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STOPPING AS SUCCESS: TRANSITIONING TO LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

FACILITATING EFFECTIVE INGO TRANSITIONS THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT CYCLE

GUIDANCE FOR NGOS AND CSOS; AND IN THE CASE OF A NEW ENTITY BEING CREATED AS PART OF AN INGO TRANSITION

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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 NGOs and CSOs partnering with INGOs have stated interest in greater leadership during specific project collaborations, as well as longer-term after INGO transitions. The Stopping As Success (SAS) literature review, online consultation, case research, and regional workshops documented the type of guidance NGOs and CSOs appreciate or are looking for throughout the project cycle that can specifically contribute to their increased leadership and responsible INGO transitions. This resource shares SAS lessons, including specific questions from NGO/CSO colleagues, as well as illustrative examples from the 20 SAS case studies.

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 led by donors or INGOs. 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.

Note: SAS documented several cases in which a new local entity was created as part of an INGO transition. Relevant guidance throughout the project cycle is included in this document, starting on page 7.

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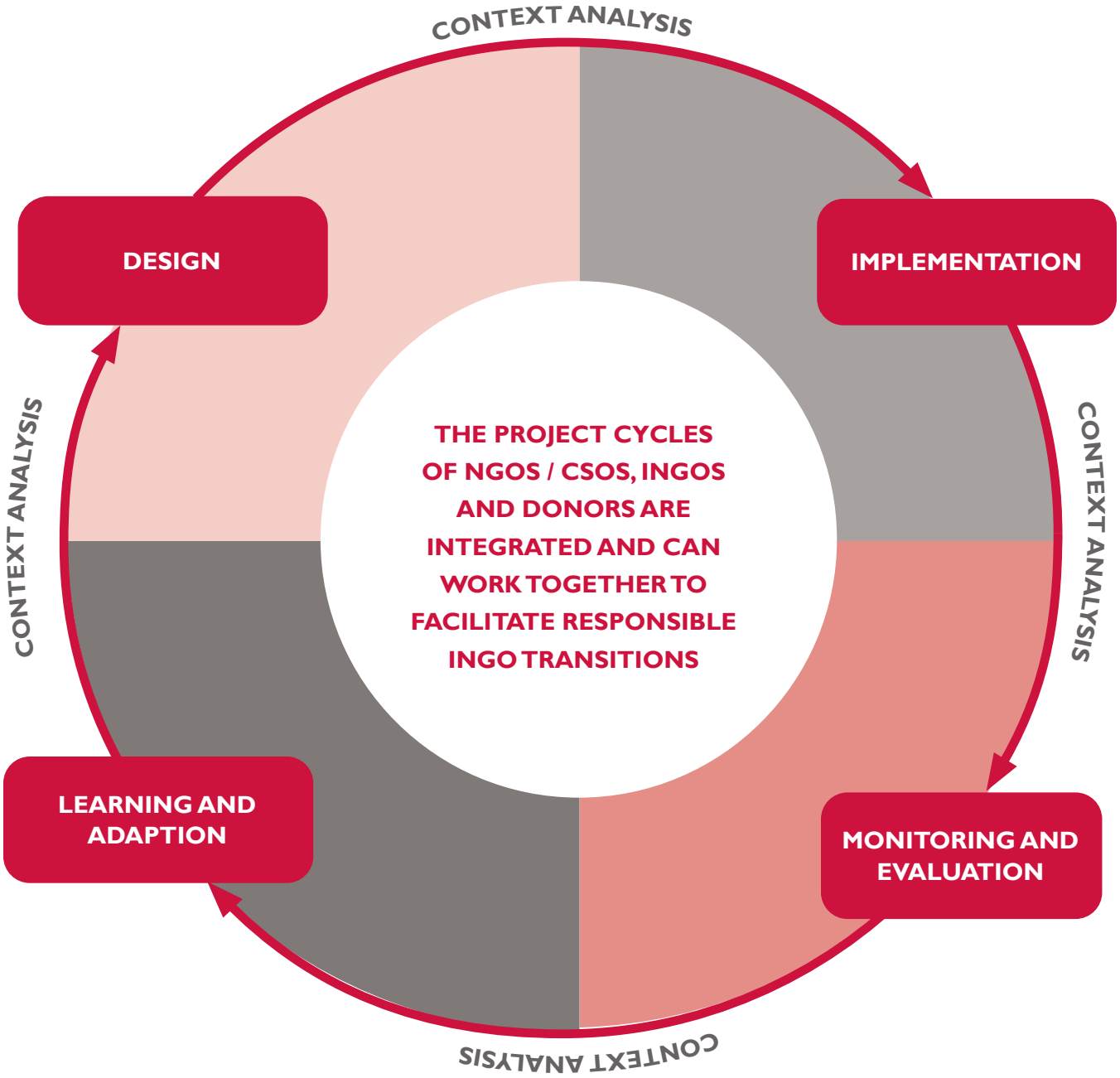
NGO/CSO, INGO, DONOR PROJECT CYCLE FOR TRANSITIONS



