donor behavior in Kenya in recent years. Donors have been increasingly moving toward offering project-based funding rather than unrestricted grants or general operating support. This trend has made it more difficult for NGOs to seek funding while adhering to their core mission. It has also hit Kenyan NGOs particularly hard, as most receive the overwhelming majority of their funding from foreign sources, and local sources of operating budget support are difficult to obtain. In this environment, exits can be particularly sharp: when funding for a project dries up, NGOs are in many cases obliged to lay off staff and halt further engagement with communities. This is one aspect of how power dynamics within aid play out in a local context: in order to survive, national NGOs are forced to pursue project-based funding, which sometimes involves programming that is outside their core competency or that is an imperfect fit for the country.

Given that closing political space and project-based funding are becoming global trends, and of growing interest to the development community, Kenya provides a fascinating contextual case for understanding how NGO transitions can succeed.

3. HISTORY OF NURU KENYA PROGRAMMING

The Nuru Kenya Exit Debrief and Best Practices Manual sets out the basis of the Nuru model as follows: "Central to the Nuru model is the concept of locally led development that expands choice and builds capacity among people living in poverty. Founded on the work of economist Amartya Sen,[23] Nuru posits that successful development requires more than just an increase in finances or income. Rather, a crucial component of poverty eradication is expanding people's capabilities and choices. Empowering people and enriching their lives should

not just be a means to improve systems or economies, but also an end goal for development. Using this lens, Nuru works to restore agency and equip local leaders to become key decision-makers regarding development in their communities by owning Nuru projects and their outcomes. The theory of change behind Nuru's interventions hinges on local leaders being able to manage, execute, and adapt the Nuru model as needed."[24]

Nuru International is an INGO with the mission to eradicate extreme poverty in fragile rural areas, in order to build communities resilient to violent extremism. Nuru International's approach, emphasizing holistic poverty reduction and local ownership, emerged from founder and CEO Jake Harriman's studies at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, which followed a seven-year career in the US Marine Corps' Special Forces. The first test of its efficacy was in the sub-county of Kuria West.

In 2008, Jake Harriman traveled to Kenya to meet and work with Philip Mohochi, a retired Nairobi-based banker native to Kuria West, with whom Jake had established contact while at Stanford. Jake and Philip began by going door-to-door, speaking with community members in order to understand local concerns. There was no premeditated program design: as described by Nuru Kenya staff, Philip and Jake spent months sitting with farmers "under a tree," designing Nuru's programming in a collaborative and organic way (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 1 - NURU KENYA – TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

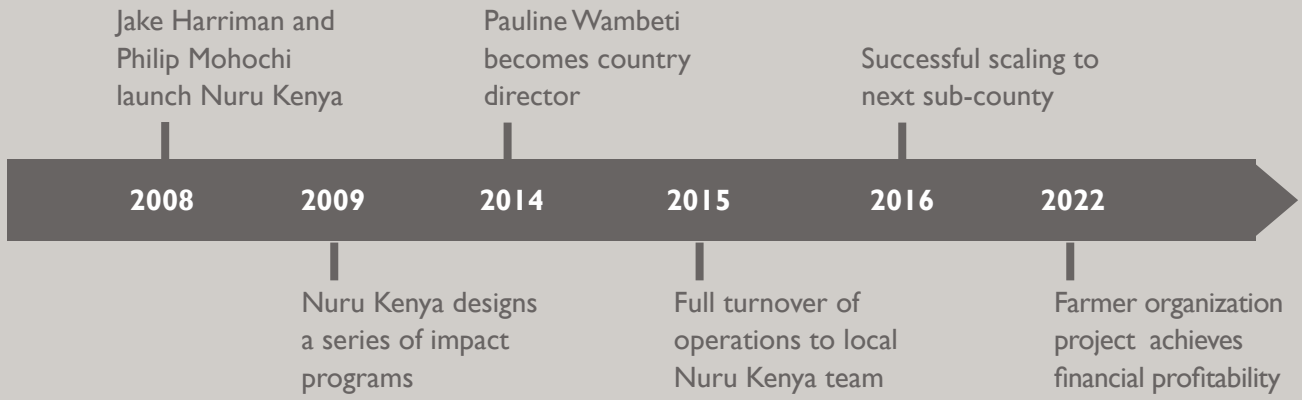


FIGURE 2 - THE CO-CREATON PROCESS[25]

1. PROMOTE AGENCY BY REMOVING BARRIERS FROM LOCAL CHANGE AGENTS

Agency, humanity and dignitiy are restablished in community members and local Nuru teams seeing themselves as change agents and not merely passive recipients of aid.

2. SUSTAIN OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES TO ENSURE LOCAL CHANGE AGENTS ARE ENGAGED IN CRITICAL THINKING, FEEDBACK AND DEBATE

Development of skills, access to resources and information, and creation of space and open forums help change agents actively and informatively provide their viewpoints in open and safe environments

3. LOCAL CHANGE AGENTS MANAGE PROJECTS AND MAKE ALL DECISIONS

International staff are a temporary scaffold supporting the foundation of local change agents who completely take over the project as international staff exit

Nuru Kenya was not operating in a vacuum in Migori County. Other INGOs had come and gone, while many continued to operate. Several Nuru Kenya staff members described a general feeling of suspicion from the community as a result of past experiences with other organizations that had arrived, implemented projects, and left without considering either what the community had invested or sustainability more broadly. Other staff pointed out that most organizations give things away for free ("handouts"), and then leave, creating an expectation by community members that they play a "passive" role in development. This was the operating context for Nuru International's early days in the Kurian community, a legacy that influenced Nuru Kenya's approach to sustainability.

The two founders determined from this consultation that the primary development challenge in the area was food security, with community members lacking sufficient food to feed themselves and their families. Farming yields in the community were very low, in part due to nitrogen-depleted soils (a legacy of tobacco farming), and in part due to substandard maize seeds and farming techniques. Accordingly, the first "impact program" focused on agriculture, coordinating local farmers and community leaders in order to connect them with modern farming knowledge. The intervention focused on affordability and being "low tech," in order to be scalable and sustainable. The agriculture program was an immediate success, with the community witnessing increased yields from 5 bags of maize per acre to 25 bags per acre. As a result, Nuru gained credibility with the community.

Shortly thereafter, Nuru embraced a theory of change focused on four areas of need: food insecurity; coping with shocks; reducing unnecessary disease and death; and building up child literacy to promote opportunities for the next generation. The essential idea was that improving crop yields and farm income would not suffice if families could be driven back into poverty and deprivation by shocks such as illness or drought. The programs were as follows:

- Healthcare: Health shocks often cascade through households – particularly tobacco farmers engaged in the curing process – so this program was developed to address preventable illness and disease.

