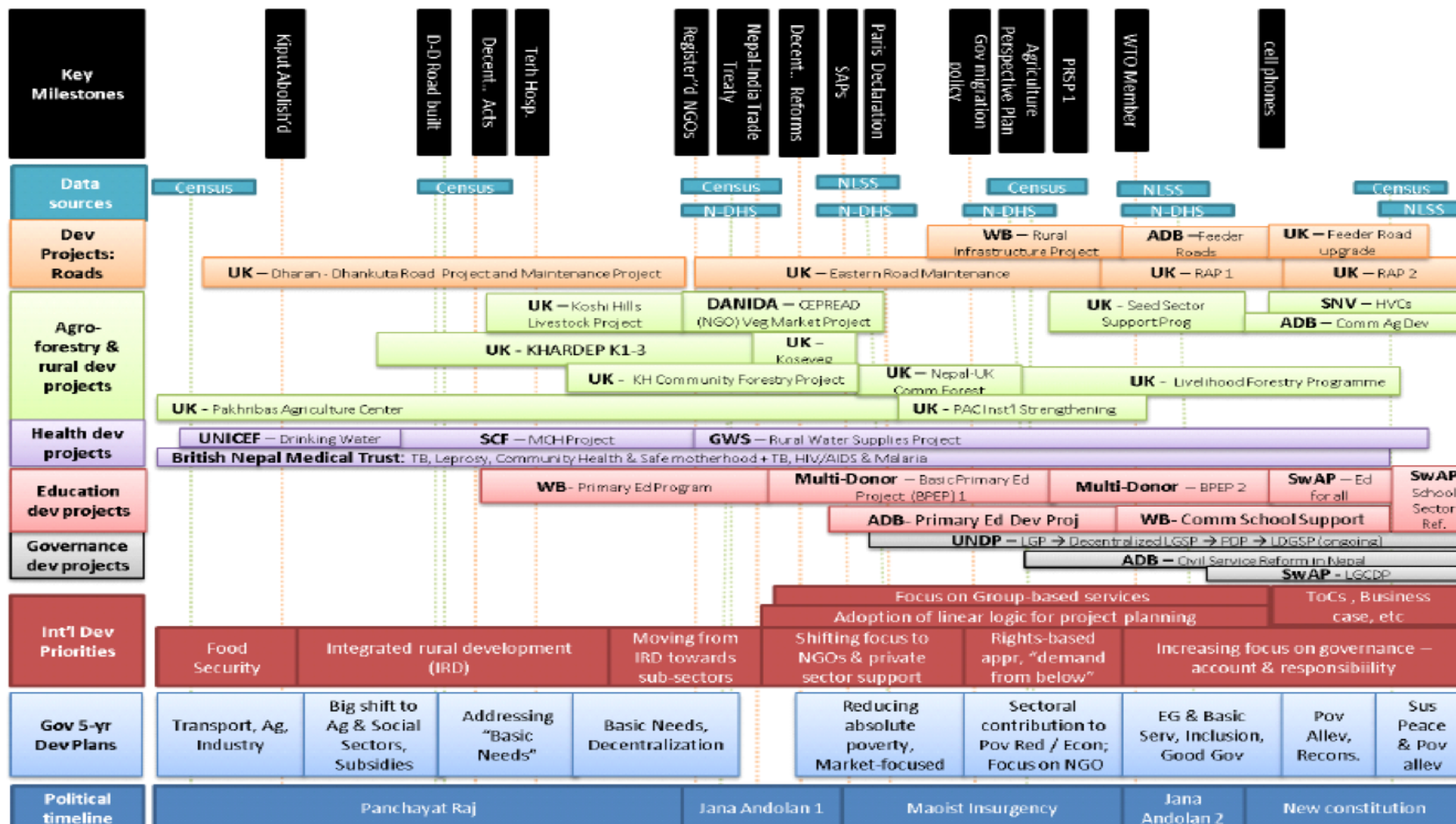Sustaining All of Our Hard Work: Plan, Implement, & Evaluate for a Sustainable Exit from the Start

Jindra Cekan PhD at VEN, Vienna Sept 2020

Aid programming across sectors & time (Nepal)

Lessons from most sustained?
- "Be clear about the **types of sustainability** that are desirable and feasible;
- Develop a **sustainability strategy early**;
- Identify **other parties that need to be involved** in implementing your sustainability strategy"

Source: Patricia Rogers, DFID, GovNepal Koshi Hills, analysis of 635 projects over 40 years 2013, presentation with Valuing Voices to AEA 2015.

Expenditures: $5+ trillion spent on foreign aid since 1945
$137 billion was spent in 2014 alone on development projects

After much M&E, we're not sure if what we're doing has *actually* been **sustainable**
Less than 1% of all projects have been evaluated for sustained impacts.
Imagine the **potential waste of resources spent if impacts are unachieved.**

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What our programming looks like as we leave

"In my 60 years working in our District, **no one has ever returned to tell us what they learned nor returned to see what lasted**. How can we get funding to do post-project evaluation ourselves?" (District Commissioner, Zimbabwe via Valuing Voices, 2016)

"Effective programs… create **islands of protected effectiveness** in a sea of need and suffering… "

(Michael Quinn Patton 2019)

VALUINGVOICES

Sustainability Definitions, Assumptions, specifically ex-post project evaluation and **Exit Strategy**

Sustainability (basis for ex-post project evaluation):
*"**The continuation of benefits** from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed**. The probability of continued long-term benefits**. **The resilience to risk** of the net benefit flows **over time**"* (OECD/ DAC Aid Criteria 2019)

Exit Strategy Approaches:

* An operational and logistical plan for **how an organization will withdraw its resources** while ensuring that achievement of project goals is not jeopardized and that **progress toward these goals will continue** (Tufts/ FANTA for USAID 2015)

* Rankings with partners are helpful to focus a multi-month/year to phase project activities over, down before phasing (exiting) out. (Valuing Voices, Bangladesh TDH 2018)

