

What We Know About Exit Strategies

*Practical Guidance For Developing
Exit Strategies in the Field*



A product of the C-SAFE Regional Learning Spaces Initiative

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This document is intended to reflect on C-SAFE's collective experience with Exit Strategies, improve our understanding, and provide guidance to NGO staff for developing effective Exit Strategies in the field. The information is drawn from a variety of sources, including EDC's 'Hello I Must Be Going'; FANTA's Technical Note on Exit Strategies; and dialogue/ discussions that took place at the C-SAFE Exit Strategy learning events in Zambia and Zimbabwe in April of 2005.

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Understanding Exit Strategies

1. Introduction

The topic of 'Exit Strategies' confounds and eludes emergency and development practitioners alike. In the dynamic context of southern Africa, the mere mention of 'an exit' when discussing food programming can cause panic among communities, NGO staff, government and other stakeholders.

The goal of this guidance document is to improve our collective understanding and ability to develop and implement sound Exit Strategies from Developmental Relief Programs.

The objectives are two-fold:

1. strengthen C-SAFE's existing Exit Strategies during the final year of the C-SAFE grant; and
2. better prepare NGO staff to develop strong Exit Strategies for future programs, including those that follow on from C-SAFE.

The groundwork for this document was laid during learning events in Zambia and Zimbabwe (April 2005) that aimed to build an understanding, share ideas, and begin to strengthen C-SAFE's Exit Strategies. At that time, southern Zambia was showing early signs of another drought, and indicators suggested the need for increased assistance to affected districts. In Zimbabwe, C-SAFE members were likewise preparing for a possible scale-up of activities following parliamentary elections (which had stifled activities for several months), and as well in response to projections of increasing food insecurity related to recurring drought conditions. Similarly, member agencies in Lesotho faced a scenario of ongoing food insecurity in the majority of participating communities.

Why talk about Exit Strategies given indications of continued, if not *increased* need? And how can we have realistic discussions of exiting when our operating environment and funding situation still appear uncertain?

This document seeks to address these and other questions around the importance of Exit Strategies. Sustainability is a key theme evoked repeatedly throughout. Users are encouraged to think of an Exit Strategy as a **Sustainability Plan** for a program, which has inherent benefits irrespective of timing and context.

This document:

- ▶ looks at some key concepts and terminology related to Exit Strategies (borrowed primarily from the FANTA technical note on Exit Strategies, November 2004);
- ▶ discusses the challenges associated with Exit Strategies;
- ▶ incorporates special consideration for the southern Africa context - which includes a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, recurrent droughts, unstable political environments, increasing poverty, and typically an environment of funding constraints;
- ▶ provides step-by-step guidance on how to develop, implement, and monitor sound Exit Strategies for Title II developmental relief programs; and
- ▶ reflects on the experiences of C-SAFE member agencies in the region.

It is intended that the guidance herein, along with the case studies and examples, will assist C-SAFE NGO members to improve their understanding of Exit Strategies and better enable them to develop appropriate and flexible Exit Strategies as the membership enters its final year, and transitions from C-SAFE to follow-on programs.

2. Methodology

Two consultants – a team leader and technical advisor – were hired to develop learning events that would be held in Lusaka and Harare with participants from C-SAFE staff, WFP staff, donors and other stakeholders from Zimbabwe, Zambia and Lesotho.

The events were composed of the following sessions:

- ▶ Presentations and dialogue on ‘Promising Practices’ in Exit Strategies from C-SAFE Zimbabwe and C-SAFE Zambia;
- ▶ A presentation and dialogue on key concepts and components of developing an Exit Strategy based on a review of literature including FANTA's technical note on Exit Strategies and EDC's paper entitled ‘Hello I Must Be Going’;
- ▶ Presentation and dialogue on WFP Rome's recently completed study on Exit Strategies from Emergency Programs;
- ▶ Presentation and dialogue on lessons learned from C-SAFE Malawi Exit Strategies;
- ▶ Presentation and dialogue on Exit Strategies in the HIV/AIDS context; and finally,
- ▶ How to adapt this learning to our context in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho -- Strategic Planning to strengthen existing Exit Strategies and plan Exit Strategies for follow-on programs.

The consultants and C-SAFE regional staff then used the review of literature, information from the presentations, and most importantly, the dynamic and thoughtful dialogue, which evolved following the series of presentations, to develop the content of this document.

Other C-SAFE Learning Spaces studies include:

1. HIV and AIDS: Opportunities for Food Security Programming Training Series.
2. Food Aid Programming for the Chronically Ill: C-SAFE Members in Zambia. Exchange Experiences C-SAFE Malawi Lessons Learned from the Malawi Working Groups on Nutrition, CI, FFW and Commodities -- Workshop and Report.
4. Targeted Food Assistance in the Context of HIV/AIDS -- Better Practices in Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia.
5. Food for Assets: Adapting Programming to an HIV/AIDS Context
6. HIV/AIDS Analysis Tool & Manual for Food for Assets Programming.
7. Stigma Reduction: Staff Training and Rollout.

Ongoing Learning Activities Include:

1. Impact of food on CI category – tool of indicators (nutrition, food/livelihood and quality of life) & Outcomes linking food to CI, TB, PMTCT and ARV.
2. Working as a Consortium Lessons Learned – Commodities, Finance & Programming.
3. Top 10 Initiatives in C-SAFE M&E.

All Learning Spaces studies can be downloaded from the C-SAFE website at www.c-safe.org

The idea for this learning activity was conceived in September 2004. C-SAFE's regional Learning Spaces initiative sponsored a Lessons Learned workshop in Malawi to mark the culmination of the Malawi Consortium's two-year involvement with the regional Consortium, and to pave the way for its transition to a five-year Development Assistance Program (DAP). One of the key weaknesses identified by C-SAFE Malawi was a lack of emphasis on the development and implementation of sound Exit Strategies, especially in light of an early departure from many of the communities that would not receive follow-on support under the subsequent DAP.

Participants from the Zambia, Zimbabwe and the Regional Program Unit saw the opportunity to avoid repeating these mistakes, and with funding from the Learning Spaces initiative, began planning a regional learning activity around Exit Strategies.