- Financial inclusion: This program was introduced to help families cope with shocks through savings and access to credit.

- Education: Lack of access to quality education reinforces intergenerational poverty, so this program was set up to help farmers' children and reinforce the public school system.

- Leadership: In 2010, Nuru formalized this program in order to develop management and organizational capacity, the ultimate objective being to hand over leadership functions to local stakeholders.

Nuru Kenya approached its programming in Migori County knowing it would need to combine local knowledge with sector expertise, while developing local leadership capacity. Nuru Kenya's teams began by training farmers in groups. As one interviewee who began working with the organization through these groups and is now a staff member pointed out, the groups later became the units of project implementation.

Nuru International deliberately designed its staff structure as a dual hierarchy: for each position, an international technical staff member was paired with a Kenyan counterpart. The international staff – called the Field Team – consisted of a Team Leader, who worked directly with the Kenyan-national position of Country Director; and Program Specialists, who worked directly with Kenyan-national Program Managers across each program area: agriculture, financial inclusion, healthcare, education, monitoring and evaluation, and leadership. The Field Team acted as scaffolding for the local organization and leaders, enabling them to design, implement, measure, and scale the Nuru model. The Field Team was also responsible for mentoring and building the capacity of host country team members. By design, the international team was not integral to the Kenyan team's management structure, ensuring it could ultimately phase out.

Meaningful local ownership is critical to the Nuru model, and so from the outset the organization planned capacity development programs to ensure sustainability. The director of the Leadership Program emphasized that the discussion around the exit of international staff was a key component of Nuru Kenya's programming from the beginning. The Leadership Program trains Kenyan staff in capacity building, skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will help them take over projects, thereby creating a pipeline of leaders.

In 2015, in response to the three key exit drivers outlined below, all international staff left the country, with full control transitioned to the Kenyan staff and leaders Nuru International had trained and developed over the previous seven years. Four years later, Nuru Kenya operates in 68 sub-locations within three sub-counties across Migori County. The organization reports that in its ten years of operation it has impacted more than 93,000 local people via direct interaction with 15,500 farmers.[26] It is currently involved in the operation of 14 cooperatives in Migori County, which it is planned will be self-sustaining within the next five years. Nuru Kenya also plans to scale its model to the neighboring sub-county district of Kuria East. The full turnover to the local team can be regarded as a success: Nuru Kenya is operationally independent and farmer organizations are on the path to financial self-sustainability through their business operations.

4. MAPPING THE EXIT AND TRANSITION

Full turnover of operations to the Nuru Kenya team was planned from the start, with progress tracked over a number of years using key milestones related to impact, operational capacity, and leadership. Conversations with Nuru International and Nuru Kenya staff revealed three key transition drivers that convinced both organizations that the full turnover to the local team could move forward in June 2015. These were, first, the achievement of key program impact milestones; second, the level of capacity reached by the Kenyan team; and, third, a strong local Country Director capable of leading the organization into the future.

ACHIEVEMENT OF PROGRAM IMPACT MILESTONES

Nuru Kenya's mission is to eradicate extreme poverty in the areas where it operates. According to Nuru International's best practices, one critical question regarding whether international staff can exit is whether the organization is demonstrating sustained impact across all four impact programs. Quantitatively, the metrics that would demonstrate such progress were the program impact milestones. In Kenya, rigorous multi-year evaluation studies including non-intervention comparison groups and applying a difference-in-difference approach demonstrated consistent impact in all program areas. Nuru Kenya staff had also maintained ongoing monitoring since the outset of programming in 2008. By June 2015, Nuru Kenya had met the relevant milestones in all impact areas, including in the agriculture, financial inclusion, healthcare, and education programs, indicating that their programming was effective, and that further transition could proceed.

KENYAN TEAM CAPABILITIES

Through the international scaffolding/Kenyan leadership approach, completion of capacity development trainings, constant and consistent exit messaging, and the transfer of responsibility to local staff, Nuru had carefully built capacity to the point that international and local staff agreed that the leadership exit could go forward. It is important to note that technical capacity was not the only factor determining the readiness for exit of international staff. Years of experience with short-term development projects had left many Kenyans believing that once the international actor left the area, the project ended. Part of Nuru Kenya's approach was to remedy this belief by encouraging feelings of empowerment and ownership over Nuru Kenya's programming.

The Nuru Leadership Program, which identified and mentored local Kenyan leaders in the servant leadership approach (described in more detail below), was critical to this capacity building program.

STRONG LOCAL LEADERSHIP CANDIDATE

The final key transition driver was the emergence of Pauline Wambeti. Pauline began as the Impact Programs Manager in September 2013, and was quickly identified by Philip Mohochi as a potential champion who could take over Nuru Kenya after the exit of international staff and his own planned retirement. The Impact Programs Manager position was not part of Nuru's original program design, with the position emerging because no one was providing oversight for all four impact programs.

Pauline fit these requirements well, and by June 2015 was Nuru Kenya's Country Director, leading the organization's team with no international presence in the field. Her visionary leadership has been lauded by Nuru International staff as key to the successful transition.

5. KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

This section tracks the key factors behind the success of the full turnover to the local team in June 2015 and Nuru Kenya's successful post-exit performance. These factors can be divided into four broad areas: planning, principles, programs, and people.

PLANNING

Transition communicated from outset

All Kenyan staff interviewed for this case study reported that from the beginning of Nuru's engagement, its leadership consistently communicated the planned exit of international staff. This included constant reminders – in meetings, official messaging, and conversationally – that the international team members would eventually be leaving the project in the hands of the Kenyan-national staff. One senior Kenyan manager commented: "From the beginning, when Nuru International came to Kenya, there was that awareness. There was that information and communication to the staff and the community that we are expecting to exit … One of the key things is that the staff already knew, and that the community knew also. This was not going to be Nuru International: they were going to leave the local staff with the project."

Similarly, another Kenyan staff member shared that Nuru founders, Jake and Philip, consistently reminded both the staff and the community that the time would come when they would have to take over the running of the program.

This messaging had two key intended objectives. First, it kept international staff and leadership focused on the end goal of local leadership, steering them away from getting caught up in the day-to-day management of projects. And second, it provided psychological support to Kenyan national staff in order that they could feel confident – within a cultural context of feeling inferior to muzungu [27] – that they could lead and manage development projects implemented in their communities.

A senior Kenyan staff member who spent years with the Kenyan military doing national-level work before acting as a peacekeeper in Burundi, said Nuru's exit communication was "… initiated early, even before I joined, and the main aim of it was to prepare the managers psychologically and mentally to understand that a time is coming when the intervention will be run by [Kenyans]. A time is coming when it is you who will be doing the projects. A time is coming when it will be you who is doing the decisions in your program."