http://mentalfloss.com/

VALUINGVOICES
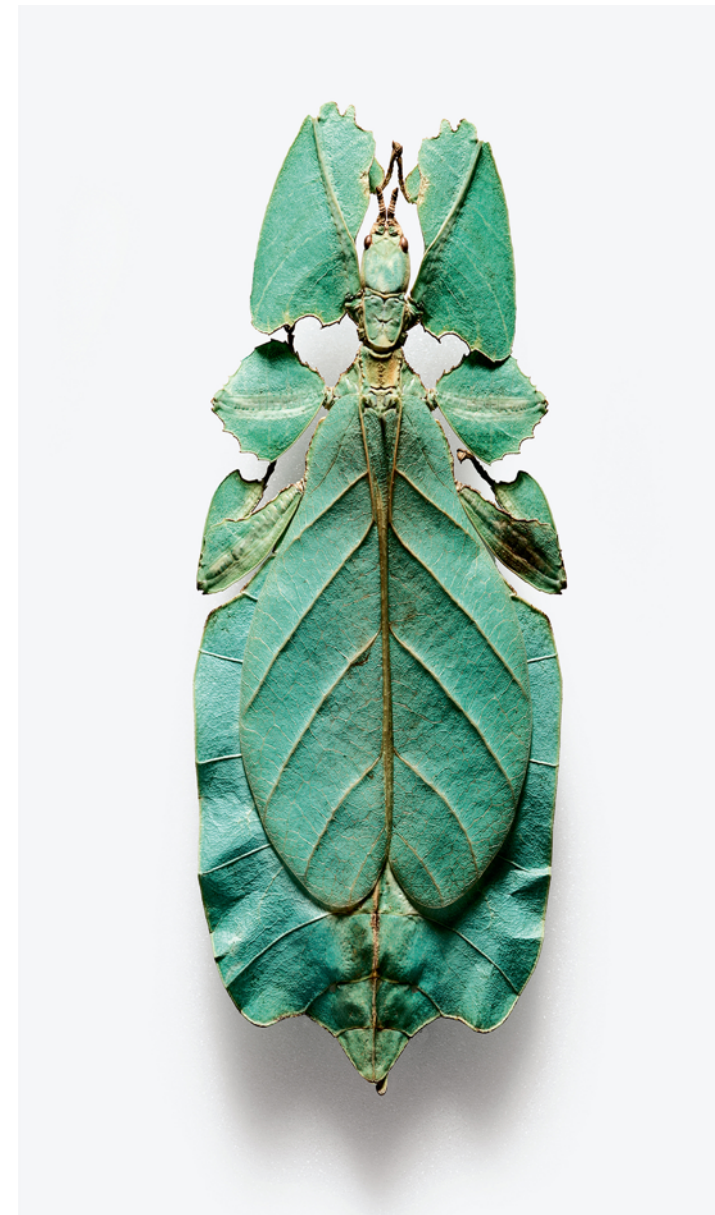
Worst Case: Negative Water/ Sanitation Outcomes 3 yrs ex-post

Less than stellar results at endline

*Dismal rates of feces disposal (**below baseline**), handwashing (**below midterm**). Nearly doubled open defecation (from midterm)*

*Discouraging rates of Latrine use (**decreases by 60-75%**)*

Baseline only re-created

Figure 1. Three-year sustainability of key RANO-HP sanitation and hygiene outcomes (household survey)

Legend:
- Latrine use*
- Private latrine use*
- Use of latrine with washable slab
- Safe child feces disposal*
- Adults practice open defecation*
- Handwashing station*
- Handwashing at key times*
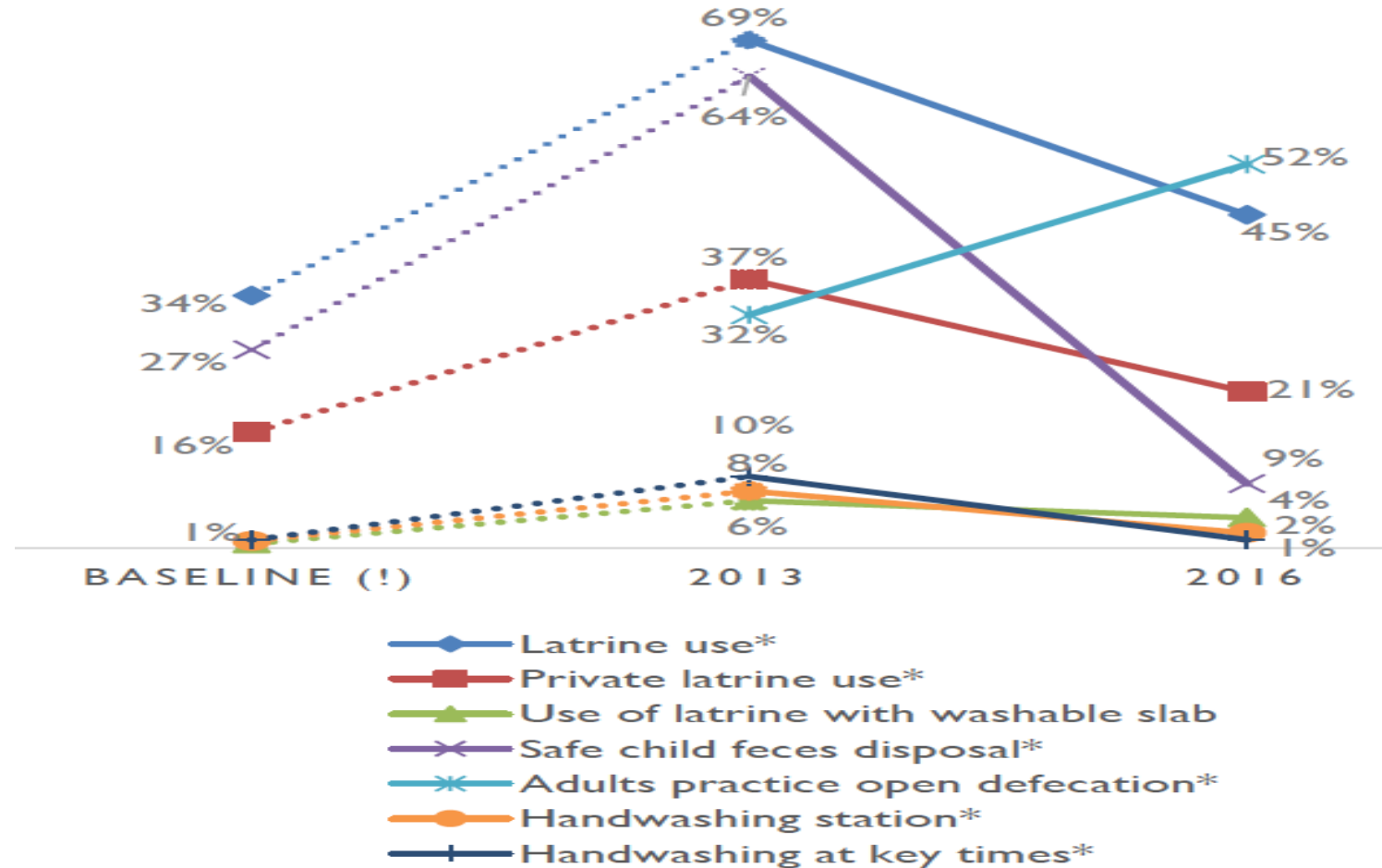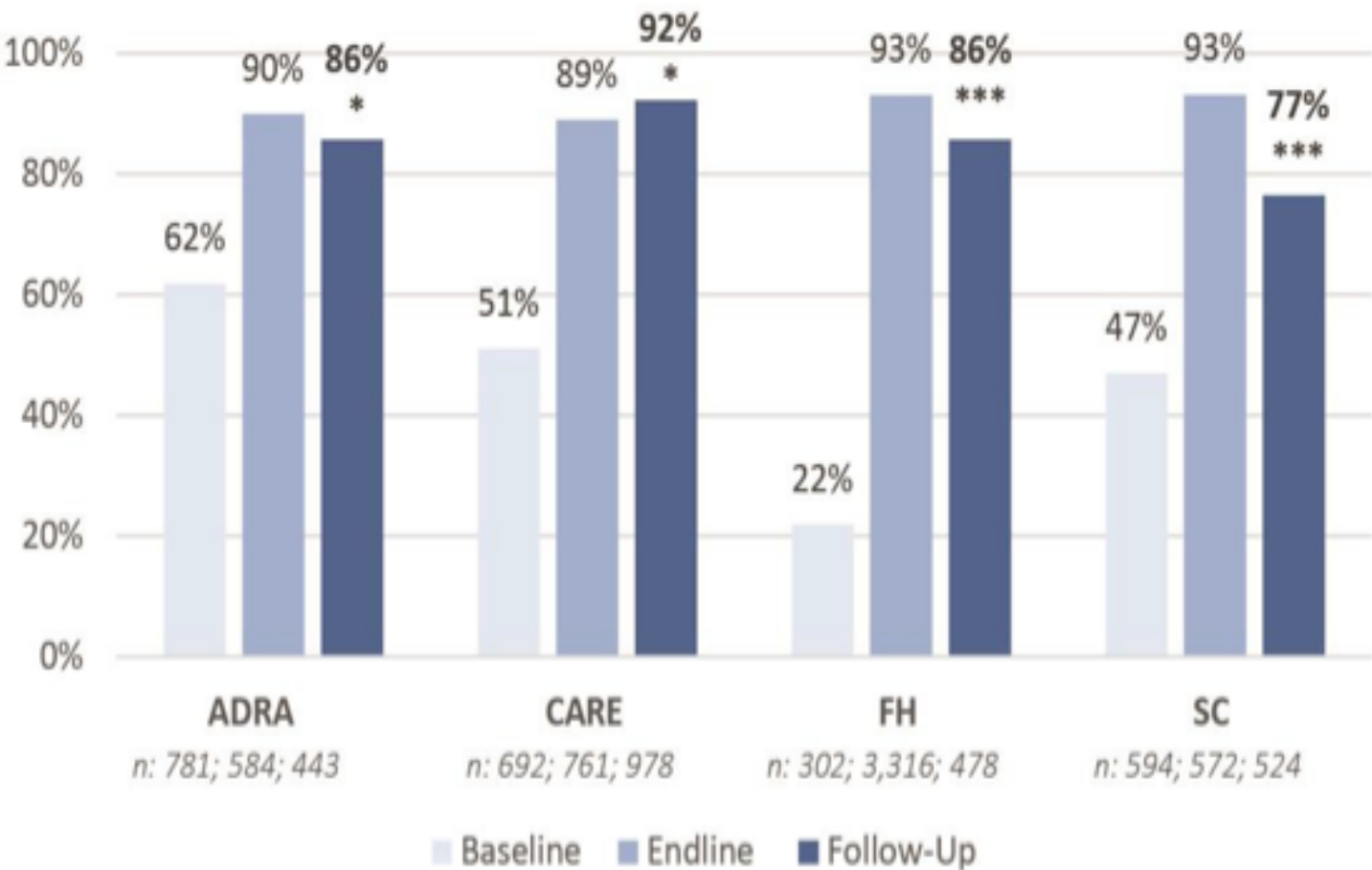
*indicates significant difference at p<0.05
(!) Baseline values, shown to illustrate prior trends, were derived from a report. Measurement or sampling methodology differed; therefore, results are not directly comparable to 2013 and 2016 results.

