

STOPPING AS SUCCESS: TRANSITIONING TO LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

ISSUE PAPER: CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN RESPONSIBLE TRANSITIONS

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DISCLAIMER

This document was developed by Grace Boone from CDA Collaborative Learning and Isabella Jean and Kiely Barnard-Webster, Independent as part of Stopping as Success: Transitioning to Locally Led Development (SAS), a collaborative learning project in partnership with Peace Direct and Search for Common Ground, funded by USAID Office of Local Sustainability. It is part of a collection of documents that should be considered initial and partial findings of the project. These documents are written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across 20 case studies. Each Issue Paper represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people at the time when it was written.

These documents do not represent a final product of the project. While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project's finding cannot be made from a single case study or Issue Paper.

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For background information on the collaborative learning process and responsible transitions, please refer to the Stopping As Success website: <http://www.stoppingassuccess.org/>

ACRONYMS

CDA - CDA Collaborative Learning

COP - Chief of Party

CSOs - Civil society organizations

GLID - Great Lakes Inkingi Development (GLID)

INGOs - International NGOs

MCC - Mennonite Church Committee (MCC)

M&E - Monitoring and evaluation

NGOs - Non-governmental organizations

SAS - Stopping As Success: Transitioning to Locally Led Development

TB - Tuberculosis

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

WV - World Vision

This document was produced with INGOs, NGOs/CSOs, and donors in mind, however the findings presented here are broadly applicable to other stakeholders in the development sector.

INTRODUCTION

Stopping As Success: Transitioning to Locally Led Development (SAS) is a collaborative learning project led by Peace Direct, CDA Collaborative Learning (CDA), and Search for Common Ground (Search), funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The consortium seeks to derive lessons about responsible international transitions and create practical resources for international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), NGOs, civil society organizations (CSOs), and donors by conducting 20 different case studies of INGO transitions in 13 countries: Thailand, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Timor-Leste, Bangladesh, Burundi, Kenya, Republic of Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, India, the Philippines, and Morocco. Based on cross-case analysis, the SAS team identified the topic of ‘capacity development’ as critical to responsible INGO transitions.¹

As a consortium, we want to recognize that the topic of capacity development has been quite thoroughly discussed in the wider discourse and may, at this point, feel like a tired subject. However, we have seen capacity development come up as a theme throughout almost all of the cases and in all regional review meetings, demonstrating that it is an essential component to responsible transitions. We hope to bring a new angle to the discourse, particularly through the distinction of joint-learning and mutual capacity strengthening.²

Capacity development has taken many forms throughout the case studies documented by the SAS project. In some cases, it included skill development through professional development and training workshops. In others, it involved team building or personal development (confidence building, empowerment). Whatever shape it takes, change and growth of individual knowledge and skills for individuals, organizations, and communities are at the core of capacity development.³ In order to make sense of how capacity development impacts

responsible transitions, this Issue Paper will discuss language, analyze the case study evidence, discuss power dynamics, and conclude with considerations for INGOs supporting local and national partners’ and staff capacities during and after a transition.

LANGUAGE MATTERS

WHY CAPACITY ‘DEVELOPMENT’ OR ‘STRENGTHENING’?

Historically, the term “capacity building” came into use in the 1970s and became popular in the 1990s in response to the perceived shortcomings in the development sector that had been providing assistance to recipient countries for over 40 years.⁴ Later, the preference for “capacity development” or “capacity strengthening” arose in response to capacity building being seen as paternalistic. SAS rejects the premise that there is capacity to be “built” but rather that communities need support to develop or strengthen human and social capital that already exists. Therefore, capacity development, or strengthening, is SAS’ preferred language.

DEFINING LOCAL

The term ‘local’ has different connotations in different contexts and is a contested term. In the context of SAS’s research, ‘local organization’ is used to refer to CSOs or NGOs in the global South that are undergoing a process of transition in their partnership with an INGO. This encompasses organizations that work at the local and national level. The broader term ‘local actors’ recognizes the diversity of this group, which can include individuals, communities, newly created NGOs or CSOs, NGOs that have devolved from an international federation, or local and national governments.

