



Planning for success from start to exit:

A review of literature,
policy and practice

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Stopping As Success: planning for success from start to exit

Introduction to “Stopping As Success”

This review of literature, policy and practice has been developed as part of the Stopping As Success project which is being implemented by a consortium consisting of Peace Direct, CDA Collaborative Learning and Search for Common Ground, with support from USAID. The primary goal of this collaborative learning project is to bring greater awareness to the international community of the multiple dynamics at play when ending a development programme and to provide guidelines on how to ensure locally-led development. The core questions examined by this project are directly linked to USAID *Local Work's* learning agenda¹ and a growing number of learning initiatives in the wider international aid sector focused on locally-led development, local ownership and localization.²

The Stopping As Success project aims to look beyond the technical aspects of an exit strategy and identify examples of aid exits and handovers that demonstrate a transition in the broader relationship between local and international actors; a transition towards more locally-led development.

To support these learning commitments, we are engaging in qualitative evidence gathering in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe. Our case studies examine historical and current realities of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) with a focus on the evolving nature of partnerships, along with experiences of closing country offices or entire organizations and different types of transitions or devolvement to a range of local entities.

As part of our collaborative learning process, we include scope for joint reflection on past and current practices and the changing landscape of development in the interest of fostering sector-wide learning. Through joint learning processes, we encourage organizations to share openly and learn with and from each other's experience. More importantly, emphasis will be put on the voices of local practitioners and people affected by the policies and actions of international funding institutions and implementing organizations.

¹ USAID's Local Works program seeks to invest in the creativity and resourcefulness of local communities, enabling them to drive their own development. More here: <https://www.usaid.gov/partnership-opportunities/ngo/localworks>.

² See the Doing Development Differently (DDD) Manifesto Community at <http://doingdevelopmentdifferently.com>; David Booth and Sue Unsworth, "Politically smart, locally-led development," (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2014), accessed July 17, 2018. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9204.pdf>.



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The purpose of this review

This review of literature, policy and practice establishes the context within which this collaborative learning takes place.

The Stopping As Success project aims to increase learning on transitions in support of locally-led development. This review outlines current thinking on how exits and transition impact the relationship between local and international actors. How do these relationships transition? What role does power play? To do this, it is necessary to reflect on the context in which such transitions occur, and to consider factors that shape the nature of the relationship between local and international actors through exit processes.

The purpose of this review is to understand these realities within which exit strategies have (or have not) developed. Up until recently, the ways in which aid exits have been and/or should be designed and implemented have rarely been addressed by international development scholars and practitioners.³

This review examines:

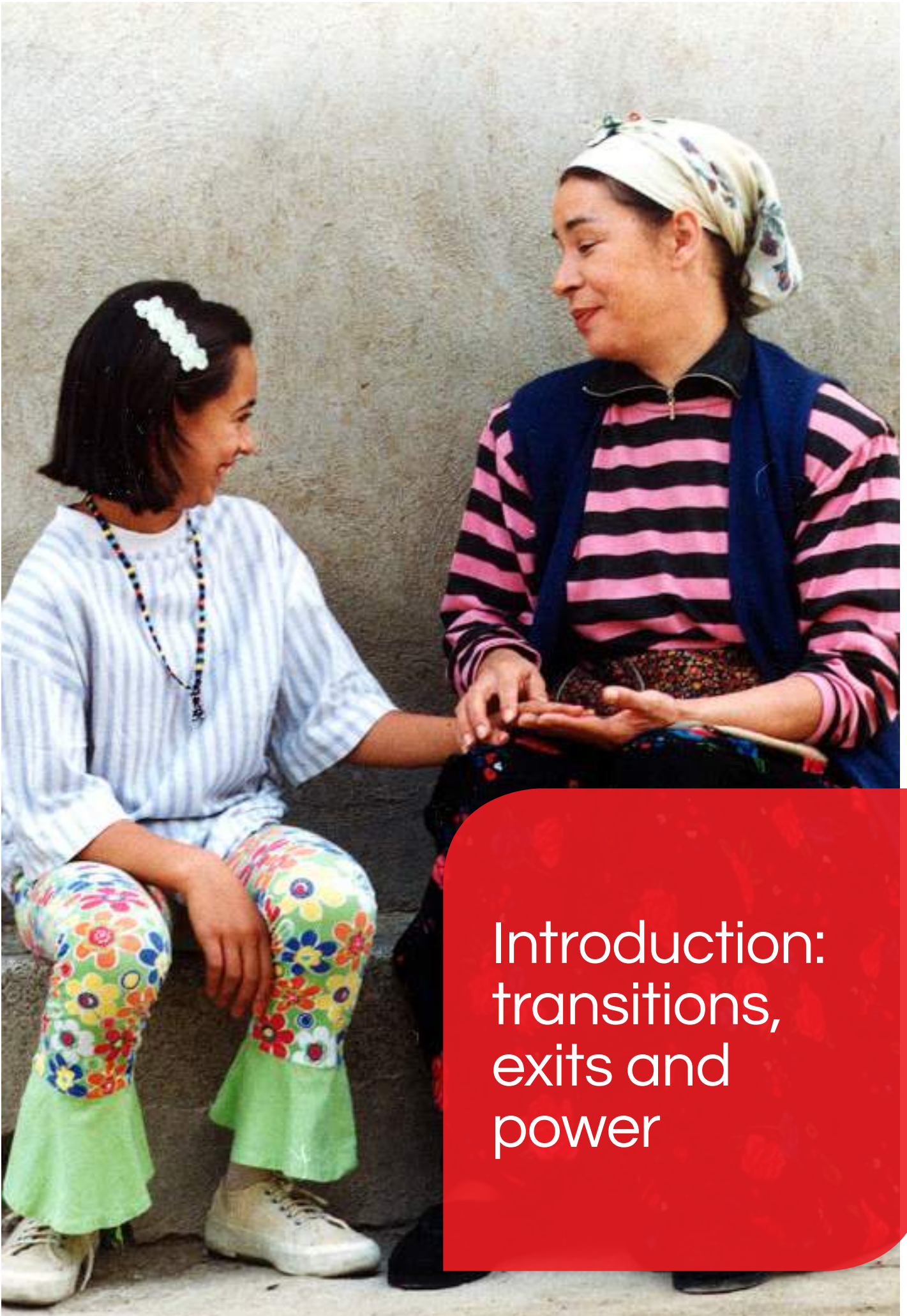
- the role of power in defining “exits” and “transitions”;

- the degree to which key milestones in the aid effectiveness agenda have led towards a rebalancing of power;
- the role and position of international actors in decision-making; the impact of aid on empowering/disempowering civil society;
- the ways in which partnerships between international and local actors begin and end in the peacebuilding sector.

In the aid effectiveness agenda, very little is mentioned on how aid exits and phase-outs should take place. Instead, the “issue of exits for too long have been overshadowed by the constant search for new entry points for aid.”⁴ Nevertheless, this literature review explores how the same principles that have been identified as key to the effective delivery of international assistance can also be used in assessing the effectiveness of aid exits. A key line of inquiry for the Stopping As Success project is to understand the extent to which exits are rooted in local context and the level of participation of local actors in designing and implementing exit strategies.

³ Though also see, for example, Derek Fee, *How to Manage an Aid Exit Strategy: The Future of Development Aid* (London: Zed, 2012) *How to Manage an Aid Exit Strategy: The Future of Development Aid*, London: Zed and OECD, *Managing Aid Exit and Transformation*, (Oslo: OECD, 2008), accessed July 17, 2018. <https://www.oecd.org/derec/norway/42208151.pdf>.

⁴ Jesper Heldgaard, *Managing Aid Exit and Transformation: Summary of a Joint Donor Evaluation*, (Stockholm: Sida/Edita, 2008), 4.



Introduction:
transitions,
exits and
power

Central to the relationship between international and local actors is the unequal power dynamics inherent in the aid sector. Power dynamics play an important role in shaping relationships between different aid actors, as well as the narratives and practices around exits and transitions.

Specifically, this review considers three overarching questions:

1. What are the different ways in which exits and transitions are understood? What meaning is ascribed to the terms exit and transition?
2. What factors impact the ways in which exit strategies are designed and implemented? For example, how do power imbalances embedded in the aid system impact aid transitions?
3. Who determines exit strategies and what role do local partners/constituents play? Specifically, how have decisions to “exit” been made? And, how have narratives around “stopping” been shaped?

To explore these questions, a review of academic literature on locally-led development, civil society space and local/international power dynamics was conducted in parallel to an extensive grey literature review of 43 documents from 17 international organizations. The grey literature review included INGO protocol for exits, internal organizational learning memos, evaluation reports and post-exit evaluations.

As much of the published and accessible material on aid reform is written by authors based in Europe and North America, to fully capture perspectives

from across the world, it has been necessary to look beyond published documents and draw on the direct experiences of those who have been at the receiving end of international aid interventions. As Bill Morton of the North-South Institute comments,

*“[Literature reviews] should be further informed by views and ideas that do not appear “on paper” at all, but that exist in the hearts and minds of people in the south who are grappling directly with the everyday realities of the international development architecture, and whose opinions can only be properly understood by listening and talking to them”.*⁵

To this end, we conducted key informant interviews with a diverse range of development actors – from members of large INGOs to small grassroots level organizations. In October 2017, we conducted a global online consultation, “Aid Exits and Locally-led Development”, to further inform our review. During the consultation, 95 participants working in over 40 countries engaged and responded to prompts organized around daily themes on power dynamics in the aid sector, the role of local actors and capacity building, and sustainability.⁶ A separate report was produced from the online consultation to compliment this literature review. That report can be found at: <https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PD-USAID-Report-.pdf>.