USAID/ CRS/ CARE/ CARITAS, and local NGOs **Madagascar,** RANO-HP project

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Mixed (Typical) Results: Child Growth Monitoring Outcomes 2 yrs post

*Decreased growth monitoring from end line by **only 4-16%** (ADRA, FH, SC)*

Improved growth monitoring by 3% (CARE)

Figure 9. Percentage of Households with Children 3–35 Months of Age Participating in Growth Monitoring in Bolivia

	Baseline	Endline	Follow-Up
ADRA	62%	90%	86% *
CARE	51%	89%	92% *
FH	22%	93%	86% ***
SC	47%	93%	77% ***

ADRA
n: 781; 584; 443

CARE
n: 692; 761; 978

FH
n: 302; 3,316; 478

SC
n: 594; 572; 524

■ Baseline ■ Endline ■ Follow-Up

ADRA, CARE, FH, Save the Children **Bolivia** USAID Exit Strategies, 4-countr study, Tufts Friedman School of Nutrition and FHI/360 '16

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Mixed Results/ Unexpected Positive Results in Village Banks 6 yrs post

Only 2/3 banks were sustained...

But **10% were new village banks formed post-closure** *in communities by word of mouth or self-help training*

No baseline or final, **only since midterm**

PACT NEPAL UNANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Number of Banks

64% sustained

10% of sample, new VB

Midterm Evaluation 2000

Post Project Evaluation 2008

Project: 1988-2002, Team visited 450 sample of 1536 Village Banks, found 288 of them thriving and 45 new ones emerged

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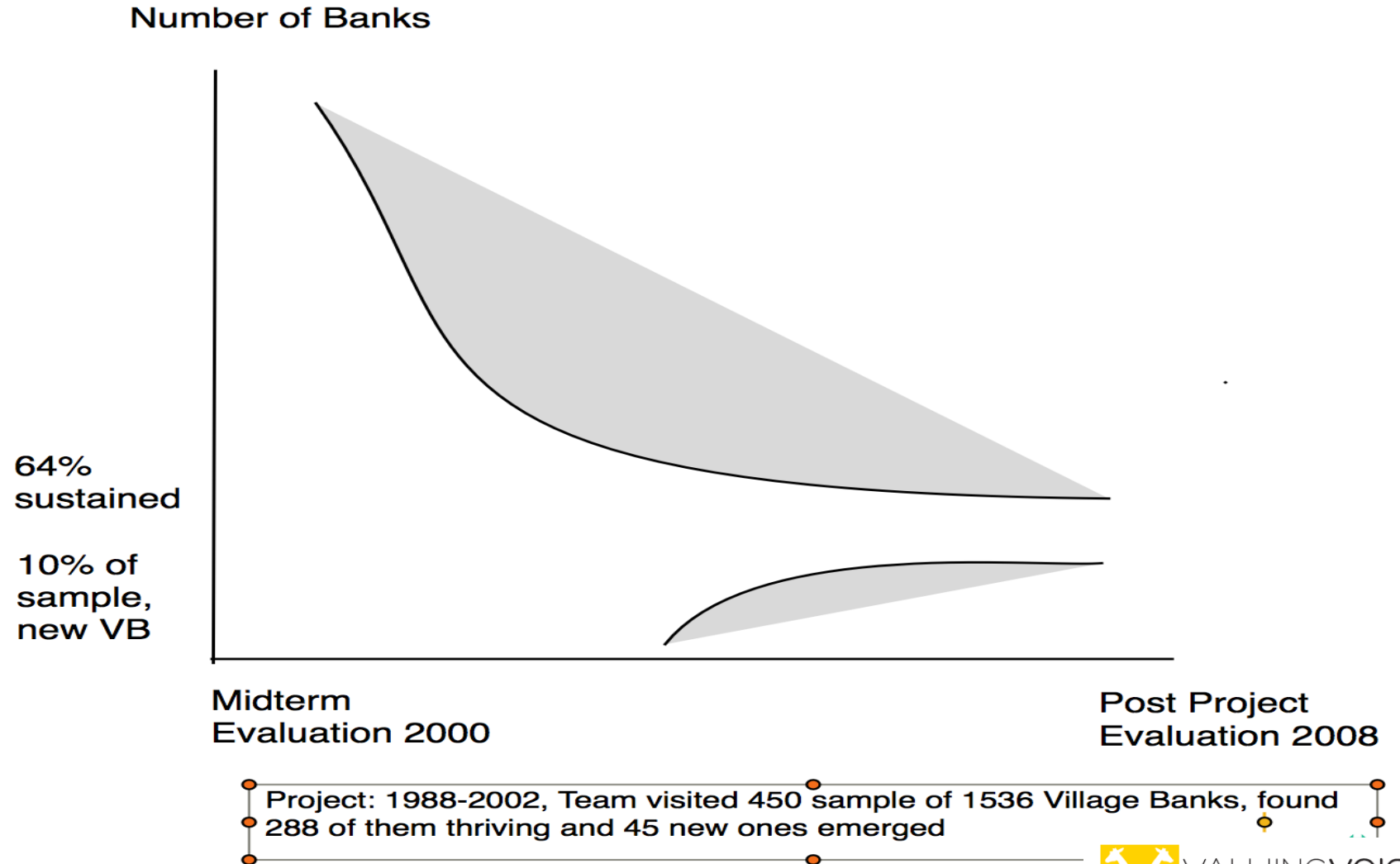
Embedding Sustainability in the Project Cycle

