

PAST-Forward Study

Assessment of USAID/BHA Program Sustainability Guidance, 2015-2021

October 11, 2023 | Online

Conducted by Tufts Friedman School & funded by USAID/IDEAL Activity



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Interpretation

Everyone must select a language!

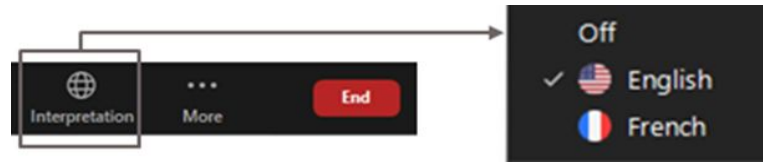
1. Click “interpretation” at the bottom of your Zoom window; and
2. Select the language that you would like to hear: English or French.

Please note that this feature is not available during breakout rooms.

Choisissez votre langue !

1. Cliquez sur « interprétation » au bas de votre écran Zoom; et
2. Sélectionnez la langue de votre choix : anglais ou français.

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Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- PAST-Forward Presentation
- Questions & Answers
- Small Groups Discussion
- Closing



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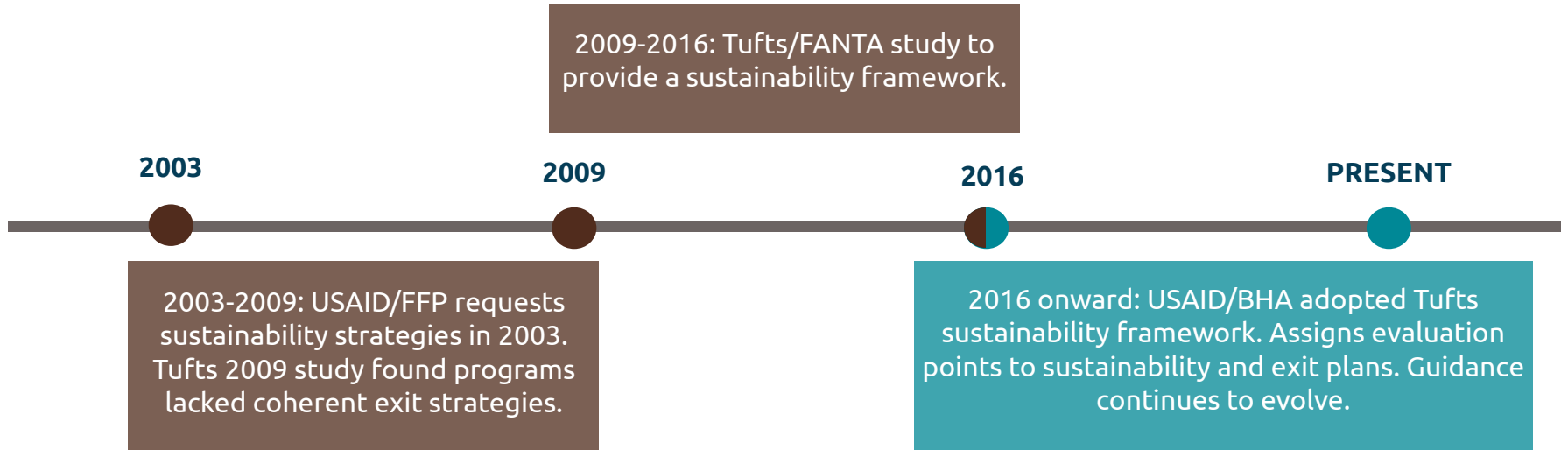
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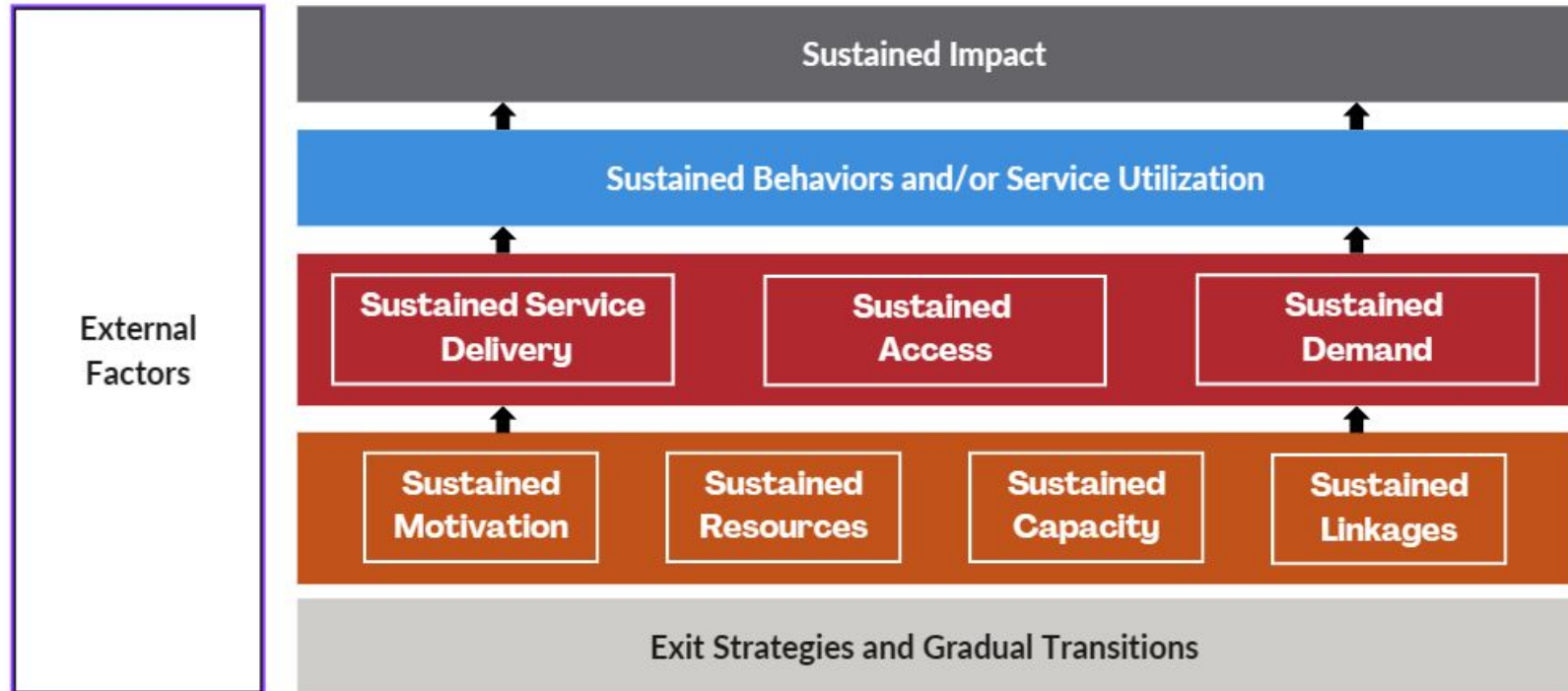
Study Overview