A FRAMEWORK FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN RESPONSIBLE TRANSITIONS

“ A responsible exit is giving sufficient time to people, showing the communities what they were able to accomplish, and helping them to become resilient and responsible.

SEGAMIL program director⁵

“Capacity development encapsulates different ways that people unleash and enhance their abilities. In most of the SAS cases, it is clear that capacity development activities were prioritized throughout the transition process. In some cases, staff decided to create a local or national entity and took the lead in the capacity development process; in other cases, INGOs played a strong role in shaping the activities. For example, in the BRIDGE Georgia case,⁶ the staff of the spin-off organization BRIDGE were given access to Oxfam’s knowledge management system which houses countless research publications, databases, M&E data sets, proposals and other relevant documents. Much of this ‘treasure trove’ of information was gathered in contexts around the world where Oxfam has worked, including in Georgia. The gesture of opening up the knowledge bank to former staff who are now continuing Oxfam’s legacy in Georgia was recognized as an important part of Oxfam’s rights-based development value system. In the Great Lakes Inkingi Development (GLID) Burundi case,⁷ CARE and GLID, the NGO, created a specific capacity development plan to address the gaps in experience and expertise that were identified during the transition. In the Nuru Kenya case study,⁸ the actual “how” process for transitioning was created between Nuru International, the INGO, and local and national staff, complete with milestones, assessments, and trainings.

Due to the wide variety of capacity development activities and process we have seen in the case evidence; this Issue Paper will use Pact’s Capacity

Development Framework⁹ that outlines the range of capacities that can be developed:

1. Technical: Specific skills
2. Operational: Potential to implement tasks
3. Influencing: Ability to alter the environment
4. Systemic: Development of systems and structures, long-term planning
5. Adaptive: Potential to react to changes in the environment

This Issue Paper primarily focuses on technical, operational, and systemic capacities as those were the most prominent aspects featured in the case study evidence.

TECHNICAL CAPACITIES

SAS cases include many descriptions of capacity development activities and how these ultimately contributed to transitions. Of all the different types, technical capacities is perhaps the most straightforward. Technical capacities are specific skills that were developed that helped support a responsible transition. In the cases, many technical capacities were prioritized, including: financial management, resource mapping, governance, proposal writing, monitoring and evaluation, and data management.

In the Mennonite Church Committee (MCC) India case study,¹⁰ MCC had a really unique partnership approach that centered listening, so they were better placed to support, fill gaps, and create networking opportunities for their partners. Their listening approach allowed them to provide ongoing technical capacity development as needed. Additionally, they host an annual week-long workshop to train their partners in relevant, needed skills and provide a space for partners to network with one another.

OPERATIONAL CAPACITIES

There is a lot of overlap with technical and operational capacities, but operational capacities are distinctive in supporting people’s ability to implement tasks.

In some instances, these may include specific skill development (technical capacities) but SAS case evidence demonstrated instances where there were distinctive operational capacities, including: operational management, strategic planning, relationship building, networking, and value formation. Interestingly, skills focused on inter- and intra-personal development, like value formation and relationship building, were noted in various cases as being the most valuable and important aspects of capacity development. Before transitioning out of the Philippines, World Vision (WV)¹¹ strategically focused on ensuring the various groups of local and national actors were bonded as a team to ensure sustainability of the NGO. One volunteer remembers: “It was good that before World Vision left us, we were built as a team. We were trained in how to work together – we had loads of capacity development, leadership training, team building activities.”