1. DESIGN PHASE

NGOs and CSOs have diverse experience with project design, possibly having led design processes or having been part of INGO-led processes. The design phase of project partnership takes on important meaning for CSOs and NGOs when working with INGOs considering project leadership transition or exiting the context where a project will take place.

NGOs and CSOs can prepare for such projects by considering: **how can we design this project so that all phases of the project cycle support our short- and longer-term vision for local leadership?** SAS case evidence shows the benefits of time and resources investments in relationship building and forming partnerships before programming starts.[1] While many INGOs appreciate this in general terms, they may need your guidance to help identify what that means specifically.

Critical reflection for NGOs/CSOs considering project partnership with INGOs

- If there is a specific need where we work that we can not address alone, are there other INGOs that could help? Which one could also support our short- and longer-term local leadership goals? What do we gain or lose by inviting them to work in our context?[2]

- If we are approached by an INGO about work on a specific project, have they worked in this context before? If not, why are they coming into the context? What is their added value relevant to the specific project opportunity?[3] Is the INGO funding the project themselves or is there a separate donor?

- How does the INGO perceive our legitimacy in this context and this technical area?

- Can project partnership with this INGO and this donor contribute to our organization's mission and vision? What questions do we need to have answered by the INGO in order to decide whether to partner?

  → If you have not worked with the INGO before, get to know them to see if there is a fit. This includes their mission, values, approach, funding, and reputation. Use publicly available information as well as talk with others that have direct experience.

  → Get to know any donors involved and how their approach influences potential INGO transitions and local leadership.

Design engagement with INGOs

- What role do we want to have in the design process? What experience do we have to offer or roles we know how to play that will benefit the project formation? Are there additional roles we want to play to strengthen our own capacity for project design or expand a particular type of experience?

- Who are all the partners – local and international – that are involved in the project? Are we comfortable with the roles in the design process? If not, what can we suggest to the organization leading the design phase? SAS lessons[4] include the need to accommodate the location of meetings or language used in the design process.

- What kind of post-transition relationship is possible and desired by our organization? How does that compare with the vision of the INGO?

  → Create a list of roles and responsibilities for program design and implementation phases, as well as monitoring, evaluation, learning and accountability activities of the project. Build in checkpoints throughout the project to see if there are ways to increase local leadership

as there is interest and capacity for your organization to do so.

→ Request additional INGO or donor resources[5] to support trust and relationship building processes (e.g. team building, where appropriate language training, feedback mechanisms[6] with partners, mutual capacity strengthening,[7] etc.). If not offered by the INGO, request or create regular times to reflect together on the quality of partnership.

→ Contribute to or review the INGO's transition/exit plan or documented ideas developed at this design phase. Jointly agree the process for reviewing transition plans in order to adapt, based on changes in local and institutional contexts.

2. IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

Just as for INGOs,[8] the guiding question for NGOs and CSOs in this phase is: **how does intentional implementation and adaptive management relate to better transitions and local leadership?**

Implementation engagement with INGO partners

- What programmatic decisions do we want to be sure we are involved with to prepare for an INGO transition? How will we build that role into our implementation plans with INGO partners?
- What project activities can we do or lead on to start or continue to build a relationship with the donor?
- Are there feedback mechanisms in place for us to share insights with INGO partners about program impacts in general and on specific to local leadership?

→ Plan for regular coordination and collaboration meetings with INGO partners, and donors as relevant, per the SAS project cycle guidance notes for INGOs and donors.

Adaptive management considerations for NGOs and CSOs

- How do our management structures fit with the project's management plan? Are there adaptive management roles we can lead in order to be better prepared for such roles after the envisioned INGO transition?
- Do our managers and leaders have channels to communicate and coordinate with their counterparts at the INGO partner?
- What management and leadership capacities will our organization need following that INGO transition?
- Are there project assets that would make a difference for our organization if they were handed over during or after the project?

→ Help establish protocols for adaptive management. SAS cases noted NGO/CSO knowledge of and perspective about changes in the context of projects as valuable assets in agile implementation that also anticipates INGO transitions.

→ Plan ahead to do any needed negotiations with donors for approval of hard asset transfers. In some case studies, the local entity retained property such as vehicles, furniture, office space, computers, and information technology systems during the transition.[9]

→ As discovered during the implementation phase, share any technical or systems capacity needs that were not noted in the design phase. Some SAS lessons were about software systems for grants management, financial management, databases, human resources, and other crucial operational functions that INGOs can build into handover plans.

3. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) work serves diverse purposes, including relevant to increased NGO and CSO leadership. The main question about this phase for local organizations is: **how can M&E systems, activities, and resulting information contribute to responsible INGO transitions and our leadership post-transition?**

Project M&E by NGO/CSOs and INGO partners

What indicator and other M&E data about project objectives do we need to inform the INGO transition?

- What indicator and other M&E data about project objectives will help us post-transition if similar technical work will continue?
- What M&E approaches or access to information do we have uniquely, as NGOs or CSOs? How can we integrate this expertise into project M&E plans?

→ Identify in what form the M&E data will be most relevant, both for leading up to the INGO's transition and after. This may include ways to understand project impact and for communicating NGO/CSO capacity or expertise.

→ Contribute to making M&E plans contextually relevant. Use locally determined indicators which will be more applicable post-transition.

Monitoring and evaluating the partnership as enabling local leadership

- Do we have the necessary skills and aptitudes to participate in M&E activities of the project, as required by the donor or INGO? If so, which part of the M&E plan can we lead and benefit from our INGO partner observing? If not, how can we prepare to contribute during the project and lead similar processes post-transition?
- How is the project defining and measuring the success of the partnership itself? Were we part of developing the targets, indicators, and evaluative process?
- How are we defining and measuring readiness for the INGO transition and the actual transition process? What indicators are needed to capture changes in social capital, institutional capacities, and the context factors we think will contribute to responsible, effective transitions?

→ Work with INGO partners to make M&E processes learning experiences for your teams. SAS cases observed INGO and local partners undertaking joint analysis of M&E data as a way to address a frequently cited capacity need.

→ Jointly set success measures and monitoring methods for the partnership, as well as the project.

→ Plan how targets and metrics will be communicated to the donor. Work with the INGO partner to advocate to the donor for any needed adjustments to agreed plans.

→ Advocate with INGOs and/or donors to plan ahead for ex-post evaluations of transitions for the purpose of learning about effective (and ineffective) transition strategies.

4. LEARNING AND ADAPTION

SAS cases demonstrate why time and attention for learning and adaptation are so important for effective, responsible INGO transitions. NGOs and CSOs can be guided by the question: **what ways of learning and organizational adaptations contribute to increased local leadership?**

Joint learning for responsible transitions

- How can we bring our ways of learning into the regular practice of the project?[10] What are the lessons for us as we assume greater leadership and for our INGO partner about responsible transitions?