The "how" of the exit was created by international and Nuru Kenya staff, and was developed to include a plan with milestones, assessments, and training.

Exit and transition as a gradual process, with joint planning and rigorous training

The leadership training and capacity building to support the handover was conducted in a steady, gradual manner, with the transitioning of functions away from the international team done through intensive mentoring and systematic handovers to the local team.

All staff interviewed for this case study described the process that led up to the June 2015 exit as gradual, and that regular, constant training was a key component to the smooth transition.

The measured, iterative nature of the handover process was designed to allow staff the opportunity to give feedback on how the process was going, and how training could be adjusted accordingly. Interviewees repeatedly stated that exit was well managed by the leadership department through open communication with staff and the community.

The leadership team also provided feedback questionnaires alongside the trainings, in order to collect feedback and update materials and presentations. When prompted to explain what worked well during the exit transition process, the majority of staff mentioned these feedback questionnaires, reporting that they were useful to the process and helpful in making them feel included. Nuru International visualizes this model of project design and handover as comprising three phases, as can be seen in Figure 3.

One Kenyan senior manager tasked with a significant amount of oversight and leadership once the international team left, commented: "… by the time [the international team] were leaving in June, it was just a normal ceremony. Yes, you're going, but we are so busy already." This manager described how, by the day of departure, local staff were

FIGURE 3. PHASES OF A COUNTRY PROJECT[28]

PHASE 1

PROGRAM DESIGN AND LAUNCH

Nuru Internatioal recruits and trains a local team in Nuru's mission, philosophy and approach to poverty solutions. The team is equipped with knowledge and skills to thoroughly assess community needs and co-create impact programs that are locally relevant, sustainable and scalable.

PHASE 2

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Local teams effectively run and manage the programs while iterating past challenges and improving on interventions to maintain relevance. Once evidence of impact is achieved, teams grow programs throughout the district.

PHASE 3

PROJECT STREAMLINING AND SCALING

Local teams identify opportunities to better intergrate program activities, staffing, budgeting and more. They ensure maximum efficiencies as the project prepares to become financially independent from Nuru International and positions to scale to a new district.

already running so many of Nuru Kenya's moving pieces that the exit moved ahead seamlessly.

The Country Director summarized the breadth and depth of the strategic planning and implementation: "We will continue communicating; we have this post-exit relationship plan nailed down, which was communicated from the board to the team to the community. [Nuru International and Nuru Kenya leadership] had 'high touch' … meetings just immediately after [exit]. Weekly, then they tapered off to biweekly, then monthly, and now not everyone needs to talk to [Nuru International leadership]. Now there are just a few people who are talking with the [US-based international] team. So that was quite a good plan. It was phased so that we could also be cushioned from that shock of their departure. We had done the strategic planning together. Everybody was sold on the new things that needed to happen. So, we were not left without a clear vision of what needs to happen."

It was reported by almost all Nuru Kenya staff that there was joint project planning between the Field Team and Kenyan staff, with varying degrees of collaboration described. Several staff members connected this to the increased training and capacities in monitoring and evaluation: joint planning and budgeting allowed for open reporting and monitoring, accountability with all stakeholders, and more inclusive planning. This process also led to the creation of the Impact Manager role for improved data management and decision making.

Although the word "transparency" was not included in the SAS research protocol, it was the word Nuru Kenya staff consistently used to identify why the exit planning and execution felt so successful, with many staff mentioning that transparency was key to feeling the communication process was effective and empowering.

It is important to note, however, that despite the apparent success of this transition messaging, the level of openness is disputed. One staff member hinted at potential gaps in Nuru's communication, saying: "All along there was always mentioning of a time when the muzungus will go back and leave the project with the locals. This was repeated in most meetings, both with staff and the community by the founders. It developed an expectation that one day the project will remain with the community but how that would happen was never said."

At least four staff members mentioned that the transparency was not vertical, with transparency mostly existing among senior managers and the board, rather than including more junior staff working directly with community members. They described a sense of tension: despite representing the organization in the field, they did not feel included in the organization's full planning process. As one staff member who had worked in both junior and management positions reported: "There was transparency

at high levels but not down to junior staff. There were good relationships between the partners except that the junior staff were never involved in the decision-making process." Another Nuru Kenya staff member commented: "There was an exit strategy in place, but the details of the exit strategy were confined and only shared among senior management and the board."

PRINCIPLES

The philosophy of "servant leadership"

When asked about what made Nuru International leadership so effective, many Nuru Kenya staff mentioned the terms "servant leadership" and "mentoring." Servant leadership is a core value of Nuru International's global approach. It underpins the philosophy that guided Nuru International's approach to the transition, and comprises a central element of the Leadership Program curriculum.

Servant leadership is described by the Servant Leadership Institute as "… a set of behaviors and practices that turn the traditional 'power leadership' model upside down" – instead of the people serving the leader, the leader exists to serve the people. Centered on a desire to serve, the practice emphasizes collaboration, trust, empathy, and the ethical use of power. Its primary goal is to enhance individual growth, teamwork, and overall employee involvement and satisfaction. [29]

Staff described both Jake Harriman and Philip Mohochi's leadership qualities as those of servant leadership: they wanted primarily to serve the community and their staff members, and were not inclined toward consolidating and wielding power. One member of Nuru Kenya's senior leadership, in describing Philip's leadership style, said: "Without Philip it would not have happened the way it happened, and I do not think it would have taken off the way it did. One: Philip was prepared to serve the community wholly, without reservation. He was one person that was totally different because he was – he is – very honest, and very loving, and he would give his time to work and serve as a leader-servant without discriminating and without benefiting … The leader-servant is one of the training qualities in Nuru. But then, Philip as a person was already a leader-servant maybe without knowing that word."

> "WE HAD DONE THE STRATEGIC PLANNING TOGETHER. EVERYBODY WAS SOLD ON THE NEW THINGS THAT NEEDED TO HAPPEN. SO, WE WERE NOT LEFT WITHOUT A CLEAR VISION OF WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN."

Nuru embedded the principles of servant leadership into its Leadership Program. According to the Nuru Kenya After-Action Report, the program "… seeks to equip local Nuru staff with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to create, implement, and scale poverty solutions independently." Importantly, it is not just intended for management: "The program offers two levels of trainings. Level one training is for all staff across a Nuru country project and includes trainings on program activities, roles and responsibilities, leadership, communicating effectively and program management. Level two training is for managerial level staff and covers topics such as understanding and using data to make decisions, communications for managers, advanced program management, and co-creating programs through a comprehensive design process."

