A Practice Review of UNESCO's Exit and Transition Strategies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Current debates in development policy and aid reform show an increasing significance and a growing concern about the issue of exit and transition. Factors such as scarcity of resources, the uncertain political environment, changing donor priorities, trends towards harmonisation of aid effort, and an increasing demand for different forms of assistance from Member States has triggered governing bodies of international organisations as well as major donors to give due consideration and thought to planned exit. Planning for exit allows development agencies to shift resources to where they are most needed while maintaining the focus on achieving sustainable outcomes.

There is general consensus amongst development agencies that having a transparent set of criteria for engagement, transition and disengagement from a given programme or activity will assist all partners in working towards a common goal. However, most development agencies find integrating the principles and criteria for exit into the programming cycle challenging. This review was commissioned by UNESCO to explore current practices and staff perceptions with regard to exit and transition, so that efforts to develop guidelines and tools for staff build on existing practices.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this review is to inform UNESCO on the current state of play in relation to exit and transition within the Organisation at an explicit and implicit level; examine the attitudes and beliefs that shape current practices towards exit and transition and how UNESCO can effectively adopt and learn from international best practices for developing and implementing exit strategies in its programming work. The scope of the review covers UNESCO practices at both the Headquarters and the field offices. Field offices in three locations were covered as part of this research viz. Dakar, Brasilia and Jakarta.

The importance of contextual factors: The issue of exit and transition within UNESCO is complicated by a number of contextual factors in the wider environment. Factors such as the breadth of its role and mandate; the governance structure and its impact on decision-making; trends in the development environment and the push towards harmonisation, alignment and results[1]; and the changing donor environment with enhanced focus on results poses huge challenges for planning and implementing exit and transition strategy within the UNESCO context. These factors require UNESCO to respond innovatively to the need to balance the longer term and sustained commitment to fostering a partnership approach to achieve desired development results with a focus on results.

Lack of a shared understanding of <u>meaning</u> and <u>relevance</u> of exit within UNESCO: Our findings show that there is no collective understanding of concepts such as exit and transition within UNESCO and the terms appear to be relatively new to staff. Opinions about its relevance are also mixed with a majority of staff feeling these concepts were of limited relevance given UNESCO's far reaching and ambitious mandate and an organisational culture that favours continuation rather than discontinuation. However, there is greater level of acceptance of exit at the project-level, as they are time bound activities and when funding is terminated, the project typically ends and UNESCO exits.

Limited evidence of systematic and deliberate planning for exit: The lack of an explicit, codified framework and guidelines for exit in UNESCO results in ad hoc and variable practice regarding exit across sectors and between projects within a sector. Consequently, practice of exit is driven by the skill and experience of individual staff, and not by the Organisation as a whole. There is a need for UNESCO wide strategy that guides and shapes staff perceptions of exit and transition and its relevance for UNESCO to ensure consistency and coherence across the different parts of the Organisation.

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[1] Paris Declaration on Aid Effectivness: Joint Progress Toward Enhanced Aid Efffectivness, 2005.

Inadequate linkages between project results, sustainability and exit: The issue of sustainability is at the core of development discourse and most international aid agencies would like to see beneficiary countries take on the ownership and leadership of programme and project results and ongoing management of the programme activities. However, these linkages need to be established at the beginning of the project as it allows capability building dimensions or notions of sustainability to be built into the design of the initiative. Failure to make these linkages could mean that project results are defined in narrow terms and focussed on measuring project outputs rather than outcomes. Often, progress in the capacity of the beneficiary country or partner agency to take on the intervention is not measured. This poses risks for sustainability of results when it comes time to leave.

CHALLENGES / LESSONS LEARNT

Balancing the tension between what HQ wants to do and what staff have the capacity to do

UNESCO's programming spans a wide range of activities – from influencing national level policy, to being an advocate for standards, to managing small scale projects in a single community. This has led many UNESCO staff to question the Organisation's ability to be equally effective in all these areas given the limited financial and human capacity of the Organisation. One way of managing this diversity and increasing the effectiveness of its interventions is for UNESCO to focus on fewer, more strategic projects that fit its core mandate areas. This implies that concerted effort needs to be made to exit from UNESCO's involvement in operational, more downstream activities consistent with the overall strategic direction of the Organisation.

Findings from our review suggest that making this transition is likely to be challenging for UNESCO. Factors such as the Organisational structure, programme specialist skills and competencies and donor preferences are likely to pose significant barriers in enabling UNESCO to make this shift. First, while the Organisation may choose, at a strategic level, to move away from

small scale, operational projects to more upstream functions, there is considerable flexibility at the field office level (owing to the recent decentralisation reforms) for staff to respond in any way they see appropriate provided they can demonstrate links to the Main Lines of Action. Secondly, field office staff come from a project implementation paradigm and see themselves as being more in tune with the needs of the countries they operate in. Therefore, they respond proactively to these needs by developing project proposals, seeking extra-budgetary funding and implementing these projects. Thirdly, donors prefer to fund projects which offer visible and measurable results and, consequently, initiatives end up taking on a short-term project flavour.

Negative perceptions associated with the term exit

The term 'exit' evokes feelings of negativity and discomfort amongst staff as it conjures up images of UNESCO leaving Member States or abandoning its responsibilities. There is an air of finality to the term "exit" that staff feel does not capture the co-operative nature of activities or longer term commitment that UNESCO has to its Member States.

There is a discernable ease when using the term 'exit' in the context of projects; however, even here staff preferred to use the word 'project closure' when withdrawing from projects rather than exit. Therefore any effort to bring about clarity and coherence across UNESCO about exit and transition must begin by building a shared understanding of key concepts and terms.

Exit is not a single event; it is a path, a series of steps, a mindset

The notion of finality associated with the term 'exit' needs to be managed if exit and transition thinking is to permeate programming practice. A possible way forward is to convey the notion that exit is not a single, sudden event; rather it is a series of steps in a programming journey that allows for a gradual, phased departure from programmes and projects. Therefore, planning for exit

is not an add-on, but an intrinsic part of the project planning cycle. Conceptualising exit in this way is likely to go a long way to changing current staff attitudes and beliefs about exit. Drawing attention to this would pave the way for:

- The beginning of an explicit discussion about 'exit' with project participants early in the relationship;

- Programming staff within UNESCO to be more disciplined and focussed about their own capacity building efforts; and

- A more open, honest representation of intentions leading to continuation and deepening of relationships, not severance of the relationship.

Planning for exit needs to happen early in the programming lifecycle

Exiting from or phasing out projects is a highly complex and negotiated process as different stakeholders have different interests in the project and these interests can sometimes clash. For example, a stakeholder group with responsibility for oversight and advice could have differing views about continuation of a project or programme and may prefer to extend the project rather than terminate it if it has significant consequences for them in terms of diminished resources or a diminished role.

Therefore establishing transparent criteria for engagement and disengagement from projects at the beginning is likely to make a critical contribution to a successful exit process. Involving stakeholders in these discussions will help manage their expectations from the outset about the 'end' of the project and sets the rules of engagement and disengagement clearly for all participants.

Strengthening the results-based monitoring and evaluation systems

Results-based monitoring and evaluation is an approach that yields information that can be used both to manage ongoing policies, programmes and projects better and to demonstrate progress to donors and Member States. It links actions with desired outcomes, showing the extent to which one contributes to

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achieving the other. However, good monitoring and evaluation systems depend on careful definition of objectives and identification of indicators. It is possible to expand current M&E frameworks (based on the logic framework approach) to look beyond the activities and output levels and incorporate regular assessment of progress towards achieving sustainable outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

<u>**Staff**</u>

Thinking about and formulating exit strategies is new for many staff and this highlights the need to dedicate resources to educating and training staff about these concepts.

Meaning and relevance of exit and transition

- UNESCO should focus on building a shared language and meaning around exit and transition amongst staff;
- UNESCO should ensure that processes used for developing strategies for exit are collaborative and participative;
- A clear communications strategy, combining advocacy with inquiry, should be designed to educate staff about value of exit;
- Take steps to delink negative results from personal accountability;
- Encourage staff to develop a theory of change model that focuses attention on the results to be achieved; and
- Undertake activities to increase awareness such as:
  - Staff seminars and workshops;
  - Integrate in DG and ADG speeches;
  - Publish case study stories of staff experiences in planning and implementing exit.

<u>**Project planning processes**</u>

Project documentation

Integrating exit thinking into project planning cycles requires UNESCO to modify its current project design processes so as to ensure planning for exit happens at the beginning of the project planning cycle. Specifically,

- Project proposals should include exit thinking and objectives when articulating the logic framework approach for the intervention;
- Planning for exit must occur at the entry or engagement stage;
- All stakeholders and partners must be involved when setting objectives and expectations regarding project exit;
- A clear but flexible timeline for exit linked to project funding cycle should be established; and
- Project planning documents should include discussion of:
    - Expectations regarding exit and transition;
    - Specific criteria for exit;
    - Measurable expectations towards sustainability goals;
    - Responsibilities for taking over activities and ongoing assessment of their willingness to continue the programme; and
    - How costs of activities associated with exit will be met.

Linking exit and sustainability

Project proposals that state sustainability as an explicit objective should also specify how the initiative will be sustained. This can be achieved in the following way:

- Project proposals should outline exit strategy that is consistent with the theory of sustainability;
- Sustainability and exit strategy goals must be used to shape the way expected results are set up;
- UNESCO should steer away from purely using results or impact measures as criteria for exit as the level of impact desired may not be achievable in the time frames;
- Ongoing monitoring of project implementation as well as progress towards milestones and results including those that measure progress towards exit and sustainability goals;
- Evaluation to assess the relevance and coherence of exit decisions and strategies and how they were implemented; and
- Evaluation of impact of withdrawal on project sustainability some years after UNESCO has withdrawn.

Institutional culture and support

UNESCO needs to reflect on the Organisational culture and promote the use of knowledge and learning in a strategic manner across the different parts of the Organisation. Some specific actions that must be considered include:

- Setting up learning forums to promote experiential and practice based learning;
- Mentoring and peer reviewing strategies;
- On line, virtual discussion group limited to UNESCO staff enabling them to share and debate issues relating to programming work;
- Use of stories on good practice for wider dissemination;
- Encourage staff to move across the different sectors within UNESCO so as to extend their understanding of issues and practices across the breadth of the Organisation;
- Encourage more cross team work; and
- Explore frameworks for building a learning organisation.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The specialised agencies of the United Nations, such as International Labour Organisation, Food and Agriculture Organisation, World Health Organisation and UNESCO, were established as focal points for intergovernmental deliberations and negotiations on common international issues in their respective areas. Member States designed them for the purpose of collection and dissemination of information linked to the setting of international standards and rules. Over time, they became centres of excellence initiating and organising their own international research and leading the discourse in their specific area of expertise. These agencies also became important sources of advice for the developing countries.

UNESCO fulfils its responsibilities in area of education, social and natural sciences, culture and communication through a combination of normative and operational activities. However, during the course of a given programme, the financial, human and material resources (i.e. the programme inputs) necessary for its implementation can vary. The programme content and modalities for delivering a programme also constantly change resulting in a UNESCO programme shifting from a focus on delivery of policy advice, to the dissemination of information and good practice, to training, or to the promotion of norms and standards.

Within UNESCO, there have recently been calls from the Executive Board for all programmes to have 'sunset clauses' and for gradual and smart transition and disengagement from certain activities in order to free up resources and mobilise them elsewhere as priorities dictate.

In principle, UNESCO rarely introduces a programme or activity with the express intention of delivering it indefinitely (this in particular applies to extra-budgetary projects[2]). Programmes regularly change in focus and some inevitably come to an end. However, at present it is not clear how and if transition and exit strategies are defined within UNESCO and to what extent planning for transition and exit is part of the UNESCO programme and project management cycle(s) *in practice.* This issue needs to be treated with some urgency given that transition strategies are high up on the international agenda, both within development agencies and within the UN family.

EVALUATION PURPOSE OR SCOPE

The scope of the evaluation was drawn from the Terms of Reference, which stated that *"the evaluation will focus on UNESCO's implicit or explicit transition strategies"* so as to develop a coherent approach to transition strategies at UNESCO.

Our interpretation of the specific objectives of this work is:

- To extend understanding regarding the current state of play in relation to transition and exit strategies within UNESCO, at an explicit and implicit level;

- To explore how UNESCO can effectively adopt and model best practices for development and implementation of exit and transition strategies; and

- To develop practical guidelines and make recommendations in relation to the development of tools and systems that will enable UNESCO to implement sound and smart transition strategies.

Key findings from exploring these questions will provide relevant inputs for UNESCO, in particular the Bureau of Strategic Planning, in relation to the development and implementation of exit and transition strategies. The findings will also assist UNESCO to develop mechanisms that promote Organisational

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[2] All of UNESCO's Agreements with Private Sector Partners contain sunset clauses.

learning in the context of the decentralisation reforms and the adoption of Results Based Management practices. As requested, a key deliverable in this regard is the development of a practical framework and guidelines for implementing exit and transition strategies which can be found in Appendix 2 of this report.

EVALUATION APPROACH (INCLUDING LIMITATIONS)

Our approach drew on the collective experience and wisdom of key actors within UNESCO. We considered it imperative that the evaluation approach bring multiple perspectives and views to bear on the issue of transition and exit strategies in order to build a shared understanding of key concepts. To this end, we viewed the Organisation and its staff as the principal unit of analysis.

Our approach also recognised that the issue of transition and exit has been a prime focus for the development community for some time and a number of agencies (e.g. SIDA) had designed and implemented appropriate transition strategies of their own. Learning from these agencies' collective experiences, as well as their perceptions of UNESCO's approach to transition and exit, offered useful insights that could be used to shape UNESCO's strategies and practices. Particularly relevant were strategies used by other UN agencies and major UNESCO donors.

The evaluation approach covered multiple data collection sources including:

Stocktake of existing UNESCO documentation

This phase of the work identified the extent to which the issue of sustainability or exit was discussed in programme documentation as well as more generally within UNESCO strategies, policy guidelines and other documentation. The analysis included an assessment of the extent to which explicit references to exit or transition formed an integral part of the project management cycles, including whether there were differences in the documentation across headquarters and other offices. The Stocktake is included as Appendix 4.

Literature review

This phase involved reviewing existing literature on the issue of exit and transition approaches and experiences of development agencies in implementing these approaches. Certain conditions in a programme or project environment may contribute to successful or unsuccessful exit in specific instances and these issues were taken into consideration in the development of the guidelines for UNESCO. The literature review is included as Appendix 3.

Interviews with key individuals and groups within headquarters and three field offices

In this phase of the work, we undertook one on one interviews to promote dynamic and thoughtful dialogue on the subject. The interviews provided a setting where staff individually and collectively reflected on their views and experiences regarding transition strategies in a programmatic context and compared and contrasted the emerging understanding with UNESCO's philosophy and expectations. We also explored the views of staff on the Organisational systems needed to support the planning and implementation of transition and exit strategies.

The three field offices selected to be part of this review were the Dakar office, Brasilia and Jakarta. The selection of the case studies was undertaken jointly with IOS and location and size of these office operations were part of the criteria in the case study selection.

Strategic conversations with selected partner agencies

This step involved undertaking face to face interviews or telephone interviews with other UN and development assistance agencies to explore:

- Their own experiences and learning with regard to transition and exit strategies;

- Their perceptions about UNESCO and its current exit and transition practices;

- Perceived gaps in UNESCO's approach that need to be addressed; and

- Key issues to be considered in the design and implementation of exit and transition strategies.

Illustrative Examples

Examples of activities or projects supported by UNESCO have been described to bring the issue of exit and transition 'alive'. They are an illustrative device and in all cases are supported by more general findings. The examples selected for inclusion in this report were chosen following analysis of the data generated by other evaluation methods.

In the literature, the term 'exit' refers to the withdrawal of externally provided resources (financial, human and other) from an entire project or activity. An exit strategy (also referred to as an exit plan) is a specific plan describing how the agency intends to withdraw from a project or activity while ensuring that the achievement of development goals is not jeopardised and, where relevant, that further progress towards these goals is enabled post exit. Consequently, the underlying goal or logic of an exit strategy is to ensure sustainability of programme or project results after a programme, or the agency's involvement with it, has been terminated.

Fundamentally, exit refers to withdrawal or discontinuation of agency involvement in the project or programme. In the literature this type of exit is characterised as *phase out*. Phase out could occur for a number of reasons, some positive (e.g. because the desired outcomes have been achieved), some negative (e.g. the programme fails to achieve the desired outcomes) and some extraneous (e.g. because of withdrawal of externally provided funding). Regardless of the reason for exit or withdrawal, it presents opportunities for learning. Sometimes organisations may choose to learn from the evaluation findings noting programme failure and modify or transform future programme or projects so as to make them more effective. Such transformation or modification of the programme is commonly referred to as *transition.*

Frequently, exit occurs when one agency withdraws but its role is handed over to another agency, which then assumes responsibility for the continuation of the project. This type of exit is referred to as *phase over*, or exit due to capability transfer. Where relevant, planning for a *phase over* at the outset of the project encourages a balance in the collaboration that over time tips in favour of strengthened local responsibility and leadership. Therefore, incorporating exit thinking in project planning ensures that projects are planned in a staged manner, appropriate attention is given to sustainability, and permits UNESCO to plan future engagements elsewhere.

However, there are two issues that are significant when talking about exit: first, there are no universal exit strategies and the choice of a specific approach to programme exit depends on the nature of the intervention; and secondly, the issue of issue of exit or transition needs to be considered in the context of the broader environment in which an agency operates. The next section discusses some of the important contextual factors that are likely to impact on planning for and implementation of exit in a UNESCO context.

2.1   CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Some of the contextual factors discussed in this section are:

- Role of UNESCO
- Governance structures
- Operating environment
- Funding
- Trends in the donor environment
- Recent introduction of RBM approach

2.1.1   Role of UNESCO

The issue of exit and transition within UNESCO is complicated by the functional and sectoral breadth of its role and mandate across its core sectors. At one level it can safely be said that there will always be a role for UNESCO to provide direction and leadership in areas such as education, science, communications and culture. These roles are part of UNESCO's constitution and are the reason for its existence. In these areas, Member States look to UNESCO to raise the quality of debate and standards in countries of need. It would not be desirable for UNESCO to exit from such normative roles.

It is therefore useful to distinguish between UNESCO's normative and operational roles when considering the relevance of exit and transition. The

normative roles can be specified as: (1) a laboratory of ideas; (2) clearing house for information; (3) setting norms and standards; and (4) advocacy. Its operational roles are: (5) capacity building; and (6) other operational activities.

In general, exit and transition is often more relevant in the context of capacity building and other operational activities, since in these areas UNESCO has relatively more discretion with regard to decisions about whether to engage or disengage from a particular programme or project. In contrast, the normative functions UNESCO performs, such as the development, promulgation and monitoring of compliance with UNESCO conventions, the function and related activities can be seen as permanent. Therefore, it is difficult to conceive of a universal exit strategy for UNESCO. It is more useful and pertinent to think about exit and transition primarily in the context of UNESCO's operational roles.

Some staff do concede that, within the broader sphere of UNESCO's mandate, it is most useful to discuss exit and transition in relation to its role as a capacity builder and as a laboratory of ideas (where the emphasis is on demonstrating effectiveness and then inviting other funding partners to scale up the project). However, as the following quotations reflect, the issue of exit and transition within UNESCO is a complex one:

> "*UNESCO is operating more in the area of thought leadership and capacity building. But overall, our mandate is idealistic and mission impossible and it is almost impossible to look for clear results in these areas*"

> "*We need to lead the way in this debate. We need to have a model for our intervention and then Member States can agree or disagree to this. However that is not what happens. It is very much about us going to member states and asking them what we should do. In such a case, exit is difficult. As long as our role is not clearly defined, exit will be difficult to implement*"

"UNESCO is an intellectual agency and so when we talk of exit, it means intellectual exit and that is not concurrent with our mandate"

"We have a mandate to work in the area of education, science, culture and communication. We cannot withdraw from these areas. Full stop".

Despite this widespread belief, exit and transition has been undertaken successfully in some areas of UNESCO's work and it is useful to draw lessons from these examples for wider use (refer to Box 1: Learning Lessons from the Media reconstruction experience in the Balkans). It also suggests that it is useful to differentiate between the need for and relevance of exit and transition strategies at different levels of programming (e.g. Major Programmes, Sub-Programmes, Main Lines of Action, Projects and Activities).

2.1.2   *Governance structures*

UNESCO's governance structure is highly complex. Member States act through the General Conference to determine the policies and Main Lines of Action of the Organisation, which are then carried out by the Secretariat, working together with National Commissions and other stakeholders, under the supervision of the Executive Board. While the Director-General is ultimately accountable to the General Conference for the Secretariat's performance of the work programme, in practice the Secretariat is also accountable to individual Member States on a bilateral basis.

Through these direct channels, Member States exert great pressure on UNESCO with regard to the programmes and activities that UNESCO should be conducting, particularly at a country-level. There is an implicit expectation within UNESCO that, where possible, requests from individual Member States for assistance must be met, notwithstanding that this creates huge demands on the Organisation's resources. Furthermore, there is a sense that once a programme or activity has been approved by the Governing Board, beneficiaries will act to stifle attempts to withdraw or step back from an

activity. These sentiments are summed up in the following quotes from UNESCO staff:

"It is an Organisation that does not have much control over itself"

"Many projects have sunset clauses but many times Member States will argue to continue the project. It is not always respected'.

"The real pressure for UNESCO is from the Member States. Whenever UNESCO moves back or withdraws, we are not popular with the delegations and that goes for the National Commissions also. They put enormous pressure on UNESCO".

The Governance structure of UNESCO makes decision making and the setting of strategic priorities a highly negotiated process and decisions are often made following rules of international diplomacy rather than being evidence based. A Member State's request for UNESCO's involvement in their country is balanced with other Member States needs for continuation resulting in UNESCO straddling a very broad programme of work, resources being thinly spread and the emergence of a strong culture of continuation rather than exit. In such a system, it becomes difficult for UNESCO to say no to new requests or to cease existing activities and this has created a culture of transition, where programmes are continuously modified and adapted to changing needs but are rarely discontinued. Moreover, demands have grown over time faster than available resources leading to dilution of effort and a reduction in overall effectiveness.

In such an environment discussions about exit and transition need to be surfaced with utmost care so as to ensure buy in from Member States. Developing a set of criteria for engagement and disengagement could help in making the decision making process more transparent and enabling Member States to make strategic choices about where the Organisation places its efforts. Monitoring and evaluation data can help in this analytical process and provide

objective data about effectiveness of UNESCO's intervention thereby allowing for more rigorous decision making about priorities.

2.1.3   Operating environment

UNESCO operates at a number of programming levels:

- Major Programmes (education, science; culture etc);
- At the Sub programme level (Teachers Training Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa, Literacy Initiative For Empowerment etc);
- Main Lines of Action;
- Project level (Community Media Centre, Capacity Building in education Planning and Management initiatives, etc); and
- Activities.

While there is a push towards involvement in more upstream work, staff feel strongly that for UNESCO to retain credibility in its areas of expertise, there is need to be present in the field and for continued engagement in operational activities. However, the general reluctance to let go of project or operational activities could also be due to the fact that some staff come from a project implementation paradigm and want to be seen as being responsive by the countries they operate in.

It is our view that any shift in the balance between upstream and downstream activities also needs to be considered in the context of the skills and competencies of staff. Upstream work requires technical skills and expertise, where as downstream work requires a different set of competencies (e.g. project management, facilitation, relationship management skills etc).

The general view amongst staff is that at the Programme and Sub programme level exit, the issue is one of transition. These are defined as upstream activities and relate to institutional capacity building efforts, or influencing policy at a national level. As such these intrinsically have a longer time frame, and UNESCO involvement is often due to political decision making (Member

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States may seek involvement from UNESCO and it is difficult for UNESCO to say no) rather than a result of a well thought out logic for the intervention. The outcomes are not clearly defined – more soft and difficult to measure.

In this context, there will always be a role for an international organisation that can provide the intellectual steer and direction for Member States to work towards attaining development goals. The relevant issue at this level is less of exit and more about a concerted effort to network and partner with other players in the region so as to enhance impact at a national level.

Currently, it is at the project level that the issue of exit is often discussed. Projects are downstream activities and usually have a more clearly defined time frame, the logic for UNESCO intervention is clearer and expected results are more clearly articulated.

2.1.4 Funding

As a specialised agency of the United Nations, UNESCO is financed from assessed contributions from its Member States under the regular programme budget, approved by the General Conference each biennium. A large part of this Regular Budget goes towards the costs of staff, administration and running the General Conference and Executive Board. Consequently, UNESCO must seek extra-budgetary funding for operational projects and programmes prepared and implemented by UNESCO. Extra-budgetary funds are those that do not form part of the assessed contributions of Member States and take a number of different forms. The Director General is authorised to receive such funds for the implementation of programmes and projects consistent with the aims, policies and activities of UNESCO. Throughout the UN system, extra-budgetary funding has been growing in importance since the 1980s and has become a significant funding source. In order for UNESCO to be effective and achieve its goals, these extra-budgetary resources are necessary and complement the Regular Budget.

