Lucy Morris

With Beena George, Cuthbert Gondwe, Rick James, Robin Mauney and Deepak D Tamang

Is there lasting change, five years after EveryChild's exit?

Lessons in designing programmes for lasting impact

AUTHORS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

About the Authors

Lucy Morris joined INTRAC as a Principal Consultant, Organisational Development in April 2020. Between 2011 and 2016 she worked at EveryChild as a Programme Manager and later as Head of Programmes. During that time, she was responsible for overseeing the final stages of EveryChild's responsible partnership exit process, and commissioning INTRAC to carry out a longitudinal study of the impact of their responsible exit process.

Beena George is an experienced development professional and consultant based in India, with over 20 years' experience in programme development, management, monitoring, evaluation, human resource development, research, and advocacy. She holds an M.Phil. in Psychiatric Social Work, and specialisms include Integrated Microfinance, advocacy on gender and liveable and child friendly cities, community-based child rights and child development.

Cuthbert Gondwe has 18 years' experience in facilitating participatory community development, and is a Pastor and a Trainer in Church and Community Mobilization Process (CCMP) based in Malawi. He holds a Diploma in Systematic Theology and Missions, and has contributed to two books in the field, and is currently finalizing his Degree in Rural and Community Development. He works as a Church Mobilization Manager for Eagles Relief and Development Programme.

Rick James is Principal Consultant at INTRAC. He is an organisational change specialist with more than 25 years' experience working with NGOs in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe. Rick has trained, consulted, researched, and written extensively on NGO capacity building and organisational change issues.

Robin Mauney lives in Cambodia and has over 30 years of program and policy development, management, research, evaluation, and advocacy experience. Before consulting in Southeast Asia, Robin served as Program Director for Southeast Asia, then Vice President of International Programs for Holt International Children's Services and was the founding director of the REACH in Murphy NC - an organization providing shelter, services, and advocacy in addressing domestic violence, sexual violence, and child abuse.

Deepak Dorje Tamang is currently the Director of an action research NGO (SEARCH, Nepal). He has four decades of practical experience in sustainable rural development. A Senior Fellow with the World Forestry Centre, Portland, Oregon USA and an NGDO trainer facilitator with the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Bangkok, Thailand, he has worked with several UN agencies and bilateral international organizations including ICIMOD. He was a British Council Fellow and an Adjunct Professor, Guest Faculty, College of Forestry and Environmental Sciences, Oregon State University (OSU), Corvallis, USA. He has published books and articles on gender, women, environment and development, and has lectured extensively globally.

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1. INTRODUCTION

At its core, sustainable development aims to create lasting change. But how much do international actors really contribute to an ongoing momentum for change, once their programmes and partnerships come to an end?

This paper seeks to answer this question, by drawing on the learning generated from a third and final research study of EveryChild's Responsible Exit process, five years after they had closed down and exited from all of their international partnerships.

The aim of this final study is to assess the extent to which the expertise and momentum for change for children which EveryChild hoped to create, had been sustained five years post-exit. Did individual and organisational knowledge and capacity remain, and did changes to legislation, policies, attitudes and behaviours continue to have positive effects on communities that EveryChild worked with and potentially beyond for example?

It summarises and analyses the situation in four countries (Cambodia, India, Malawi and Nepal) five years after exit, and provides glimpses of EveryChild's lasting legacy as well as exploring implications for other international development actors wanting to design programmes that have a lasting impact following a responsible exit.

The research teases out why expertise and momentum for change was sustained and actually grew in some countries, while it flagged in others. This provides important learning for International NGOs as they design sustainable programmes and develop healthy partnerships enabling them to exit responsibly and leave a lasting legacy of change.

The key learning is that international NGOs should:

- **Talk honestly about sustainability.** For sustainability planning to be effective, the same stakeholders who are often already overstretched and under-resourced need to have sufficient capacity take on additional responsibilities, ideally during a gradual transition period during the project's lifetime. This requires the active buy-in and consent of the stakeholders which are expected to take on new responsibilities at the end of the project from the start, not an unspoken assumption or last-minute agreement which cannot be fulfilled later.
- **Recognise trade-offs in any programme strategy.** Does your target group exist in the present, or in the future? Is the focus issue within partners' immediate control e.g. meeting the urgent needs of a relatively small group of people today, or potentially influencing long-term impact at scale later? There will always be a trade off, and being clear on these from the start will help when it comes to sustainability planning.
- **Build in resilience to future context changes.** While risk management plans are often in place during the project lifecycle, INGOs and their partners are advised to identify 2-3 simple future scenarios, to identify likely shifts in the external context going forwards and how the partners would respond to each of these, post-exit. Also to increase partners skills in policy influencing, advocacy and networking, even if not a core part of their mandate – providing there is appetite for this.
- **Avoid creating dependency at all levels.** Over-dependency on INGO inputs results in unhealthy partnerships, and avoiding creating dependency has implications for scale and levels of funding INGOs provide to CSOs. Chances of long-term success will also be

increased if INGOs work with local power structures that hold legitimacy, power and agency at community-level.