Donors that give local leadership the freedom to fail, innovate, and experiment

When discussing what has allowed her to flourish as a leader and meet the milestones set for Nuru Kenya's operational success, Country Director Pauline Wambeti repeatedly mentioned the freedom to fail, innovate, and experiment. She reported that, in line with the servant leadership philosophy, Nuru International leadership was extremely supportive of local staff making choices for themselves, even if this meant learning, adapting, and making course corrections along the way. She shared two key quotes from Nuru International to illustrate this. First: "You are the local people. You know what happens on the ground. You are the experts at the end of the day." And second: "Don't be afraid to say what needs

to happen. Because things will change. They have changed already here. We thought things were rosy from 2008 to 2012 and then bop! All the challenges of crop failure and all that drought … So, as you continue on your own maybe things will change, and you need to tell us [Nuru International, 'the donor'] 'this will not work.'" Pauline, along with other local leaders, was encouraged to conduct interventions, adapt as needed, and not treat failure as something to avoid above all else.

Other senior Nuru Kenya staff we interviewed also brought up the importance of this atmosphere. One staff member tied the ability to create the architecture of the Nuru cooperatives to the "freedom to fail," as "when you start something new, you really don't know the exact challenges that you're going to face. But had the concept of cooperatives been the beginning of Nuru, we could not be where we are now." Their point was that if Nuru had prescribed developing cooperatives from the beginning, the organization would not have the success it has now. Nuru Kenya staff had the freedom to develop and design alongside Nuru International for years, and after the full turnover to the local team, they were able to identify cooperatives as the next development for the organization.

As the Country Director stressed, the freedom to innovate and fail is crucial in a development intervention focused on agriculture. This is illustrated by Nuru Kenya's attempt to diversify the crops grown by community members, in order that they could have a cash crop other than surplus maize (or, as was previously the case, tobacco). As she explained: "We piloted the chilis as a cash crop for the farmers so that we could wean them off of tobacco farming. We were doing a lot of pilots, planning, and introducing new concepts. We still had to do these evaluation studies and comparison studies. If you're a Nuru farmer, how much is your yield? If you're not a Nuru farmer, how much can we see is working, is not working. So, 2014 we were able to make progress, good progress. But we had some failures, like the chili did not work. But at least the sorghum, millet worked well."

Nuru's ability to foster flexibility, innovate, and adapt its programmatic implementation accordingly, was key to its success. The support provided by Nuru International as Nuru Kenya's "donor" was repeatedly referenced as the source of this ability.

PROGRAMS

Collaborative design leading to ownership and creativity

In Nuru's approach, collaborative design between international and Kenyan-national staff was central to creating a sustainable, locally led, and locally owned program.

When asked how Nuru identified where and how to intervene, Nuru Kenya staff repeatedly highlighted that community members themselves helped in identifying their needs, which is how agriculture became the focus of the initial intervention. From the very beginning, collaborative design was a part of Nuru's operating methodology, with one Nuru Kenya staff member commenting: "They guide us, they show us the direction they want to go or the direction they like, but they do not ask us to take their position. They give us options and leave us to make the best decision."

In one interview, a Nuru International staff member who played a key role in the exit reflected that those in the international team, due to their educational and professional backgrounds, relied on theory and "best practice" in their approach to designing and implementing successful interventions. Accordingly, they were focused on year-to-year impact, leadership capacity building, and the eventual transition. It was not until they opened up collaborative design conversations with Kenyan staff that the idea of founding cooperatives to sustain Nuru's work was developed. In the interviewee's view, it was the Kenyan staff who advocated for leadership at the community level, pushing Nuru to focus on community needs, the eventual community takeover, and the end goal of community management through the cooperatives model. She reflected that, while from a theoretical standpoint this had always been the intention of the international team, it was easy, due to their backgrounds, to be sidetracked into a focus on research instead of the reality. She said shared design and creation with Kenyan staff was crucial to creating the cooperatives, which are at the heart of Nuru Kenya's current sustainability plan. As of May 2018, Nuru Kenya is playing an active role managing the cooperatives, training 14 of them to manage themselves.

One Kenyan senior manager explained this process from the Kenyan perspective. Given many Nuru Kenya

staff were either farmers in the community or worked directly with them, their collaborative design process involved the community designing the programs that Nuru Kenya would embrace, eventually leading them to the cooperative, community-owned model. In early bumper crop years, farmers found themselves with a surplus of produce, which they were not always able to sell. The cooperative model allowed for a more reliable way for farmers to sell their goods. Importantly, as the model was collaboratively designed, community members view the cooperatives as their own, rather than Nuru's. The cooperatives are farmer-owned and farmer-driven, driving them to acquire – through Nuru – the technical expertise and cooperative management capacity needed to eventually run the cooperatives without the support of Nuru Kenya. This final level of self-reliance is projected for 2022.

A technical expert on the international team also highlighted the ability of locally owned cooperatives to create more accurate data, saying that giving cooperatives the tools to assess the environment themselves allows such tools to be better tailored for risk analysis.

The collaboration that allowed for the formation of cooperatives is closely aligned with the theme of ownership explored below. Participatory design was crucial to shifting the attitude of community members, and Nuru Kenya staff, toward creating a project they could take true ownership of. As the Nuru Kenya Country Director shared, collaboration was central to fostering ownership: "This is a community that was used to things being done for them. Giving seeds, someone comes out with extension services, helps them out with planting and everything. They get the yield. They deliver it to a certain point, etc. Now we are telling them, 'Think! Think how you're to get the inputs, think how much profit you're going to charge your members, the profit you're going to make and what you'll need to be responsible for, the decisions you're supposed to make. Think where you're going to sell your produce.'"

Another senior Nuru Kenya staff member added to this: "If Nuru exits today, as Nuru now, and there's no funding from Nuru, which structures are we leaving behind? Because we have realized, when we are reaching out to farmers directly, if Nuru left them, these farmers would not even know where they can get inputs from, they do not know who they can sell their products or produce to, how can they control the pests in the field and all that. But if we put them in the cooperative, and we empower them in the management of the cooperative, then it means eventually when Nuru exits completely, this cooperative knows where to buy seeds from, where to buy fertilizer from."

For Nuru and Migori County, establishing and managing the cooperatives and, ultimately, the cooperative union, from a co-created design process to local ownership of these mechanisms, was a foundation for the sustained achievement of outputs and outcomes.

Designing programs to create ownership

At its inception, Nuru Kenya operated primarily as a farm extension service, loaning inputs – such as seeds, pesticides, and equipment – to farmers, with the expectation of receiving payment. Some Kenyan staff mentioned that some of the farmers who were early adopters of Nuru's programming, especially before the June 2015 exit, expected to receive the inputs for free, as had previously been the case with other development actors in the region.