Apparent in both the online consultation and the literature on aid, development and peacebuilding included in this review, there are a variety of definitions of “exits” and approaches to “exit strategies”. The next section explores the use of terms and sets out working definitions of key terms.

⁵ Bill Morton, *Southern Writing on Reform of the International Development Architecture: A Review, prepared for the DFID* (North-South Institute, 2005), 2, accessed May 2018. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/events-documents/3575.pdf>.

⁶ A separate report was produced from the online consultation, which is intended to compliment this literature review. You can read this here. Stephen Leach, *Aid Exits and Locally Led Development: key insights from a global consultation convened by Peace Direct, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects and Search for Common Ground* (USAID: 2018), accessed May 2018. <https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PD-USAID-Report-.pdf>.



Definitions and key terms

Exit strategies and transitions

The need for the Stopping As Success project is that exits and transitions in the context of international aid have generally been under-researched and under-planned.⁷ This context also opens up the opportunity for the project to have a positive influence on the practice of INGO exit strategies.

INTRAC is one organization actively promoting research and planning on exits and transitions within the international aid sector. Since 2012, INTRAC has been developing a programme to offer practical support on exit strategies in response to an increasing number of withdrawals of aid programmes by international NGOs around the world. This phenomenon offers both the challenge of change, yet the significant opportunity to move towards locally-led development. INTRAC note that, “approaches vary across organizations with multiple ways to describe the process: handing over, phasing out, transition, winding down, wrapping up, moving on, spin-offs”.⁸

This review, acknowledging the “confusion” and lack of consensus around the terms⁹, takes this broad yet clear definition of “exit strategy” offered by INTRAC¹⁰:

*[A] tool used by INGOs and their southern partners to plan and structure the implementation of an exit – typically the withdrawal of financial resources or closure of an office – in a specific project, programme, country or region.*¹¹

Whilst the definition above points to a closure or transition based on material resources, the impact of an international organization in a development setting includes much more. Care International (CI) use the term “presence” to denote a broader conception of their role:

*The idea of presence is moving away from ‘having staff and an office’ to something much more vibrant: presence relates to CI’s ability to influence, add value, join in with others, harness resources for the purpose of fighting poverty and inequality, and amplify the voices of people and groups in the fight against poverty and inequality. Presence means playing diverse roles most relevant to each context that best supports multiplying impact and innovation in line with CARE’s Program Strategy.*¹²

The intentional use of the term “presence” invites a more explicit acknowledgement of entrance and existence of INGOs, and, by extension, exits. This term hints at something important for this review, and for Stopping As Success more broadly. International development and peacebuilding are about material resources, yet it is also about relationships, and it is about power. Financial resources bring power, through their influence on decision-making processes and by defining accountability processes and what counts as knowledge. These areas are further considered later in this review, in the context of transition and exit.

For the purpose of our learning project, we understand the term “exit strategy” to describe complete “phasing down” of programming and organizational presence (leaving the space completely) or “phasing over” to a local entity. Such an approach will allow us to explore a variety of case studies and draw out valuable lessons for the wider aid sector. Although we primarily use the term “exit strategy”, we acknowledge the different terminologies preferred by different organizations. For example, some organizations prefer the word “sustainability” as the term “exit” can create a barrier to maintaining a positive relationship with their local partners, or because they see exiting as a process rather than an event.

⁷ The recent CGD Policy Paper (2017) focusing on USAID has sought to address this by learning from past transitions, identifying criteria to select countries ripe for transition and to define the nature of US engagement through the transition process. See, Sarah Rose, Erin Collinson, and Jared Kalow. *Working Itself Out of a Job: USAID and Smart Strategic Transitions* (Washington DC: Centre for Global Development, 2017), accessed May 2018. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/working-itself-out-job-usaid-and-smart-strategic-transitions>.

⁸ “Aid withdrawal and exit strategies,” *Home/Projects/Global*, INTRAC, no date, accessed May, 2018, <https://www.intrac.org/projects/aid-withdrawal-exit-strategies>.

⁹ Murray Boardman. “Exit Strategies: Approaches and Challenges in Development,” (conference paper, Southern Perspectives on Development: Dialogue or Division? The University of Otago, New Zealand, 2008).

¹⁰ see appendix for ways in which different organizations talk about exit/transition, and how the terms may be used in practice

¹¹ Sarah Lewis, *Developing a Timeline for Exit Strategies. Experiences from an Action Learning Set with the British Red Cross, EveryChild, Oxfam GB, Sightsavers and WWF-UK: INTRAC Praxis Paper 31* (Oxford: INTRAC, 2016), accessed May 2018. https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/INTRAC-Praxis-Paper-31_Developing-a-timeline-for-exit-strategies-Sarah-Lewis.pdf

¹² Care International, “Guidance Note: Care International Presence Reviews, Strategy and Business Plans, v.4,” (Internal Document, Care International, 2015), 2-3.

Exit as a process, not an event

Several organizations use their guidance documents to remind practitioners that exiting well is a mindset and a process. As discussed in their internal memo to Programme Managers and National Office Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation staff, World Vision chose to use the term “transition” as opposed to the term “exit strategy”, though acknowledging that they could be used interchangeably.

*Transition describes the process of World Vision (WV) ending its involvement in a programme or project. It is important that WV ends its involvement in a well-planned way, so that the benefits gained by communities and stakeholders can continue into the future, after WV has withdrawn.*¹³

Like World Vision, interviews with Project Concern International staff captured that “exit” emphasizes one point in time, while “transition” and “sustainability readiness” emphasize process.¹⁴ Similarly, UNESCO’s internal document *A Practice Review of UNESCO’s Exit and Transition Strategies: Evaluative Review Document for Internal Learning* summarised five main findings: one being that, “exit is not a single event; it is a path, a series of steps, a mindset”.¹⁵ For USAID, a “strategic transition”

will “remodel the bilateral partnership, moving from a heavy reliance on traditional foreign aid to alternative forms of cooperation that are better matched to a partner country’s needs and often generate mutual benefits”.¹⁶ It is a gradual and deliberate process, specific to the context in which it is occurring.

Each context requires different considerations for planning an exit strategy. For example, Centre for Global Development (CGD) and USAID note a typology of seven possible transition types.¹⁷ The World Food Programme (WFP) has guidance for “Exit Strategies for School Feeding” and “Programme Options for Transition from Emergency Response.” While there are shared factors for each of these, it is clear from the review that focusing on *process* is key to ensuring that any exit, transition, phase-over, or phase-out is “successful” in that it causes minimal harm given the circumstances, can be locally-led and owned, and benefits can be continued for the future. This view was echoed in our key informant interview with a former World Bank director. According to this interviewee, “the concept of an ‘exit strategy’ is indicative of development projects being time-bound, punctual and one-off forms of interventions”.¹⁸

¹³ World Vision, “(DRAFT) Programme Transition Guidance,” (Internal Document, World Vision, 2015)

¹⁴ Key Informant interview, August 8, 2017.

¹⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Internal Oversight Evaluation Service: A Practice Review of UNESCO’s Exit and Transition Strategies*. (New York: UNESCO, 2006).

¹⁶ Rose, Collinson, Kalow, *Working Itself out of a Job*, 4-6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸ Key Informant Interview, former World Bank Director, 13th April 2017.

Three examples of aid exits and transitions in action

To illustrate the spectrum of exit approaches, and the general emphasis on process amongst exits that were deemed to be successful within the literature reviewed, and by key informants who contributed to the research, three broad approaches of processes undertaken by international organizations are outlined below.

1. Full Closure Model – the example of EveryChild UK

The leadership of EveryChild UK took the decision to close each of its 18 country offices in June 2012. This process did not include the creation of or transfer to local organizations, and took approximately four years. This decision was part of wider strategic organizational restructuring (not a financial decision), which saw the transformation of EveryChild from a medium-sized, UK-based funding organization into a global alliance, on the premise that this would enable a greater long-term impact. The process was based on “exit principles” designed to minimize the potential negative impact on children and communities. These principles sought to ensure completed work was sustainable, either in the creation of continuing services or in lasting positive change for the children it worked with, and that expertise and momentum for change is not lost.¹⁹

Significant lessons learned through EveryChild UK’s experience include:

- Exits can generate new opportunities by catalysing critical and creative thinking about which activities can be sustainable in the long-term, for example in assisting the Government of Malawi to develop its own strategy to support children living on the street.
- Transparency and communication are critical. An effective process requires trust built on honesty and opportunities for open communication.²⁰
- Investment in continuous monitoring, evaluation and learning processes enables modification and improvement of the exit processes.

¹⁹ Rick James, Rowan Popplewell, Jamie Bartlett, “Ending Well: Phase 1 Interim Report – Longitudinal Evaluation of EveryChild’s Responsible Exit Process.” (Oxford, UK: INTRAC, 2015), 5, accessed July 16 2018, <https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Responsible-exit-interim-report-first-phase-Mar-2015.pdf>. See also, Lucy Morris, “Working at the Sharp End of Programme Closure: EveryChild’s Responsible Exit Principles,” (Oxford, UK: INTRAC, 2015), 7, <https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Praxis-Note-70-EveryChilds-Responsible-Exit-Principles-Final-Lucy-Morris-Head-of-Programmes.pdf>.

²⁰ The British Red Cross’s Exit Strategy highlights transparency as a key component of a successful exit, particularly elevating the importance of transparent financial management, asset donation/disposal. See, British Red Cross, *Leaving Responsibly: A Practical Guidance Document* (Oxford: British Red Cross, 2008), 4.

