



RECOMMENDATION THREE

TRANSITION PHASE

*Appendix 2 to Services that Last
Recommendations for building institutionally
sustainable WASH projects in Malawi*

A step-by-step facilitation guide for transitioning a typical WASH project near the end of the project.

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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TRANSITION PHASE OVERVIEW

A transition phase allows for time during a project period to ensure that permanent institutions and stakeholders are able to sustain project gains. The aim of the transition is not only to ensure local ownership of services, but also to ensure that those responsible for managing and maintaining services have the required skills, practices, and lines of communication with other stakeholders in the system.

The transition phase allows time to trial how various stakeholders such as local government or community members will carry out their responsibilities in a post-project context. The focus of this phase should be arms-length support and solidifying communication channels and not on implementing project activities. It is crucial to cease all infrastructure work and direct investment during this period to allow roles and practices to be played within the financial and human resource context of those permanent institutions. Some examples of how funding during the transition phase could be different from the implementation phase:

- No borehole drilling nor rehabilitation
- No new Water Point Committee (WPC) trainings
- No funding directly to local government district council for District Coordinating Team (DCT) meetings or other ongoing management activities
- No maintenance on facilities built during the project
- No funding for Area Development Committee (ADC) meetings or CLTS task force activities
- No procurement of spare parts for any type of maintenance
- No supplementing of fuel to any government office or health centre
- No allowances for non-project staff participation in ongoing activities like data collection

As a rough guide, a transition phase should be approximately 20% of the length of the entire project. For example, a three-year project should have a transition period of no less than 7 months, or approximately the final two quarters of the third financial year of the project. This gives enough time to address critical concerns that have arisen, but does not dramatically extend the total length of the project.

STEP ONE: POST-PROJECT ROLES AND RISK ANALYSIS

PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ To collaboratively map out the post-project roles of permanent stakeholders (such as government and community structures) that will ensure sustainability of project impacts. ❖ To understand the environment in which these roles will be played without project support, and how these roles might therefore be at risk of not happening due to financial, human, or other constraints. ❖ To plan the priority capacity building efforts of the transition phase itself based on identified risks.
TIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Individual consultations with partners improve project staff understanding of current and future roles, and allow potentially sensitive concerns to be shared in a confidential space. This can be useful in early parts of the transition- before group discussions and periodically throughout the phase. ❖ Bringing all partners and relevant stakeholders together in the same space such as a workshop to discuss future roles allows expectations to be challenged, support and communication lines between levels of hierarchy to be clarified, and official policies on service management to be reinforced from government down to community level.

EXAMPLE FACILITATION GUIDE

Activity Type: workshop-style discussion (could be adapted for smaller group/individual consultations)


Time: allocate one day, at very beginning of transition phase

Participation: facilitated by project staff but with attendance and participation from all key partners from the project, including all relevant district officers, extension workers from relevant sectors (likely water, community development, and environmental health), as well as ADC representatives or other specific community structures that have been targeted (a health advisory committee, for example)

1. Session One: Project Impact Description
 - a. Time: 15-minute presentation, 10-minute question period from participants
 - b. Activity: Project staff briefly describe the project, its activities, timelines, capacity building work, key partners, and intended impact.
 - c. Facilitation Note: Project staff describe in a group plenary the above details of the project, with a few PowerPoint slides or flip chart notes as a visual aid

2. Session Two: Future Roles Brainstorm
 - a. Time: 1-hour group plenary brainstorm
 - b. Activity: Ask the group to imagine that this project has been entirely successful, and all goals have been achieved and sustained. When you come back 5 years after the project closed, what roles are being played by the various stakeholders to continue sustaining the ideal impacts of the project?
 - c. Facilitation Note: Project staff facilitators take notes on flip chart while encouraging participants to respond.
 - i. Use as much detail as possible: the impact observed, the role and/or activity sustaining that impact, who is filling that role or conducting that activity, and the frequency of the activity. Example responses from this activity:
 - District Health Office maintenance officers are checking in on health centre infrastructure bi-annually
 - District Water Development Office (DWDO) has provided one refresher training for WPCs
 - WPC is active, and is able to swiftly reach out to the Area Mechanic (AM) when a repair is needed
 - Infection Prevention and Control focal person at health centre ensures that people are using hand washing facilities upon entry and exit of health centre
 - Communities have established by-laws that encourage construction of latrines
 - District council and/or ADCs are procuring batteries for solar pumps when needed

3. Session Three: Sustainability Risk Prediction
 - a. Time: 1-hour group plenary brainstorm
 - b. Activity: Given the future roles brainstorm in session 2, develop a list of reasons why those particular roles and/or activities may not actually be happening in the future, given existing and realistic capacity gaps or resource constraints. These reasons can also be considered the risks to the sustainability of this project.
 - c. Facilitation Note: Project staff facilitators take notes on flip chart while listening to responses from participants.

