LITERATURE REVIEW OF GOOD PRACTICE IN LEAVING WELL

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Contents

1 Introduction

Porticus have commissioned Triple Line Consulting to conduct an Exit Review to capture good practice in exiting programmes and partnerships responsibly, to minimise negative impacts and sustain programme results. This literature review forms part of Phase A of the Exit Review and seeks to distil lessons from external institutions with experience of exiting particular geographic or thematic areas, or closing their funding operations entirely.

The literature review has relevance for the design and implementation of Porticus' programmes and future exits, including programmes within Porticus' Building Future Generations priority area, in that it provides recommendations of how and what institutions should consider and communicate around their exits, and when best to do this in the funding relationship.

The key findings of this literature review are distilled into eight themes covering exit decisions, principles, management, communications and sustainability. These are presented in Section 3 of this report after a short section on the review methodology.

> *"Aid withdrawal is a fact of life. The question is not so much whether it is happening, but how."*
>
> – Hayman, James, Popplewell, and Lewis (2016)

2 Methodology

The methodological approach of this literature review is based on a systematic and extensive search and analysis of high quality evidence. The literature was collected through database searches based on specific inclusion/exclusion criteria and a list of search terms. Additionally, a snowballing methodology was employed where reference lists in documents found in the database search were then used to discover additional literature that matched the inclusion criteria. Some literature was also provided by Porticus, which was primarily external to the foundation but had been collected for internal learning. A deductive coding approach was applied to the selected literature to identify key themes. Details on the inclusion/exclusion criteria, search terms, and analysis approach can be found in Annex 1 'Methodology'. The final list of documents reviewed includes:

- Literature, primarily from 2010 onwards, although limited earlier literature that is widely cited has also been included;
- Literature on exit strategy in both the Global North and Global South to include literature relevant to Porticus' exits from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America; and
- High quality peer reviewed journal articles and 'grey' (unpublished or published through alternate distribution channels) literature produced by funding bodies (including foundations and international institutions), international development training institutes and civil society organisations. This included strategic documents and exit strategies from funding bodies, evaluations and case studies of programme and project exits, reports from workshops and focus group interviews, and research from a diverse list of academics and publications.

Box 1: How do we define exits?

In this paper we refer to an exit as a process that organisations go through when they have been providing funding to a partner or group of partners to implement a programme,[1] project, or grant that is now being stopped. Exits can be either planned or unexpected, and be caused by internal or external factors that may be unforeseen to partners and/or funders.

Planned exits are when all parties are aware in advance of when and why funding will cease, such as a contract coming to a natural end. An unexpected exit is when the decision to exit is taken mid-contract (even if funding continues to the end of the contract date) and the programme stakeholders are required to course-correct with the remaining money; or when there may have been an unwritten expectation that funding would be continued beyond a contract end date through additional grants or other financial mechanisms. However, the distinction between the two types of exits becomes blurred from the moment that the exit decision takes place because all conversations from then onwards include some form of planning around how the exit will take place. It is also noted that the literature rarely differentiates between a planned and unplanned exit when discussing exit planning post-decision to exit.

Different terminology is used across different organisations and organisation types. Other exit terminology includes: ‘programme closure’, ‘withdrawal’, ‘transition’, ‘graduation’, and ‘phase out’. A list of definitions from Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert (2005) is outlined in Annex 3. The lessons drawn in this review have been taken from all types of exits/withdrawals/transitions and graduations conducted at grant, project, or programme level by any organisation type where the researchers felt the lessons were relevant for any potential future Porticus programme exits, planned or unplanned. Where the type of exit is pertinent to the finding, the exit circumstances have been explained. No analysis has been conducted on when different terminology is used and what the differences may be between the terms.

3 Key Themes

This section presents the lessons, considerations and good practices found in the literature relating to programme exits, organised by the eight key themes that emerged from the review.

3.1 Deciding to exit

This section describes the lessons found in the literature around factors, information and practices that senior management should take into consideration when making a decision to exit. While the literature provides limited recommendations on how to make exit decisions beyond recommending developing clear exit criteria to inform exit decisions, it emphasises the importance of funding bodies having a clear funding identity, be it as a catalytic funder or a systems change partner, and then keeping this role in mind when committing to a partnership or considering an exit.

Despite money withdrawal and an end to funding being a fact of philanthropic management, the literature provides little insight into how senior management can make these difficult exit decisions. Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert (2005) identify three common categories of exit criteria used by funders to inform their exit decisions:[2]

- **Time limited funding cycles.** These tend to increase a programme’s focus on establishing systems of sustainability or impose artificial time constraints.

[1] In this report, the definition of programme is based on Porticus’ own definition of a programme. A programme is a group of partners and grants working together to achieve a shared set of strategic goals, complemented by activities, advice and support from the Porticus programme manager. Therefore, when we refer to the closure or exit of a programme in this review, we are referring to the closure of a set of grants, as opposed to just one individual project or grant.

[2] In this report, the term ‘funder’ has been used to encompass any organisation providing financial support to philanthropic projects and programmes. These may be private foundations, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), bilateral donors and Social/Impact Investors.

- **Achievements of the programme's intended impact.** In this instance, the intended programme impact is often difficult to achieve in a given time frame and attempting to measure impact may create perverse incentives. Impact indicators can be used to focus a programme's 'graduation' efforts and help inform the exit strategy timeline.
- **Achievement benchmarks:** Benchmarks are measurable indicators to identify steps in the graduation process towards a full exit. This is part of monitoring from the outset and linked to the graduation process and to the programme phase out.

The literature suggests that exits should ideally only take place when partners are assured of the sustainability of the outcome achieved, and that there are few examples of this occurring. Many exits do not have any scope to explicitly focus on sustainability of results (Heldgaar, 2008). Some literature hints at exits often being led by boards and trustees becoming interested in new, innovative things rather than because the exit is in line with the organisation's funding aims (Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013).

Kerkhoven and Herweijer (2013) stipulate that it is important for any organisation to be clear on what kind of funder they are and for this to drive the exit decisions:

1. Do they provide catalytic grants to strengthen capacity within grantee partners and then move out?
2. Are they there to start relationships and networks and exit as soon as those introductions have been made?
3. Are they aiming for system change, which requires a long-term commitment and clear communication to partners about what 'success' looks like that will trigger an exit?

For example, supporting adaptation to climate change may suggest a commitment of at least 50 years (*ibid*.). Considering how important communication appears to be in minimising the negative consequences of an exit (see section 3.5 of this report), this implies that clear communication of this organisational identity is important to clarify for all staff and partners at the start of any new relationship. It would suggest that communicating the funding type upfront has potential to manage staff and partner expectations, reduce the negative feelings around an exit, reduce surprise, and help provide context to an exit decision, particularly if all strategic exit decisions are made in line with this organisational goal. However, it also implies that when an exit decision is not aligned with the organisational goal, such as an exit from a systems change funding relationship before the system change has been achieved, it will likely lead to distrust and a feeling of lack of transparency and fickleness. The authors (*ibid*.) imply that if there is not sufficient – or sufficiently honest – critical analysis of "*is the organisation leaving for the right reasons?*", or if the analysis is not clear, the exiting process is going to be difficult. Furthermore, leaving early in a system change scenario would suggest that there is little likelihood that any of the obtained results will be sustained beyond the exit because the systems are not yet in place to continue the momentum. Kerkhoven and Herweijer (2013) argue that being clear about what the funder wants to leave behind can in turn help to identify what the true sense of the expected funding legacy is.

Lewis (2016) makes a similar suggestion that funding organisations need to be clear on their exit criteria from the start of providing any funding: will decisions be driven by the organisational strategy and how well projects fit within the focus of a region or thematic area? Or are they driven by considerations of sustainability (i.e. when there is no longer a need for organisational support)?

3.2 Exit principles

This section sets out what the literature review found around the formation and application of principles to guide the exit decision and process. The literature recommends formulating these exit principles at programme outset to provide clarity to partners and internal staff regarding future exit processes. Additionally, the literature highlights the importance of designing them to be flexible and sensitive to exits across different contexts.

The literature review suggests that while many organisations have principles outlining programmatic good practice and organisational values, or partnership principles setting out how the organisation conceptualises its partnerships, few have specific exit principles. In cases where exit principles exist these have been developed at different times – often during an exit, after it has occurred, as a result of the exit happening, or as part of the exit plan development (Lewis, 2016., James, Popplewell, Lewis, and Bartlett, 2016., Rönngren, 2011., Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013., GloAct, n.d.). They also differ in purpose, format and application (Lewis, 2016). The working group of INGOs contributing to INTRAC's Action Learning Set (ALS) concluded that the value of exit principles can depend on what they are being used for and by whom (*ibid*.). For some organisations, they are useful for senior management who need to make decisions but do not have time to look at detailed exit plans. For others, they are used by staff and partners as practical guidance on how to exit and are seen more as tools. Lewis (2016) developed a list of tips to help practitioners decide when to develop exit principles based on the discussions that took place among the ALS participants (see Annex 4 part C).

Some examples of exit principles can be found in Annex 4 'Example Exit Principles'. Only one example was found that showcased how exit principles were applied to making exit decisions or implementing an exit process to reduce negative impacts and sustain programme results. In 2016, EveryChild, a UK based INGO, made the strategic decision to close operations and form a family of separate organisations, resulting in its exit from 18 partnerships and/or country offices. In a review of their exit process, James *et al.* (2016) found that partners and EveryChild staff valued having broad, flexible exit principles during the exit process. They reported that the principles acted as a useful reference point to guide behaviour and were used as an accountability mechanism throughout the exit process. They were not operational instructions. Three principles were developed by EveryChild senior management within a month of the exit decision being made:

1. As far as possible, ensure that the work we [EveryChild] have done is **sustainable** – this could be continuation of services or lasting changes in children's lives.
2. Ensure the exit does **not have a detrimental effect** on the children and communities where we [EveryChild] work. This principle can be paraphrased as **'do no harm'** to children and communities through exit.
3. As far as possible, **retain the expertise and momentum** for change in the country.

These were accompanied by exit criteria (to inform decisions about when and how soon to withdraw) and exit indicators (to monitor progress). Interestingly, these principles intentionally did not mention the sustainability of the partners because this was seen as being beyond the organisation's remit and as secondary to the sustainability of the services and impact on children (*ibid*.). While this may seemingly contradict the third principle, its focus is on wider societal and sectoral change and momentum rather than at the partner level, hence its secondary importance.

James *et al.*'s (2016) review found that these principles facilitated the exit process by:

- Ensuring everyone still agreed that the primary objective of everyone in the room was prioritising the well-being of the children;
- Providing a safe space to discuss the exit and understand the reasons behind it;
- Acting as a motivating force, but still allowing partners to identify their own priorities;
- Giving them a common vision and vocabulary;
- Providing guidance for management decisions that took place during the exit; and
- Clarifying what they were trying to achieve with the exit.

Heldgaar (2008) concludes that if exit principles or guidelines are developed, they should be sensitive to how different the exit might look in different contexts. They should support the different management challenges that arise from exiting in different circumstances, respecting different cultural, power and funder-partner relationship dynamics.

3.3 Managing the exit internally

This section addresses recommendations for the exiting organisation and its senior management regarding internal considerations, practices and communications once an exit decision has been made. This includes communications that should be made by the decision makers themselves, and by middle-management to support staff managing the exit process. This communication needs to be timely, consistent and transparent on the rationale and process of an exit. Beyond communication, the literature recommends that funders practice strong personnel management through developing the capacity of permanent staff to handle the pressures that come with an exit and also look at bringing on new contracted staff/consultants where appropriate to support the exit process.

The literature reviewed suggests that once an exit decision has been made, it is not just how the immediate funding relationships are managed that determine how well the exit goes. Attention needs to be paid to how the exit is communicated and supported internally within the exiting organisation. Internal processes and personnel management impact how well the message and process of the exit is communicated externally to partners and other funders by the team managing the exit (Hayman *et al*., 2016).

3.3.1 Communicating the exit internally

To communicate the exit, Lewis (2016) suggests that it is important to immediately make some subsequent decisions and communications:

- Decide:
    - Who will be responsible for overseeing exits;
    - How leaders will lead by example;
    - The type of support they will require to conduct such exits;
- If roles are at risk, review the policies and procedures for redundancies;
- Ensure mechanisms are in place for handling complaints;
- Establish a proactive communication policy;
- Discuss what support partners will require; and
- Make sure the managers of all those affected develop and agree clear plans and strategies so that staff get the same information and support where necessary.

Hayman *et al*. (2016) also suggest that communication needs to be timely, strong and provide a clear, consistent rationale on how the process will take place, what implications this will have on internal staff jobs and on the partners (i.e. what the exit will mean), and what support is available to manage the process. However, there is a tension in the literature around needing to communicate the exit decision and its parameters as soon as it is made (*ibid*.), and making the exit decision in consultation with different levels of the organisation so that they can feed into those decisions (Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013). The latter would imply communicating that potential exits are coming before concrete plans have been made.