In some cases, these relationship building activities served as a way to break down power differentials between expatriate and local or national staff. In the Ikibiri Coalition Burundi case,¹² social team building activities centered around an atmosphere of sharing and celebrating certain Burundian cultural events together. Due to the investment of staff and the Chief of Party (COP), these team building activities broke down power dynamics and created lasting relationships between people with different backgrounds who had not had intentional encounters with each other in the past due to the ethnic conflict in Burundi. The evidence of the relational component of capacity development in the cases has suggested that building relationships and empowering people individually and as a group boosts local development actors’ competency in both operational and programmatic realms and helps sustain the organization after the INGO has transitioned.

SYSTEMIC CAPACITIES

In addition to technical and operational capacities, systemic capacities were also developed across the cases. Systemic capacities support long-term planning and the development of systems and structures to ensure the local entity that remains post-transition is set up to succeed once the INGO has transitioned. SAS case evidence shows examples of systemic capacity development both from the INGO and the local and national actors.

Accompaniment and partnership relationship are what has helped make Belun stronger. The experience of working together, learning by doing, then going out and applying those factors were a recipe for why Belun has been so successful.”

Belun founder (Timor-Leste)

In multiple cases, local or national staff heard of the impending INGO transition and decided to get involved in the transition process, developing their capacity and that of the INGO in the process. In the SOS Colombia case,¹³ although the decision to transition came from SOS International’s headquarters, the national staff in Colombia decided to prepare for a day with no funding and lead the transition process internally. They made various programmatic, operational, and financial shifts that centered long-term sustainability and resulted in the organization growing immensely throughout the transition. As one staff member notes: “We are growing every day. In 2012 we had 400 staff members... Now we have near 1,000.” To facilitate this growth, a new Strategy Team was created to increase partnerships, advise the overall organizational strategy, and increase monitoring and evaluation skills and systems development during the transition. In doing so, SOS Colombia considered the development of systems and structures throughout the transition, leading to a very successful INGO transition.

In the CARE Morocco case,¹⁴ it was the approach that CARE France took to develop the managerial capacity, specifically the board and leadership of CARE Morocco, that proved to be critical in terms of the organization’s development. In this case, French members slowly transitioned out of the board and were replaced by Moroccan members over the course of several years, which allowed CARE Morocco to mature as an organization in terms of their systematic capacity. It was that maturity that eventually enabled them to confidently apply for membership within the CARE confederation, which in turn, allowed for “the local to influence the global”, as the case study notes.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN TRANSITIONS

In addition to different types of capacities, this paper will look at three distinct ways that these capacities manifested in the case evidence:

- 1) local or national entity's programmatic capacity,
- 2) local or national entity's organizational capacity, and
- 3) INGO capacity development.

There is overlap between 1 and 2, however, the distinction often depends on if the transition was a programmatic or organizational one.¹⁵ When a program was being transitioned to local/national actors, the INGO tended to focus on training the local/national staff to lead the program post-transition. In organizational transitions, the INGO tended to focus on ensuring the local/national staff were ready to lead the newly established local entity post-transition.

LOCAL OR NATIONAL ENTITY'S PROGRAMMATIC CAPACITY

In this paper, the programmatic capacity highlights the capacity development activities that were implemented by INGOs in order to **support the local or national entity's programmatic components post-transition**. Throughout the cases, there are various examples of capacity development activities that focus on building programmatic capacity, such as skills training, mentoring between INGO and local or national staff, team building, value formation training, and more. In the Iloilo City TB Task Force Philippines case, WV trained the Federation leaders in filling out necessary government forms and other documentation, record management and referral which are essential for the programmatic aspects of the organization to continue. WV also focused on value formation and team building activities which a former program officer notes: "We included values formation training. We invited a pastor to bring out the values in us. Our trainees felt empowered – like they have a responsibility because they are part of a community."