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- i. If needed, this discussion can also expand to general sustainability risks for the project overall. Example responses from this activity:
 - No support from ADC to the WPC on who to contact for water point repair
 - No follow-up after WPC training near end of project, therefore no ability to know if they were ever able to raise funds for maintenance
 - ADC not responding to requests for assistance from the WPC through the Village Development Committee (VDC)
4. Session Four: Mitigation Strategy Development
 - a. Time: 1-hour breakout group brainstorms
 - b. Activity: For each risk identified in session three, brainstorm mitigation strategies or action(s) that can be taken by a particular stakeholder group to address that particular risk. Consider the skills and resources available to the person executing that mitigation strategy in the post-project context. These mitigation strategies could be actions required to be taken by project staff during the transition phase itself, or could be strategies permanent stakeholders could take on their own.
 - c. Facilitation Note: Brainstorm conducted in small group discussions, groups clustered by stakeholder group hierarchy (District Officers in one group, extension workers in a second group, and all community level structures in one group). Each group to take notes on flip chart.
 - i. Project staff can also partake in the discussions within any group, contributing ideas or suggestions. Example responses from this activity based on a brainstorm regarding the future risk that WPCs aren't working with Area Mechanics:
 - District Water Development Office: discuss WPC relationships with AMs during next monthly follow-ups with AMs
 - Extension workers from Community Development Office: get AM contact information from DWDO and share with the ADC during the next monthly meeting, requesting that the ADC also share this information with VDCs
 - ADCs: help VDCs to develop plans to meet with WPCs in their area and endorse the importance of working with AMs, also sharing this contact information
5. Session Five: Mitigation Strategy Discussion
 - a. Time: 1-hour group plenary
 - b. Activity: Each stakeholder group to share back with the group their brainstormed sustainability risk mitigation strategies from session four.
 - c. Facilitation Note: Each group to share, and participants to ask questions for clarification, ensuring each proposed mitigation strategy is in line with the existing role of that stakeholder and that it would be possible within existing resource constraints. From there, the action points that are both appropriate and feasible are committed to in the group space.
6. Session Six: Next Steps
 - a. Time: 10 minutes
 - b. Activity: Project staff share that the mitigation strategies developed will be used to direct skills building efforts for the transition phase, and will also be used to guide long-term project impact assessments.

- c. Facilitation: Project staff describe the above, potentially with a few PowerPoint slides or flip chart notes to support.

OUTPUT FROM STEP ONE ACTIVITIES			
STAKEHOLDER	FUTURE ROLE	SUSTAINABILITY RISK	RISK MITIGATION ACTION
District Coordinating Team Officers - DWDO (water sector) - DEHO (health sector) - DCDO (community sector) - DPD (planning sector)	<i>Roles for each key stakeholder that will ideally sustain project impacts beyond life of project</i>	<i>Possible pit-falls for each stakeholder to fulfill identified future roles</i>	<i>Strategies and action points that will mitigate foreseen sustainability risk</i>
Extension Workers - WMAs (water sector) - HSAs/AEHOs (health sector) - CDAs (community sector)			
Area Development Committees			
Project Staff			

STEP TWO: SKILLS ASSESSMENT

PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ To know how post-project roles of permanent stakeholders are being fulfilled. ❖ To define the skills needed to execute these roles. ❖ To assess those skills in a facilitative and participative manner. ❖ To rank all skills for each stakeholder in terms of importance to sustainability. ❖ To scope further transition steps on improving the simultaneously weak and important skills.
TIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Ensure permanent stakeholders being brought through an assessment understand there are no correct answers and that they should be entirely transparent ❖ Example questions below to be used in the assessment are meant to a) gather additional information for project staff facilitator's understanding of partners and b) help the stakeholder being assessed to fully explore all aspects of their capacity for each skill before making a judgement on that skill as either strong or weak ❖ After completing the assessment for all stakeholders, it can be useful to then share all results in some sort of meeting space, so that feedback on the accuracy of the assessment can be discussed, and the results can be agreed on ❖ If a capacity assessment was already conducted before or during the project, those same skills may be assessed again during the transition phase in addition to those skills identified as important to post-project roles ❖ Other capacity assessment methodology may be used, as long as participants do not feel they are being tested, in order to maintain honest and open discussion about critical gaps

