RECOMMENDATION ONE
DESIGN PHASE

Appendix 1 to Services that Last
Recommendations for building institutionally sustainable WASH projects in Malawi

A step-by-step guide for designing WASH projects with impacts that can be sustained within typical low-resource enabling environments.

This guide was developed based on work done in Malawi from 2014 to 2017. Some of the language used in this guide, especially in the examples provided, is drawn directly from experience facilitating the transition strategy of a WASH project from one rural district in Malawi.

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DESIGN PHASE OPPORTUNITIES

Project planning is required for project impacts to be sustained by permanent institutions or actors and within their existing resource environment. In Malawi, permanent institutions include district council and community structures, which are very resource-stretched and have a limited capacity for managing complex systems. It is imperative for project staff to know:

1. How the project impacts will be sustained by local, permanent stakeholders, well beyond the length of the project, and
2. The ability of permanent stakeholders to fulfill their roles in the post project context.

This guide details how to develop a better understanding of the enabling environment needed to sustain specific project impacts without the artificial resource inflation of project support, and to ensure expectations fit within the constraints those stakeholders face. This type of thought process is often done subconsciously at some point during the project cycle. However, a clear process can transform ideas into practice through project implementation tactics and improve long-term outcomes.

STEP ONE: PROJECT IMPACT DEFINITION

PURPOSE	❖ **To consolidate and understand as a group the desired lasting impact of the project, which allows later analysis of roles that will need to be played to sustain the impact.** ❖ **To identify risks to the sustainability of project impacts and to start a brainstorm on possible mitigation strategies**
TIPS	❖ **Desired project results/impacts can be drawn from existing documentation/plans, but can also incorporate staff views during the session.** ❖ **Facilitators may consider preparing the skeleton of information for sessions one and two in advance, to allow discussion to progress quickly to identifying sustainability risks and mitigation strategies.**

Activity Type: Group meeting/discussion with project staff and relevant support organization staff
Time: Full day meeting, completed as part of pre-implementation meetings and planning discussions
Participation: Facilitation by project staff, participation by project staff and any staff from donor organization

1. Session One: List project results/activities
    a. Use the project funding proposal and logframe, as well as any existing plans or budgets, to understand and define the intended results of this project, at a detailed-enough level to perceive sustainability risks. Often, the description used for activities in the project logframe will be adequate in defining the precise goals of the project.
    b. The "activities" column in the below table gives examples of these results or activities.

2. Session Two: Categorize project results/activities
    a. Once activities/key results are listed, they can be allocated into the following categories to differentiate between types of impact:
        i. *Infrastructure Built and Services Delivered*: all activities that result in new or improved WASH services for beneficiaries, or expected infrastructure to be built as a result of training or triggering.

ii. *Capacity Building and Training Provided*: all activities that are focused on knowledge transfer and skills building, whether technical or non-technical in nature.

iii. *Coordination and Management Behaviours Established:* any committee set up specifically through this project, or coordinating activities performed by non-project, permanent institutions.

3. Session Three: Discuss considerations/sustainability risks for each category of activities

   a. For each category of activities, there are considerations that need to be addressed prior to the implementation of those activities in order for the project impacts to be sustainable. These risks and considerations can be primarily brainstormed by project staff, but other stakeholders may also be important in assessing feasibility.

   b. The table below lists example considerations for each of the three categories of results/activities.

EXAMPLE from a WASH/Maternal Healthcare project		
Project Output	*Pregnant women and mothers access sustainable and inclusive WASH facilities for improved health of mothers and newborns*	
	RESULTS/ACTIVITIES *(Session 1)*	**CONSIDERATIONS** *(Session 3)*
Infrastructure Built and Services Delivered *(Session 2)*	- Placenta pits, incinerators, pit latrines, menstrual hygiene, refuse pits, and bath shelters built - Solar pump installed on health centre borehole - Afridev pump installed on new village borehole - Placenta pits, incinerators, pit latrines, menstrual hygiene, refuse pits, and bath shelters built	- Longterm cost of maintenance - Revenue generation for cost of spare parts - Technical skills for repair - Management and liaison with technical repair provider - Spare parts supply chain - Responsibility of maintenance (community vs. DCT vs. NGO) - Responsibility for ongoing monitoring of functionality to identify where maintenance is needed - Etc.
Capacity Building and Training Provided *(Session 2)*	- WPC trained in water point management - Health facility staff trained in IPC - Villages surrounding health facility triggered in CLTS - DCT trained on MNH	- Accountability links for all stakeholders - Timeframe for eventual refresher training needed and how it will be funded - Management of local structures (by whom, to whom, at what frequency) - Support for retaining skills in the long term - Etc.
Coordination and Management Behaviours Established *(Session 2)*	- Health advisory committee established - DCT coordinating activities at health centre - Health advisory committee established - DCT develops District Investment Plan inclusive of MNH	- Cost of activities related to coordination mechanisms (allowances, field visits, etc.), and by whom/how these are budgeted for - Management and reporting dynamic for each structure trained - Expectation for practice of coordination behaviour after project exit - Etc.