Understanding these funding patterns is important in order to understand how staff perceive the relevance of exit and transition strategies within the UNESCO context. Staff interviewed found it easier to understand and relate to the concept of exit in the context of extra budgetary funded projects – these are time bound, donor driven and have greater focus on results. We found a few examples where exit strategies had been considered in agreement with the donor, the recipient country and UNESCO (e.g. Community Multimedia Centre; Capacity Building Projects under Education For All, etc). In contrast, UNESCO staff found it difficult to think about exit in the context of Regular Programmes as decisions regarding continuation or transition are taken at the General Conference during their discussions on project proposals and budget bids.

2.1.5 Trends in the donor environment

Many of UNESCO's operational activities are funded directly by donors through extra-budgetary funding. UNESCO's funding partners represent a large, heterogeneous community with a range of individual priorities and procedures. The main extra budgetary funding source for UNESCO are the bilateral government donors. Other important donors include European Commission, United Nations funds and programmes, multilateral development banks, private sector comprising foundations, private companies and the public at large who are emerging as a promising funding source for UNESCO.

According to UNESCO, of these diverse funding sources, the bilateral government funding sources and private sector organisations lend themselves best to responding positively to UNESCO's own project proposals as elaborated on behalf of the beneficiary Member States. In contrast, the European Commission's procedures for cooperation tend to vary depending on the individual programme and budget line in the Commission's portfolio, which may not always be compatible with UNESCO's mandate.

The donor environment in recent years has become more competitive and constrained by finite supply of resources. Donors have also been focussed on improving the quality and effectiveness of their bilateral aid through a reduction of the number of partner agencies within each country and the number of sectors that each donor focuses on. Alternative policies to enhance effectiveness of their interventions such as concentration policies, increased harmonisation and alignment with partner country policies and procedures, and stronger focus on Millennium Development Goals are being considered to inform decisions about continuation of funding.

For some time now donors have been under pressure to anchor their interventions on a number of discrete priorities in beneficiary countries and communities so that the benefits are sustained over time. This has led them to insist that an explicit discussion about sustainability or an exit strategy be included as part of the project proposal documentation and associated funding contracts which in turn has influenced UNESCO's practice with regard to exit and transition. UNESCO programme specialists admit that discussions about exit and sustainability in their project documentation are ofen initiated by donors whose procedures and documentation require these issues to be considered. This is not the ideal situation, as donor triggered exit decisions are sometimes motivated by changes in donor policy or donor administrative practice, rather than by considerations of project or programme success. Donor funding timeframes may be inflexible and unable to cope with slower than expected programme or unforeseen circumstances. Further, donor driven exits may create perverse incentives whereby the justification or rationale for exit becomes procedural rather than built into the logic or design of the programme.

Programme staff may discuss the issue of exit or sustainability in their proposals but notions of sustainability are often not adequately built into the design of the programme or the nature of the activities undertaken in the programme itself. Therefore it is important for UNESCO to have well defined policies in this regard so that it can actively drive and lead the discourse in this area.

2.1.6 Recent introduction of RBM approach

Since the mid-to late-1990s, UNESCO has implemented a range of 'results-based management' reforms aimed at improving the performance framework governing all UNESCO's activities (i.e. Major programmes, Sub programmes, Main Line of Actions, Projects and Activities). These changes have included requirements to specify and report against objectives, the development and monitoring of progress towards performance measures and improving the explicit links between work programmes for each biennium and expected results. RBM is intended to be a participatory and a team based approach to management designed to improve programme and management effectiveness, efficiency and accountability that focuses on achieving defined results. It seeks to develop at the beginning of the planning process a complete understanding of what is to be achieved, by whom and how these achievements will be assessed. It also seeks to build a collective understanding of the scope of activities and how they contribute to the larger, more strategic objectives and goals of the Organisation.

In line with these changes, the Organisation has developed a number of supporting information management tools, including the System of Information on Strategies, Tasks and the Evaluation of Results (SISTER). SISTER is intended to assist and encourage programme staff to provide ongoing monitoring information and report on the progress towards the achievement of results. However, SISTER is a central monitoring tool and does not (and should not) replace the need for planning for and implementation of exit strategies. Therefore, while RBM provides a logical and coherent context within which decisions about the continuation or discontinuation of a programme can be considered, to be successful it needs to be built into programme planning more generally.

In our view, widespread acceptance and *practice* of RBM is critical to promoting exit thinking within UNESCO. It provides the evidence base for ensuring greater transparency in decision making about continuation or

discontinuation of UNESCO's involvement in projects and activities. In practice we found that there isn't a widespread acceptance of RBM and the results based framework is not yet embedded within the culture and work practices of UNESCO staff. Therefore ongoing training and guidance is needed in order to improve the quality of project planning and reporting practices and integrate exit thinking and planning into this process.

2.2   RESEARCH FINDINGS

A key objective of this research is to examine the extent to which exit and transition planning is an intrinsic part of the UNESCO programme and project management cycle(s). Our findings indicate that while there is no explicit, codified framework to guide exit and transition planning and implementation within UNESCO, exit and transition thinking is usually *implicit* in programme and project documentation and examples of exits and, more often, transition occur frequently in practice. Projects that demonstrate this include amongst others IICBA's Micro Programme for Teacher's Training (Dakar); Community Multimedia Centres in Mozambique; Literacy for Empowerment of Women in Morocco (Building Capacity for Sustainable Development) and Strengthening Capacity of GO/NGO Managers and Policymakers for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation including use of Research in Literacy and Pilot Literacy/Skills Training for Empowering Rural Illiterate Girls and Women. Programmes and projects are continuously modified, adapted or transformed to keep pace with changing priorities or needs of the Member States. However, in the instances where exit or transition has occurred more formally, the decision to exit often appears to have been driven by extrinsic factors (e.g., donor requirements).

For Regular Programme activities, the notion of transition appears to sit more comfortably with UNESCO staff than exit and our findings show that there are many more instances of transition than exit within UNESCO. However, the decision to transition frequently appears to be in response to collective resistance to the concept of exit within UNESCO rather than a genuine need to transform the programme. Favouring transition as opposed to exit is likely to pose significant challenges for UNESCO since meeting the demands of

Member States and donors to take on additional responsibilities and activities, without discontinuing existing initiatives, inevitably results in a dilution of human and financial resources over a very broad range of activities.

This situation is further exacerbated when funding for additional activities is constrained, as is currently the case with UNESCO's Regular Programme and Budget. Left unchecked, this cycle of ever increasing demands and constrained financial and human resources could ultimately result in a reduction of UNESCO's overall effectiveness. When seen in this context, appropriate exit from existing activities is critical to retaining the flexibility to adjust to emerging needs and priorities as well as lifting the organisational credibility to undertake projects that make a difference.

From our interviews it is clear that within UNESCO there are instances when exit has been a conscious choice (e.g. Media reconstruction in the Balkans) as well as instances when exit occurs unintentionally or inadvertently. Some of the triggers for exit (i.e. withdrawal from, or diminishing involvement or transformation of a project or activity) and transition in UNESCO have been due to:

- Pressure from Member States;
- Lack of perceived fit between programme (as it evolved) and UNESCO's core mandate or strategic priorities leading to transformation of the programme (refer to the Madagascar project example on page 28);
- A fixed time limit or deadline often imposed by the donor;

> *"Many projects are time limited and clearly defined. For instance, if we are supposed to do curriculum developments for a journalism school in Sudan. We define the project, it runs for 24 months, and then that's it. Unless something wildly positive or negative happens, it will end at the end of the 24 month period. If something positive happens, we will see what we can do to continue supporting them. If something negative happens, I am sure we will try to get out as beautifully as we can".*

- Reduced budgets; and

- Lack of an advocate for the programme (e.g. when the champion for an initiative moves on).

Deliberate and planned exit from projects or initiatives that have run their course and either achieved, or failed to achieve, the desired outcomes does not appear to be a routine reason for exit within UNESCO. However, there are exceptions to this and the following example of UNESCO's significant withdrawal from media reconstruction activities in the Balkans (Refer Box 1) offers excellent insights and lessons on how exit decisions have been planned and successfully implemented within UNESCO.

Box 1 Learning Lessons on exit from the Media reconstruction experience in the Balkans

Project description - UNESCO supports independent media in conflict- and post-conflict areas, to provide the non-partisan information that is vital for reconciliation, reconstruction and democracy. Between 1999 and 2006, UNESCO was actively involved with media reconstruction in the Balkans in the wake of the civil war between Serbia and Bosnia when "that whole part of Europe broke down".

Sector Reflections – During the last two years, the CI sector has been working to develop a consistent programme describing the nature and type of media reconstruction work UNESCO should do in post-conflict countries. Reflections on these issues led the CI sector to establish a clear set of guidelines, a roadmap for what UNESCO's criteria for involvement should be, and the kinds of activities that UNESCO should not be engaged in. Integrating these reflections in their work in South Eastern Europe in a systematic way led to the decision that the concerted past effort from UNESCO was no longer needed in this region. A transparent set of criteria was used to arrive at this decision which included monitorable indicators such as the presence of independent editors and associations, a vibrant training system; diversity in the media landscape such as State owned media, private media and community media, etc.

Implementing exit – The trigger for UNESCO to consider exit in this instance was a combination of political and financial factors. Therefore, in order to enable UNESCO to make strategic choices about its continued involvement in the Balkans, the CI project team initiated discussion with all key partners in the region. They were asked to suggest ideas about the most important subjects in the media area that could form the future focus and phase for the project. Of these, eleven ideas were selected and each project built around these ideas aimed at building capacity, both local and regional capacity within institutions and capacity of public service broadcasters, so that the country could deal with these issues on their own following UNESCO's departure. Simultaneously the team also initiated contact with Organisation for European Economic Cooperation who were mandated with the specific responsibility for democratic development in the Balkans, so that they would take over the responsibilities (*phase over*). However, UNESCO continues its involvement in Albania and Kosovo as these are still areas of unrest.

Lessons learnt – While exit had not been considered in this instance at the beginning of the engagement, the process of exit was managed in a systematic and planned way. This was due to the fact that the rationale for the exit was contextualised within a broader strategic framework. This framework formalised UNESCO's role and involvement; established partnership with donors and professional organisations and sought their involvement in decision making and contributed to the development of a coherent programme with clear and observable outcomes. The CI team's systematic questioning and reflection regarding the ongoing role for UNESCO in this work contributed significantly to debate and challenged some of the beliefs, assumptions and views of the team members without undermining what had been achieved so far.

Variation in practice across and within programming sectors

Our interviews with UNESCO staff across the programming sectors revealed that there is some variability in the mindsets and practices of staff in the different sectors in relation to exit and transition. While the Communications and Information sector appears to be "ahead of the game" in terms of their planning and implementation of exit strategies, there appears to be less clarity about the notion of exit amongst staff in other sectors and a number of explanations are offered by those interviewed in these sectors to help explain the variation.

- There is a general perception that the activities undertaken in the CI sector are intrinsically tangible, time bound, and the results are more measurable than in other sectors;
- There is marked difference in the level of resourcing available to the different sectors - the CI sector has far less resources compared to education, and this puts greater pressure on the sector to operate in tight budgets and come up with more creative solutions for managing with limited funds. As a result, the sector has to constantly reflect and make ongoing choices about relative priorities; and
- Staff in this sector appeared to be generally younger, newer to the organisation, have a private sector or business background; and stronger management focus and training to work within strategic frameworks.

2.2.1   What is the current state of play?

The findings from the research threw up three key insights that reflect the current state of play with regard to exit within UNESCO:

- Lack of a shared understanding of meaning and relevance of exit;
- Little evidence of systematic and deliberate planning for exit; and
- Inadequate linkage between project results, sustainability and exit.

Lack of a shared understanding of <u>meaning</u> and <u>relevance</u> of exit within UNESCO

<u>Meaning</u>

In our interviews of UNESCO programme staff, both at headquarters and the field offices, the idea of exit or transition or an exit strategy generated a considerable amount of discussion and there were a variety of differing opinions about the meaning of exit and transition. This was not unexpected and the lack of consensus about the meaning of exit probably reflects different semantic interpretations of the word "exit". What was surprising, given the emerging literature on exit in the international development context, was that the terms exit and transition appeared relatively new to UNESCO staff, and a number of staff indicated this to us: 'it is quite a new concept for me'; 'I haven't heard it before in UNESCO'; 'I don't understand the term' were not uncommon in our interviews across HQ and field office alike. Interviews with staff in the Brasilia field office revealed wide variations on understandings of concepts of exit and transition and in the Dakar office too, there was a lack of a shared understanding of these concepts.

When persuaded by researchers to think about exit and transition a bit further, responses by staff were more questioning and tentative than authoritative: 'is it to do with how you finish a project'; 'is it about how we disengage from the project'; or ' is it about how you change the programme to adapt it to changing environment?". Therefore, most interviews began with respondents seeking clarification from the researchers about definitions. This suggests that these concepts are not top of mind for UNESCO programme staff and a significant contribution of this research is to trigger critical reflection about exit and transition and its possible relevance for UNESCO amongst the staff we interviewed.

Once the meaning and definitions were clarified, a surprisingly different array of terms emerged, including 'termination of funding', 'withdrawal', 'closure', and 'disengagement'. Therefore, in order to understand what constitutes a 'successful' exit or a 'successful exit strategy' and how introducing exit

thinking might add value to the context in which UNESCO operates, there is a need to begin with a shared definition of what exit means and a common understanding of why exit is important. Without this understanding there is little value in taking things to the next step and talking about the development of exit and transition strategies.

Relevance

There were differences of opinion amongst staff interviewed regarding the relevance of exit for UNESCO. In Jakarta for instance, those that thought it was relevant nevertheless expressed a strong reluctance to exit ongoing projects and many did not see the relevance of developing an exit strategy *per se* given the large number of very small scale (e.g. US$5000- US$60,000) projects that form the core of the current programme work. These discrete projects are short term in focus and have clear start and end points. They often tend to be opportunistic and respond to specific needs (e.g. disaster response) and can be seen as independent or ad hoc rather than complementary initiatives that collectively contribute towards the achievement of an overarching strategic objective.

Other UNESCO staff interviewed who felt the concept of exit was not relevant in the specific context within which they worked offered a number of reasons in support of their position:

- The term 'exit' has negative connotations and an air of finality which is contrary to how UNESCO staff view the Organisation's responsibilities towards Member States. There is a greater level of comfort with the term transition as it has an ongoing tone and flavour and is felt to describe more accurately UNESCO's long term commitment to achieving development goals;

- In the context of UNESCO's current organisational culture, exit appears to be widely regarded as implying a negative result (i.e. a failure), which may in turn be seen as reflection of an individual or team's ability or competence. Therefore, there is a bias towards persevering with projects

or initiatives even where there may be good legitimate reasons to end them;

- The role of UNESCO is very broad and ambitious and there is a commonly held view that the outcomes UNESCO is seeking can never be fully achieved (e.g., Education for All). Even if the current expected results are achieved, there is a view that the goal posts will continually shift making it necessary to maintain involvement (e.g. if primary education for all is achieved, then the focus will shift to secondary and then higher education);

- There was a sense among some staff about the futility of thinking about exit on the grounds that, even if it exit was a good idea, it would not be accepted by affected Member States.

> *"If UNESCO is here to serve the needs of the Member States, then where is the question of exit? As long as there is need, we will continue to serve this need in the best way we can".*

While these concerns are valid and legitimate, we believe that it is still pertinent to conceive of exit at a programme or project level. Interestingly, there are some staff, albeit a minority, within UNESCO who clearly see exit as being relevant for UNESCO's work and actively seek to integrate concepts of exit and sustainability into their project work. In their view, thinking about exit and sustainability is fundamental to development work and having clarity about the end of a project during project planning allows transparency and shared ownership of project successes. Failure to do so means that projects lose focus, put a strain on the resources and make little contribution to achieving the desired development goals.

> *"There are these larger programmes where, if you don't take care, they may run on more or less for ever. Some of them without damage, but also without really being useful in the way they could be. I do think they absorb huge financial or human resources that could be put to better use in other areas of UNESCO. So we need to think about what we are doing, what we are achieving, and when we are no longer needed."*

> **Recommendations**
> - UNESCO should focus on building a shared language and meaning around exit and transition amongst staff;
> - UNESCO should ensure that processes used for developing strategies for exit are collaborative and participative;
> - A clear communications strategy be designed to educate staff about the value of exit;
> - Take steps to delink negative results from personal accountability; and
> - Encourage staff to develop a theory of change model that focuses attention on the results to be achieved.

Little evidence of systematic and deliberate planning for exit

Within UNESCO there is no explicit, codified framework or guidelines for exit that staff have access to. Consequently, the practice of exit usually appears to be ad hoc and variable across sectors and between projects within a sector. In instances where exit thinking has been integrated in project planning cycles, it has occurred either due to the skill, competence and experience of the individual programme specialist or because it is driven by the donor. This is well illustrated in the Jakarta case study where staff who were most familiar with concept of exit admitted that their familiarity with these concepts did not come from their time in UNESCO, where the terms are not in common use. Instead, these staff gained their familiarity with exit strategies during previous employment, often with another UN agency, major donor or NGO.

> *"There are two types of exit in UNESCO – those that are conscious (but even these are usually self driven) and those that just happen because money has run out and no one cares to actually proactively go and find new money. Or a programme specialist moves from one role to another and the things he has been dealing with just falls off the radar."*

Interestingly, notions of exit appear to be implicit in extra budgetary projects due to their specific time period – *'these projects are funded for only 2 years,*

so when the time is up, the project is finished' and the expectation is that beyond this time, project participants have to find additional funding from other sources to continue project activities. However, these time periods have more to do with donors' guidelines rather than a deliberate consideration of the whether the time is sufficient to achieve the desired results. This type of exit can result in closing down projects (particularly if future funding is not sorted in advance) without due consideration for the adverse impact on the partners and beneficiaries as in the instance of the Madagascar project. This project offers insights into the adverse effects of not having a considered exit strategy built into project plans and is discussed below (see box: 2)

Box:2 Description of the Madagascar project

Project context/description: UNESCO was involved in a five year integrated development project in Madagascar more than a decade ago. The five year timeframe was linked to the funding timeframe of the donor at the time. The project combined concepts of conservation and development and dealt with a range of issues relating to agriculture, health, fisheries, women and gender in the community. The project was implemented in partnership with key players in the region. At the end of the five year period a review was undertaken to help inform the decision to continue or discontinue the project. However, there was a general expectation from all players that the findings of the review would be used to inform the next five year phase of the project.

What happened next?: While there may have been a general desire to have a second phase, funding for the second phase had not been secured and this was to become a significant issue for the project. During the transitional phase of the project (the period between phase one and phase two) people working on the project lost their jobs as there was no money to pay them; stakeholders were unhappy as they had not been prepared for this eventuality; and amongst all this uncertainty there was pressure to keep projects going with minimal funds in order to ensure that they didn't fall over. Needless to say that this period was fraught and tense for all concerned.

Meanwhile, the review indicated that while the project was successful in meeting the objectives set out in the first phase, the second phase needed to be more targeted and focused on UNESCO's mandate. The review suggested a shift in emphasis from generic development issues to more specific issues that were at the heart of the debate around conservation and development. Netherlands came forward as the donor for the second phase with an explicit understanding that the funding was only for the next five year phase of the project.

Learnings about exit and transition: Given their experience with phase one, the project team was particularly keen not to run into similar issues again. They realised that the main reason for the problem in phase one was that they had not considered exit or transition issues in their project planning and implementation process. Consequently, they began thinking about it only when the phase came to an end. Due to this many things happened: everyone was taken by surprise when the time frame came to an end; no money was arranged for the transition; the team lost skilled and experienced people due to attrition caused by the uncertain environment.

These reflections were considered by the project team in the planning and implementation of Phase 2. During the 4th year of the project, the project team initiated an internal evaluation to assess progress and explicitly discussed the future of the project with the national government. As a result of these discussions, UNESCO worked with national institutions to hand over the project, identified skills and competencies needed to continue the project and transferred some of the local project staff to the national institutions to ensure sustainability of the effort. UNESCO also provided support to the Madagascar government in their negotiations with the European Union to take over the management of some of the rural development activities.

There are exceptions to this general finding that exit strategies are mostly implicit and we did find examples of projects where there were explicit discussions about exit. For example, project documentation for the Community Multimedia Centre project includes an explicit discussion of *phase over.* Ownership and building of community assets are discussed as a means for the programme to exit the community, as this ensures continued focus on achievement of programme outcomes even after the project has closed. Other projects or UNESCO documents where issues around exit and sustainability issues are discussed include:

- IICBA's Micro Programme for Teacher's Training (Dakar);
- Community Multimedia Centre Project;
- UBO Project Review (Brasilia);
- Transitioning from UBO's Portfolio in the Health Sector (Brasilia);
- Transitioning from UBO's involvement in the Open Schools Programme (Brasilia);
- Project Proposal for Trust Fund for Human Security (Dakar); and
- Capacity building of local radio project (Jakarta); etc.

While this is a step in the right direction, most of these documents do not discuss *how* the stated goals of sustainability or exit will be achieved in reality. Also the core elements of an exit strategy (e.g. identifying the key partners and the processes by which they will be involved, clarifying expectations regarding exit, and managing risks around continuation) are not discussed and exit appears to have entered into the project mix more as an afterthought rather than at the beginning of the project.

For instance, applying principles and criteria of exit to the Community Multimedia Project's sustainability strategy would suggest that more comprehensive planning is required to ensure that ownership and transfer of community assets is successful. In order to do this, assumptions underpinning how programme sustainability will be achieved need to be unpacked and a detailed and explicit plan for achieving phase over needs to be developed,

including a plan for transferring responsibility for maintenance of the centre; a MOU describing roles and responsibilities of key actors when project timeframe has elapsed; capacity and confidence of the local players to do so; as well as setting benchmarks and monitoring to gauge readiness of local groups to assume responsibility. The project document we examined does not discuss these issues or address how the capacity and confidence of the local organisation to assume responsibility for the project will be monitored nor do they explicitly budget for the activities and costs associated with handing over the project during the lifecycle of the project. Identification of key partners alone is not sufficient. A sound exit strategy will identify the steps that need to be taken to ensure that intended handover is smooth, and does not jeopardise the sustainability of the project.

The Guidelines attached to this report (refer Appendix 2) offer some guidance and direction in this regard. Thinking about and formulating exit strategies is new for many staff and there is a need to disseminate information and suggest actionable steps that staff can take to incorporate exit thinking into their project planning cycles. Several considerations such as timing, communication with key stakeholders, building exit into project design are discussed in the Guidelines.

Recommendation

Integrating exit thinking into project planning cycles and current RBM framework requires UNESCO to modify its current project design processes so as to ensure planning for exit occurs at the beginning of the project planning cycle.

Specifically,

- Project proposals should include exit thinking and objectives when articulating the logic framework approach for the intervention;
- Planning for exit must occur at the entry or engagement stage;
- All stakeholders and partners must be involved when setting objectives and expectations regarding project exit;

> - A clear but flexible timeline for exit linked to project funding cycle must be established;
> - Project planning documents should include discussion along the following lines:
>   - Specify expectations regarding exit and transition;
>   - Specific criteria for exit;
>   - Specifying measurable expectations;
>   - Identifying responsibilities for taking over activities and ongoing assessment of their willingness to continue the programme;
>   - Action steps including roles; and
>   - How costs of activities associated with exit will be met.

Inadequate linkages between project results, sustainability and exit

The issue of sustainability is at the core of exit thinking and the two concepts are inextricably linked. Understanding sustainability, and therefore, exit is central to improving effectiveness of UNESCO, particularly in the area of capacity building. Therefore, reviewing UNESCO's involvement and activities within a sustainability and exit framework is likely to set the tone for early engagement with stakeholders about exit and focus attention of project participants on the need to monitor progress towards sustainability. In turn this will offer clear signals about when to exit.

Our interviews revealed that UNESCO programming staff lack a shared understanding of sustainability and most of the discussion around sustainability occurred at a conceptual level (e.g. that it is central to development work; training the trainers) and consequently, often it is not explicitly reflected in the design of the programme or project itself. Even the ways in which outcomes or goals are commonly framed do not lend themselves to thinking of sustainability first and foremost.

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A S S O C I A T E S

Interestingly most staff interviewed in the Jakarta Field Office appeared to recognise the intrinsic link between sustainability and UNESCO's exit from a project or programme (i.e. exit is the ultimate test of sustainability). However, many interviewees were understandably reluctant to exit from a programme or project even in cases where they argued the programme or project in question had been successful and had become sustainable owing to pressure from Member States.

The lack of understanding of sustainability is well illustrated in the capacity building for Education For All project titled Support to Strengthen the Capacity of Primary and Basic Education Teacher Training Institutions in Sierra Leone. The overarching goal of this initiative is stated as "*support a post-conflict Member State (Sierra Leone) to formulate and implement policies, plans and programmes in the context of UNESCO TTISA for the production of quality teachers for Basic Education.*" However, capacity building for sustainability requires more than just measuring whether a framework was developed or policies and plans for teacher training were put in place; sustainability requires a role beyond just *support*. It requires a concerted effort by all partners particulary UNESCO to map and build the *capacity of* the national partners in continuing to carry out this programme of work *after* UNESCO leaves and incorporating those capacity building components into the programme activities from the outset. The project documents we examined do not discuss these aspects of sustainability.