EXAMPLE FACILITATION GUIDE

Activity Type: individual consultation with each target stakeholder group

Time: half day discussion with each target stakeholder group, occurring within first two weeks of transition phase

Participation: project staff with each target stakeholder group that participated in the initial workshop



Discussion Guide:

- Use the output from step 1 to guide this discussion that produced ‘Future Roles’
- It is important to then translate these roles into skills, because skills can be strengthened. Do this before conducting assessments, in consultation and collaboration with the stakeholder responsible for that role.
 - Discuss with each stakeholder their current skills that are enabling them to play the ‘Future Roles’ as above, as well as execute the proposed mitigation actions.
 - You may want to do this in a separate discussion prior to the one-on-one assessment discussion below
- Once you have generated a list of important skills for the ‘Future Roles’, hold one-on-one discussions with each stakeholder or stakeholder group (for community level groups) to understand more about the capacity level for each skill:
 - To help the stakeholder being interviewed recall skill use in practice, ask questions such as:
 - When do you need this skill in your job/role?
 - For each particular skill, can you give an example of when you last used that skill?
 - To conduct a general self-assessment of the stakeholder on their ability for each skill, ask questions such as:
 - In the last 6 months, is there a time when you found using any of these skills easy? Difficult?
 - For each particular skill, would you rank it as a strength or a weakness?
 - To discern the importance of each skill on role performance, ask questions such as:
 - For each particular skill, how much does it help you to play your role? Is it critical or just nice to have?
 - If it is a weak skill, is this causing any significant problems or challenges in executing roles?
 - Based on the list of skills generated, please rank the skills in order from most important to least important to playing your ‘Future Role’ (as the facilitator you can try to suggest a ranking based on what was said, and then have a discussion about if/how they would change the ranking and why)
- This will generate a qualitative assessment result that can be used to focus skills building on the most important gaps with each stakeholder- those that are both the weakest and most critical. On the next page is an example summary generated from this assessment, based on conducting interviews with four different community groups with identical roles.

EXAMPLE OUTPUT FROM STEP TWO ACTIVITIES FOR ONE STAKEHOLDER GROUP					
Area Development Committee Skills (ranked by importance)	Traditional Authority A	Traditional Authority B	Traditional Authority C	Traditional Authority D	Average
1. Identify root causes to problems	Strong	Strong	Weak	Weak	Medium
2. Self-direct action planning	Strong	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak
3. Develop meeting agendas	Weak	Weak	Strong	Strong	Medium
4. Communicate existing procedures to other stakeholders	Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong	Strong
5. Model smart water, sanitation and hygiene behaviours	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong
6. Organize and plan community group check ins or follow ups	Weak	Weak	Strong	Strong	Medium

STEP THREE: SKILLS BUILDING

PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ To build the skills necessary to perform post-project roles that will sustain the impacts of the project. ❖ To develop a skills building strategy in collaboration with the stakeholder that focuses on skills building.
TIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Before brainstorming skills building activities, have a conversation about how that permanent stakeholder could begin to build that skill on their own, then have the skills building exercise complement the initiative being taken ❖ Building management-type skills instead of technical skills can be challenging, and sometimes seems very simplified in practice, but these skills can be some of the most important so don't neglect them

EXAMPLE FACILITATION GUIDE

Activity Type: individual consultation with each target stakeholder group

Time: half day discussion, occurring within first month of transition phase

Participation: project staff with each target stakeholder group from assessment above

The development of mitigation strategies and conducting a skills assessment will assist in the process of identifying priority skills gaps along with action plans to mitigate risks in general. These action plans will steer the focus for support throughout the transition period. Project staff should be working with each stakeholder group to strengthen the weakest skills. The methodology used to strengthen these skills should be co-developed between project staff and the targeted stakeholder.

- Brainstorm how the weak skill could be strengthened.
- Brainstorm how the target stakeholder could build the focus skill independently and practice it independently
- Brainstorm how the target stakeholder could work with colleagues from other departments to learn or improve that skill through mentorship

- Brainstorm how the project staff could support the target stakeholder to build the focus skill

Project staff then finalize an action plan, specific for each stakeholder, that details the skills to be addressed during this period. Beyond facilitating skills-building exercises for these stakeholders, the project should also be supporting the target stakeholder to take their own steps to build the identified skills above. For example, if a skill to strengthen is related to district level coordination meetings, those stakeholders should take responsibility for funding and doing all logistics for the meeting, but project staff could help develop a meeting agenda and assist with learning/reflecting on the effectiveness of these meetings.

This follow-up period, detailed next, clearly highlights why a transition period needs a preserved amount of time distinct from regular project implementation, to allow time for these skills to be practiced while project staff can still be available for advice.