3. Concepts and Terminology

To date, little has been written on Exit Strategies, particularly for developmental relief programs such as C-SAFE. Although still limited, relevant information is available on exiting from Development Assistance Programs (DAPs), such as the recent study produced by FANTA, entitled, *“Program Graduation and Exit Strategies: Title II Program Experiences and Related Research.”*¹

World Food Programme has drawn heavily from the FANTA documents, and also conducted a study of lessons learned from five countries where WFP ‘exited’. These lessons were then used to develop a policy statement entitled *“Exiting Emergencies: Programme Options for Transition from Emergency Response.”* Both the FANTA guidance and the WFP policy statement draw heavily on the earlier work by the Education Development Center (ECD) entitled, *“Hello I Must Be Going: Ensuring Quality Services and Sustainable Benefits through Well-Designed Exit Strategies.”*

How can Exit Strategies help?

- ✓ Exit Strategies can protect and improve a community’s resilience in disasters.
- ✓ Exit Strategies can help to empower beneficiaries with assets.
- ✓ Exit Strategies, when planned and implemented correctly, can be a springboard for improved food security and sustainable development.

-- Participant comments at the Zambia learning event

Given the developmental relief model used by C-SAFE, as well as the contextual factors related to southern Africa (i.e. high HIV/ AIDS prevalence), it has been necessary to adapt the concepts and terminology thus far developed for Exit Strategies. The following section draws from available literature to explain and define key concepts and terms as they relate to Exit Strategies in the C-SAFE context.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PROGRAM EXIT?

A program “exit” refers to the **withdrawal of all externally provided program resources from an entire program area.**² In the C-SAFE context, a program exit may refer to the withdrawal of external support from an entire program area, or it may address the withdrawal of support from communities or districts within a program area. It could also refer to the end of a program funding cycle, with an extension through a follow-on extended recovery program or a longer-term development program. And lastly, it may include a combination of withdrawal, program extension or transition.

WHAT IS A PROGRAM EXIT STRATEGY?

A program Exit Strategy is a plan describing **how the program intends to withdraw its resources while ensuring that achievement of the program goals (relief or development) is not jeopardized** and that progress towards these goals will continue.³ In the C-SAFE context, the Exit Strategy may include several scenarios or contingency plans that address unknown factors, such as recurrent droughts or the effects of a high prevalence of HIV/ AIDS. Contingency plans may also include planning for further resources when it may not be possible to exit entirely from program areas.

¹ This was later summarized in a brief technical guidance note by Beatrice Rogers and Kathy Macias entitled “Program Graduation and Exit Strategies: A Focus on Title II Food Aid Development Programs.” [Hwww.fantaproject.org](http://www.fantaproject.org)

² Beatrice Rogers and Kathy Macias, “Program Graduation and Exit Strategies: A focus on Title II Food Aid Development Programs,” FANTA Technical Note No. 9, November 2004.

³ Rogers and Macias.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF AN EXIT STRATEGY?

The goal of an Exit Strategy is **to ensure the sustainability of impacts after a program ends**. It could also be defined in a broader sense as a program's '**sustainability strategy**', which could be accomplished through staggered graduation from specific project areas, simultaneous withdrawal from the entire program area, or transitioning to associated programming in selected areas.

WHY ARE EXIT STRATEGIES IMPORTANT?

Exit strategies, when planned with partners in advance of close-out, **ensure better program outcomes and encourage commitment to program sustainability**. In addition, good Exit Strategies can help resolve tension that may arise between the withdrawal of assistance and commitment to achieve program outcomes.⁴ Exit strategies can help clarify and define a sponsor's role to host countries and local partners as being time limited, reducing the potential for misunderstandings and future dependency. Finally, they are critical to developmental relief programming as they inform a program's sustainability plan or planning for its next phase. Conversely, without Exit Strategies, program transitions and exits are likely to be more haphazard.

Remember!

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

--WFP Rome presentation on lessons learned from exiting emergencies

WHAT IS A GRADUATION STRATEGY?

According to FANTA, the term "graduation" refers to the exit of a program from specific communities or a project site.⁵ C-SAFE, however, uses this term to describe the **graduation of beneficiaries** (or communities) from a particular program **once they have achieved the intended results**. Thus, C-SAFE's 'graduation strategy' is the specific plan describing how the beneficiary will be discharged from Targeted Food Assistance while assuring that achievement of the program's objective (with regard to that particular beneficiary) is not jeopardized, and that further progress toward that objective will be made.

Similar to an Exit Strategy, the goal of the graduation strategy is to ensure sustainability of impacts after the beneficiary has been discharged from a program or a specific intervention. When the intervention involves Targeted Food Assistance, a beneficiary can be 'graduated' to other food security interventions to ensure that their food security and livelihood status continues to improve.

WHAT IS A PROGRAM TRANSITION?

A program transition is defined as the **change from one type of assistance program to another**. In the C-SAFE context, it often connotes the change from program emphasis on one type of food assistance to another (i.e. General Food Distribution (GFD) to Targeted Food Assistance (TFA)) and usually indicates the scaling down of resources. Conversely, a program transition could also refer to the change from a food assistance program to another type of programming (ie. non-food).

⁴ 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., October 2002.

⁵ Rogers and Macias.

4. Three Approaches to Exit Strategies

Three basic approaches to Exit Strategies are outlined below. They are: 1) phasing down, 2) phasing out, and 3) phasing over.

1. PHASING DOWN

Phasing down is a **gradual reduction** of program activities, utilizing local organizations to sustain program benefits while the original sponsor (or implementing agency or donor) deploys fewer resources.⁶ Phasing down is often a preliminary stage to phasing over and/or phasing out.

2. PHASING OUT

This refers to a sponsor's withdrawal of involvement in a program without turning it over to another institution for continued implementation.⁷

Ideally a program is phased out after permanent or self-sustaining changes are realised, thus eliminating the need for additional external inputs. It is recognized that in the C-SAFE context, reaching a level of self-sufficiency through behavior change and asset creation activities (such as crop diversification and nutrition education) requires a long-term investment, and is unlikely to be realized entirely during the term of a given project. Such constraints are exacerbated by the high HIV/AIDS prevalence in the southern Africa region.

Programs can be designed from the onset to inculcate knowledge, skills and tangible assets within a fixed time period, and with funding cycles considered in the planning of phase out timing. CARE/TEBA's Food for Assets keyhole garden work was designed in such a manner (see box at right) to allow for phase out without jeopardizing intended outcomes of the program.

Note! Funding cycles don't always coincide with needs. Donor support and funding cycles may impose artificial timelines on program phase-out. For instance, where harvest cycles may be an obvious choice for timing a program phase-out, the donor's fiscal year and other pre-determined timing requirements for grant closeout may not accommodate this.