- How can we integrate learning from the project and about the partnership into wholistic reflections and practical donor guidance about what responsible transitions take?

→ Consider publishing the reflections and guidance or sharing them in statements, blogs, video messages, etc. through your networks and those of your INGO partner. Other donors and stakeholders will benefit from your experience. Your organization may also benefit from raised profile for future funding or partnership.

NGO/CSO adaptation for responsible transitions

- Do we have the skills and structures to use ongoing context analysis and M&E data to adapt organizationally?

- Have any of our staff gone through transitions in other INGO or project partnerships? Or any of our peer organizations in the local or country context? What lessons and practical insights are relevant to this partnership/transition?

  → If the means for organizational adaptation exists, consider making needed changes during the life of the project to make transitions more manageable. If not, work with the INGO to plan ways of strengthening your capacities for organizational changes and how they will be undertaken as part of the transition.

  → If there is no transition experience on your team or in your network, work with the INGO partner to determine if more guidance is needed, including hiring a change management expert or transition advisor/consultant to assist with the transition.[11]

PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR CASES OF A NEW ENTITY BEING DEVELOPED POST INGO TRANSITION

If part of an INGO-led project includes creating a new local entity to carry forward project objectives or themes in a given context, there are more specific considerations for every phase of the project cycle. Visionary leadership stands out in the SAS case evidence[12] and the project observed it is often local/national staff that decide to create a new organization or program once the INGO transitions. Therefore the guidance in this section is aimed towards local staff for considering development of new entities as part of responsible INGO transitions.

1. DESIGN PHASE

The design phase takes on important meaning when a new entity is an option or part of plans post INGO transition. A guiding question for local staff is: **how can we design this project to facilitate establishing our leadership, while staying focused on being accountable to and sustainable for the impacted communities?**

Critical reflection for creating a new entity post INGO transition

- What mission and focus will our new organization have? Will it reflect the focus of the project, be broader or more narrow? What factors contribute to those decisions and who determines them?
- Who will lead the new organization? What governance structure will support the mission?
- What is needed to become or continue to be financially sustainable?[13]
- How will we communicate with the community during and after the transition? SAS observed transitions can cause significant uncertainty and transparent and frequent communication can support more sustainable transitions.[14]
- Who are the relevant stakeholders, and how should we involve them in establishing the organization's focus and structure? What accountability systems will be maintained or need to be strengthened or developed?
- How will we assess how the organization is doing post-transition? How do we define success? What resources do we need to achieve it?
- In SAS cases,[15] local entities had to downsize due to the decrease in INGO funding. This can be quite difficult because staff may lose their jobs or become uncertain about their job security. Are there staff positions that are no longer necessary? How will we handle the decrease or increase of staff?
  - → Due to the time-intensive nature of designing projects (and new organizations), it may be important to advocate for design time that is built into your work before the INGO transitions. In the Georgia case study, 10% of national staff's time was funded to establish a spin-off organization in parallel to the existing INGO which contributed to a successful transition.[16]
  - → Transitions create an opportunity to identify or re-envision the organization's focus.[17] If the INGO transitioning,[18] consider the organization's value add, existing capacities and gaps, and what aspects of the work to keep and which parts need to be re-envisioned.

Potential INGO relationships with new local entities

- A significant SAS lesson is that partnerships often do not end just because the INGO is transitioning.[19] Before the INGO transitions, consider advocating for a relationship that is beneficial for your organization as well as for the INGO. The SAS cases offer several examples of ongoing partnerships:[20]

- INGOs donate office space to newly established local entities

→ INGOs share knowledge management systems before the transition

→ INGOs share their brand with the local entity

→ INGOs serve as a "silent partner" who accompanies the local entity as often as it needs, and continues to learn from the local entity

→ Staff of the INGO serve on the board of the local entity, or vice versa

2. IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

Newly established organizations have the opportunity to implement programming in a way that adds value and is contextually grounded. In the implementation phase, it is important to ask: **how does intentional implementation and ongoing adaptive management contribute to sustainable and accountable programming?**

Considerations for intentional and adaptive implementation

- Where do we have programmatic or organizational gaps? Who can we partner with to help fill those gaps?