- **Plan for a tapered exit.** This could include both: ongoing technical backstopping for programme management and advocacy for up to a year post-exit, as well as to actively profile and link former partners to potential donors even after the funding relationship has officially ended; and has the potential to enable former partners to continue to grow their capacity and confidence post-exit.

Box 1: Background to EveryChild's Responsible Exit Process

In 2012, EveryChild decided to close all of its international programmes through a carefully managed process, and to transfer its remaining assets to a new global alliance called Family for Every Child.

EveryChild drafted a set of Responsible Exit Principles that it used to guide its exit from 18 partners in 15 countries over a three-year period before closing down completely in 2016.

Their Responsible Exit Principles were:
1. As far as possible, **ensure that the work we have done is sustainable** – this could be a continuation of services or lasting changes in children's lives.
2. **Ensure that exit does not have a detrimental effect** on the children and communities where we work.
3. As far as possible, **ensure that expertise and momentum** for change in the country is **not lost**.

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2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

These findings are drawn from a cross-case analysis of four short country studies carried out by INTRAC researchers in Cambodia, India, Malawi and Nepal, between September 2020 and January 2021. They are based on interviews with a selection of former EveryChild partners and Community-Based Organisations as well as focus group discussions with community members and key duty-bearers such as Government officials, both in person and remotely.

> **Box 2: INTRAC's Evaluation of EveryChild's Responsible Exit Process**
>
> **Purpose:** EveryChild developed a set of Responsible Exit Principles to guide its exit from 18 partners and 15 countries between 2012 and 2015, and to mitigate the impact of exit (Morris, 2015). EveryChild commissioned INTRAC to conduct a longitudinal evaluation of its Responsible Exit Process in November 2014. The evaluation focused on the extent to which EveryChild achieved its aim of exiting responsibly from its country offices and partners from 2012 onwards.
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> **Overall methodology**: The evaluation had three phases.
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> - In Phase I (January to February 2015) evaluators conducted a survey of all 18 partners, and six case studies (Cambodia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal and Russia) which were mostly desk based (with the exception of Malawi where a field visit took place). The focus was an initial review of to what extent EveryChild had achieved their aim of exiting responsibly.
> - In Phase II (February to June 2016) local consultants undertook field visits to four countries (Cambodia, India, Malawi and Nepal) to see what remained between five and 15 months after exit. The focus was a review of programme exit through the lens of sustainability.
> - In phase III (September 2020 – January 2021) local consultants undertook field visits to four countries (Cambodia, India, Malawi and Nepal) to see what remained approximately five years after exit. The focus was a review of assess the extent to which the momentum for change had been sustained five years post-exit.
>
> **Where to find out more:** Resources relating to this evaluation, including a number of blogs, can be found on the INTRAC website and in the references and useful resources section below.

COVID-19 travel restrictions meant that local travel within India and Nepal was not possible, so interviews were carried out remotely. However, the risks associated with field visits in Cambodia and Malawi were lower at the time, so in-country consultants were able to visit communities and a selection of partners for more comprehensive face-to-face research there.

The limited research budget and time available for the research was one limiting factor, along with the travel restrictions. It was not always possible to re-connect with previous staff/partners who had moved on, and it was not possible to speak to children in contact with the law in Cambodia, due to ethical concerns about raising their expectations. This means that some perspectives are not reflected in the research, and that these are glimpses from a limited number of actors, five years on rather than an all-encompassing study. Another limiting factor is the difficulty of irrefutable attribution to EvC five years later, given the influence of other factors (both positively and negatively) in the meantime. Finally, the pandemic complicated the research process both practically when it came to scheduling the research meetings, but also in terms of untangling the impact of COVID-19 on the original long-term momentum for change.

3. TO WHAT EXTENT WAS EXPERTISE AND MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE FOR CHILDREN SUSTAINED FIVE YEARS POST-EXIT?

What we found was that expertise and momentum for change for children had perhaps unsurprisingly slowed in some places, whilst in others there was evidence of lasting change, which continues in new and different ways and had even increased.

3.1 Some slow down

> "EveryChild is no longer here so why bother?"
>
> *(Village Chief to Community Based Organisation in Malawi, 2020)*

Despite careful planning, we identified several examples of where expertise and/or momentum for change had slowed or stopped within five years of EveryChild's exit.

In **Cambodia**, although legal support is now being provided by the Government, the quality and timeliness of this support is not as high as before. Neither partner was able to sustain the same child protection activities in the original target provinces after the project came to an end, and a number of expert staff who worked on EveryChild-funded projects have now left the partner organisations, meaning important institutional memory and expertise has been lost.