3. PHASING OVER

The third type of Exit Strategy approach is 'phasing over'.⁸ In this case, **a sponsor transfers program activities to local institutions or communities.** During program design and implementation, emphasis is placed on institutional capacity building so that the services provided can continue through local organizations. The phase over approach is currently being utilized in some operational

C-SAFE Phased Down From GFD to TFA & FFA

C-SAFE began operation in early 2003 in response to acute food insecurity caused by the drought. General Food Distribution (GFD) was a prominent feature in both C-SAFE and WFP programming throughout southern Africa, with each consecutive year seeing a reduction in the levels of food programming. C-SAFE later experienced a 'program transition' - the GFD pipeline (phased down) to a reduced and more targeted pipeline focused on Targeted Food Assistance (TFA) and Food for Assets (FFA) programming.

Lesotho FFA Has Built-in Phase Out With a Fixed Timeframe

The C-SAFE Lesotho nine-month modular FFA program targets able-bodied beneficiaries from food insecure households for food assistance. The ration is an incentive for participation in a hands-on gardening curriculum with household level asset creation. The program is designed with sustainability and exiting in mind. On completion of the curriculum, the household will have a functioning garden and will have achieved some level of self-reliance.

⁶ Rogers and Macias.

⁷ Rogers and Macias.

⁸ Rogers and Macias.

World Vision Zambia uses Nutrition Support Groups (NSGs) as a Phase Over Approach to Exiting

NSGs were identified as an exit approach for Home- Based Care programs for Growth Monitoring & Promotion (GMP) and vegetable gardening activities. NSGs were trained and are in the process of taking over the activities and services that were provided under the C-SAFE WV program.

Training: Basic nutrition and health, Home-Based Care, and GMP. Training in vegetable gardening, included trench gardening, treadle pump use and management, organic composting, pest and disease control, and entrepreneurship. They were also trained to write proposals for additional funding (i.e. to CRAIDS).

Core Activities: Group Gardens & GMP: The resultant group gardens focus on vegetable production, allowing the groups to provide high nutrient produce to vulnerable households during home visits, as well as to sell their surplus to fund other NSG activities. Community-based GMP is conducted through the NSGs to monitor the health status of children under five in the communities. C-SAFE provided seeds and tools (and treadle pumps in some cases) for the community gardens and anthropometric equipment for GMP.

areas in Zambia and Zimbabwe as various C-SAFE members train local counterparts to assume control and responsibility for programmatic activities (see box above).

In developing phase over Exit Strategies, there are several questions that must be considered⁹:

- ✓ How strong is the community's sense of ownership/commitment to continue program activities?
- ✓ To what extent does the community value program activities? What is the level of demand for the "phased over" services?
- ✓ Do community members, groups and service providers have the knowledge and skills needed to implement the program activities?
- ✓ Do the local organizations implementing the phased over activities have sufficient institutional and human resource capacity?
- ✓ Are the organizations responsible for implementing phased over programs resilient to shocks and changes in the political and social environment?
- ✓ Is there a viable plan to generate the consumable supplies (such as the food or agricultural inputs) that are required to implement activities?

C-SAFE Malawi - Combining Phase Out & Phase Over

In June 2003, C-SAFE consortium members operating in Malawi proposed to transition out of the regional consortium one year early, with the goal of moving to a five-year country-specific DAP. Programmatic coverage went from 23 districts under C-SAFE to eight under the new DAP, entitled I-LIFE. In preparation for I-LIFE, the partners engaged in a detailed targeting exercise to prioritize the most appropriate geographic regions of the country for inclusion in I-LIFE. Five indicators were analyzed across the 27 districts of the country, and aggregated to create a holistic picture of vulnerability and food insecurity.

The five indicators included chronic malnutrition, HIV prevalence, severity of poverty, food needs and female literacy rates. The five indicators were consolidated into a vulnerability index, allowing consortium partners to initially prioritize 14 districts of the country for I-LIFE activities. Later, due to I-LIFE budget constraints, only the eight most vulnerable districts were selected. These eight districts (of the 23 original C-SAFE districts) currently receive services under the I-LIFE/DAP. In essence, C-SAFE was phased *out* of 15 districts, while in eight, there was a phase *over* to a DAP.

⁹ Rogers and Macias.

5. Exit Criteria: What determines 'When' to Exit?

Criteria used to determine when to exit programs vary. However, they can be grouped into three general categories.

1. Time Limit: Relief, recovery and development programs all have time limits dictated by funding cycles.¹⁰ Time limits may increase a program's focus in establishing systems of sustainability or they may impose artificial timing constraints.

2. Achievement of program impacts¹¹: Although achieving the intended program impact is often difficult within a given timeframe (and may even create perverse incentives¹²), indicators of program impact can sometimes be used as exit criteria. Impact indicators can be used to focus program "graduation" efforts on the more self-reliant communities or the effective program components. Lastly, impact indicators can help inform and guide the Exit Strategy time line.

3. Achievement of Benchmarks: Benchmarks are defined as the measurable indicators of identified steps in the graduation process of an Exit Strategy.¹³ They are part of the Monitoring and Evaluation planning matrix from the onset. Benchmarks should be linked to the graduation process and to the program components to be phased out or over.

The WFP exit policy uses the word '**trigger**' to describe the benchmarks or context specific indicators that need to be achieved before exiting an emergency situation.¹⁴ Triggers may be contextual or programmatic and ideally relate to achieving program goals, such as improved household food security. However, they may also relate to increased government capacity or external constraints, such as lack of donor contributions. Conversely, triggers or benchmark indicators could also be used to decide when to return to an area or to broaden eligibility for food assistance programs.

Use of Impact Indicators in Exit Strategies:

In the C-SAFE context, it may be possible to utilize pre-drought or pre-food distribution household and community food security indicators that could later be compared to the same indicators post drought and post food distributions. This would provide information on the program's impact as well as valuable information for planning an exit.

"The situation may change to the point where communities' resilience to the shock (and future shocks) improves and they can deal with the situation on their own...In Namibia, during a drought in 1989, the approach was to work closely with the government and build its institutional capacity. The government was in a position to set up an Emergency Management Unit to deal with drought and other emergency situations. WFP supported that effort and at a certain point closed its office in Namibia. The government unit is still functioning today."

-- WFP Rome representative at the Zimbabwe learning event

¹⁰ Rogers and Macias.

¹¹ Rogers and Macias.