In order to examine the linkages between sustainability and exit, we delved a bit deeper into the TTISA project proposal documentation. We use it as an illustrative example so as to bring these issues 'alive' in a real world context. TTISA is a teacher training initiative and is run for a four year period in each of the sub Saharan African countries. Key TTISA programming staff see the fixed time frame as an *implicit* criterion for exit and there are no other explicit exit criteria discussed in the project documents. Within the initiative, expectations regarding sustainability are implicit and fulfilled in a number of ways (e.g. the TTISA initiative will result in the development of comprehensive teacher education plans for the participating country; the

initiative is country driven and responds to country needs and priorities; and it is aligned with other two core UNESCO initiatives: LIFE and EDUCAIDS).

There are also references to the appointment of a "full time country designated educationist to guide over four years for sustainability and ownership". National co-ordinators, who are employed for the duration of the programme and located within a government Ministry in each beneficiary Member State, are paid from the project budget during this period for their work.

The expectation of project stakeholders is that these coordinators will be responsible for Project implementation and for managing relationships across the different stakeholder during the life of the programme. It is *assumed* that since they are national representatives, they will stay on after the completion of the four year programme. There is also an implicit assumption that these individuals will be able to support activities aimed at accomplishing and expanding goals of the Programme after the initial four year period. However, there is no way in which this can be enforced programmatically, revealing a flaw in how sustainability is conceptualised within the design of the initiative.

From a monitoring and evaluation perspective, there are additional questions that remain unanswered including:

- how will the co-ordinator's role be sustained financially once the time frame is up;
- what are the determinants and indicators of ownership in the context of this initiative and how will progress against these be tracked;
- how will the coordinator's capacity and confidence to take on the catalyst and coordination role played by UNESCO be assessed;
- what is the incentive for these coordinators to continue after the initiative is completed; and
- how will the Ministry build in costs for these coordinators in sustaining the initiative over time.

Indicators of sustainability are required to enable progress towards post-programme sustainability to be monitored over time and to allow refinements to the iniaitive should local capability develop slower or faster than expected.

In another example of a project undertaken with the Government of Sierra Leone, titled "Project Proposal for the Trust Fund for Human Security", (refer box 3) the goal of sustainability is intended to be met by "*ensuring full involvement of all stakeholders*", and ensuring that "*priority is given to strengthening and building partnerships at all points and levels of the project*". However, the entire project is to be implemented and managed by an international consultant who will have full responsibility (for a twelve month period) for the overall project plan as well as coordination of the studies and reviews, developing materials and planning training for the various programmes and taking responsibility for accounting for all project outputs. While other individuals are involved (e.g. the national project coordinator, national experts or consultants), who are paid for their involvement in this activity, there is no explicit discussion as to whether there is a intended phase over to these individuals by the consultant. It is our belief that if this expectation was made clear, then one would need to monitor the extent to which these individuals were able to take on responsibility for the project.

Box 3: Project proposal for the Trust Fund for Human Security –
Support to Community Education Centres for Functional Literacy and
Life Skills in the Rural War-affected Districts
(For the Government of Sierra Leone)

Project Description – Community education Centres (CECs) and technical and Vocational Centres (TVCs) are Level 1 and Level 2 non formal institutions that run parallel to the formal Basic education (6 year primary and 3 year secondary) school structures. Through this project, 60 pilot integrated community education centres in 12 districts in Sierra Leone are expected to receive technical and financial support to improve the provision of functional literacy and vocational and life skills training. A National

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Standards and policy guideline is to be developed, training material and kits will be produced for an average of 120 learners in each of the 60 pilot centres. It is also expected that 2000 teachers and master crafts persons will be trained. A Steering Committee is to be established in each of the 12 districts comprising UNESCO Dakar Office, the Sierra Leone Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), the National Commission of UNESCO, and four representatives drawn from the teacher's college, the technical and vocational teachers association, employers of labour and women and children's bureau.

The sustainability or exit dimension – Our review of the proposed project document shows that there is no explicit aspiration regarding sustainability or exit built into the project. The only reference to sustainability appears in the section under implementation modalities with the following statement '*because sustainability of the project will depend on the participation of all interest groups, special attention will be given to ensuring the full involvement of the Stakeholders and the execution agency. UNESCO will ensure that priority is given to strengthening and building partnerships at all points and levels, of the project*.' However this is not reflected in the project activities, nor have resources been allocated to undertaking this in a systematic way.

From an exit and sustainability perspective, the design of this initiative suggests an expectation that the Steering Committee will act as de facto guardians of the project and will take over the responsibility for ensuring that the project continues after the two year period has passed. However, there is no explicit discussion in the project proposal as to how full involvement and ongoing participation of the stakeholders will be achieved; are they the right people to be involved, how will progress towards achieving this goal of handover be monitored; what specific activities will need to be undertaken to ensure that participation is achieved.

The example discussed above illustrate that sustainability appears to be implicit in the language and intent of projects. But unless sustainability and, therefore, exit is specifically planned for and progress towards its achievement monitored, the exit at the end of the four-year timeframe may end up jeopardising the results it intended to achieve. It is possible that both these projects are still in the early stages of development and that these issues will be addressed as further work gets underway. It is important that planning for exit occur as early as possible. Project documents should list both the activities that are needed to achieve the stated results of the project and the activities that are needed to achieve the sustainability goals of the initiative.

Recommendations

- Project proposals should outline an exit strategy that is consistent with the Project's theory of sustainability;
- Sustainability and exit strategy goals should be used to shape the way that expected results are set up and communicated;
- UNESCO needs to steer away from purely using results or impact measures as criteria for exit, as the level of impact desired may not be achievable in the time frames.

2.2.2 What are the international best practices in relation to exit and transition strategies?

The topic of exit or transition has gained significance for many international development organisations as well as donors owing to scarcity of resources, changing priorities, increased emphasis on emergency relief and a constantly increasing demand for different forms of assistance among member-states. Countries like Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands see the issue of exit in a broader context of development assistance and refer to exits as "effort to enhance 'internal' and 'external' aid effectiveness". These perceptions are reflected in their "concentration policies and principles where donor countries aim to improve the quality and effectiveness of their aid through either a

reduction in the number of partner countries and sectors they are engaged in or focus aid efforts around key priorities for aid assistance more generally e.g. Millennium Development Goals" (SIDA,2005). Within UNESCO, there is a recognition that concentrating UNESCO's work will help improve impact and produce greater synergies – in strategic, programmatic and geographic terms. Regardless of the drive for exit, there is a general push in international circles to consider the establishment of a transparent set of criteria for engagement, transition and disengagement from a given programme or activity.

Our reading of the literature in this field revealed that exit strategies are a relatively new concept in the development context and exit is most frequently discussed at a project level. A review of planning and evaluation documents undertaken as part of a USAID research (Roger and Macias, 2004) found that many programme documents addressed the issue of sustainability but far fewer explicitly spelled out an exit strategy. Similarly the Food Aid and Food Security Assessment (Bonnard et al., 2002) found that most food security development assistance programmes lacked a clearly defined exit strategy including benchmarks, action steps, a timeline and identification of key actors at each stage.

More recent work initiated by SIDA identifies principles and criteria for exit at a country, sector, and project level, and once completed, is expected to provide additional insights on the topic of exit and what constitutes a successful exit strategy. This work is being undertaken in collaboration with other partners and will therefore offer the recipient country perspective as well. However more general lessons can be drawn from international experiences and this section discusses some of the key learnings.

Factors that impact on success of exit and transition strategies

An exit strategy is a <u>planned approach</u> to ending funding and organisational support in a manner that is consistent with the objectives of the programme or project. The level of planning undertaken is a critical component of an exit strategy, as it recognises the huge impact exit can have on staff, people and the

country or community involved. Investing time and effort in planning exit can help minimise the negative effects of the withdrawal. International development agency staff interviewed in this research also accept the theory and principles underpinning planning for exit. However, they note that the practice is often quite different – in their experience, programmes or projects develop a constituency of vocal support within an organisation who tend to favour continuation rather than exit.. This creates a culture that inhibits planning for exit.

There are some circumstances when organisations do manage to exit successfully. Our interview with a staff member at UNICEF offered some insights as to the factors that contribute to the success or otherwise of an exit strategy and its implementation. These can be summarised under the following three categories:

- Project definition
- Project management
- Institutional culture and philosophy

Project definition

A well defined project with a clearly articulated theory of change/sustainability allows all partners to focus attention on the overarching outcomes and expected results, and the steps to be taken to achieve them. Building this clarity and shared understanding about project aims, goals and what constitutes success amongst programme partners is critical to the success of an exit strategy. It sets the parameters regarding when an intervention can end and defines this at the beginning of the programme, at the time of engagement, thereby minimising risk of partners being surprised as reflected in the following quotes:

"If the project results are defined clearly at the beginning and agreed by all the partners, then exit is a rationale that is based on a logic model of what it is that we are collectively pursuing"

"When we pilot a programme or a project, it is clear to everyone that it is a pilot; so once we can demonstrate the effectiveness of the programme, we will try and find richer donors who may want to take it to scale. We don't always have resources to take it to scale and so are very happy to hand it over to another agency, preferably government. In these circumstances, we are happy to exit."

Even in projects where the effects of an intervention are uncertain or unclear at the beginning, or where not intervening is not an option (e.g. humanitarian crisis), it should still be possible to articulate in broad terms the conditions upon which exit from the intervention will be considered.

A clearly defined intervention allows for questions about exit to be raised at the outset. It allows exploration of questions such as "is the intended aim complete withdrawal of resources regardless of sustainability"; "is withdrawal linked to building capacity of local organisations to take over the activity"; or "what outcomes from the programme does the organisation want to sustain when it withdraws". These questions need to be raised early to ensure that (a) the project definition is realistic, both in terms of timeframes and outcomes; and (b) the exit strategies are dynamic enough to take account of relevant factors.

Project Management

Project management processes can help monitor whether the implementation of the intervention has diverted from the project scope and enables any slippage or unexpected events to be considered in terms of the original aims and objectives of the project. Therefore, in order to ensure projects maintain focus, monitoring and evaluation data is often used to inform decision makers about the progress of projects. At this stage it is important to ensure that, in addition to progress towards project goals, monitoring data also looks at progress towards exit strategy goals.

Effective project management also includes thinking ahead to post-intervention. If an intervention is planned to continue after an organisation exits, then the exit strategy needs to include a funding strategy and/or a handover strategy so that capacity or capability of the organisation to take over the project can be assessed. This will allow the programme or project to develop its own identity which is separate from the donor organisation, thereby helping it to gain the support it needs to continue (The Cornerstone Consulting Group, 2002).

Institutional culture and philosophy

There are a number of political and human resource challenges that organisations have to manage to allow exit strategies to work. Issues such as projects and programmes developing a support constituency, programme staff developing a vested interest in continuing involvement, and linking "failure" of programme to personal accountability are just some of the factors that create a culture of continuation and anxiety about exit. One possible way to overcome these barriers is to develop a transparent set of criteria for exit and use monitoring and evaluation data to inform decisions about:

- what works

- what doesn't work

- what could be done better

UNICEF believes that they have been able to achieve moderate success in this regard owing to the positive cultural attitude fostered by encouraging staff to take risks when designing or developing new projects or solutions. In accepting the risk of failure, the organisation also accepts and values learning as a goal, thus creating an environment where RBM can take shape and steer UNICEF in the right direction.

"If we are a static Organisation or worried about our prestige or a risk averse Organisation or one which is punitive then RBM information will be hanging over our heads. If we hire rigid personalities or people who

define themselves by the technical skills or technical suits they wear, then their personal identify is linked to the success of the programme, so they will not accept failure".

2.2.3 How and in what ways can UNESCO effectively adopt best practice for designing and implementing exit and transition strategies?

Thinking about and formulating exit strategies is new for many UNESCO staff and there is a need to dedicate resources to training staff and providing guidance towards the development and design of exit strategies. Many staff that we interviewed found it difficult to conceive of how exit could be incorporated into UNESCO's work. They also found it difficult to differentiate between programme activities and *exit strategy activities*. Consequently, if UNESCO wants to implement exit and transition strategies so as to achieve its overarching objective of improved project management and planning practice, it is likely to be challenging and will require action across a range of fronts.

Regardless of the challenges posed in planning and implementing exit strategies within the current environment, it is incredibly valuable to do and offers a number of benefits and advantages to UNESCO:

- interventions are more likely to be sustainable;
- capacity will be built in the Member States and local communities; and
- resources will be freed for pursing other development priorities.

Harnessing these benefits requires a concerted effort at a number of levels in UNESCO to achieve changes in staff attitudes and current programming practices. Our analysis suggests a three pronged approach is necessary to achieve the desired outcome of effective and efficient use of resources through the planning and implementation of exit and transition strategies. Our approach is centred on achieving change at 3 levels viz. staff, project planning processes and the institutional culture and support. Through bringing about changes in current attitudes, practices and the wider UNESCO environment it is intended that an integrated and sustainable response will be developed. The following diagram presents this approach:
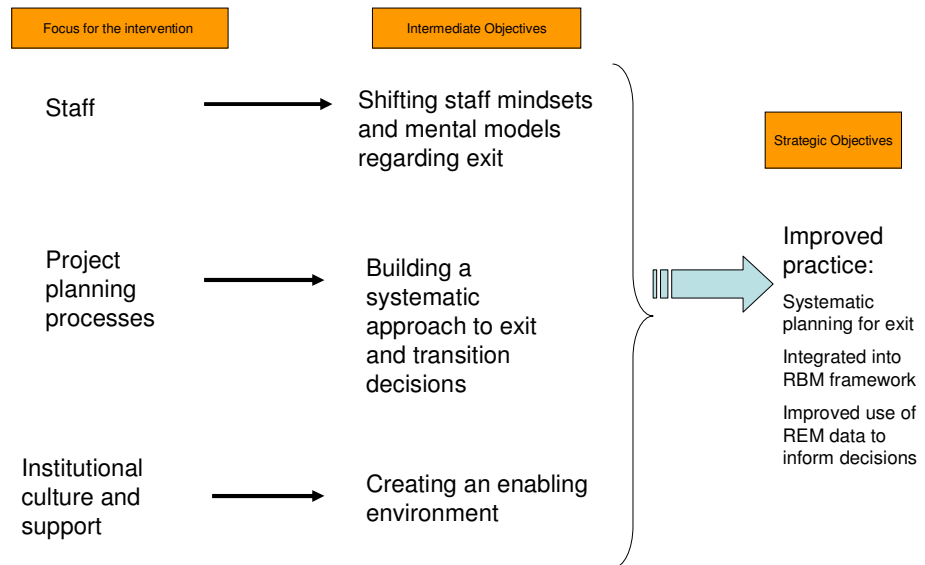
Achieving these intermediate objectives implies that a series of initiatives or building blocks are needed that cumulatively produce the desired outcomes. Thinking about how and in what ways UNESCO can achieve these objectives in a systematic way points us to three sets of initiatives in support of:

- improving staff awareness of and capacity to implement exit;
- integrating exit into programming approach and RBM framework; and
- promoting a culture of knowledge and learning within the Organisation.

The following diagram graphically depicts the relationships between the overarching objective for UNESCO, the three contributing objectives and the initiatives that need to be put in place:
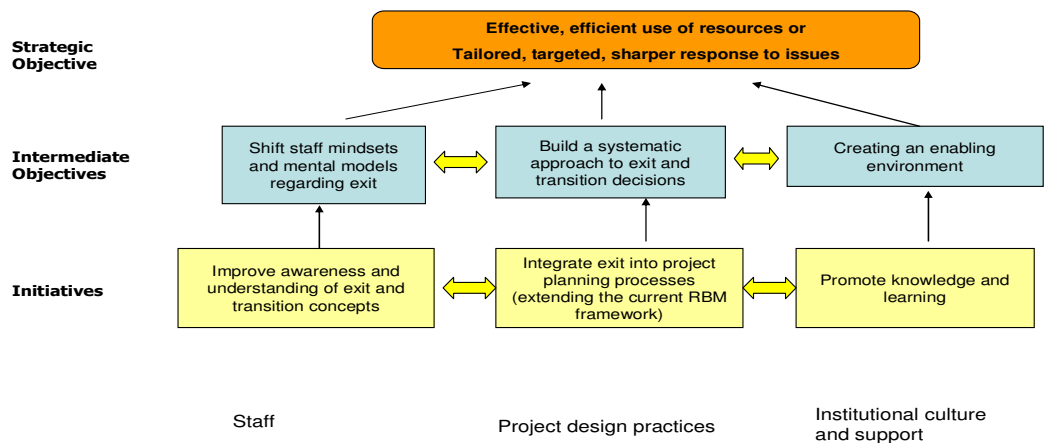
The following section discusses our rationale for suggesting these initiatives as possible pathways for driving design and implementation of exit and transition strategies within UNESCO.

Improve awareness and understanding of exit and transition amongst staff.

Currently there is no shared understanding within UNESCO as to the meaning of exit, the relevance of exit, the reasons why it should be considered as part of the programming cycle and the value it offers. There are some attitudinal barriers in accepting the role and value of exit amongst staff and these barriers need to be addressed before significant changes in practices can be realised. Staff need to realise that even capacity building projects intuitively suggest a foreseen end – *capacity will be built* (Human Development Report, UNDP, 1990).

Addressing these barriers is critical if UNESCO wishes programming staff across the Organisation to actively plan and implement exit in their work. A positive impact of this research is that it raised awareness of the staff interviewed as evidenced in the following quotation:

> *"Now that we have thought about it and discussed it in such detail, maybe we will consider it as part of our project development phase"*

> *"There is a lot of internal opposition as well that needs to be dealt with. You will have colleagues or maybe even units or divisions that have dedicated their whole professional career to a certain programme. They will certainly oppose you when you start talking exit.*

This positive result suggests that a large outreach programme would be more effective in raising overall levels of awareness of exit.

Clearly, thinking about and formulating exit strategies will be new for many staff and this highlights the need to dedicate resources to training staff,

developing guidelines that help staff incorporate exit planning in their work. Further, exit is a term with a number of definitions and this can cause misunderstanding. Therefore clear and effective communication that highlights the relevance and importance of the concept, particularly if it is built into speeches by the Director General or the ADG, and developing a taxonomy that clarifies the different types of exit and how exit can be thought about at different levels of programming will go a long way towards creating a shared sense of meaning.

Recommendation

Increasing salience and awareness of exit will require specific activities such as:

- Staff seminars and workshops;
- Integrate in DG and ADG speeches thereby mandating it from the above;
- Publishing case study stories of staff experiences and challenges in planning and implementing exit.

Integrate exit into project planning cycles and thereby extending the RBM framework

UNESCO staff use the planning framework recommended in the Results Based Programming, Management and Monitoring guide, which assists staff to plan and clarify projects and communicate those plans to internal and external stakeholders. A project plan is supposed to provide a useful summary of the following elements – why the project is important, what is intended to change as a result of the intervention, and strategies and modalities likely to be used to give action to the expected results. Project planning represents an ideal opportunity to integrate thinking about exit into project design and encourage staff to articulate the nature and type of exit strategy that is likely to work in the project context.

Incorporating exit into project planning cycles requires staff to move beyond thinking of an exit strategy as an 'end game' strategy and instead see it as a strategy for ensuring that appropriate steps are taken early in the project planning cycle – in the preparation phase and during implementation – towards ensuring that UNESCO will be able to exit in future without jeopardising the sustainability of what has been achieved. Including exit thinking and objectives in the logic frameworks is therefore an integral part of project proposals.

Following this practice allows staff to see an exit strategy in a very broad sense, as a strategy for designing, implementing and ending external support in a manner consistent with the objective of producing sustainable development outcomes. It also helps to ensure a focus on exit from the early stages in the project development cycle. All partners are then aware of the conditions under which exit will occur and there are no surprises when the time comes to put strategy into practice. Communication is central to an effective exit strategy – there is strong need to communicate clearly with all stakeholders, including beneficiaries and partners about plans for exit and the factors that are driving current thinking and planning for exit. This allows everyone to 'own' the decision and invites suggestions and ideas about who can take over the project and ensure that it continues.

Integrating exit into the current project planning processes requires consideration of two additional but related factors:

- Maintaining focus on sustainability or exit strategy (where relevant), at the project proposal stage;
- Expanding the monitoring and evaluation processes to track progress towards exit goals.

<u>Maintaining focus on sustainability, where relevant, at the project proposal stage</u>

In project proposals that state sustainability through capacity building as an explicit objective, it would be useful to build on the current logic framework

approach and encourage staff to also articulate the theory of sustainability – how will the initiative be sustained, what specific activities need to be undertaken to meet the sustainability goals of the programme/project, and how progress towards capacity building will be monitored. Evaluators can help with this process. Articulating a theory of sustainability can help strengthen the ability of donors, programming staff and other participants to make choices that will increase the likelihood that an initiative will be or can be sustained. If the issue of sustainability is recognised as being important by UNESCO, then the different aspects of sustainability that may be relevant to the project must also be considered:

- Sustainability of participation (of partner organisations, of NGO's, project beneficiaries);
- Sustainability of capacity (pre-existing capacity and those built during the project and confidence to continue after the project has formally ended);
- Sustainability of the outcomes that were achieved for the beneficiaries during the project;
- Sustainability of activities.

Often the term sustainability is used to refer to one or two of these aspects and others are taken for granted. We suggest that, where relevant, sustainability and the specific aspects of sustainability should be stated as an explicit objective and activities undertaken within the project to fulfil this objective be evaluated.

For instance, the Capacity Building for Education For All initiative in Sierra Leone states 'ownership and participation' of key partners as a 'sustainability' goal. However, there is no discussion with regards to how this will be achieved. Maintaining focus on sustainability requires the articulation of a sustainability theory and stating how 'ownership and participation' will be achieved. To build shared ownership of the project goals from early on, further work is needed in terms of gaining commitment from partners to continue the project after the project timeframe is completed; gathering evidence of sufficient capacity (management, personnel and financial) to keep activity

running in the long-term; and identifying the activities and tasks that would help ensure ongoing participation from key players. All this would need to be initaited within the project lifecycle and not thought of at the end of the project.

Requiring (and encouraging) staff to outline a plan for exit and sustainability, and building this into the design of the programme from the beginning, is at the core of good practice. This would require systematic examination of the following questions:

- How is the issue of exit and sustainability integrated into the project design?
- What is regarded as success in this project from an exit perspective?
- What are the different exit activities that need to be undertaken?
- Who will undertake them?
- When in the project cycle will these be undertaken?
- How will they be monitored?
- Is there an exit strategy timeline?

Expanding monitoring and evaluation processes

Evaluation and monitoring are integral yet distinct parts of project planning and implementation. While they serve different purposes, they are critical tools for tracking progress towards intended goals. Integrating exit thinking into project planning requires that monitoring data also captures information regarding progress towards exit (e.g. measuring whether sustainable capacity is being built) to help make informed decisions about continuation or discontinuation of a project activity. Project proposals must demonstrate how progress towards exit is to be tracked, describe the measures that would be used, and how changes in capacity to take over the project will be monitored.

> **Recommendation**
>
> Improving the links between project design and planning for sustainability requires:
>
> - Ongoing monitoring of project implementation, as well as progress towards milestones and expected results;
> - Expected results should include indicators of progress towards exit and sustainability goals;
> - Evaluation to assess the relevance and coherence of exit decisions and strategies and the effectiveness of their implementation; and
> - For significant projects/programmes, evaluation of impacts of withdrawal on project sustainability some years after completion.

Promote a culture of knowledge and learning

Currently, there appears to be no institutional forum or shared space (other than immediate physical space) through which programming staff in Headquarters and the field can connect with, discuss, challenge or draw on one another's experiences. Nor is there effective and comprehensive training and induction programmes that allow staff to develop a shared sense of purpose, thereby countering the tendency for a sectoral and silo mentality. The following quotations capture the mood and frustration that staff experience in their day to day work and the lack of support from the Organisation:

"Currently there is no institutional support for staff. There is no place where we can find information about UNESCO experiences in the past, where has it done well, where has it not done so well. Maybe the education reforms will cover this off and make information more easily available for all. I would really like a more updated intranet system with a chat function, where we can pose questions and access the experience of others in UNESCO, communicate more with the field office so we can support them in the conception stage of projects and ideas. In this way,

the project is not the domain of one person, but is shared and ownership is UNESCO wide."

"This is an Organisation with no memory. There is not much transmission of knowledge between the different generations within UNESCO".

"Within UNESCO, we have education people; we have science people, culture people. I think we must learn to operate in a more team, cross cutting way. Because when we work across disciplines, you get a new view of things. If you exchange your views and experiences with people from other areas, then you get inspired to do new things."

"Also in UNESCO there is a hierarchy, and maybe that is one of the reasons why people are afraid of doing new things. When I came to UNESCO many people told me that you cant even talk to someone who has a grade higher than you, and it is true. This is not there in UNDP. So if you can't talk to people at a higher level, then how can you progress your thinking, where are you going to learn from. And more importantly how will the people higher up know what is happening on the ground?"