LOCAL OR NATIONAL ENTITY'S ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

In almost every case, INGOs focused on organizational capacity development to **ensure the local or national**

entity that is created during the transition is set up to operate successfully post-transition. Some of these capacities include leadership training, joint planning between INGO and local staff, mentoring, and access to the INGO's resource and management systems. In the Belun Timor-Leste case,¹⁶ there was a capacity development plan that had clear goals, a mid-term assessment and final evaluation. In order to ensure a sustainable transition, a Timorese staff was paired with an international staff who occupied a key management position. This "learning by doing" approach allowed for decisions to be made collaboratively and, when the capacity development plan was actualized, allowed for a responsible INGO phase out to a locally led entity.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL OR MORAL SUPPORT

A surprising, yet salient component of organizational capacity development was the importance of psycho-social or moral support, such as empowerment and confidence building, in order for local actors to feel confident to lead their own organization post-transition. In the Nuru Kenya case, the case writer highlights how local community members often felt inferior to *mzungu*.¹⁷ One Regional Manager for Nuru Kenya, the NGO, explains: "When a Black person sees a *mzungu*, he thinks he has a lot of money and all the solutions to solve their problems." Consequently, Nuru International focused on working with the community to ensure that they felt confident and empowered to lead the organization after the *mzungu*s left. Overall, "the expatriate-Kenyan dual hierarchy, capacity building, constant and consistent exit messaging, and the gradual transition of responsibilities to local staff [meant that] Nuru had built capacity to the point that expatriate and local staff both felt comfortable with a Nuru International exit."

Bangkok regional review meeting participants shared how the lack of confidence of local actors can be a barrier to capacity development and locally led transitions more broadly. A mental shift that reframes the inherent power of local actors and NGOs outside of INGO involvement was proposed as a way to counteract this barrier. As one participant shared, "looking inward [more locally] may have more collective value than searching outwardly [towards INGOs]."¹⁸

INGO CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

INGO capacity development, also called joint-learning and mutual capacity strengthening,¹⁹ explains that although INGOs provide numerous resources and support for local actors, **local actors also provide knowledge and resources for INGOs to develop their technical capacity, to learn from pilot testing and to expand their geographic and cultural expertise** before, during and after transitions.

In the Kenyan case, it is evident that local actors not only shaped the transition but also taught Nuru International invaluable lessons about partnering and transitioning in other contexts. Kenyan locals pushed Nuru International to focus more directly on their needs, shaping the entire organization. The case study notes: “It was the Kenyan staff who advocated

for leadership at the community level, instead of the organizational level, to produce true sustainability and local ownership. The Kenyan national staff pushed Nuru to focus on community needs, the eventual community takeover, and the end goal of community management through the cooperatives model.” In this way, local and national staff helped develop Nuru International’s transition strategy and organizational model to better build their capacity for transitions and programming in the future.

After the Bosnian micro-finance organization was founded in 2000,²⁰ two Mercy Corps staff stayed on the Board (to this date) and continued learning about the operational success of Partner, which was the first micro-finance organization in Bosnia. Mercy Corps hoped that their Board Members would learn what made Partner so successful in order to replicate the results in similar micro-finance programs in other countries.

POWER DYNAMICS IN CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

As with all aspects of transitions, power dynamics showed up in capacity development activities. In our case evidence, very few cases show that local actors were involved in determining how capacity development activities would be structured, that decision usually came from headquarters or national level, leaving local staff outside of decision-making roles.

In the GLID Burundi case, interviews with local entities and other actors highlighted aspects of unequal power (between INGOs and local and national actors) and how capacity development activities can play a role in that dynamic. In this context, local and national actors shared that INGOs and international agencies provide capacity ‘building’ activities that are tailored to particular skills within particular systems which inherently maintains power inequities rather than promoting independence. A number of actors highlight that INGOs are not interested in supporting certain types of capacity where local or national organizations could result in them becoming competitors.

In Bangladesh,²¹ an interviewee shared that while some INGOs have dedicated time and effort

incorporating a local entity’s capacity development into programs, it is rare that there is any follow up to ensure that the abilities remain after projects ends. In this case, it was argued that capacity development can be an essential antidote to the power imbalance, if activities are established collaboratively, implemented long-term (not just in 3-year program cycles), and abilities remained after the INGO transitioned.