¹² In some cases beneficiaries intentionally did not acquire assets to ensure that they remained on food distribution lists. C-SAFE and other food security programs use 'asset wealth' as a measure of vulnerability for targeting beneficiaries.

¹³ Rogers and Macias.

¹⁴ "Exiting Emergencies: Programme Options for Transition from Emergency Response, Policy Issues", World Food Programme, February 2005.

Benchmarks for Monitoring FFA Programs

Benchmarks should include numbers or percentages to work toward at the various places along a phase over or phase out continuum. Some examples include:

- ✓ Community-led programs (gardening, nutrition education, & seed storage) in place and active
- ✓ Community groups mobilized and prepared to support the chronically ill or destitute
- ✓ Nutrition knowledge and skill at a sufficient level (in a large enough number of community members) to be shared with others over time
- ✓ Community groups/members linked to __ number of ASOs, CBOs, government agencies
- ✓ Sufficient number of former program participants producing and eating vegetables, which contribute to improved nutrition security
- ✓ Successful program participants/graduates mandated to share their experience and knowledge
- ✓ Number of self-sufficient households; number of dependent and partially dependent households; ratio of dependent households to self-sufficient households
- ✓ Maintenance and use of community assets, ensuring ongoing contribution of community assets to food security

Setting the Timeframe for Program Exit

There are several considerations when establishing the timeframe for program Exit Strategies.¹⁵ Exit Strategies should be built into the design of programs from the beginning. This will encourage the development of interventions that are sustainable, since an Exit Strategy is, in essence, a **'sustainability plan'**. For food assistance programs, this may be more challenging than for other kinds of programs, and will require the involvement of communities and local partners from the outset.

"How do we overcome the fact we didn't start planning our Exit Strategy from the beginning?"

-- participant at the Zimbabwe learning event

Unfortunately, you can't. However, you can start now to mainstream program sustainability and "exit" thinking. As C-SAFE moves into its fourth and final year, Exit Strategies can be implemented and monitored; this effort will contribute to your learning. Where possible, continue the monitoring of your Exit Strategy activities after C-SAFE ends to further learning through your follow-on program. However, for your follow-on programs, Exit Strategies can be incorporated from inception. Don't miss this opportunity!

Establishing an exit timeline that is linked to the program funding cycle, and clearly communicated to the community is essential. Since program implementation will influence Exit Strategy activities, it is important that the exit plan remains flexible with the expectation that some of the exit criteria and benchmarks may need to be modified during the program cycle.

Further, implementing exit plans in a gradual, phased manner is recommended, as the staggered graduation of project sites can contribute to sustained outcomes by applying lessons learned from earlier sites to those that come later. Lastly, after phase over or program phase out is complete, continued contact with communities will help to support sustainability of outcomes.

¹⁵ Rogers and Macias.

Exit activity linkages and sustainability

ADRA Zambia has formed linkages with the Ministry of Agriculture to conduct monitoring on its program impact after closure of C-SAFE.

CARE Zimbabwe developed strong linkages with Traditional Leaders, AIDS Action Committees and key government departments such as Agricultural Extension (AREX) services for continued technical advice on vegetable and fruit production, provision of seeds and basic tools.

Special Considerations for Exiting Food Assistance Programs¹⁶

When exiting from food assistance programs, it is important to evaluate the need for continued food assistance in the relevant communities. In some situations, phase out may be possible without compromising program outcomes. If continued food assistance is needed to ensure sustained outcomes, phasing over to government, local institutions or other sponsored programs may be feasible. When the continuation of food aid after program exit is *not* feasible, some of the program outcomes indicators may require modification. Obtaining appropriate non-food inputs could also be explored as they may contribute to sustaining outcomes.

Exit Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation

Ongoing and timely monitoring of benchmarks is critical to the successful implementation of Exit Strategies. The monitoring of Exit Strategy benchmarks should, in fact, be integrated into the overall program's monitoring and evaluation plan. This will prevent duplication of monitoring efforts and maximize use of existing data. While '**process indicators**' are helpful to gauge the program or local partner's progress along a developed continuum, '**result indicators**' may help to graduate communities or to assess readiness to phase out programs. An example of a process indicator in a home-based care program may be the number of household visits conducted by the local partner, whereas a result indicator would be the improvement in nutritional awareness by the home based care client and household.

To determine the success of an Exit Strategy, an evaluation should be conducted **after a period of time has elapsed** following the program exit. Since funding is not usually programmed in this manner, Exit Strategies are rarely evaluated.

Three measures to gauge the success of an Exit Strategy:

1. If the program impact has been sustained, expanded or improved after program end;
2. If the relevant activities are continued in the same or modified format; and
3. If the systems developed continue to function effectively.

¹⁶ Rogers and Macias.

6. Exit Strategies in the Context of HIV/AIDS

It is widely understood that HIV, AIDS, nutrition and food security are inextricably linked. For people infected with HIV, the nutritional needs increase with disease progression as they simultaneously become less capable of contributing to household food production or income. When the number of HIV/AIDS affected households increases, the cumulative effects impact on the community. A community's capacity to cope with the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, even under normal circumstances, or respond to other shocks such as drought, are difficult to quantify. However, there are several factors worthy of consideration in Exit Strategy planning for communities with a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Some of these are identified below.

In Exit Strategy planning, it is necessary to assess (and monitor) how some of these factors will affect the capacity of a community to care for its chronically ill, orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), and other destitute members. It will be important to consider both its current *and* future capacity, especially if the Exit Strategy involves handing over aspects of the program to local partners or communities.

Factors that are Unique to Communities with a High HIV/AIDS Prevalence

- ✓ Large and often increasing number of the long-term chronically ill members – both adults and children
- ✓ Higher numbers of orphan/elderly/single parent headed households
- ✓ Change in the types of beneficiaries typically targeted for livelihood and asset creation activities when heads-of-household are either dead or incapacitated
- ✓ High staff turnover within NGO, CBO and government programs (hence the need for repeating training/capacity building efforts)
- ✓ Decrease in services available in communities (i.e. government extension services)
- ✓ Increased poverty and increase in chronic malnutrition
- ✓ Increased food insecurity (diet quality and diversity more affected than quantity)
- ✓ Increased nutritional requirements, and increased importance of meeting RDAs for both macro and micronutrients, among PLHA
- ✓ Increased need for foods that are nutrient-dense and easy/quick to prepare, even portable (e.g. to carry to garden/work for people needing to eat small frequent meals)
- ✓ Increased incidence of acute malnutrition (children and adults)
- ✓ Decreased transfer of knowledge and skills from adults to children
- ✓ HH labor supply diminished (at least temporarily or intermittently), resulting in less HH income and food production
- ✓ Land/asset ownership and inheritance conflicts become more common where adults are dying without sorting out inheritance issues
- ✓ The needs of PLHA and those affected change over time, contributing to a constant stream of new beneficiaries who's programming and service needs alter over time¹⁷