One regional manager for Nuru Kenya explained the phenomenon thus: "When a black person sees a muzungu, he thinks he has a lot of money and all the solutions to solve their problems. They perceived Nuru International, when they were here, as people who would solve their problems. When Nuru International exited, it took a lot of time for [Nuru Kenya staff] who remained to try to create awareness, teach farmers on why muzungu exited, why we are changing our strategy … When a program comes with muzungu intentions, or muzungu initiatives, it can become hard to implement. Or at times, you implement, and at the end of the day, you don't get that impact. Many times you hear, 'we are supposed to be given [things] for free.' When the strategy changed, moving toward cooperatives and making the farmers own it themselves, many were negative about it. But for the ones who understood it, they embraced it first. Nuru doesn't give handouts. Handouts are the norm, they're what people expect [from muzungu-led International NGOs]. People like being given handouts. But they also think 'the muzungu would know better' [in fixing/creating solutions to problems]. When they participate in the process, they own the process."

One international staff member who supported the Kenya team for years, and directly supported the exit, spoke honestly about the tension she experienced as a

development practitioner working in extreme poverty alleviation: "Most of us got into this work because we want to help people and we care about the issue." But in a moment of challenging climate realities, such as drought or floods, insect infestation, or a failed crop season, there can be a tension between wanting to "help" and making the right decision to facilitate long-term shifts of mindset among the chronically poor.

As the staff member explained: "You have to pick and choose, when something goes wrong. Our intention is to be a long-term, institution-building form of sustainable development, but that's really hard to do consistently in poor rural communities because it's really hard for poor rural communities to succeed year after year. Long-term development implies year on year progress … Do we want to quickly help them bounce back so that we don't lose ground gained, or be more consistent with the fact that we don't do [humanitarian response]? There was a drought in Kenya in 2013 and [Nuru International] chose to forgive loans and be lenient the following year. It created cascading [negative] effects. You can ask [the Kenyan Country Director] about this; she wasn't [employed with Nuru at the time]. I am positive she wouldn't have made that decision."

This Nuru International employee knew that having local leaders make these difficult strategic decisions helps overcome the international urge "to help," when what is really required is to facilitate ownership from community members.

Pauline, the Nuru Kenya Country Director, described a similar instance when an infestation of fall armyworm appeared in many of the farmers' crops. She said many of the farmers were crying, visibly upset to lose valuable crops before the harvest. Jake, the head of Nuru International, wanted to lessen the loan repayment burden, and told Pauline that she needed "to listen." She described her response as being: "I know the farmer is crying, but it is through that crying that they will sort themselves out." She knew that going through the hardship was an important step in changing the mentality of community members toward one of "Yes, they will receive help from Nuru, but it is not simply free support," and to realize that in the long run better outcomes result from requiring repayment on farm inputs, which in turn creates ownership.

The Country Director reported that at the end of that season "… we had actually 117 percent increase in yield. The farmers cried, but they were able to tough it out." She further shared that due to negative cascading effects from loan forgiveness following the 2013 drought, mixed with financial challenges resulting from the organizational restructuring (outlined below), loan repayments to Nuru were as low as 44 percent. In the two years following the drought, she was able to increase loan repayments to 88 percent, and after the full turnover to the local team, to 97 percent (as of May 2018). Nuru Kenya staff read this change as reflecting an increased sense of ownership on the part of local farmers and community members.

> "OUR INTENTION IS TO BE A LONG-TERM, INSTITUTION-BUILDING FORM OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

PEOPLE

Strong local leadership

As discussed above, the leadership of Nuru Kenya's Country Director Pauline Wambeti has been lauded by Nuru International staff and management as key to the successful transition. Having Pauline in position gave confidence that the transition would be well managed, and that she would serve as a champion to continue Nuru's mission post-exit.

The value of networks and building a community of practice

When asked about the initial establishment of Nuru International in Kuria West, near the border of Tanzania and far from any major cities, one Nuru International staff member replied that not basing themselves in the capital city helped buffer them from the aid space in East Africa, where Nairobi is the primary hub. In the beginning, Nuru was "almost intentionally" isolated from the perceived top-down, managerial, Western-led dynamics of so-called "Big Aid." At the same time, reflected the staff member, too much isolation results in having to reinvent the wheel, and since its founding, Nuru has come to a more balanced space:

"We've used a lot more consultants and developed a lot more relationships with [NGOs] … One Acre Fund has been super instrumental … I definitely have a lot of respect for them. They're good at what they do. They've shared a lot of research/innovation capacity that they have and changes that they've made around their operations, particularly around technical agriculture stuff. We started out likening ourselves to them." The staff member added that Nuru and One Acre Fund now have different models and goals, but even so maintain a close and valuable relationship.

Since the June 2015 exit, Nuru Kenya has attempted to increase its collaboration with other organizations and institutions. Under the Country Director's leadership, Nuru Kenya established the Development Partners Forum for organizations in Migori County, in order to minimize the duplication of effort and resources. Development Partners Forum had its first meeting in late 2017, and another in early 2018. Some participating organizations have preventative programs, some have livelihood programs, while others have education programs. They are all part of a collaborative approach to ending extreme poverty. As Nuru Kenya's Country Director stated: "We are the drivers of this process." Nuru Kenya also participates in international forums, including Humentum, Locus Coalition, The Movement for Community Led Development, and the International Literacy Association.

Nuru Kenya's Country Director shared that the local network was set up in an effort to learn. Given Nuru Kenya is in the process of handing over cooperative management and leadership to farmers, establishing networks is a sustainable way to ensure knowledge transfer. One organization in particular – Child Fund – has helped Nuru Kenya with their dairy strategy regarding the purchasing of new breeds of cows. Child Fund, having failed in a similar capacity, learned from its experience and so has been able to pass on valuable knowledge to Nuru Kenya. As a result, Nuru Kenaya revisited its strategic approach, with the Country Director reporting: "When they heard that we were doing dairy, and we were seeking their opinion, they were very surprised; 'I failed, why do you want my opinion?' I said, yeah, exactly, that's the reason why. We want to know the reason why, and see how we can work together so that you don't fail." These types of local networks, sharing both successes and failures, have expanded Nuru Kenya's knowledge base and laid the groundwork for future sustainability.

6. CHALLENGES

Despite the fact that Nuru Kenya was well-placed for the full turnover to the local team, the transition was not without its challenges. This section outlines some of the difficulties faced, and how they were addressed.

GETTING COMMUNITY BUY-IN AS AN "OUTSIDER"

Even though a muzungu is clearly not East African, there are still varying levels of "local" within Kenya, Migori County, and even sub-counties such as Kuria West and Kuria East. Given that Nuru Kenya's Country Director is not from the Kurian community, but rather from another region in Kenya and another ethnic background, there was a level of trust and buy-in that she had to build after the Nuru International staff departed. The process she underwent (and Nuru International before her), provides salient lessons about how to define the "local" in local ownership, as well as how to build support in a community, regardless of whether the people involved are the same nationality, the same ethnicity, or from the same background.