If the latter is chosen, Hayman *et al*. (2016) posit that an overlong consultation period can undermine, rather than build trust among internal staff. The positive experience of EveryChild's senior management putting exit principles in place within a month of the exit decision being announced (Lewis, 2016) suggests that uncertainties and concerns about the remaining unknown parameters that are created by the consultation period can be mitigated if senior management take swift action to outline implications of the decision, guidelines, parameters and support that will be available. Lewis (2016) found that it can be very stressful for internal staff if they are suddenly tasked with designing an exit process without guidance.

> *"Just about everyone interviewed stressed that communicating the decision about exits should not be left only to an individual programme officer. Communication with the field is a shared responsibility at all levels of the*

> *[exiting] organisation, and it has to be embedded in very strong internal communication."*
>
> – Kerkhoven and Herweijer (2013)

3.3.2 Personnel management

James *et al.* (2016) conclude that how well internal management staff and partners respond to an exit is closely linked to personality and individuals' appetite for managing change. Staff can either block change or be forward thinking and provide leadership in how they manage the change. There is a need for senior staff to nurture this positive dynamic. Hayman *et al.* (2016) suggest that a good risk assessment, proactive communication policy (internal and external), and establishing an independent complaints procedures are some ways to mitigate problems.

Another factor that influences how well internal management staff and partners respond to an exit is how senior management communicate the role of the funding organisation (internally to staff and to its partners). If a funding body perceives itself as 'creating change' rather than 'managing grants', this naturally creates very long term relationships between grant management staff and their partners (Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013). The set-up encourages programme managers to develop a deeper relationship rather than one based on a limited operational agreement (Cao Yu, Jhawar, and Berman, 2017). Breaking those relationships is perceived as not doing justice to the type of relationship which has been developed (Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013). This suggests that making an exit when the messaging has been to create social change is particularly difficult for internal staff and partners to accept because the partnerships and programmatic work have been set up on the understanding that all parties will remain in the relationship until the intended social change has been achieved and, potentially, beyond.

Lewis (2016) recognises that managers often face significant psychological and personal pressure from balancing ongoing project management, exit coordination and potential personal job changes. The literature (Rogers and Coates, 2015., Rose, Collinson, and Kalow, 2017., Lewis, 2016., Coates, Kegode, Galante, and Blau, 2016) indicates that many funding bodies try to counteract this by providing training and support, with types of support provided including:

- Resilience or stress management training;
- Developing internal staff capacity;
- Specialised exit training;
- Institutionalising sustainability and exits as part of programme planning;
- Increased formal and informal meetings to keep staff informed about the exit process; and
- Tailored job-hunting support (e.g., CV-writing and flexible working hours) to allow staff to look for jobs in cases where layoffs occur.

Exits can lead to internal staffing changes and so capacity considerations need to be accounted for (Cao Yu, Jhawar, and Berman, 2017., Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007). Lewis (2016) also specifically identifies several methods to help maintain motivation among internal staff in the midst of an exit:

- Regularly check in with staff;
- Update regularly on exits, filling in on details and providing reassurances and mitigating uncertainty;
- Celebrate achievements of staff as they leave (if there are staffing changes due to the exit) as a way to boost morale amidst exits;
- Offer a flexible working policy to allow for job-hunting if the exit entails layoffs;
- Facilitate peer-to-peer mentoring and formal training;
- Offer redeployment opportunities for staff that would otherwise be leaving in an exit;
- Provide training and services to prep staff for job search: interview prep, CV writing workshops; and

- Highlight the skills staff develop in managing exit.

Good examples of this can be found in spend-out organisations.[3] For example, Kerkhoven and Herweijer (2013) found that a spend-out foundation they interviewed provided coaching and training and post-exit opportunities two years before they closed. The interviewee suggested these provisions gave staff a sense of the mission and buy in, and led to commitment to see the process through. Cao Yu, Jhawar, and Berman (2017), in a review of funders and exits from large scale initiatives across the United States, found that some funding bodies expressed a wish to have hired change managers or outside facilitators to help them through the process.

Lewis (2016) also suggests the exiting organisation should consider the benefits of hiring staff specifically to manage the exit versus empowering permanent staff to do so. This is particularly important for maintaining momentum and staff motivation during change and getting buy-in at the right times during the exit process. There is no consensus as to whether one approach is better than another. The review conducted by Lewis (2016) found that hiring new staff with a specific remit helped maintain motivation and keep the exit on track during WWF-UK's closures. They created a permanent Transformation Team that managed exits, consisting of existing staff as well as new staff on fixed contracts, who would ensure that project exits happened according to plan and did not drift. However, the team felt separate from the rest of the funding body's staff, which created its own challenges (*ibid*.). Martins (2020a) highlights, in the case of Oxfam's closure of its Georgia office due to a wider institutional transition, the potential benefit of bringing in external consultants to manage an exit, in that it can provide a buffer between the broader programme-level decision making process and the specific circumstances of a partner to allow for a smoother exit. On the other hand, EveryChild preferred to use permanent staff members to manage their relationships through the exit, so as to maintain relationship continuity for the partners, reduce the risk of poorly managed staff changes, and improve consistency, stability, institutional memory, knowledge retention, and relationships, considering these as critical to the exit (Lewis, 2016).

3.4 Duration of the exit

This section summarises the recommendations found in the literature regarding how long an exit process should take from when an exit decision has been made to full closure. While the literature has little consensus on ideal exit timelines due to different contextual circumstances requiring a tailored, case-by-case approach, it is clear that exits take time and that gradual or staggered processes can help to ensure that exits are conducted responsibly and with consideration of the partners' sustainability.

There is little consensus in the literature around how long an exit process should take. However, all papers reviewed agree that exiting responsibly takes time. James *et al.* (2016) found that a rushed and underfinanced exit can in fact lead to an exit that drags on and becomes more costly due to legal fees and tax complications (in cases where office closures occur) as well as the extra staff time required. Rose, Collinson, and Kalow (2017), in a review of global USAID exits, also found that a rushed exit can negatively impact bilateral relations and undermine the funder's past results. Several factors are mentioned that may determine the length of the exit, including the length of the funding relationship, what the programme goals are, the nature of the funding relationship (e.g. how dependent the grantee partner is on the funding), and the non-financial grantee partner needs. However, there is consensus that the length of the exit should be determined through a co-created exit strategy (see section 3.6.1). A co-created timeline allows the partners to better grasp what will occur within this time frame and objectives that will need to be met while also increasing the likelihood of financial sustainability (Martins, 2020b). Establishing a clear but flexible timeline and linking it to programme funding cycles can further help the transparency of the exit process (Boiardi

[3] A spend-out organisation is an organisation set up with a pre-determined amount of money and defined life span. They often use endowment income and capital, with a view to using up all the assets of a trust over the defined period of time.

and Hehenberger, 2014a., Rogers and Macías, 2004., Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert, 2005). One negative implication of a long exit period identified by Van Der Meer, Tostensen, Slob, and Jerve (2008) in their case study of Sida's exit from Malawi was that contextual circumstances can change considerably, calling into question the wisdom of the exit and giving time for those who are opposed to the exit to undermine the process.

Some suggestions within the literature are that a responsible exit takes three to four years (Petrovich, 2011., Kiryttopoulou, 2019). In the case of EveryChild, the funder took two years to exit from any partnerships that were more than five years old (Hayman *et al.* 2016) and in the case of the C&A Foundation's exit from Brazil, three years or more were needed to make a substantial contribution to grantee sustainability and ensure minimal adverse effects (Kiryttopoulou, 2019). This three-year process allowed grantees to engage with other funders, develop and implement sustainability plans, put in place sound financial practices, and ensure their eligibility for other funders. Heldgaar's (2008) summary report for Sida on exits from Botswana, Malawi, Eritrea, India, and South Africa found that phase-outs of two years or less lacked meaningful consultation, co-creation, and communication with stakeholders, whereas longer time-frames were more likely to include deeper monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) processes and involve key stakeholders in the planning of the exit.

According to Van Der Meer *et al.* (2008), there are at least four reasons for why a longer timeline should be considered for an exit:

- **Volume:** extent of financial dependence when the donor makes up a significant share of funding (over 50%) so that there is time for the funding shortfall to be made up elsewhere;
- **Institution/field building:** when the donor plays a key role in systemic change, which inherently takes a longer timescale;
- **Policy change:** if the donor is involved in policy change, which is slow moving, a longer phase out may be necessary;
- **Alternative donors/funding:** if the sector/field has limited options for donors, a longer time scale is necessary to soften the blow and support the search for other sources of funding.

The authors also make a critical point about honouring commitments during an exit process which has a tangible impact on the duration of an exit. They create a distinction between legal and ethical commitments, with the former referring to completing contractual obligations set out in the original grant or partnership agreement and the latter being more informal commitments that are perceived or expected by the partner organisation and internal staff, such as an expectation that further phases of funding or partnership would be approved. Not following through with these ethical commitments can be perceived as a breach of trust for the partner organisation and reneging on an agreed vision for change. These ethical considerations must be taken seriously (above and beyond the legal commitment) when making a decision to exit or when planning an exit, and they can often elongate the timeline required for a responsible exit (*ibid*.).

While the commitments to completing legally binding and agreed funding cycles or implementing escape clauses for early funding termination may feel comprehensive enough for donors, reneging on the informal agreements or expectations can be seen as an ethical breach of trust.

Hayman *et al.* (2016) suggest older partnerships require longer exits because they are more complex, whereas Rönngren (2011) suggests the grantee partners' institutional capacity and alternative funding opportunities are the most important factors that should determine the length of the exit period.

Staggering the timing of exits for different partners within a programme can also lead to more learnings and data to inform the later rounds of exits. Such learnings are not feasible in quick and simultaneous exits (Rogers and Macías, 2004., CEO Water Mandate, n.d.).

Alternatively, other literature suggests there is benefit in conducting gradual project exits, with phases of incremental independent operation, such as changing one's role from that of funder to advisor before exiting altogether (Coates *et al.*, 2016., Lee, 2017., Rogers and Coates, 2015., ERRY III, n.d., Engels, 2010., Rogers and Macías, 2004., Martins, 2020b., Le Cornu, Gruby, Blackwatters, Enrici, Basurto, and Betsill, 2023., Oxfam, n.d.). This gradual withdrawal can help partner organisations increase capacity and allows for monitoring of the exit process to generate lessons and resolve problems (Oxfam, n.d.). Lessons can also be taken from earlier rounds in a gradual exit to inform partners in a later round (Lee, 2017., Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert, 2005., Engels, 2010).

Engels (2010), in his analysis of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's exit from Armenia, suggests that any timeline provided should be specific and clear throughout the transition to help establish chronological commitment from all stakeholders. Agreeing a timeline provides the stakeholders with a schedule for what is expected of them and allows the donor and partner to prepare and execute activities for which they are responsible, but these should be realistic and flexible. Benchmarks should be established to monitor sufficient progress towards transition, and flexibility allowed where timelines need to shift.

3.5 Communicating the exit externally

In much of the literature found, the timing, content and approach to communications is seen to have played a significant role in how well or badly the exit was perceived to have been conducted – both internal communications within the exiting organisation, and external communication of the exit to partners and funders. This section focuses on findings relating to external communications (with partners and other funders). The literature highlights the need for early and consistent communications on exits to take place between all levels of the funding organisation and its partners, to ensure that partners are prepared and understand the rationale and process of the exit as soon as possible. Findings in the literature specifically around internal practices within the exiting organisation are described in section 3.3.1.

3.5.1 Timing of communication

The literature is very clear that informing partners as early as possible is crucial to starting off an exit process well (Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013., Hayman *et al*., 2016., Coates *et al*., 2016). This is even more critical in exit scenarios with short timelines (Petrovich, 2011). While hearing about an impending exit can be frustrating and disappointing, Hayman *et al*. (2016) found that in the EveryChild exit, partners were appreciative of advance warning, despite some mixed messaging at the outset. This is not to say that early communication trumps all other considerations, such as the clarity of the early messaging. The timing and details around any exit need to be clearly communicated. Early rumours of an exit without clear or formal messaging will be detrimental to the process (Martins, 2020b). Behrens and Gordillo (2019) found, in their survey of American foundations, that although many foundations reported that they notified grantee organisations two to three years in advance of the funding exit, the grantee organisations surveyed were more likely to indicate that they were only given one year or less notice. These survey results highlight a clear failure in communications between donor and implementing partners, with donors' perception of the clarity of their exit communications not aligning with the experience and understanding of the partners. Therefore, an early announcement can help partners to process the exit, enable deeper consultation, ownership and co-creation of an exit strategy (Rogers and Macías, 2004., Boiardi and Hehenberger, 2014a).