It is not always possible for the chronically ill to regain sufficient health to become productive. And while some do, HIV/AIDS continues to affect the community as more adults die (leaving orphans to be cared for), and those previously healthy become sick -- both outcomes placing an increased burden on the community. While C-SAFE's TFA and FFA programs continue to adapt to the

¹⁷ Kate Greenaway and Dan Mullins, "The HIV/AIDS Timeline as a Program Tool: Experiences from CARE and C-SAFE," C-SAFE Learning Spaces Initiative and CARE, April 2005. ([Hwww.c-safe.org/H](http://www.c-safe.org/H))

HIV/AIDS context, it is clear that longer-term resourcing and flexible, innovative programming will be needed to create sufficient resilience and viable Exit Strategies for high prevalence communities.

To contribute to learning in this area, implementation of developmental relief programs like C-SAFE's should be monitored closely to gauge communities' food security resilience, and to develop their capacity to assist potentially increasing numbers in need. After a community's capacity has been strengthened through FFA and other livelihood interventions, and a sufficient number of households are self-supporting, it may be possible to phase over the maintenance and use of the assets to the community with ongoing monitoring from the sponsor.

Benchmarks to gauge the community's increasing capacity to maintain and use newly-created assets, and to care for the chronically ill and destitute, would need to be developed and measured. Ongoing monitoring of the benchmark indicators will provide essential program learning, and help determine when it would be possible to phase down and out the FFA program. The last benchmark along the continuum of self-reliance may also be identified as the community's graduation or exit criteria.

Exiting from TFA programs may be more difficult than exiting from FFA programs, given the increasing proportion of social welfare and malnutrition cases in areas of high HIV/AIDS prevalence. However, when the community has demonstrated sufficient resilience, as assessed through benchmark monitoring (see box at right), TFA may be phased over if sufficient food-surplus households and community-led programs exist to provide safety nets for the ill and destitute. Alternatively, TFA programs may be transferred to ASO/OVC service organizations or the relevant government ministry (MoH, Community Development, Social Welfare) if the food commodities can be procured locally and sufficient capacity building has been provided. In either situation, post-exit monitoring is recommended to determine the effectiveness of the phase over and draw lessons learned.

As government ministries can play an important role in program phase over and continuation, developing collaborative working relationships and including them early on in program design and implementation is recommended. Further, establishing an MOU with relevant agencies, which describe the roles and responsibilities of government, local NGOs or WFP in the phase over process will ensure better program transfer.

Developing Exit Strategies in areas of high HIV/AIDS prevalence involves more concerted assessment, planning and monitoring, as noted in C-SAFE's "Food for Assets Through an HIV/AIDS Lens Manual" and "Targeted Food Assistance in the Context of HIV/AIDS" studies. It is necessary to plan an Exit Strategy *as the program is designed*. This will encourage a design that is oriented around 'sustainability' from the outset. Likewise, it is helpful to apply an HIV/AIDS lens to the design phase to ensure that the overall program considers constraints posed by the southern Africa context.

In areas of high HIV/AIDS prevalence, benchmark monitoring is even more critical than usual due to changing capacities of communities and local partners. Exiting from program areas with high prevalence of HIV/AIDS may take more time, i.e. involve a longer phase down or phase over or

Benchmarks for Monitoring TFA Programs

The benchmarks to gauge a community's preparedness to accept a phased over TFA are similar to the one listed above for FFA with the following additions:

- ✓ Local organization(s) trained in all aspects of TFA programming with adequate staff capacity and a food pipeline in place, OR
- ✓ Sufficient community programs (i.e. irrigated gardens) to provide for the needs of the food insecure CI or destitute households, AND/OR
- ✓ Sufficient number of food secure, able-bodied community members/ households with sufficient resources (and commitment) to "adopt" the CI or destitute households, AND
- ✓ Evidence that the intervention will be sustained overtime
- ✓ Local organizations demonstrate capacity to access external resources (i.e. proposal development, targeting, accountability capacities)

additional funding to continue the unsustainable components of the program. Further, as little is known regarding the long-term effects of HIV/AIDS on livelihoods, it may not prove possible to sustain program outcomes following an exit, especially in situations where phase over and out is premature or other shocks occur.

TFA & FFA in an HIV/AIDS Context: Learning from C-SAFE's Experience

As the need for general food distributions lessened in C-SAFE program areas, it was apparent that a portion of the former caseload (especially the chronically ill, orphans/vulnerable children and the destitute) would continue to need food assistance. In addition, programming to address the loss of assets during the drought and to build community resilience to future shocks was needed.

Targeted Food Assistance, in the C-SAFE context, includes food assistance to four categories of beneficiaries: CI, malnourished under fives, pregnant & lactating mothers, and OVCs¹⁸. Where food insecurity exists, TFA programs have targeted beneficiaries on the basis of medical eligibility, including TB patients, individuals starting on ART, the chronically ill, HIV positive and/or MCH programs which include underweight pregnant & lactating women¹⁹, and malnourished under-fives. These beneficiaries receive time-limited assistance in response to short-term food/nutrition deficits. While a proportion of TFA beneficiaries will need no further intervention once their health has been restored, C-SAFE programming attempts to create opportunities for those who recover, but remain food insecure. Where possible, these beneficiaries are transferred to FFA or other livelihood programs to develop self-reliance (and reduce the risk of repeated decline in nutritional status).

These former TFA beneficiaries can contribute to a community's capacity to be self-reliant. Some beneficiaries, however, fail to recover adequately to support themselves and their families, and are unable to graduate from TFA. As well, the primary (CI) beneficiary may die, leaving a household destitute. These households are generally transferred to a longer-term assistance category.

The process of increasing the self-sufficiency of former TFA beneficiaries through graduation to FFA or other livelihood programs contributes to community resilience as formerly dependent members become productive and empowered. In many communities, C-SAFE FFA programming has been specifically designed to address PLHA and households affected by HIV/AIDS²⁰. Simultaneously, able-bodied community members are also participating in FFA programs, which provides sustainable community assets, fosters community participation and increases human capital.

