

## With the right staffing, attitudes and resourcing, programme exits can be done well: A review of INTRAC's longitudinal report on EveryChild's exit process

### Introduction

Building on a People In Aid (now CHS Alliance) external learning review of EveryChild's transformation from an INGO to a network of national NGOs (Hailey, 2014, [The Role and Involvement of Staff During a Journey of Organisational Change](#), People In Aid), this paper reviews INTRAC's responsible exit report (James, R. 2015, [Ending well: Phase 1 Interim report - A Longitudinal Evaluation of EveryChild's Responsible Exit Process](#), page 25, INTRAC). This paper was written with the generous permission of Rick James at INTRAC.

EveryChild (EvC) is an International NGO which funded and implemented child protection and child rights projects in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

In 2011, a strategic decision was made that in order to maximise the opportunity to create an impact for greater numbers of vulnerable children globally, the structure and emphasis would in future focus on an international alliance of childcare and child protection organisations. A new international alliance, [Family for Every Child \(FEC\)](#) was created with a vision to ensure that children 'can grow up in a permanent, safe and caring family'.

In 2012, EvC's board took the decision to close all international programmes, transferring revenue and material assets and as the sun went down on one model of operation, another rose with local communities and organisations empowered to resource their own programmes to protect and support children.

The first part of the exit process was reviewed by INTRAC (A full copy of the INTRAC report can be downloaded from the [EveryChild website](#)) in early 2015, in order to assess if EvC had achieved the responsible exit process from 18 partners and country offices it had set out in the proposal phase. The interim report, produced by INTRAC following their initial review of the exit process, provides insight into the specific EvC series of case studies and learning which form part of the longitudinal evaluation to influence both the second half of EvC's exit process and to inform other organisations considering a similar shift of emphasis and power.

The purpose of this paper is to:

- examine the journey of an International NGO taking a major change step to shift the balance of power and to move to local ownership of programme activity;
- share the learning from the identified mistakes;
- share good practice in the form of a series of 'how-to guidelines';
- briefly describe programme impact of the process.

### INTRAC's Methodology for carrying out the interim analysis

*"I have seen lots of international NGOs leave badly, without any sustainability. Two years later there is nothing left. The manner of leaving can destroy years of good work."* This statement from an EvC country director captures the essence behind wanting to do things differently.

While the report details the limitations of a mainly desk based methodology for gathering data (for example the negative effect of erratic communication technology and language challenges), the second reporting phase in 2016 intends to include additional field visits.

The methodology included identifying the crucial questions to ask, review of documentation, survey feedback from 18 sites in 15 projects, cases studies from project work in six countries (India, Malawi, Russia, Kenya, Nepal and Cambodia) and design of a framework for the analysis.

## The EvC exit process

This paper highlights a set of clearly identified principles and tools adopted to carry out an exit process involving the closure of all EveryChild country offices and partner programmes and the redundancy of all EveryChild programme staff over a period of four years. Strategic reasons for these decisions were communicated, with a process of consultation and engagement to support the process.

1. As far as possible ensure that the work is sustainable, measured either as continued services (albeit in a different way) and/or lasting change for children.
2. Where possible, no negative impact of the exit process on communities.
3. Expertise and the drive to continue change is not lost within country.

**Figure 1** EvC's guiding principles for exit

## Critical success factors for exit

A number of critical success factors and elements of activity explored in the INTRAC report (page 6), could form the basis of a set of guidelines as part of a toolkit:

### 1. Participatory planning for exit

Participatory planning<sup>1</sup> was based on the three principles of

- i. transparent communication
- ii. commitment to continued communication with support of partners
- iii. the maintained wellbeing of children.

The planning process was supported by staff visits to project sites and increased local engagement through the drafting of annual operational plans.

### 2. Rigorously sustained programming

The strategy was designed to future - proof programme work, pooling and managing limited global resources. Partners were involved to identify which unsustainable programme activity should stop, be handed over to communities and where resource mobilisation was needed to facilitate activity, for example ensuring transition to another existing donor. Throughout the process, maintaining continuity between existing country office and/or partner staff with Everychild UK key contacts was essential for sustainability beyond the exit. A Malawi member of staff commented that:

*“Programme work defines responsible exit. It is about what happens in communities when you leave.”* (page 8).