2. The Localization Model – the example of CARE International²¹

CARE International began to consider exiting from countries in the early 1990s, based on changes in national economies and at country-level. This led to the creation over a five-year period of a “spin-off” local organization in Thailand. This process sparked a larger conversation within CARE and led to the development of an organizational check-list for country entry and exit in the early 2000s. As the global financial crisis unfolded several years later, CARE International decided to close several country offices. The response of local staff in Sri Lanka, Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia and Peru was that they wanted to continue the work and so CARE collaborated with the staff in these countries to turn these federated offices into local organizations. In Sri Lanka, for example, national staff founded Chrysalis which registered as a social enterprise in 2017. Discussions about a continued partnership with CARE led to an MOU

endorsing Chrysalis as an independent affiliate.

Significant lessons learned through CARE International’s experience include:

- Local staff are key to the viability of localized programmes. Common across the transition of CARE offices to local organizations was that the local organizations were initiated by local staff. All but one of the transitions had leadership from within the country in question.
- External experts can help facilitate the process. CARE International worked with an “exit expert”, who had also helped develop the entry/exit criteria to facilitate the localization process of the six offices.

3. The Devolved Programme Model – the example of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)²²

AFSC began “devolvement” in 2008, in which organizational handover processes took place in countries in Asia, Central and South America and the Caribbean. Devolvement follows nine months’ preparation, including assessments of local challenges and the development of handover plans, vetted through consultations with leadership from community-based organizations (CBOs). AFSC Haiti drew on its experience with integrated community development and engagement with 22 CBOs to become the Association for Health and Community Development (ASADEK). Key steps in the devolvement process included the creation of community liaison groups; training on technical, financial and organizational issues; addressing sustainability issues and legal requirements. Following these processes, AFSC officially handed over to the federation – ASADEK – at the end of September 2008. Devolved organizations can continue to use AFSC branding, though AFSC does not exercise

control through continued relationship, nor will it compete for resources.

Significant lessons learned through AFSC’s experience include:

- Investing in establishing the viability of a possible local entity is critical. AFSC committed to a substantial technical and operational assessment process to ensure that local entity would be sustainable and effective following handover. With resources dedicated to handover processes, key training needs identified in the assessment could be addressed.
- With devolvement, an organizational brand can continue. Local organizations are not required by AFSC to stop using its brand. Using the brand can support continuity and effectiveness as it symbolizes trust in local leadership and ongoing relationship.

²¹ Key Informant Interview, 9th August 2017.

²² AFSC, Cambodia Programme, “Integrated Sustainable Livelihoods Program: Localization Program.” (Phnom Penh: AFSC Cambodia, 2018); AFSC, “Report: AFSC Visit to Ocodema, Manica, 21 to 24 September 2011” (Philadelphia: AFSC, 2011).

Key Terms

Development

A widely contested concept, development is broadly understood to be about improving the wellbeing of people in terms of their choices, freedoms and capacities to live with dignity. Over recent years this has broadened from being understood in purely economic terms to Amartya Sen's 1999 definition of development being about an expansion in people's ability to be and to do.²³ This therefore takes in individual aspects, though is increasingly understood to include consideration of system-wide, interacting and interconnecting elements. Recognizing the interconnected nature of people and planet, the Sustainable Development Goals recognize eradication of poverty in all its forms as key for the prosperity of people and planet (SDGs). These 17 goals agreed by UN member states, include eradication of poverty, alleviating hunger, good health, education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, sustainable cities and communities, protection of habitat on land and in below water, combat climate change, builds resilient, inclusive and sustainable infrastructure and industry, decent work for all, responsible consumption and production. Crucially for this review, SDG 16 focuses on peace, justice and strong institutions, acknowledging that there can be no peace without development and no development without peace.²⁴ The relationship between conflict and development is well known – it is estimated that civil war can set back a country's development by 30 years.²⁵

Peacebuilding²⁶

A variety of official and unofficial definitions can be elaborated for peacebuilding. United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 report, *An Agenda for Peace*, defined peacebuilding as action to solidify peace and avoid relapse into conflict.²⁷ The 2000 *Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations* (also known as *The Brahimi Report*) defined it as, "activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war".²⁸ In 2007, the UN Secretary-General's Policy Committee agreed on the following conceptual basis for peacebuilding to inform UN practice:

"Peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives".²⁹

Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian action is intended to "save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and after man-made crises and disasters caused by natural hazards, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for when such situations occur".³⁰ Furthermore, humanitarian action should be governed by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's key humanitarian principles of: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, as reaffirmed in UN General Assembly resolutions and enshrined in numerous humanitarian standards and guidelines.³¹

The Stopping As Success project consortium acknowledges the cross-over of humanitarian aid with development and peacebuilding, and indeed greater linkages between phases of intervention need to be forged. We included humanitarian exit literature in this review. However, exits relating to humanitarian and emergency aid lie outside the scope of the Stopping As Success project and we do not extensively engage this subject further. Nonetheless, its relevance in the conversation around aid exits is noteworthy. For example, organizations often enter a country context due to a natural disaster, and in their exit they decide if they will phase down (exit completely) or transition into long-term development programming.³²

²³ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁴ United Nations Development Program, "The Sustainable Development Goals," United Nations Development Programme, Accessed July 17, 2018. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

²⁵ See <https://www.peacedirect.org/conflict-poverty/>

²⁶ This definition from Peace Direct, *Atrocity Prevention and Peacebuilding: Key insights and lessons from a global consultation convened by Peace Direct*, (London: Peace Direct, 2018), 7, accessed July 17, 2018. https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Atrocity-Prevention-Report_PD-2.pdf

²⁷ Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), "Multi-stakeholder Processes for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: A Manual," The Hague: GPPAC, 2015. Accessed July 17, 2018.

²⁸ United Nations General Assembly, "Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, A/55/305-S/2000/809 – 'The Brahimi Report,'" accessed July 17, 2018. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/55/305.

²⁹ UN General Assembly, "Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly, 60/1: 2005 World Summit Outcome, A/Res/60/1," accessed July 17 2018. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ods/A-RES-60-1-E.pdf>

³⁰ See, for example, Development Initiatives, "Defining humanitarian assistance," Bristol: Development Initiatives, no date, accessed July 17, 2018. <http://devinit.org/defining-humanitarian-assistance/#>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² World Food Programme, "Executive Board First Regular Session, Rome 5-7 February 2003," (Rome: World Food Programme 2003), *Policy Issues, Agenda Item 4: Exit Strategies for School Feeding: WFP's Experience*. WFP/EB.1/2003/4-C.



Locally-led
development
and
peacebuilding

Aid exits and transitions to locally-led development cannot be understood outside of the context within which they take place. Issues critical in shaping the global agenda on aid effectiveness, including country and local ownership of development, aid conditionality, sustainability and capacity building, serve as pointers to better understand what impacts and shapes aid exit and transition to locally-led development. At the heart of these concerns are power dynamics, and the degree to which they have shifted towards local actors in recent years.

Within the global agenda on aid effectiveness, the ways in which aid exits have been and/or should be designed and implemented has been somewhat neglected by international development scholars.³³ Initial Stopping As Success scoping work³⁴ suggests that since 2000 there has been more discussion on exit within international organizations and NGOs at the highest level of strategic and programmatic management, with the subsequent publication of policies and procedures as they set their exit strategy.

Driving transitions

In the early 2000s, the international community recognized the need to make aid more effective. As global leaders committed to the Millennium Development Goals in September 2000, they agreed to not only eradicate poverty but also to improve the quantity and quality of international assistance. At the heart of the aid agenda was the conviction that “donors do not develop developing countries – developing countries must develop themselves.”³⁵

The quest to improve development assistance prompted High Level International Forums on Aid Effectiveness in Rome (2003), Paris (2005),

Accra (2008) and Busan (2011).³⁶ Whilst the *Rome Declaration on Harmonisation* engaged simply with the Development Assistance Committee’s donors, the *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation* adopted a more inclusive approach that brought together a wide range of actors from aid recipient countries – from civil society organizations to the private sector to government institutions.³⁷ However, even after these developments, a number of questions persist: how much impact did these forums have in bringing about locally-led development? And how have these discussions influenced aid exits and transitions?

³³ Though also see, for example, Derek Fee, *How to Manage an Aid Exit Strategy: The Future of Development Aid* (London: Zed, 2012) *How to Manage an Aid Exit Strategy: The Future of Development Aid*, London: Zed and OECD, *Managing Aid Exit and Transformation*, (Oslo: OECD, 2008), accessed July 17, 2018. <https://www.oecd.org/derec/norway/42208151.pdf>.

³⁴ For example, in the UK, INTRAC have convened a working group to develop and support the technical aspects of exit strategies including British Red Cross, Every Child, Oxfam GB, Sight Savers and WWF-UK – see <https://www.intrac.org/projects/aid-withdrawal-exit-strategies/> and also OECD, *Managing Aid Exit and Transformation*.

³⁵ OECD/DAC, *Reaching Our Development Goals. Why Does Aid Effectiveness Matter?* (Paris: OECD, 2008), 4, accessed July 18, 2018. <https://www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness/40987004.pdf>.

³⁶ See Annex for key commitments and milestones

³⁷ Jessica Martini et al. “Aid Effectiveness from Rome to Busan: some progress but lacking bottom up approaches or behaviour changes.” *Tropical Medicine and International Health*, 2012: 931.

Development discourse: towards local ownership?

