



STOPPING AS SUCCESS: TRANSITIONING TO LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

RESPONSIBLE INGO TRANSITIONS AND LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

FINDINGS FROM A GLOBAL ONLINE CONSULTATION

Executive Summary & Recommendations



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A key component of working towards locally led development is to enable responsible partnership transition processes.¹ This is especially crucial in the aid sector where donor priorities regularly shift, and contexts are ever-changing, which has led to a greater need to sustain impact and ensure local actors' sustainability. However, a significant gap that has emerged to support international actors to effectively leave contexts, end programs, or transform organizational structures is the lack of knowledge around best practices and practical examples of responsible partnership transitions.²

Stopping as Success (SAS) recognized this need and from 2017-2020, conducted research to build evidence and create tools and resources to support responsible partnership transitions. Under the current phase of the project, SAS+ seeks to apply these learnings and accompany organizations currently going through partnership transitions. In order to continue learning how partnership transitions happen in different contexts and what factors support or hinder such processes, SAS+ held a 2-day online consultation to examine recent shifts in the aid sector related to partnership transitions. As phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts such as the #ShiftThePower movement and decolonizing aid conversations have forced international actors to reimagine their relationships with local actors and vice versa, this consultation sought to understand how partnership transitions are impacted and influenced by these dynamics.

KEY INSIGHT 1

The use of particular forms of language and terms when discussing partnership transitions can infer power imbalances that are unfavorable to local actors. Such language might be disempowering, not grounded in local realities, or hold varied meanings for people in different contexts.

“The terminology around transitions is not very appropriate as it may actually reflect a level of power; not a partnership of mutual consideration of each other’s level. It sounds like there is a dominant and a dominated, one dependent on the other.”

- Yvette Mushigo

KEY INSIGHT 2

Local resource mobilization not only leads to more responsible partnership transitions and local ownership, but also contributes to the local partner's sustainability, meaning they can continue to contribute to positive impact even after a program ends. Ideally, this mobilization can take place in tandem with international organizations changing their systems to fund transition processes and collaboration from the project planning stage.

“On the conversation about transitions; there is no way we can talk about transition without “Sustainability”. But again, how can we talk about sustainability without exploring “local resource generation” or “domestic resourcing”. Local actors MUST

1 Throughout this report, a responsible partnership transition refers to a process that is planned, jointly led by both local actors and their international partners, and gradual, in order to best support local leadership.

2 Hayman (2015)

come alive to the fact that donors are increasingly moving to co-ownership or co-funding because this is one of the aspects that “could” guarantee sustainability.”

- Aweno Norman

KEY INSIGHT 3

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that local actors are not only able, but also best placed to lead work in their own contexts, which supports the argument for local actors to lead on partnership transition processes. With the flexibility to design interventions that have not been imposed by INGO partners, local actors were also able to bypass arduous bureaucratic procedures which are often resource and time intensive.

“We have experienced a partnership transition because of COVID-19. This transition was because the international actor needed a grounded response, and we were better placed for this considering our local language and context. On the ground here locally, we were able to design our own interventions and did not need to work on what the partner dictated. The pandemic has changed how organizations engage in partnerships. For example, bureaucratic processes involving several documentations were suspended because of the lack of physical contact.”

- Tah Kennette Konsum

KEY INSIGHT 4

Partnership transitions can be a form of transformation for local and international organizations if power imbalances are acknowledged and addressed. Efforts such as the #ShiftThePower movement and conversations on decolonizing aid continue to question the power imbalances inherent within the international development system, as well as the structures that help perpetuate harmful practices and continue to occur in partnership transitions.

“...I believe a power shift is possible, but it’s vital that international organizations first shift their perspective in relation to local organizations. Many times, the most critical sources of support for vulnerable communities are organizations that are more informal and embedded in local social networks. These organizations however face many barriers in obtaining funding, including being seen as less trustworthy, involving more risk, and having less resources to fill out the complicated bureaucracy and thorough paperwork required by international organizations. Decolonization requires valuing other ways of existing in this world, that are not rooted in Western modernism. Therefore, international organizations have to shift their funding practices in a way that values the ways that local communities form organizations, rather than simply expecting them to abide by the standard set by Western NGOs.”

- Chelsea Barrera

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are recommendations that emerged from the consultation on ways for INGOs to work towards responsible partnership transitions:

- **Enter partnerships with an initial transition plan already in place.**
Responsible and successful transitions are often planned from the start. This can ensure at the earliest stage that the expectations of all partners involved are managed, and that local actors are able to help shape and take ownership following the transition.
- **Collaborate directly with local partners throughout every stage of the partnership transition process.**
This includes organizing transparent and open conversations from the initial design phase of a joint program or collaborative effort to the implementation and evaluation stages, as well as during the transition itself. It is equally important to consult with local communities impacted by the project throughout the process to ensure their buy-in, taking their contributions to the joint program or initiative into full account at each stage.
- **Tailor capacity strengthening efforts according to existing local capacities.**
Partnership transitions are best carried out when local partners can determine and frame the types of capacity strengthening support that they need to ensure the sustainability of their work following the transition.
- **Recognize and address inherent power imbalances in the international development system and how these undermine the agency of local actors.**
This includes fully recognizing and taking into account the agency of local actors and acknowledging their insights, perspectives, and experiences. INGOs need to properly value and invest in local knowledge systems and practices, reform their systems so they can be more courageous with their funding, and re-assess their relationships with local actors to create and sustain more equitable partnerships that in turn lead to more responsible partnership transitions.³

3 Paige (2021a)

View the full report by [clicking here](#).

Stopping As Success: Locally-Led Transitions in Development (SAS+)
is a collaborative learning project that looks into how to make INGO
transitions more responsible.

The SAS+ project team consists of **Peace Direct**,
CDA Collaborative Learning, and
Search for Common Ground.



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