In **India**, two partners (FENCE and SGGKK) folded early on as they were heavily reliant on EveryChild for funds, and were not able to transition to a more sustainable operating model. This meant that activities with the Dalit and tribal communities where they worked stopped. Many of the children in these communities who had started going to school for the first time, are now thought to have dropped out of school and returned to their previous situations, such as bonded labour or child marriage. Positive attitudes in these communities towards education and child marriage are thought to have stalled.

In **Malawi**, the three Community Based Organisations (CBOs) which we interviewed (originally established by EveryChild) were still active and functioning. At community-level, where staff or community members had received training in child rights and child protection from EveryChild or their partners, there is evidence that shifts in attitudes, knowledge and behaviour have continued. This is particularly the case for children that had dropped out of school – either to work or as a result of child marriage – and were able to re-join their families and complete their education.

But there has been a marked decline in the CBO's activities. For example, while they used to meet twice a month, it is now unusual if they meet every two months. The respondents said it was because some of the members of the CBO needed to cover long distances to attend meetings and EveryChild used to refund their transport expenses. Now EveryChild is not there, there is no one to refund the expenses. They have cut down on activities that require money or technical knowledge, previously paid by EveryChild (for example trainings of care givers, following up child marriages in areas far from village). Some of the original Chiefs that EveryChild staff had worked with on child marriage issues have now changed, and fewer orphans are being sent to school in

these areas now. Soon after EveryChild left, the Government Social Welfare department conducted trainings, but once the money ran out, they have not connected any follow up trainings with communities since.

In **Nepal**, the new Constitution introduced in 2015 created federalised political and administrative structures. 753 metropolitan, town and rural municipal local governments became autonomous authorities, with the potential to mobilise and disburse their own funds for child friendly policies, programmes, rules and regulations.

However, five years later all of the previous child friendly structures and institutions have been dissolved including the local level Child Rights Committees, while new structures are yet to be introduced. The inclusive system of budget allocations for women, children, Dalits and social sector programmes received a set-back after 2015, and new policies, programmes, rules and regulations for child rights and child friendly activities are yet to come on-stream again. There is also now more emphasis on physical and material infrastructure development over social development in Nepal than before, and an associated negative trend of children being employed on construction projects such as road building which has increased instances of child labour.

Finally, the pioneering "Green Flag Movement" originally supported by EveryChild which campaigned to replace child labour with adult domestic workers and was active in 5-6 wards of Lalitpur municipality five years ago, has stopped altogether. This was due to reluctance on the part of local politicians, representatives and Ward Chairs to continue with Child Rights and ending Child Labour activism, fearing a backlash from voters and negative consequences of children no longer earning income.

3.2 Impressive lasting change

> "Every (former) Partner Organisation had stories of EveryChild's lasting impact on their work, which is helping them to thrive. This legacy…will continue through the generations to come: when we touch the life of one child, we touch one generation."
>
> *(Beena George, India, 2020)*

The research also found that extraordinary, lasting changes have taken place five years after EveryChild's exit, and the momentum for change continues in new and different ways too, and there is much to celebrate.

In Cambodia, children who had taken part in the project still knew their rights (to education, to health, to participate) and know where to go for help. This was repeated over and over by children. Some mentioned their right to talk to a lawyer or parents if they "were in trouble" too. We found evidence of lasting changes in men and women's knowledge and attitudes to children's rights within these communities, and they are still largely supportive of community solutions such as diversion programs to prevent children from going to prison.

Relevant authorities are still aware of and continue to implement child friendly procedures, and gave examples of procedures still in place. "*We still implement child friendly procedures that were established such as limited detention, and legal representation or a family member present for questioning*" (Cambodian police officer)

Both of EveryChild's former partners (LAC and Khemara) continue to exist and carry out their important work, albeit in different target areas.

Box 3: Cambodia and the Juvenile Justice Law

Just after the project ended, the long-awaited Juvenile Justice Law was passed. This represents a landmark in the development of an improved Juvenile Justice System. While EveryChild has not been involved in its implementation, its support through the "Justice for Children" project laid strong foundations for its passage and implementation.

Since then, a Juvenile Justice Law Strategic and Operational Plan has been jointly developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY), the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), and the Ministry of Interior with support from UNICEF. The aim of the plan is to improve the current juvenile justice system and reduce numbers of children in detention. A model project implementing the Juvenile Justice Law in Siem Reap province is also currently being implemented by LAC, and an important early priority is the prevention of and release from detainment for children.

In **India**, at the time of the last review in 2016, two partners had folded completely and the other eight were in "survival mode" and 60% of the Children's Activity Centres had closed down.

