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STOPPING AS SUCCESS:
TRANSITIONING TO LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S TRANSITION TO PLAN INDIA

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CONTEXT

India has experienced rapid GDP growth in recent decades, with the World Bank estimating it will be the world's fastest-growing economy by 2021. However, inequality levels remain high, as increased wealth has not been equally spread across society, nor between states. According to World Bank standards, 659 million Indians (about half the country's population) are poor, with 176 million people living in extreme poverty. In response to this, an ever-increasing number of civil society organizations (CSOs), alongside international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), have sought to address the country's long-term systemic challenges. In 2015, the Indian Express reported that there were 3.1 million NGOs in the country.

At the same time, India has experienced an evolving funding landscape. While there has been an increase in private sector funding and individual philanthropic giving, there has been a concurrent decline in foreign aid contributions due to a government crackdown on NGOs for not complying with legislation. This changing funding landscape has affected Indian civil society, providing both challenges and opportunities.

This case study explores the transition from Plan International India's office – an international entity – into Plan India, which became a locally led organization in 2004. It focuses on the internal transition Plan India underwent and the components making it a success. The report draws on data from ten semi-structured key informant interviews with Plan India staff, as well as interviews with one of the organization's partners at the time of transition.

STORY OF TRANSITION

Plan International registered in India in 1979 as an international organization, initially working as a traditional sponsorship charity across a number of states, with its main office in the capital of New Delhi. Although the Country Director of Plan International's India office came from outside the country, most of its staff were local. Plan International India had to work through local partner organizations in order to be allowed to deal directly with communities, which it successfully did for many years. By 1996, when Plan International (India Chapter) was registered under the Indian Societies Registration Act as a local NGO, Plan India International had grown to employ approximately 100 staff.

Nonetheless, the local entity lay dormant until four key factors prompted the transition of Plan International India into Plan India. First, a national legislative change regulating the receipt of foreign aid meant INGOs needed to set up Indian entities in order to directly implement programs, raise funds, and conduct advocacy work. Second, changes in the global development discourse meant a shift in power from the Global North to the Global South was receiving serious consideration. Third, a vision for Plan India was presented in which it would become a full, self-sustaining member of Plan International, capable of reaching new sponsorship areas. Fourth, Plan India set itself the goal of building an Indian identity, strategically growing its presence through both marketing and advocacy in in order to become an institute of national importance.

This transition has already had positive impacts, with Plan India proudly sharing in interviews that they are currently working in close partnership with the government to help formulate national policies. They have, for example, recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the government as part of the latter's Aspirational Districts Programme, something which would not have been possible had it not transitioned into a local entity.

KEY LESSONS

Ensure complete alignment of two organizational leaders. The alignment of a newly appointed National Director who worked for a year alongside the international Country Director ensured a **smooth transition process, and that the two entities felt like one.**

Set up a new Country Management Team (CMT) with prior transition-related experience. Several of new CMT had prior experience of transitioning an INGO to a local entity, which meant they were aware of the possible challenges faced and how best to manage them.

Appoint a Transition Manager. Crucially, the Transition Manager – who was trusted and well respected – was not part of the CMT, rendering them a "neutral party" in the eyes of junior staff.

Streamline back- and front-end processes. A systematic listing of all tasks and a step-by-step approach was employed, which helped ensure a smooth and efficient transition.

Emphasize teamwork. Throughout, the CMT emphasized that teamwork was paramount, employing an internal motto of "Together Everyone Achieved More (TEAM)."

Create a dynamic and active board. A strong, local, and independent board was established, their skillsets and dedication to providing mentorship proving to be highly useful.

Make use of cross-country learning. Plan India's National Director communicated regularly with the transition team in Colombia, providing the two entities with an opportunity to exchange ideas and support each other.

Communicate the need for transition. Transitioning to a local entity was communicated as a positive challenge, with a people-centric communication strategy employed. This included regular transition team meetings and updates, as well as creating multi-channel, staff-specific communication tools in order to mitigate potential anxieties.

Create a positive narrative of change. The CMT and transition team considered their words carefully, with communication delivered in a positive tone in order to cultivate confidence and encourage people to align themselves with the transition. Furthermore, partners were assured their work and terms of engagement would be unaffected by the transition.

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