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Case Report

Project completion and exist strategy plans: A case study of world bank supported community and social development programme AF (CSDP-AF) in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Most programs' ultimate goal is to achieve significant long-term benefits, or results that can be maintained and/or improved after the livelihood support organization has left. In theory, this means indefinite sustainability, but in practice, it can be helpful to project out enough years after exit (project completion) to be able to make some predictions about long-term change long enough to illustrate whether the project appears to be sustainable. Considering resource constraints and multiple livelihood assistance needs, many livelihood support organizations are increasingly realizing that they cannot fund and sustain any one initiative continuously. We should be able to quit responsibly once we've met our objectives, sure that our livelihood support results will not be jeopardized. To accomplish this, we must prepare for long-term sustainability as we design and implement programs.

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1. Introduction

Community Driven Development (CDD) is a mechanism to improve service delivery and local governance by empowering communities, local governments, service delivery, accountability, transparency, communication and capacity building at all levels. Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) is a scaled-up of Community-based Poverty Reduction Project (CPRP) and Local Empowerment and Environmental Management (LEEMP) pilot project. Therefore, CSDP is an intervention that has built on the CPRP and LEEMP structures. CSDP is supported by World Bank to promote community-driven development.

CSDP-AF adopts Community Driven Development (CDD) approach with a Project Development Objective (PDO) to increase access to sustainable social and natural

resource infrastructure services throughout Nigeria by poor people, and in particular internally displaced and vulnerable people in the northeast of Nigeria. It assists communities with micro projects in education, health, rural electrification, transport, water, socio-economic, natural resource and gender and vulnerable groups in implementing their felt needs.¹

1.1. Project completion

Any project has two points viz. initial and exit points. Between these points are the phase involved and working towards sustainability of the project beyond its stipulated time period is very critical.

1.2. Creating project ownership

Creating ownership of a project refers to a series of activities related to presenting and discussing with the aim

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of engaging the community to actively participate.² The group needs to be properly consulted and active to consider the project as their own.

1.3. Understanding exit strategy

Exit strategies confuse and elude emergency and development practitioners in Africa's dynamic context. It is a planned approach in which after completion the implementing organization, responsible local government bodies and the community or target group plan to hand over the project management.³ A joint exit strategy should be planned and agreed to clarify how the project will end or transform, how the implementation organization will withdraw and who will take over to sustain project outcomes.⁴

2. Program Exit

It refers to eliminating all externally provided system services from a whole system field; may apply to the completion of a funding period of the system, with an extension by a subsequent extended rehabilitation plan.

3. Program Exit Strategy

It is a plan outlining how the program plans to remove its resources while ensuring that the achievement of the program objectives is not jeopardized and that progress towards those goals will continue. The Exit Strategy can include multiple scenarios or contingency plans addressing unknown factors. The goal of an exit strategy is to ensure that the impacts are sustained after a program ends.⁵ It is a sustainability strategy accomplished by staggered graduation from specific project areas, simultaneous withdrawal from the entire program area, or transition to associated programming in selected areas.⁶

4. Project Ownership to Adopt Exit Strategy After Project Completion

Project ownership creation and exit strategy planning help to ensure the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of an intervention. Encouraging all members of the community to take part in the project process increases their sense of responsibility for the project and helps to promote transparency and integrity.⁷ An exit plan encourages resilience and mitigates the potential for failure.

Identify handing over partner: After handing over, the partner who owns the project assets must be identified jointly with local government and community. Depending on the project type, national policy framework and local priorities, options include transferrable to:

1. The community, which represents the most common approach.

2. Local authorities: This is a choice because it is the responsibility of local government to promote service delivery especially in rural areas.
3. The supplier of the local water services: It is another option if there is a public water service provider who also manages assets on behalf of the local government.

All options have strengths and weaknesses as the immediate partner handing over will feel most ownership.