However, four years later, all eight of the former EveryChild partners which existed at the time of the last review are now flourishing. These organisations have now been able to reach out to more children than before. The total number of Children's Activity Centres providing community-based education increased more than 200% from 60 (2016) to 145 (2020), now reaching 6,150 children. 157 'Uddan Clubs' had also been created for adolescents (some of whom are outside the formal education system), and these clubs are engaging a further 3,310 children on health-related issues and child marriage cases.

The first-generation of high school and college graduates from the former target villages have now completed their education, and a number are reported to have gone on to take up jobs within Government. Some villages are now completely free from bonded labourers and child labourers, demonstrating a lasting shift in attitudes towards children's education, especially girl's education, bonded labourers and child marriage.

Many of the former partners have expanded their services geographically and programmatically, and their combined community interventions mean that hundreds of thousands of families are receiving the benefit of their continued efforts.

The review highlighted many examples of how individual partners are continuing to scale their work in India.

With EveryChild's support, NIMHANS has developed a model for working with "children in difficulty" called the "Community participation" model. The Government of Kerala has now adapted this model to create its own intervention for the Psycho-Social Care of Children in Conflict with Law, and it is being implemented by the Government in Orissa state (excluding Kerala). Tamilnadu and Chhattisgarh states have also shown interest.

The Child Development policy environment in India also continues to develop positively, and many child rights policies and laws are being actively adopted and implemented by the Local, State, and Central governments, thanks to the various advocacy efforts of many organisations,

including former EveryChild partners. Two examples of this are the Right To Education Act and the Juvenile Justice Act.

Box 4: NIMHANS' Psycho-social Lab

One of the most significant developments is that a Psycho-Social Lab created by NIMHANS when they were still an EveryChild partner, became a separate wing of the organisation. It is now a full-fledged institution with a multi-disciplinary approach, five faculties, 20 staff and a modernised state-of-the-art conference facility. The Lab provides Psycho-Social Care through Outpatient services, Community based Services, and a National Helpline. EveryChild encouraged NIMHANS to look into the social impact of disasters, and as a result the Psycho-Social Lab includes a Centre for Disaster Management. This has reached out to hundreds of thousands of children and people in distress during all of the major disasters which the country has faced in the recent past, including COVID-19. In addition, NIMHANS continues to work with more than 10 state Governments, the Ministry of Home Affairs GOI, and Defence Ministry etc.

In **Malawi**, the Kasamba Mothers' group "have not stopped anything they started doing with EveryChild". For example they still visit children that are not going to school and ask them why; they provide the poorest children with school materials like pens and books, they cook for children sitting exams; they advise girls on marriage and pregnancy, strongly discouraging child marriage. During 2020, they bought facemasks for children at their primary school when the school demanded that every child should come to school wearing a mask during Covid-19.

All three communities that were interviewed have seen an increase in the number of Village Savings and Loan Associations since EveryChild left (one of the initiatives had been introduced to help communities to mobilise resources in their own areas). Some of the groups have been started by people that were trained by members of the CBO.

Significant positive policy changes have happened since EveryChild left, particularly with respect to child marriage which was core to EveryChild's Country Strategy in Malawi, and which was an issue they'd actively advocated on at national level before exiting. In 2017 the Malawi Parliament voted to amend the Constitution to make child marriage illegal and remove a provision that allowed children to marry at 15 with parental consent. In 2018 Malawi co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolutions on child, early and forced marriage. A year earlier Malawi had co-sponsored a Human Rights Council resolution on recognising the need to address child, early and forced marriages in humanitarian contexts and in 2019 a further resolution on the consequences of child marriage. In 2018 the Government of Malawi launched the Strategy of Adolescent Girls and Young Women, developed with the support of UNICEF. In 2019 Malawi Government committed itself to end child marriage and delay first pregnancy amongst girls by 2030 (at the Nairobi Summit on ICPC25).

In **Nepal**, approximately 90% of children reintegrated with their families with EveryChild's support have remained with their parents and guardians, and the majority have continued to go through high school education where they were able to secure support from family, state and NGOs. In the Kathmandu valley, adult domestic workers rights and their working conditions have improved. Most households are willing to keep adult workers in place of child workers now, and domestic works is seen as paid professional work.

Most former partners have integrated Child Rights activities into other projects. The know-how, networks and lessons learnt have allowed them to continue and even expand their own individual

projects in the area of child rights and domestic workers rights. This has allowed them to mobilize technical and financial resources from other funders which have stepped in to address the issue of earthquake in terms of relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and resilience. This is still visible and attributable to EveryChild's support.

