

STOPPING AS SUCCESS: TRANSITIONING TO LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

FACILITATING EFFECTIVE INGO TRANSITIONS THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT CYCLE : PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR INGOS WORKING WITH LOCAL PARTNERS

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This document is part of a suite of practical resources to support increased local leadership of development initiatives, through responsible transitions of international partners. Evidence informing the guidance is from the global Stopping As Success program. More information available at

<https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/>

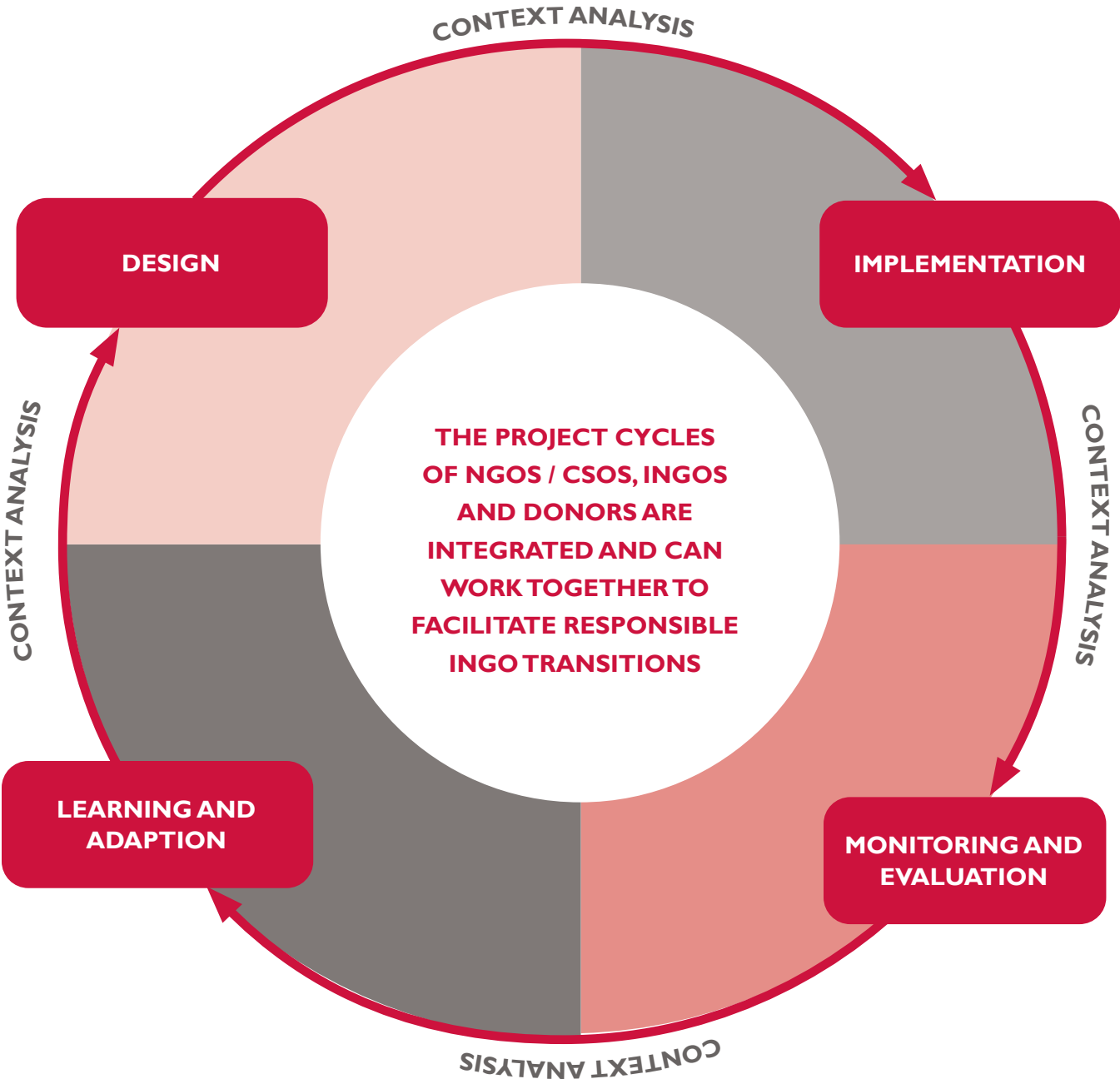
INTRODUCTION

Many INGOs see the significant gap between their desire to foster sustainable local development and the knowledge and processes for actually doing so. The Stopping As Success (SAS) [literature review](#), [online consultation](#), [case research](#), and regional workshops found again and again that INGO staff working at different levels and contexts are looking for guidance on how to plan for, implement, and learn from good transitions. This resource shares SAS lessons, including specific questions asked by INGOs throughout the project cycle and illustrative

examples from the 20 SAS case studies and feedback during practitioner review workshops.