### 3. Capacity building of key stakeholders

<sup>1</sup> Participation: ‘a process by which stakeholders influence and share control over NGO initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them’. BOND (p.iii). A BOND Approach to Quality in Non-Governmental Organisations: Putting Beneficiaries First.

While local capacity building had always been a strategy within EvC's programmes, new skills acquired would now remain within the community: leadership, resource mobilisation, financial management, budget planning and proposal writing, diversity and safeguarding practice.

#### **4. Collaboration with government and national networks**

EveryChild worked closely with local and national government structures on a range of issues such as child marriage, street children issues and juvenile justice and were supportive of advocacy forums such as [Better Care Network](#).

#### **5. Systematic monitoring and learning**

Having enabled local ownership of workplans, thorough six-monthly monitoring and review was maintained throughout. Staff surveys, review of partner sustainability plans, visits and Skype calls helped identify progress towards milestones and staff perception of progress.

#### **6. Institutional or Partnership closure activities**

EveryChild developed a toolkit comprising a range of activities to ensure local partners could complete the exit programme efficiently and effectively and to continually review learning, see table 6 below.

Final communication with children • Destruction of child sponsorship data • Handing over documentation to pass onto Family for EveryChild. • Finalising human resource contracts. • Disbursing legacy grants to CBOs • Finance – valuation and disposal of assets and finally closing bank accounts • Legal de-registration • Communication to auditors, tax authorities, and the general public. • Leaving the office and returning the keys to the landlord • Partnership Completion SKYPE call • Six month follow up call • Legacy celebrations

## **Sharing the learning**

Adhering to the three principles of responsible exit and the previously identified critical success factors meant that 14 of the 15 projects reported positive levels of support, transparent communication and motivation for local ownership of the challenge.

Guidance was specific enough to build capacity while allowing flexibility for adaptation within the local environmental and cultural context.

#### **Lessons learned:**

1. Focus on sustainability as opportunity at the outset.
2. The value of transparent communication vs. the danger of confusion and uncertainty.
3. Respect for local ownership of ideas, planning and execution.
4. Using indicators of change progress.
5. The problems associated with localisation of country offices rather than exit.
6. The value of the amount of time given by EvC to the process.
7. Protection of the partner's budget during the process.
8. Improved opportunities for sharing learning and celebration of the progress made.
9. The need for strong and capable leadership with inclusivity strengthening partner relationships.
10. Ensuring adequate country visits and face to face support.

## **Report conclusion**

Everychild's 2013-14 Annual Review states that they were at that time inspired by their past and excited about their future. INTRAC reports empirical evidence that EvC has on the whole secured an exciting future in achieving what they set out to do.

INTRAC examined whether EveryChild had achieved this in the way they had envisioned. Ultimately, the exit process was about handing over the balance of power to local communities, NGOs, CBOs and government departments. The Director of Children's Affairs in Malawi commented about the shifting of responsibility: *"We have a workable exit strategy, but the challenge is on the government, chiefs, MPs and communities to ensure activities continue."* (page 11).

By adopting a rigorous intentionally planned exit programme, EveryChild has 'shifted their partners towards more responsible and sustainable programming.....they have had to look locally for support..link up more with local government and local fundraising ....become more autonomous." (page 15).

At this stage of reporting, there is sufficient evidence that no harm has been done however wider impact on local policy and the operating environment has yet to stand the test of time.

Download and read the [full INTRAC Responsible Exit report](#) here. You can also read a recent blog post on exit programmes by [Rick James at INTRAC here](#).

## Additional Resources

- Morris, L. (2015) [Praxis Note No. 70- Working at the Sharp End of Programme Closure: Everychild's Responsible Exit Principles](#) (EveryChild)
- Hailey, J. (2014) [The Role and Involvement of Staff During a Journey of Organisational Change](#). (People In Aid).
- James, R. (2015) [Ending well: Phase 1 Interim report - A Longitudinal Evaluation of EveryChild's Responsible Exit Process](#) (INTRAC)