Communications around the reality of an eventual exit should begin long before a decision to exit has been taken. Upfront communication at the start of a relationship about what the end should look like and when it is likely to occur can help to minimise confusion and resentment and manage expectations of the funding relationship (Lewis, 2016). Speaking about exits regularly, and even discussing fundraising and alternate funding with partners at the programme planning phase can help to make the topic less uncomfortable and even lead to more focused, sustainable results or opportunities for the grantee to identify their needs for the funding organisation to provide training or networking opportunities (Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007., Petrovich, 2011). Ideally, conversations about exits and a post-funding existence will become a natural point of discussion, which can be regularly incorporated into meetings to allow for an ongoing refinement of the exit strategy and analysis of progress towards a sustainable organisation or programme results. Mackinnon and Jaffe (2007) recognise that having meaningful discussions about an exit strategy is hard at the start of a relationship because it is difficult to anticipate what capacities will need to be grown. However, they suggest an exit strategy should still be discussed as early as possible, such as using the middle of a funding phase as an opportunity to discuss exits.

3.5.2 Content of communication

There are multiple decisions about what needs to be communicated, to whom and at what time. This balance is important for a smooth transition process, as well as for maintaining strong relationships and managing reputational damage (Martins, 2020a). Most importantly, communication needs to carefully and comprehensively explain the reason, method and timelines for the exit (Behrens and Gordillo, 2019., Petrovich, 2011) and be consistent in its messaging (Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007., Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013). Senior management being clear to internal staff about communicating why the funding organisation is entering a new context or partnership and therefore when and on what basis they intend to exit (see section 3.1) and providing programme managers with guidance as to how to discuss the exit plans from the start of any new relationship can help in ensuring messaging remains consistent (Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013). However, this implies that if the exit decision is not in line with the original funding goal identified by senior management, clear guidance needs to be provided to the programme managers about how to explain the discrepancy to partners. For example, if the start of the relationship was set up on the basis of creating systems change and joint agreements that systems change can take up to 10 years to achieve sustainable results, the funder will need to explain why they are exiting before any results are likely to be able to be sustained. The funder needs to ensure that all staff are informed of the exit and the reasons for it, to prepare them to effectively answer questions to avoid reputational and relationship damage (Petrovich, 2011., Le Cornu *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, programme managers must manage the tension between closing the programme, managing the partnership relationship and keeping the door open in case there is any possibility of future partnerships, either through the same portfolio or through other arms of the organisation (Lewis, 2016).

Whilst exits are challenging, if managed well, partners can use exits as an opportunity to strengthen their capacity, become less dependent on donors and focus their work on sustainable results (Hayman *et al.* 2016). Clear communication of the timeline of the exit can further help partners focus on priority phase-out activities (Gienapp, Reisman, Shorr, and Arbreton, 2017).

A sustainability tool developed by the Regional Resource Centre for Asia and Pacific (n.d.) identifies the following key pointers for relating to communicating the exit to partners:

- Signal intentions in advance – stakeholders should be aware that exit is planned and be actively involved in planning for it;
- Formally communicate decisions when they are known;
- Discuss implications of an exit, including expectations for each main activity; and
- Communicate in time to allow time for scale-down of activities, as appropriate.

3.5.3 Delivery of communication

When delivering the message to partners that an exit decision has been made, the exiting organisation must decide who delivers the message to partners – senior management, programme managers with a direct relationship, or an external or new hire responsible for managing the exit. Little information was found about how exiting organisations make this decision but among the papers reviewed, there was consensus that it is crucial that senior leadership be involved in the process (Petrovich, 2011., Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013).

Lewis (2016) recommends that during the exit process there should be more frequent touch points with senior leadership for both internal and partner staff so that they are checking in at key points in the process. It is important that those who are managing exits do not feel isolated. Additionally, it is recommended that senior management do a field visit. One of the case studies in Lewis' report highlights the benefit this can have towards the motivation and confidence levels in the exit among partners (*ibid*.). Lastly, it is particularly crucial that senior management's communication around the exit is clear, precise and consistent to avoid issues of disbelief, show respect for staff, partners and communities and generate alignment on the exit process among all stakeholders (*ibid*.).

That being said, Lewis (*ibid*.) recognises that programme managers play a key role in communications through their direct relationship with partners. To help them manage this day-to-day interaction, Lewis recommends that programme managers are equipped with templates and guidance notes on how to communicate with partners and given the agency to edit these as necessary to make them appropriate for their specific context. While this contextualisation and personalisation is necessary, maintaining consistent communications across all levels in the foundation is important to avoid situations where partners try to circumvent a programme manager or other staff members and go to others within the hierarchy (Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007., Petrovich, 2011., Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013).

Kerkhoven and Herweijer (2013) write that funders almost need to be a "broken record" by consistently speaking with partners about exits through a wide variety of channels and methods, even before the exit has begun or potentially been decided. This supports the exit process and sustainability right from the outset. Additionally, it is key to providing some level of predictability and stability in the midst of what can often be a hectic process (Van Der Meer *et al.*, 2008). Mackinnon and Jaffe (2007) emphasise the need to make sure communication about the exit is clear yet empathetic, and delivered though meetings and calls, as well as in writing. This allows the partners to track the progress and context of an exit.

Martins' (2020b) synthesis of 20 case studies captured creative mechanisms organisations have used to clearly and transparently communicate exits, including town hall meetings to avoid rumours and speculation, an email address for anonymous questions and thoughts, and an external transition manager being onboarded to field questions and frustrations of partners and who would potentially be easier to communicate with than foundation staff. Another option is to have an open door policy for any questions or conversations about the exit from partner staff; however, this might require additional training or capacity for funder staff (Petrovich, 2011).

Mackinnon and Jaffe (2007) recommend that foundation staff speak with partners before news about an exit is made public so that they have a chance to process it. They even suggest that these conversations could be done communally with partners from across the programme and provide partners with a network to speak to without any funder representation present.

The literature on exit communications also recommends developing a clear communication plan that considers which stakeholders need to know what and when. This plan should cover all stages of an exit, either starting at the point when an exit is contemplated or even from programme inception (Van Der Meer *et al.*, 2008., Martins, 2020b). Martins (2020b) also encourages the plan to be transparent about the fact that it will be flexible and that potential constraints may occur in the future which could necessitate alterations to what has already been communicated. Additionally, implementing partners may benefit from support in drafting their own communications plans (*ibid*.).

If the exit is from an entire thematic or geographic area, the organisation may also need to consider how to communicate its exit to external funders and stakeholders working in the space (locally and internationally) so as not to start a domino effect, impact the partners' reputation, or reduce the possibility of sustaining results (Petrovich, 2011).

3.6 Creating an exit plan[4]

This section sets out what the literature review found around the creation and content of exit plans used to guide the exit process. The literature stresses the importance of developing an exit plan in

[4] The literature refers to exit plans, sustainability plans and transition plans interchangeably. We have therefore combined the findings from all references into one section and called this an 'Exit Plan'. A separate section of the report (section 3.8) addresses the issue of sustaining programme results beyond the exit.

coordination with partners and to begin this process early in the partnership, not only when an exit is imminent. Early planning requires a great deal of flexibility, with timelines, stakeholders, and activities potentially changing over the lifetime of the programme. The values of co-creation and flexibility are reflected in exit plans not having consistent structures and elements, but the literature is clear that these plans should look beyond the immediacy of managing an exit to seriously considering the long-term stability of the partners and develop a roadmap to that future. Exit plan documents that were found during the course of this literature review can be found in Annex 6.

> *"The purpose of an exit strategy is not to hasten the exit – exit is not valuable for its own sake – but to improve the chance of sustainable outcomes for the program."*
>
> – WFP Rome presentation on lessons learned from exiting emergencies from Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert (2005)

Exit plans are a critical aspect of ensuring a responsible programme closure that respects the implementing partners and other stakeholders, minimises negative consequences, and improves the possibility of sustaining results beyond the funder's direct involvement. James *et al.*'s review of EveryChild's exit (2016) concludes that:

> *"exit planning from the start of a programme… 'accelerates the process and sharpens the mind'. The thinking is not only addressing exit but also life beyond exit, specifically, how will you work towards creating programmes (and even organisations) that are sustainable?"*

The concept of an exit plan is central to nearly every piece of literature analysed in this review, but the terminology and parameters used are varied. An exit plan is often presented as an exit strategy. Other common terms used in the literature include sustainability plan, transition plan and graduation strategy. The focus of these documents varies from future growth and development to exclusively focusing on the logistics of the impending programme closure. In one of the foundational pieces of literature on exit strategies, Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert (2005) encourage readers to "think of an Exit Strategy as a Sustainability Plan for a program, which has inherent benefits irrespective of timing and context." An exit plan can at times be helpful for future fundraising as well, particularly if it can reduce speculation on the causes of exit (Boiardi and Hehenberger, 2014a).

3.6.1 How and when to create an exit plan

The most prevalent theme in the literature regarding how an exit plan should be developed is the importance of participatory practices and co-creation with partners at the point at which any new funding relationship is started, as well as with community members or other stakeholders where appropriate (Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013., Kiryttopoulou, 2019., Lewis, 2016., Rogers and Coates, 2015., Petrovich, 2011). The literature suggests this co-creation can help to maintain trust during the exit process, help partners identify needs for the remaining lifespan of support, and help partners take ownership of what happens afterwards. One country office from EveryChild is reported to have said that this consultation and co-creation "shifted the discussion from 'one about exit, to one about sustainability'" (Lewis, 2016). On the other hand, one EveryChild partner emphasised the need for the exiting organisation to not make the process about the partners and their exit: "one side's 'responsible exit' is the other side's ongoing struggle for survival, sustainability and impact. [...] Exit is their process, not ours." (Hayman *et al.*, 2016).

Conducting meaningful engagement with partners means allowing them to control the planning and decision-making as much as possible, especially when the exit decision itself was beyond their control (Martins, 2020b). In an interview, Nuru Kenya's Country Director reported that the flourishing of the organisation and her leadership post-exit came from the freedom to innovate and fail (*ibid.*). To enable such a co-creation relationship requires the donor to take a step back and focus on providing technical support, providing constructive and critical appraisals through evaluation, and disseminating learnings among partners. Kiryttopoulou (2019) labels this role for the donor as a

”critical friend”, balancing between allowing agency for the partners to define and work towards their post-exit existence while also providing services to the partner to empower and advise them. However, this role relies on the donor's ability to engage with partners as a 'critical friend' in reality, where both parties hold one another accountable to the exit strategy and its process.

Kiryttopoulou (2019) records that in C&A's exit from its education programming in Brazil, the donor provided guidance to partners for them to develop an exit strategy using a template with specific guidelines to support its use, as well as conference calls and in-person training workshops. These in-person workshops are reported to have been of particular value to partners because they were conducted in groups, allowing for knowledge sharing and cross-pollination of the technical support provided by foundation staff. These calls resulted in a sustained network between partner organisations. One workshop participant noted,

> *“the exchange between organisations made it possible to better understand the different processes and learn about new strategies on how to cope with similar issues [around sustainability]. It also strengthened the ties between the organisations, creating a space of trust and hope […] It was also important to see that we share common challenges.” (ibid.).*

Similarly, in a report by Stopping as Success, a USAID funded collaborative learning project that researched responsible transitions of INGOs, one interviewee proposed the development of local technical working groups made up of representatives from across the public sector, private businesses and civil society to develop the programme's exit strategy from the onset, which would also enable the group to oversee the later phases of the exit process (Leach, 2020).

Creating a joint vision for an exit can be beneficial in developing accountability for both donors and partners. It develops a stake in the process for both the local and international actors and enables them to hold each other to account for the progress and fulfilment of the various targets and activities involved with the exit (Martins, 2020b). Additionally, in the aforementioned C&A case study, participants found that the process of developing an exit strategy was valuable for the reflection and conversations surrounding sustainability in itself, providing a new avenue to discuss the health and future of their organisations, especially when done in collaboration with other local partners (Kiryttopoulou, 2019). The co-creation engagement trickled down to their own community-engaged practices, with partner networks integrating deeper participatory decision making processes and even served communities having more say through surveys and periodic meetings (*ibid*.).

Inviting partners to design an exit plan will not always result in the levels of integration mentioned above, but the literature is clear that what is perhaps more crucial is to be very clear in defining the role and responsibilities of the stakeholders in the process, and to regularly meet with all stakeholders to ensure they either shape or, at minimum, are informed of the exit strategy (Lee, 2017).

Closely tied to this co-creation process, the literature also highlights the importance of starting the process of designing an exit plan from the beginning of a programme or relationship, regardless of whether a concrete exit is already planned.

> *“Exits, to me, that's like life, birth, and death. It's going to happen and if we could just face the mortality upfront, we might live better and more fully […] and we can get out of that fantasy world on both sides”*. (Le Cornu *et al.*, 2023).

Ideally, an exit plan is developed alongside the creation of the programme itself, which then allows for partner sustainability to be mainstreamed across programme design (Rogers and Coates, 2015., Oxfam, 2021b). Lewis (2016) points out that funders are likely to be using tools to understand partners' strengths and weaknesses at the start of the relationship anyway. She consequently suggests building exit thinking into these tools and developing exit plans based on the results of these early assessments. It has become increasingly common for USAID projects to have exit strategy elements incorporated even at the funding proposal stage (Stopping as Success, 2021). These strategies include three elements:

1. **Programmatic phase out** – identifies key 'results/outputs' the programme expects to transfer to key stakeholders, and the processes by which it will be accomplished;
2. **Administrative and financial phase out** – outlines the tasks and deadlines for close-out of administrative and financial processes;
3. **Legacy plan** – outlines the key legacy the programme intends to leave behind, and how it will be documented and handed over to relevant stakeholders (Farley, n.d.).