Former partners have also strengthened their networks, advocacy and lobby works at local, national and regional levels. For example, a new set of Government policies, rules and regulations is being developed, and the Constitution includes a number of provisions for child rights and protection, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1992. Local NGO partners are currently stepping in and providing support to local governments informally, on how to frame policies, procedures, rules and regulations at the local government level. While the overall policy environment has deteriorated for children in the short-term since EveryChild left, potential exists for local organisations to collaborate with international community, Local and Federal Governments and NGOs now, and to continue to campaign for Child Rights providing they can access the necessary resources.

4. WHY? WHAT WERE THE MAIN INFLUENCES ON THE MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE?

Three factors in particular have had a major influence on the momentum for change, which are: 1) the **national political and policy context**, 2) **ex-partner capacity** and 3) the impact of the original **programme design.**

4.1 National political and policy context

Even the best laid plans are no match for a changing context, and political factors had a significant impact on the momentum for change, and whether they enabled or hindered positive change - even before a global pandemic hit. In some cases, changes in the context helped considerably:

In **India**, a supportive national and policy environment and the roll out of legally mandated Corporate Social Responsibility requirements, first introduced in 2014, helped to catalyse positive progress, as former partners were able to tap into new sources of domestic funds for example. This helped to mitigate the impact of the new amendments to the Foreign Contribution Regulations legislation, which created bottlenecks for international funding. In addition, changes within the Child Development policy environment, first identified in 2016 in the first research

> **Box 5: Out of coverage-but not out of service**
> YCDI created an innovative programme to address children's hurdles in accessing online education during COVID-19. The children in their villages were not able to access online schooling due to lack of resources such as smart phones and internet connection, which the parents could not afford. They have been providing online education since March 2020, with 300 laptops they were able to source from various partners in villages. They formed small groups, of 5-6 Children in villages, and then a community volunteer helped them to access the laptops and the online school lessons. The volunteer ensures the children study and supports them whenever they need help. Approximately 4000 children have benefited from this support.

study have continued to evolve favourably. Many of the implications for child rights have now been actively taken up and implemented by the Local, State and Central governments.

In **Cambodia**, the passage and ratification of the Juvenile Justice Act after 10 years of intense advocacy and lobbying, means that the context for children in contact with the law has improved.

However, in in other places political changes have undermined progress and the momentum for change.

In **Nepal**, two major political events tested EveryChild's legacy at national and community level. These were the process of Federalisation of the country from one state into seven provinces and 753 local governments which began in 2016; and the disillusion of the Parliament and government, lasting from 2017/18 until January 2021.

The impact of this extreme political instability in the last five years has resulted in the dilution of knowledge, know-how and focus; a radical re-organization of Governmental structures from unitary to federal, provincial and local Governments and lack of technical, financial and human resources to continue with sustained development.

Specifically the administrative structures which existed to support children were dissolved during the federalisation process. While there is potential for new structures to provide more tailored local services for children in future, these have yet to materialise. "In a volatile, extremely fragile and almost a 'failing state' such as Nepal; political upheavals, and revolutions…combined with an ecologically fragile environment subject to disturbances such as earthquakes, floods, landslide, droughts, hurricanes or pests – mean that development assistance can be quickly nullified" (Nepal research)

In **Malawi**, the national policy context was initially more conducive to positive change, for example when the Malawi Parliament voted to amend the Constitution to make child marriage illegal in 2017, and when the Government of Malawi launched a Strategy for Adolescent Girls and Young Women in 2018. But after a prolonged electoral process between 2018 and 2020 which resulted in new elections in May 2020, campaign-related issues dominated community meetings, and political discussions took precedence over development ones during that time.

While it is never possible to predict exactly what will happen in the future with 100% accuracy as COVID-19 is showing us, it is clear that a changing national political and policy context will serve to amplify the momentum for change in some places, but severely repress it in others.

We also found early indications that COVID-19 has affected children negatively, and eroded some of the gains made during EveryChild-funded programmes in the past. For example in Nepal, lack of disposable income has resulted in poor food security amongst certain households, and an increase in physical, psychological and mental illness. There has been a decrease in the number of children from poor households going to schools – in particular from years 7,8,9 (ages 12-15 years old) and an increase in child labour migrants. Manthali school enrolment has begun to go down, so schools have begun to withhold data from the School Inspectors and District authorities (DEO).

Sadly, these same districts have also reported a 200 percent increase in suicide, some of which have been linked to increased cases of incest and rape within families whilst confined to close quarters during 'lock-down'.

4.2 Ex-partner capacity

The capacity of former EveryChild partners and Community Based Organisations has impacted considerably on the momentum for change.

All of the organisations that are thriving now were not solely dependent on funding from EveryChild in the past. Instead, they relied on a mix of funding sources, so were less vulnerable to the impact of exit by one of their INGO partners. Their capacity to cultivate healthy partnerships and resourcing plans rather than to become highly dependent on any one international funding partner, has been a critical factor in their ability to continue the momentum for change.