POST-PROJECT EVALUATION

Learning about Sustainability

Informed Exit, Stakeholder Sustainability Consultation

Project Close, Final Evaluation

Designing for Sustainability & Exit with Partners

Project Design, Partnership Agreements

PARTICIPATION

Sustainability Monitoring & Adaptation

Implementation, on-going monitoring, midterm

Project start up, Baseline

Sustainability Indicators; Checking Assumptions

VALUINGVOICES

Theory of Sustainability by Tufts/ FHI 360 (2016)

Figure 1. Sustainability and Exit Strategies Conceptual Framework
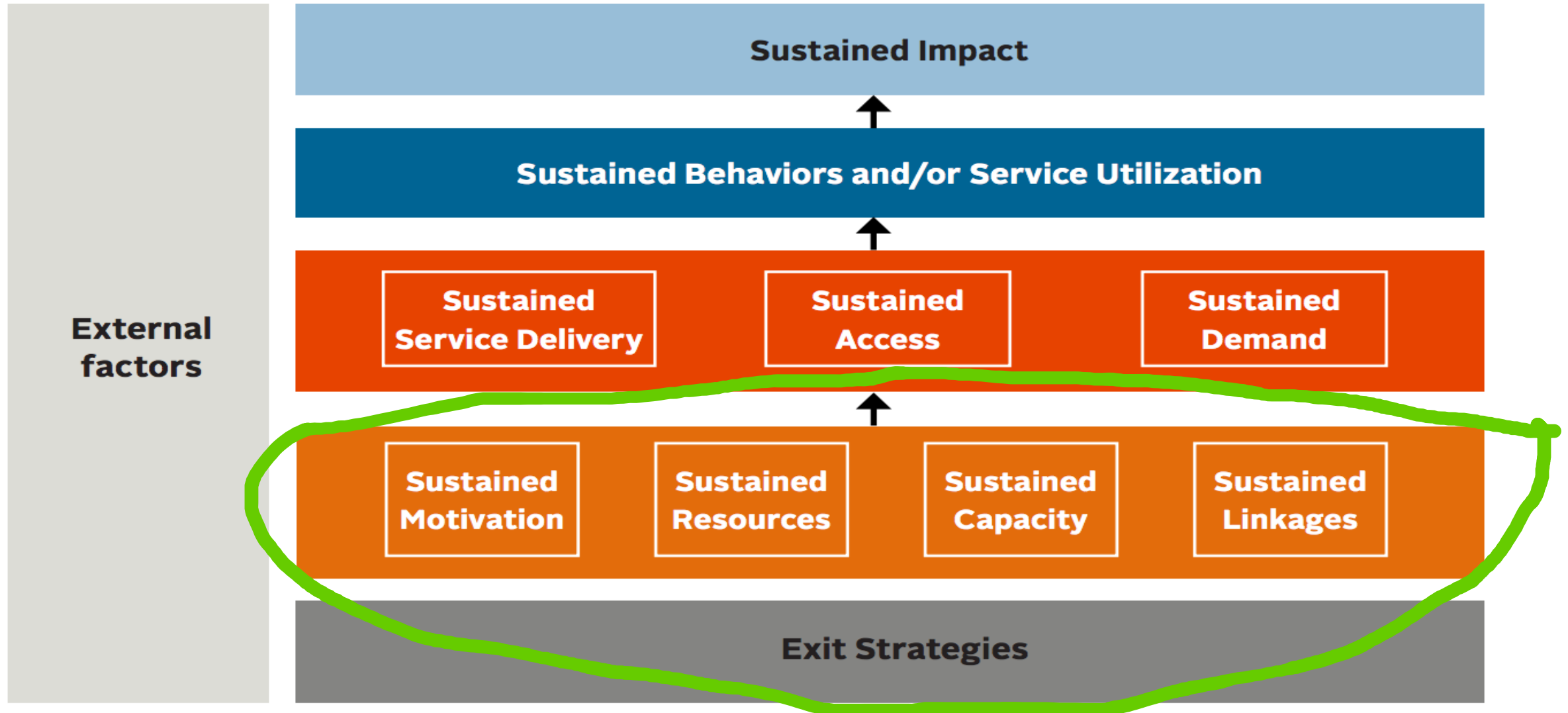
Adapted from Coates and Kegode. 2012. "Kenya Exit Strategies Study Round 2 Report." Unpublished, submitted to FANTA April 8.