SAS also recognizes that social change is complex and requires systemic and long-term approaches that are not fully captured by any project cycle. Some of these approaches are part of actions by donors or local/national NGOs/CSOs. As such, this resource can be used along with the accompanying resources for those groups. [SAS cases and issue papers](#) provide further insight about adaptations in diverse contexts and partnerships.

NGO/CSO, INGO, DONOR PROJECT CYCLE FOR TRANSITIONS



I. DESIGN PHASE

How INGOs enter a partnership or context is as important as how they transition. And because responsible INGO transitions are significantly informed by how partnerships are framed, investing in the design phase can have significant impact on local leadership.

INGOs can prepare for this phase through considering: **how can we enter into development contexts and partnerships in a responsible way that supports local capacities and leadership?** SAS case evidence shows the benefits of time and resources investments in relationship building and forming partnerships before programming starts.¹ In cases where this is not possible, INGOs can take intentional steps to advocate for and facilitate collaborative project design by involving local and national partners and other interlocutors in the design phase.

Critical reflection for INGOs entering a context

- Were we invited into the context by local or national actors? If yes, why? If no, why are we best placed to engage in this context, with this project? Some organizations like CARE International have commissioned “presence reviews”² to inform organizational decisions about entering and transitioning.
- How do local actors perceive our legitimacy as an external actor?
- What is our value add? How can we amplify instead of duplicate efforts, or divert resources from capable local or national groups?
- How long do we plan on staying in the context? What criteria and locally determined indicators will help us make the decision to transition?
 - Get to know the aspirations of local/national partners or potential partners through existing relationships and intentional outreach.³ Brainstorm, independently and alongside local partners, other roles we INGOs could play to support local development goals. Further verify through conversation with local/national partners.

Design engagement among INGOs and local/national organizations

- Which local partners will be involved in the design process? How can we best accommodate their participation (e.g., timing of meetings, language)?⁴
- How can our engagement on a specific initiative contribute to local leadership goals? How will those or other partners be involved at every stage of the project?
- If multiple local partners are involved in the project, they may have different levels of engagement in the design phase. Be transparent about why this is (e.g., availability of staff, technical expertise) and how our INGO will be equitable.
 - Share our current thinking about timeframe in this context in order to set clear expectations and begin building trust in the partnership.
 - Identify ways to cultivate leadership of local staff and partners throughout the project.

Think ahead about INGO transition planning

- What kind of post-transition relationship is possible and desired by our organization?
 - How does that compare with potential or identified local partner organizations?
 - What resources and decisions are needed for this relationship to contribute during and after the formal transition?
 - Formulate a transition/exit plan to a local or national entity when writing grant proposals, if possible do this jointly with local partners and adapt based on changes in local and institutional context.
 - From the outset, allocate resources⁵ to support trust and relationship building processes (e.g. team building, where appropriate language training, feedback mechanisms⁶ with partners, mutual capacity strengthening,⁷ etc.). Provide regular opportunities for our staff and local partners to reflect together on the quality of partnership.
- If you do not have the answers to some of these questions, consider investing time and resources to help all partners have confidence in the objectives and ways of working. Conducting joint context analysis and capacity assessments, planning for likely context changes and developing a transition strategy are all examples from SAS cases. Skipping over these steps can bring challenges throughout the project cycle and potentially hinder locally led development.

2. IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

INGOs can advance local leadership objectives by building incremental steps into project implementation and management plans and activities. A starting place to plan for adaptability based on ongoing feedback and consistent communication among our staff and partners. The key question guiding this phase is: **How does intentional implementation and adaptive management relate to better transitions and local leadership?**

Many INGOs told SAS that, during implementation, they learn that the program planned may not be what is most relevant or applicable, especially if local/national stakeholders were not included in the design phase. Case evidence shows flexible programming⁸ that adapts to changes in the local context and feedback from national staff and local partners allows for ownership and more sustainable programming. Many donors understand this and can be flexible if there is good rationale.⁹

Implementation engagement among INGOs and local/national organizations

- What programmatic decision-making can you anticipate the local partner leading? What decisions will you make jointly? What decisions do you need to make with partner input?
- How do local partners interact with the project donor? Some SAS cases noted local/national staff were invited to meetings with key donors and decision-makers, so funding relationships are built before INGO transitions¹¹
 - Assign roles and responsibilities for INGO and local/national staff in anticipation of a responsible transition.
- How will you and local partners communicate with consistency throughout implementation?¹⁰ Some SAS cases include details of INGOs inviting partner organization staff in regular staff meetings where project updates are given and actionable information shared.