The growth of the remaining eight former partners in India is primarily due to the vision and capacity of their own leadership, and their ability to scale their work cannot be attributed to EveryChild. However, EveryChild's contribution to their growth was found to be significant, as it created a strong foundation and platform which they could take off from. *"Partner organisations wouldn't have their current status, if not for EveryChild. SATHI would have remained as an Organisation in Karnataka alone. It is EveryChild who helped SATHI to scale up its programme and go beyond Southern India"* (India research)

Other influences on partner capacity included: a clear vision for how improvements in child protection and child rights can be achieved; access to resources and access to strong national networks. While most partners were able to continue their important work and even to scale it in places as in India, those with access to fewer resources and networks like the Community Based Organisations in Malawi have struggled.

4.3 Programme design

EveryChild applied a different partnership model in each of the four focus countries, which this influenced how programmes were designed and delivered, and was another significant factor impacting on the momentum for change in each context.

Box 6: EveryChild's partnership models by country

- In **Cambodia**, Legal Aid of Cambodia (LAC) in Cambodia had been a long-term EveryChild partner since 2008. EveryChild closed its Country Office in 2012, and began a new 3 year juvenile justice programme from 2013 - 2016 with LAC and Khemara (a new partner), supported by an in-country Coordinator.

- In **India,** EveryChild had a long-term Country Office which closed in 2015 as part of the exit process. They worked through 10 Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) partners for approx. 10 years.

- In **Malawi,** EveryChild also had a long-term Country Office which closed in 2015 as part of exit process. They worked directly with 10 communities through Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) which they helped to established in around 2005.

- In **Nepal**, EveryChild partnered with Children & Women in Social Service & Human Rights (CWISH) from 2011. The global decision to exit came in the first year of a four-year programme.

When it came to programme design, one of the most significant decisions was **whether to work with NGO partners or to work directly with local communities, and if so how.**

EveryChild's Theory of Change had 3 distinct dimensions which informed programme design with partners: 1) work with children themselves as agents of their own change; 2) work with communities (e.g. schools, parents etc); and 3) work at systemic level (e.g. policies, laws, national advocacy work). Every programme included aspects of work at all three levels in order to create impact, but the balance was different in each case.

In Malawi, EveryChild decided to work with Government structures, but also directly with local communities by helping to create 10 new Community Based Organisations, which would become the vehicle for most project activities. As civil society was still developing in Malawi, a lack of existing national NGOs in the target areas is likely to have played a key role in this decision. Another factor was a child sponsorship fundraising model, which relied on regular access to local communities and sponsored children. EveryChild's Theory of Change had 3 distinct dimensions which informed programme design with partners: 1) work with children themselves as agents of their own change; 2) work with communities (e.g. schools, parents etc); and 3) work at systemic level (e.g. policies, laws, national advocacy work). Every programme included aspects of work at all three levels in order to create impact, but the balance was different in each case.

> **Box 7: Malawi: ownership and local power structures**
> It appears that the local Church structures and the local Chiefs were not always engaged in the original initative, or that the incoming local Chiefs were not briefed after EveryChild left. The impression is that the local community did not really own the fight against child marriage long-term, but they did it because the organisation advocated for it and bylaws against Child Marriage were created.

While members of the CBOs were highly motivated and knowledgeable in the area of child rights and child protection, this has not always translated into the wider community itself. For example, in Kasamba, when asked questions about child marriage issues, the chiefs said, "We don't know, ask these people" (pointing to the CBO members) and people don't really respect the byelaws established with EveryChild. In Bulala in Malawi, CBO members are losing their influence on the wider community, and when a child is married and the CBO members try to confront the family, they have become defiant saying "EveryChild is no longer here so why bother?"

EveryChild had originally planned to help set up an umbrella NGO to support the CBOs. But over time, they dropped this plan once the challenge of developing a new, sustainable national NGO, became clear. As a result, there have been changes at national level, but the 10 Community Based Organisations which were at the heart of EveryChild's Malawi programme design and sustainability plans, have little lasting external support and are challenged to continue the momentum for change at community level. The Government sadly still struggles to find the resources for child protection services, and other INGOs have also exited from the regions where EveryChild used to work.

In **India** by contrast, EveryChild worked with 10 national partner organisations from the start, 8 of which continue to work on child rights issues and many of which have scaled their work at community level and beyond.

Every Child's former partners in India continue their advocacy efforts more vigorously now. The majority of them were not advocacy organisations, but the training they received from EveryChild helped them to bridge their grass root programmes into the advocacy space and integrate advocacy activities into their work. They are involved in the following policy areas currently: children in difficult situations; child marriage; children's participation; alternative care and

protection; creation of better working conditions for young women workers in textile supply chain and Psychosocial Care in Disaster Management.