The aid effectiveness agenda has brought the issue of local ownership to the forefront of discussions on aid.³⁸ This is particularly important for understanding exits and transitions in which power is handed over to local actors. Jonathan Glennie, whilst outlining the many unresolved issues and flaws in the Paris Declaration (2005), acknowledged that it did in fact lead to some improvements in the relationship between donors and aid recipients. According to Glennie, there has been a “subtle rebalancing of power” and recipients “armed with a list of promises are better able to demand that donors improve their practices”.³⁹ Some international organizations have taken action to redistribute power. For example, Action Aid have advocated for direct involvement of aid recipients in, “all processes of local programme appraisal, analysis, research planning, monitoring, implementation, research and reviews, including recruiting and appraising frontline staff”.⁴⁰ Indeed, the forums in Paris, Accra and Busan triggered participation from local actors in aid recipient countries, including government bodies, private sector organizations and civil society groups. And more importantly, the principle of country ownership underpinned the discussions on aid effectiveness.⁴¹

However, this narrative has been widely contested. Action Aid’s 2005 Paris report, *Real Aid: An Agenda for Making Aid Work*, published in the aftermath of the Paris Declaration, suggested that the aid effectiveness agenda does not go far enough to address power dynamics. The report called for a new international agreement that would “replace the prevailing top down, donor-dominated model with a system of genuine mutual accountability that balances the legitimate interests of donors, recipients and, most importantly, poor people.”⁴² Although country ownership of development was an integral part of the Paris Declaration, it was still based on an international system that was largely donor-driven. These sentiments

were echoed in the *Aid Exits* consultation, with the majority of participants arguing that progress has been overstated as the resource imbalance “creates an asymmetric power structure”, meaning that despite “notable progress...decolonizing aid is still just a myth”.⁴³

In his critique of the Paris and Accra forums, David Booth has argued that at the “core of country ownership is the orientation of the country’s political leadership, not some technical device such as a good plan or functioning budget process”.⁴⁴ Some have argued that the aid effectiveness agenda has failed to consider the “political and economic relations underlying the aid system”.⁴⁵ Country ownership as thought of by donors was centred on a technical framework of development, in which the political realities inherent in public-policy making was overlooked. In this sense, it can be said that the aid effectiveness agenda served to depoliticize development policies in countries receiving international assistance.

Though there is limited discussion on aid exits throughout the international development discourse, related themes of sustainability and capacity building are present. A number of development scholars and practitioners make linkages between these concepts. For example, the set of guidelines for successful exits published by the Consortium of Southern Africa Food Security Emergency (C-SAFE) encouraged users to “think of an Exit Strategy as a Sustainability Plan”.⁴⁶ Similarly, Levinger and McCleod, in their study of exit strategies have also noted that a “resolution of the tension between the withdrawal of assistance and commitment to the goals of sustainable development lies at the heart of successful exit strategies”.⁴⁷ The issue of sustainability gets to the heart of what locally-led development can look like, and is a theme running through this review.

³⁸ For example, the 2005 Paris Declaration asks partner countries to exercise greater leadership over their development policies, which is reasserted in the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action.

³⁹ Jonathan Glennie, “Yes, The Paris declaration on aid has problems but it’s still the best we have.” *The Guardian*, November 18, 2011, accessed September, 11, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/nov/18/paris-declaration-aid-effectiveness-necessary>

⁴⁰ Action Aid, “ALPS: Accountability, Learning and Planning System,” (Johannesburg: Action Aid, 2006), 7, accessed July 17, 2018. http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/actionaids_accountability_learning_and_planning_system.pdf

⁴¹ See David Booth “Aid Effectiveness: bringing country ownership (and politics) back in” (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2011), 15, accessed July 17, 2018. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/6028.pdf>.

⁴² Action Aid, “Real Aid: An Agenda for Making Aid Work,” (Johannesburg: Action Aid, 2005), 34, accessed July 17, 2018. http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/real_aid.pdf

⁴³ Stephen Leach, *Aid Exits and Locally-led development*.

⁴⁴ David Booth “Aid Effectiveness: bringing country ownership (and politics) back in” (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2011), 15, accessed July 17, 2018. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/6028.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Alina Rocha Menocal and Andrew Rogerson, “Which Way the Future of Aid? Southern Civil Society Perspectives on Current Debates on Reform to the International System: Working Paper” (London, Overseas Development Institute, 2006), 7, accessed July 17, 2018. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/2029.pdf>

⁴⁶ Alison Gardner, Kara Greenblott and Erika Joubert, “What we know about Exit Strategies: Practical Guidance for Developing Exit Strategies in the Field.” (C-SAFE 2005), 4, accessed July 17, 2018. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A02C7B78FB2B408B852570AB006EC7BA-What%20We%20Know%20About%20Exit%20Strategies%20-%20Sept%202005.pdf>

⁴⁷ Beryl Levinger and Jean McLeod, “Hello I must be going: Ensuring Quality Services and Sustainable Benefits through Well-Designed Exit Strategies.” (Newton, Massachusetts: Education Development Center, Inc., Center for Organizational Learning and Development (COLAD), 2002), 1.

Defining local ownership

A recurring question raised in our interviews with key informant interviews is: how are we defining “local”? One director of an INGO pointed out that “it isn’t always about international actors exiting a local situation. But sometimes about local actors at the district level exiting a rural context”.⁴⁸ Moreover, a representative of a private foundation noted the importance of looking at the impact of development on the entire ecosystem in a development context. According to him, local ownership is about mobilising local resources. Otherwise, “you take people out of their world and what you build through development projects is not integrated into the country that is left behind”.⁴⁹ Similarly, in our online consultation, many participants expressed concerns that the use of “local” and “global” can create binaries that oversimplify complex relationships and the diverse role of local actors.⁵⁰

An increasing number of INGOs have taken steps to shift power from “northern countries, where many NGOs were founded, to the countries in the south”.⁵¹ It is believed that by devolving country offices, those at the receiving end of aid would have more control of the aid agenda and programme design. However, one former INGO director is sceptical of such developments, seeing it as a “McDonaldisation of INGOs. We can call [devolved entities] local, but it is the same thing on offer everywhere”.⁵² From the beginning the Stopping As Success project made an intentional decision to adopt a broad definition of “local” that goes beyond partner organizations of INGOs. Case studies in the project will include exits and transitions that involve a range of local actors including local INGO partners, local and national governments, local businesses and social enterprises as well as networks of local CSOs.

⁴⁸ Key Informant Interview. Director of an INGO. 13 April 2017

⁴⁹ Key Informant Interview. Director of a private foundation. 14 April 2017

⁵⁰ Stephen Leach, *Aid Exits and Locally-led Development*, 17.

⁵¹ Laura Sullivan, “You ask if NGOs have a right to exist, but some of us are already devolving power,” *The Guardian*, March 23, 2016, accessed July, 07, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/mar/23/ngos-right-to-exist-already-devolving-power>.

⁵² Key Informant Interview. Director of an INGO. 09 August 2017

The current context

In recent years, the international development environment has been profoundly impacted by dynamics within the global political economy.⁵³ With shifting aid policies and funding patterns, practitioners and policymakers cannot avoid economic consideration of issues around aid exits and locally-led development.⁵⁴ INTRAC studies on INGO exits from across the world have noted that the reasons for aid reduction and withdrawal include: “funding cuts by donors, decisions to reduce support for middle-income countries, changing operating environments, and shifts in the strategic direction at the organizational level”.⁵⁵ Moreover, ongoing changes in domestic politics in donor countries continue to lead to cuts in international assistance, which will inevitably lead to an increasing number of development actors withdrawing their assistance, some of whom could have initiated where donor-independent sustainability was not a priority.⁵⁶ Understanding the planning and execution of these exits enables increased awareness of the impact such development policies and practices continue to have on local institutions, governments, civil society groups and communities. Whilst the

current economic climate prompts an acute focus on exit, to students of aid effectiveness, these questions are not new.

Although the progress made in the aid effectiveness agenda over the last decade may have signalled a move away from “top-down” approaches, there still lies an inherent power imbalance which plays out in almost every aspect of the relationship between donors and recipients. Even though this is primarily observed in the fact that donors and INGOs hold the majority of resources, unequal power dynamics is also present in the following, explored in the next section:

- The perceptions held by development actors of local actors.
- The policies and practices of international agencies and organizations, including the design and implementation of exit strategies.
- The ways in which development knowledge and decision-making takes form.

⁵³ Rachel Hayman, Sarah Lewis “INTRAC’s Experience of Working with International NGOs on Aid Withdrawal and Exit Strategies from 2011 to 2016”. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 29, no.2 (2018): 361-372, accessed July 17, 2018, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11266-017-9901-x>.

⁵⁴ Rose, Collinson, Kalow, Working Itself out of a Job

⁵⁵ Sarah Lewis, “Praxis Paper 31: Developing a Timeline for Exit Strategies: Experiences from an Action Learning Set with the British Red Cross, EveryChild, Oxfam GB, Sightsavers and WWF-UK,” (Oxford: INTRAC, 2016), 5, accessed July 17, 2018. <https://www.intrac.org/resources/praxis-paper-31-developing-timeline-exit-strategies/intrac-praxis-paper-31-developing-a-timeline-for-exit-strategies-sarah-lewis/>

⁵⁶ For example, the British commitment to 0.7% of GDP being spend on Foreign Aid.

A woman wearing a green hijab and a floral patterned shirt is speaking to a group of people outdoors. She is gesturing with her hands as she talks. The background shows a rustic setting with wooden poles and a building with green walls. A red rounded rectangle is overlaid on the top right of the image, containing the title text.