From the outset, the Nuru International team had instilled a strong feeling that the most effective way to conduct an international development intervention is collaboration with a community, and cultivating ownership by that community. After the international staff left, the Country Director utilized this approach when attempting to gain buy-in from community members who had no prior relationship with her, and therefore no reason to trust her. She credited Nuru International's two founders, Philip and Jake, with their support and encouragement when such processes proved challenging:

[Philip] made me remember the time I had to drop out of school because of school fees. And I had to do odd jobs like sell second-hand clothes that could supplement my mom's income so they would not take my sisters out of school, you know? It was tough for her, and I had to make sacrifices as the first-born, and [Philip] kept telling me, you went through that. Make sure the community understands that. So that they don't see you as different from them... Like when this lady told me, "I'm not taking my girls to school anymore" and I told her, "You know what? Let me

come and talk to you on Saturday." And when I shared my story with them, they were shocked. "We thought you went to school and everything worked out" and I was like, "No. But I didn't give up on the opportunity because of lack of funds. I had to drop out for two years, I had to do this and this. But eventually I was patient, I toughed it out, and here I am."

And then I decided, okay now, what do I do with the males … So I decided, okay, let's start having chiefs meetings on a quarterly basis. So I start with the chiefs. They are the ones who are listened to, they are the gatekeepers. If I have them on my side, at least I'll be fine. So I started engaging. And the first meeting was not good; it was like an interview. Grilling me, and they're seated, "What are you going to do differently?" The other time I had the Deputy Director, he was from Kuria and so, I would front him to firefight for me. Then he'd give me the opportunity in those meetings to share my vision, share my strategy, why I believe in this, why I think it will work, why they should not be insecure that Jake is not around anymore or his team, that they are in good hands, we're in this together, we may not have all the answers, but that is the beauty about it, we're going to figure it out together. It's not like we're going to be doing things for them, we're going to be doing things with them. You know, and they felt that they were included, and their opinion is welcome. And I told them, we'll be having these meetings and you'll be rating us: hold us accountable, tell us what's not working, and how do you think that we need to proceed. So that really helped. So now things were changing, and they would even champion for me. They would tell the team, "You have to support [Nuru Kenya Country Director], you are working, this is your community, you can't let us down."

Another key Nuru Kenya leader related a story about building trust with a community through sharing his experiences as a Kenyan peacekeeper in Burundi, and how that was similar to Nuru International's operations in Kuria. He joined Nuru Kenya in January 2015 as a Community Outreach Officer, and after two years was working as Regional Manager of Cooperatives, eventually spearheading the formation of (and then heading) seven cooperatives. He returned to being a Community Outreach Officer in April 2018, as the cooperatives began to be self-governing.

His role in the community outreach department is to create a conducive environment for Nuru's operations within the community. He asserts that the most important thing to learn about is the culture and people of a new place – effectively, he acts as a point-person, explaining to community members exactly what Nuru is, and what it is supposed to do, and how it plans to do this. The role is pivotal in making leaders – the chiefs, the members of county assemblies, the government leaders, ministry officials – understand Nuru's approach. His work as a UN peacekeeper provided him with keen insight into the dynamics of an international presence in a community, and how to build trust.

As he described: "I had the opportunity to work in the [UN] as a peacekeeper in Sierra Leone [and] Burundi. So all those were a matter of talking to the community … [When] you reach the community, tell them exactly what the UN is doing, why we are here, why do we want [them to] bring back the weapons and all that. It entails a lot of talking. When I take that and bring it back to what I'm currently doing, it's similar. I think the most important thing here is that first, before any approach to a community, the international community must understand the basic needs of the community that you are going to work with. Because there are a lot of times you could be having a good idea; you want to help a community, but the approach or the need that you think is their need would not be their need … You will get to understand what's the basic need of this particular community and how do I get in to assimilate myself into them so that you can move together and solve these problems together."

Lastly, a technical advisor from Nuru International shared insights about his ongoing relationship with the leadership of Nuru Kenya. He said that prior to the exit, they had been (organizationally) very focused on defining the relationship. As a result, they had become "hung up" on this need for a definition, relying on various frameworks developed by think tanks and academic institutions that focus on partnerships. He argued that "What actually works is trust-based relationships with Kenyans, based over time." Effectively, a theoretically robust definition was no substitute for long-term relationship building.

COMMUNITY ASSUMPTION THAT TRANSITION MEANT THE COLLAPSE OF NURU KENYA

Many interviewees mentioned that community members thought that when the international team left, Nuru

would close. One staff member reported that most of the farmers were thinking "now without the muzungu, there is no finance, there is no Nuru," while other interviewees reported fear among the community as the day of the full turnover to the local team approached.

Nuru Kenya's management staff knew the transition was going well and that there was a strategy in place, but it was important that this was effectively communicated to farmers. At the time of the exit, Nuru Kenya was also forming cooperatives, as well as downsizing and restructuring the organization (discussed in detail below), so managing public relations was critical.

One of Nuru Kenya's regional managers and Nuru Kenya's gender expert shared that there were both positive and negative impacts for the community after Nuru International exited. While some farmers simply assumed Nuru would close, others were able to understand the strategic aspects of the graduation plan, viewing the cooperatives as structures that would be able to sustain development outcomes over the long term. This is why, she explained, despite the fear that Nuru would close, many farmers embraced the cooperatives.

Nuru Kenya staff explained that many community members had seen internationally-led organizations close when a project ended and the international staff left, and that they associated community development with international management. Though the area has strong local leadership in the form of chiefs, local government, and other public-sector roles, there was a perception within the development sector that projects started and led by muzungu were not generally handed over to Kenyan leadership.

Nuru Kenya staff shared stories about the challenges they faced persuading local community members that Nuru would survive, indeed thrive, under Kenyan leadership. As discussed above, combating these perceptions while psychologically empowering Kenyan staff with techniques such as the servant leadership method was a critical part of Nuru International's exit.

DOWNSIZING AND RESTRUCTURING

Shortly after Nuru International turned over operations to the local team in June 2015, Nuru Kenya realized it needed to restructure the organization, the staff, and its programming. Before the exit, Nuru had more than 200 people on staff. This was because Nuru was serving around 7,000 farmers, and reaching them directly required a large staff. For example, even if each staff member within the agriculture program could reach 100 farmers, this would still require 70 staff members. The health and financial inclusion programs also had their own teams.

