

# Rough Guide to Exit Strategies

Good quality programmes ensure that the benefits they generate will continue and that they have a **lasting impact on poor people's lives**. Any intervention will at some point cease and this needs to be planned for if our work is to achieve this sustainable impact. Exit strategies can help ensure that the programme's objectives are met, that benefits made will not be lost, and that capacity has been created for others to continue the work that Oxfam has started.

Exit strategies outline plans for withdrawal once **key criteria** have been met. These criteria should indicate how programme benefits will continue, for example:

- **Impacts are self-sustaining.** Programmes can create self-sustaining changes in a number of ways. For example, economically profitable activities, such as improved agricultural production or marketing practices are likely to encourage farmers to continue these practices. Promoting behaviour change, for example, relating to health and nutrition, is more likely to be self-sustaining if individuals can see the benefits to themselves and if the changes are acceptable and feasible. Humanitarian programmes that provide infrastructure such as wells, latrines or roads can ensure self-sustaining impacts through training communities in maintenance.
- **Capacity building enables programme benefits to continue.** All exit strategies will involve some form of capacity building to ensure others - whether communities, government or local organisations – can continue the work that Oxfam has started. Key criteria to determine whether capacity building has been successful include whether those who will continue the work can decide on and manage their own affairs; whether they have acquired the necessary technical skills; and whether they have the ability to secure the financial and other resources needed to continue activities.
- **There is continued ability to generate resources.** For many programmes, the continuing ability to secure resources is absolutely key to sustainability. Some approaches that can enable this include: charging user fees for services or products – though care must be taken that poorer families do not get excluded; establishing a revolving credit or business model – for example, micro-credit schemes; seeking community contributions, for example in maintaining gardens for school-feeding programmes; or gaining external support from other funders – though care must be taken here not to substitute one funder for another, which does not address the issue of longer-term sustainability.



## An example of planning an exit strategy

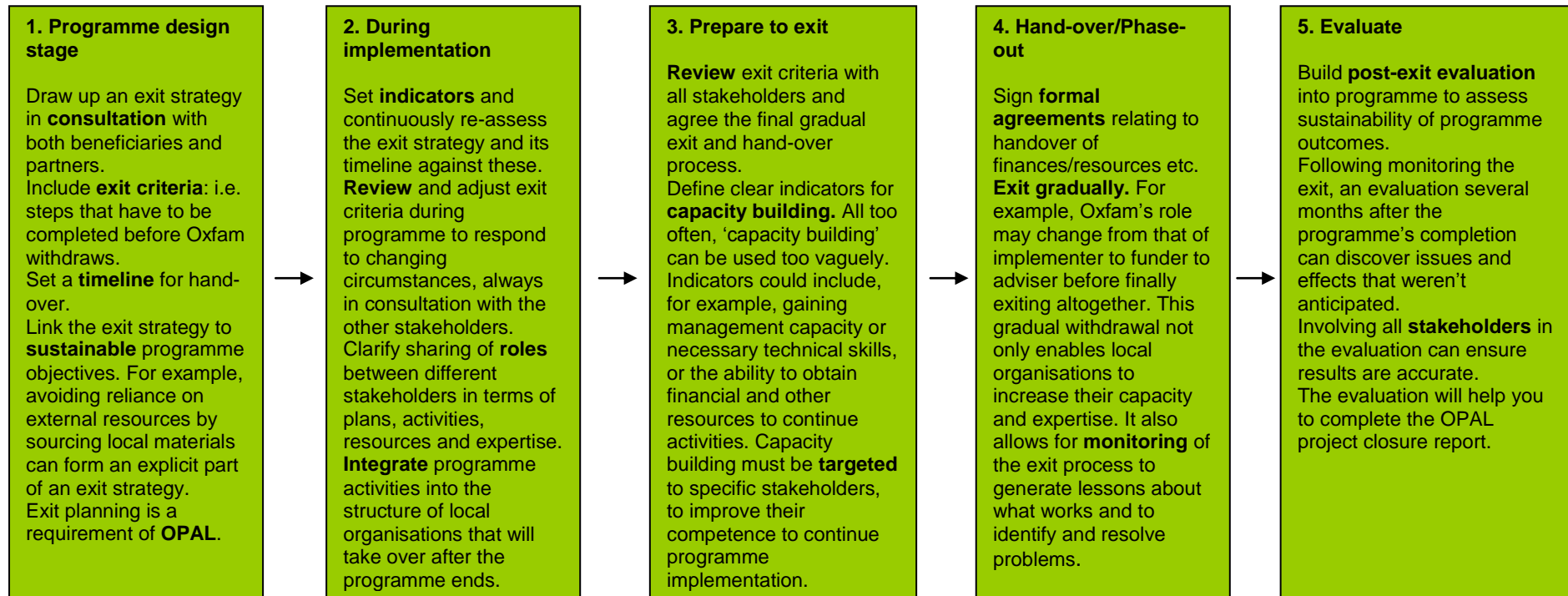
In Malawi, the Mulanje livelihoods programme recognised that “to develop a sustainable model, it is essential to demonstrate that Oxfam’s relationship with the district is a finite one”. Oxfam made communities aware of this from the very beginning and **reviewed the exit strategy** on many occasions including during a mid-term evaluation. The programme’s **objectives were clearly linked to sustainability**: taking advantage of government decentralisation,

the programme aimed to enable communities to help themselves, by claiming and accessing rights and services. Sharing the lessons learned from Mulanje included lobbying donors and government to **provide resources directly to the local level**. At both community and government level, Oxfam helped **ensure continuing benefits** by providing access to other funds, supporting income generation and giving skills training.

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## Building an exit strategy into your programme

An exit strategy plans a series of steps that need to be taken to make sure that programme benefits are sustained once Oxfam ends support. It is important to develop an exit strategy with beneficiaries, government, partners and other stakeholders *right at the beginning* of Oxfam's intervention. This can help to avoid dependency and encourage ownership of the development process as well as increase Oxfam's accountability to stakeholders. Sometimes it may be necessary for Oxfam to withdraw earlier than anticipated, as funding runs out, priorities shift, or something fundamental goes wrong. In these cases, it is extremely important that when Oxfam withdraws, the positive benefits of its programme are not undone. This can be ensured through continual monitoring of the context and environment to ensure that the exit strategy and timeframe can be adapted to remain relevant and effective.



## Further information

- A useful guide to exit plans is *Program Graduation and Exit Strategies* from FNTA [http://www.fantaproject.org/downloads/pdfs/TN9\\_EXITTS.pdf](http://www.fantaproject.org/downloads/pdfs/TN9_EXITTS.pdf)
- Also see Section 6 of Oxfam GB's Programme Framework: <http://intranet.oxfam.org.uk/programme/pm/Programme-performance/programme-framework/index.html>