The politics of transitions to locally-led development and peacebuilding

Power dynamics and the politics of aid

Unequal power dynamics lie at the heart of all policies and practices of international development actors, including in the processes of both providing and reducing international assistance. In order to understand the impact of hierarchical power structures and political relationships in the international development sector, it is critical to consider: 1) Why do donor countries provide aid in the first place? 2) Where do decisions on aid exits and phase-outs come from? 3) What are the experiences of local actors in such processes?

Critics of international development have argued that international assistance is used to further the political and economic interests of donors rather than improve conditions for aid

recipients.⁵⁷ Dambisa Moyo is one of a number of commentators⁵⁸ whose analysis engages with the negative impact of politically-driven and tied assistance, which she argues did not lead to development in Africa nor was it intended to.⁵⁹ Instead, international assistance has created dependency, distorted markets and increased corruption.⁶⁰ As donors make strategic decisions on where to deliver international assistance and for what purpose, the needs of the recipient communities are often overlooked. In the *Aid Exits* consultation several participants noted that the donor's agenda too often drives deliverables in line with foreign policy objectives, to the extent that it can be seen as "an important component of the imperial arsenal of western donors".⁶¹

The impact of politics on exits

By acknowledging the political nature of international assistance – that it can function as an arm of foreign policy – we can better understand not only why international assistance is given to some countries but also why it is taken away from others.⁶² Decisions to reduce international assistance tied to the foreign and security priorities of donor countries, do not require the same assessment of a project's sustainability that other aims (for example locally-led development) demand.⁶³ Moreover, politically-driven aid exits often take place abruptly, which jeopardizes relations between aid providers and local partners.

For example, an evaluation of several donor exits found Denmark's exit from Malawi over just six months to be a "worst practice" example of an exit.⁶⁴ The political decision to cut the aid budget by the Danish government resulted in little consultation and flexibility.⁶⁵ The centrality of donors' political interests in processes of aid entrance and exits impacts the local context of aid recipient countries in various ways.⁶⁶ Ultimately, donors are part of complex power relations and have played a role in both empowering and disempowering actors they believe they are supporting. This constraining role on civil society space is discussed below.

⁵⁷ Ilan Kapoor, *The Postcolonial Politics of Development* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁵⁸ See also, for example, the work of William Easterly, Nina Munk, Paul Collier, Mark Duffield amongst others.

⁵⁹ Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid*, (London: Penguin, 2011).

⁶⁰ See for example the 'Time to Listen' and 'Do No Harm' publications of CDA in this area: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, *Do No Harm and Conflict Sensitivity*, (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects), accessed on February 4, 2018. <http://cdacollaborative.org/what-we-do/conflict-sensitivity/> and Mary Anderson, Dayna Brown, and Isabella Jean, "Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid," (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2012), accessed July 17, 2018. <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/publication/time-to-listen-hearing-people-on-the-receiving-end-of-international-aid/>

⁶¹ Stephen Leach, *Aid Exits and Locally-led Development*, 7.

⁶² For an effective summary see <http://politics.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-332>

⁶³ See Rose, Collinson, and Kalow, *Working Itself Out of a Job*, 21.

⁶⁴ Heldgaard, Jesper. "Managing Aid Exit and Transformation: Summary of a Joint Donor Evaluation." Stockholm: Sida/Edita, 2008. 8

⁶⁵ Katy Oswald and Laurent Ruedin, "Empowerment sustainability and phasing out support to empowerment processes". Paris: OECD, 2012, accessed July 17, 2018. <http://www.oecd.org/development/povertyreduction/50158268.pdf>

⁶⁶ See also, Stephen Leach, *Aid Exits and Locally-led development*, 7-8.

Controlled by aid? How perceptions of the “local” undermine civil society

One common critique is that local civil society undergoes a process of “NGO-ization”, whereby donors interact with and change CSOs based on their own “western” models, prioritising the support of those who “fit” their systems. This impact, documented by Christopher Pallas, can skew local civil society, undermining local organizations by professionalizing those a donor chooses to support.⁶⁷ The point was made forcefully by the director of an INGO based in Uganda, who stated, “civil society in Uganda is one of the biggest but it is largely a donor created nest. They spend all of their time looking for donor funding. There is very little collaborative work”.⁶⁸

The 2014 Peace Direct “*Local First*” initiative captured this fundamental problem within the current international development sector:

Because the sector focuses on the provision of external resources, it is dominated by donor agendas and often ignores existing capacities in aid-receiving countries. This has a number of damaging and distorting consequences for local agency and ownership...⁶⁹

The provision of external resources shapes the perception and understanding of the contexts in which international actors wish to work. This view was borne out in the *Aid Exits* consultation, with participants noting the re-shaping and fracturing effect of aid. This led to local NGOs restructuring to be competitive within the development architecture, yet “abandoning their local structures and strategies, hence making them less relevant to the communities

they represent”.⁷⁰ In these examples, the power imbalance is rooted in resource provision and enables those with the resource to dictate and potentially undermine local voices and interests. This could lead to the empowering of local CSOs who receive resources over those who do not and as such distort the pre-existing local context. Donor support may have been intended to increase CSO effectiveness, yet this same support can also weaken groups’ grassroots connections and reduce accountability to their communities. For example, civil society still receives only a tiny fraction of direct funding.⁷¹

Why does this occur? As well as the political dynamics in development aid, this stems in part from the perception of many international actors that local people lack the capacity to lead their own development.⁷² From the perspective of many aid providers, local capacity is measured according to the ability of local organizations to carry out technical aspects of a project. This overlooks the ways in which local organizations function in a broader setting, which is made up of multiple and overlapping networks. Aid interventions can cause local communities to feel powerless and dependent on the external aid provider. For example, in CDA’s Listening Project it was noted that many local actors “felt used in activities that were designed and run by outsiders”.⁷³ Similarly, Oxfam’s report on the role of local actors in South Sudan’s humanitarian sector found that local capacity was underestimated by international actors and that the humanitarian system was exclusively internationally-led, with recognition given to only a small number of national NGOs.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ Christopher Pallas, ed., *Workshop Proceedings: Impact of Aid Reduction on Local Civil Society in Conflict-Affected States* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, 2015). Accessed July 17, 2018. Available open access at: http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=conf_proceedings_ccm.

⁶⁸ Key Informant Interview. Director of an INGO program in Uganda. 05 September 2017.

⁶⁹ Peace Direct, *Local First in Practice: Unlocking the power to get things done*. (London: Peace Direct, 2014), 7. Accessed July 17, 2018. <https://www.peacedirect.org/publications/local-first-practice/>.

⁷⁰ Stephen Leach, *Aid Exits and Locally-led development*, 10.

⁷¹ Laurie Lee, “World Humanitarian Summit. Local Civil Society is an effective humanitarian actor”, *Care Insights: development blog*, May 19, 2016, accessed February 2, 2018. <http://insights.careinternational.org.uk/development-blog/world-humanitarian-summit-local-civil-society-is-an-effective-humanitarian-actor>. See also Masooda Bano, *Breakdown in Pakistan. How aid is eroding institutions for collective action in Pakistan* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁷² Private foundations could provide lessons for other development actors in this area. For example, the relationship between Thousand Currents and its local partner in Mexico, Desarrollo Económico y Social de los Mexicanos Indígenas (DESMI). Thousand Currents Regional Director (Latin America), Katherine Zavala, pointed to the strategic role played by DESMI in shaping strategy and theory of change, as well as leading on various learning exchanges. This two-way partnership went beyond the traditional capacity-building approach.

⁷³ Anderson, Brown and Jean, *Time to Listen*, 21.

⁷⁴ Lydia Tanner and Leben Moro, “Missed Out: The role of local actors in the humanitarian response in the South Sudan conflict”, (Oxford: Oxfam, Christian Aid, CAFOD and Tearfund, 2016), accessed July 17, 2018, https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/rr-missed-out-humanitarian-response-south-sudan-280416-en.pdf.

International scepticism of local capacity has affected the types of relationships that have been formed in the international development sector.⁷⁵ Assuming local people lack capacity in the form of knowledge, experience and skills, inevitably leads to an unequal relationship between outsiders and insiders. Some commentators suggest this has contributed to structural racism in the international development sector, which has created a salary gap between local and international staff and has excluded local actors from strategy-making positions within an organization.⁷⁶

This challenge also brings with it an opportunity which the current shifts in international policies and funding practices creates. Although the withdrawal of donor funds may initially reduce established CSO capacities, Pallas noted that it can lead to increased innovation amongst CSOs as they adapt to reduced aid funding.⁷⁷ In Vietnam, Pallas found

that cuts in donor funding had “prompted local CSOs to begin exploring innovating solutions, including expanding social enterprises and mobilizing indigenous funding”.⁷⁸ Here, funding reduction can hasten the move to locally-led development as local actors take ownership of policies, services and funding streams. Not without risk, this increased innovation occurs once the shackles of external provision are removed. It is this risk that CDG suggests USAID mitigate through the development of a set of criteria to identify a state’s “readiness for transition”, based on indicators of development progress (need, fragility, good governance, business/economic environment, non-aid financing capacity) determined by international actors including the World Bank, UNDP, Freedom House, The Fund for Peace.⁷⁹ The two-stage process identifies readiness in the first stage, before conducting more contextual assessments to determine appropriate transition planning.⁸⁰

Development knowledge and decision-making

The power dynamics at the heart of aid and development capture decision-making, knowledge and extend to reform efforts. Whilst the aid effectiveness agenda set out above has resulted in shifts towards locally-led development, Menocal and Rogerson (Overseas Development Institute) note that, “most of the impetus and intellectual leadership for reforming the international aid system... comes from donors themselves”.⁸¹ These sentiments were

echoed during our online consultation, where many participants felt aid still reflected the foreign policy agendas of donor countries rather than the needs of local communities.⁸² Donors have played a dominant role in directing international discussions on aid reforms and setting trends. Concurrently, the representation of local actors in decision-making processes and in designing programmes of aid agencies and organizations remains low.