Adaptive management considerations

- Do managers and leaders have an effective, consistent communication plan?¹² In one SAS case study, the international director and national director held the same position for a full year before the transition. This demonstrated sound planning and supported a smooth and disruption-free leadership transition.
- What is the process for adapting to a dramatically changed project context? How will you and local partners make decisions?
- How will project assets be accounted for at the end of the project? What are donor requirements and local partner interests? In some case studies, the local entity retained property such as vehicles, furniture, office space, computers, and information technology systems during the transition.¹³
 - Conduct scenario planning using original context analysis information and knowledge of likely or significant risks or opportunities that may emerge during the project timeframe.
 - Ask partners about their interests in systems transfers. In addition to hard assets, local organizations may benefit from software systems for grants management, financial management, databases, human resources, and other crucial operational functions that INGOs can build into handover plans.

Continue to ask partnering questions from the design phase

- What capacity needs did our partners identify and how are we strengthening these? What capacities can our local partners strengthen in our team before we transition?¹⁴
- Who is willing and best placed to lead the organization post-transition?
- What is our communication plan and was it jointly developed?? Transparent and inclusive communication builds trust and is essential to a future transition process.¹⁵
- What processes are in place to ensure the local entity can be financially sustainable after we transition?¹⁶

3. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

INGOs monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are often well established and an important resource for new projects to be accountable and generate information for donors. SAS cases¹⁷ show the value in finding ways for local partners to help shape what is monitored and evaluated. The central question for this phase is thus: **how can the project build shared ownership of M&E approaches to contribute to local leadership?** It is important to note that INGOs and NGOs/CSOs have different needs for M&E information during and after projects.

M&E engagement among INGOs and local/national organizations

What needs do we have for M&E information? What needs do local partners have? What are the overlaps and differences?

- How can we work with local partners to make monitoring and reporting standards culturally appropriate (language, methods, etc.)?
- How can we support easy and accessible M&E plans and practices so local and national partners can contribute (technicalities, time limitations, etc.)?
- How are we defining and measuring success of programs and the readiness for transition to local actors? What indicators are needed to capture

changes in social capital, institutional capacities, and civil society leadership?

- To what extent was developing that criteria inclusive of local and national stakeholders and actors? Are we using locally determined indicators? If not significantly, what can be done to integrate their perspective?

→ Identify what M&E data will be most relevant during the project for adaptive management, accountability to communities and others,

donor advocacy, or other uses, versus after the project related to understanding impact and communicating capacity or expertise.

→ Consider what the local/national partner's role is in the evaluation and how to learn about the outcomes and long-term impact of both the program and the transition.

→ Jointly set success measures and monitoring methods.

INGO-led advocacy with donors for M&E enabling of local leadership

- What donor advocacy can you do to create appropriate M&E and reporting approaches?
- How is local feedback collected on the relevance and quality of programming (from who, how often)? Are we soliciting local views on the vision for transition to local leadership? How is feedback

acted upon to ensure the transition process has buy-in and support from key stakeholders?

→ Plan time and resources for ex-post evaluations of transitions, or advocate to donors to do so, for the purpose of learning about effective (and ineffective) transition strategies.

4. LEARNING AND ADAPTION

INGOs are responsible for making learning and adaptation an integral part of the whole project, modeling this for local partners, and creating the space to understand how partners learn and adapt. SAS cases demonstrate why this is so important, beyond M&E and specifically being curious about what facilitates local leadership. INGOs and local partners can be guided by the question: **what lessons inform programming effectiveness, as well as organizational systems for equitable and sustainable transitions?**

Learning and adaptation engagement among INGOs and local/national organizations

- How can learning be a regular activity throughout the project? Are there creative ways we can use the opportunity of the project to learn from and with each other?¹⁸
- Have any local partner staff gone through transitions in other project partnerships? What insights or role does that person/people have in this transition?
- Have other INGOs transitioned from similar

programming or out of the project context? What lessons can we learn from their experience?