Negative & Positive factors affecting ex-post sustainability

1. Negative: Project Exits Overestimated Continued Resources/ Capacities:

- **Lack of regular trainings and monitoring also affect the quality and fidelity of implementation**.” (EDC/ Zanzibar)

-Failure of community volunteers to continue in promoting health program = **provision of capacity and even motivation may not ensure sustainability without resources** (FH/Kenya)

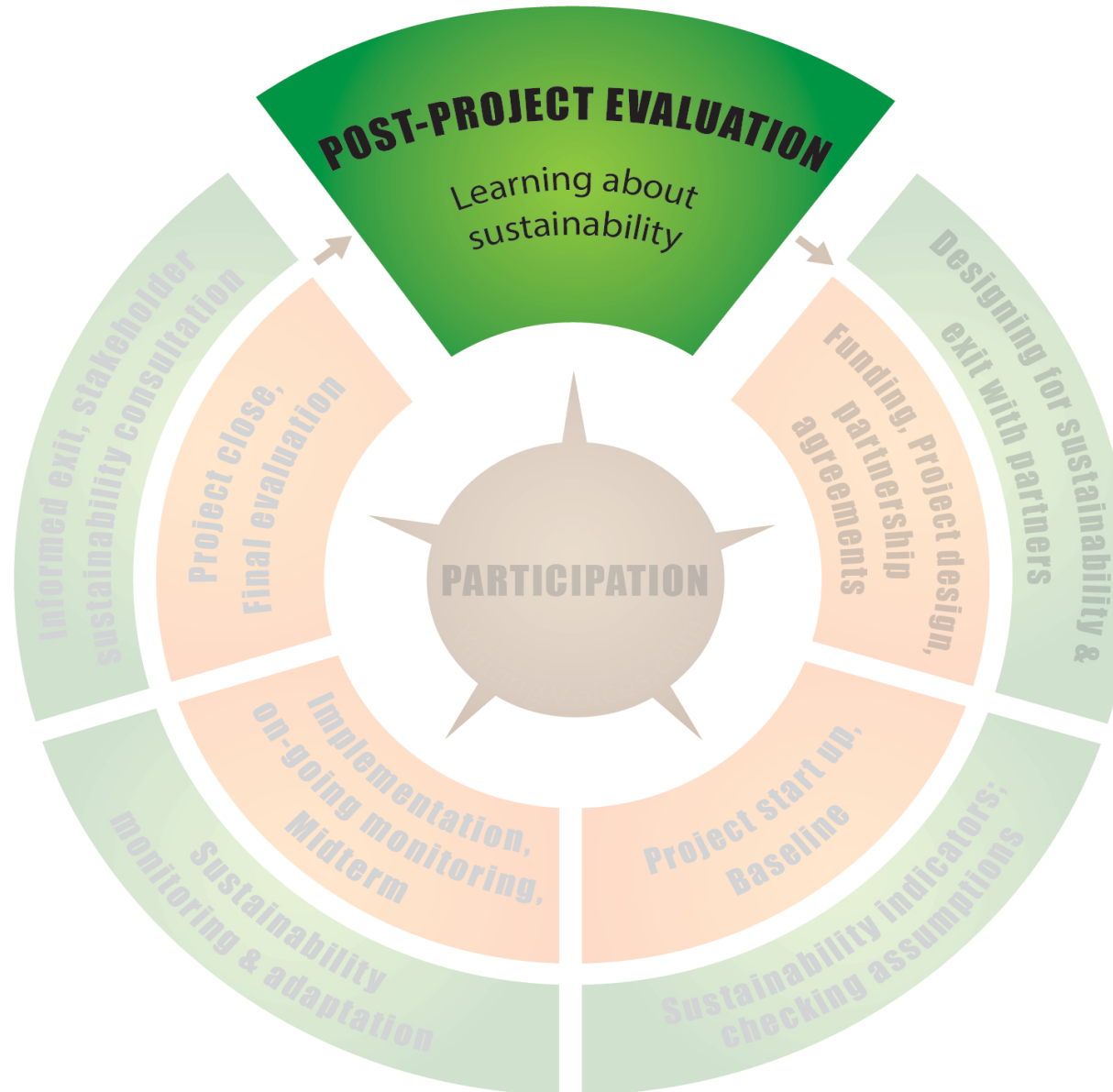## *2. Positive: Exits Underestimated handover success of local Resources/ Capacities via Ownership*

- **New Ministry funding reallocated** to sustain [health] investments, private traders purchase crops (*CRS/Niger*)

--**Trained local women charged rates to sell course materials onward** (*PACT/Nepal*)

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New, *Emerging* Outcomes

1. **Resources & Capacities:** *A food security project improved assets and consumption but **better water access led to surprising decreases in gender violence** (LWR/ Niger)*

2. **Linkages/Partnerships** & **Motivation***: Half of the members of the **all-women Village Banks reported helping one another** deal with domestic disputes and violence.* (Pact/Nepal)

3. **Motivation:** *Participants valued clinic-based birthing and sustained it by **introducing locally-created incentives*** (CRS/Niger)

Sources: Valuing Voices study for CRS/ Niger, 2016, Cekan for LWR 2008, PACT/ Nepal 2013,

Ex-post project evaluation as a Learning Tool for Project Exit, and should feed Future Funding, Design, Implementation & M&E

POST-PROJECT EVALUATION
Learning about sustainability

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PARTICIPATION

VALUINGVOICES

3 Lessons from Ex-posts and Exit for Re-design

1. Lutheran World Relief (LWR) learned from Valuing Voices 3-year ex-post of a Tanzanian Grape Value Chain and Food Security project (2018):

- A **lack of an exit strategy** caused problems.

- No clear articulation of a **theory of change**

- **No shared sustainability model, nor of roles and responsibilities for continuing relevant work after the end.**

LWR RESPONSE: LWR should ensure **that sustainability plans are well-developed and continually referenced throughout design/ implementation.**