Having such early conversations about exit also clarifies from the outset the temporary role of a donor and establishes realistic expectations for the partnership during the programme implementation and its eventual exit. This can provide more stability and certainty during an exit process and, potentially, mitigate tensions in the partnership (Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert, 2005., RRC.AP, n.d.). Early co-creation of an exit plan allows the donor, partners, and other stakeholders to develop an understanding of each other's ambitions and vision for future goals as well as discrepancies that may exist between the parties, allowing potential issues, both related and unrelated to a potential exit, to surface early on (CEO Water Mandate, n.d.). This can be particularly useful in the case of an unplanned exit. The instability or shock of the decision may still be difficult to process but can be slightly mitigated by the stability of an exit plan having already been agreed, with mutually understood next steps.

The literature also suggests that exit strategies must be flexible and iterative in a way that can be refined throughout programme implementation and exit stages (Leach, 2020., Lee, 2017., Coates *et al.*, 2016). Flexibility in an exit plan is particularly important when the exit is unplanned or the decision comes as a surprise (Le Cornu *et al.*, 2023), implying that an exit plan should include considerations for both planned and unplanned exits. It is crucial to be clear and transparent from the outset that the exit strategy may shift over the lifespan of the programme to account for unseen circumstances or for programmatic adjustments (Boiardi and Hehenberger, 2014a., Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert, 2005). It can serve as a living document to be altered as the programme's lifecycle progresses to account for any changes that occur or obstacles that may present themselves, including a sudden, unplanned exit (Le Cornu *et al.*, 2023). Rogers and Macías (2004) conclude that it can take a couple of years for a programme to finalise its exit criteria or begin planning an exit strategy due to the slow nature of developing programmatic goals. This means that discussions regarding exit strategies may be somewhat rudimentary at the outset. However, they stipulate that there is still value in beginning these conversations.

The literature also recommends contingency planning having a role within sustainability and exit strategies to ensure that potential shocks do not damage the sustainability of the organisation or achievements (Coates *et al.*, 2016., Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert, 2005). Heldgaar (2008) recommends developing guidelines at the funder level (which can then inform exit strategy co-creation) that are sensitive to varying contexts and management challenges, such as exit as crisis management, exiting in a sustainable manner, and exits as transformation of relations. Having these guidelines inform exit strategy planning would allow for the plan to incorporate contingencies for different scenarios and timelines, which can be useful both for the donor and partner. Kiryttopoulou (2019) suggests forming exit and sustainability plans with short, middle and long term phases in mind to allow for firmer plans in the short term and more fluid longer term targets. In the case of EveryChild's exit, partners reported that "breaking the plan into bite-sized, six-monthly chunks made it less overwhelming, and also helped maintain the urgency (as two years can seem like a long way off)" (James *et al*., 2016).

Some lessons on how to create an exit plan can be drawn from the experience of spend-out foundations. The Association for Charitable Foundations (Firth, 2010) identified some questions that programme managers can ask themselves when closing out a programme to help focus and develop their exit plans:

- Do we want to leave a legacy?
- If so, what kind of legacy should it be and to whom? (The founder? Grantees? The public? Other trusts and foundations? The sector supported?)

- What learning is it helpful to leave behind?
- Who will it be useful to and how do we know they want it?
- How do we collect, communicate and make it easy to use?
- How much priority will we give to helping the charities we have supported become more sustainable?
- How much attention will we give to developing new sources of money for the sectors we have supported?
- Do we want to consider making 'gift grants' to key grantees on closure?

ACF designed these questions for funder organisation to ask themselves, but they may be relevant for programme managers to ask themselves or ask together with senior management or with partner organisations when looking at how to identify and prioritise exit activities.

3.6.2 What to include in an exit plan

The content and structure of exit plans can vary, but some common themes emerge across the literature. Rönngren (2011) summarises the broad elements of the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation's exit strategies:

1. Exit criteria;
2. Measurable indicators of progress to meet criteria;
3. Timeline of exit process;
4. Activities and division of responsibilities until exit; and
5. Mechanisms to assess progress.

For example, Mackinnon and Jaffe (2007) suggest funders consider checking-in on issues like raising funds from other sources as part of reporting, although Van Der Meer *et al.* (2008) warns against this becoming a box-ticking exercise.

In addition to the five core elements, Rönngren (2011) also considers it crucial to include a discussion of what the donor and partner relationship should be post-exit and to hold a post-exit evaluation to assess the exit strategy. Although not mentioned explicitly, their monitoring (encompassed in elements four and five), captures progress towards a more sustainable existence post-exit.

Alternatively, Boiardi and Hehenberger (2014a) developed six elements that should be included in an exit plan for social business investments in their manual for venture philanthropy (VP) and social investment (SI) practitioners:

1. **Investment goals/clear objectives** – in terms of social impact, financial sustainability and organisational resilience;
2. **Milestones** – milestones are defined to monitor the progression towards the goals, identify issues along the way and adjust the plan accordingly, and to help determine when exit readiness is achieved;
3. **Timing of the exit** – i.e. the investment horizon, which largely depends on the flexibility offered by the funder;
4. **Mode of exit** – including how and whom to exit to;
5. **Resources required for the exit** – to monitor the investment and roll-out the exit plan; and
6. **Exit market scenarios** – a prediction of whom to exit to and what the market will be like at the time of exit.

Kerkhoven and Herweijer (2013) identified a funder who prioritised creating a plan that focused on the sustainability of the partners they were leaving behind. To help them come up with a sustainability plan, the funder would ask themselves:

- Is the organisation able to tell their story in a compelling way? You can only do that if you can show outcomes or demonstrate impact of your work.
- Do we understand the maths, the numbers? You need to know how much every part of your operation costs and what the relative scale of your contribution is.
- Can we help our partner to expand their networks beyond its comfort zones; can we help them to get out there, meet people?

Additionally, Morris, George, Gondwe, James, Mauney, and Tamang (2021) and Rogers, Coates, and Friedman (2016) suggest exit plans should include resilience plans to accommodate external and environmental shocks to make sure the partner has capacity to deal with external obstacles that will threaten the sustainability of results.

Lee (2017) suggests an exit plan should also analyse risks and opportunities associated with the exit for all parties involved. For example, Kerkhoven and Herweijer (2013) found a foundation who reported:

> *"We have been forced to change completely our way of working. In the past our assets provided us with a huge flow of money which we could put into these programmes, now we are talking more and more about cooperation. This is a complete change, it requires a complete change of our mind-set. In the past there was no urgency to cooperate so closely with local entities, now we cannot avoid joining forces. For me that is the biggest lesson learned: In this world nothing works without some sort of collaboration."*

This suggests that careful exit planning can provide an opportunity for the partner to invest in a new way of working or use it as a pre-text to convene stakeholders and gain traction with them.

Several pieces of literature recommend having partners base their sustainability and exit strategies on clearly articulated theories of change, ideally created at the outset of the partnership and project design, to enable careful assessment of the assumptions underlying the sustainability plan (Rogers, Coates, and Friedman, 2016., Rogers and Coates, 2015). For example, it is important to be honest about the realities of any assumptions that resource-constrained communities and governments can pick up elements of the project at the end (Morris *et al.* 2021). These assessments should be continually reassessed to account for changes in the external environment (Rogers, Coates, and Friedman, 2016). The theory of change can then provide the basis of a MEL system for both the programme and the exit strategy. Evaluations within an exit strategy should tackle several elements: monitoring progress of the exit criteria and timeline, capacity development of partners, and progress towards partner sustainability (both during and post-exit). The literature generally recommends to tie any exit evaluation systems directly into the programme monitoring and evaluation efforts to save on resources and also to mainstream considerations of sustainability into programme activities (Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert, 2005., Coates *et al.*, 2016., Lee, 2017). It is crucial that resources are set aside from the outset to cover both the programme and its exit (Boiardi and Hehenberger, 2014a), as organising funding for this at a later point might be difficult and mean that crucial data that could have informed exit assessments is not captured. Sustainability indicators are also helpful for developing a roadmap for partners to expand their staff, organisational capacity and financial stability (if relevant). Benchmarks and indicators can also help gauge whether partners are capable of withstanding an exit before one is formally initiated, based on their progress towards the agreed upon milestones (Martins, 2020b., Boiardi and Hehenberger, 2014a., Mkomagi and Mwaseba, 2013., Stopping as Success, 2021).

Within an exit plan, several sustainability considerations may be included in the form of a sustainability plan, with components of such a plan laid out in detail in section 3.8. Several pieces of literature have sought to create categories of sustainability elements that can be helpful to consider when co-creating an exit plan and developing matching indicators to measure the partners' progress. Boiardi and Hehenberger (2014a) frame sustainability within an exit plan around three broad dimensions: social impact, financial sustainability, and organisational resilience. Alternatively, Rogers and Coates (2015) provide additional specificity through four factors to prepare for post-exit sustainability: source of resources, technical and managerial capacity, partner motivation, and vertical and horizontal linkages. These groupings can be used to co-create activities that would improve the partners' chances of surviving post-exit, as well as sustainability indicators for any exit evaluations.

Table 1: Models of key sustainability considerations

Model	Elements	Definition*
Boijardi and Hehenberger (2014a)	Social impact	The social change on the target population resulting from an SPO's [social purpose organisation] actions.
	Financial stability	The assessment that an SPO will have sufficient resources to continue pursuing its social mission, whether they come from other funders or from own revenue generating activities.
	Organisational resilience	The assessment of the degree of maturity of an SPO, in terms of the degree of development of the management team and organisation (governance, fund raising capacity etc.).
Rogers and Coates (2015)	Source of resources	Resources could come from activities that were run profitably using a business model, funds secured through government operating budgets, funds provided by other donor agencies or nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), contributions by community members in cash or in kind, or other types of innovative finance. Resources in the form of profits (e.g., from agriculture or livestock sales or other income generation) or income from user fees (e.g., fee for service for piped or improved water sources and paravet services) encouraged sustained service delivery and also made it possible for some practices (e.g., agriculture and livestock practices requiring purchased inputs) to be maintained. Required resources also included a continued source of technical support and training to ensure that capacity was maintained.
	Technical and managerial capacity	Building high-quality technical and managerial capacity throughout the service delivery chain and ensuring mechanisms to maintain that capacity was also of the utmost importance, enabling, for example, water committees to manage their finances and farmers individually or in PAs to negotiate contracts. Capacity building among individual beneficiaries—to implement improved child care, hygiene, or agricultural practices, and to manage their resources to do so—was similarly critical to sustained behaviour change.
	Partner motivation	Ensuring a continued source of motivation for service providers and beneficiaries alike was imperative. The study found that financial incentives and in-kind benefits were the most successful motivators for service providers. Personal commitment, community service, and prestige were important but not sufficient to sustain active service delivery in the long run.
	Vertical/horizontal linkages	Horizontal linkages refer to relationships created among communities, groups, or individuals for support. For example, awardees promoted meetings of groups of CHWs [community health workers] from different communities to

	share information and mutual support; associations of community water committees were also encouraged to share experiences and solutions to problems. Vertical linkages refer to the formal or informal relationships between individuals or communities and the government, NGOs, or other entities to provide support. For example, CHWs were often linked to the government health care system to provide supervision, training, and materials; PAs created contractual relationships with commercial entities such as exporters or wholesalers.

*Definitions are sourced from literature

Another consideration for Rogers and Coates (2015) is the importance of gradual exits, with phases of incremental independent operation. This is particularly pertinent when the funder provides technical or administrative support to its grantee partners, or when the partner is significantly dependent on the exiting organisation's funds (compared to other funding sources) (Coates *et al.*, 2016., Martins, 2020b., Oxfam, n.d.). A gradual exit should be incorporated into an exit plan to clarify who is responsible for what, and within what timeline during the exit, including whether any party is taking on additional financial or service delivery responsibilities to facilitate the exit (Rose, Collinson, and Kalow, 2017).

Lastly, the literature suggests that any exit plan should address whether the expectation is that activities requiring further funding need to take place and, if so, plan for where that funding is going to come from – such as through exit funding provided by the exiting organisation, or through helping grantee partners find funding elsewhere (Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013., Petrovich, 2011). All funders should be familiar with other funders working in their context, and the exit plan will need to establish how they plan to gain traction from those donors. However, it is important that funders are aware that no funding context is reliable. Many sector and international funders are volatile and local/domestic philanthropy can be vulnerable to political shifts (Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013). This section of an exit plan can also include potential conditions or parameters around the remaining or additional funding, such as earmarking it for capacity strengthening, evaluations, or communication planning. The priority of these closing funds should be decided upon in consultation with the partner (Petrovich, 2011).

3.7 Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

This section describes lessons in good practice on how MEL can be used to inform the exiting decision, and during an exit to inform the process and sustain results. The literature highlights the importance of integrating programme and exit MEL systems to both inform and manage programme exits. MEL tools should be used throughout the process not just to monitor progress but also to develop and disseminate internal learning to inform future exits and sustain programme results post-exit.