- How is the organization perceived and trusted within the community? The new leader of the organization as well as staff may have to focus on building trust, depending on their relationships in the community and the context.[21]

- Are we financially sustainable relevant to our mission and scope? Are our financial systems working as planned? What is going well and what could be improved?[22]

- How were staff affected by the INGO transition and what is needed to ensure the existing, or newly hired, staff can be effective in their new role? In some SAS cases, local/national organizations had to downsize both financially and in regard to human resources in response to the decrease of funding when the INGO transitioned. In these instances, it is important to build teamwork and staff cohesion during and after transition processes to support staff retention.

→ Establish a transition plan and communicate it with the community. In the Nuru case study, the local entity, Nuru Kenya, had a transition plan to leave the contexts where they currently operate, and this is creating ownership, independence, and sustainability in the communities they work in.[23] Consider how to build programs or activities that can sustain themselves

→ Identify needs and a strategy for ongoing capacity strengthening to support organizational independence post-transition.[24] Skills such as reporting, financial management, and human resources are specifically noted in the SAS case studies.

3. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The role of M&E to ensure that work resonates with and is owned by staff and other partners is a particular focus in cases of a new entity being created. Transitions can cause uncertainty, making feedback from staff and partners especially important. Here feedback includes both formal and informal mechanisms for M&E of programming, as well as how people are feeling about the transition and new organization more generally. A focusing question for new entities or those creating them is: **how do we measure success and adjust our organization and work based on community and partner feedback?**

M&E considerations for the local entity

- What does success look like and how do we measure it?
- What is the M&E plan for organizational effectiveness? For programmatic impact? Who is involved in creating that process?
- What feedback mechanisms will be most effective in our operating context? How often do we collect feedback on programming to help it be relevant? What other data helps guide our actions and adaptations?
- How are the funding streams flexible to account for any adaptations in programming to better work with partners? How can we advocate for flexible funding if it is not readily available?[25]

→ M&E requirements from donors may or may not be contextually relevant. Advocate with donors for processes that make sense in the context (language, technical skills, etc). If there are gaps in staff capacities to fulfill these requirements, invite accompaniment from partners to support.

→ SAS observed the benefits of collecting feedback throughout the project, and ongoing regularly post transition to ensure subsequent programming is owned by and accountable to the community.

M&E considerations for INGOs planning transitions

- What was our transition strategy for this project, region, and/or country? How has it evolved?
- How can we assess the capacities of the individuals forming a new entity or the new entity in formation? What indicators or other information will help us determine the point at which our presence is no longer needed?
- What type of capacity strengthening has our organization received throughout? What elements have made the biggest difference in our organization's ability to plan for transitioning?

→ To design M&E in the context of new entities being created, refer to the Project Cycle Guidance Note for INGOs. The design phase questions include visioning and planning for the transition itself and can inform M&E plans that help support independent, locally led development programs and organizations, including such groups created as part of the project.

4. LEARNING AND ADAPTION

Creating a new entity is an adaptive act and the whole process of doing so benefits from intentional learning. A guiding question for local staff is thus: **what mechanisms do we have in place to learn throughout the process of creating our new entity and how do we adapt in order to be impactful?**

Because transitions can cause a lot of uncertainty amidst constant evolution (new programs, structures, staff, etc.), learning about what works and what does not while incorporating that information into the organizational structure and programming is essential to impact and long-term sustainability.