'Whatever I know is because of my background, UNESCO didn't teach me anything. I had one week briefing where I was introduced to a lot of people and given some information. Then I was thrown in the sea like that. Whatever I have learnt is through trial and error and I am not the only one. Many of us are in the same situation. For example we are given a template for filling in our project specifications, but nothing that makes us think critically about the whole philosophy behind the project, why we are doing this, what do we want to achieve etc".

UNESCO staff interviewed in this research viewed this as a significant disadvantage and expressed a strong need for establishing mechanisms for improving capability and for sharing knowledge and experience. Promoting discussion and debate with other practitioners could help staff to continually

learn and expand their capacity to contribute to the results and vision of the Organisation. Staff too believe it would contribute to building a body of knowledge, as well as an institutional memory that is based on appropriate *practices*. In this scenario, the concept of building communities of practice becomes relevant owing to its focus on promoting learning across groups:

> "The concept of a community of practice refers to the process of social learning that occurs when people who have a common interest in some subject or problem collaborate over an extended period to share ideas, find solutions and build innovations in their practice" (Wenger, 1998)

There are other theoretical frameworks that also discuss the value of creating an environment of collaborative learning that may be useful to explore, such as learning organisation (Senge, 1990; Kerka 1995); social capital (Putnam 2000); and dialogue (Gadamer, 1979). However, examining these in detail is outside the scope of this research.

Our rationale for suggesting these frameworks for consideration by UNESCO is to encourage the promotion of practice change amongst staff by utilising and drawing on the significant intellectual capital within UNESCO. In order to successfully implement exit strategies across UNESCO programmes and projects, there is need for changing current mental models and practices of staff. Practice change can be affected in a number of ways including by providing opportunities for staff to collectively reflect on their current practice, access to guidelines and tools to enable them to implement new practices, access to mentoring and peer reviewing services, promoting more cross team work, and creating opportunities for personal, professional development. Implementing these initiatives requires the Organisation to consider different human resource policies and create alternative structures within the wider system so that staff can be better supported in their pursuit of best practice.

Recommendation

UNESCO needs to reflect on how its Organisational culture influences the practices of staff and should promote the use of knowledge and learning in a strategic manner across the different parts of the Organisation with the aim of improving those practices. Some specific actions that should be considered include:

- Setting up learning forums to promote experiential and practice based learning;
- Mentoring and peer reviewing strategies;
- On line, virtual discussion group for UNESCO staff to enable them to share and debate issues relating to programming work;
- Dissemination of stories about practice;
- Encourage staff to move across the different sectors within UNESCO, so as to extend their understanding of issues and practices across UNESCO;
- Encourage more cross team work;
- Explore frameworks for building a learning organisation.

The three pathways for change combined with the recommendations developed in this report can be depicted in the following way to show the interconnections between the different activities:

		Effective, efficient use of resources or **Tailored, targeted, sharper response to issues**		
Strategic Objective				

Intermediate Objectives

Shift staff mindsets and mental models regarding exit	⟷	Build a systematic approach to exit and transition decisions	⟷	Creating a learning organisation

Initiatives

Improve awareness and understanding of exit and transition concepts	Integrate exit into project planning processes (extending the current RBM framework	Promote knowledge and learning

Activities

• Staff seminars and workshops; • Developing exit taxonomy; • Integrate in DG and ADG speeches thereby mandating it from the above; • Publishing case study stories of staff experiences and challenges in planning and implementing exit	• Guidelines and tools to help build exit into project documentation; • Develop sustainability plans; • Expand monitoring frameworks to include data on exit and track progress towards exit and sustainability goals; • Undertake exit evaluations; • Review RBM training and practices	• Set up learning forums; • Mentoring and peer reviewing strategies; • Intranet strategies; • Use of stories on practice for wider dissemination; • Mobility across sectors; • Cross team work; • Explore frameworks for building a learning organisation

Staff | Project design practices | Institutional culture and support

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CHAPTER 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS TO UNESCO

Recommendations

Staff

Thinking about and formulating exit strategies is new for many staff and this highlights the need to dedicate resources to educating and training staff about these concepts.

Meaning and relevance of exit and transition

- UNESCO should focus on building a shared language and meaning around exit and transition amongst staff;
- UNESCO should ensure that processes used for developing strategies for exit are collaborative and participative;
- A clear communications strategy, combining advocacy with inquiry, should be designed to educate staff about value of exit;
- Take steps to delink negative results from personal accountability;
- Encourage staff to develop a theory of change model that focuses attention on the results to be achieved.
- Undertake activities to increase awareness such as:
  - Staff seminars and workshops;
  - Integrate in DG and ADG speeches;
  - Publish case study stories of staff experiences in planning and implementing exit.

Project planning processes

Project documentation

Integrating exit thinking into project planning cycles requires UNESCO to modify its current project design processes so as to ensure planning for exit happens at the beginning of the project planning cycle. Specifically,

- Project proposals should include exit thinking and objectives when articulating the logic framework approach for the intervention;

- Planning for exit must occur at the entry or engagement stage;

- All stakeholders and partners must be involved when setting objectives and expectations regarding project exit;

- A clear but flexible timeline for exit linked to project funding cycle should be established;

- Project planning documents should include discussion of:
  - Expectations regarding exit and transition;
  - Specific criteria for exit;
  - Measurable expectations towards sustainability goals;
  - Responsibilities for taking over activities and ongoing assessment of their willingness to continue the programme; and
  - How costs of activities associated with exit will be met.

Linking exit and sustainability

Project proposals that state sustainability as an explicit objective should also specify how the initiative will be sustained. This can be achieved in the following way:

- Project proposals should outline exit strategy that is consistent with the theory of sustainability;

- Sustainability and exit strategy goals must be used to shape the way expected results are set up;

- UNESCO should steer away from purely using results or impact measures as criteria for exit as the level of impact desired may not be achievable in the time frames;

- Ongoing monitoring of project implementation as well as progress towards milestones and results including those that measure progress towards exit and sustainability goals;

- Evaluation to assess the relevance and coherence of exit decisions and strategies and how they were implemented; and

- Evaluation of impact of withdrawal on project sustainability some years after UNESCO has withdrawn.

Institutional culture and support

UNESCO needs to reflect on the Organisational culture and promote the use of knowledge and learning in a strategic manner across the different parts of the Organisation. Some specific actions that must be considered include:

- Setting up learning forums to promote experiential and practice based learning;

- Mentoring and peer reviewing strategies;

- On line, virtual discussion group limited to UNESCO staff enabling them to share and debate issues relating to programming work;

- Use of stories on good practice for wider dissemination;

- Encourage staff to move across the different sectors within UNESCO so as to extend their understanding of issues and practices across the breadth of the Organisation;

- Encourage more cross team work; and

- Explore frameworks for building a learning organisation.

Evaluation of UNESCO's approaches to modifying programme
parameters and sustainability (Evaluation Plan, 33C/5)
Working Title: Evaluation of Exit and Transition Strategies

BACKGROUND

1. For any intergovernmental organisation one of the major challenges is to establish a clear set of criteria for engagement, and subsequently transition and disengagement from a given programme or activity. Scarcity of resources, the political environment, new priorities, emergencies, and a constantly increasing demand for different forms of assistance among member-states has triggered governing bodies of international organisations as well as major donors, to request the establishment of a transparent set of criteria for engagement, transition and disengagement from a given programme or activity. This, in particular, applies to certain programmes which have been running for a number of decades, and for which the initial rationale, such as the Coupons Programme in UNESCO, has become obsolete. There have been calls from the Executive Board for all programmes to have "sunset clauses" and for the Director-General to identify programmes which should be discontinued, thereby enabling UNESCO to focus on a smaller number of high priorities. ADG/ED has recently referred to the need to put an end to the "bad habit" UNESCO has acquired in starting new initiatives without properly ending or discontinuing less successful ones.

2. In principle an intergovernmental organisation rarely introduces a programme or activity with the intention of delivering it indefinitely (this, in particular, applies to extra-budgetary projects[3]). Programmes regularly change in focus and some inevitably come to an end. A programme might

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[3] All of UNESCO's Agreements with Private Sector Partners contain sunset clauses.

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end when it has proven to be sustainable and/or that the critical mass of capacities was built[4], but it may come to a close for a host of reasons (financial resources, political reasons, etc). We should also be prepared to end projects and programmes that are not successful. These variations in programme characteristics and consequent transition strategies are strategic choices an organisation must make. In this context, different criteria can be established. For example, an NGO or member-state agency takes over the programme, or a certain benchmark (X% of people trained etc.) has been reached, or the programme gets merged with a similar one, and so forth. Those criteria often represent an integral part of Results Based Management practices and the achievement of certain results is often manifested in the transition strategy which is put in place.

3. This is particularly important to an agency such as UNESCO in which the demand for its services is unlimited and due to scarce resources, both regular budget and extra budgetary, the spectrum of activities has limits and mobilizing and migrating resources from one programme to a new one is a reality. In this context, and in order to minimize or eliminate the risk of permanent tying up of resources, UNESCO must develop a clear set of criteria for gradual and smart transition and disengagement from certain activities in order to free up resources and mobilize them elsewhere as priorities dictate.[5]

4. In principle, and for the purposes of this exercise, a transition strategy can be defined as a sequence of steps leading to the gradual disengagement from an activity, project, programme and/or geographic region. This transition can include the termination of support, e.g. funds, material goods, human resources, technical assistance, etc. There are two main approaches to transition: *phase over* (transfer of responsibilities for activities to another entity – e.g. local institutions or communities); or *phase out* (withdrawal of inputs without making explicit arrangements for the inputs/activities to be continued by another entity). *Phase down*

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[4] The planned evaluation of Capacity Building (33C/5) will assess the effectiveness of UNESCO's capacity building initiatives.

(gradual reduction of program inputs) is the preliminary stage to both *phase over* and *phase out*.[6] Most often an explicit and coherent transition strategy, planned from the outset, would include designing, implementing, and ending a programme in a manner consistent with the objective of producing sustainable effects of an intervention.

5. The diagram on the following page captures possible scenarios which different transition strategies may hypothetically lead to, i.e. certain programmes (in this example marked Z) may remain static, or dynamic (such as X), or gradually decreased (such as Y) to the point of closure.
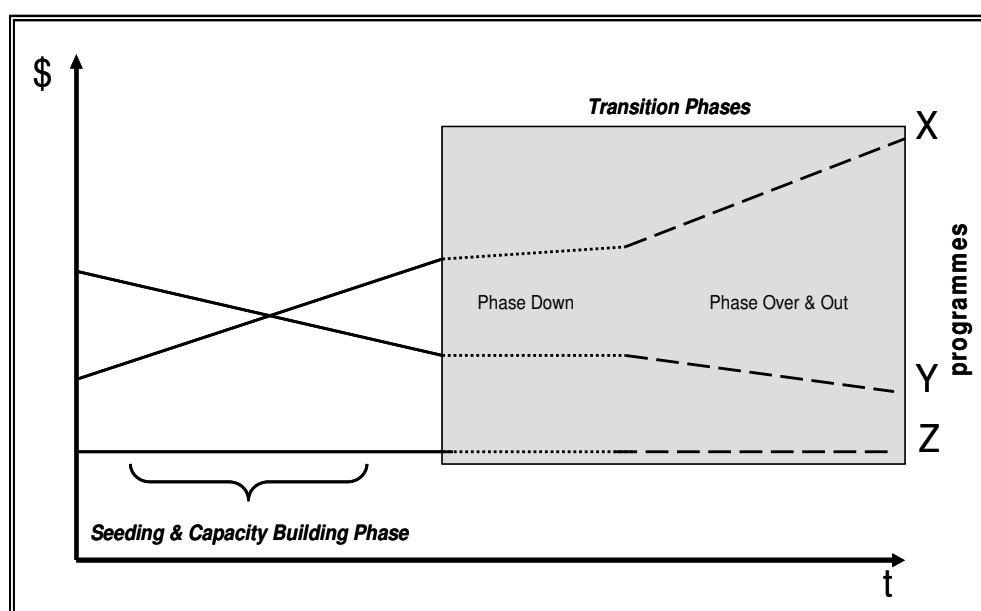
6. At present it is not clear how or if transition strategies are defined within UNESCO, and to what extent planning for transition is a part of the UNESCO programme and project management cycle(s). UNESCO does not have a lot of experience regarding explicit planning for transition,[7] and several evaluations of UNESCO programmes/projects/activities have pointed to the need to develop transition strategies.[8]

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[5] This is very much consistent with UNESCO's intention to engage in the role of seed funder.

[6] Levinger, Beryl and Jean McLeod. Hello, I Must Be Going: Ensuring Quality Services and Sustainable Benefits through Well-Designed Exit Strategies. Newton, Massachusetts: Education Development Center, Inc., Center for Organizational Learning and Development (COLAD), 2002.

[7] This is based on internet/intranet research and informal input from different stakeholders within UNESCO.

7. In addition, transition strategies[9] are high up on the international agenda, both within development agencies (bilateral and non-governmental) and within the UN family.[10] There might be several reasons why organisations develop transition strategies. One major reason is the need to demonstrate an efficient and effective use of resources which requires mobility in their use. Priorities change and all organisations have to demonstrate how resources can be used most effectively. In addition, a shared and known set of objective criteria for transition increases the credibility and accountability of organisations, and makes decisions more transparent. For example, if the beneficiaries of a specific UNESCO intervention knew, based on a set of shared objective criteria, that UNESCO would only disengage when objectives where achieved or if the project failed and not because of other reasons, this could both increase donors and beneficiaries trust in UNESCO and make the transition process transparent and more predictable to them. Such criteria can also be applied to a stocktake of existing programmes and projects to identify those which could be subject to transition strategies.

EVALUATION PURPOSE

8. This evaluation is planned in the evaluation plan in the UNESCO Approved Programme and Budget for 2006 – 2007 (33C/5). The evaluation will address approaches undertaken by UNESCO to modify and improve programme characteristics including the establishment and application of criteria for transition strategies, fine-tuning and ensuring the sustainability of programmes.

9. Programme characteristics may be defined as UNESCO support of a programme/ project/activity, e.g. funds, material goods, human resources, technical assistance, etc. This evaluation will focus on UNESCO

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[8] See 164 EX The Environment and Development in Coastal and Small Islands (CSI), 164 EX UNESCO Brazil, and 165 EX The Division for Freedom of Expression, Democracy and Peace.

[9] Related terms used, which are not necessarily synonyms, are graduate strategies and sustainability strategies.

[10] E.g. OCHA is currently undertaking a review of its exit strategies and Denmark (through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Norway (Norad), and Sweden (Sida) have agreed to jointly evaluate strategies for the phasing out and ending of development assistance at country, sector and programme levels.

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approaches or criteria used to alter such programme characteristics throughout the programme management cycle and finally to disengage from (phase over or phase out) and - whenever relevant - ensure sustainability of these programmes/projects/activities. That is to say, this evaluation will focus on UNESCO's implicit or explicit transition strategies.

10. Since UNESCO does not have a lot of experience in planning for transition or an explicitly formulated transition policy, the evaluation will comprise of the following elements:

   • undertake a stocktake of existing UNESCO implicit or explicit policies and practices vis-à-vis transition strategies

   • examine the effectiveness of existing approaches to transition strategies

   • identify key gaps and propose a framework/guidelines/approaches to transition strategies

11. A key outcome of the evaluation would be to provide UNESCO staff, and any UNESCO implementing partners, with practical guidance on how to address transition and sustainability issues more explicitly and effectively throughout the programme/project management cycle. The framework developed should be used to identify existing projects/programmes which are ripe for transition strategies.

12. By developing a more coherent approach to programmes for transition at UNESCO, another outcome will be the more efficient and effective use of resources within the Organisation and secure the sustainability of programmes and high levels of mobility of UNESCO resources.

EVALUATION SCOPE

13. The evaluation should identify a sample of programmes/activities/projects that UNESCO has recently transitioned and/or disengaged from, as well as

implicit and explicit policies/practices used for disengagement at HQ and Field Office levels. It will also identify the scope to apply the framework/guidelines proposed to a review of existing projects and programmes to identify those that should be subject to transition strategies.

14. The following evaluation questions are to be answered by the evaluation:[11]

Stocktake of existing UNESCO policies and practices:

- What are the current implicit or explicit policies and practices in UNESCO vis-à-vis transition strategies?[12]
- Are they an integral part of the project management cycle(s)?
- Examples of most recent transition and/or disengagements at HQ and Field Offices levels.

Examining the effectiveness of existing approaches to transition, and identifying key gaps:

- At the planning stage of the programme:
    - Was there any form of transition strategy developed, e.g. was there an expected timeframe of the programme/project/activity? Was this explicit and agreed upon by the relevant stakeholders?
    - Was any criteria established (e.g. performance indicators) for what was expected to be achieved (expected results/objectives /goals), hence an implicit or explicit transition point?
    - Was any specific criteria established for the eventual transition – e.g. achievements of results/objectives/goals or ineffectiveness of programme/project/activity delivery?
    - If transition strategies were not formulated before/at entry point, what were the reasons for this? Were there special features about the programme/project/activity that made it not possible or desirable to formulate a transition strategy? If so, what features?

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[11] The list given is indicative, not exhaustive. The evaluators will have to consider additional evaluation questions where they deem it necessary.
[12] This includes both programmes/activities funded from the regular budget and extra-budgetary sources.

- During the delivery of the programme:

    - Was the initial expected timeframe for the programme/project/ activity being followed?

    - If the timeframe was revised during the programme/project/activity delivery, what are the reasons for this (e.g. result of experience, changing conditions etc.)?

    - Were there any systems to monitor performance against any criteria for transition, and how effectively did UNESCO act on such performance-criteria relationships? (Also relevant at the point of transition.)

- At the point of transition:

    - What were the key reasons for the actual transition? How was the transition decided?

    - Was the transition a result of a previously established set of criteria or a transition strategy?

    - Did extra-budgetary resources affect the decision to transition? If so, how?

    - How was the transition communicated? What kind of dialogue with partners and beneficiaries was facilitated?

- Post-transition – sustainability and organisational learning:

    - Was there any follow-up of the consequences of the transition decision (e.g. negative or positive impact of the transition)? Have relevant activities continued (possibly modified) to serve the goals/ objectives of the programme/project/activity? What were the key factors affecting the sustainability of the programme/project/ activity? Were there any provisions that could be taken to increase the likelihood that interventions will be sustainable in the long run? If so, what provisions?

    - How does UNESCO get feedback on experiences from previous transitions into the development of policy/principles?

- UNESCO compared to other UN and development assistance agencies:
  - What is to be considered "good practice" within the UN and development assistance agencies with regard to transition strategies?
  - How well does UNESCO practice compare to such "good practices"?
  - What lessons can UNESCO learn?

Development of framework/guidelines/approaches to a programme for transition at UNESCO:

- When, and for what level of programming, is a transition strategy relevant, and why?
- What should trigger transition (such as a hierarchical set of criteria)?[13]
- How can planning for transition be more effectively integrated into the UNESCO programme and project management cycle?
- How can UNESCO secure credible commitment to an established transition strategy and alter any perverse incentives that might be created by programming for transition (e.g. incentives to not achieve objectives since it will lead to the termination of support)?

Advice on applying the framework/guidelines/approaches:

- The evaluation will demonstrate how the framework etc. developed can be applied to identify existing projects and programmes which are ripe for transition strategies.

EVALUATION METHODS

15. The evaluation process will require a combination of multiple and complementary evaluative concepts. Building on these Terms of Reference,

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[13] Such criteria might i.a. be organizational wide, sector specific, and/or on country level.

the evaluators should elaborate their overall approach and methodology. The evaluation methods will include:

- Document reviews, preparatory-study and analysis
- Interviews (face-to-face and by telephone) with stakeholders (both within all the sectors and central services at HQ, e.g. BSP, BFC etc., and the field network)
- Case studies of 3 big UNESCO FOs, Bangkok, Dakar and Brasilia
- Interviews (face-to-face and by telephone) with other UN agencies and development assistance agencies

16. The evaluation team will need to start by conducting a preparatory study, including a thorough desk-review and conducting some initial interviews with key stakeholders to refine and complete the scope of the ToR and the question design matrix.

17. During the interview phase the evaluators will have to meet with a range of people from different sectors to investigate the existence/non-existence of transition strategies in UNESCO and identify a sample of the programme/project/activities from which UNESCO has disengaged.

18. During the implementation phase the evaluators will assess the effectiveness of UNESCO's transition strategies. The evaluation will provide a framework or set of guidelines/ approaches/principles to the programme for transition at UNESCO (as an output of the evaluation) and also identify existing projects/programmes which are now ripe for transition strategies.

PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND TIME SCHEDULE

19. The evaluation is to be conducted by a team of external evaluators. To be able to conduct a sufficient number of interviews during the evaluation, the team should consist of 2-3 people. An approach on how to constructively

involve the relevant stakeholders, especially the BSP, should be developed by the team before embarking on the evaluation.

20. Deliverables and schedule:

- Preparatory study (including a thorough desk-review and initial interviews) conducted to refine and complete the scope of the ToR, develop an interview list and complete the question design matrix (annex 1): first two weeks in June, 2006.

- Data collection (interviews and field visits) and analysis: June and July 2006.

- First draft evaluation report (including a framework/guideline/ approach to transition strategy in UNESCO):15th of July 2006.

- Final evaluation report: 21 July 2006.

APPENDIX 2: GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING EXIT STRATEGIES

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES

These guidelines are aimed at enabling UNESCO programming staff to build upon their current understanding and practice in relation to exit strategies. They have been developed using information gathered from a number of sources including a review of current literature on exit strategies, interviews with UNESCO field staff, interviews with other development agencies and a review of UNESCO field documents to examine current practices with regard to exit. However, the guidelines alone cannot ensure that changes in practice are achieved. They work alongside other UNESCO initiatives, as recommended in the report, to collectively bring about the desired changes.

RATIONALE FOR THE GUIDELINES

The development of these guidelines is in response to the observation of diversity in practices within UNESCO in relation to planning for and implementing exit strategies. The concepts of exit and exit strategies are new for many staff and there has been an expressed need for training, tools, guidelines and resource materials by staff. These guidelines offer a pathway to help staff navigate this complex and new territory by setting out the relevant information in two parts:

Part A is aimed at building the knowledge base regarding key concepts, explains why exit strategies may be relevant to UNESCO, and discusses criteria for exit and some exit approaches.

Part B is aimed at using this knowledge base and providing guidance for applying it in the context of programming work.

PART A

UNDERSTANDING EXITS

This part of the guidelines covers the following topics:

➢ **What is an Exit Strategy?**
➢ **Why Exit Strategy?**
➢ **Criteria for exit**
➢ **Principles that underpin development of an exit strategy**
➢ **Three approaches Exit Strategy**

WHAT IS AN EXIT STRATEGY?

An exit strategy is a <u>planned</u> approach to ending UNESCO support and subsequently ending the intervention or passing over the responsibility for the intervention to a local partner. It is expected that interventions with a focus on sustainability would plan for exit in a systematic and integrated way so as to ensure that exit is not an add on but an intrinsic part of the project planning cycle. A well articulated exit strategy would require consideration of the following questions:

- *What does UNESCO want to achieve?*
- *What will happen when these goals have been reached?*
- *Will UNESCO have a role once gaols have been attained?*
- *Is there an expectation that the project will be continued? Who has this expectation? Is it shared by all stakeholders and project partners?*
- *Who is likely to continue the project?*
- *What will determine decisions regarding continuation?*

These aspects are covered in more detail in Part B of these guidelines.

In the literature on exit and exit strategies there are a number of elements identified as being important when developing an exit strategy. They are:

Is there a generic exit strategy? No. There is no such thing as a universal exit strategy; just as each project is unique, so are their corresponding exit strategies.	➢ Identification of approaches to be used for different program components; ➢ Specific criteria for exit; ➢ Measurable benchmarks for assessing progress toward meeting the criteria; ➢ A time line, recognizing flexibility may be required; ➢ Identification of action steps to reach the stated benchmarks and identification of parties responsible for taking these steps; ➢ Mechanisms for periodic assessment of progress toward exit and for possible modification of the exit plan (Rogers and Macias, 2004).

An exit strategy is not a single event, rather it is a process of clarifying what work needs to be done, why, and when is it appropriate to stop. An Exit Strategy signals the intent of UNESCO to reduce its involvement as Member States and other partners take on the responsibility for continuing the project or activity. Therefore, it is a process aimed at making explicit what are often implicit assumptions and behaviours regarding the end of the programme or project. Explicit articulation of intent regarding withdrawal of support benefits all groups involved with the activity: the stakeholders, clients, and project staff.

WHY EXIT STRATEGIES?

Exit strategies have increasingly become incorporated into the planning of interventions by donor agencies. The primary driver for this change in practice has been increased demand by Member States coupled with reduced levels of funding. Donor organisations are being asked to use their resources more strategically, focus on fewer activities and be more effective. Exit strategies are one method to achieve these results. An Exit Strategy encourages early

consideration of how a project or programme of activities will be sustainable. Exit strategies raise the question about what role, and subsequent actions, UNESCO should take to ensure interventions are sustainable.