Given Nuru Kenya was shifting its operational model from direct extension services to the cooperative system, it did not need nearly as many staff members. Though this shift in the operational model was necessary for sustainability and community ownership, laying off so many staff members was a challenge that required savvy communication from the Nuru Kenya team. The team received criticism from staff who were laid off, some of whom spread problematic stories in the community, such as that Nuru would indeed close after the departure of the international team.

Nuru Kenya also restructured the board of directors and some of its technical expert staff post-exit, with Kenyan staff feeling the organization needed new expertise to allow it to test new ideas. As the Country Director said: "Because you see, with Nuru, the strategy is holistic and it has to be integrated, and we have to integrate all these different things together. And I'm not the expert in all these things. Every area. I have all these ideas to do it, and when you bring in a board that has the expertise they tell you, yeah, this is possible, this is possible, this is my area of expertise, I'll give you what you need. So we had to restructure the board. We brought in an expert in cooperatives. We brought in an expert in law. We changed the education representative. We have a health expert. And we brought in a market linkage person. Cooperatives and market linkage were new sectors, so we brought those people in."

This transition caused growing pains, both in terms of layoffs and restructuring. These types of changes can be difficult for small local organizations, who may face community ill-will, new demands for technical expertise, and other short- and long-term issues.

7. KEY LESSONS

This case study has analyzed the transition of Nuru International from Nuru Kenya in June 2015. Nuru planned well, executed a smooth transition to local partners, and has charted a path toward financial

sustainability for its counterpart farmer organizations. It is not a stretch to call Nuru a singular case – it is rare to find an organization so single-mindedly focused on long-term sustainability, so focused on inclusive community collaboration, and so disengaged from the project-driven cycles that often define contemporary development. There is much that the development community, including donors, implementers, and local CSOs, can learn from Nuru's experience. Below are a list of recommendations, reminders, and suggestions to assist teams in designing, implementing, and transitioning locally led, locally owned development interventions.

Listen to the community before programming. If sustainability is to be meaningfully put at the heart of program design, programming should be community-based and focused on solving problems actually faced by the community. While this approach is often discussed, it is rarely put into practice. Nuru Kenya found success and community buy-in by learning about community issues before designing interventions, spending months listening to community members, then collaboratively deciding on program sectors and specific interventions. Involving all stakeholders from the local community can also improve program design and implementation, with community members more-often-than-not understanding their context and needs better than donors.

Reconsider project timelines. Standard project timelines and top-down course corrections can frustrate local partners and communities, often serving to perpetuate and sometimes worsen power dynamics already present in development. In the words of Nuru Kenya's Country Director when talking about previous experiences: "…[From previous experience] short-term fragmented approaches don't work. I've been in them for so many years. I've wound up their programs according to their work plans. After one year they're supposed to run for three years and in the middle you're told, stop, change directions, go left. And you have no say. If you don't change, no more funding." It is notable that a significant part of Nuru's early work involved addressing damaging assumptions about development assistance harbored by local Kenyan communities, which were accustomed to prescriptive three- and five-year projects followed by abrupt departures.

By bucking the global trend toward project-based funding, Nuru was able to make a long-term community investment and ensure long-term sustainability. In addition, through its collaborative program design and implementation, it was able to meaningfully include the communities it served, thereby making true local ownership possible. Though Nuru Kenya does not anticipate financial independence in its NGO operations, it does support farmer organizations, which are for-profit, farmer-owned entities. Through business and technical support, as well as injections of seed capital, Nuru Kenya intends that these entities become independently financially sustainable.

> "…[FROM PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE] SHORT-TERM FRAGMENTED APPROACHES DON'T WORK.

Be aware that in times of repression, the choice of sector matters. Although Kenyan civil society remains relatively open, there is no doubt that the political and social space to criticize government activities is shrinking. Countries experiencing this closing of space for freedom of expression can be difficult places for NGOs to operate. This is especially true for INGOs, which can be painted as hostile foreign actors.

Nuru Kenya, however, was able to sidestep this issue, reporting no negative interactions with government representatives. It is a perhaps an uncomfortable truth that in these cases, the choice of sector matters: NGOs focused on economic development, such as Nuru, find operating in difficult political environments far easier than those involved in monitoring corruption or human rights violations. A Nuru International board member from Kenya confirmed that even their relatively uncontroversial work came under government scrutiny, and that the government council "was against the [internationals] working here."

Planning and implementation is a process of transition. Teams interested in long-term project success should, from the very beginning, plan for sustainability with the communities involved. This helps make the vision for the future clear to both international and local staff, and it psychologically

prepares local staff to take over management.

As one senior Nuru Kenya staff reflected: "You're getting into a relationship that you know will end one day. Have exit in mind. Plan for it from the beginning." From its inception, Nuru incorporated sustainability into its planning, building a scaffold of international staff around local leadership, holding technical trainings, building capabilities through its Leadership Program, and maintaining consistent messaging about the forthcoming transition in order to psychologically prepare local staff for ownership. Thus, staff exit transitions should be gradual, jointly held, and rigorous.

Provide room for failure and learning. Nuru International's experience mentoring Nuru Kenya staff in preparation for the 2015 turnover shows the value in providing room for failure. Nuru Kenya staff were allowed the freedom to experiment without fear of sanction, which built leadership and staff capacity, and encouraged a culture of innovation. A quote from the Nuru Kenya's Country Director illustrates this point: "I think [donors say], 'We're investing too much in this, why should we allow failure?' Circumstances that are unforeseen, sometimes you need to let things happen for you to be able to address them. Be liberal. Be open minded. Be risk-takers. Donors who are risk-takers will usually be more impactful. Because they give people room to figure it out. They give them room to practice what they want. You're not training people to spend your money. "You need to spend our money this way and that way, look at the burn rates…" When I was working for USAID that was the word. What are your burn rates? What are the allowables, blah blah blah. When you give people room to figure it out, it's not just about the bandwidth. Maybe we don't even need to spend that much money, but we need to know how to spend a little money and in an impactful way. Maybe we need to know how to have systems that are efficient and cost effective in the long run. Maybe we need to know what we have, how do we evolve what we have, develop what we have, turning things around. Change what we have."

A strategy of encouraging grantee experimentation can also be an effective risk management technique: by making several small approaches, donors can more easily identify successful, context-specific interventions that can then be adapted and scaled up, just as Nuru was able to do with its system of cooperatives. Such an approach can dovetail with adaptive management strategies that are based on real-time monitoring data, including, for instance, USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) Framework.

Allow accountability to flow both ways. Aid donors are traditionally good at holding their staff and local partners accountable, with Nuru Kenya's Country Director summing this relationship up as: "Why did you spend this? Spend it this way, and don't do this and don't do that." Donors, she said, can be "very rigid." At the same time donors should allow their local partners to hold them accountable as well. As the Country Director said, donors should ask themselves: "Are they being receptive to feedback? Are they giving room to be held accountable? Are donors receptive to feedback not just from their implementers, but by the communities in which the implementers work?"