Involving PLHA presents opportunities

The involvement of asymptomatic PLHA (people who are HIV positive and still well) and their households, presents an opportunity for longer term planning and prolonging lives through the inculcation of behavior change around nutrition. Even FFA programs, which have traditionally excluded PLHA, can be adapted to be inclusive in both the design and implementation. (see C-SAFE Learning Spaces manual "Food for Assets Through an HIV/AIDS Lens"). Including asymptomatic PLHA early in the life of a project will contribute to a more effective program and Exit Strategy.

Increasing Self-Sufficiency of PLHA

Esther Chimwanda is living with HIV. Through a C-SAFE FFA initiative, she has established vegetable garden and cultivates a variety of vegetables including rape, cabbage, potatoes, tomatoes and carrots. Besides having vegetables for consumption, Esther has been able to sell the surplus to raise money for books and pens for her two children who are in primary school. Esther's brother commented, "As a family we embrace the situation our sister is in and we are grateful to CARE for coming up with a program that has made life easier for us." (C-SAFE News, March 2005)

¹⁸ This varies from country to country depending on the country-specific needs. For more information, see the C-SAFE Learning Spaces study entitled "Targeted Food Assistance in the Context of HIV/AIDS - Better Practices in C-SAFE Programming in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe." (www.c-safe.org)

¹⁹ Food aid has also been used to support the uptake of emerging PMTCT programs.

²⁰ "Food for Assets Through an HIV/AIDS Lens Manual and Checklist," C-SAFE Learning Spaces, March 2005.

7. Other Challenges and How We Can Address Them

There are numerous challenges to developing and implementing Exit Strategies. Based on dialogue at the learning events, some suggestions on how to address these challenges are proposed below. (Note: The previous section addressed the challenges to exiting in the HIV/AIDS context, therefore they are not included here.)

Drought: The recurrent cycle of droughts (and floods) in the southern Africa region presents repeated shocks to communities in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho. These shorter cycles leave the rural poor barely recovered from the last onslaught before another arrives. This presents a particular challenge to planning and implementing Exit Strategies. To combat the effect of these shocks, both WFP and C-SAFE participants recommend a focus on enhancing community resilience especially in areas prone to recurrent natural disasters. One example (mentioned in Zambia) of an initiative which is focused in this direction, is a CRS privately funded project called LISTEN. LISTEN works with communities to conduct risk assessments and develop action plans to mitigate future shocks to food security and livelihoods.

Political & economic environment: An uncertain and/or unwelcoming political environment makes it difficult to implement programs, including Exit Strategies. Uncertainty about the current and future political situation affects programming adversely as NGOs cannot be sure of their scope of operation, their access to resources and how, when and with whom to plan for exit. In particular, building critical relationships for program phase over is even harder than usual. C-SAFE Zimbabwe participants emphasized that an unstable economy also adversely affects exit plans due to price fluctuations and inconsistent availability of vital inputs, making it difficult to adhere to a plan.

In this dynamic environment, it may be necessary to develop several different 'exit scenarios' and include a regular re-assessment of the current exit plan in your timeline so that you may make adjustments as your situation evolves. It is also important to acknowledge the additional burden of planning Exit Strategies within this context. It will require more time and effort than is usual.

Funding / project cycles and the uncertainty of future funding: The funding / project cycle can force an exit even when the organization and/or community are not yet ready. As the project close-out date nears, uncertainty about donor support to a proposed follow-on program poses further constraints. Concerns about job security for NGO staff and continued support to local partners cause attrition and anxiety until a budget is approved – which is often many months after a program's proposed start date has come and gone.

To address these issues, contingency plans for the various funding scenarios (including fundraising for complementary funding) are suggested, ensuring that the program is not 100% reliant on one donor. Keeping staff informed as plans change is also important, giving as much notice as possible when budgets for staffing are in jeopardy.

Recurring Drought causes C-SAFE to Re-visit Program Planning

A partial dry spell experienced in the 2005 agricultural season adversely affected crop growth, thus increasing the number of food insecure households beyond what the current program is able to serve. Participants in the Lusaka workshop noted that the exit of C-SAFE (at the end of 2005) was coinciding with an increased level of food insecurity, which posed a serious dilemma.

This scenario emphasized the need for a flexible exit strategy with a flexible timeline. In this context, the exit plan most certainly needed adjustment to account for the changes in operating context.

The C-SAFE Consortia in all three countries have since developed proposals to extend the program for a fourth year. The Consortium Exit Strategy should be adapted to reflect these plans, and when funding is received further modification of the exit strategy from the follow-on program is

Belated planning of an Exit Strategy: When an exit is not planned and designed from the beginning of program implementation, it can lead to uncoordinated and haphazard implementation of exit activities near the program's end. In this scenario, the opportunity to monitor and track a community's progress (toward graduation) over time will be missed, as will the opportunity to develop strong linkages and partnerships with local organizations over time. Although it is difficult to compensate for belated planning, applying what we have learned can still be used to 1) revisit our existing Exit Strategies and strengthen them where possible; and 2) apply the concepts in this document to develop effective Exit Strategies early for programs that follow C-SAFE.

Lack of resources/funding restrictions: When an Exit Strategy is not planned /budgeted for from the beginning, an NGO may not have sufficient resources to implement the subsequently identified exit activities. Workshop participants also cited cases where training and capacity building of local partners and communities was not allowable (under USAID regulations) since training was not directly related to the provision of food assistance. This was considered a significant constraint since building community resilience is not always linked to food. Linking to other programs to share resources, as well as raising complementary funding for exit activities were suggested at the learning events, although neither were seen as ideal.

Need for training/improved understanding among staff: Thinking about and formulating Exit Strategies is new for many NGO staff and there is a need to dedicate resources to training staff and facilitating the development of their Exit Strategies. For example, during the learning events in Zambia and Zimbabwe, there were often difficulties in differentiating between *program* activities and *Exit Strategy* activities.

FFA activities were often cited as Exit Strategies, since staff viewed the development of community assets (built through FFA) as a means for the program to exit the community while leaving behind something that would facilitate a continuation of program outcomes. This has merit, and well-designed FFA interventions often do contribute to sustained program outcomes, however, a FFA intervention is more appropriately identified as a program activity (and possibly a component or activity of an Exit Strategy), with an *Exit Strategy* requiring more holistic thinking, including a plan for transferring maintenance of the asset; building capacity of local groups to do so; as well as setting benchmarks and monitoring to gauge the readiness of local groups to eventually assume responsibility for the asset.