⁷⁵ It should also be noted that as Leach, *Aid Exits*, p.12, reported, “Some donors and INGOs are, however, meaningfully and constructively engaging communities. Key signs of such engagement include building relationships through listening, trusting communities over intermediaries, building coalitions within communities to amplify local voices, and planning for exits during project design”.

⁷⁶ Rashida Petersen and Jennifer Lentfer, “Grassroots Means No Brains: How to tackle racism in the aid sector”, *Guardian*, August 4, 2017, accessed July 17, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/aug/04/grassroots-means-no-brains-how-to-tackle-racism-in-the-aid-sector>

⁷⁷ Susan Appe and Christopher Pallas, “Aid Reduction and Local Civil Society: Causes, Comparisons and Consequences.” *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 29 (2018) 2: 245-255, accessed July 17, 2018, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11266-017-9846-0>

⁷⁸ Christopher Pallas, “Donor withdrawal and local civil society organizations: An analysis of the HIV/AIDS sector in Vietnam”. *Development Policy Review*, 36 (2017) 1: 131 – 151.

⁷⁹ Rose, Collinson, and Kalow, *Working Itself Out of a Job*, 21, 24-25.

⁸⁰ From this process, CDG identifies 14 countries that meet the first-stage readiness criteria: Albania, Brazil, Colombia, Cyprus, Dominican republic, Jamaica, Jordan, Macedonia, Mexico, Montenegro, Peri, Serbia, Thailand, Tunisia, (P.37).

⁸¹ Menocal and Rogerson, “Which Way the Future of Aid?”, 5.

⁸² Stephen Leach, *Aid Exits and Locally-led development*, 07.

The under-representation of local actors and the over-representation of donors and INGOs has shaped the aid agenda in a particular way. In his review of “southern writing” on international assistance, Bill Morton has found that southern writers were more concerned with, “development efforts at the regional, national or local levels, with the roles of government, institutions, the private sector, civil society, and other actors at these levels; and with the implications of national policies and decision-making”.⁸³ Essentially, their concerns include considerations of where power lies and the impact on the resulting activities. In contrast, northern development actors have typically focussed on the technical aspects of institutional reform such as traditional capacity building programmes, leaving the fundamental questions of power to one side.⁸⁴ Indeed, a key line of inquiry in the Stopping As Success project is to understand how projects differ and adapt to local context when leadership and control is transferred from an international actor to a local actor.

As development priorities continue to be shaped by the donor community, this impacts the types of projects that receive funding and brings into question how responsive aid agencies and organizations are to local needs. The dominance of northern views in the development discourse has been a consistent theme in both the online consultation and key informant interviews. For example, whilst speaking with the CEO of a Middle Eastern NGO we were told that:

Every three years the international community sets new trends. So, then we have to change our programs again. This has made it difficult for us

*to keep the trust of the communities and national governments we work with in the MENA region.*⁸⁵

There are steps being taken to rebalance power in development discourse. Norman Girven has identified the role of southern knowledge centres – namely the *Fundacion Gobierno y Sociedad* (FGS) in Argentina and The Consortium Graduate School of Social Sciences in the Caribbean. According to Girven, such centres have created “opportunities for local governments, agencies and professionals to influence intellectual content and policies that may not exist in global bureaucracies”.⁸⁶ More research is required to understand the impact of such centres.

Further transition to locally-led knowledge management is noted by Girven in the case of Vietnam. In managing its relationship with 50 separate donors, Vietnam has drawn up the Hanoi Core Statement on Aid Effectiveness. This calls for “respect of the country’s sovereignty” as well as the other principles outlined in the Paris Declaration⁸⁷ and offers an example of consolidating knowledge and experience in order to influence donor policies; being active proponents of relevant approaches rather than passive recipients of externally designed programmes.

The purpose of these sections of the review is to provide a snapshot of the challenges present in the current aid and development context which impact and shape exits and transitions to locally-led development. The following sections look at some of the ways these processes have taken place and the changing nature of relationships between international and local actors.

⁸³ Morton, “Southern Writing on Reform”, 4.

⁸⁴ For more on this, see Duncan Green, *How Change Happens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), and his excellent blog From Poverty to Power available at <http://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/>

⁸⁵ Key Informant Interview. Director of a regional NGO in the Middle East and North Africa. 15 September 2017.

⁸⁶ Norman Girven. “Power Imbalances and Development Knowledge,” (Ottawa: North-South Institute, 2007), 37, accessed July 17, 2018. <http://www.oecd.org/site/oecdgfd/39447872.pdf>

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

The drivers of aid exits

In almost all case studies identified in the grey literature and through key informant interviews, we found that decisions to exit were nearly always driven by factors outside of the local context, exemplifying the issues described above.⁸⁸ These ranged from funding restrictions imposed by donors on aid providers to changes in the domestic political climate in donor countries. Although sometimes aid exits were due to conflict and insecurity in the recipient country, decisions around when and how to exit came from external actors.

It is conventional international development logic that the phase out of international assistance should only take place when the development partners are assured of the sustainability of

the outcomes achieved through international assistance. Exit decisions are rarely based on sustainability being achieved, and invariably made before sustainability was ensured.⁸⁹ A study by the “PPA Partnership Approaches Learning Group”, on the experience of being on the receiving end of aid exits⁹⁰ found that there was little focus on sustainability as part of the phase out of international assistance. Similarly, a local peacebuilder from Pakistan noted:

*the international community have a habit of frequently changing their strategic objectives. They are more focussed on multiplying partner organizations and less focussed on the quality and sustainability of the project itself.*⁹¹

⁸⁸ For example, one international organization's decision to devolve their Colombia office was because of funding drying up internationally. In another case, the decision to handover a project in Philippines was because the INGO were not able to renew funding. People we interviewed have reported that exits are nearly always externally driven. One local NGO director from South Sudan told us that partnerships between international and local actors tend to be “transactional”. And “we don't take an active role in the entire project or planning stage. It's not worth talking about exit strategy being collaborative” (Key informant interview, 19 September 2017).

⁸⁹ Heldgaar, “Managing Aid Exit and Transformation,” 5.

⁹⁰ Sarah Lewis, “What's it like to be on the receiving end of exit? A partner and country office view: learning paper,” (London: Bond and INTRAC, 2017), accessed July 17, 2018, https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/ppa_learning_paper_the_receiving_end_of_exit.pdf.

⁹¹ Key Informant Interview. Local peacebuilder from Pakistan. 22 May 2017.



Aid dynamics in peacebuilding⁹²

⁹² Peace Direct, Search for Common Ground and CDA Collaborative Learning, who are implementing the Stopping As Success project, all have a particular interest in peacebuilding, as well as previous experience of researching aid dynamics in a number of peacebuilding context.

Several case studies identified for this research are projects in conflict-impacted contexts.⁹³ This may in part be due to the fact that in many conflict-affected contexts, it is particularly challenging for international actors to operate, and therefore a greater focus has been paid to the capacities of local civil society groups.

We are interested in understanding how the relationship between INGOs and local actors develop

The “local turn” in peacebuilding

The relationship between local and international actors is central to a critical debate in peacebuilding, which is over the relative merits of traditional “liberal” peacebuilding approaches as opposed to more “bottom-up” or “locally-led” approaches. The former is characterized by, “the promotion of democracy, market-based economic reforms and a range of other institutions associated with ‘modern’ states”.⁹⁴ The latter pays attention to “local dimensions of peace in a wider context of increased assertiveness by local actors as well as a loss of confidence by major actors behind international peace-support actors”.⁹⁵ This is rooted in local or traditional conflict resolution strategies. In recent years, there has been more focus on local approaches, which some authors have deemed to be the “local turn” in peacebuilding.

To understand the interaction between the local and international, Roger MacGinty and Oliver Richmond suggest the notion of a “hybrid peace” to capture a more participatory process of peacebuilding. Hybridity is essentially about “interaction across difference”, and emphasizes the agency and power of each actor to shape the situation.⁹⁶ This includes the impact of traditional and customary approaches and enables a focus on local agency and local politics in peacebuilding settings.⁹⁷ As Severine Autesserre notes, whilst there are numerous international contributions to conflict resolution, effective peacebuilding relies, “primarily on the actions,

in such settings and whether valuable lessons can be learned on partnerships and transitions by applying a conflict sensitivity lens. The three organisations carrying out the Stopping As Success project (Peace Direct, Search for Common Ground and CDA Collaborative Learning Projects) all have a particular interest and expertise in the field of peacebuilding. This is an additional factor in a special focus on aid dynamics in peacebuilding, where we can build upon our existing expertise in this area.

interests, and strategies of domestic entities”.⁹⁸ Foreign intervention can “support peace initiatives and undermine efforts to resume violence”, thereby increasing the chance of establishing more durable peace, yet it is at the local level that the crucial transformation has to happen.⁹⁹

However, postcolonial critiques emphasized that injecting local actors into externally driven processes does not challenge the normative underpinning of liberal peacebuilding. For example, Suthaharan Nadarajah and David Rampton have argued that a hybrid analysis does not address the multiple sides to a conflict and can serve the liberal agenda as it “reproduces liberal peace’s logic of inclusion and exclusion”.¹⁰⁰ Interventions by international organizations in situations of violent conflict, commonly neglect local priorities and concerns, dominating the interaction and negotiation with their national and local partners.¹⁰¹ Too often the international actor remains the chief powerholder in shaping the outcomes.¹⁰² In such cases, Dana Burder argues, the “beauty of participation is in the eye of the donor or facilitator,” rather than participants themselves.¹⁰³

Whilst a hybrid analysis may help identify the roles that local actors play in peacebuilding processes, hierarchical power structures remain largely embedded in the aid system.