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Remember!

The purpose of an exit strategy is not to hasten exit – exit is not valuable for its own sake – but to improve the change of sustainable outcomes for the programme.

Source: World Food Programme (Lessons learned from exiting emergencies)

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Exit strategies when planned in a systematic and collaborative way in advance of a project end *ensure better programme outcomes and encourage commitment to programme sustainability by all partners*. In addition, good exit strategies can help resolve tension that may arise between the withdrawal of assistance and commitment to achieve programme outcomes[14]. Having an exit strategy also provides clarity, focuses programming work and enables better planning of available human and financial resources. Finally, it gets people to think about the end at the beginning. It takes the issue out of the realm of the personal and makes it a legitimate conversation to have with key partners.

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From UNESCO's perspective, developing exit strategies are useful in that it gives the Organisation a clearer picture of its activities and enables stronger alignment of project activities to UNESCO's overall strategy. It also makes it easier for UNESCO staff to initiate conversations about the longer term sustainability of the intervention and clarifies the different expectations of partners early. This may help UNESCO ameliorate some of the pressure from Member States as the discussions require a broader range of parties beyond UNESCO and Member States. Contextualising these discussions in an exit strategy framework also takes the issue out of the realm of the personal and makes it a very legitimate conversation to have – people usually don't want to get rid of projects because they have been associated with it for years, they are perceived as the experts in the area and have not developed expertise in any other area.

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[14] Beryl Levinger and Jean McLeod, "Hello, I must be going: Ensuring Quality Services and Sustainable Benefits through well-designed Exit Strategies," Educational development center, Inc., Ocotber 2002.

Perhaps the most important impact of exit strategies is that they signal UNESCO's commitment to sustainable development. Initiating discussions about exit explicitly conveys UNESCO"s expectations to transfer ownership and responsibilities at the end of the project and to do so collaboratively. This can be empowering for the beneficiary countries.

CRITERIA FOR EXIT

Criteria for exit can vary overtime and the criteria considered at the beginning of the project could change as the project is implemented. For instance, if a two year timeframe is set as the criteria, and if during the course of the project, a war breaks out, then it is difficult to see the project through to its original timeframe. Therefore, flexibility is the central principle that that must be incorporated in any decisions regarding exit.

Our reading of the literature and interviews with staff within UNESCO indicates that the reasons for exit can be grouped into four broad categories:

➢ Project achieved results – although it is difficult to achieve the desired result within a given timeframe, good quality indicators can show whether the programme is on track to achieve the impact. This can be used to determine decisions regarding exit.

➢ Project did not achieve results – using robust data, it is possible to make some judgements about whether the programme achieved the desired impact. If it didn't, then it is a useful criterion to use for exit. Lessons learnt from this experience could inform future project design and

thinking. This will save time and costs as there is little point in investing scarce resources in interventions that do not hit the mark.

➢ Donor reprioritisation – given the scarcity of resources, donors are under pressure to harmonise or reprioritise their effort in order to maximise the effectiveness of their aid. This can sometimes lead to exit occurring ahead of time and before sustainability of impact can be achieved.

➢ Time limit – relief, recovery and development programmes all have time limits dictated by funding cycles (Rogers and Macias, 2004). Often, donors agree funding cycles for a specified time limit, and when that timeline elapses, exit occurs.

Why are we thinking of leaving when we have only just started?

"Because if we understand what we are here to achieve, it will force us to find out if we have been successful and if not, then it will tell us what we can do differently".

Regardless of the criteria for exit, it is important that all stakeholders are aware of the decisions that need to be made. This includes establishing a timeline for exit strategies and clarifying what is intended to be achieved and by when.

What is the link between Sustainability and Exit?

The fundamental goal of an exit strategy is to ensure the sustainability of impacts and activities after UNESCO departs.

The goal of an exit strategy is not only to maintain benefits achieved, but also to enable further progress toward the programme's development goals. Ideally, an exit strategy sets in place a system whereby the benefits expand beyond the original beneficiaries and their communities (Rogers and Macias, 2004).

We note that staff face some difficulty in applying the concept of sustainability in their programming practice. How do we know this? On reviewing a sample of project documents, we noted the following:

➢ Projects do not have an explicit theory of sustainability;

➢ The actions required to achieve sustainability are not incorporated into the design of a project;

➢ Actions designed to ensure sustainability are not appropriately designed;

➢ An exit strategy is not developed;

➢ Underestimation of the impact and momentum a UNESCO presence has and answering the difficult question of how to maintain this momentum when UNESCO leaves.

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING DEVELOPMENT OF EXIT STRATEGIES

Each intervention is unique. Equally each exit strategy is unique and activity specific. All exit strategies share a common set of principles upon which they are developed. These principles are not unique to exit strategies; they are common to international development practice and an intrinsic part of project planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Significant exit strategy principles:

✓ Early planning

✓ Results focused

✓ Transparency

✓ Sustainability

✓ Flexibility

✓ Evidence based

✓ Learning focused

✓ Partnership approach

What do these principles actually mean?

Early planning Exit strategies should be developed at the design phase of an activity and they should be inextricably linked to the development of project goals. Early planning of exit strategies ensures that everyone knows their roles and responsibilities and how they contribute to achieving outcomes.

Results focused Exit strategies should be developed with a definite end in mind. Knowing what the intervention is aiming to achieve is central to setting criteria to measure the progress of the intervention towards its goals. It also provides a focus as to when the right time to exit will be.

Transparency An explicit exit strategy ensures that there is transparency in the processes leading up to the engagement, transition and disengagement from a programme or activity. This will help manage stakeholders and the local community involved in the project and ensure that they understand that at some point in the future UNESCO will exit. A transparent process further ensures that they know on what criteria this decision has been made, and why.

Sustainability Focusing on sustainability ensures that UNESCO maintains a clear view about how continuation of the project activity or outcome will be achieved without their involvement. This encourages a different approach to planning interventions so that staff can ensure that there is funding for the project when they exit from the project.

Flexibility The timing of exit is crucial. Timeframes need to be clear, realistic and flexible. Enough time needs to be allowed so that the people being affected can be self-sufficient. Allowing too much time can build dependency.

Evidence based Reviewing the project using monitoring and evaluation information is important as it helps monitor progress towards exit. While exit decisions should not be solely triggered by impact measures, measuring impact can suggest which elements of an intervention should be the focus of an exit

strategy. Using evidence to inform exit decisions encourages rigorous and transparent decision making.

Learning focused Exit strategies are not rigid formulas to follow. They require staff to set goals and to learn and adjust as new information comes to light. Exit strategies should be flexible and adjusted as the project unfolds. Exit Strategies enable UNESCO to maintain focus on what is to be achieved and how this relates to the project being undertaken. A learning approach means that decisions are based on lessons learnt from the success/ failure of projects.

Partnership approach Exit strategies need to be developed in collaboration with stakeholders. Stakeholders need to have a shared understanding about when exit should occur and what processes will be used for assessing performance. It is particularly important for interventions that are phased over. In these instances the community or government agency taking over responsibility for the intervention will need to value the project, take ownership, and have the ability to carry out the intervention. It is crucial therefore that they are actively involved in the process through which the phase over is intended to occur.

APPROACHES TO EXIT

There are three approaches discussed in the literature. These are:
- ➢ Phase down – refers to a gradual reduction of programme activities;
- ➢ Phase out – refers to a withdrawal of involvement without handing over to a local partner; and
- ➢ Phase over – refers to transfer of programme activities to a local institution or communities.

However, these approaches do not fit easily in an UNESCO context as UNESCO operates at a number of programming levels (Major Programmes, Sub-Programme, Main Lines of Action, Project level and Activities). Within each level a number of factors contribute to determining decisions regarding

continuation or discontinuation, some of them political and some of them relate to available resources. Based on UNESCO's range of activities and criteria for exit, different approaches emerge as options for exit:

> Project closure - refers to the end or closure of the project which could occur either due to time limited funding; meeting of objectives or failure to meet objectives;

> Graduation or phase down – refers to a gradual reduction of UNESCO's involvement in project or programme activities while local capacity is being built to take the project over;

> Transition – refers to the modification or adaptation or transformation of project that did not meet the needs. The decision to transition depends on availability of funding and wider support for transformation; if this is not secured, the project is closed;

> Capability transfer or phase over – refers to the hand over of the responsibility of the project to a local partner.

Any decision to exit needs to be made in conjunction with a review of the project and its contextual factors. However, the approach for exit strategies depends on a combination of the level at which UNESCO operates and the criteria determining decision to exit. These possible combinations have been captured in the following matrix. This is intended to serve as a guide only and needs further validation and verification with key stakeholders in UNESCO.

Table 1: A matrix combining the project type and possible reasons for exit

Reason for exit / Level	Achieved stated results	Did not achieve stated results	Donor reprioritization	Local partner take over	Timelines elapsed	Emergency (Political, natural disaster, war)
PILOT	*Roll out*	Closure	✕	Capability Transfer	✕	Closure
PROJECT	Closure	*Continuation* or Transition Or Closure	Graduation	Capability Transfer	Closure	Closure
PROGRAMME (TTISA, LIFE, etc)	Closure	Transition	Transition	Capability Transfer	Closure	Closure
STRATEGIC	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕

MARTIN JENKINS
ASSOCIATES

Example: The case of a pilot project

Imagine that you are involved in the design and plan of a pilot project. This matrix is intended to give you some guidance to help consider issues relating to exit and transition at the early planning and design stage. According to this matrix, the exit options that you can consider depends on what *your intentions* are regarding the project, specifically what to do if (a) results are achieved; (b) results are not be achieved; (c) your donor reprioritises, ending funding; (d) you want a local partner to taken over the project at the end of the pilot; (e) the project timelines elapses; and (f) there is an emergency e.g. war?.

Giving consideration to these questions helps you think about your expectations and devise a strategy accordingly. For instance, if your expectation is that at the end of the pilot, you will hand over the project to a local partner, then capability transfer needs to occur. This requires that you build in elements of capability transfer into the project design early so that you are able to meet this expectation. On the other hand, you may decide that if the pilot does not achieve the stated results, then you may close the project. In such an event, you need to share this expectation with key partners involved so that there is no confusion or disappointment at the time of closure.

PART B
PLANNING EXITS

This part of the guidelines covers the following topics:

- ➢ **The four stages in an exit strategy**
  - • **Project development stage**
  - • **Project implementation stage**
  - • **Project review stage**
  - • **Exit strategy implementation stage**
  - • **Review exit strategy**
- ➢ **Barriers to successful exit**
- ➢ **An example of an exit strategy**

UNESCO is involved in a wide variety of projects around the world. Each project that is set up and funded by donors will have a number of aims and goals that UNESCO wants to achieve. The Results-Based Management (RBM) system adopted by UNESCO provides a way of structuring the planning, monitoring and evaluation of projects.

RBM is an internationally recognised way of developing 'an outcome focused' way of managing projects. An essential part of managing this way is to think about what the end looks like. RBM is a flexible way to enable every part of UNESCO to plan, assess progress and take decisions about the next phase.

RBM asks three basic questions:

➢ What do we wish to achieve?
➢ What will we do to reach that goal?
➢ How will we know whether we have achieved our goal?

Developing exit strategies also focuses attention on the end result and managing a process for exit once expected results have been achieved. In addition to the RBM questions, the design of an exit strategy involves asking the following additional questions:

➢ When (and how) is it appropriate for UNESCO to exit from the activity?
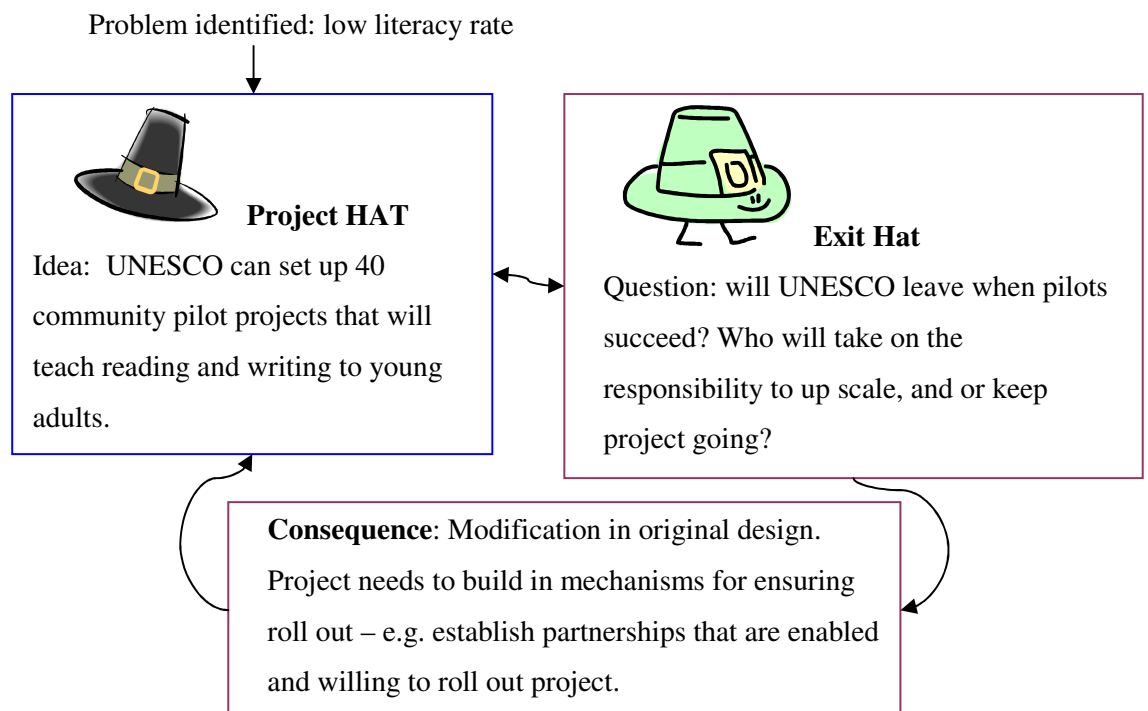➢ What does UNESCO have to do to ensure exit is successfully managed?

Answering these questions requires that the goals of the project are clearly articulated, activities are undertaken in a planned and logical manner so as to lead to the achievement of stated goals, and decisions about continuation or discontinuation are taken on the basis of evidence that expected results have been achieved or not achieved.

Thinking and planning for exit involves the same process needed to plan and manage a project using Results-Base Management. Essentially planning for exit is an on-going process that starts before the project has been rolled out and continues throughout the life of the project.

<u>Dynamic process</u>

The exit strategy is a parallel process to project management: the development of one informs the development of the other. Incorporating exit thinking from the start and throughout the project cycle prompts the project manager critically appraise the role, and approach UNESCO is taking. Exit strategies encourage clarifications of goals, and the development of sustainable practice.

The following diagram illustrates one example of the benefits of adopting a dual thinking process. When the project staff question from two different positions, that is, wear different hats, the activities of the project will be challenged and refined. The outcome will be a project designed and managed to be sustainable.

Problem identified: low literacy rate

Project HAT

Idea: UNESCO can set up 40 community pilot projects that will teach reading and writing to young adults.

Exit Hat

Question: will UNESCO leave when pilots succeed? Who will take on the responsibility to up scale, and or keep project going?

Consequence: Modification in original design. Project needs to build in mechanisms for ensuring roll out – e.g. establish partnerships that are enabled and willing to roll out project.

The Four Stages

There are four stages in an exit strategy that correspond to stages in the project cycle.

1. Exit strategy is developed during the project development stage
2. Exit Strategy is refined during project implementation stage
3. Exit strategy is assessed during monitoring and evaluation stage
4. Exit strategy is implemented. Project is phased over, ends, or transitions
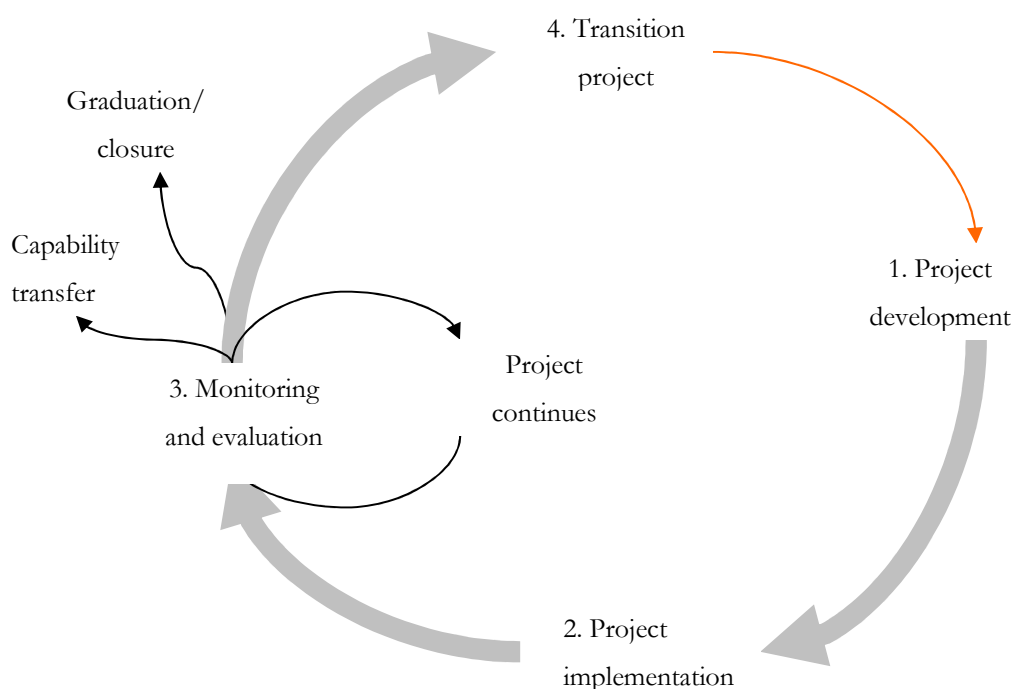
Note: The types of exit questions asked over the Four Stages relate to the type of exit approach taken. Phase over exit strategies require more planning, considerations and collaboration.

1. Project development stage

In this stage of the project the foundations are set. In this stage, the project gets defined, expectations get set, and the processes needed to implement and review the project are designed.

Aspects of the project will change and evolve as the project is implemented and reviewed. At this stage many considerations can only be answered in a

hypothetical way. Recording and thinking ahead makes good management sense; it provides the parameters around which decisions can be taken and provides a historical account of process.

During this stage the exit strategy is also developed. Creating an exit strategy at the start of the project ensures staff question what the end of the project will look like. Doing this helps to refine project activities. It provides away to test the logic and assumptions made about the project and the involvement UNESCO has.

Illustration of project and exit perspectives

Project Hat	**Exit Hat**
UNESCO Outcome: Strengthen <u>capacity</u> of community based organisation to deliver literacy & entrepreneurial skills	What is current capacity? How will our activities affect or build this?
Community outcome: More women earning money, improved well being of their families and communities	How will we know that **capacity** has increased?
What **activities** will achieve this aim? – decide a) design skills development material b) provide equipment, training & supervision for 2 community learning centres.	How will we know whether **activities** have been implemented? What needs to happen to ensure the continued relevance and use of the material & community centre? Does UNESCO have a role to play in this?
Project **parameters**: cost $40,000, project will be done in 1year & 2 months.	On what basis should UNECSO exit from this project a) when material & centres are up and running? b) when the funds or time run out? c) when mechanisms to ensure the continued success of the material and community centres are in place?

Clarifying the goals UNESCO is aiming to achieve, establishing the link between activities with goals, and signalling UNESCO's intent at exit provide the basic building blocks for progressing towards implementation.

Project development checklist

<u>Project considerations</u>

✓ What does the project intend to achieve? What are the aims and goals?

✓ What is to be sustainable: participation, capability, outcomes, and or activities?

✓ What activities will be undertaken as a result of this project?

✓ How do the activities relate to achieving the project aims and goals?

✓ How long will the project run for?

✓ What resources are needed both financial and human to do the work?

✓ What results are expected from this project?

✓ What are the indicators of success for the project?

✓ What particular action steps are required to reach the success markers?

<u>Generic Exit considerations</u>

✓ What type of exit can be considered? (E.g. Capability Transfer, Graduation)

✓ What factors will determine when the project should be exited? (Budget, Time, Results)

✓ What is the appropriate time line for exit?

✓ What criteria will be used to assess exit factors? Are benchmarks necessary?

✓ How will tracking towards exit be monitored?

✓ Who needs to be involved in the exit of the project?

✓ What is the communication strategy?

✓ What is the sustainability theory?

✓ What expectations do partners and stakeholders have about UNESCO exiting

✓ What are the challenges and risks for exiting?

<u>Specific Capability Transfer Considerations</u>

- ✓ Have people and organisations been identified?
- ✓ Have roles and responsibilities been defined?
- ✓ What capability and resources are needed for the project to successful transfer?

2. Project implementation stage

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Project Hat

Resources have been mobilised.

The material is designed and will be printed, a distribution plan is needed. One of the community centres has been built, currently recruiting & training staff.

Project is changing, now unlikely that second centre will be built in time and funds are short. Project co-ordinator is currently seeking more funding for second centre.

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Exit Hat

Anticipated exit strategy has been identified:

Closure strategy for material – criteria for exit is the distribution of material

Capability Transfer for Community Centre – criteria for exit is the attainment of desired level of capability & resources of community to take over and run centres

Data on the current capacity level of community organisations has been benchmarked. A system for collecting data is in place to measure impact.

All relevant stakeholders have been identified and a steering group has been set up to engage them with this project.

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During the project implementation stage the project moves beyond an ideal and becomes a reality. In making this jump lessons are learnt about the practicalities of implementing the project leading to adjustments. Changes need to be made in relation to the original aims and goals of the project.

During this stage systems will be set up and project reviews will be initiated. As the project develops, the exit strategy needs to be reconsidered in light of any changes made.

Maintaining the goals UNESCO is aiming to achieve, implementing the activities and developing the exit strategy provide the basic aims of the project implementation phase.

Project implementation question checklist

Project considerations

- ✓ Mobilisation of resources
- ✓ Establish project activities
- ✓ Establish benchmarks and data collection systems
- ✓ Development of local partnerships
- ✓ Review project aims and goals – have they changed?
- ✓ Review project activities – will they still achieve aims and goals?

Generic Exit considerations

- ✓ Is the basic premise of exit still appropriate? If no, how does this impact on the exit strategy?
- ✓ Is the type of exit conceived of early in the project cycle still relevant?
- ✓ Has the nature of sustainability changed?
- ✓ Has UNESCO changed its role?
- ✓ Have the factors that will determine exit changed?
- ✓ Is data being collected that will allow exit criteria to be measured or judged?
- ✓ What expectations do stakeholders have about exit?
- ✓ What are the challenges and risks for exiting?

Specific Capability Transfer Considerations

- ✓ Have the stakeholders changed?
- ✓ Have local partners been identified?

✓ What are the challenges and risks for exiting?

✓ Has exit strategy been communicated o the stakeholders?

✓ Have roles and responsibilities changed?

✓ What activities need to be done to ensure capability transfer can happen?

3. Project review stage

The project review stage is a time for reflection about how well the project is progressing towards its goals. Monitoring and evaluation information will enable decisions to be made about the expected life span of the project. Depending on the progress made, decisions about the timing of exit will need to be made. A project that is progressing very well or doing poorly may both be considered ripe for exiting though for quite different reasons. Exit should not be a sudden event, it should be gradually.

Project Hat

The material has been successfully designed, printed and distributed. One community centre was set up.

Measures of desired outcome, community organisation capacity, show marginal improvements

No further funding was obtained for second community centre

Exit Hat

Marginal improvements in capacity can be explained by the need for material and community centre to take effect.

From UNESCO's point of view, the project has been partly successful – material delivered and one centre operational.

Capability and resources are appropriate for community to take responsibility for centre. UNESCO's role has therefore ended.

Details about the exit strategy need to defined, this includes identifying when, how, who will take responsibility for community centre and how UNESCO will withdraw its resources.

The review stage is critical for providing UNESCO with sound information upon which to make decisions about whether or not to continue their involvement.

Project review checklist

Project considerations
- ✓ Has the project achieved the desired outcomes? To what extent?
- ✓ What decision has been made about the project, will it continue in its current form, change, or end?
- ✓ Is there an adequate timeframe to exit?
- ✓ What practicalities need to be organised?

Generic exit considerations
- ✓ Is the project ripe for exiting?
- ✓ What options should be considered?
- ✓ How much will exiting cost?
- ✓ How much time is needed to exit at a gradual pace?
- ✓ What are the challenges and risks for exiting?

Specific Capability Transfer Considerations
- ✓ Is the new organisation ready and capable to take over responsibility?
- ✓ Are local partners & stakeholders clear about their role and responsibility when UNESCO exits?
- ✓ Does the group taking over the activity value the project(s) and the associated proven outcomes?
- ✓ Does the group taking over the activity have ownership and commitment to continue the activity?
- ✓ Are individuals and communities empowered to demand quality service?
- ✓ Does the group taking over have the required skills and knowledge needed to generate desired outcomes?
- ✓ What are the explicit plans for resource generation needed to sustain the activity and impacts?