Learning for more sustainable change

- How do we, as an organization, learn about our work, both internally and with external stakeholders? Where have we failed? Where have we succeeded? What threats and opportunities are on the horizon?
- Who is going through something similar that could benefit from our lessons, failures, and successes? How can we share what we are learning with others? Are there existing networks or groups that we can plug into that would benefit from what we are learning?
- Are there other organizations, groups, stakeholders who have been through something similar? How can we learn from them? Are they able to mentor us through our challenges, failures, opportunities?

→ Consider holding periodic feedback and reflection sessions with stakeholders that go beyond M&E needs, to gather information and insights and to build the relationship with the people your work is intended to help.

→ Practice flexibility, adapt accordingly, record how changes were made, and communicate changes and impacts with those who provide feedback.

Post transition relationship with INGO partners

- What kind of a post-transition relationship is possible and desired by both us and our INGO partner/former partner?[26] What are the parameters of our specific relationship? How will we agree and/or formalize the relationship?
- What resources are needed to make the relationship a reality? Is external financial support available?
- What needs or aspirations do we have that the INGO can support? What needs or interests does the INGO have that we can support?

→ See the design phase for more information about what post-transition relationships have looked like in the SAS case studies. A hallmark of several types of relationships[27] is ongoing learning between INGOs and local entities. Consider how learning, both formal and informal, and strengthening each other's capacities can happen post-transition. Design and implementation phases can include a learning agenda focused on the future relationship.

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." For specific partnership guidelines, see SAS's Partnership Guidelines forthcoming on the SAS website.
2. For a unique case highlighting intentional collaboration before programming even started, see the Belun and CICR case, page 6: "In 1999, Ramos-Horta **invited** CICR to participate in an international advisory group conducting research on economic and social conditions in Timor-Leste…".
3. For some guiding questions for INGOs at the design stage, see SAS's INGO project cycle (forthcoming).
4. See the Nuru Kenya case study.
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 on the SAS website.
8. Refer to the INGO Project Cycle document forthcoming on the SAS website.
9. For an example of the INGO leaving certain resources behind in the transition, see the Oxfam Grand Bridge case study (starting on page 8).
10. See Guidelines for Joint-Learning and Mutual Capacity Strengthening Before, During and After Transition forthcoming on the SAS website.
11. See how the Plan India case study used a Transition Manager to support a responsible transition forthcoming on the SAS website.
12. See the Leaders and Champions issue paper.
13. See SAS financial sustainability resources: How to: access unrestricted funding and practical guidelines
14. See Practical guidelines: Communicating INGO transitions
15. For a particularly important example of staff retention and human resource considerations, see the The Raks Thai Foundation case study, page 9.
16. Oxfam Great Britain and BRIDGE case study
17. See how local staff re-envisioned the new local entity's organization in the Nuru Kenya case study, page 12: '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."'
18. See SAS's Synthesis Report, page 7, for the different types of transitions that SAS documented.
19. For more examples, see Partnership in responsible transitions: issues at stake and practical guidelines forthcoming on the SAS website.
20. See Guidelines for Joint-Learning and Mutual Capacity Strengthening Before, During and After Transition forthcoming on the SAS website.
21. See how trust was built in the World Vision and TB Taskforce Federation, Inc. case study, page 14: "National staff and champions within an international organization are important to driving local programs… many of those we spoke to cited how national staff understood their situations more, because they, too, were Filipinos. As one volunteer shared: "… they have the heart of a Filipino – they understand what it means to give to a fellow Filipino."
22. See SAS financial sustainability resources: How To: Access unrestricted funding and Practical Guidelines.

23. See the Nuru Kenya case study, page 12-13: "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."
24. See SAS's Capacity Development Issue Paper.
25. See SAS financial sustainability resources: How To: Access unrestricted funding and Practical Guidelines
26. See Guidelines for Joint-Learning and Mutual Capacity Strengthening Before, During and After Transition forthcoming on the SAS website.
27. See Partnerships in Responsible Transitions: Issues at sake and guidelines forthcoming on the SAS website.

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