Advocacy efforts generally take time to show results and require a long-term engagement, and both at district and national level, long-term investments in policy and advocacy work are now starting to bear fruit. *"It is when EvC decided to exit...that the efforts of EvC through its partners towards creating a conducive policy atmosphere for children in India has started showing glimpses of positive results."* (Former EvC partner in India).

Similarly, in **Cambodia**, support was provided for work with children at community level, and there was a long-term investment in systems change at national level. In the end, it took more than 10 years of intense support along with others for the Juvenile Justice Act to be passed and ratified, and this development mean that momentum for change exists at regional and national level, and have potential to impact large numbers of children in future.

5. WHAT ARE THE KEY LESSONS FOR OTHERS, WHEN DESIGNING PROGRAMMES FOR LONG-TERM IMPACT?

5.1 Talk honestly about sustainability

The original rationale for externally-funded projects is often because of an absence of local capacity, resulting in a parallel system of support. Some of EveryChild's sustainability plans relied on resource-constrained communities or Governments continuing activities by themselves once external funding came to an end. But this has not always been possible.

For sustainability planning to be effective, the same stakeholders who are often already overstretched and under-resourced need to have sufficient capacity take on additional responsibilities, ideally during a gradual transition period during the project's lifetime. This requires the active buy-in and consent of the stakeholders which are expected to take on new responsibilities at the end of the project from the start, not an unspoken assumption or last-minute agreement which cannot be fulfilled later.

It is important to be honest about this, and for programme staff to avoid falling into the common 'sustainability planning fantasy' trap, that resource-constrained communities and governments can magically pick up the slack at the end of every project. The 'sustainability planning' box in project proposals, is an opportunity to genuinely think this through and set communities and partners up for success. This doesn't mean having all the answers at the start, and contexts will continue to change during the lifetime of the project. But having serious conversations about sustainability planning from the start, and regularly revisiting these are a good indicator of mature programme design.

5.2 Recognise trade-offs in any programme strategy

EveryChild's Theory of Change involved supporting change for children at 3 levels simultaneously: with children themselves, at community level and at systemic level. Often the investments were skewed more towards one of these than towards another – by focusing investment on direct

programme support to children and communities, over investing in advocacy work at the regional level for example. This sometimes resulted in direct benefits to children and communities during the lifetime of the project, but not always beyond.

Does your target group exist in the present, or in the future? Is the focus of the programme on issues within the partners' immediate control e.g. meeting the urgent needs of a relatively small group of people today, or on potentially influencing long-term impact at scale later? There will always be a trade off, and being clear on these from the start will help when it comes to sustainability planning.

5.3 Build in resilience to future context changes

It is hard to over-state the impact of context on the long-term momentum for change, which become increasingly significant over time. Places subject to frequent natural disasters, political instability and lack of resources are difficult terrain for lasting change to take hold. The choice of context and where to work are major strategic issues, and the implications of choosing to work in the most fragile, hardest to reach places, on the long-term momentum for change should be acknowledged.

While there were risk management plans in place during the project lifecycle, one way to help minimise the impact of context on the long-term momentum for change, would be for INGOs and their partners to identify 2-3 simple future scenarios, to identify likely shifts in the external context going forwards and how the partners would respond to each of these, post-exit. This would help to anticipate significant developments, and prime partners on their likely best course of action in advance.

Another way to create greater resilience to negative changes in the national context post-exit, would be to increase partners skills in policy influencing, advocacy and networking, even if not a core part of their mandate – providing there is appetite for this.

5.4 Avoid creating dependency at all levels

The partners and CBOs that received 100% of funds from EveryChild were the most vulnerable to funding cuts. EveryChild had tried to create healthy partnerships by checking on the levels of funding partners are used to operating within, absorption capacity and access to other funding sources at the start, but it's clear that over-dependency on INGO inputs resulted in some unhealthy partnerships in places. Avoiding creating dependency has implications for scale and levels of funding INGOs provide to CSOs.

Another way to avoid creating dependency in partnerships and increase the momentum for change, is to avoid creating dependency between NGOs and communities, by integrating work with local power structures. For example by understanding and proactively engaging with key stakeholders such as local Chiefs and Church Groups in Malawi, which hold legitimacy, power and agency at community-level), and connecting them with any new Community-Based Organisations or project groups, as this will increase an initiative's chances of long-term success.

5.5 Plan for a tapered exit

Several former partners highlighted that they would have preferred a tapered exit process, rather than a 'hard exit'. While EveryChild invested in a responsible exit process, it was not in a position to provide ongoing support post-exit as the organisation itself closed down. But partners signaled they would have appreciated the following types of ongoing support had it had been an option:

- Ongoing technical backstopping for programme management, and advocacy for up to a year post exit. This could take the form of a retainer contract, where former partners could draw down support as needed, from a trusted staff member / advisor / consultant who had a good understanding of their work.
- To be actively profiled and linked to potential donors even after the funding relationship had officially ended. As one former partner put it, INGOs could "continue to be a promoter of or ambassador of the former partners, to make our legacy and work visible for the global community".