4. Exit Strategy is implemented

Having reviewed the results achieved in the project a decision is made about the further of the project and the role that UNESCO will have. If a decision has been made to exit one of the four exit types needs to be implemented.

a. Capability Transfer

b. Transition

c. Graduation

d. Closure

Projects that are continued will be re-reviewed at a later stage, and will continue until a decision is made to either change the program, stop it, or hand it over to another organisation.

Project Hat

UNESCO's role has ended.

UNESCO no longer has a project role. Need to disengage staff and resources.

What staff and resources need to be reallocated? How will this be done? Over what time period?

Exit Hat

Remainder of the equipment and resources for material sent back to HQ

Date set for community centre transfer to X. Future funds will come from Y. Training issue identified, X will seek advice from partner organisation.

Exit Implementation checklist

Project considerations

✓ How will resources and staff be reallocated or placed?

✓ How much time will it take to disengage?

✓ What assistance is needed to disengage?

Generic Exit considerations

✓ When will exit occur? Over what period of time?

✓ Who will be involved in the exit?

✓ What are the challenges and risks for exiting?

✓ How will costs be met?

Specific Capability Transfer Considerations

✓ What capacity is needed in the country in order for them to take over the responsibility for the project?

✓ What current capacity exists?

✓ How will this gap be bridged?

✓ What ongoing support is available for the organisation in terms of access to skills, and knowledge?

Review Exit Strategy

Undertaking evaluation of the exit strategy once a project has been completed will provide UNESCO with a clearer sense about what works and what does not. This could be used as evidence about how, in hindsight, UNESCO exit strategies work and explore how they can be adapted in an ongoing way towards developing good practice. Reviewing exit strategies will help build institutional knowledge about successful and unsuccessful exiting that will help inform future exit strategy development.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL EXIT

There are three barriers to effective exit strategies:

- Poor project definition;

- Poor project management; and

- Competing organisational culture and philosophy.

Projects with poor project definition do not have clear aims, objectives or a well articulated theory of change. This means that it is very difficult to judge

whether a project has achieved its aims, and therefore whether it is appropriate to exit.

Projects that are <u>poorly managed</u> lose their focus, benchmarks and monitoring information either measure the wrong thing or do not inform decision making. A consequence of poor project management is that the criteria for exit become blurred and the project lumbers on regardless.

UNESCO staff needs to be aware that <u>competing Organisational culture and philosophy</u> are a barrier to successful exiting. UNESCO staff may themselves have a vested interest in continuing involvement in a project; attitudes and patterns of behaviour may develop that legitimise continued involvement. One way to manage this it to ensure the project is effectively defined and managed, and that staff is provided with appropriate incentives and rewards.

SUMMARY

- ➢ Exit strategies are crucial for sustainable development.
- ➢ There are a number of approaches to exiting. These relate to the role UNESCO takes and the criteria used to assess the appropriateness of exiting.
- ➢ Developing exit strategies is an ongoing process.

EXAMPLE OF EXIT STRATEGY

Activity
Description of activities
Action steps to achieve benchmarks
Description of benchmarks
Intended outcomes for UNESCO
Expected timeframe for activities

Generic Exit		
Type of exit proposed	Phase over	Phase out
Rationale for proposed exit type		
Description of exit criteria		
Details of strategy for monitoring exit criteria *(measures, timeframe)*		
Detail required exit activities		

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What is the appropriate time line for exit?
What is the budget for the exit strategy?
Identification of relevant stakeholders
Detail communication strategy for exit plan

Phase Over
Which activities should be phased over?
Which organisations or groups should take responsibility for activities? Why?
Do phase over organisations have the capacity to do activities? How has this been assessed & monitored?
Do phase over organisations value activities & are they committed to their continuation & success?
What resources need to be generated to continue activities? How will this be achieved?

Phase out Section
What is determining the decision to phase out?
Is another development agency picking up the project?

Review Exit Strategy
Will the exit strategy be evaluated? What resource is available and when should it be done?

INTRODUCTION

The topic of exit or transition is gaining significance for many international development organisations as well as donors owing to scarcity of resources, changing priorities, demand for emergency relief and a constantly increasing demand for different forms of assistance among Member States. Countries like Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands see the issue of exit in a broader context of development assistance and refer to exit as "effort to enhance 'internal' and 'external' aid effectiveness". These are manifested in their concentration policies and principles (SIDA, 2005) which are described as follows:

- concentration for internal effectiveness signals an attempt by donor countries to improve the quality and effectiveness of their aid through a reduction in the number of partner countries and sectors in each country the donor is engaged in. This is in part driven by a perceived disconnect between expanding aid budgets which are politically decided as a percentage of GNI on the one hand, and generally restrictive or declining budgets for the administration of aid on the other. Therefore, the decision to exit or concentrate appears to be driven by management reasons to respond to such disconnect.

- concentration for external effectiveness signals a desire to focus aid efforts around key priorities for aid assistance in general terms. For instance, focussing on Millennium Development Goals provides a stronger focus on poverty which in turn triggers exit from less poor countries.

Regardless of the drive for exit, there is a general push to consider the establishment of a transparent set of criteria for engagement, transition and disengagement from a given programme or activity.

Our scanning of the literature in this field reveals that the field of exit strategies is relatively new, especially in the development context. A review of planning and evaluation documents undertaken as part of USAID research found many programme documents that addressed the issue of sustainability but far fewer explicitly spelled out an exit strategy. Similarly the recent Food Aid and Food Security Assessment (Rogers and Macias, 2004) found that most food security Development Assistance Programmes lacked a clearly defined exit strategy including benchmarks, action steps, a timeline and identification of key actors at each stage.

However, lessons can be drawn from various agencies experiences and this section discusses some of the emerging issues and challenges in this area that informed the research process. It provides a useful backdrop for UNESCO in its journey towards developing gradual and smart transition and disengagement from certain activities in order to free up resources and mobilise them elsewhere as priorities dictate.

This chapter provides a general description of the current landscape with regard to exit and transition from the development literature and is by no means intended to serve as an exhaustive document on this subject. It notes the current debate with regard to definitions, what is success, key principles underpinning successful exits and interrelationships between exit and sustainability in order to inform the research process and to provide contextually relevant information to the researchers undertaking this work. The chapter covers five broad areas:

1. Key concepts and terminology with regard to exit and exit strategies
2. Factors that help or hinder the success of exit strategies
3. Principles underpinning successful exit
4. Implementing an exit strategy
5. Guidelines and tools for implementing exit strategies

It is clear from the literature that there are a number of competing terms used to describe the withdrawal of externally provided programme resources from an entire project area (Rogers and Macias, 2004). The range of terms include: transition, exit, phasing out, withdrawal, graduation, closure, closing out. The use of different terminology may reflect alternative perspectives about the impact language can have on perceptions about exit or withdrawal.

What do we mean by exit?

An "exit' refers to 'the withdrawal of all externally provide programme resources from an entire programme area' (Rogers and Macias, 2004). However, exits by a donor organisation do not necessarily mean that an 'intervention' has stopped; the intervention may be handed over to the community, another organisation, or to the government to continue. This type of exit is referred to as phasing over.

Exits vary in character; they may be foreseen, or unforeseen.

- Foreseen exits are those that are pre-determined by factors such as deadlines, funding, and/ or achieving (or not) success and or sustainability.

- Unforeseen exits are external factors which operate independently of interventions but profoundly affect their future. These factors include changes in the political, policy, social, and or funding environment.

Other characteristics of exits are whether they were mutually or unilaterally determined, whether they occur rapidly or over a long period of time.

What is a programme transition?

A programme transition is defined as the *change* from one type of assistance programme to another. It usually indicates the scaling down of resources and could also refer to the change from one type of programme to another type of programming activity e.g. from food to a non-food programme (Gardner, Greenblott and Joubert, 2005).

What is a graduation strategy?

The term 'graduation' refers to the exit of a programme from specific communities or project sites. Rogers & Macias (2004) use this term to describe the *graduation of beneficiaries* (or communities) from a particular programme *once they have achieved the intended results*. Thus, the 'graduation strategy' is the specific plan describing how the beneficiary will be discharged from Targeted Food Assistance while assuring that achievement of the programmes objective is not jeopardised and that further progress toward that objective will be made.

This suggests that there is some degree of similarity between a 'graduation strategy' and an 'exit strategy'. In a broad sense, these strategies and their intent can be integrated into the notion of a programme's 'sustainability strategy', which could be accomplished in a number of ways - through a staggered graduation from specific project areas (implying there is a plan or a strategy for making this happen), or simultaneous withdrawal from the entire programme area (implying an exit), or transitioning to associated programming in selected areas (implying a graduation or exit).

What is an exit strategy?

An exit *strategy* is a planned approach to ending donor support. The goal of an exit strategy is not simply to end the programme, rather it is "to ensure the sustainability of impacts and activities after the programme has departed (Rogers and Macias, 2004)." Therefore, it is our view that the term exit strategies or graduation strategies may be developed as part of the programme design, or considered when a programme reaches certain milestones, or when the programme is due to end. In its broadest sense it is a strategy for designing, implementing, and ending external support in a manner consistent with the objective of producing sustainable development outcomes. As with exits, the strategy may have been developed in partnership or may have been unilaterally decided.
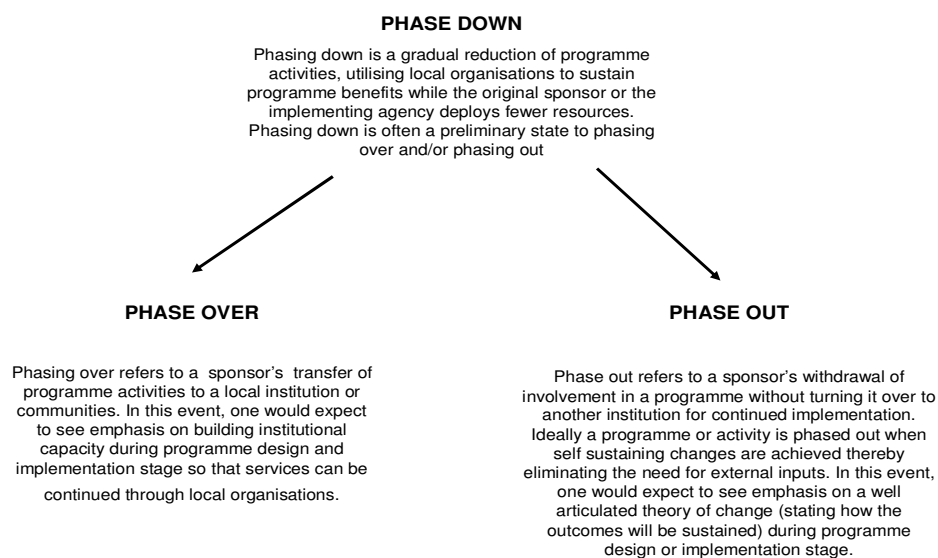
There are no universal exit strategies and there are a variety of exit types. For example, explicit exits allow for strategies that can take a holistic approach and one that can be integrated into the project plan. However, more often than not, exit appears to be implicit in programmes that have a specified time period. This is not ideal as these time periods may or may not be determined in collaboration with all actors in the project and may have little to do with the project's ability or capacity to achieve the desired result. In instances when an exit strategy has been formulated, it appears to factor in things like:

- Specific criteria for exit

- Specific and measurable bench marks

- Identified individuals responsible for taking over activities & assessment of their willingness to continue the programme (partnership parameters)

- Action steps including articulating the roles of key actors

- Clear time frames

- Mechanisms for periodical assessment

- Funding, what costs will continue and how these will be met

- Conduction of post-program evaluation

The literature defines *implicit* exits as those triggered by factors that are beyond the control of the donor agency. These may consequently be more 'emergency' or crisis driven and focus on the practicalities of who does what, when, and how.

It is our view that while an organisation may not have an explicit exit strategy may be lacking, there may be *implicit exit strategies* – these refer to existing mental models that shape attitudes, behaviour and work practices of programming staff in these organisations. Therefore, the exit *strategy* is not codified or stated in project documentation.

There are three approaches (Levinger and McLeod, 2002) to exit strategies discussed in the literature and these are interrelated and can be diagrammatically represented in the following way:

PHASE DOWN

Phasing down is a gradual reduction of programme activities, utilising local organisations to sustain programme benefits while the original sponsor or the implementing agency deploys fewer resources. Phasing down is often a preliminary state to phasing over and/or phasing out

PHASE OVER

Phasing over refers to a sponsor's transfer of programme activities to a local institution or communities. In this event, one would expect to see emphasis on building institutional capacity during programme design and implementation stage so that services can be continued through local organisations.

PHASE OUT

Phase out refers to a sponsor's withdrawal of involvement in a programme without turning it over to another institution for continued implementation. Ideally a programme or activity is phased out when self sustaining changes are achieved thereby eliminating the need for external inputs. In this event, one would expect to see emphasis on a well articulated theory of change (stating how the outcomes will be sustained) during programme design or implementation stage.

The decision to use the phasing over or the phasing out approach depends largely on the nature of the programme activities. When an intervention requires continued activity and an entity to take over responsibility for oversight of the activity, it suggests that a phase over approach be considered. On the other hand, if an intervention is intended to create permanent changes in a community and does not require the ongoing provision of services or resources, it is more suitable that a phase out approach be considered.

However it is unclear as to the extent to which these intentions are signalled in the design stage of an intervention. Is the intervention designed to build sustainability of the organisation so that phase over strategy is possible, or is the intervention designed to deliver a set of outcomes in which case a phase out strategy will be adequate?

Other factors that also affect decisions about whether to take a phase over or phase out approach include the time frame for exit, available funding and available human, institutional, financial and physical resources in the area where the programme is departing.

An exit strategy is a <u>planned approach</u> to ending donor support in a manner that is consistent with the objectives of the programme or project. The level of planning undertaken is a critical component of an exit strategy, as it recognises the huge impact exit can have on staff, people and the country or community involved. Investing time and effort in planning exit can help in minimising the negative effects of the withdrawal. International development agency staff interviewed in this research also accept the theory and principles underpinning planning for exit. However, staff note that the practice is often quite different – they observed that programmes or projects develop a support constituency within an organisation who are usually vocal about continuation, not discontinuation. This makes the planning for an exit strategy redundant.

There are some circumstances when organisations do manage to exit successfully. The learnings from the World Food Programme (2003) offers some insights as to the factors that contribute to the success or otherwise of an exit strategy and its implementation. These can be summarised under the following three categories:

- Project definition
- Project management
- Organisation culture and philosophy

<u>Project definition</u>

A well defined project and a clearly articulated theory of change allows all partners to focus attention on the overarching outcome and the steps to be taken to achieve this. Building this clarity and shared understanding about project aims, goals and defining what constitutes success amongst programme partners is critical to the success of an exit strategy. It sets the parameters regarding when an intervention can end and defines this at the beginning of the programme, at the time of engagement, thereby minimising risk of partners being surprised. Even in projects where the effects of an intervention are uncertain or unclear at the beginning, or where not intervening is not an option

(e.g. humanitarian crisis), it should still be possible to articulate in broad terms the conditions upon which exit from the intervention can be considered.

A clearly defined intervention allows for questions about exit to be raised at the outset. It allows exploration of questions such as "is the intended aim complete withdrawal of resources regardless of sustainability"; "is withdrawal linked to building capacity of local organisations to take over the activity"; or "what outcomes from the program does the organisation want to sustain when it withdraws". These questions need to be raised early in so as to ensure that (a) the project definition is realistic, both in terms of timeframes and outcomes and (b) the exit strategies are dynamic enough to take account of relevant factors.

Project Management

Effective project management ensures that the implementation of the intervention has not diverted from the project scope, and that any slippage has been considered in terms of the original aims and objectives of the project. Therefore, in order to ensure projects maintain focus, monitoring, and evaluation data are often used to inform decision makers about the progress of projects. At this stage it is important to ensure that in addition to progress towards project goals, monitoring data also looks at progress towards exit strategy goals.

Effective project management includes thinking ahead to post-intervention. If interventions are planned to continue after organisation exit, the exit strategy needs to also include a funding strategy. To enable this, the intervention needs its own identity which is separate to the donor organisation. This will help the intervention gain the support it needs to continue.

> *Example of a successful exit strategy – Exit strategies for school feeding, World Food Programme*
>
> From the outset of a project, identification of anticipated benefits and the development of an exit strategy that will maintain them should be incorporated in planning discussions and such benefits together with the

strategy should be monitored in project activities. An exit strategy should be developed in coordination with implementing partners, beneficiaries and the relevant government authorities and should be based on six key components:

- The setting of milestones for achievement;
- Government commitment;
- Community contributions;
- Technical support;
- Management and communication; and
- Involving the private sector.

Ensuring these factors are built into the programme design from the earliest possible moment is central to successful exit. This does not mean, however that operations already ongoing are precluded from the benefits of strategic planning for phasing out. Objective assessments of ongoing school feeding programmes can identify programme strengths and weaknesses and contribute to the development of a detailed phase-out plan. As programmes evolve and as different economic or political factors alter the project scope, periodic assessments become an increasingly important tool in all phases of an operation.

While this experience of the WFP identifies six features of successful exit strategies, it is our view that a programme does not necessarily need all six to maintain the benefit stream after WFP ends its assistance. Country offices need to review closely the issues covered in these six areas and decide with their partners which ones are of most important given their country context.

Source: Exit Strategies for School Feeding: World Food Programme's Experience (WFP/EB.1/2003/4-C; 2003)

Organisational culture and philosophy

There are a number of political challenges that organisations have to manage to allow exit strategies to work. In part this is a realisation that organisations, and the programmes they implement, can be resistant to change (SIDA, 2005). An

intervening organisation needs to be aware that they themselves may have a vested interest in continuing involvement; attitudes and patterns of behaviour may develop that legitimise continued involvement. One approach to managing this is to ensure the project is effectively defined and managed, and the staff are managed and provided with appropriate incentives and rewards. The literature also points to the need for examining who the stakeholders are and what their vested interests are. Clear communication with stakeholders will also enable exit strategies to be successful.

There is much discussion in the literature regarding how donor organisations can support sustainability through their strategic analysis process. Along with the critical organisational factors that are often considered such as the donor's mission, goals, and programming areas, the scope of strategic analysis can be expanded to 'involve the gathering and deliberation of data that informs the donor's choices about opportunities for investment in a given social change area. Such analysis contributes to a donor's ability to make internally consistent and mutually reinforcing choices that provide the basis for a configuration of activities that is reflective of the unique position the donor has identified for itself and the initiative' (Kramer,2001). The components of strategic analysis identified include – needs assessment and environmental scanning (determining sustainability needs early), analysis of programming trends, evidence of what works, articulating the theory of change, theory of leverage and the theory of sustainability.

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING SUCCESSFUL EXIT

One of the most significant lessons from the literature about successful exit is the need for planning exit at the design phase of the intervention. Exit should not occur suddenly, and transition strategies should be implemented gradually. Planning for exit includes ensuring that there is a shared understanding about when exit should occur, and establishing a transparent process for assessing performance and therefore knowing when to exit.

In the development context, issues and dilemmas relating to exit are closely linked to the issues and goals relating to sustainability and therefore some general rules and approaches can be considered when thinking about exit:

- Stay focussed on sustainability – many donor agencies have no clear idea about how continuation of the activity will be achieved without their involvement. This points to the fact that sustainability may not be taken very seriously. Do they have funds that are expressly devoted to fund raising so as to ensure replacement funding or a general idea of who would pick up an initiative or activities are some of the issues to explore?

- Start early – focus on sustainability has to be part of the original design of the initiative and maybe even included as part of the basis for engagement.

- Transparency - being explicit about agency commitments – often programme documentation discuss issues of outcomes or sustainability in very broad terms which leaves some room for misunderstanding and resentment to develop. It is critical that there is clarity of communication so that exit strategies are known and understood by, partners and their staff[15]. To ensure support and aid, clarification of objectives, and exit strategies should be decided mutually by communities and donors through dialogue and plan for managing the impacts of exit together. Being clear about what happens at the end of the timeframe for a project is critical in this process.

- Flexibility of timing - the timing of exit is crucial. Enough time needs to be allowed so that the people being affected can become self-sufficient, and before dependency has developed. Some writers suggest that intervention time limits should be set to avoid carrying on regardless of whether the target has or has not been achieved.

- Participation - Involvement of key partners in exit decisions helps to ensure alignment of needs and objectives of diverse stakeholders.

- Achievement of intended outcomes – impact is a consideration in planning for exit. The level of impact achieved can guide the time frame for exit and may also suggest which programme goals should be the focus of efforts to

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[15] Beatrice Rogers and Kathy Macias (November 2004) "Program Graduation and Exit Strategies: A focus on Title II Food aid Development Programs," FANTA Technical Note No 9.

achieve sustainability and which, due to lack of impact, should be given less attention. However, rather than set inflexible impact targets as exit criteria, it makes more sense to establish an explicit time frame, though one with flexibility built in and to link the timeframe to the achievement of process related benchmarks (Levinger and McLeod, 2002).

- Ongoing programme review - recognising the role of monitoring and evaluation in the design of an exit strategy. While exit decisions should not be solely triggered by impact measures, measuring impact can suggest which elements of a programme should be the focus of an exit strategy. It can also suggest levels of overall success that may indicate that it is appropriate to start the process of exit or transition.

IMPLEMENTING EXIT STRATEGIES

Rogers and Macias (2004) argue that thinking about exit strategies is new for project staff and that this implies a need for staff to be trained and supported to implement exit strategies. Ways in which this can be done include:

1. Being upfront and clear about the need and rationale for exit – this should be documented and supported in the project management plan;
2. Rewarding staff for the 'right' behaviours – don't make it in their own interest to continue a project;
3. Directing staff to understand what the agency/organisation is responsible for achieving and what lies beyond its responsibilities. This is linked to measuring what is important to measure and therefore assessing the right activities and performances.

Rogers (2004) also identifies the following elements in a step by step guide to exit as being critical in the design and implementation of an exit strategy:

➢ Identification of exit approaches to be used for different programme components – phase out versus phase over;

➢ Design of an exit plan including determination of benchmarks; establishment of time line; and identification of activities and responsible individual groups;

- ➢ Communication with all stakeholders regarding exit plans;

- ➢ Exit plan implemented starting from the time of programme entry or as soon as programme activities are sufficiently identified to permit planning;

- ➢ Development of local partnerships and local capacity;

- ➢ Exit plans benchmarks modified and revised tat the time of the mid term evaluation;

- ➢ Mobilisation of resources;

- ➢ Final detailed design of exit strategy and timeframe;

- ➢ Implementation of the exit strategy;

- ➢ Monitoring and evaluation – monitoring of progress towards established benchmarks as well as evaluation of impact;

- ➢ Follow up – long term benefits of exit to be evaluation by returning to the communities after exit.