In the Nuru Kenya case, Kenyan staff were not only involved in planning milestones, assessments, and trainings, but feedback mechanisms were built into the process which allowed staff to reflect on and adapt to activities as needed. This early expectation management by Nuru International directed focus at the outset on designing capacity development activities that provided the most effective support possible, with the Nuru Kenya team at the center of design and decision-making. As one senior manager from Kenya noted: “From the beginning, when Nuru International came to Kenya, there was that awareness [of the exit] ... This was not going to be Nuru International: they were going to leave the local staff with the project.” In this way, capacity development was essential to the entire project because handing the organization over was the end goal.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR INGOS

According to the case evidence, transitions are rarely planned from the beginning of country presence and programming. Most cases showed that transitions were triggered by financial changes, causing INGOs to plan transitions amidst programming, which can be a challenging task. Therefore, the SAS consortium has identified themes of what INGOs did or did not do in regard to capacity development, and how those actions affected the transition. Those lessons are compiled below.

- **Local staff and actors are not merely on the receiving end of capacity development but are sources of knowledge, resources, and skills that are vital for INGOs.** In the Iloilo City TB Task Force Philippines case study, staff and volunteers had built such deep relationships that learning continued beyond programming. As the case study notes: “The relationship between program staff and volunteers remained even after the project, with the former readily accepting invitations to be trainers and resource persons. They also continue to communicate informally, updating each other of news and developments.” Although the SAS consortium recognizes joint learning and mutual capacity strengthening,²² the evidence suggests that INGOs are not actively seeking local actors as advisors or sources of capacity development, ignoring the knowledge and skills to be gained from local actors in each transition.
- **Involve local staff, partners and other relevant stakeholders in the decision-making and agenda setting.** In the SAS cases, very few noted joint planning between local staff and the INGO. When joint planning is not present, there are power dynamics that can go unaddressed because

local actors are not a part of the decision-making or agenda setting. In the Nuru Kenya case, this joint planning allowed for collaboration, feedback, and targeted capacity development that met what the staff expressed they needed for the transition. Language barriers and other obstacles for local partners and actors should also be considered and addressed.

- **Training is not enough.** During the regional review meeting, participants noted the sector bias towards trainings because they the most prominent type of capacity development. However, participants also shared that training is usually not contextualized and is often expensive to attend. Other alternatives to consider are on-the-job accompaniment, long-term capacity development for sustainable organizational development, or learning processes that include practice, reflection, and adaptation.
- Ensure that **feedback mechanisms** are in place so that capacity development activities can be adapted based on local actors’ and staff feedback. In the Kenyan case, Nuru International developed the capacity development activities alongside local staff and set up feedback mechanisms at each stage of the transition to ensure that the programs adapted in response to staff’s needs.
- During the regional review meeting, a **SWOT analysis**²³ was suggested as a way to determine what needs the staff of the local entity may need post-transition. This, in addition to the feedback mechanisms, is a tangible way to ensure capacity development activities are designed and implemented to meet the needs of local staff and other actors.
- **Psycho-social capacity development**, such as moral support, coaching, confidence building, empowerment and team building, should not be underestimated. In some cases, this support was valued more, in retrospect, than technical workshops on financial management. As noted in the BRIDGE Georgia case, “moral, psychological, and knowledge-sharing support can be more important than financial during the transition.”
- **Consider how to support the local or national entity post-transition.** Even after a transition, it is possible for the INGO to continue supporting the

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“Training from INGOs is often a blanket package, not contextualized, often irrelevant for local contexts.”

Bangkok Regional Evidence Review Participant

work of the local or national entity. In the Thailand case, there was a need to support the new NGO with navigating reputational risks in a complicated national context, which CARE USA did by allowing Raks Thai to continue relationships with CARE

donors in Thailand, and by continuing to use CARE's name and brand during the transition process when it was strategic to do so. INGOs should consider asking the local entity what support might be most needed and assess how the INGO can fill that need.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

To conclude, capacity development is an important piece of INGO transitions, to both local entities and INGOs navigating these transition processes, and it may not always conform to normative ideas of 'capacity development' activities. Although this Issue Paper analyzed capacity development amidst a transition, there is still more analysis to do on this topic, particularly in regard to joint-learning and mutual capacity strengthening. The following questions were not covered in depth in this Issue Paper and may be areas for further consideration.