This type of transitional arrangement would need to be managed well, so as to avoid raising expectations about potential re-engagement at the end of the transition period. But it has the potential to enable former partners to continue to grow their capacity and confidence post-exit.

6. CONCLUSION

Transformational change takes time and will not be accomplished in a single 1-3 year project cycle. This does not mean that projects should not be implemented, but it does require a razor-sharp focus on the key principles or actions needed to embed sustainable change from the very start. It also requires an acknowledgement of the trade-offs between investing heavily in external inputs in the short-term (e.g. funding, infrastructure, physical resources) vs focusing on existing community assets which may result in less immediate impact, but will maximise sustainability in the long-term

While some of the original EveryChild-funded activities had clearly tailed off post exit, we also saw glimpses of change which had been sustained far beyond all expectations in all four countries. This is most obvious in India, where a combination of a supportive enabling environment, long-term EveryChild engagement and high capacity partners has resulted in significant momentum for change. But it is also evident in Nepal, in spite of a disabling policy environment and a relatively short engagement by EveryChild.

All former partners which EveryChild had worked with and which existed at the time of the last review in 2016, have successfully survived the initial shock of separating from a trusted partner. Some organisations such as READ and YCDI in India have reported multi-pronged growth, and have significantly expanded both programmatically and geographically. Several of these organisations have also been actively responding to the impacts of the recent pandemic on children and their families.

In the context of COVID-19 where many civil society organisations have sadly folded, these achievements should not be underestimated, and there is still much to celebrate. Who knows what the next five years will bring…?

7. REFERENCES AND USEFUL RESOURCES

All INTRAC resources are available from the INTRAC website at www.intrac.org

7.1 References

James, R., Popplewell, R. and Lewis, S (2016). 'What Remains: Programming for Sustainability.' Praxis Series Paper No. 1 Oxford: INTRAC

James, R., Popplewell, R., Lewis, S and Bartlett, J. (2016). 'Ending Well. Synthesis Report. Longitudinal Evaluation of EveryChild's Responsible Exit Process.' Oxford: INTRAC

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Morris, L. (2015) 'Working at the Sharp End of Programme Closure: EveryChild's Responsible Exit Principles.' Praxis Note No. 70. Oxford: INTRAC.

INTRAC blogs on learning and recommendations from evaluation of EveryChild's Responsible Exit Process:

- Go through the door marked 'Exit' to reach sustainable development (2015)
- Exit: the end of the road? (2016)
- Is there such a thing as responsible exit? (2015)

7.2 Further reading

Hayman, R. and Pratt, B., eds. 2016. Civil society sustainability: facing up to new challenges in organisational legitimacy, credibility, and viability (Special Issue). Development in Practice, 26(5): 527-680.

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Lewis, S. 2016. Developing a timeline for exit strategies: experiences from an Action Learning Set with the British Red Cross, EveryChild, Oxfam GB, Sightsavers and WWF-UK. Praxis Paper No. 31. Oxford: INTRAC.

Lewis, S. 2015. Leading by example? Why leadership buy-in is crucial to NGO exit strategies. INTRAC blog, 01 April 2015. Available at: https://www.intrac.org/leading-example-leadership-buy-crucial-ngo-exit-strategies/

Lewis, S., Adu-Boateng, A. and Hayman, R. 2015. Building sustainability of civil society: debates, challenges and moving forward. Oxford: INTRAC.

7.3 Related INTRAC blogs on exit strategies and sustainability:

- Leading by example? Why leadership buy-in is crucial to NGO exit strategies (2015)
- The human side of the exit strategy: staff care and personnel management (2015)
- Capacity Building, Partnership Relations and Exit Strategies (2014)
- Strategic funerals in capacity building (2014)
- NGO exit strategies: Are principles for closing projects or ending partnerships necessary? (2014)
- Living our values in the distress of exit (2020)
- If INGOs consider sustainability in their planning, exit can be a good thing for local civil society (2020)
- There's no need to reinvent the wheel in exit planning – let's use what's already out there (2020)
- If you can't exit well, at least exit 'less badly' (2020)
- In Ethiopia, exit presents real challenges for Civil Society Organisations (2020)
- A cautious welcome to the localisation agenda (again) from Indonesia (2020)
- Ending well (2020)
- What working with EveryChild taught me about responsible exit (2020)

7.4 Useful websites

- Family for Every Child http://www.familyforeverychild.org/
- Valuing Voices: https://valuingvoices.com/
- "Stopping as Success" CDA/ Peace Direct/ SCG: https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/

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