REMEMBER!

Developing and implementing Exit Strategies from program inception will address many of the challenges presented in this section. Continued dissemination of information as well as sharing the lessons learned from implementing Exit Strategies will also help minimize the difficulties.

There are, however, challenges that are more difficult to address, such as recurrent droughts and floods, the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, the political economic situation and funding constraints. Acknowledging these challenges and incorporating them into your Exit Strategy planning, (i.e. creating contingency plans or scenario planning) will help. As well, understanding and articulating the constraints to the sustainability of programs is imperative.

Rehabilitation of Dip Tanks as part of C-SAFE Zimbabwe's Exit Strategy

WV Zimbabwe views the intentional shift from ordinary FFW to FFA as an appropriate way of both providing food assistance to the needy and addressing some community livelihood concerns.

One of the livelihoods projects showcased at the learning events was the rehabilitation of non-operational dip tanks, an activity which WV considers a unique way of resuscitating household food economies as well as invigorating coping strategies. Dip tank rehabilitation involves mending fenced areas where animals gather before dipping and providing training in their use and maintenance. A total of 15 dip tanks had thus far been rehabilitated involving 360 workers who received 31 metric tons of food. This activity assists communities by protecting their sources of income (the livestock), providing life skills important in their regions, and leaving behind rehabilitated infrastructure which will help them to withstand future food security shocks. While dip tank rehab is more accurately classified as a 'program activity,' the training of 'management committees and enlisting of local institutions to provide technical support (i.e. veterinary services) are *components* of a sound Exit Strategy.

High turnover of staff: High turnover among NGO staff, as well as local partners, negatively impacts continuity and service provision. In this context, additional resources are required for repeating training and capacity building on a regular basis. High turnover can be especially difficult in terms of Exit Strategies since those partners who are initially targeted for assuming responsibility of program activities may not be present when the program exits.

Lack of volunteers and local partners to phase over to: The limited number of available volunteers, and the heavy burden already borne by most community volunteers, can hamper the implementation of exit activities. The implementing agency also may not be able to identify an appropriate local organization to phase over their program to. Early planning for exit may help to address this, however, lack of volunteers and an appropriate organization may be the reality (and thus one of the challenges) in some communities.

Continued supply of inputs: In many cases, the exit plan relies on a continued source of inputs (i.e. seeds, incentives for volunteers, etc.) that will be available after your exit. Securing a reliable source for those inputs is certainly a challenge and could make or break your Exit Strategy. Again, planning for exit from inception will help provide time and a network for provisioning inputs at a later date.

Limited follow-up capacity: To measure the success of an Exit Strategy, it may be necessary to conduct a post-project evaluation -- ideally several months after the project has ended. It will be important to ask: "Is the partner organization (who assumed responsibility for activities) continuing to meet its obligation to the beneficiaries?" And, "How can you be sure that other stakeholders are holding to their commitments i.e. Are government agencies continuing to provide technical support?" But how does the sponsor continue to monitor and follow-up with partners once the activities are phased over, the grant is closed, and funding is no longer available?

A staggered exit from communities or activities will allow you to gauge the partners' and other stakeholders' ability and commitment to meet their obligations, provide opportunities to gauge the success of your Exit Strategy on a limited basis as you can learn from the communities that are exited from earliest. It may be necessary to solicit complementary funding for post-project follow-up with partners, and a post-project evaluation several months later to assess whether the activities and outcomes were indeed sustainable. It may be possible to write these costs into subsequent project proposals, since the learning achieved from the exercise can be applied to the subsequent project.

Community vs. household level targeting: Debate has arisen around whether NGOs should be targeting communities OR households in their Exit Strategy plans. Participants from C-SAFE Lesotho noted that their success lies in their determination to advance individual *households* towards improved food security. They were adamant that community-owned assets will not be cared for and maintained following the exit of C-SAFE (or other NGO sponsor), and therefore the only way to engender sustainable outcomes is to focus on the development of household-level assets. Members from Zimbabwe and Zambia countered that it is critical to target entire communities so that the community's capacity to care for the most vulnerable members of society is also taken into account.

Community ownership of the Exit Strategy: For an Exit Strategy to be effective, it has to be 'owned' by the local partners/communities who will carry the activities forward. In relating the concept of 'a planned exit' to communities, developing and communicating the strategy in a transparent fashion is critical. However, what may be more relevant or meaningful is conveying a sense of responsibility for implementation of ongoing activities to support agreed outcomes. Good communication on the intent of the program and its Exit Strategy are key to enabling this sense of ownership. There are many examples of community assets that were constructed under FFW/FFA programs, and later left in disrepair because the community did not feel a sufficient sense of ownership for the asset to take on responsibility for its maintenance.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE TO DEVELOPING EXIT STRATEGIES

What follows is a proposed process to guide organizations in planning their exit from a Title II developmental relief program.

PROPOSED STEPS:

- ① Where to start
- ② Planning Matrix - An Exit Strategy Tool
- ③ Defining the Exit Strategy and Planning the Exit Activities
- ④ Developing and Implementing a Flexible Time Line

① Where to start:

With whom:

Discuss this question within the organization (and in the case of C-SAFE, within the regional and country consortium) as well as with the community, beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders. The level of Exit Strategy to be developed (i.e. program, community, district, consortium) will inform whom to include in the discussions.

A detailed plan for 'Exit' really should be developed at the 'Entry' point.

- lesson learned identified by participants at the Exit Strategy learning events in Zambia and Zimbabwe

The task:

The overall question to answer when planning an Exit Strategy is: **What outcomes from the program do we want to sustain after it has ended?**

Discuss this question with the stakeholders selected to participate in the discussion. The responses will inform the rest of your Exit Strategy planning process.

② Planning Matrix - An Exit Strategy Tool:

With whom:

Conduct this process with the same group of people that were included in the previous step. This can be done in a group meeting or in the form of a facilitated workshop.

The task:

After having discussed the above question, follow a similar participatory process with the same relevant stakeholders and apply the Planning Matrix for Exit Strategies²¹ (on next page). The planning matrix includes six key elements of planning Exit Strategies extracted from the literature and interviews.

²¹ Beryl Levinger and Jean McLeod. Note: Given that the C-SAFE program is implemented in a high HIV/AIDS prevalence context, the EDC planning matrix was modified by C-SAFE, allowing the user to view issues through an HIV/AIDS lens.