1 This Issue Paper assumes that local and national actors develop INGO capacity throughout the transition process. In the Partner Microcredit Foundation Bosnia and Herzegovina case, the INGO still has a Board Member on the local entity's board, which allows the INGO to learn not only about the transition process but also about authentic partnerships. Although this is one example, it is less clear how local and national actors develop INGOs' capacity or how INGOs integrate that learning into their organizational model across cases. With this in mind, how do local and national actors develop the capacities of INGOs throughout transitions?

2 Some INGOs that were able to transition "successfully" in the SAS cases have struggled to do so elsewhere and therefore attribute the SAS case to a "secret sauce." This implies that INGOs are not learning enough about transition processes in a way that allows them to replicate similar transitions elsewhere. With this in mind, what have INGOs done to learn about their transition process after the transition has already been done? If anything, how has that learning been integrated into their transition strategies and overall partnerships and country program model? And, how can capacity development activities during the transition be designed with that learning in mind?

3 From several cases, it is clear local/ stakeholders were not always consulted or asked to play a central role in transition conversations and decision-making. What is more, in one case when the INGO built local and national actors' emotional capacity (e.g. confidence building) to lead a local entity it was noted as being more effective than any sort of technical skill building. This begs the question: are INGOs thinking outside of the paradigm when it comes to capacity development and inclusive processes for supporting future local or national entities? Are INGOs considering power imbalances and who is included and who is not when deciding how a transition will unfold – and what needs are being prioritized? Lastly, INGOs may ask themselves what incentives are guiding the transition; if one of the motivations of transition is to support an independent local or national entity, for example, are there ways they might integrate emotional support mechanisms during the transition process?

END NOTES

1. Learn more on the SAS website: <http://www.stoppingassuccess.org/>
2. See the Guidelines for Joint-Learning and Mutual Capacity Strengthening (forthcoming) for detailed information on the topic.
3. CADRI, Capacity Development, <https://www.cadri.net/en/areas-we-work/capacity-development>
4. European Parliament, Briefing: Understanding capacity-building/capacity development: A core concept of development policy, April 2017, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599411/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)599411_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599411/EPRS_BRI(2017)599411_EN.pdf)
5. ECADIS Guatemala case study.
6. BRIDGE Georgia case study.
7. Great Lakes Inkingi Development Burundi case study.
8. Nuru Kenya case study.
9. Better Evaluation, Evaluation capacity development results, <https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/themes/capacitydevelopment>
10. Mennonite Church Committee India case study.
11. Iloilo City TB Task Force Philippines case study.
12. Ikibiri Coalition Burundi case study.
13. SOS Colombia case study.
14. CARE Morocco case study.
15. Refer to the SAS Synthesis Report for a detailed definition of programmatic and operational transitions.
16. Belun Timor-Leste case study.
17. Meaning white, foreign people.
18. The Sidekick Manifesto was shared in the capacity development session of the Bangkok regional review meeting. For those working in contexts that are not their own, it is a good reminder that we are only visitors: <http://sidekickmanifesto.org/>
19. Read the Guidelines for Joint-Learning and Mutual Capacity Strengthening (forthcoming) on how to intentionally develop joint learning before, during and after transitions.
20. Partner Microcredit Foundation, Bosnia and Herzegovina case study.
21. CREL program Bangladesh case study.
22. See the Guidelines for Joint-Learning and Mutual Capacity Strengthening (forthcoming)
23. See this guide for how to conduct a SWOT analysis: <https://articles.bplans.com/how-to-perform-swot-analysis/>

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