APPENDIX 4:   KEY FINDINGS FROM THE STOCKTAKE

PROGRAMME CLUSTER AREA	KEY STRATEGIC DOCUMENTATION REVIEWED	DESCRIPTION OF INTENT/AIM OF STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME	SUCCESS CRITERIA FOR UNESCO	EXPLICIT REFERENCE TO EXIT
Medium Term Strategy 2002-07 (all 5 sectors)	Sets new aim and profile for the Organisation Unifies 4 main programme areas and defines a number of strategic objectives for each programme Sets road map for revitalising UNESCO – principles of action and programming	Organisational mission and purpose	2002-2007	Determined at the level of strategic objectives and lists strategies to be pursued and outcomes expected.	None
Education	Education For All – the six Dakar goals EDUCAIDS – Towards a comprehensive education sector response	Determines the outcomes and priorities for the six goals of the Dakar Framework for Action and this sets the overriding priority for UNESCO's education strategy. It is a multi-country initiative to support the implementation of comprehensive national education sector response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic – led by UNESCO with the collaboration of key stakeholders and in full compliance with the agreed upon UN division of labour.	**2015**	Determined at the level of the strategic objectives. Scanning these suggest that they are focussed around specific outcomes sought in the programme – but do not mention exit as a measure of success	**None**

Natural Science	- UNESCO Natural science sector, Its structure, mission and vision for the future	Defines the missions of the Natural Science sector at large, and for each of the 6 divisions, the CSI platform and the IOC[16], within the overall UNESCO's framework mission.	Not indicated	The success criteria are determined at the level of the missions' objectives.	None
SHS	- Social and human sciences strategies and action	This document describes the content of the UNESCO strategy as regards SHS.	Not indicated		None
Culture	- UNESCO Universal Declaration on cultural diversity	The declaration adopted in 2001 sets the objectives and an Action plan.	Not indicated	The success criteria are probably the achievement of the 20 objectives set in the Action Plan.	No explicit reference although mentioning the "viability of local cultural markets"
Communication and information	Medium term strategy 2002-2007	Organisational mission and purpose for the Communication sector	2002-2007	**None**	**None**
Cross cutting themes	- Eradication of poverty, especially extreme poverty (United Nations Millennium Declaration) - ICT contribution to the development of education, science and culture and the construction of a knowledge society (Dakar framework for action, see Education sector		**2015**		

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[16] IOC: Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission

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Area	KEY STRATEGIC DOCUMENTATION REVIEWED	DESCRIPTION OF INTENT/AIM OF STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME	SUCCESS CRITERIA FOR UNESCO	EXPLICIT REFERENCE TO EXIT
African countries	Medium-Term Strategy (2002-2007) for the Africa region	The strategy defines the objectives and sets the outcomes of the regional strategy within each sector	2002-2007	Achieving outcomes	No explicit reference to exit but many references to development sustainability.
Arab states	Medium-Term Strategy (2002-2007) for the Arab States	The strategy defines the objectives and sets the outcomes of the regional strategy within each sector	**2002-2007**	Achieving outcomes	No explicit reference but reference to UNESCO's role of "catalyst for international cooperation"
Asia and Pacific regions	Medium-Term Strategy (2002-2007) for Asia and Pacific region	The strategy defines the objectives and sets the outcomes of the regional strategy within each sector	**2002-2007**	Achieving outcomes	**None**
Latin America and Caribbean regions	Medium-Term Strategy (2002-2007) Latin America and Caribbean regions	The strategy defines the objectives and sets the outcomes of the regional strategy within each sector	**2002-2007**	Achieving outcomes	**None**

DESCRIPTION OF KEY GUIDELINES AND POLICIES FOR STAFF	AIM OR PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT	AREAS OF FOCUS	TIMEFRAME	EXPLICIT REFERENCES TO EXIT OR TRANSITION
RBM guide (2001)	This BSP document aims at providing guidelines to the staff in order to apply the result based programming, management and monitoring.	Organisational practice	The guide does not provide precise information as regards a specific timeframe. But the whole RBM logic is built upon a management cycle and timeframe for involvement is addressed through the notions of results, outcomes and impacts.	None
UNESCO`s extra-budgetary activities. A practical guide (2004)	This document intends to help the staff to deal with the management of project funded under extra-budgetary lines.	Organisational practice (practical guides with list of stakeholders, model agreements, logical framework and project preparation, etc…)	The guide describes the project management cycle, from the proposal's preparation to the completion of activities). Projects are time-defined from the start.	None
UNESCO`s RBM training programme (powerpoint slides of the workshop)	This document are designed to help people with result-based management system during the three days training period	Organisational practice	Timeframe for involvement is addressed through the notions of results, outcomes and impacts.	None
Improving municipal wastewater management in coastal cities (Training manual V1), UNESCO-IHE[17] and UNEP-GPA[18] February 2004	This document is designed to help *municipal wastewater managers* with how to select, plan and finance appropriate and environmentally sound municipal wastewater management systems.	Organisational practice for programme managers who are **NOT** UNESCO officers.	Timeframe for involvement is addressed through the description of project cycles.	The document mentions directly the exit strategy in the third module of the training dealing with the writing of the project feasibility study.
Operational guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention (National Library of Australia)	This document aims at helping preservation specialist to implement the Draft Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage	Organisational practice for managers and preservation specialists **NOT** UNESCO officers	Timeframe for involvement is put into question in the chapter related to management programmes.	The guidelines makes precise reference to sustainability an exit strategies in the 10th Chapter "Managing digital preservation programmes"

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[17] UNESCO Institute for Water Education

[18] United Nations Environment programme, Global Programme of Action.

PROJECT OR PROGRAMME TITLE	DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK How is the capacity building activity described in each project or activity?	REASONS FOR UNESCO'S INVOLVEMENT How does it fit with UNESCO's medium term strategy and strategic objectives?	RESOURCES/ BUDGETS	KEY MILESTONES/ outcomes sought	PROJECT PARTNERS	REFERENCES TO EXIT OR TRANSITION (Is there an expectation that effort will be continued after UNESCO involvement ends? Is there an explicit discussion around sustainability in project plans)
Education						
Project # 1 Support to Strengthen the capacity of Primary and Basic Education Teacher Training Institutions in Sierra Leone	Capacity-building for implementation of national education plans: teacher training	This project is fully in line with the priority basic education for all and EFA. Sierra Leone is currently reconstructing its educational system.	Total budget US$950,000	- update the existing national Education Policy and Education Sector Plan. - Institution Strengthening - increased rate of trained teachers	6 external partners (UNICEF, UNDP…)	The exit strategy is defined with the pre-defined length of the project (2 years) and other technical provisions.
Project # 2 Joint Project Proposal Form Extra-budgetary Programme - Capacity-Building for EFA 2006-2007	Capacity-building for implementation of national education plans: literacy	This project is fully in line with the priority basic education for all and EFA.	Total budget US$ 1,000,000.00	- Curriculum and Assessment Framework - Capacity building of literacy personnel - Women empowerment - Community Learning Centres	Several external partners (public sector, NGOs and international partners)	An exit strategy is built upon three principles: the institutionalisation of the project, integration and participation of the non-profit private sector.
Project proposal for the Trust Fund for Human Security	The project involves providing support to Community Education Centres for functional literacy and life skills in the rural war affected districts.	Not discussed in the document	US $800,000	At the end of the project about 50% of the beneficiaries will become functionally literate and over 45% will have acquired credible vocational and life skills. A national policy guidelines and clear conditions for organisation and management of Integrated Community Education Centres will be established.	A joint task force established comprising UNESCO Dakar Office; Sierra Leone Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the National Commission for UNESCO and 4 representatives drawn from the Teachers College, the Technical and Vocational teachers Association, Employers of labour and the Women and Children's Bureau.	Yes, implicit in the expectation those CECs will become part and parcel of national development activity. However, how this will be achieved and monitored is not discussed. Also the project implementation and accountability for milestones lies with the International Consultant mandated with the task that is contracted for the duration of the project.

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Capacity building for EFA – Extra budgetary programme for technical services to member states – Support to consolidate the HIV/AIDS education priority programme of ECOWAS countries	Involves creation of a network for consultation, exchange and sharing of experiences among actors in the field of HIV/AIDS education in ECOWAS.	Links into MLA 5 in section 1.1.1 in 34/C5 document	Total budget $200,000	Expected results A framework for consultation, exchange and sharing of experiences among actors is set up. Process for introducing HIV/AIDS as a subject in school curriculum is underway A sub-regional teacher training policy in life skills for behaviour changes as regard HIV?AIDS is adopted and utilised	National partners – National Ministries, CSO and NGO Multilateral partners – World Bank, UNICEF, Imperial College of London and other partners supporting the education system in target countries	None
Project of the Government of The Gambia	The project involves providing support to the study on alternative agricultural mechanisation strategy for farm production and poverty alleviation in The Gambia. Project objective is to provide reliable baseline information for appropriate policy on rural agricultural productivity in support of The Gambia Poverty Reduction programme.	Not discussed in the document	Total budget US $ 30,019	Current situation of agricultural mechanisation is described. Technology and policy options for farm mechanisation in farming systems in The Gambia are established.	Key partner is The Gambia National Agricultural Research Institute.	None. Again, the coordination, monitoring and reporting on the project is the responsibility of the International Consultant on behalf of UNESCO, the executing agency.
EDUCAIDS – Towards a comprehensive education sector response	It is a multi-country initiative to support the implementation of comprehensive national education sector responses to the HIV and AIDS epidemic – led by UNESCO with the collaboration of key stakeholders and in full compliance with the agreed upon UN division of labour	Adopted as one of the three core initiatives for EFA			Coordination of EDUCAIDS takes place through national AIDS authorities, consultation with UNAIDS Inter-agency Task Team on education.	Yes, implicit in its expectation of being country led and country driver. However, no explicit discussion in this document about how exit dimension is integrated into this work, no timeframe for UNESCO's involvement;

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Title of document	Content of programme/platform…	Date	Mention of exit strategies
UNESCO Brazil Evaluation Report on the Activities of the Brasilia Office (Phase 1)	Activities and organisation of UNESCO Brazil office	September 2001	One of the 5 recommendations of the evaluation calls for a "Further strengthening UNESCO's exit strategy"
An Evaluation of UNESCO's "Special Projects" for Priority Groups	Special projects in direction of the four categories labelled "priority groups" (women, youth, LDCs[19] and the Member States of sub-Saharan Africa)	December 2001	The lack of evaluation strategy is stressed as one of the 4 weaknesses of the project Poor design and management skills among programme specialists is picked out as one of the 4 areas of weakness and in particular note "*that projects that relied heavily on UNESCO's contribution (intellectual or financial) did not always build in credible exit strategies for UNESCO that could allow projects to continue as stand alone projects (i.e. without UNESCO input, either financial or intellectual)*".
External Evaluation of the Environment and Development in Coastal Regions and Small Islands (CSI) Platform	"CSI is a global platform for environmentally sound, socially equitable, culturally respectful and economically viable development in coastal regions and small islands. The main CSI goal is the mitigation and management of conflicts over coastal resources and values".	February 2002	The team of evaluators recommends the CSI to "develops an 'exit' strategy to be incorporated into the design of Field Projects"
PEER Programme Assessment	The UNESCO Programme of Education for Emergencies and Reconstruction	February 2004	This evaluation addresses the sustainability and/or exit strategy topic several times.

[19] LDCs: Least developed countries

DAKAR   **BACKGROUND/CONTEXT**

The UNESCO Regional office of Dakar was created in 1970. The Regional office is better known as BREDA, its French acronym *(Bureau regional pour l'éducation en Afrique)*. At its inception, BREDA's role was primarily dedicated to educational planning in Africa, South of Sahara.

BREDA has moved from this first perimeter of action, and now represents all the five sectors of UNESCO, i.e. Sciences (Natural science and Social science), Culture, Communication and information and Education.

Following the decentralisation reform policy initiated in 2000, BREDA now wears two hats: it acts as the Regional office as well as a Cluster office. As a Regional office BREDA covers all 46 African sub-Saharan countries and its focus is primarily in the area of education. In this sector, BREDA provides technical advice to national governments and co-ordinates the implementation of educational programmes within this region.

The Regional office for education core mission is described as such[20]:

> *"Promoting, through its activities, the ideals of UNESCO of building Peace, Democracy and Human Rights through the promotion of the sharing and utilisation of knowledge and particularly by ensuring that Education, Science, Culture and Communication are placed on the top of the development agenda of African Member States;*

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[20] Source: www.dakar.unesco.org

Systematically developing a regional overview of major trends of UNESCO's areas of competence (Education, Science, Culture and Communication);

Feeding the results of such systematic studies and regional overviews into UNESCO's Medium Term, and biennial programmes;

Reflecting its in-depth knowledge of the needs of African Member States in the development and execution of its own regular and extra-budgetary activities and in its response to specific emergencies;

Working, as much as possible, in close cooperation with governments, regional and international IGO's, NGO's, other UNESCO Offices in Africa, UNESCO National Commissions, the entire UN family, bilateral development agencies, the intellectual community and the civil society"

The Dakar Cluster office is multi-sectoral and comprises seven countries: Cap Verde, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone. BREDA works directly with UNESCO National Commissions in each of the seven countries. In practice, there is no distinction between the Regional office and the Cluster office. UNESCO staff in Dakar work without distinction for the regional priorities and the Cluster's priorities.

The budget for the Dakar office amounts $5 million for the 2006-2007 budget. The education sector represents 70% of the total budget. BREDA has about 80 UNESCO staff and more than half of the staff are temporary. There are currently only two programme specialists.

BREDA also hosts the Senegalese node of the International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) and the Pôle de Dakar. The Pôle de Dakar is the result of a partnership between the French ministry of foreign affairs and BREDA. Its main task is to develop expertise in the field of educational sectoral analysis (statistical analysis).

<u>Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceptions [about Exit and Transition]</u>

From the evaluator's perspective, there is no clear, consistent or common understanding of exit and transition within this field office. Each staff member acts and operates in his/her own way creating huge variability in programming practice. This variability also contributes to the lack of a shared understanding of exit and transition concepts amongst staff.

This is illustrated in our interviews where the researchers were asked to provide a definition of "exit or transition strategy" prior to the interviews. This suggests that these concepts are absent from the FO and the UNESCO vocabulary. This does not mean that they do not think about stopping or withdrawing from projects/activities. It just means that they do not think about "exit/transition" as topic in itself. The definition proposed by the evaluators was accepted although many of the interviewees declared that the term "exit" was probably too strict and should not be used. They also underline that "exit" might not be applicable to UNESCO's activities.

Perceived relevance of transition and exit concepts for UNESCO and the field offices

It seems that there is heterogeneity in views about the meaning and significance of terms like "transition and exit" and their perceived relevance. There is obviously different understandings that relates to different level of UNESCO's activity (definition of long-term objectives such as EFA), running of programmes, projects), or UNESCO's different roles (laboratory of ideas, clearing house, standard-setter, capacity-builder in Member States, catalyst for international cooperation).

As regards UNESCO's roles, some of the interviewees felt that there is absolutely no room for an exit strategy or anything related to exit at this level as there will always be need for these roles in Member States. For instance, the advocacy role UNESCO can never ends.

It seems that UNESCO's role as capacity builder is less present in people's mind. Activities that evaluators got information about are more about *immaterial* roles such as advocating, supporting, lobbying advising states or counselling. The role of catalyser is also very present: staff considering UNESCO does not have financial resources, his job is also to put stakeholders around the table. Those *immaterial* projects can hardly have any exit. For instance the Associated Schools project is about improving education quality. As the objective is "improvement", there is necessarily no end to it.

At a general level:

Many of the interviewees consider that UNESCO never has to withdraw and that UNESCO's mission is for ever. For instance, if a particular goal has been achieved in one specific area, UNESCO will stop the activity but will continue in a different area, within the same country.

At the project level:

The relevance of exit and transition concepts has been questioned at the project level. The project's scale could make exit strategy relevant or not. For instance, it may not be necessary to have exit strategies for small-scale projects targeting a limited number of individuals. If exit strategy is understood as finding means to pursue the action, one of the project outcomes could be that, for instance, trainees become trainers. There is a question of critical mass under which no leverage effect will produce any more impacts. Indeed, the leverage effect will be limited if you train only five individuals.

Some staff would consider regular budget activities as part of an overall strategy that has no end. From one biennium to the other, projects change and are re-designed but goals remain the same. There is no place for exit strategy in the sense that if one project stops, another project will to pursue the same objectives.

The relevance of exit seems to be better understood when applied to extra-budgetary-funded activities. Extra-budgetary project are limited in time and

financial resources, therefore there is compulsorily an exit strategy because goals to be achieved are short-term and quantitative goals and no other project will replace it.

When in the typical programming cycle (e.g. planning, implementation, review, transition, and exit) do staff perceive as appropriate to think about exit?

There is almost a consensus on when in the programming cycle do staff think it is appropriate to think about exit. Most of the staff considers project's inception to be the most adequate phase to think about exit strategy.

What do FO staff belief is UNESCO's orientation and expectations with regard to exit?

None.

Examples of Exit and Transition/ Current Practices

In the cases where an exit or transition strategy is taken into account, the main driver for it is UNESCO's lack of financial resources. In the CI sector for instance, the project's sustainability is part of project's implementation because beneficiaries know from the start that UNESCO will only contribute to fund a specific part of the project (ex: buying equipments) and will provide funding to hire someone to run the project. The practice of granting people a salary for a limited period of time does no longer exist and the need to sustain the project remains.

> **IICBA Micro programme for teacher's training: the development of a sustainability issue during the programme.**
>
> The IICBA programme attempted to find existing training programmes produced by Universities in the field of ICT and adapt it to the need of targeted countries. These were one-year duration programmes.

IICBA adapted a training programme created in Montreal University for Cameroon, Niger and Mali. Each session of the programme trained 30 teachers with a high rate of success. The specificity of the programme was that participants have to sign a contract before the start of training to commit themselves to reinvesting the capacities acquired. At the end of the traineeship in Cameroon in 2004, trained teachers built up a team and decided to become trainers without any help from IICBA. In parallel, a forum has been set and IICBA was able to monitor the development of the programme.

CI sector: Radio project: By only buying the radio equipment, and by not paying someone for a limited amount of time as they use to do, UNESCO obliges project beneficiaries to find a way to render the activity sustainable (computer material renting, etc). This secondary activity provides income that permits the radio activity (first funding purpose activity) to go on.

Which projects have exit strategies and which projects don't? What is the reason for the difference?

The main difference between projects with exit strategies and projects without first comes from the difference in managing regular budget and extra-budgetary activities. Donors may (often?) require project designer to mention compulsorily exit strategies in project proposals whereas this is not compulsory within regular activities. Since there are no guidelines to help staff when writing project proposals, mentioning such strategy depends greatly upon the individual's mentality and personal work practices.

If no explicit exit strategy, are there implicit or tacit understandings and practices regarding exit? If so, what are they and why not codified?

An example of an implicit practice regarding exit can be found within the HIV/AIDS area. During the project design, managers are asked to insert their initiative into national frameworks so that sustainability is guaranteed.

Another practice is to choose projects that do not require funding. As regards HIV/AIDS education programmes, managers try to work with local

governments that have enough money to run the project. UNESCO's task is then oriented towards coordination or to provide help at project start.

How and in what ways do the current organisational culture, systems and structures help or hinder the practice relating to exiting?

UNESCO planning process:

The question of exiting is related to UNESCO's entire planning process. From the interviewee perspective, the C/5's top down approach is not reflecting enough countries' needs in their own specificity. Starting from that, some project might not match one country's needs or priorities. So it is not useful to talk in terms of sustainability of impacts and exit strategy if you do not believe in project you are operating.

Lack of human resources to do the planning at the project level:

It seems that the planning activity in itself is hindered by the fact UNESCO is lacking some human resources. In the same way, monitoring would require more human resources.

Staff training and integration to the whole UNESCO's Organisation and culture:

Staff arrive at UNESCO with their own background and work experience and use the knowledge they already possess. There is no "upgrading" of their skills to help them work the UNESCO's way.

Knowledge transfer and sharing:

The best practices shaped by previous staff are not always available. It can happen that someone leave a UNESCO position without leaving any indication, advice or documents describing the lessons learned from its past experience to pass it on to the next manager. The lack of mobility between sectors, prevent best practices that may exist in one particular sector (CI) to be transferred to other sectors.

From the interviews, it seems that officers feel quite lonely and, in a way, abandoned when entering a job position at UNESCO.

Lessons Learned

What do FO staff perceive UNESCO could do better in relation to planning for and implementation of exit and transition strategies? What is the nature and level of support that FO staff would need to develop, plan and implement exit and transition strategies in their work?

As mentioned in the previous section, staff really felt they lacked access to systematic training or orientation programmes that could introduce newcomers to UNESCO's philosophy and culture when they join the Organisation.

The existing training is not perceived as efficient enough (one week training is too short). For staff that benefited from training, there was a low level of satisfaction. There is above all, no help in understanding what the whole philosophy behind UNESCO's action is.

UNESCO could organise knowledge transfer between staff.

If UNESCO was to consider a more structured approach to the issue of exit and transition, how would you suggest it go about it? What would need to be done?
One of the interviewee considered that it should be the FO direction's role to take the decision to stop a project or withdraw from it.

UNESCO first established presence in Brazil through a technical cooperation agreement signed in 1964 between the Brazilian government and the UN bodies present in Brazil at that time. From the mid-1990s, the UNESCO Brasilia Office (UBO) started to grow and expand in exponential ways. Staff and partners agree that UNESCO gained much visibility and developed in Brazil, which is one of the reasons why it branched out to different states and municipalities. As a response to this growth and to Brazil's diversity, UNESCO established decentralized structures, referred to as Antenna Offices in at least 5 locations,[21] and entered into contractual agreements with local authorities and developing projects.

UBO's financial resources—primarily extra-budgetary funding-- grew significantly beginning in the late 1990s. In fact, the funds available for UBO's program execution grew from $9.6 million in 1997 to an estimated $126.9 million in 2005. Concurrently, UNESCO personnel in the Brasilia Office increased from 38 to 216 people (of which seven posts established under regular program and budget, 62 under FITOCA,[22] the others being on temporary contracts). In addition, the management and administration of projects involve 2,297 personnel employed on temporary contracts throughout the country. These temporary contracts account for the majority of Open School program volunteers.

The increase in extra-budgetary funding at UBO can be explained in part by changes in the environment where UN agencies operate in Brazil. The NEX— National Execution model, set forth by the Brazilian government, set the rules of engagement of all UN agencies in the country. The main feature of this NEX is the self-benefiting funds that government agencies in Brazil provide to UN agencies, including UNESCO, to run a program or contract services. The

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[21] Antenna offices were set up in Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, Sao Paulo, Salvador de Bahia, Mato Grosso, and Rio Grande do Sul. The office in Pernambuco has since been closed.

[22] Fund-in-Trust Overhead Costs Account.

main concern is that the majority of the funds received by UNESCO from the Brazilian government are being used to set up service-oriented contracts which have little or no relationship to the Organisation's mandate. In November 2005, the Director-General of UNESCO launched an exercise for reorienting the operations of the UNESCO Office in Brasilia (UBO). The goal of the reorientation process was two-fold. First, it was intended to align the office in Brazil with the mandate, priorities, procedures, and decentralization strategy of the UNESCO. Second, it took into account changes in the environment which the office operates, namely the Brazilian Government's objectives and guidelines regarding cooperation with UN organisations and agencies as spelled out in Federal Decree N° 5.151/2004 of 22 July 2004.[23]

Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceptions about Transition Held by UBO Staff

The views discussed in this case study highlight descriptions reflecting the range of perceptions expressed by the Office Director, Program Coordinators and some staff at UBO.

UBO staff agreed that transition should play a key role when planning work for the organisation as it relates to UNESCO engaging/disengaging from an activity. However, there are variations on how they relate the concept to the work carried out at UBO. For example, some staff expressed a definition of transition that alluded to the phasing out of a specific activity or engagement within a project, while others addressed transition in relation to the UBO reorientation as a whole; that is, the UBO being transitioned to a new framework where projects are in full alignment with UNESCO priorities. All staff agreed, however, that transition should only occur when there is planning and mutual agreement from all the parties involved that the next steps are both mutually beneficial. So, transition is viewed as a consensual arrangement, not a single-sided decided-upon strategy.

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[23] This decree defines more strictly the rules and regulations for hiring of contract personnel, as well as the types of contracts and services to be rendered by the international agencies. Above all, it stresses that cooperation projects should focus on the delivery of technical cooperation that provides quality assistance to government partners in the areas of expertise and capacity-building, adding value to national programmes in accordance with the specific mandate of each agency.

Transition strategies for projects are viewed by UBO staff as somewhat contradictory in a work environment that has such a heavy reliance on raising extra-budgetary funds. The donor, which in this case is primarily the Brazilian government, has the upper hand in deciding when a contract starts and stops, and the concept of transition is completely absent from these negotiations. Case in point: UNESCO provides (indirectly) staffing solutions for the Ministry of Health; however, the Ministry has limitations on the number of staff they can hire directly, so there is no way that UNESCO could exit with an expectation that the Ministry (alone) could carry out their current scope of work without the additional staff. Therefore, transition was not discussed during the negotiations of the contracts because there was nothing to transition to at that point (in the absence of another partner). Additionally, it is often the case that changes in the administration (government) lead to the cancellation of contracts (unilaterally), highlighting the inherent difficulty in implementing a planned approach to exit and transition. In an environment where organisations must compete for funding, a plan to transition away from partnerships from the beginning has not been rooted in the way UBO carries out its work.

Staff members interviewed agreed that UBO's focus on transitioning away from its involvement with partners on specific projects is largely a work in progress. While they consider the concept of transition relevant, it is the mechanics of implementing it into the project management cycle, from project inception to execution, monitoring, and evaluation, which will take time to develop. Asked when they envision the process taking shape, most staff interviewed agreed that the reorientation of the UBO would have to come to closure before any substantive developments in this regard would become visible. One of the most cited reasons for this was the vast amount of resources—especially time—that has been devoted to collaborate with UNESCO HQ staff to reorient the office and the portfolio of projects in each sector. In addition, because of the anticipated overhaul of projects which have a service-oriented component, it is unclear, at least for some sectors at UBO, which partners would be those who would work with UNESCO to implement specific projects and activities.

Examples of Exit and Transition/ Current Practices

Due to long-standing management issues and the concerns raised by the UNESCO's external auditor regarding the use of extra-budgetary funds, the Director-General initiated a comprehensive review to reorient UNESCO's operations in Brazil. Since November 2005, Central Services, a division of UNESCO, and under the coordination of the Bureau of Field Coordination, began working closely with program sectors to make proposals to reorient the operations of the office. The multi-disciplinary team also developed proposals for a new strategic framework for the office and reviewed structures, staffing, administrative and financial procedures and processes. The purpose of the ongoing reorientation is to make UNESCO's activities more focused on results.

UBO Project Review

To establish the relevance of the work carried out by UBO to UNESCO's mission, a team of consultants reviewed the ongoing projects and those in the "pipeline" to see which ones should be revised or terminated. In addition, the project review identified the overall strengths and weaknesses of the existing project portfolio. For those projects that were not in alignment, the consultants proposed some reengineering so that it would be clear what UNESCO's added value to the project was. Some projects were completely outside the scope of UNESCO's work and did not align with any of the programs, so those are being phased out (see the transitioning from UBO's portfolio in the Health Sector below). The assessment of the strength of UBO's project portfolio was used to develop a strategic framework to ensure that its work responds to Brazil's needs while keeping a focus on UNESCO priorities. The typical review of a project contained a full profile of its field of action (e.g., institutional development and capacity building); the main objectives; the partners involved; the budget, duration and it status within UBO, i.e., whether it was an ongoing project or new in the "pipeline." The analysis component highlighted the relevance of the project to Brazil priorities, UNESCO's mandate and, based on these elements, comments and recommendations for management to consider next steps for the project.