The Nuru case study shows that two-way accountability flows can improve the relationship between donors and implementers, local partners, and the communities in which they work. Nuru Kenya leadership reported that Nuru International "… values feedback from the community. It's not just us going back to [Nuru International] to tell [them] 'yeah, things are OK, we spent this amount of money, we did it this way, we have an urge to do this and this,' but it's also them now looking at the community, how is the community valuing Nuru, how is the community perceiving themselves, and what is the progress that has been made." These feedback loops, whether operationalized through post-activity questionnaires, after-action reviews, or other techniques, make local staff and communities feel more involved, thereby eliciting a stronger sense of ownership. Furthermore, they generate a standard of accountability that improves trust, encourages community buy-in, and ultimately contributes to long-term sustainability.

Learn how to let go. The Nuru case study shows the importance of sharing, and then surrendering, ownership to local partners and communities. This can be a difficult proposition for international organizations with years of experience and technical expertise, especially when local staff experience challenges. Nuru Kenya's Country Director described the process thus: "You need to throw us in the fire for us to get ourselves out. We realize we are getting burned, and we need to step out of the fire … Let's experience the uncomfortable things. And that will trigger us to reality and proactivity. And next time

we will be proactive about it, if we find ourselves in the same situation, we will think ahead and not do the same thing as before … Those meetings in 2013, 2014, were so stormy. "The farmers are suffering!" And I'm like, "Yeah, suffering is good." "We need to cushion them!" and I'm like, "No, let them realize it's a problem. And it's their problem. And they need to be responsible about getting their solution to their problem." And they're like, "She's being so ruthless." And I'm like, "I need to be." So I think donors need to be – they're not God. No one here is God, and you can't do a miracle all of a sudden and things turn around. Let's go through the thing together … When we get rained on, we are together in the rain."

Sustainability plans are becoming ubiquitous for international development programs, but it can be difficult for organizations to execute them successfully. Learning to let go involves donors being willing to follow through on sustainability plans and truly test the ability of local organizations to succeed once they transition.

ENDNOTES

1. The full turnover to the local team can be distinguished from the "Financial Exit" of Nuru International from Nuru Kenya, which is expected to take place in 2020. For the purposes of this report, SAS researchers did not focus on the financial aspect of the exit, except where relevant to the full turnover to the local team.
2. CIA, "The World Factbook: Kenya." Available: www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ke.html World Bank, "Kenya." https://data.worldbank.org/country/kenya
3. African Development Bank Group, "Kenya Economic Outlook." www.afdb.org/en/countries/east-africa/kenya/kenya-economic-outlook/
4. CIA, "The World Factbook, Country Comparison: Distribution of Family Income – GINI Index." www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2172rank.html
5. WFP, "Kenya." www.wfp.org/countries/kenya
6. Pilar Domingo and Leni Wild, "Will Kenya's 2010 Constitution Work for Women and Children?" ODI Project Briefing No. 74, May 2012. Available: www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7677.pdf
7. Development Initiatives, "Kenya." http://data.devinit.org/country/kenya
8. The areas where Nuru works are highly marginalized: the Kuria, who make up less than 1 percent of the country, are one of the smallest minorities in Kenya, and have just one member in parliament.
9. OECD, "Kenya: Aid at a Glance Charts." www.oecd.org/countries/kenya/aid-at-a-glance.htm
10. USAID, "Kenya." www.usaid.gov/kenya
11. USAID, "2016 CSO Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa (CSOSI)," 2016. Available: www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/2016_Africa_CSOSI_-_508.pdf
12. Central Bank of Kenya, "2016 Annual Report," 2016. Available: www.centralbank.go.ke/reports/cbk-reports-and-financial-statements/
13. Summary from the NGOs Co-ordination Board. www.ngobureau.or.ke/
14. Naomi Njoroge. "Socio-economic Factors Influencing Implementation of Njaa Marufuku Kenya Programme for Sustainable Food Security in Makuyu Division, Murang'a County," University of Nairobi, 2012. Available: http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/7342
15. Hon Millie Odhiambo, "The Role of Civil Society in Kenya Today." Available: http://crecokenya.org/new/attachments/article/172/speechmil.pdf
16. Freedom House, "Kenya." https://freedomhouse.org/country/kenya
17. Abdullahi Abdi, "Kenya, Again, Represses Civil Society," Human Rights Watch, 7 November 2017. www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/07/kenya-again-represses-civil-society
18. Sara Jerving, "Legal Limbo Leaves Kenya Civil Society Vulnerable to Targeting," Devex, 11 October 2017. www.devex.com/news/legal-limbo-leaves-kenya-civil-society-vulnerable-to-targeting-91059

19. Clár Ní Chonghaile and Carla Kweifio-Okai, "Has Kenya's NGO Crackdown Affected You?" Guardian, 17 December 2014. www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/dec/17/kenya-ngo-crackdown-terrorism-al-shabaab; Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2018: Kenya." https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/kenya; Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Kenya at Critical Juncture, Leaders Must Act Responsibly – Zeid," 15 August 2017. www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21972&LangID=E
20. William Ikutha Maema, W. I. "Shifting Ground: Which Way for NGOs in Kenya," IKA, 25 September 2017. www.ikm.co.ke/news/articles/2017/SHIFTING-GROUND-WHICH-WAY-FOR-NGOs-IN-KENYA.html
21. USAID, "2016 CSO Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa (CSOSI)," 2016. Available: www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/2016_Africa_CSOSI_-_508.pdf
22. Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom. New York: Anchor Books, 1999.
23. Amy Sherwood, Nuru Kenya Exit Debrief and Best Practices Manual, December 2015. Nuru International, "The Leadership Program: Manual 2.0," p. 10. Available: http://www.nuruinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Nuru-Leadership-Program-Manual_v2.pdf
24. Nuru International and Nuru Kenya promotional brochure.
25. Muzungu is the term used across East Africa to refer to a white person, and can be used with a neutral, appreciative, or pejorative tone, depending on the context. It can also mean someone who speaks English.
26. Nuru International, "The Leadership Program: Manual 2.0," p. 20. Available: http://www.nuruinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Nuru-Leadership-Program-Manual_v2.pdf
27. Servant Leader Institute, "What Is Servant Leadership?" www.servantleadershipinstitute.com/what-is-servant-leadership-1/

This document was made possible by the generous support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this case study are the sole responsibility of Peace Direct, CDA Collaborative Learning and Search for Common Ground, and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Stopping As Success: Transitioning to locally led development.

www.stoppingassuccess.org

AUGUST 2018