⁹³ For example we will be conducting case studies in Eastern DR Congo, the Mindanao region of the Philippines, Burundi and Timor-Leste

⁹⁴ Edward Newman, Roland Paris and Oliver P. Richmond, *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*. (New York: United Nations University Press, 2009), 3.

⁹⁵ Roger MacGinty and Oliver Richmond, “The Local Turn in Peace Building: A critical agenda for peace,” *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (2013): 49.

⁹⁶ Sarah Hellmüller, “The Power of Perceptions,” *International Peacekeeping*, 20, no. 2(2013): 223.

⁹⁷ Roger MacGinty, “Indigenous peace-making versus the liberal peace,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 43, no. 2 (2008): 140

⁹⁸ Severine Autesserre, “International Peacebuilding and Local Success: Assumptions and Effectiveness,” *International Studies Review*. (2015): 2

⁹⁹ Severine Autesserre, “International peacebuilding and Local Success: Assumptions and Effectiveness,” *International Studies Review* (2017): 1-19.

¹⁰⁰ Suthaharan Nadarajah and David Rampton, “The limits of hybridity and the crisis of liberal peace,” *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 1 (2016): 49.

¹⁰¹ Hellmüller, “The Power of Perceptions,” 226; Audra Mitchell, “Peace beyond Process?” *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (2010): 643.

¹⁰² Hellmüller, “The Power of Perceptions,”; David Chandler, *International Statebuilding: The Rise of Post-Liberal Governance* (London: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁰³ Dana Burder, “Weak State, Strong Community? Promoting Community Participation in Post-Conflict Countries,” *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 6, no.2 (2004): 73

Conflict sensitivity

The relationship between international actors and local civil society in conflict settings has additional complications that may affect the exit strategies used, because aid can play a destabilizing role in conflict settings. CDA Collaborative Learning Projects began work on “conflict sensitivity” in 1993 with a project that developed into the “Do No Harm” programme:

*When international assistance is given in the context of a violent conflict, it becomes a part of that context and thus also of the conflict. Although aid agencies often seek to be neutral or nonpartisan toward the winners and losers of a war; the impact of their aid is not neutral regarding whether conflict worsens or abates.*¹⁰⁴

From the Do No Harm research, CDA emphasized the concept of “Conflict Sensitivity”:

*Conflict sensitivity refers to the practice of understanding how aid interacts with conflict in a particular context, to mitigate unintended negative effects, and to influence conflict positively wherever possible, through humanitarian, development and/or peacebuilding interventions.*¹⁰⁵

Conflict sensitivity must also be considered during the project end. Exit strategies need to be flexible enough to address changes to conflict dynamics and political developments, but proactive enough to ensure local partners and communities’ expectations

are not unduly raised. Decisions should be well thought out and should respond to dynamics identified through conflict analysis and subsequent monitoring. In conversations with four international development researchers working in/on Burundi, we were told that many INGOs exited Burundi abruptly during political unrest in 2015. For them, important questions to consider are: “can INGOs always plan for exit? And, how do they accelerate their plans for exits when situations deteriorate dramatically?”¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, in a separate interview with an INGO consultant, we heard that in some conflict-impacted contexts announcing an exit could endanger local staff and leave the local office vulnerable to looting by militia groups. In some cases, “active participation and participatory processes was a risk” and exits were “communicated but not celebrated”.¹⁰⁷ The Stopping As Success project will seek to understand if and how exits driven by a rapidly changing conflict situation can still be done responsibly.

Exit strategies may also be complicated by the nature of civil society in conflict-affected settings, where civil society may be nascent or affected by trust issues which impact on their relationships with external actors.¹⁰⁸ Perceptions of civil society may also be contested in conflict-affected societies in ways that international actors need to understand for effective partnerships and exit strategies. As an example, one key informant from Pakistan told us in an interview that INGOs in Pakistan have been tied into CIA operations and as such “local communities in rural areas are less trustful of international organizations”.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Mary Anderson, *Do No Harm. How Aid Can Support Peace or War* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993): 1.

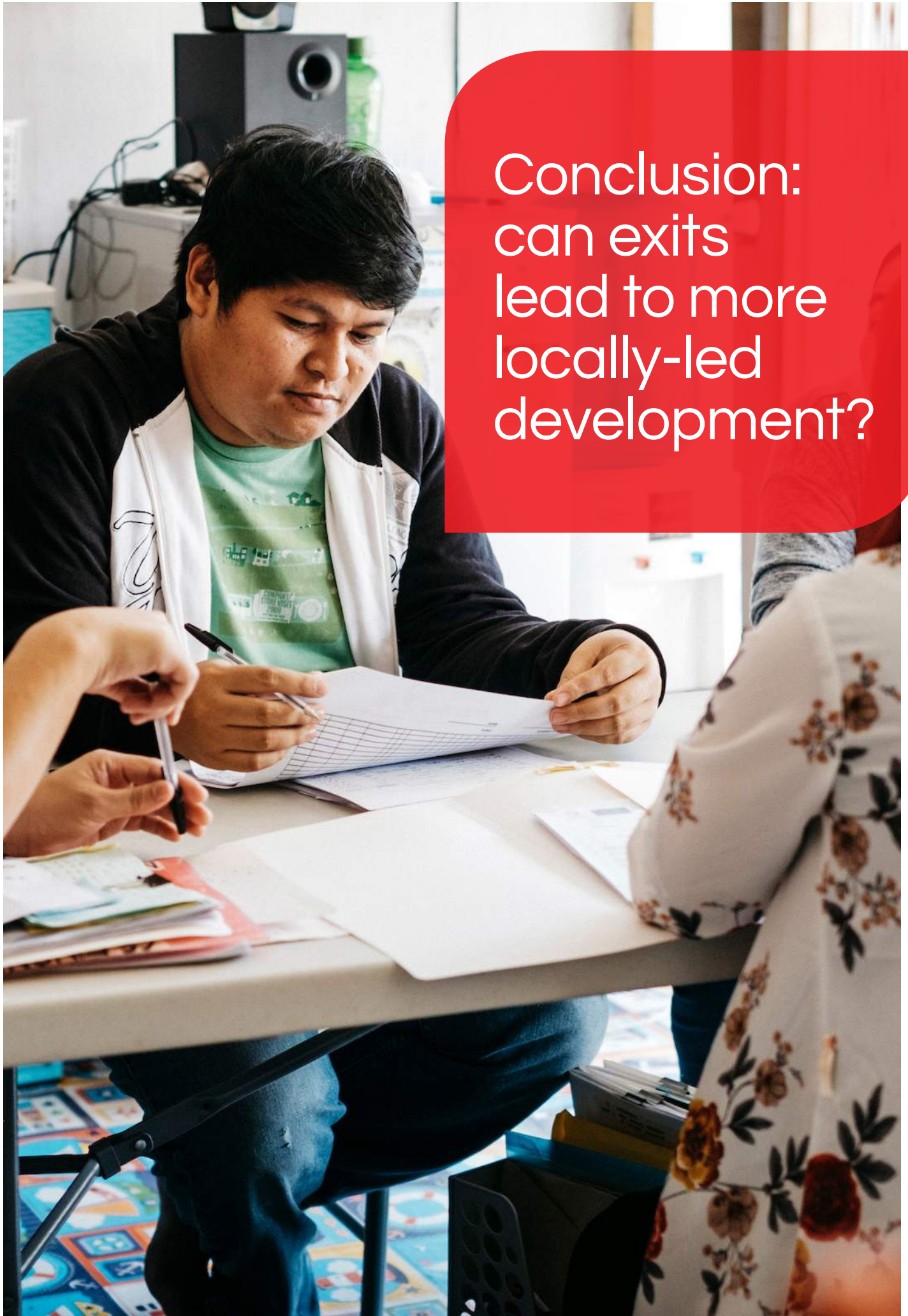
¹⁰⁵ CDA, “Do No Harm”.

¹⁰⁶ Key Informant Interviews. International development researchers from Burundi. 10 August 2017

¹⁰⁷ Key Informant Interview. International development consultant. 12 September 2017

¹⁰⁸ Mary Anderson and Lara Olson, with Kristin Doughty, *Confronting War: Critical lessons for peace practitioners* (Cambridge: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2003).

¹⁰⁹ Key Informant Interview. Local peacebuilder from Pakistan. 22 May 2017



Conclusion:
can exits
lead to more
locally-led
development?

This review engages with a number of themes in the broader development discourse, which are important for understanding the realities within which aid exits and transitions take place. We examined various academic papers, grey literature, evaluation reports and conducted several Key Informant Interviews to capture a range of opinions and views. An understanding of the wider aid context is important for the consortium as we begin the Stopping As Success case study research.

One key theme requiring increased understanding within international aid is the unequal power dynamics inherent in the sector and the ways in which it plays a critical role in every aspect of the relationship between international and local actors. This influences the ways in which

international organizations have thought about and approached exits and transitions, and also the level of participation, if any, of local actors in these exit processes.