3.7.1 Monitoring, evaluation, and learning to inform the decision to exit

There is very little reference to factors, information or methods that senior staff members/boards of a donor organisation can use when they are required to make an abrupt or internally strategic decision about exiting a programme, thematic area or geography. The literature appears to suggest that the ideal scenario is that senior management and boards are only making exits based on the premise that all desired outcomes have been achieved. For example, Cao Yu, Jhawar, and Berman (2017) suggest if all programmes use a theory of change that can be evaluated, the results towards pre-identified goals can help decision-makers determine what to sustain or close. The Hazen Foundation leaders, for example, used an initiative's theory of change as a lens to identify the community capacities that needed to be sustained in order to keep their grantee partners from reverting back to how they were before the initiative began. Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert (2005) highlight the need to have two types of indicators: process and result indicators. If these are set up, result indicators can help senior management assess readiness for a phase out of a programme. Similarly, Kerkhoven and Herweijer (2013) suggest external independent evaluations may help to make sense of programme progress. Although not always entirely without bias, external evaluations can help to provide an objective view on whether outcomes have or have not been achieved and inform the Board's decision on whether it is an appropriate time to exit. An external evaluation can combine data and observations from a range of stakeholders and triangulate the information to uncover and interpret contradictions in information that may be reaching the funding boards for the purpose of helping them understand whether it is an appropriate time to exit.

3.7.2 Monitoring, evaluation, and learning during the exit

In the literature reviewed, the benefits to monitoring the exit process itself largely fall into two categories:

1. For internal learning (for the purpose of programme management or future exit management); and
2. Sustaining results (i.e. knowledge transition, advocacy and ensuring the uptake of good practice in others).

Some methods that exiting organisations have used to help monitor, evaluate, and learn from their exit processes include:

- **Building indicators relating to exits and post-funding sustainability into M&E systems from the outset**. Example indicators found include: sustainability of resources, technical/managerial capacity, appropriate horizontal and vertical network linkages, motivation, gradual transition to independent operation, market monitoring (to track progress for the sector in general), lesson sharing (in relation to the funder or other partners), and the extent to which sustainability considerations have been integrated into the project plan (Rogers, Coates, and Friedman, 2016., ICAI, 2016., ERRY III, n.d., Coates *et al.*, 2016., Lee, 2017., Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert, 2005). Exit-related indicators can be used to inform and assess exit decisions or reassess timelines (Oxfam, n.d., CEO Water Mandate, n.d.). In a post-exit review of 12 programmes across four countries (Bolivia, Honduras, India, and Kenya), Rogers, Coates, and Friedman (2016) found that indicators of sustainability — that is, evidence of continued resources, capacity, and motivation; establishment of appropriate linkages; and gradual transition to independent operation – were vital for judging a project's potential to achieve lasting change.
- **Holding post-exit evaluations to measure the sustainability of partners after the funding has ended (potentially 3-10 years after exit) and inform future exits** (Stopping as Success, 2021., Coates *et al.*, 2016., Rogers and Coates, 2015., Leach, 2020., Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert, 2005., Le Cornu *et al.*, 2023). This approach has also been used to help maintain relationships with partners post exit (Rogers and Macías, 2004). Lee (2017) highlights the need for regular communications with partners regarding the role of evaluations in the exit strategy and the setup of discussions to ensure mutual understanding of the outcome measures and the role of any impact assessment.
- **Staggering an exit within a region or programme so that leaders and managers can learn from each exit to immediately inform later rounds of exit** (Rogers and Macías, 2004., CEO Water Mandate, n.d., Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert, 2005).
- **Conducting participatory MEL:** enabling self-assessments and reflections among partners and avoiding central evaluations, as well as involving stakeholders in evaluation design and implementation to encourage partner ownership of MEL, with the aim of supporting capacity strengthening and increasing the chances of uptake of lessons by all stakeholders (Petrovich, 2011., Leach, 2020., Kiryttopoulou, 2019).
- **Setting up clear systems and channels to preserve, maintain and disseminate lessons and data (generated by the funder or other partners) across various channels to avoid reinventing the**

wheel. Examples found in the literature include: websites, participation or facilitations of conventions, field conferences, op-eds, field assessments, regular sharing meetings, workshops, joining media programmes and more (Clarke, 2019., Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007., Petrovich, 2011., Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013., Farley, n.d., Lewis, 2016., Rogers and Coates, 2015., Kibbe, 2017., Kerkhoven and Herweijer (2013) document a series of lessons that were gathered from the Diana, Princes of Wales Memorial Fund's archive project that can help guide exiting organisations who are planning on leaving an archive of lessons behind. The full list of lessons can be found in Annex 5 'Lessons learned: Leaving an archive'.

- **Setting up feedback mechanisms from partners on the capacity strengthening and partner management provided during the exit, and building these learnings into future planning cycles and support** (Lewis, 2016). Creating opportunities and mechanisms for partners to provide feedback regarding the exit strategy and implement learning into the strategy also helps to keep the strategy flexible and informed throughout the process (Le Cornu *et al.*, 2023). In Oxfam's community-based protection programming, for instance, they incorporated annual exit planning meetings with the community to update and discuss the exit plan. These meetings were initially led by Oxfam's staff but increasingly moved to being led by local stakeholders (Oxfam, 2021a).
- **Conducting separate meetings that include other stakeholders (such as evaluators and funder board members) for exit compliance updates and learning meetings to see how the exit is going and capture what can be learned and improved on in the future** (Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013). For example, EveryChild developed a number of tools to assist them to exit well and capture learning, and did so in different ways depending on the context. Some example tools included the Partnership Completion Report; Letter of Recommendation to potential funders; Partnership Completion Final Skype Call, and Partnership Completion Six-month Follow-up Call. In particular, partners found that EveryChild's initiative to do a follow-up call six months after exit both unique and helpful for closure. Additionally, EveryChild Malawi invested time and financial resources to produce national reports on programme learning entitled 'Approach to ending child Marriage' and 'Voluntary Savings and Loan Associations'. They also contracted an external consultant to document the Journey of EveryChild Malawi, highlighting achievements, lessons and best programme practices of working with children without parental care in Malawi, and commissioned a video documentary for distribution to key government officials and international NGOs (James *et al.*, 2016).

3.8 Sustaining results post exit

This section describes various methods found in the literature that organisations have used to sustain programme results beyond the exit. Lessons relate to exit grants, strengthening grantee capacity, building networks, acquiring new funding, and maintaining a post-exit role. The literature stresses the importance of co-designing the structure of exit grants and capacity strengthening plans and investing in developing partners' networks with alternative funding sources, government agencies, and local civil society organisations. Lastly, maintaining a non-financial relationship with partners post-exit is common, but needs to be negotiated with partners to see if such a role would be useful or appropriate.

Funders have employed various methods to try and sustain programme results post funding. Some methods found in the literature were using learning products to help partners continue advocacy efforts, leaving research and tools with policy-makers and practitioners, creating networks of organisations working on the same topic, linking partners to funders, supporting partner organisations to continue activities by finding them more funding or helping them develop a sustainable financial model, and supporting partners to demonstrate their impact to others. Some of these methods are described in more detail in sections 3.8.1 to 3.8.5. The literature shows that organisations have used a combination of these, depending on each programme's circumstance. The consensus is that the most important element in deciding which activities will best sustain results is being flexible and tailored to each programme/partner, and the methods selected should be developed through co-creation with the grantee partner (Cao Yu, Jhawar, and Berman, 2017., Petrovich, 2011) (see section 3.6 for findings on co-creating exit plans). However, very little externally available literature was found that documents examples where sustainability efforts have been successful. This is partly because verification of sustained results would require the funder to conduct evaluations long after the exit has occurred, which is not always practiced. The following three examples of post-exit evaluations were found that document lessons that can be learned regarding what does or does not work to sustain results. However, it must be noted that this is a small sample size and a literature search was not conducted to find additional documentation on post-exit evaluations. Thus, these findings must be interpreted with caution.

Rogers and Coates (2015) reviewed exits for 12 food assistance projects run by USAID in Bolivia, Honduras, India, and Kenya. They found that the majority of gains made during the project on food security systems had not remained, project activities were rarely continued and, if they were continued, they deteriorated in quality due to lack of accountability and incentives for actors to undertake their roles as envisioned. The structures collapsed due to grantee partners' reliance on the funding organisation coordinating stakeholders and holding them to account. The main take-away from this study is that project impact at the time of exit does not predict sustainability, and the magnitude of the impact is not related to the probability of sustainability. Instead, they found that three key factors – resources, capacity, and motivation – were critical to achieving sustainability. These factors are interrelated and synergistic; no project in the study achieved sustainability without all three of them in place before the project ended. Project provision of piped water in Bolivia and Honduras provided an example of the convergence of these factors: user fees generated needed resources; beneficiaries valued piped water and were therefore motivated to pay for it; and water committees received training in both technical and managerial skills that were maintained through continued application.

Morris *et al.* (2021) reviewed EveryChild's exit in four countries, five years after closure. They found that although some gains had remained, such as government recognition of the importance to continue child-friendly practices in schools, almost all gains in community attitude and school attendance had been lost. In this case, partners were direct service providers (among conducting other activities) and children had dropped out of school due to partners being unable to transition to a more sustainable operating model before EveryChild had to exit. The findings demonstrate the importance of ensuring the necessary capacities are in place before the funder fully exits.

Rijneveld, Pieterse, and Bender (2022) conducted a review to assess whether systems changes that had been achieved as part of a programme to combat human trafficking in Europe had been sustained a year later. The review found that 31 concrete system changes were still present. However, on the whole, proactive project activities were still active due to exit grants or extensions, or because partners had found other funding. The study was consequently inconclusive as to whether these results would be sustained longer term in the absence of further funding, particularly because many results were reliant on partners directly providing service delivery (and consequently requiring external funding to do so).

3.8.1 Provide exit grants

Many organisations opt to provide exit grants or interest-free loans to their partners to help them prepare for the exit and allow for good closure (Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007., Petrovich, 2011., Martins, 2020b). The purpose of these grants may be to distil learning from the programme so that the impact of the activities can reach more stakeholders, support partners to strengthen internal capacity in fundraising or financial models, or improve organisational processes to help them through future due diligence. These grants are sometimes used simply as an extension of existing funding to help partners close off their activities in a planned way. In other circumstances, the parameters of these grants can be significantly different to prior funding, such as having a heavier focus on operational/core funding, providing assets (Engels, 2010., Mkomagi and Mwaseba, 2013., Martins, 2020b., Lewis, 2016), and organisational capacity strengthening (Behrens and Gordillo, 2019., Martins, 2020b). For example, the Tubney Charitable Trust (2011) decided that, where prior funding required rigid outcomes delivered in instalments, their exit grants could be used as an unrestricted funding source with very few restrictions and paid out immediately to allow their partners to adjust their plans as needed and develop their own vision. As a result, the trust's role changed from one of a 'donor' to one of a "critical friend providing free business consultancy." This approach was taken because the trust decided that in order to sustain results beyond their exit, their primary focus had to be to sustain their partners' work beyond their exit.

> *"There was an alternative way of achieving our long-term objectives: by ensuring that the key organisations working in our fields had the capacity to deliver the objectives we shared. This led to much discussion and soul-searching and, in the end, we came to the unanimous conclusion that we should stop thinking about 'us' and our goals, and start thinking more about 'them', our partners."*
>
> – The Tubney Charitable Trust, 2011

If the exiting organisation has found other funders who can step in, exit grants are also used to sustain the grantee during the transition period (sometimes called 'glide out funding' (Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007)), or to provide matched funding and challenge grants to incentivise the search for alternative funding (Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007., Boiardi and Hehenberger, 2014a., Petrovich, 2011). Providing this kind of match funding exit grant can counteract any negative image of the grantee that may have been generated from the exit and signal continued interest in the sector and grantee to other funders (Petrovich, 2011). Some funders choose to pre-specify the kind of activities that can be funded using exit grants, such as dissemination, replication, planning for sustainability, research, continuation, and miscellaneous (Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007) while others leave it completely open for programme managers and grantees to decide.

Some donors worry that exit grants do not support sustainability (Petrovich, 2011). However, there are several ways to offset this dependency. Co-funding, or a gradual reduction in funding when a grantee is particularly dependent on the exiting funder can lead to a transition to reduced dependency or complete exit (Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007). Rogers, Coates, and Friedman (2016) found that a gradual transition from project-supported activities to independent operation was important for sustainability. Providing free resources can threaten sustainability, unless replacement of those resources both as project inputs and as incentives has been addressed. Micro-savings and loan organisations in Kenya continued to operate, and even expanded after project exit, in part because the majority were operating independently well before exit, having been "graduated" to independent operation once they had completed pre-defined milestones that included a process of initial mobilisation and training.