Background



Sustainability and Exit Strategies Conceptual Framework

Adapted from Rogers and Coates (2015)



Objectives

To learn from 5+ years of experience implementing USAID/BHA sustainability guidance

To improve the effectiveness and usefulness of sustainability requirements and expectations

Key Research Questions

How can the USAID/BHA guidance on sustainability and exit planning be improved in terms of clarity and feasibility?

1. How have the RFA sustainability and exit guidance and requirements changed since 2016?
2. To what extent have awardee sustainability and exit plans met the criteria for assuring sustainability?
3. What has been the experience of DFSAs/RFSAs as they seek to implement their sustainability and exit plans?

Note: This study is not an evaluation of USAID or IPs, but rather a review of how the evolving sustainability guidance has served all stakeholders.

PAST-Forward: Methodology

RFA and External Document review

11 RFAs and accompanying CSIs between 2015-2021

~**60 documents** screened for relevance to sustainability; 8 selected for in-depth review

DFSA/RFSA document review

Applications for 27 of 28 programs funded; Refined TOC for **5 programs**

Key Informant Interviews

23 with current and former **staff from RFSA**s or **third-party grantees**

9 with current and former **BHA staff** involved with RFSA

DFSA/RFSA Locations



- LOCATION OF DFSA/RFSA FOR DOCUMENT REVIEW
- LOCATION OF DFSA/RFSA SELECTED FOR KII

Findings & Recommendations



Overview: Four main takeaways

RFA guidance and requirements for sustainability and exit planning increased over the period studied, growing more detailed, more prescriptive, but with context-specific variation.

Most application sustainability plans were very responsive to the RFA guidance but did not fully meet the criteria for assuring sustainability.

During the Refinement period and beyond, there are untapped opportunities to focus on sustainability and exit planning.

A variety of recommended actions could be taken by BHA and awardees to enhance sustainability and exit planning and implementation.