The review also identifies some of the steps taken by the international community and aid recipient countries to foster more locally-led development. Although there is still a long way to go before we see truly locally-led development, some improvements were noted. Several key factors present in examples that look to re-dress the power balance, through aid exits or transition towards locally-led development include the importance of local leadership, the role of civil society and the degree of support and relationship between international and local actors after exit/transition.

The importance of local leadership

Across international organizations we found consistent emphasis on the need to offer structural and institutional support after successful exit. However, the example of CARE International¹¹⁰ emphasizes the need to look beyond the reduction of exits and transitions to technocratic exercises focusing on finances and governance. Instead, local, passionate and well-networked leadership

was prioritized. CARE interviewees pointed to the successful transitions of offices in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia, Peru and Bangladesh¹¹¹ to independent, local NGOs, initiated by local staff who wanted to continue the programming. The leadership of a number of other international NGOs experienced in such transitions also emphasized the importance of local leadership in transition and exit processes.

The role of civil society

Notwithstanding the challenges to locally-led development outlined throughout this review, there is increasing recognition of the key role of civil society organizations (CSOs)¹¹² in achieving sustainable development.¹¹³ As the examples above explore,

when development is locally-led, civil society can be a vibrant and critical independent sector that engages in service delivery, holds governments and donors to account, and takes a lead role in shaping dialogue for development policies and practices.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ See pages 8-9

¹¹¹ Bangladesh and Vietnam are currently exploring exits as of August 2017.

¹¹² Whilst civil society remains a contested term, the OECD offers a useful working definition of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as, "The multitude of associations around which society voluntarily organizes itself and which represent a wide range of interests and ties. These can include community-based organizations, indigenous peoples' organizations and non-government organizations" (OECD, "DAC Guidelines and Reference Series Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment: Good Practice Guidance for Development Co-operation", Paris: OECD, 2006).

¹¹³ For example, see UNDP – <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>; BOND – <https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/leaving-no-one-behind-0516.pdf>; Cordaid – <https://www.cordaid.org/en/news/sdgs-fail-without-civil-society/>

¹¹⁴ and Janice Giffen and Ruth Judge, "Civil Society Policy and Practice in Donor Agencies," (Birmingham: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, 2010), 2.

Relationships after an exit: a transition of roles

There are varying degrees of ongoing relationship between international and local actors, from entire independence to continued use of branding and endorsement. As set out earlier, AFSC allows devolved organizations to utilize its branding if beneficial in terms of maintaining support, without expectation of control or resources.¹¹⁵ The “Accompaniment” approach outlined by Partners Global, offered another model for ongoing support, which can range from relationship or funds management, external fundraising, impact measurement, or technical business capacities. This is one of many models that are emerging to support locally-led development in new ways.

In examining the role of aid providers and civil society, we found that decisions on development policies and practices were focussed on donor agendas. The relationship between international and local organizations and communities remains significant in defining the autonomy available to local actors. This influenced the types of development projects that were designed and implemented by INGOs and laid the groundwork for aid exits. A successful exit therefore was often dependent on a successful entrance. These relationships are most apparent in conflict-affected contexts.

¹¹⁵ AFSC, “Integrated Sustainable Livelihoods”.

Annex 1.

How organizations talk about “exit strategies”

In our review of the internal and external document of organizations, we found a broad range of terms used around exit strategies:

Organization	Term
American Friends Service Committee	Devolvement, localization
World Food Programme	Exit
World Vision	Transition
INTRAC	Exit
EveryChild	Exit (phase out), localization (phase over)
Search for Common Ground	Legacy, exit
CARE	Exit, transition (and by contrast: Presence)
Catholic Relief Services	Transition, S/T strategies (sustainability/transition strategies)
Project Concern International	Sustainability, exit (phase out), graduation (phase over)

The range of terms used by different organizations indicates a lack of agreed terminology around exit strategies. However, the review of the literature demonstrates that organizations choose their terms intentionally.

CARE International (CI) chose to define the term “presence” to inform their organizational philosophy:

*“The idea of presence is moving away from ‘having staff and an office’ to something much more vibrant: presence relates to CI’s ability to influence, add value, join in with others, harness resources for the purpose of fighting poverty and inequality, and amplify the voices of people and groups in the fight against poverty and inequality. Presence means playing diverse roles most relevant to each context that best supports multiplying impact and innovation in line with CARE’s Program Strategy”.*¹¹⁶

The intentional use of the term “presence” invites a more explicit acknowledgement of entrance and existence of INGOs, and, by extension, exits.

The British Red Cross note that “exits” can be difficult processes but advised against the use of euphemism:

*“When discussing Exit, many terms and definitions are used interchangeably: But Beware! Choose language and terms carefully, as many of the terms associated with ‘exit’ have negative connotations (loss of resources, uncertain future, quick get outs). But in reality, what are the alternatives? The alternatives can descend into euphemism, and sometimes you just have to call a ‘spade a spade’ and tell it how it is”.*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Care international, “Guidance Note”, 2-3.

¹¹⁷ British Red Cross, “Leaving Responsibly”

Some organizations choose certain terms as they felt they present a more useful “framing” of the processes. For example, an EveryChild staff member suggested “it can help to refer to “sustainability plans rather than exit plans to frame discussions in a positive way”.¹¹⁸ Exits refer to an action by the donor, whilst sustainability, refers to the aid recipient. In this sense, “sustainability” perhaps confers more agency to those on the receiving end of aid.

It should be noted though that the difference between “exit” and “sustainability” goes beyond just framing. Indeed, some authors specifically draw attention to the distinction between “sustainability strategies” and “exit strategies” as a way of distinguishing between a planned approach focused on impact and a much more limited focused on processes of organizations for phase-out or phase-over.

Writing on sustainability of exit strategies in India, Rogers and colleagues note that a sustainability plan “should represent all the elements of project design that take sustainability into account and should increase the likelihood that project outcomes and impacts and (where relevant) activities continue.”¹¹⁹ A sustainability plan represents all elements of a project, such as outcomes, impacts and related activities, that take sustainability into account, whereby an exit strategy is specifically about the part of the sustainability plan that deals with phasing out and/or phasing over. Exit strategies live within the sustainability plan. An “exit strategy” relates more specifically to the portion of a sustainability plan that deals with the process of “phase-out” (withdrawal of external support) and “phase-over” (transfer of responsibility) by an implementing organization from an activity, a project, or an entire area by the end of a project cycle.¹²⁰

Some organizations use the term “legacy” (or “legacy strategy”) in their internal documentation. In Search for Common Ground’s internal strategy documents, “legacy strategy” and “exit strategy” are used interchangeably, connoting an internally-held view that values the legacy of their conflict transformation work as a living continuation of the people, the peacebuilders, who continue to do their work even if there is no longer a brick and mortar office or international funding.¹²¹

The British Red Cross says your “legacy” is central to your exit strategy: “Ultimately, with ‘Exit Strategy,’ the name of the game is Legacy! ... What do we want and not want to leave behind? ... [A] good legacy [means] no unfulfilled promises or incomplete projects”.¹²²

Similarly, EveryChild held one-day “Legacy Conferences” in closing ceremonies celebrating their work prior to their permanent exit in two countries.¹²³ Legacy is also used synonymously with “reputation” in the INTRAC external evaluation¹²⁴ commissioned by EveryChild to analyze their exits. In this sense, it could be seen that a focus on legacy puts additional emphasis on the continued reputation of the INGO, as compared with a focus on “sustainability”.

¹¹⁸ James, Popplewell and Bartlett, “Ending Well”.

¹¹⁹ Beatrice Rogers, Carisa Klemeyer, Ameya Bondre, and Jamie Fierstein, “Sustaining Development: Results from a Study of Sustainability and Exit Strategies among Development Food Assistance Projects—India Country Study,” (Washington, DC: FHI 360/Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA), 2017): 8

¹²⁰ Levinger and McLeod, “Hello I must be going”.

¹²¹ Search for Common Ground, “Memo on Legacy Strategy for Timor Leste,” (Internal document, March 2015).

¹²² British Red Cross, “Leaving Responsibly”.

¹²³ Rachel Hayman, Rick James, Rowan Popplewell, and Sarah Lewis, “Exit strategies and sustainability: lessons for practitioners. Special Series Paper No. 1,” (Oxford: INTRAC, 2016), Accessed July 17, 2018. <https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Exit-strategies-and-sustainability-Lessons-for-practitioners.-November-2016.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Annex 2.

Milestones in the aid effectiveness agenda

Milestones	Key commitments
2003: Rome Declaration on Harmonization	Donors asked to coordinate activities and commit to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivering development assistance based on recipient country priorities.• Co-operation and flexibility on country programmes and projects.• Strengthening leadership of recipient countries in determining their development path.
2005: Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness	Established five principles for aid effectiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ownership: Partner countries to exercise effective leadership over their development policies and strategies and coordinate actions.• Alignment: Donors to base their overall support on partner countries' national development strategies, institutions and procedures.• Harmonization: Donors' actions to be more harmonized, transparent, and collectively effective.• Managing for results: Donors and partners to focus on achieving and measuring development results.• Mutual accountability: Donors and partners to be accountable to each other and their electorates for development results.
2008: Accra Agenda for Action	Reassert commitments made during the Paris Declaration, with a particular emphasis on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encouraging country ownership of development.• Building effective and inclusive partnerships.• Achieving development results and openly accounting for them
2011: Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation	Broadened the aid agenda and changed the narrative from <i>aid</i> effectiveness to <i>development</i> effectiveness as well as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Think of development beyond just traditional aid.• Recognize the contributions from recipient countries themselves, South-South cooperation and the private sector.• Engage with new partners such as China, Brazil and India.

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