STEP FOUR: FOLLOW-UP COACHING ON ROLES

PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ To provide light-touch coaching to stakeholders as they work through practicing new skills built. ❖ To discuss post-project roles repeatedly with each stakeholder group, and discuss challenges and solutions as they work towards role fulfillment. ❖ To empower stakeholders to be owning these roles entirely on their own, and reaching out to colleagues (not project staff) if additional advice or support is required. ❖ To communicate clearly the impending project exit and departure of project staff from the region OR that they may be around but not supporting this particular project.
TIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Offer supportive advice to stakeholder during follow-ups when discussing challenges they are facing in role fulfillment, but be sure to not assign responsibility to project staff in addressing any more capacity gaps (as this decreases permanent stakeholder ownership of their own skills development) ❖ At each follow-up meeting, project staff should clarify timelines for project exit, and clarify the intention for future follow-ups ❖ These discussions also help stakeholders realize how these skills and post-project roles are applicable to all areas of their work, even beyond the original scope of the project

EXAMPLE FACILITATION GUIDE

Activity Type: individual consultation with each target stakeholder group

Time: series of follow-up conversations/meetings held at least 3-5 times with each target stakeholder group through the duration of the transition phase

Participation: project staff with each target stakeholder group participating in activities during the project or transition phase

Consistent follow-up discussions with each stakeholder group should be held as often as possible. This will help project staff ensure each stakeholder group is actively applying their skills to new situations, is communicating with each other, and that they are prepared to be independent from the project. During these follow-ups, project staff can also be reiterating the post-project roles envisioned at the start of the transition phase. This clear and repetitive communication will help ensure that permanent stakeholders have a clear understanding of their needed roles, and are able to execute them entirely independently from project support.

STEP FIVE: FINAL PROJECT CLOSURE AND COMMITMENTS

PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ For the project to communicate the final close of the project and withdrawal of staff and support. ❖ To clarify any intention for further monitoring or project presence in region. ❖ For permanent stakeholders to publicly commit to the post-project roles one last time, creating an accountability expectation.
TIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ This step should be completed together with representation from government officials as well as community level structures, so that everyone hears the final communication from the project ❖ It is important to celebrate the accomplishments of the project, but this should be focused on the hard work and commitment of permanent stakeholder partners, as their involvement is imperative for the sustainability of project impacts and this recognition could encourage ownership even further

EXAMPLE FACILITATION GUIDE

Activity Type: workshop-style discussion

Time: one-day workshop, at very end of transition phase

Participation: facilitated by project staff but with attendance and participation from all key partners from the project, including all relevant district officers, extension workers from relevant sectors (likely water, community development, and environmental health), as well as ADC representatives or other specific community structures that have been targeted (a health advisory committee, for example)

In a final group space, repeat the post-project role visioning activity articulated in step one. This time however, all roles need to be able to be executed within currently existing skills and capacities, as there is no longer time for the project to assist with skills building.

1. SESSION ONE: COMMITMENTS GOING FORWARD


As an additional session to the role-envisioning exercises in step one of this guide, each individual who has participated in the project and the transition phase should make a final verbal commitment to the group about how they will work to sustain the impacts from this project. This exercise is about the commitments made of course, but also works to reinforce the ownership of sustainability onto the shoulders of permanent institutions. Finally, these commitments can inform any long-term monitoring questions that the implementing partner or donor conduct in the years following implementation, to evaluate how these groups are executing the identified roles.

- Each participant to answer this question: What will you commit to that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the impact of this work?
- Each participant to verbally commit to the above, although signing a declaration or something more official could be an option.

2. SESSION TWO: CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS

To celebrate the achievements of not only the project, but also the transition phase and skills building conducted within this transition, it can be nice to recognize participants for their contribution, their growth, or their hard work.

- Each participant to recognize another participant for a specific action that person has made which has demonstrated their commitment to sustainability and their commitment to ensuring communities benefit from services that last. These “cheers” can be informal, and should not necessarily be a space to recognize those with highest seniority nor highest status.



These activities, final post-project role definition as well as sharing final commitments to sustainability, act to replace the common “handover ceremony”. This common practice, where Fanta is shared and songs are sung, does very little to impact the sustainability of the project. Although it is nice to celebrate a new facility or access to a new service, this should not be done when blatant concerns for the long-term functionality of said facilities have not been addressed. The above description of a final workshop makes sure to clarify that sustainability rests in the hands of permanent stakeholders, and is thus an effective way to fully transfer whatever ownership is left over the project to these same permanent stakeholders. It is also a clear demarcation of the finality of the project entirely.

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.