3.8.2 Grantee capacity strengthening

While many funders consider capacity strengthening efforts for their grantees as a part of the original granting relationship, this aspect can become particularly important when an exit is imminent. The type of skills the funder focuses on will depend on the grantee need, which should be collaboratively identified with the partner (see section 3.5.1). Boone, Jean, and Barnard-Webster (2020) identify three types of capacity development: technical capacity, operational capacity, and systemic capacity.

- Technical: specific skills that help support a responsible transition – financial management, resource mapping and mobilisation, governance, proposal writing, strategic communications, monitoring and evaluation, critical thinking, and leadership skills, donor knowledge (how they work) and data management.
- Operational: overlap with technical, but distinctive in supporting people's ability to implement tasks – governance, operational management, strategic planning, relationship building, networking, and value formation, coping with the political context, organisation development and human resource.

- Systemic: support long-term planning and the development of systems and structures to ensure the local entity that remains post-transition is set up to succeed once the funder has transitioned.

They noted that operational skills focused on inter- and intra-personal development, such as value formation and relationship building, are often the most valuable and important aspects of capacity development. Additionally, case studies in Kenya and Thailand demonstrated that psycho-social and moral supports can also be useful to include confidence-building and empowerment elements to strengthen the belief that local actors and partners are capable of sustainably running programming independently, both for local community and staff within partners (*ibid*.). A few papers suggest that capacity strengthening should prioritise how to deepen existing knowledge and expertise, rather than focusing on introducing new technologies, methods, or tools (Leach, 2020., Boone, Jean, and Barnard-Webster, 2020). However, capacity strengthening priorities should be identified through a co-created exit plan and tailored to the partners' priorities (see section 3.6.1). Mackinnon and Jaffe (2007) suggest the funder needs to spend time with partners to understand their capacity strengthening priorities. However, Cao Yu, Jhawar, and Berman (2017) warn that the funder cannot strengthen the capacity itself. They can create the enabling conditions but as a funder, they are rarely an organisational development expert. Furthermore, Singer and Cowan (2010) point out that one person (such as the programme manager managing the grantee relationship) cannot undertake the strengthening and growing of an organisation alone.

Many papers suggest that skills such as technical or management skills could be developed during project/programme design, but they also remind us that funders will need to consider how to maintain motivation past exit (Coates *et al.*, 2016., Le Cornu *et al.*, 2023). One way to do so is to set up a knowledge bank that partners can access even after exit, such as lessons, proposals, templates etc. as a form of continued support (Boone, Jean, and Barnard-Webster, 2020).

Some funders choose to bring in external consultants to support capacity strengthening in specialised skills (Petrovich, 2011), but this can also come with complications of creating new power imbalances between partners and 'foreign experts' (Leach, 2020). Others find ways to elevate expertise within partners and create peer-to-peer capacity strengthening opportunities (*ibid*.).

If exit plans are planned from the start, these kinds of decisions and plans for capacity strengthening can be put in place from the start of the relationship. The literature suggests it is good practice to develop a capacity development plan at the outset that is connected to the transition/exit plan (see section 3.6.1). This should include capacity strengthening milestones and assessments both at exit and throughout the programme life cycle, with a focus on making the partners' work sustainable post-exit (Lewis, 2016., Boone, Jean, and Barnard-Webster, 2020., Morris *et al.* 2021). At the point of exit and throughout the exit process, it is important to reevaluate the status and progress in the capacity of the partner and increase investment/focus on capacity development if needed (Lewis, 2016). Feedback loops can be crucial to tailor and adjust capacity development throughout life cycle; new demands may come up and training/support needs to adapt to new challenges (Boone, Jean, and Barnard-Webster, 2020).

3.8.3 Develop networks

Developing networks can support the sustainability of results for many reasons. Some examples found in the literature refer to their ability to:

- Facilitate peer-to-peer learning after the exit;
- Create a platform for others to take ownership;
- Connect actors to potential future funding opportunities and/or non-financial resources such as tools and knowledge materials;
- Increase coordination among donors; and
- Act as a local governance structure made up of local residence and partners.

Kiryttopoulou (2019) provides an example from Brazil where the exit strategy and sustainability plans were partially developed in learning workshops with groups of partners (rather than one-on-one with partners), leading to a sustained sharing and support network.

Lee (2017) suggests that horizontal linkages (peer-to-peer networks of similar groups or key individuals) can be key to maintaining partner motivations and morale by providing them with a source of information, mutual support and assistance, particularly during and after exit. This is in addition to the capacity strengthening benefits and resource/knowledge sharing. However, obtaining sustainability when developing and managing networks comes with many challenges. Kibbe (2017) warns that relationships between the remaining organisations may shift when a major donor leaves. When they are no longer there to convene stakeholders or support collaboration, grantee partners may suddenly become competitors. On the other hand, Rogers, Coates, and Friedman (2016) found that linkages, especially vertical linkages, such as those between community-based organisations or individuals and existing public or private sector institutions, were critical for successful phase-over of responsibilities formerly supported by food assistance projects run by USAID. They offer economies of scale and can provide lower-level system actors with resources from higher-level actors such as consumable supplies, training, administrative assistance supervision and legal support (Rogers, 2004, as cited in Lee, 2017). Morris *et al.* (2021) and Coates *et al.* (2016) advise developing vertical linkages early in the programme cycle to ensure that the network does not depend on the funder's involvement. This will ensure maturity of the network by the time the exit occurs. They also warn against creating too strong downward vertical linkages to community level, where reliance on funding and capacity from local populace can be less sustainable in the long run.

In cases where the funder has been a core member of a network for some time, a poorly communicated and sudden exit can damage partner networks, particularly vertical linkages with government stakeholders. The blame may not be placed with the donor but with implementing partners (Van Der Meer *et al.*, 2008). It is therefore important to communicate early and clearly. Particularly if the funding organisation plays a founding and leading role in the network, finding and investing in new leaders who will outlast the foundation's involvement and provide them with academic training and mentoring is key to sustaining the network post exit (Petrovich, 2011).

3.8.4 Acquire new funding

If the exit occurs before programme results are fully achieved, an obvious way for the exiting organisation to sustain results is to look for alternative funding streams for their partners. They may support their partners to transition to a different financial model (such as fee-for-service to become self-sustaining), or by finding other funders to fund the partners' work.

Exiting organisations can participate in funder collaboratives and funder affinity groups to promote partners, learn about what other funders are looking for, and make connections between potential funding matches (Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007., Petrovich, 2011). Pitches or funding transitions are more likely to occur in time if conversations begin at the early on in the programme timeline, as opposed to when the exit is nearing (Stopping as Success, 2021., Kiryttopoulou, 2019).

If the chosen approach is to find new grant funding, the exiting organisation can support the partner by providing support in strengthening their organisational practices and management to navigate others' due diligence processes, support them in their search for new funding, publish evaluations and reports that highlight the partners' work and directly reach out to target organisations and funder networks to attract other funders (Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007., Kiryttopoulou, 2019., Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013). A popular approach is to organise/attend events to support partners and invite other funders, and to pay for/invite partners to attend conferences and share their successes (Mackinnon and Jaffe, 2007). The involvement of senior management, board members and staff of the exiting organisation in events, communications and the introduction of partners to other funders is important for counteracting other funders' concerns that may be arising from the exit because it demonstrates public support for their work (Petrovich, 2011).

However, Kibbe (2017) warns against relying on strengthening the partners' 'fundraising capacity' as the primary sustainability plan because it is rarely met with success. Obstacles to passing partners on to other funders identified by Van Der Meer *et al.* (2008) include:

- Funders interested in the context have often already committed their available resources to a portfolio;
- They may lack the required expertise and experience;
- Nervousness to enter due to the original funders' exit – doubts as to why they are exiting if the work is worthwhile funding;
- "Perverse solidarity" within the donor community because entry could come across as criticism of the exiting donor;
- Limited number of donors in region/country; and
- High likelihood of other funders also exiting in the future.

It is therefore important to support partners to diversify their funding if the aim is to ensure the partner organisation reaches long-term sustainability (Engels, 2010., Kiryttopoulou, 2019). One way funders have done this is to support partners in developing and implementing a fee-for-service model before exit (Coates *et al.*, 2016., Kiryttopoulou, 2019).

3.8.5 Maintain a non-financial role post exit

The literature is inconclusive as to when it is useful for a funder to maintain some kind of presence in the context post-exit. Some papers suggest that there are benefits to the funder playing an ongoing role though continuing to offer advisory services for networking and remaining in partner networks after their financial exits (Cao Yu, Jhawar, and Berman, 2017), providing evaluation support, providing funding to maintain knowledge banks and templates, or playing an active knowledge sharing role (Petrovich, 2011., Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert, 2005). Programme managers within the exiting organisation often hold key contextual knowledge and contacts that can be beneficial actors remaining in the field, which is lost if they are not kept on in an advisory capacity (Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013). One example of a funder maintaining a post-exit role includes a partner organisation choosing to sign an agreement with their previous funder to continue future cooperation, exchange and support in advocacy/campaigning, resource mobilisation, learning sharing (Martins, 2020b). Another example is the C&A Foundation creating "The Legacy Collection", a knowledge library with documentation from its Projeto Legado programme, which is hosted on a website with over 150 documents. The website is accessible to partners and broader audience of professionals (Kiryttopoulou, 2019). There are also examples of donor staff or board members joining boards or funder groups related to the partner to show continued solidarity (Martins, 2020b). A complete exit, where no efforts are made to pass on the positive results of the programme, can lead to loss of learnings and field knowledge (closing down websites, resources, thinning out files, etc.), and total field disengagement from stakeholders, including other funders (Petrovich, 2011).

However, maintaining a post-funding relationship is not always necessary or appropriate. The literature suggests, in alignment with the value of co-creation, that it is best to ask local partners and funding networks in what ways a continued non-financial presence could be useful or if it may be detrimental and confusing (Engels, 2010., Martins, 2020b).

4 Conclusions

It is clear that implementing an exit responsibly, in a way that minimises the negative impacts and sustains results beyond the lifetime of the programme is extremely challenging, particularly when a funders' goal is to influence systems change. Strong staff-partner relationships will have been built up over a long period of time, meaning any exit is likely to be painful for all involved.

However, there are examples of exits being implemented better than others. Key practices can be put in place by senior management, funder staff, and their partners to make the process as smooth as possible for everyone involved. Some good examples of practices that facilitate a responsible exit include: the funder being clear with staff and partners alike about their end goal, planning an exit strategy from the very start, providing clear and concise messaging around what the parameters of the exit are, providing guidance and training, thinking deeply about the kind of legacy the funder would like to leave behind, and recognising that the process will impact people's jobs and livelihoods.

The earlier funders and partners accept that exits are a fact of philanthropy and look for the opportunities it can provide, the more likely they will be able to leave behind results that are sustained beyond the funding relationship.

Annex 1. Methodology

Search Terms

Below is a list of the principle search terms that returned the majority of the documents reviewed:

- (“Foundation” OR “Funder”) AND “Exit strategy”
- “Foundation” AND (“Exit strategy” OR "Exit principles") AND "International development"
- (“Foundation” OR “Donor”) AND (“Exit” OR “Closure”)
- “Foundation” AND "Sustainable exit" AND "International development"
- “Foundation” AND "exit plan" AND "International development"
- “NGO” AND “Exit strategy”
- “Foundation” AND “Exit" AND "guidance” AND "International development"
- “International development” AND “Programme Exits”
- “Foundation” AND "Sustainable exit" AND "International development"
- “Foundation” AND "exit plan" AND "NGO"
- “Foundation” AND "responsible exit"

Websites/Databases

In the database search phase, the following websites were used to look for relevant literature using the above search terms:

- Google Scholar
- RefSeek
- SciSpace

A search was also conducted across a range of websites owned by foundations, INGOs, bilateral and multilateral organisations, international development institutes and training organisations. Key locations that returned relevant results included:

- World Bank
- ODI
- Bond
- INTRAC
- Candid. (previously GrantCraft)
- Center for Global Development
- Oxfam International
- Stopping As Success

Additionally, Porticus directly provided several resources from searches they had conducted previously, and one Porticus MEL Partner provided an unpublished post-exit evaluation they had conducted on a Porticus-funded programme that had exited in 2022.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

- The literature search was narrowed down to include only literature from 2010 onwards. However, if literature published earlier than 2010 was frequently referenced in the selected literature and was seen as a foundational text, it was checked. If it was found to be providing insights not captured elsewhere, it was included in this review.

- Literature was inclusive of exits in both the Global South and Global North to reflect Porticus' strategic shift away from programmes in North America and Europe in addition to other exits.
- Academic literature was classified as case studies and evaluations of project and programme exits. While published and peer-reviewed literature was favoured, several unpublished theses at the doctoral and master's level were ultimately incorporated because they provided valuable insights into case studies that were not available elsewhere.
- Grey literature[5] was included where it was produced and published by reputable funding bodies, international development training institutes, and civil society organisations. This included strategic documents and exit strategies from funding bodies, published reports produced by foundations and bilateral and multilateral aid institutions, case studies and evaluations of programme and project exits, and reports from workshops and focus group interviews. The inclusion of grey literature did not discriminate by organisation type (e.g. private foundation or INGO). Instead, all literature was included where the researchers felt the lessons learned were relevant for any potential future Porticus exits, planned or unplanned.