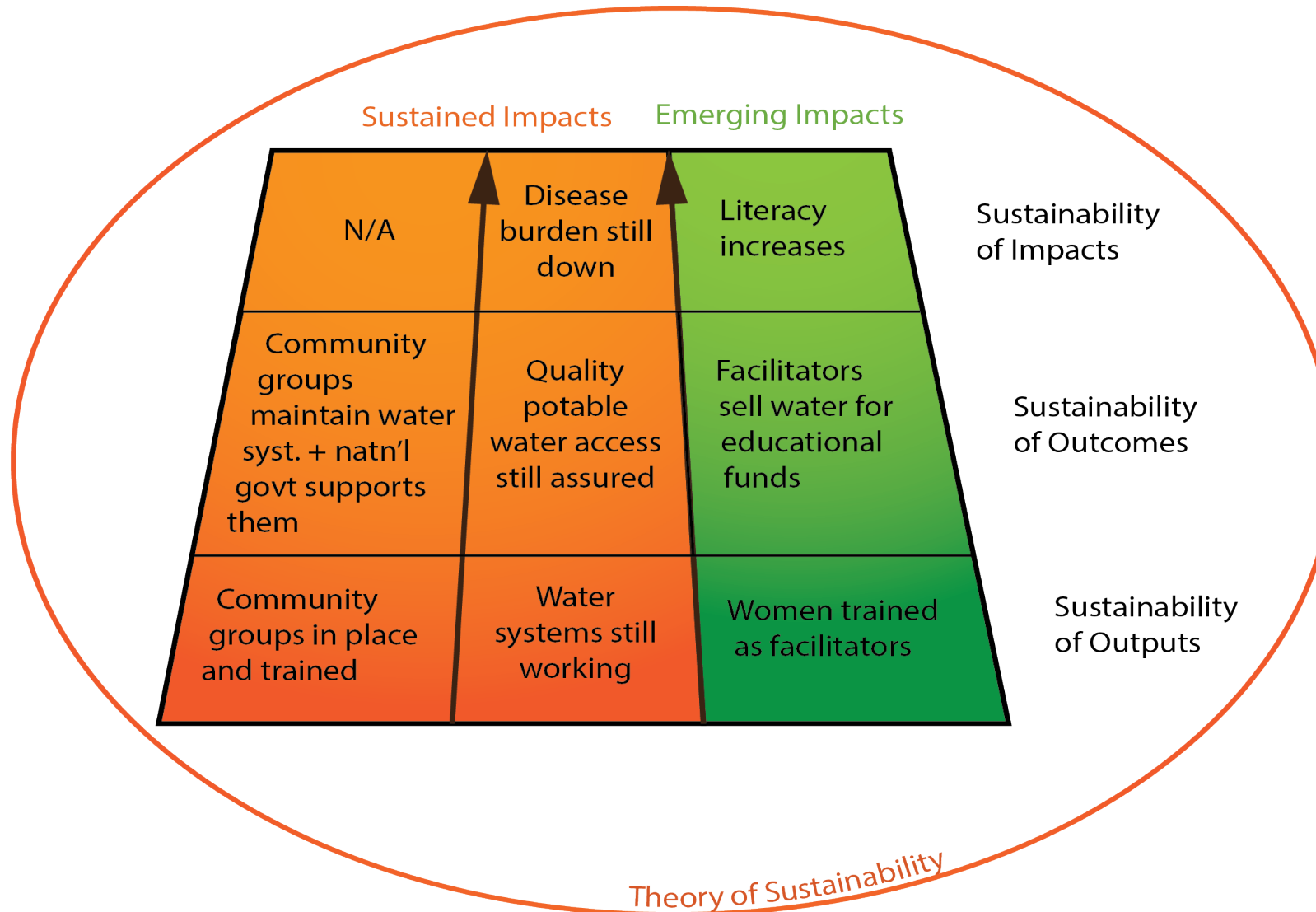*****

2. **INTRAC's Exit research** (2016):
- "**Implementers should "build exit thinking into the design of the project**"
- During the program, representatives should be **monitoring pre-determined exit indicators**"
- "**Leadership buy-in is crucial.** Senior staff and management need to **prioritise resources for exits** in order to do them well, **embed learning within organisations...**, and **ensure mistakes are not repeated**."

3. The widespread "Culture of Disbursement" needs a **shift to funding only what can be sustained-** VV

Theory of Sustainability: *Evaluating along the results chain from outputs to impacts* (from a hypothetical WASH project)

Sustained Impacts | Emerging Impacts

N/A	Disease burden still down	Literacy increases	Sustainability of Impacts
Community groups maintain water syst. + natn'l govt supports them	Quality potable water access still assured	Facilitators sell water for educational funds	Sustainability of Outcomes
Community groups in place and trained	Water systems still working	Women trained as facilitators	Sustainability of Outputs

Theory of Sustainability

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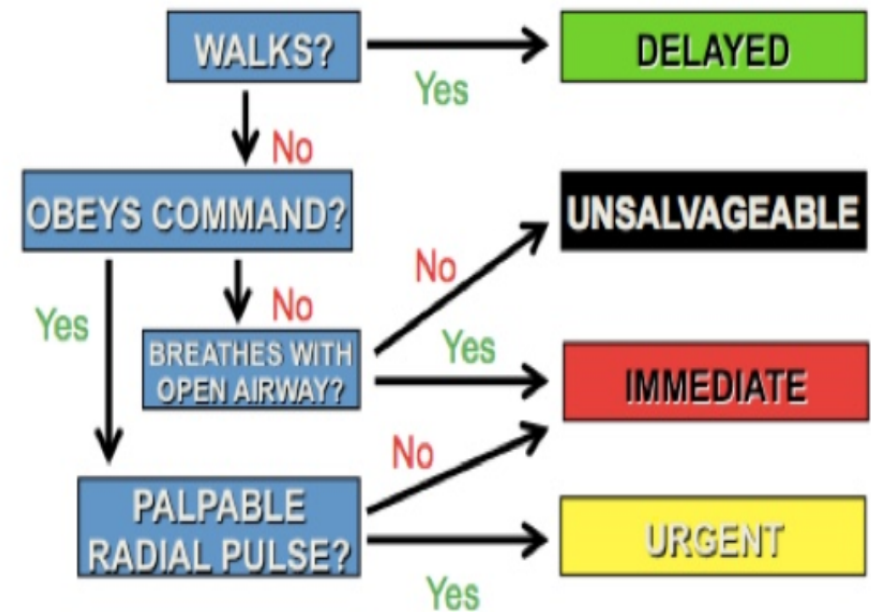
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Consider Triage to foster Sustainability all along the project cycle

- What **project activities are nationally and locally sustainable** according to partners and participants given ownership, resources, partnerships and capacities?

- What **conditions need to be improved**, by when, by whom to make it so?

- What **timeframe** works for handover? What does **'success' look like at exit and for how long after**?

below for the CareFlight Triage – Mass Casualty Card.

WALKS? → Yes → DELAYED

No ↓

OBEYS COMMAND? → No → BREATHES WITH OPEN AIRWAY? → No → UNSALVAGEABLE

Yes ↓ (OBEYS COMMAND)

BREATHES WITH OPEN AIRWAY? → Yes → IMMEDIATE

PALPABLE RADIAL PULSE? → No → IMMEDIATE

PALPABLE RADIAL PULSE? → Yes → URGENT

https://careflightcollective.com/tag/triage/

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At project onset, midway or pre-startup elsewhere, consider Valuing Voices' Sustained Exit elements

Commitments to Sustainability	Conditions for Sustainability:
Exit/ Handover for Sustainability choices: - Phase down over time - Phase over to others - Phase out (exit at end of funding)	**High quality, sustainable project at exit (precondition) and joint commitment to learning from what is emerging (revised implementation, adaptations)**
Address **Risks to Sustainability, e.g.** Resilience to Shocks (e.g. economic, political) and Natural Environment	**Ownership/ Motivation**
	Resources
	Partnerships
	Capacity Development
HOW: **M&E: Transparent Benchmarks examining assumptions and "Impact"** Consider project's **Contribution vs Attribution**	
Adaptive **Timeframe/ Adaptation for Resilience**	
Participatory **Communications**	

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Example Checklist Questions on Ownership & Partnerships

Ownership/ Motivation:

- Are project activities meeting current needs of stakeholders? Do they 'own' them?

- What are their (adaptive) benchmarks to exit?

Photo credit: Cekan, Bushenyi District, Uganda

Partnerships:

- Project knowledge, skills from stakeholder partners transferred?

- Collaborations with other partners, e.g. advocacy organizations, umbrella industry organizations to take over what aspects?