4. Session Four: Develop mitigation strategies for each consideration identified above

   a. For each activity, discuss risks and mitigation strategies for all related considerations. These should be generated by project staff, but also involving stakeholders like local government and community groups.

STEP TWO: IMPACT-SUSTAINING ROLES

PURPOSE	❖ **Define the long-term roles to be played by permanent stakeholders that will enable project impacts to be sustained.** ❖ **Pre-emptively assess sustainability risks related to roles of permanent stakeholders and the resources available to them to play those roles.** ❖ **Reflect back on the original project impacts to re-assess whether they are appropriate/feasible given the roles that will need to be played to sustain them in the long-term**
TIPS	❖ **The sessions outlined below are for conducting a workshop with project staff in addition to permanent stakeholders, however the process of defining roles and adjusting project goals to be feasible/sustainable is an ongoing process that requires constant reflection and adaptation. This workshop is meant only as a starting point for these discussions.**

Activity Type: Workshop
Time: Half-day to full-day discussion, occurring before any implementation has begun
Participation: Facilitation by project staff, contribution and participation from all key partners in the project

1. Session One: Define stakeholders of project
   a. Time: 10-minute group plenary
   b. Activity: List all relevant permanent stakeholders that will be partners in this project, whether through direct involvement in implementation, through coordination oversight at management levels, participation in trainings, or any other type of involvement.
      i. Examples: district water development office, health centre infection prevention point person, health centre staff, district health office maintenance crew, community development extension staff, area development committees, water point committee members, etc.

2. Session Two: Post-project roles
   a. Time: one to two-hour group brainstorm, done in either small groups or as a large plenary with representatives from each partner group
   b. Activity: To help in brainstorming, imagine that the group is now in the future, 5 years after the project ended. The project has been a total success, and all impact has been sustained. Looking back in time given this "ideal" future scenario, for each partner, brainstorm and define:
      i. Their needed roles in the post-project context: the necessary activities and responsibilities that allowed them to sustain project impacts
      ii. Which stakeholders had to work with and communicate with each other on a daily/monthly/etc. basis in order for the impacts to be sustained.
      iii. Challenges they may have faced in playing that role (financial, human resource, time, etc.)

3. Session Three: Beginning post-project roles during project implementation
   a. Time: one to two-hour group brainstorm, done in either small groups or as a large plenary with representatives from each stakeholder group
   b. Activity: For each partner, brainstorm and define:
      i. The post-project roles from above that can begin to be performed by permanent stakeholders during the project, even from the beginning of implementation or in stages throughout.

  ii. The resources (financial or non-financial) that each stakeholder currently has that will enable them to perform that role in the future, as this is the most crucial factor that will determine their ability to actually execute the role. It may be necessary to do prior research or have pre-emptive meetings before this activity to collect some of the example information below.

    o Examples: amount of recurring government budget and activities that are already budgeted within; staffing levels in various offices; roles that are already being performed as part of regular duties (as well as defining the funding source for these roles currently); stakeholder-owned equipment like motorbikes and computers that can be used to execute roles like field visits or data analysis; performance indicators for community groups that highlight their existing capacity, etc.

 c. Given the constraints identified in the previous 2 steps, re-envision the long-term roles that are practical for each stakeholder group. While re-defining feasible roles, consider the following:

  i. Leverage existing relationships instead of forcing people to develop new relationships

  ii. Ensure all activities by permanent institutions can be executed within current financial and human resource constraints, preferably within budgets not supported by external funding

  iii. Avoid establishing new committees/roles as much as possible, instead work with the existing system to bolster the prominence and utility of committees that are already working well

4. Session Five: Reflection on appropriateness of original project goals

 a. Time: 90-minute small group discussion, including large-group plenary to share back main points

 b. Activity: Look back at original "*Project Impact Definition*" from Step One, changing/narrowing/scoping goals if it is deemed unfeasible for these goals to be sustained within resources and roles of the permanent institution enabling environment

  i. For example, if the inevitable repair of a solar pump is above the skill expertise of the maintenance officers in the district, then either those skills need to be taught to the relevant maintenance officer and practiced well before the end of the project, or a different type of technology should be used that will be able to be maintained by local knowledge and skills.

CONCLUSION

The spirit of this guide is to inspire and encourage adaptation across sectors, across projects of various sizes, and across countries. It should be considered as an example, and not a strict path that must be adhered to. The authors hope that with a more concrete example of how to best set up permanent institutions to manage services beyond the length of projects, the sectors in which we work can see more sustainable impact realized.