Transitioning from UBO's Portfolio in the Health Sector

As part of the project review, the team determined that all contracts with the Brazilian Ministry of Health, which were service-oriented, were out of UNESCO's scope of work considering its mission. For the most part, UNESCO's role was to contract technical experts for the Ministry of Health.

In order to advance on the transition of these projects away from UNESCO's purview, a delegation met with the then Vice-Minister of Health, Ministry staff members, and the Director of Multilateral Technical Cooperation of the Brazilian Agency for Cooperation, in December 2005. The overall objective of the meeting was to (1) set basic principles of a transition strategy for the gradual phasing out of UNESCO from projects in the health sector (those falling outside its mandate while maintaining the HIV/AIDS preventive education programs) without harming the Ministry's operations and programs; (2) reach an agreement on a realistic timeframe for this transition strategy; (3) agree on a process for developing the transition strategy through discussions between the Ministry of Health and UBO.

The Ministry of Health's position was that (1) the time frame to phase out projects the Ministry outside UNESCO's mandate should be acceptable to both parties; (2) already negotiated pipeline projects that have raised expectation on the Brazilian side should be carefully analyzed as the non implementation of many of them may be very damaging; (3) approved and ongoing projects should be given priority and that great care be taken not to interrupt them abruptly. Additionally, the Ministry's position is that they do not want to close down their ongoing cooperation with UNESCO.

Both UNESCO and UBO have agreed that:

- ongoing projects should be completed by 2008 and that pipeline projects that would be retained following a joint review should also go until 2008, bearing in mind that many of these pipeline projects are simple extensions of ongoing ones;

- that strategies for the re-orientation of related agreements to increase the added value provided by UNESCO and the capacity building of the Ministry, as well as for their smooth completion during the transition period, be jointly defined;

- that cooperation between the Ministry of Health and UNESCO will be carried forward and moved to a different phase maximizing UNESCO's added value, notably in capacity building and research, in areas corresponding to national and UNESCO priorities;

- that a joint working group with representatives from the Ministry of Health and UBO will be established to develop an overall strategy for the transition phase, specific strategies for the re-orientation and implementation of on-going projects and to define areas and modalities for future cooperation.

The talks with the Ministry staff have started, most recently on 30 June 2006. The purpose of that meeting was to agree upon on the Terms of Reference of the working group (sent to the Ministry staff in advance of the meeting) and to develop a mutual understanding of the proposed transition.

Transitioning from UBO's involvement in the Open Schools Program

During the period from 1999-2000, the UNESCO Office in Brazil conducted some research to assess the situation of youngsters in low-income, urban areas, within the cities of São Paulo, Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, Fortaleza, among others. Additionally, UNESCO published the "Map of Violence", a complete databank of information on violence indicators in Brazil, as well as "Cultivating lives, disarming violence", a survey of 200 youths and their struggle against violence in all Brazilian States. The findings of this research suggested that Brazilian youth were wanting to participate in productive activities in order to stay away from crime and violence; a widespread lack of access to cultural and sports activities; a general agreement that arts, sports, education and culture could be an alternative channel of expression for youth; and the lack of confidence in governmental institutions and policies.

UNESCO started advocating for the opening of schools and other vacant public and private spaces on weekends in order to attract the youth with a whole host of recreational activities, in the hope of addressing the situation of violence and to construct spaces for the development of citizenship and understanding. Aside from offering youth an alternative to occupy their spare time with cultural activities, the program raises awareness and provides discussions on sexuality, drugs, intolerance, violence, AIDS, pregnancy, ethics, politics, and citizenship.

Since the beginning of its implementation in the year 2000, the Making Room Program has conducted training workshops in all states and municipalities where the Program is active, involving several participants who collaborated for its development. In addition, UNESCO has the responsibility to issue payments to over 2000 volunteers of the program.

After verifying the success of the Program in several Brazilian states, the Federal Government decided to launch the "Making Room" program on a national scale. Through this program, over 1 million Brazilian shall have access to sport, leisure, arts and preventive education workshops, and other cultural and educational assets until the year of 2007.

In January 2006, UNESCO met with the Ministry of Education – FNDE and SECAD –to discuss managerial questions related to the implementation of the Escola Aberta Program. UNESCO emphasized the importance of discussing ways to institutionalize the program. The Ministry of Education suggested that the Programa Dinheiro Direto na Escola (Money Direct for the Schools) – PDDE – could be a viable alternative to transfer resources to schools and to those who develop the program. The Ministry of Education has already used this mechanism in similar actions, which suggests that UNESCO role as financial administrator can be replaced.

It was agreed that a Working Group composed of UNESCO and Ministry representatives would prepare a document adapting the Programa Dinheiro

Direto na Escola to the needs of Escola Aberta Program. The need to revise the agreement which establishes the partnership between UNESCO and the Federal Government was also mentioned. The new proposal brings about an important change regarding the "service oriented" component which represents an annual amount of 21 million Reais. The new focus is for UNESCO to intensify its own activities as a technical cooperation organisation and focus on training the Program's team, developing implementation strategies, creating partnerships, monitoring and evaluating, and developing publications. UBO's ability to take on this new role will depend, in part, on what the new office will look like after the reorientation, both in terms of staff and their areas of technical expertise in the areas denoted above.

In March 2006, UNESCO and the Ministry of Education delivered workshops in 8 Brazilian states on the PDDE system where the program is implemented. School directors, local coordination teams (specialists from Education Secretariats), state coordination teams and supervisors connected to the Secretariats, attended the training. Its objective was to familiarize the various teams in working with PDDE – how to send the resources, rendering of accounts, etc. Further negotiations are ongoing with the Ministry for transitioning UBO's involvement in the nationwide Open Schools program. Ministry of Education officials stated that a potential role for UNESCO would be to monitor and evaluate the progress made by the program, given its prior involvement at the state and local level.

Issues and Challenges

The full development of a comprehensive focus on transition at UBO will probably hinge in large part to several factors, such as:

- The extent to which staff dealing with partner organisations can engage them while making it clear that UBO's involvement will cease over time.
- Avoid engaging in work that positions UNESCO to deliver services without an added value component from the organisation and outside its scope of work, as defined by the Programme and Budget (C/5).

- Infusing the concept of transition to staff working within each sector and providing ongoing training and support to them to ensure that the focus on transition is sustained.

- The favourable disengagement form areas where UNESCO is scheduled to withdraw, such as the health sector. The extent to which this can be accomplished in a way that accommodates the needs/interests of all parties would be a huge success, sending a message to stakeholders that what is intended can provide a suitable outcome for all parties involved.

- One of the challenges of the transitioning away from service-oriented contracts is that, at least in the short-term, the project portfolio of each sector may be reduced considerably. Smaller portfolios will inevitably provide less financial resources for UBO.

UNESCO first established a presence in Jakarta in 1951 when it opened the Field Office for Southeast Asian Science Cooperation (SEASCO), which subsequently became the Regional Office for Science and Technology for Southeast Asia (ROSTSEA) in 1967. A further name change occurred in 1993, when ROSTEA became the UNESCO Jakarta Office in keeping with the house-wide policy on office names. In 2001, the Office added to its regional science responsibilities by becoming the Office of the UNESCO Representative to Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Today, the UNESCO Office, Jakarta has dual responsibilities as both a Cluster Office and Regional Science Bureau:

- UNESCO Jakarta operates as a sub-regional office with responsibilities across all UNESCO sectors – education, science, social science, culture and communication – for a "cluster" of five Member States including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Timor Leste (since 2003) and Brunei Darussalam (since 2005); and

- UNESCO Jakarta has particular responsibility as the Regional Science Bureau for the 47 Member States that constitute the Asia-Pacific region.

Reflecting these broad ranging responsibilities, UNESCO Jakarta is also one of the largest field offices of UNESCO, with around 65 staff at the time of the visit – including those employed under UNESCO Regular Programme Budget and those working on extra-budgetary contract, on secondment from other aid agencies or under Member State programmes, and as interns, contract volunteers and field project officers. The total programme staff comprises eight unit heads (typically a UNESCO Programme Specialist), including one in each of the Education, Communication and Information, and Culture sectors. Within the Science sector there are a further five Programme Specialists in the areas of Engineering and Technology, Basic Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Earth and Water Sciences and Costal and Marine Sciences. The

remainder of the Office staff comprise programme and administrative assistants, field coordinators and project officers, and finance and other organisational support staff.

The Regular Programme budget for the Jakarta Office is approximately $2.1 million for the 2006/07 biennium. In previous years this has been supplemented with significant extra budgetary funds. For example, in the 2005 fiscal year, the office received a total of $5.6 million, of which 72% was extra budgetary funding. As the Regional Bureau for Science, the largest share of funding is dedicated to the Science sector (44%), followed by Education (27%), Culture (11%), Communication and Information (9%) and other running costs (9%).

Since the end of 2004, a major focus of the office has been on cross-sectoral efforts to coordinate the UNESCO response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami and the subsequent Jogyakarta earthquake. The devastating damage and loss of life in the Tsunami-hit coastal regions of Aceh and North Sumatra has required a host of immediate and medium-term responses to rebuild both the physical infrastructure as well as the social infrastructure.

It is UNESCO's role, as the United Nations agency responsible for education, science, culture and communication, to assist in particular with the rebuilding of the social infrastructure in Tsunami-hit areas. This objective has been a central driver of the Jakarta Office's activities over the last two years, including supporting the development of an Earthquake and Tsunami warning system, strengthening community-based disaster preparedness, restoring radio broadcasting in Aceh, providing post-Tsunami support to community education and mainstream teachers, and supporting the protection and conservation of biodiversity in protected ecological environments, particularly in the light of new and existing threats associated with the Tsunami and its aftermath.

BELIEFS, ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

UNSECO Jakarta is a busy and vibrant Office staffed with talented and enthusiastic people. All interviewees gave willingly of their time and were keen to discuss their own work and interested in the issue of exit and exit strategies. In general, the staff we interviewed expressed a strong interest in seeing the outcomes of the evaluation, which they considered could provide some useful tools and guidance for use in their work.

Interviews with programme staff revealed a generally low level of understanding of the concepts of exit, transition and exit strategies. Some staff immediately grasped the concepts and could clearly articulate their understanding of the terms (i.e. exit meant withdrawal of UNESCO resources and participation from a programme, project or activity). Interestingly, most of these individuals said that their familiarity with these concepts did not come from their time at UNESCO, where the terms are not in common use. Instead, these staff gained their familiarity with exit strategies during previous employment, often with another UN agency, major donor or NGO.

As a result of their low level of familiarity, many interviewees sought clarification of what was meant by exit and exit strategies. When we provided an explanation of the terms, based on the definitions in the Terms of Reference for this project, staff understood at a conceptual level what was meant by exit and transition strategies. Many staff immediately made the connection to sustainability, and began talking about how their work practices were heavily influenced by principles of sustainability (e.g. involving local partners from the outset; taking care to develop local ownership; and embedding project support mechanisms in the local communities and government). Many staff had also thought about exiting from programmes but there was a strong reluctance to do so and many staff did not see the relevance of developing an exit strategy *per se* for a variety of reasons discussed below.

One important feature of the Jakarta Office environment that influences the perceived irrelevance of exit strategies is the large number of very small scale

(e.g. US$5,000 – US$60,000) projects that form the core of the current programme of the Office.[24] These discrete projects are short-term in focus and have clear start and end points. For example, at the smaller end of the scale, a project might simply entail the organisation and hosting of a one-off workshop on a topic of interest to partners and Member States. Such projects are not of sufficient scale, length or complexity to merit planning for exit and, since such projects dominate the day-to-day activities of Programme Specialists it is not surprising that they consider exit strategies of little relevance to their work.

Furthermore, many of these small scale projects are opportunistic and respond to specific needs (e.g. disaster response) and collectively can be seen as independent or *ad hoc* rather than complementary initiatives that collectively contribute towards the achievement of an overarching strategic objective. Thus, programme staff often loose sight of the long-term strategic objective associated with a project or set of projects and, consequently, does not identify the needs for strategic programming and planning for exit. The recently appointed Director of the Office has identified this issue as one of the key challenges facing the Office and is committed to lifting the strategic horizons of programme staff and to reorienting the Office to focus on fewer, larger projects that enable planning over a medium-term horizon.

Another feature that is particular to the Office's role as the Regional Science Bureau for Asia-Pacific is that the Science Sector has defined long-term programmes (e.g. Man and the Biosphere and the International Hydrology Programme) that run over extended periods of several decades. For an Office operating within the confines of those long-standing (some would say permanent) programmes, the question of exit from broad areas of activity does not really arise. Decisions on exit at a programmatic level do not rest with the field offices but instead lie in the hands of the General Conference, Executive Board and the relevant councils responsible for governing these large international programmes. Office staff consider that exit strategies (if appropriate) in relation to such programmes should be articulated in

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[24] We note that this is not a feature that is particular to the Jakarta Office but is characteristic of many UNESCO field offices.

UNESCO's major programming documents (C4 and C5), which is not currently the case.

Most staff interviewed considered that planning for exit is both more relevant and critical for larger, longer-term projects. Nevertheless, of the larger, multi-year projects managed by the Office that have involved exit (e.g. see box on the Capacity Building of Local Radio project), the *exit strategy* is almost always implicit rather than explicit and was developed as the project progressed rather than being in built into the project design. In our limited sample of project documents provided by the Office, we found no examples of explicit or codified exit strategies.

Notwithstanding the above, we did find exceptions of good exit thinking, particularly in relation to projects and programmes that involve working to build capacity of communities at a local level. Programme staff are generally very aware of the risks of intervening unsustainably at a local level, where UNESCO's actions impact directly on the day to day lives of vulnerable people. This is reflected in their focus on sustainability, as evidenced by the care that programme specialists take to ensure that project modalities do not create dependencies that obstruct exit and undermine sustainability.

Most staff interviewed recognised the intrinsic link between sustainability and UNESCO's exit from a project or programme (i.e. exit is the ultimate test of sustainability). However, many interviewees were understandably reluctant to exit from a programme or project, even in cases where they argued the programme or project in question had been successful and were sustainable. When asked about the inherent contradictions in this viewpoint, staff put forward a variety of arguments to justify their positions. Some common reasons included:

- UNESCO may step back from a project but will always provide further help if asked;

- Since UNESCO is not a major funder, it cannot negotiate binding commitments from programme partners (e.g. governments) to take over

responsibility for the programme, and so UNESCO's withdrawal risks undermining the programme and all that it has achieved; and

- Member States sometimes place pressure on UNESCO not to withdraw.

Although most staff had limited direct experience of developing and implementing exit strategies for their projects and programmes, most staff thought that in circumstances where an exit strategy was needed, it would be important to develop the strategy in the early stages of the planning cycle. Staff stressed that it is not possible to anticipate and plan for every contingency in the context of a particular project or initiative, but most agreed that their sectoral and project experience would help them identify the sort of issues that might be likely to arise.

Most staff did not consider that UNESCO had clear expectations in relation to exit, and that good practice was essentially left up to the programme specialist to decide. Many felt there was a lack of guidance material and opportunities for training on such issues. A related point is that programme staff generally work individually rather than in teams due to the small number of programme staff in the Office and because they are working across diverse disciplines that do not necessarily share much in common. Consequently, a number of staff commented that when they first joined the Office they were effectively left to teach themselves the job. Furthermore, many Programme Staff are hired for their subject expertise rather than their programming skills and competencies. Their role as a UNESCO Programme Specialist often requires quite different competencies to those that they bring with them to the job and, consequently, there is wide variation in the programming competencies of Staff in the Office. This manifests, for example, in inconsistent quality of project proposal documents.

A common complaint of Office staff related to the administrative burden of their jobs, which has consequences for the amount of time they have to spend on project and programme content and contributing to and overseeing the implementation of activities. This administrative burden is exacerbated by the large number of small scale of projects. Most staff interviewed indicated that,

irrespective of the size of a project, all disbursements of funding must comply with the same contractual and other administrative requirements. Consequently, programme specialists spend a disproportionately large amount of their time on contract administration for small projects rather than contributing their energies and intellectual capacities to programme implementation. In some instances, the process of developing a project proposal document becomes a "compliance" exercise (i.e. a necessary requirement to gain funding or approval to disburse funds but of little benefit in and of itself) and it is not unheard of for project documents to be "delegated" to a partner or consultant who is to be involved in the prospective project. It is therefore unsurprising that project documents do not place significant emphasis on exit strategies.

Notwithstanding the above, many staff observed very useful insights that were pertinent to the subject of exit strategies and indicated that the interviews had been useful in shifting their thinking. From this perspective, the interviews themselves can be seen as having raised awareness levels of staff in the Office. A number of staff indicated that they would bear the discussion in mind the next time they were working on a significant project proposal.

EXAMPLES OF EXIT AND TRANSITION

Most examples of exit discussed during the interviews were externally driven and linked to termination of funding. Indeed, we found few examples of proactive and planned exit from projects or programmes.

A major contributing factor is the fact that the Office's regular programme budget is largely committed to meeting staff costs and extra budgetary funding is often small scale and time limited, thereby limiting the perceived value of planning for and implementing exit. Similarly, the independent and *ad hoc* nature of these projects means that individual programme specialists see little sense in thinking about the combined impacts of projects, which also narrows the planning horizons of staff.

Most staff indicated that they would develop an exit strategy for larger, longer-term projects but the lack of such projects meant there were few if any codified exit strategies. Even for the larger projects overseen by the Office (e.g. the Aceh Tsunami Disaster Response projects, particularly the development of an Early Warning System; the Creative Learning Communities for Children project; and the Development of Media and Democracy in Indonesia project) we did not find examples of codified exit strategies.

The project documents for most large projects contain discussions of sustainability, which influence the features of the programme design such that sustainability is "built in" to the programme. For example, a project proposal for post-Tsunami assistance for Gunung Leuser National Park in Aceh, Indonesia discusses how the activities of the project (e.g. provision of physical infrastructure and equipment for park rangers, enhancing the capabilities for park management in dealing with post-Tsunami and other threats, and improving the park conservation monitoring regime) are expected to contribute to post-project sustainability. While this is to be commended, the exit strategy for the project was implicit rather than explicit and, consequently, it is unclear under what circumstances UNESCO would consider deferring exit should certain contingencies arise.

Communication and Information Sector: Capacity Building of Local Radio Project

An example of a significant project where deliberate and proactive exit has occurred is the Capacity Building for Local Radio project aimed at strengthening democracy and good governance through the development of media in Indonesia.

The project originated in February 1999 and, through a four-phase series of donor-funded projects, continued until April 2004. The activities conducted during each phase were as follows:

- Phase 1 concentrated on capacity building of the radio media in relation to the 1999 general and Presidential elections. The participating radio stations received a starting package of technical equipment and a grant of US$2,000 to cover Internet connection and recruitment of additional reporters. The main element, however, was the training of local radio reporters in basic journalistic skills, democracy and election coverage methods.
- Phase 2 involved adding more radio stations to the network and the establishment of an Internet-based information exchange system to enable radio station managers and journalists to share learning and experiences amongst themselves.
- Phase 3 involved adding still more stations were added to the network, the production of four media text books and assisting the network to formally establish itself as a government-recognised independent media organisation– the Local Radio Network for Democracy (LRND); and
- Phase 4 concentrated on training of trainers in each of the radio stations enabling LRND members to develop their own training capacity. Furthermore, a number of transparency seminars were conducted to promote awareness of the role of radio in building democracy.

UNESCO's involvement in the project was originally planned to end by May 2002. However, due to intensified political and religious conflicts in Maluku and political tension in Aceh, combined with the tense situation created by the Bali bombing, UNESCO's withdrawal from the project was deferred. This required good faith on the part of the donors in the absence of a codified and agreed exit strategy. Furthermore, after the project had officially ended in May 2003, a donor approved utilisation of unspent funds on follow-up activities, including further seminars/workshops for members of LRND.

A recent report on the results achieved by the project concluded that "the project's overall achievements have been a success. The radio stations have become more editorially independent with relevant programmes and have gained the respect of the community they cater [to]. The stations involved have become credible sources of information and a forum where people can

participate in constructive dialogue for democratic governance. In addition, the independent LRND has been engaged in at least three co-operations with three different organisations – a good sign of the trustworthiness of the LRND as well as a promising [sign of] sustainability for the Network's future."[25]

Notwithstanding the apparent sustainability of this initiative following UNESCO's withdrawal, the programme specialist in charge of this project now considers that it would be important, for similar projects in the future, to formulate an explicit exit strategy early in the project rather than developing the exit strategy implicitly as the project unfolds. The reasons given for this included that it would become easier to adapt the project to changing circumstances and to adjust timeframes and the planned activities if problems are encountered that threaten to compromise the sustainability of the project. The Programme Specialist considered that a key advantage of having an explicit exit strategy would be greater transparency and agreement amongst all project partners of the circumstances under which UNESCO (and the donors) would withdraw their support. It would also make it easier to recognise in advance when expected results are not in line with expectations, so that problems and potential solutions to those problems can be identified at an earlier stage than they might otherwise be.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The main issues and challenges for field office staff in planning for and implementing transition and exit strategies can be summarised as follows:

- The level of awareness amongst programme staff of the concept of exit is generally low and a number of staff also questioned the relevance of exit strategies for their day to day work. Without awareness of the potential role for exit and, in particular, codified exit strategies, staff cannot judge for themselves when developing an exit strategy would be appropriate;

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[25] Development of Media and Democracy in Indonesia: Completion Report.

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- Staff have very limited (if any) experience of planning for and implementing exit strategies in an explicit way and lack the knowledge and expertise to develop exit strategies within the context of a comprehensive project document. This is exacerbated by the lack of training opportunities for staff and the culture of working independently within their sphere of responsibility;

- The large number of small, short-term, opportunity-driven projects limits the planning horizon of staff, which reinforces the perceived irrelevance of exit strategies, which are typically implemented in the case of programmes and projects with medium- to long-term objectives; and

- Project planning systems do not encourage or support the development of exit strategies. Generally speaking, project documents are produced to standards set by donors and there is no consistent practice in relation to planning for implementation of projects, activities and programmes. Staff are not aware of any guidance material on the development of project documents or, more specifically, on exit strategies.

Exacerbating these issues and challenges are aspects of UNESCO's current organisational culture, systems and structures that hinder exit practices:

- There is a culture of continuation of programmes, projects and activities which manifests in a general reluctance to withdraw from an initiative or to say no to requests for further assistance;

- There is also a culture within the Office of working in isolation, in part because each Programme Specialist has a broad area of responsibility that may have little or no overlap with the responsibilities of other Programme Specialists. This is exacerbated by the lack of critical mass within each Sector in the Office, with the exception of the Science sector where there is greater capacity. Collectively, these factors limit the sharing of good practices and exchanges of ideas, knowledge and experience, including about how to plan for and implementation exits;

- There is a very high administrative burden on staff, particularly associated contract administration. This burden limits the time that

programme staff can spend on project/programme content and the planning and oversight of activities;

- The "trickling filter" allocation of regular programme funds to UNESCO field offices, whereby budgets are broken down into five programme levels (Major Programme, Sub-programmes, Main Lines of Action, Actions and Activities) and then spread geographically across regions and Offices within regions, results in very small amounts of money (e.g. US$5,000) being available for discretionary spending within a given area. This is one cause of the high administrative burden on staff but, more seriously, it significantly limits the modalities that UNESCO can use and, therefore, the impacts that it can achieve.[26] In some cases, costs associated with administering Regular Programme discretionary spending may exceed the amount of discretionary funding to be spent. It is therefore unsurprising that such funding is used for one-off, discrete initiatives where planning for exit is not relevant; and

- There is a lack of mobility and interchange of personnel, knowledge and ideas, which provides little opportunity for personal growth and development of new competencies amongst programme staff. There is also a lack of training of new UNESCO staff about what it means to perform the role of a UNESCO Programme Specialist.

LESSONS LEARNED

Staff had a number of suggestions to improve understanding and practices in relation to planning for and implementation of transition and exit strategies. These included:

- Provide increased support for programme staff by providing more and better targeted training and coaching;

- Promote mobility of all UNESCO staff, not just those that have recently joined UNESCO;

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[26] Field Offices have previously requested that decentralisation of Regular Programme funds to Field Office be done at Sub-programme level, so as to give flexibility to Offices over the best use of funds.

- Reduce the administrative burden associated with administration of programme funds, including adopting a risk-based approach that applies less onerous standards for low value contracts;

- The Office should focus on fewer, more significant projects instead of trying to be all things to all people, which staff considered impractical given the small size of the office; and

- Facilitate information and knowledge sharing; including through enhanced use of ICTs (e.g. develop an intranet with tools and guidance material for programme staff, including templates for project documents and guidance on how to develop sound exit strategies).

Interviews and meetings

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