- Has the project consulted these Stakeholders on who will provide different kind(s) of support for exit and sustainability:
  - ➤ Local and International NGOs (non-profits)
  - ➤ Communities or other groups of participants
  - ➤ Local and National Government
  - ➤ Donor(s)
  - ➤ Private Sector and Others

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Example Checklist Questions on Resources and Capacities to Consider

Resources:

- **Grant funding or other income generation** available?
- **Local resource**s from national sources, e.g. donations?
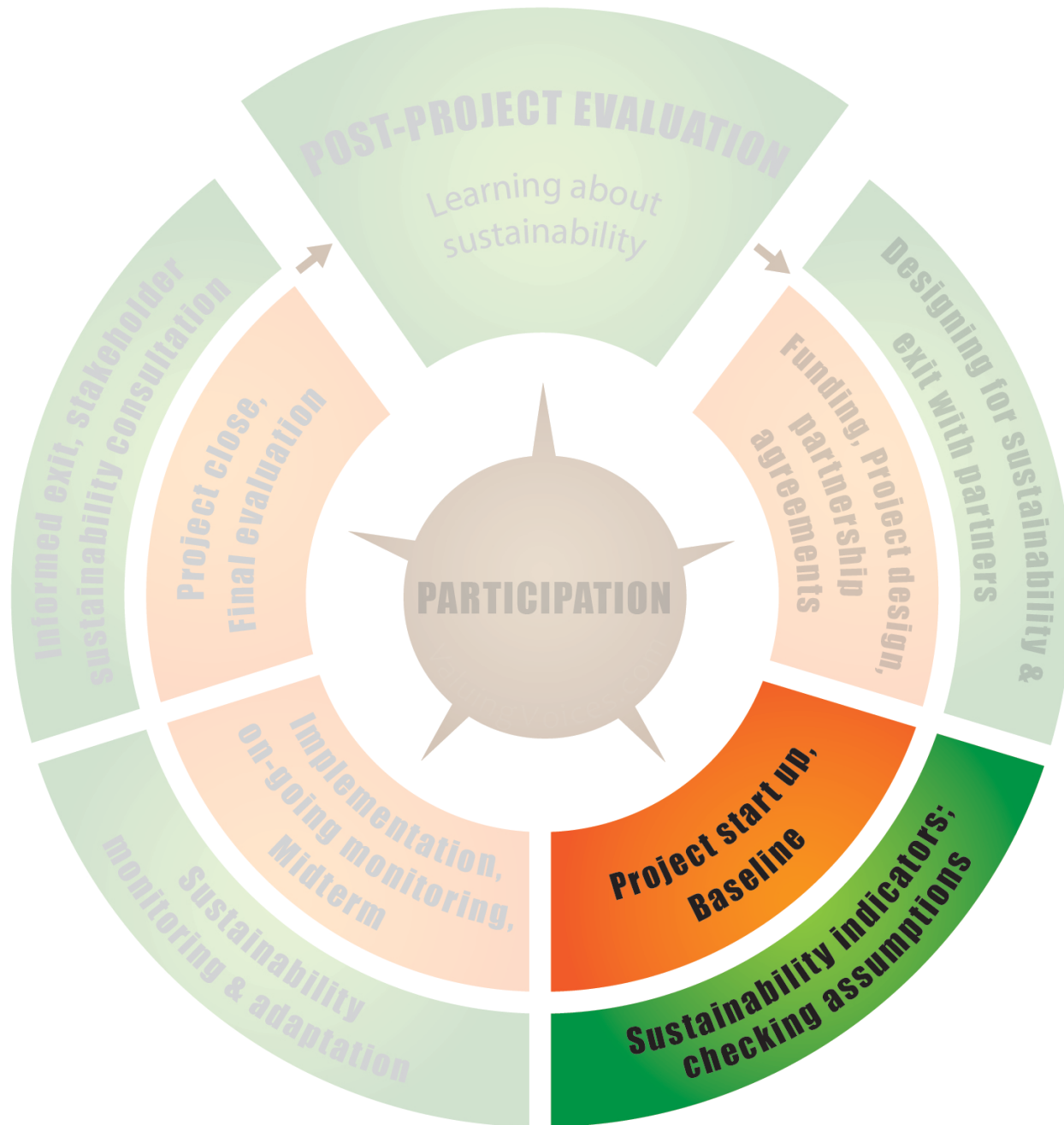- None (because the project will naturally phase out)?

Photo credit: Cekan, ERCS, Tigray Ethiopia

Capacities to be Developed:

- Program activities – **how will capacities be sustained, by whom?**

- **Local expertise** to harness (programmatic, technical, financial, managerial)?

- Are there **new capacity developments and/ or resources** needed to
  take over and sustain from emerging activities not part of original project ?

(Note: See resources under Stopping As Success, especially for financial and institutional NGO sustainability, 2020)

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"Hope is not a strategy"… Assumptions made are untested (Tufts)

- "**Sustainability plans cannot be based on the hope that activities and benefits will continue in the absence of the key factors…**"

- **Assumptions that projects made about sustainability** in order to exit and closeout, which were variably disproved, such as:

  - Government's **resources and commitment** for future needs

  - Community-based organizations **institutional capacity** including administrative capacity and **resources** to manage their budgets

  - Community members will recognize benefits of activities and will be **motivated** to continue them without further **inputs or remuneration**

  - Partner organizations will continue to provide **training**

Rogers, B. L., & Coates, J. (2015, December). Sustaining Development: A Synthesis of Results from a Four-Country Study of Sustainability and Exit Strategies among Development Food Assistance Projects. Retrieved from https://www.fantaproject.org/research/exit-strategies-ffp