The literature search found 65 documents that met the inclusion criteria which are listed in Annex 2.

Analysis

An exploratory qualitative analysis approach was taken using the analysis software ATLAS.ti. Guided by the knowledge that Porticus was interested in learning about (1) how to take an exit decision, (2) the process of managing an exit (internally and externally) and (3) sustaining results after an exit, the researchers searched for key topics that emerged to enable a code book to be created organically from the bottom up. This approach helps to avoid a reliance on preconceived ideas that may govern analysis when using a predefined codebook. The analysis resulted in eight key themes that funding organisations could consider before embarking on an exit journey.

Once all documents had the codes applied to them (to extract the relevant information), the raw evidence was organised by theme (code) and then synthesised to identify the main points across the resulting dataset.

All findings considered to be relevant were included, whether or not they were triangulated with other sources because the lessons relate to the individual experience of the exiting organisation and their partners. Where a number of papers make the same point, all papers are referenced. The researchers found some sources to be particularly useful, providing the bulk of the findings. Examples include Lewis, 2016., Petrovich, 2011., Rogers, Coates, and Friedman, 2016., Hayman et al., 2016., and Kerkhoven and Herweijer, 2013. However, the report includes findings from across all 65 resources found.

Little research was found that tried to assess whether results had been sustained post-exit. Of the three cases found, all were assessed to be of high quality and were therefore included.

Codebook

The codebook has a recurring structure for key themes. There is an overarching code used for most themes and then sub-codes for 'Learning', 'Positive', 'Negative'. Some themes had additional codes where we found it relevant to have more specificity. Quotations were often coded with multiple labels where relevant.

Code	Description	Mentions
Capacity building		

[5] Grey literature is materials and research that has not been peer-reviewed or produced by academic institutions. Common grey literature publication types include reports, working papers, government documents, white papers and evaluations produced by practitioners.

Code	Description	Mentions
Capacity building: Learning	This code collects any key point/learning that would be relevant to capacity development of internal staff, community stakeholders, partner staff, etc. It also included broader recommendations regarding staffing, including staffing changes (both in the partner and funder organisation).	252
Capacity building: Positive	Captures stories/examples of a positive experience related to the 'Capacity Building: Learning' code.	73
Capacity building: Negative	Captures stories/examples of a negative experience related to the 'Capacity Building: Learning' code.	28
Capacity building: Internal Staff	Specifically captures any information on developing the capacity of the staff within the funding body.	30
Co-creation		
Co-creation: Learning	This code collects any key point/learning that would be relevant to including stakeholders and partners in designing and owning programme elements/systems.	164
Co-creation: Positive	Captures stories/examples of a positive experience related to the 'Co-creation: Learning' code.	35
Co-creation: Negative	Captures stories/examples of a negative experience related to the 'Co-creation: Learning' code.	14
Co-creation: Exit strategy	Includes any mention of co-designing any exit planning documents.	139
Co-creation: Sustainability plan	Includes any mention of co-designing any partner sustainability planning documents, which often overlapped with the 'Co-creation: Exit strategy' code as they were usually referring to the same document.	104
Communication		
Communication: Learning	This code collects any key point/learning that would be relevant to internal, external, and partner communications	180
Communication: Positive	Captures stories/examples of a positive experience related to the 'Communication: Learning' code.	37
Communication: Negative	Captures stories/examples of a negative experience related to the 'Communication: Learning' code.	30
Communication: Approaches	Used to capture typologies of communication strategies.	19
Decision to exit	This code collected any key points that related to how decisions to exit were made. Due to the smaller number of quotations, it was not split up in the same structure as other codes.	26
Exit Strategy and Planning		
Exit strategy and planning: Learning	Collects any mentions of planning considerations regarding developing an exit plan and exit management but where it was clear there was no explicit co-creation element. Mentions of early exit planning were also captured under this code.	219

Code	Description	Mentions
Exit strategy and planning: Positive	Captures stories/examples of a positive experience related to the 'Exit strategy and planning: Learning' code.	31
Exit strategy and planning: Negative	Captures stories/examples of a negative experience related to the 'Exit strategy and planning: Learning' code.	21
Finding Funding		
Finding funding: Learning	Collects references to searching/coordinating new funding opportunities, donor-to-donor relationships, and funder networking for partners.	104
Finding funding: Positive	Captures stories/examples of a positive experience related to the 'Finding funding: Learning' code.	45
Finding funding: Negative	Captures stories/examples of a negative experience related to the 'Finding funding: Learning' code.	24
MEL and dissemination		
MEL and dissemination: Learning	Includes any mention to MEL activities, including the dissemination of learning, reports, literature, etc.	157
MEL and dissemination: Positive	Captures stories/examples of a positive experience related to the 'MEL and dissemination: Learning' code.	23
MEL and dissemination: Negative	Captures stories/examples of a negative experience related to the 'MEL and dissemination: Learning' code.	9
Partner networks		
Partner networks: Learning	Captures anything related to networks that primarily don't include funding bodies.	67
Partner networks: Positive	Captures stories/examples of a positive experience related to the 'Partner networks: Learning' code.	30
Partner networks: Negative	Captures stories/examples of a negative experience related to the 'Partner networks: Learning' code.	13
Phasing out funding		
Phasing out funding: Learning	Includes any references to final grants or other unique funding mechanisms (i.e. matching/challenge grants, tie-off funding, exit grants, etc.).	94
Phasing out funding: Positive	Captures stories/examples of a positive experience related to the 'Phasing out funding: Learning' code.	31
Phasing out funding: Negative	Captures stories/examples of a negative experience related to the 'Phasing out funding: Learning' code.	9
Post funding relationship		
Post funding relationship: Learning	Includes any references to extending contact/relationship beyond the funding life cycle or post-exit.	36

Code	Description	Mentions
Post funding relationship: Positive	Captures stories/examples of a positive experience related to the 'Post funding relationship: Learning' code.	7
Post funding relationship: Negative	Captures stories/examples of a negative experience related to the 'Post funding relationship: Learning' code.	7
Principles	Collects any key points related to exit principles that were developed. Due to the smaller number of quotations, it was not split up in the same structure as other codes.	31
Timelines		
Timelines: Learning	Collects any references to exit timing and timelines	78
Timelines: Positive	Captures stories/examples of a positive experience related to the 'Timelines: Learning' code.	8
Timelines: Negative	Captures stories/examples of a negative experience related to the 'Timelines: Learning' code.	8

Limitations

- The inductive coding method means that codes generated towards the end of analysis were potentially missed in earlier documents. To the best of our ability, the authors have gone back over key documents from early stages of analysis and applied the new codes to the relevant sections. However, some data may have been missed. We also sought to mitigate this limitation by maintaining a smaller codebook that captured broader themes, which were then later dissected into more specific findings within the key themes in this review.
- Although the review did not proactively exclude literature from any language, the search terms used to find literature were only conducted in English. This means that lessons documented in other languages are likely to have been excluded from this review. Some sources directly provided by Porticus were in German and have been included.
- Literature published before 2010 has been excluded from this review, except for several documents that were considered foundational literature based on their discussion in other documents. This is because an initial exploration exercise found that many lessons learned prior to this were captured in more recent publications and other lessons were no longer relevant for today's funding landscape due to philanthropic practices changing over time. Terms relating to 'responsible exits' were infrequently used. However, this does mean that some lessons documented prior to 2010 may have been missed in this review.

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Annex 3. Exit Terminology

The following terminology and definitions are based on Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert (2005). The authors reference the following literature in their definitions, and relevant additions from these sources have been included in the following definitions:

- *Hello I Must Be Going: Ensuring Quality Services and Sustainable Benefits through Well-Designed Exit Strategies* by Beryl Levinger and Jean McLeod (which was not included directly in this literature review due to it no longer being available online as an open-source document, but is referenced here through its inclusion in most exit literature).
- *Program Graduation and Exit Strategies: A focus on Title II Food Aid Development Programs* by Beatrice Rogers and Kathy Macias.

Programme exit: A programme exit generally refers to the withdrawal of all externally provided programme resources from an entire programme area. It may also refer to a withdrawal of support from communities or districts within a programme area. This exit may occur at the end of a programme funding cycle or at an unplanned point before a natural end point. Importantly, a programme exit may also incorporate a transition to other funders or to local stakeholders, where the withdrawal does not equate to an end to the programme's activities or strategy.

Exit Strategy: An exit strategy is a plan which lays out how a project or programme intends to wind down its activities and resources while ensuring that achievement of its goals is not jeopardised and that progress towards them will continue. It may include several scenarios or contingency plans that address unknown factors or shocks, such as public policy shifts or natural disasters. The goal of an exit strategy is to ensure the sustainability of impacts after a programme ends and a smooth wind down or transition of activities, not to hasten an exit. Due to its focus on maintaining the progress seen during the programme life cycle, it is often defined in a broader sense as a sustainability or transition plan.

Graduation: Graduation is often treated as synonymous with a programme exit. However, it is often also used to define a subset of exits where beneficiaries graduate from a programme due to achieving its intended results or achieving sustainability. Similar to an exit strategy, graduation strategies are used to create a sustainability roadmap to ensure that achievements from the programme are not jeopardised and that further progress can be made once the funding body leaves.

Transition: A programme transition is defined in two ways. Firstly, it can be a change from one type of assistance programme to another (be it in the same sector or a switch to other sectors – for instance, switching from a programme focused on early childhood supports to one centred on youth employment), or, secondly, it can denote an exit of the funder where the implementation partner or community has taken over the activities and strategy of the original programme. This second use of programme transition is commonly used in the literature as a way to denote a sustainable transition to community leadership and ownership once the funder exits the programme.

Three Approaches to Exit Strategies by Beryl Levinger and Jean McLeod:

Phasing Down: This is a gradual reduction of activities within a programme, utilising local organisations and stakeholders to sustain programme benefits while the original or implementing agency or donor reduces involvement and resources. Phasing down is often a preliminary stage to phasing over and/or phasing out.

Phasing Out: This refers to the funder withdrawing their involvement in the programme and not handing it over for continued implementation to any other institution. This would ideally occur in a scenario where no further external resources are needed to maintain the achievements of the programme, which are permanent and self-sustaining. Programmes, from inception, can be designed to prepare for such an exit by developing knowledge and skills in the community during the funding cycle as well as distributing remaining assets upon closure. The intention is that self-sufficiency is developed within the community for behavioural change and asset creation activities.

Phasing Over: The last type of exit approach outlined by Levinger and McLeod is ‘phasing over’. In this case, the funder directly and explicitly transfers programme activities and responsibilities to local institutions or communities. During the design phase and implementation, emphasis is placed on institutional capacity strengthening so that the services provided can continue through local organisations.

Annex 4. Example Exit Principles

Part A: Operational-based principles

These examples of principles lean more towards providing operational guidance for an exit process, with the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and Levinger and McLeod's models even including guidance for the structure and make-up of an exit strategy/plan.

Figure 1: WWF-UK's Exit Principles

Box 3: WWF-UK's principles of responsible exits

- Ensure that planning for exits is part of the strategic planning process
- Ensure (where appropriate) the long-term sustainability of the work
- Design a realistic process and timetable for implementing an exit
- Keep the momentum for positive change where we are exiting
- Ensure that the necessary capacity and funding is available to deliver the exit
- Support the staff in the projects/programmes from which we are exiting

Source: Lewis, S. (2016). *Developing a Timeline for Exit Strategies: Experiences from an Action Learning Set with the British Red Cross, EveryChild, Oxfam GB, Sightsavers and WWF-UK.*

Figure 2: Summary table of principles by Kvinna till Kvinna (2011), GrantCraft (2013) and Levinger and McLeod (2002)

Kvinna till Kvinna (2011)	**GrantCraft (2013)**	**Levinger and McLeod (2002)**
Guiding Principles for Making Exit Strategies: • We need to be clear about how we intend to make our programme sustainable, i.e. what our exit strategy is. • When planned together with partner organisations well ahead of a phase out, an exit strategy increases the likelihood of sustainability. • When entering into a programme country we need to know which of our goals we wish to sustain. This can help clarify and define our role to local partner organisations as being time limited, thus reducing the potential for misunderstandings and future dependency. As the context changes over time, we also need to be flexible and ready to modify the strategy. • A well-managed exit includes careful consultation with all stakeholders, long-term planning, flexibility and good monitoring of results. A Kvinna till Kvinna exit strategy includes: 1. Exit criteria 2. Measurable indicators of progress in meeting the criteria 3. A time line for the exit process 4. Activities and a division of responsibilities 5. Mechanisms to assess progress (monitoring system) The following points have been important for us to increase sustainability when phasing out:	Nine helpful practices: 1. **Look before you leap** – you can prevent unhappy exits by being honest and rational about why you enter a partnership. Many unhappy exits seem to come from flawed decisions to enter a field or a relationship, from decisions that are based on incomplete or biased information or an emotional interpretation of information. 2. **Be prepared** …Nailing down what you really want to leave behind can help you in turn to identify what the true sense of your funding and legacy is. 3. **Think sustainability early on** – So what do you leave when you exit? Do you seek something that needs to last? What has to actually remain over time? You have to make sure that all partners share this expectation and that what you provide and fund is helpful to achieve that. When considering support, a funder has to reflect on this and table it in conversations with grantees and partners at the start. 4. **Talk timelines** …it seems to be practical wisdom to talk at any – and possibly every – stage of the relationship with partners about timelines: both your timeline and theirs. 5. **Manage irrationalities in relations –** If you want your charities, your partners or a field you intervene in to become sustainable and independent, you need to give the actors space and freedom…you have to find the right degree of involvement. 6. **Reflect, be patient and realistic –** all too often exits come out of nowhere… regular reviews, in which information from different sources is triangulated, seem helpful and may prevent rushed or crash exits.	Six elements of an effective exit strategy [these are interdependent] and guiding principles for each stage: 1. Plan for exit from the earliest stages of programme design *Guiding principles:* • Flexibility • Ongoing review and revision • Transparency • Participation 2. Develop partnerships and local linkages *Guiding principles:* • Diversity • Complementarity • Clear and common goals 3. Build local organisational and human capacity *Guiding principles:* • Build on existing capacity • Model (on organisational and individual) behaviours • Create environments that support new behaviours • Monitor progress 4. Mobilise local and external resources *Guiding principles:*