I. Changes to RFA sustainability and exit guidance

- Increasingly emphasized sustainability and exit planning overall
 - Increasing specificity, application sections to incorporate content, and scoring
- Did not emphasize the need to incorporate all sustainability factors together at the level of individual services and behaviors
- Increasingly emphasized capacity building and linkages in contrast with motivation and resources
- Included many other sustainability factors beyond those identified in the Tufts/FANTA study, with wide variation by country

I. Changes to RFA sustainability and exit guidance

- Exit guidance increased substantially more recently, with a focus on gradual transitions by Year 4
- Certain interventions were specifically discouraged due to their low likelihood of sustainability, and certain approaches were recommended or (sometimes) required
- Certain RFA guidance and terms warrant special sustainability considerations
 - Resource transfers
 - Potential for implementation extensions

II. Sustainability and exit plans in awarded applications

- What BHA requested and required in the RFAs, BHA generally received in the applications
- Sustainability plans grew more detailed over time, particularly with the addition of the required Sustainability Transition Plan annex
- Many sustainability strategies in the applications were similar to those identified in the Tufts/FANTA study
- Awardees evolved their sustainability and exit approaches in response to changes in the RFAs

Recommendations



- Build an evidence base around sustainability strategies and models through desk review and evaluation
- Allow flexibility in the selection of sustainability strategies based on evidence of successful models in different contexts

II. Sustainability and exit plans in awarded applications

- Few sustainability and exit plans in awarded applications completely met the criteria for assuring sustainability
- There was great variability in how Theories of Change addressed sustainability
 - Inconsistent incorporation of sustainability logic
 - Assumptions about post-award sustainability often unaddressed
 - Few M&E plans included strategies to monitor progress towards sustainable outcomes

Recommendations



- Provide detailed guidance to address persistent gaps in applicant and awardee understanding of sustainability requirements
- Extend TOCs beyond impact to include sustainability thinking, and ensure activity modifications (particularly those resulting from the Refinement period) address implications for sustainability

III. Experience of DFSAs/RFSAs

- Awardees faced challenges operationalizing BHA guidelines and requirements at different stages of DFSA/RFSAs planning
 - Number and degree of details required in the applications
 - Separation between RFA writing team and implementation team
 - Disconnect between forms and formats required in the application and at other implementation stages

III. Experience of DFSAs/RFSA's

- The Refinement period's influence on sustainability planning was not apparent in revised RFSA documentation submitted at culmination
- During implementation, two prominent issues challenge the achievement of RFSA sustainability goals:
 - Implementation timeline
 - External operating environment

Recommendations



- Assess progress toward sustainability as part of routine monitoring, including clear benchmarks for gradual transition
- Institutionalize the process surrounding a sustainability-focused extension period by standardizing criteria for the award and clarifying its purpose, to improve its effectiveness

IV. Other findings

- Despite efforts to build capacity and cohesion around sustainability and exit planning, awardee and BHA capacity gaps remain
- In-person workshops are perceived as being among the most useful forms of support that BHA provides, and their further enhancement can better support sustainability and exit planning

Recommendations



- Ensure a common and consistent understanding of sustainability concepts among both BHA and awardee staff involved in RFSA design, application scoring, and implementation
- Encourage the sharing of best practices and lessons learned from an expanded and more diverse set of contexts through workshops and meetings
- Expand learning and dissemination of sustainability approaches more broadly among humanitarian and development stakeholders

The image features a solid teal background. In the center, there are two overlapping speech bubbles. The bubble on the left is a light teal color with a white outline and a white tail pointing towards the top-left corner. The bubble on the right is a slightly darker teal color with a white outline and a white tail pointing towards the bottom-right corner. The text "Questions & Answers" is centered within the overlapping area of these two bubbles in a white, sans-serif font.

Questions & Answers

The image features a solid teal background. In the center, there are two overlapping speech bubbles. The bubble on the left is a light teal color and has a tail pointing towards the top-left corner. The bubble on the right is a slightly darker shade of teal and has a tail pointing towards the bottom-right corner. The text 'Small Group Discussion' is centered within the overlapping area of these two bubbles in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

Small Group Discussion

Recommendations

1. Build an evidence base around sustainability strategies and models through desk review and evaluation
2. Allow flexibility in the selection of sustainability strategies based on evidence of successful models in different contexts
3. Provide detailed guidance to address persistent gaps in applicant and awardee understanding of sustainability requirements
4. Extend TOCs beyond impact to include sustainability thinking, and ensure activity modifications (particularly those resulting from the Refinement period) address implications for sustainability
5. Assess progress toward sustainability as part of routine monitoring, including clear benchmarks for gradual transition
6. Institutionalize the process surrounding a sustainability-focused extension period by standardizing criteria for the award and clarifying its purpose, to improve its effectiveness
7. Ensure a common and consistent understanding of sustainability concepts among both BHA and awardee staff involved in RFSA design, application scoring, and implementation
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9. Expand learning and dissemination of sustainability approaches more broadly among humanitarian and development stakeholders

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Plenary Discussion



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Thank you!

Merci !

Download the report and executive summary:
[Assessment of USAID/BHA Sustainability Guidance for Food Security Activities \(2015–2021\)](#)

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