Choose management option: Besides ownership of assets, it is important to clarify how long-term they will be managed, operated and maintained. Again there are several choices depending on the policy and legal system, as well as the local context:

1. Community management in collaboration with the local authorities
2. Community management in partnership with local or private service providers
3. Private owner-contracted operator
4. Local government owned infrastructure

Support the community to select and register a community committee: Hold a meeting with the community as a whole which discusses the importance of choosing and registering a community committee.⁸ Clarify that the project is owned by the beneficiaries, and the community committee members are not paid on behalf of the beneficiaries for the work they do, but rather on voluntary bases.

Hold a meeting with the community: The following information should be shared during a meeting with the whole community, and related questions should be addressed:

1. Presentation of the intended project. The proposal is debated and integrated based on feedback from changes in the community.
2. The implementation organization, the community committee and the local government plan and agree on the exit strategy. During this process, the Community Committee formally accepts responsibility for the required project follow-up (e.g. operation and maintenance, revenue collection or continuation of training activities, depending on project type) and potential support and local government requirements or standards are agreed upon.⁹ If the community committee needs additional training to carry out these activities, the implementing organization should include the development of any required capacities within the scope of the project.

Once the agreement is reached, the entire community approves the project and the assignment of the related responsibilities.

Importance of exit strategies: Good exit strategies can

1. Resolve the tension arise between withdrawal of aid and commitment to achieving program outcomes;
2. Explain and identify the role of a sponsor in host communities and other stakeholders.

5. Graduation Strategy

It is a specific plan describing how the recipient will be discharged, disengaged from further assistance while ensuring that the achievement of the program's goal is not jeopardized and that further progress will be made towards that goal.¹⁰ The aim of this strategy is to ensure continuity of impacts after a program or external intervention discharges the beneficiary.

6. Program Transition

This is the change from one form of assistance program to another in direct response to on-the-ground needs.

7. Universal Approaches to Exit Strategies

Three basic exit strategies approaches are:

1. *Phasing Down:* This is a gradual reduction in program activities, using local communities, beneficiaries to sustain program benefits while less resources are deployed by the original sponsor and is often a preliminary phase.
2. *Phasing Out:* This applies to the removal of a participant from the participation of a program without turning it over to another organization for continued implementation. From the beginning, initiatives should be structured to inculcate awareness and skills before the maturity or understanding of measurable benefits.¹¹ It should be noted that project funding cycles sometimes don't always coincide with needs. Cycles of donor support and funding can impose artificial deadlines for phase-out of the programme.
3. *Phasing Over:* The focus is put on community capacity building during program design and implementation, so that the services delivered will continue across local systems.

8. Exit Criteria

Criteria used to assess when services are to be exit differ.

1. Time Limit: Support, rehabilitation and growth services have time limits determined by periods of funding.
2. Achievement of Program Impacts: Program impact indicators can sometimes be used as exit criteria. This

can help, advice and guide the timetable for the exit strategy.

3. Achievement of Benchmarks: It is observable measures of the established steps in an exit strategy's graduation process. They are a part of the initial preparation process for monitoring and evaluation.

9. Setting Timeframe for Program Exit

It is important to set an exit timetable to the funding period of the program and is clearly communicated to the group. Program execution may affect exit strategy activities, and the exit plan remains flexible with the assumption that during the program process any of the exit requirements and metrics may need to be changed.¹² Finally, after the phase-out of the system is complete, continuing interaction with communities will help to promote results sustainability.

10. Exit Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation

Continuous and timely tracking of benchmarks are key to effective exit strategies. This will avoid duplication of surveillance efforts and maximize the use of existing data. To determine the success of an exit strategy, an assessment should be carried out after a period of time. Since funding is usually not programmed in this way in most instances, exit strategies are rarely assessed. Three measures to gauge the success of an exit strategy are: (i) if the impact of the program has been sustained, expanded, or after a program has ended; (ii) if the activities concerned continue in the same or modified format; and (iii) if the existing systems continue to work effectively.

11. Source of Funding

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12. Conflict of Interest

None.


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