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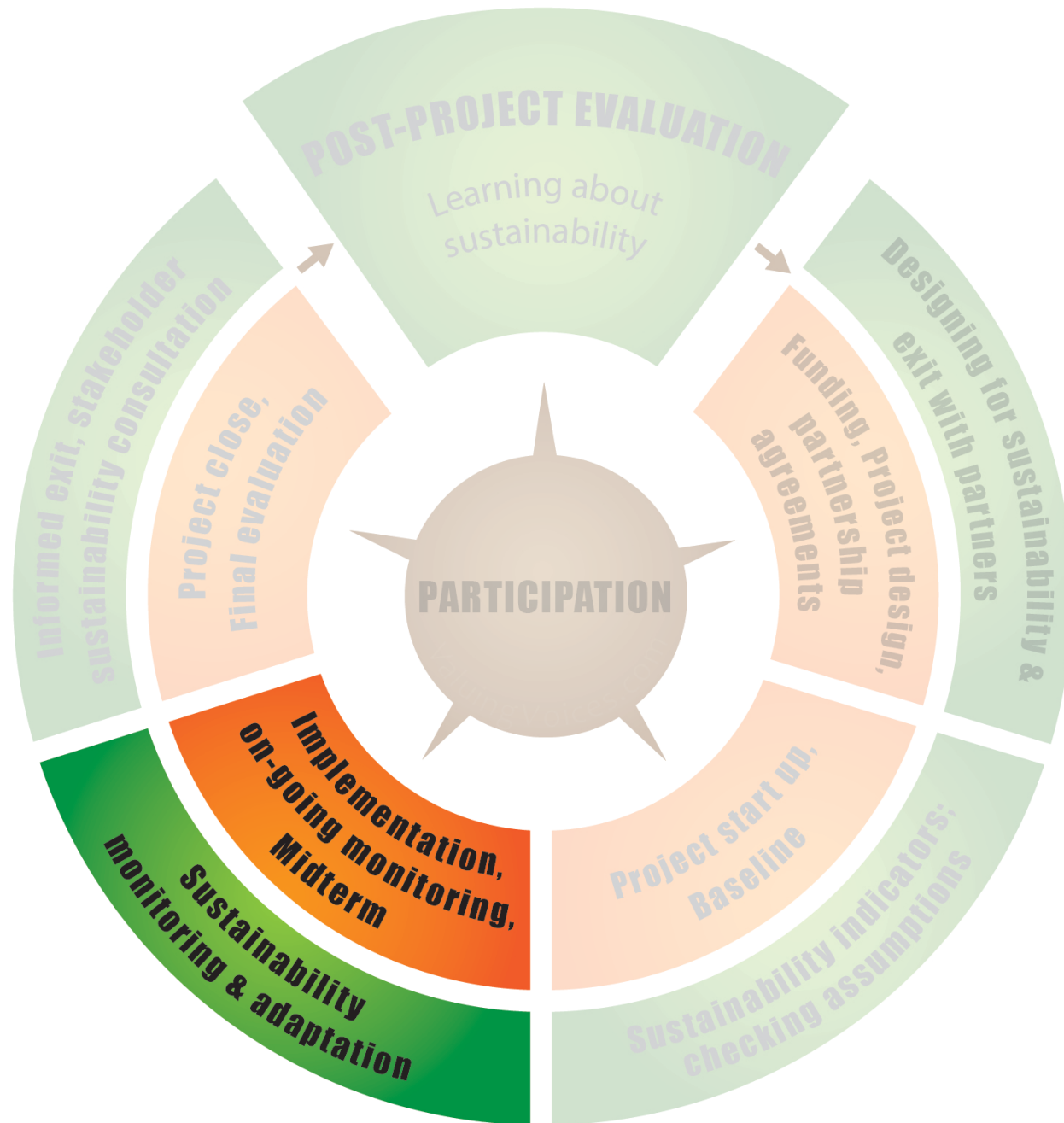# Exit Strategies

1. PHASING DOWN
Gradual shift to locals, decrease in spending

2. PHASING OVER
Build capacity to transfer to locals

3. PHASING OUT
Withdrawal without handover to institution

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UNDP Swaziland Assessment for Exit of a Water Project

ASSESSMENT:
Excessively drought-prone area, hence the deterioration of the infrastructure (corrosion of pipes).

	Assessment Criteria	Low	Acceptable	High
1	Communities' level of ownership to continue program activities	✓ X		
2	Community values program activities	✓ X		
3	Level of demand for the "phased over" services			✓ X
4	Sufficient institutional/human resource capacity to sustain the project		✓ X	
5	Is there a viable plan to sustain the project		✓ X	

RECOMMENDATION:
Project status be retained as is and that further assessment be undertaken after it rains.

Needed: *Flexible Learning with 2-way feedback loops to and from the communities, partners, donors*

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Final Evaluation & Projected Sustainability at Project Exit for next site design

* Asked participants **what they consider self-sustainable assets** –agreement across 3 communities but against donor and GOE priorities of plough oxen, dairy cows, bees
* Communities **knew what indicators to monitor** for design-for-impact

Selected activities which participants believe will be continued without the support of partners at Enderta District			
Name of Tabia	**Shebta**	**Dedeba**	**Dergaaien**
Activities	Men: • Poultry • Shoats • Ox fattening Women: • Poultry, • Shoats • Dairy	Men and Women: • Poultry • Shoats • Ox fattening	Men and Women: • Poultry • Shoats and • Ox Fattening

Source: ERCS/Valuing Voices 2014

Fostering Equitable, Collaborative Sustainability

- **Trust and Equal Partnership** in Planning Key

- **Communications among Equal Partners:**
  - Role clarity is vital at the outset... helps to manage expectations, avoid miscommunication by **establishing responsibilities clearly, and contribute the trust necessary** for nurturing ongoing collaborations [and]

  - Ongoing accompaniment, including **managing donor and community expectations during transition** and communicating to external partners. CDA Stopping as success (2019)

- **Sustainable? For how long, when to evaluate**? (World Vision)

A common dream for Malagasy communities bringing together actors in the field, designers and evaluators. Photo: Celicia Theys.

Source: CDA

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Take-Aways

> **It is not about your project. It is about my country.**
>
> *Oumoul Ba Tall, Mauritania, 2007*

SDG Eval 2017 comment

- **Commission and learn from ex-post evaluations** to foster better programming by **evaluating sustainability assumptions and exit** two years or more ex-post project

- **Make Commitments to Sustainability**
  - Choosing exit/handover approaches with stakeholders with clear timetable of exit (phasing), while mitigating risks to sustainability
  - Fund what can feasibly remain sustained from the onset

- **Foster Conditions for Sustainability: Capacities and Processes:**
  - **Ownership and Capacity** development/ training/ mentoring
  - **Resource** considerations and **Partnerships** and linkages to viable successor organization(s) with clear long-term local & national ownership
  - **Transparent benchmarks and adaptation** of workplans to successful handover

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Next Steps - Discussion:

- *What needs to be in place to shift donors/ implementers/ evaluators to a sustainable project cycle?*
- *What barriers needs to change within the aid industry (e.g. contracting limitations?) and aid recipients (e.g. transparency?), our relationships?*
- *What else?   LET'S DISCUSS!*
- *ALSO: Exit Webinar early Nov see www.ValuingVoices.com*

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External sources of inspiration

- **Tufts/ FANTA on ex-post** for USAID (2015) https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/discussion_note-ex-post_evaluation_vfinal_may2020.pdf

- **INTRAC UK** (2014-16) https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/INTRAC-Praxis-Paper-31_Developing-a-timeline-for-exit-strategies.-Sarah-Lewis.pdf

- **UNDP Swaziland** (2015, online copy, no link) "Draft Exit Strategy: Adapting National and Transboundary Water Resources Management To Expected Climate Change Project"

- **CDA** on Feedback Loops (2016) https://www.cdacollaborative.org/publication/accountability-mirror-shows-not-face-also-back/

- Michael Quinn Patton (2019)"Transformation to Global Sustainability: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/ev.20362

- **CDA/ Peace Direct/ SCG** (2020): https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/resources/guidelines-for-joint-learning/ & https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/resources/practical-guidelines-responsible-transitions-and-partnerships/

Sources cited in Valuing Voices blogs focused mainly on ex-post sustainability:
- http://valuingvoices.com/implementing-scaling-and-planning-for-aid-exit-and-sustainability/ (2019)
- http://valuingvoices.com/sustainable-exit-strategies-usaid-vs-eu/ (2020)
- http://valuingvoices.com/sustaining-sustainable-development/ (2020)

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