→ Hold periodic reflection sessions with local stakeholders to capture the lessons in writing or through video.

→ If no remaining staff have transition experience or if more guidance is needed, consider hiring a change management expert or transition advisor/consultant to assist with the transition.¹⁹

Cultivate learning at all levels across INGOs and local partners

- Have staff and governance leaders reflected on what our INGO does well in planning for and working toward a responsible transition? What could be done differently in the future?
- How have our capacities been strengthened by the local/national partners?
- How can these lessons be applied to future transitions?
- What systems – within our organization and among partners – need to be more flexible to help programming and funding go where local and/or national partners determine is most relevant?
 - > Determine the relevant decision-makers and support staff at different levels of our organization (e.g. Board, senior management, strategy team, partnership team, etc.) to share lessons to have impact across the organization.

If a local or national entity is going to be established as part of the INGO transition:

- What insights from the design phase can we revisit to help guide the transition? Lessons from the implementation and M&E phases?
 - INGO's relationship with that entity does not have to end when the project ends. SAS case evidence has shown examples of this ongoing relationship in multiple ways:
 - INGOs donate office space to newly established local/national entities.
 - INGOs share their brand with the local/national entity.²⁰
- INGOs serve as a “silent partner” who accompanies the local/national entity as often as it needs, and continues to learn from the local/national entity.
- Staff of the INGO serving on the board of the local/national entity, or vice versa.²¹
- INGOs share knowledge management systems before the transition or ensure continued access or joint ownership by their former partners of knowledge management systems (e.g. repositories of programmatic and M&E frameworks, lessons evidence from past programs, etc. all of which were informed and enriched by national partners.

END NOTES

1. For an example of relationship building before programming starts, see the [Belun and CICR case study](#). As Belun founder and former CICR staff member puts it: “Belun began with a relationship.”
2. For more information on Care International’s “presence reviews”, review the [Care International Code](#).
3. See [SAS Synthesis report](#), p. 10, key takeaway #1: How INGOs enter matters just as much as how they leave: partnerships based on solidarity and trust from the beginning allow for smoother transitions. Mercy Corps, [Local Partnerships: A guide for partnering with civil society, business and government groups, p. 5](#).
4. As the [Nuru Kenya case study notes](#), “There was no premeditated program design: as described by Nuru Kenya staff, Philip [local staff] and Jake [INGO staff] spent months sitting with farmers “under a tree,” designing Nuru’s programming in a collaborative and organic way.” See page 6 of the case study for a detailed image of the collaborative design process.
5. For guidance on how to facilitate financial sustainability, see the SAS [Practical Guidelines for Financial Sustainability tool](#).
6. CDA Collaborative Learning, [Accountability and Feedback Loops](#).
7. See Guidelines for Joint-Learning and Mutual Capacity Strengthening Before, During and After Transition (forthcoming).
8. Read more on designing flexible programming through USAID’s [Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting \(CLA\) Toolkit](#).
9. See the Donor project cycle resource (forthcoming).
10. See the Communicating INGO Transitions Guidelines (forthcoming).
11. See the [Financial Sustainability in Responsible Transitions Issue Paper](#) for key ways that INGOs supported their local partners, particularly through key donor connections. <https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/SFCG-Issue-Paper-Financial-Sustainability-in-Responsible-Transitionsv2-1.pdf>
12. See the Communicating INGO Transitions Guidelines (forthcoming).
13. For an example of the INGO leaving certain resources behind in the transition, see the [Oxfam Grand Bridge case study](#) (starting on page 8).
14. Refer to the [Capacity Development Issue Paper](#) for further analysis. <https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/resources/capacity-development/>
15. See [Communicating INGO Transitions](#) for more information: <https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/PD-Issue-paper-Communicating-INGO-transitionsv2.pdf>
16. See SAS resources on financial sustainability: [Issue paper](#) and [practical guidelines](#).
17. For a particularly unique use of gathering and utilizing local feedback, see the [Nuru Kenya case study](#), page 9. “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.” <https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/PD-Case-Study-KenyaV4.pdf>
18. See Guidelines for Joint-Learning and Mutual Capacity Strengthening Before, During and After Transition (forthcoming)
19. See how the Plan India case study used a Transition Manager to support a responsible transition (forthcoming)
20. See the [CEPAD and Interpeace Timor-Leste case study](#).
21. See the [Mercy Corps and Partner Microcredit Foundation case study](#).

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