• **Goal achievement -** When considering exit, it is important to identify what your organisation regards as the key objectives that might in turn be indicators of sustainable change. • **Funding** – Having an exit strategy provides opportunity to plan ahead and find funding for the programme, thus increasing the chances of following through on your strategies. • **Context** – Especially in long-term partnerships and in volatile political situations many factors influencing sustainability will change over time. A flexible timeline is therefore necessary for a successful exit. • **Our added value** – Focusing on what your organisation can contribute with will improve your strategic thinking and thus the chances of making achievements last. *Post exit* **Evaluating the exit strategy** **In order to learn** from our phase out, an evaluation should be carried out when a period of time has elapsed following the exit. **New relationship with partner organisations** **During the phase out** we should discuss with our partner organisations the kind of relationship that would be most useful when the phase out is completed. The relationship should be based on common values and goals.	7. **More than money** – As a funder, your relationship with your partners probably involves much more than money. Ensure this non-financial contribution aspect is also part of your exit considerations. Sometimes there simply is no more funding, but you can still draw on your non-monetary assets to add value to the work of your (former) partners. 8. **Communicate, communicate, and communicate** – once you have taken an exit decision you need to communicate. Take your time, use a variety of channels, ensure a unified message, ensure that the hierarchy takes responsibility, repeat yourself, and do not assume that your messages will be easily absorbed and processed. 9. **Revisit and learn** – Only rarely do funders go back five or more years later to revisit former grantees or partners to look back at the exit process and see what remains after the exit. It is not a bed of roses, yet those who have done this have found it to be an enlightening and inspiring exercise.	• Continue to progress toward sustainability • To the extent possible, generate resources locally • Increasingly, bring external resources under local control and management 5. Stagger the phase out of various programme activities and resources *Guiding principles:* • Consider providing new activities or types of support as financial resources are phased out 6. Allow roles and relationships to evolve and continue after exit *Guiding principles:* • Prevent slippage by re-entering if necessary

Source: Lewis, S. (2016). *Developing a Timeline for Exit Strategies: Experiences from an Action Learning Set with the British Red Cross, EveryChild, Oxfam GB, Sightsavers and WWF-UK.*

Part B : Values-based principles

The second set of principles focuses more on broader values that influence an exit process and envisions a desired post-exit state. In the case of EveryChild, this set of value-based aspirations was crafted more broadly with the intention of guiding decision-making while still enabling partners to develop their own blueprints for an exit that was relevant to their own specific context.

Figure 3: EveryChild's Exit Principles

The decision to exit was made at a senior level, within EveryChild UK, in June 2012. A month later, the EveryChild Programmes team in London developed three principles to define and guide what responsible exit would mean in practice:

1. As far as possible, **ensure that the work we have done is sustainable** – this could be a continuation of services or lasting changes in children's lives.
2. **Ensure that exit does not have a detrimental effect** on the children and communities where we work.
3. As far as possible, **ensure that expertise and momentum** for change in the country is **not lost**.

Source: James, R., Popplewell, R., Lewis, S. and Bartlett, J. (2016). *Ending Well Evaluation of EveryChild's Responsible Exit Process - Synthesis Report.*

Figure 4: GLO.ACT's Exit Principles

PRINCIPLE 1 – PLACING BRICKS IN THE WALL, NOT DROPS IN A BUCKET

GLO.ACT supports "bricks in a wall" – actions contributing to a bigger framework, rather than "drops in a bucket", more ad-hoc interventions whose effects are not as strategic. Regional and country theories of change provide clarity and consistency on how activities contribute to intended outcomes at the end of the project.

PRINCIPLE 2 – PLANNING FOR EXIT FROM THE OUTSET

This strategy has been designed at project inception and is being integrated into all aspects of programming, including planning, monitoring, assessment and reporting. The project's Outcome Monitoring Tool (OMT) includes key issues to be considered for each activity, with a particular focus on sustainable programming (next principle).

PRINCIPLE 3 – PROMOTING RIGOROUSLY SUSTAINABLE PROGRAMMING
GLO.ACT avoids activities and approaches likely to require substantial financial support after project conclusion and minimizes possible substitution or displacement tasks. Operational support essential to ensure successful outcomes will be provided only in the context of a clear, written exit strategy agreed with government counterparts.

PRINCIPLE 4 – SUPPORTING RESOURCE DIVERSIFICATION
To realise their full potential, many activities supported by GLO.ACT require complementary and ongoing external support. Host governments benefit from a diversification of funding sources through reduced dependence on any one provider and access to different skills and technical inputs. GLO.ACT supports this through close dialogue with other external entities providing support on TIP and SOM issues.

PRINCIPLE 5 – BUILDING POLITICAL SUPPORT
Political support is crucial to sustainability. GLO.ACT engages key decision-makers at national level to contribute to improved policy and legislative frameworks, and to create a positive spill-over to cross-cutting issues such as gender, human rights and good governance. At regional level, GLO.ACT supports mutually reinforcing progress through the sharing of experience and joint work on developing and implementing standards and policies informed by evidence, good practice and international legal frameworks.

PRINCIPLE 6 – FACILITATING LOCAL ENGAGEMENT
GLO.ACT recognizes that key counterparts play the most important role in this exit and sustainability strategy. The project team works with these key counterparts to document promising practices and lessons learned from each project activity. Post-project planning will be supported through the inclusion of the strategy is a specific agenda item at six-monthly project steering committee meetings.

PRINCIPLE 7 – CLOSING WELL
The final step towards exit involves closure and handover of activities. This includes a project completion meeting at which key counterparts will assess project benefits and structures and the likelihood that these will be sustained, identify which activities can be taken forward by government and where additional external support is needed.

Source: Glo.Act (n.d.). *Exit and Sustainability Strategy.*

Part C: When to develop or review exit principles

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS: PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The timeline and discussions show that principles and values are very organisation-specific. However, if you were to use a similar exercise to think through the exit process, important factors to consider at key moments include:

Before entering new partnerships or designing new programmes: decide on entry criteria.

At the start of the relationship: agree whether formal partnership and exit principles are appropriate at this stage, if they don't already exist.

At the programme design stage: build exit thinking into the design of the project or programme; apply partnership principles if appropriate.

Between programme design and the decision point to exit: think about whether you will use criteria to guide decisions on when to exit, and if so, how you will ensure they are applied consistently, for example through monitoring indicators.

At the decision point to exit: if they don't already exist, decide whether you need exit principles, especially if you already hold yourself to account to other criteria, values and standards.

If they would add value, consider whether revising existing principles within the organisation is enough, or whether you will develop new ones. If the latter is the case, think about who you are developing them for, and whose input you need. Look at existing guidance, manuals and ideas on exit to see whether elements of these could be incorporated into the principles.

Don't forget to pay attention to how partnership principles will be maintained from this stage onwards.

During implementation: use exit indicators and principles to monitor the process, review progress and keep the exit on track. If you follow formal exit principles, keep revisiting these to ensure they are still relevant. Honour implicit principles, such as those embedded in exit guidance.

Post-exit: take the time to reflect on the exit and learn from it; revise principles based on this; or think about developing principles to build into future programming if they would be deemed relevant at that stage.

Source: Lewis, S. (2016). *Developing a Timeline for Exit Strategies: Experiences from an Action Learning Set with the British Red Cross, EveryChild, Oxfam GB, Sightsavers and WWF-UK.*

Annex 5. Lessons learned: Leaving an archive

Lessons learned: Leaving an archive

1. Leaving an archive takes time and needs resources. The review of files (reading the files to check for information that might be problematic for legal, reputational, or data protection reasons) was by far the most time consuming stage of the project.

2. Good records management is key. Files that came from teams with less consistent records management practices are less complete and will be more difficult and time consuming for researchers to navigate and interpret.

3. The choice of archival repository is significant. Deciding early with whom to work was important to plan and complete the process. The 'Don't Throw It Away' project has published a guide for organisations considering whether to develop an archive in-house or to donate to an archival repository: http://www.voluntarysectorarchives.org.uk

4. Decide upon criteria for what should be included in the archive at an early stage in the project. By having set criteria through which to judge whether files should be included in the archive, the process of including or excluding files in the archive was more transparent and less subjective.

5. Staff, board members and third party organisations will have concerns. It is important that these are addressed. A Board of Directors has to manage the reputational risk and any legal issues arising from placing files into an archive. It was also important to address the issues raised by the Fund's staff and grantees, including concerns that the release of information might damage the work of some of the Fund's grantees or make it difficult for them to secure future funding. Consider closure periods for particularly sensitive files.

6. The process of building and managing an archive will differ for organisations that are closing down and for organisations that are remaining operational. Yet all foundations should consider building and managing archives whether they are spending out or existing in perpetuity. Any organisation can benefit in several ways from having an archive during its own lifetime: They can learn from previous work in a systematic way by accessing the archive files at regular intervals and by being transparent, they can increase their accountability to the beneficiaries of the work.

7. Think ahead about how the archive is going to be used. Trusts and foundations hold a lot of information that is pertinent to our social history. An archive should not be a dusty cupboard of files that is never accessed. It is a good idea to think ahead about how the archive might be accessed and used.

From: Why and how did we publish our archive? Learning from The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund's archive project, John Erde, 2012

Source: Kerkhoven, R. and Herweijer, R. (2013). *Foundations Moving On: Ending programmes and funding relationships*. [online] GrantCraft. Available at: https://learningforfunders.candid.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/12/moving_on.pdf.

Annex 6. Exit Plan Reference List

The below literature is a list of all publicly available exit strategy documents that were found during the literature search. The list includes draft and final versions of exit reviews as well as an exit strategy template.

Clarke, R. (2019). *Project Exit Strategy*. [online] UNDP. Available at: https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/JAM/Project%20Exit%20Strategy%202019DEVMIN.pdf.

DFID (2020). Exit Strategy: DFID Forestry Research Programme R6915. [online] DFID. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08d74e5274a27b200185f/R6915Exit_strategy.pdf.

ERRY III (n.d.). Joint Programme Sustainability and Exit Strategy. UNDP. Available at: https://erc.undp.org/api/download?filePath=%2Fdocuments%2F13778%2Fmgmtresponse%2Fkeyaction%2Fdoc_846805452842419260SustainabilityandExitstrategyERRYIII.docx.

Farley, C.S. (n.d.). CAFEC Salonga Landscape Exit Strategy. [online] USAID. Available at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WGC8.pdf.

GEF (2020). Project Exit Strategy - Republic of Zambia - Reducing UPOPs and Mercury Releases from the Health Sector in Africa. UNDP, GEF, HCW. Available at: https://greenhealthcarewaste.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Zambia-GEF-HCWM-Africa-Project-Exit-strategy.pdf.

Glo.Act (n.d.). Exit and Sustainability Strategy. [online] UNODC, EU, IOM. Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/documents/two_pagers_exit_and_sustainability_v04.pdf.

LCC Capital (2015). Draft Exit Strategy: Adapting National and Transboundary Water Resources Management to Expected Climate Change Project. UNDP, GEF. Available at: https://www.gefieo.org/sites/default/files/documents/projects/tes/4255-terminal-evaluation.pdf.

Pro PALOP-TL (2023). Programme for Consolidating Economic Governance and Public Finance Management Systems in the PALOP-TL Countries (Pro PALOP-TL SAI – Phase II) Exit Strategy. Pro PALOP-TL. Available at: https://erc.undp.org/api/download?filePath=%2Fdocuments%2F11130%2Fmgmtresponse%2Fkeyaction%2Fdoc_419646751741411 4922ProPALOP-TLSAIExitStrategy_ApprovedDraft_260123.pdf.

REACH (2023). REACH Exit Strategy. [online] University of Oxford. Available at: https://www.smithschool.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-01/REACH-exit-strategy.pdf.