Planning Matrix for Exit Strategies through an HIV/AIDS Lens

QUESTIONS:			
1) WHAT IS YOUR PROGRAM'S OBJECTIVE?			
2) WHAT PARTS OF YOUR PROGRAM AND WHICH OF ITS OUTCOMES DO YOU WANT TO SUSTAIN?			
COMPONENT	KEY QUESTIONS	GUIDING PRINCIPLES	CHALLENGES
1. Plan for Exit from the Earliest Stages of Program Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will we "phase-down" our program? Will we "phase out" activities or hand them off to a local actor? • What is the appropriate time line? • How will we know we are on track for phase out? • What indicators or benchmarks will we use? How will we monitor them? • What are the specific action steps to reach the benchmarks? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Flexibility; consider the HIV/AIDS timeline, i.e. the needs of HIV/AIDS affected or infected beneficiaries are not static 2. Ongoing program review and revision 3. Transparency: especially regarding program limitations and funding cycle 4. Participation: include HIV/AIDS service organizations, PLHA, Ministries of Health, Comm. Dev't or Social Welfare, HH affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing firm commitments with flexibility as conditions change; sometimes planning is necessary although future funding is uncertain • Allowing adequate time to develop capacity, while working within the program funding cycle • Responding to changing needs of HIV/AIDS affected and infected individuals and communities
2. Develop Partnerships and Local Linkages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With what types of organizations should we partner? • What will our partners bring to the partnership? What can we offer? • How will the partnership prepare for exit? • How can the partnership help facilitate a successful exit? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Diversity: other program inputs may be needed as well as food assistance 2. Complementarity: consider all possible partners, build in coordination and referral as it is critical when serving PLHA and HIV/AIDS affected HHs 3. Clear and common goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligning the needs and objectives of diverse stakeholders • Supporting local partners without building dependency • Increased numbers of "role players" in areas of high HIV/AIDS prevalence; more time needed to identify, select and build partnerships

COMPONENT	KEY QUESTIONS	GUIDING PRINCIPLES	CHALLENGES
3. Build local organizational and human capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What capacities are needed? • What capacities already exist? • What indicators will we use to monitor progress in building these capacities? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build on <u>existing</u> capacity whenever possible 2. Sponsoring organizations and partners model appropriate organizational & individual behaviors given the HIV/AIDS context 3. Create environments that support new behaviors and skills 4. Monitor progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing a monitoring system to track capacity building • Providing appropriate, sustainable incentives • Retaining experienced staff in program areas with high HIV/AIDS prevalence and/or job mobility
4. Mobilize local and external resources as an Exit Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What inputs will we need to maintain services? • Who can provide these inputs? To what extent are they available locally? Externally? • Which benefits of the program can be sustained without continued inputs? To what extent can the benefits be sustained without ongoing inputs? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to progress toward sustainability, e.g. support the production of local fortified commodities 2. Generate / procure? resources locally where possible 3. Increasingly, bring external resources under local control 4. Advocate for long term needs of communities and individuals infected/affected by HIV/AIDS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in finding adequate or available local resources • Sources of other funding may not buy-in to all of the original program's objectives • Resisting the tendency to cover a lack of sustainability by simply finding a new donor to fund inputs • Sustaining program impacts among HIV/AIDS infected and affected HHs
5. Stagger phase out of various activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key elements of the program? • Which elements are dependent on others? • What is the graduation and exit plan and timeline for the program components? How will it be implemented? How will it be monitored? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Flexibility; the logical sequence for staggering phase out of various activities may change once activities have been implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient time in program cycle to start seeing the impact of activities other than direct food distribution in order to effectively transition to them when food distribution is ended • Increased nutritional needs of PLHA Difficulty identifying program activities other than direct distribution that HIV-affected households can transition to in a staggered phase-out
6. Allow roles and relationships to evolve and continue after exit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of ongoing support would be most useful (e.g. advice, mentoring, TA) • How will such ongoing support be funded when the project finishes? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prevent slippage of programs results by re-entering if necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of funding for ongoing support • Availability of program staff who can focus sufficient time and energy on ongoing support in an area where a full program doesn't exist

3 Defining the Exit Strategy and Planning the Exit Activities

Now that you have completed the questions in the Planning Matrix - developed in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders - it's time to define and articulate your Exit Strategy.

The following questions and activity table will assist you to frame your strategy, identify activities, assign responsibilities, draw up a timeline, select benchmarks and develop a monitoring plan. [To see how the planning steps progress and interrelate, review the Exit Strategy Planning Diagram in Annex 6.]

With whom: Internally, within the NGO or consortium, or in the case of C-SAFE, the stakeholder group will need to reconvene.

The task: Given the timeframe / funding cycle of your specific program, answer the following questions in order to develop your Exit Strategy and to plan specific exit activities.

1. What should the strategy achieve? (What are the objectives?)
2. What Exit Strategy do you propose for this program or specific components of your program?
3. What will be your overall criteria for exiting?
4. What exit activities (as different from program activities) need to be implemented to meet the exit criteria of the Exit Strategy and to achieve the objectives?
5. Specify who (identify partners, stakeholders - not necessarily a person's name) should do what exit activity and when.
6. What are benchmarks for measuring the implementation and results of *each* exit activity?
7. Decide who should monitor each benchmark and when to monitor them.
8. Develop the budget for your Exit Strategy. Be sure to include the costs for each exit activity, and for monitoring.

You should record your responses to the above questions. You may want to use a matrix, like the one below, for this exercise.

EXIT ACTIVITY	Who will do this?	When in the project cycle will this be done?	How will it be monitored? WHAT benchmarks will be used to monitor the activity?	Who will do the monitoring and when?	Budget: what is the cost of this activity?
1.					
2.					

4 Developing your Exit Strategy Timeline

Having a flexible timeline will be key to the success of your Exit Strategy. On the next page is some guidance that will help you to establish a working draft of your Timeline. Note the difference for a one-year (SYAP) vs. a five-year (MYAP) program. Consider plotting your Exit Strategy timeline alongside your program's implementation timeline. This will help you to see them holistically and improve your ability to link various steps in your exit plan with those of your program implementation plan. For example, there may be a monitoring system (i.e. bi-monthly EUM) already in place to collect information on certain programmatic indicators. There may be an opportunity to add some of your indicators for measuring Exit Strategy progress to that existing tool (i.e. the EUM questionnaire). This will save you the time and effort of setting up a separate monitoring system for your Exit Strategy.

④ Developing and Implementing the Flexible Exit Strategy Timeline (1-year program):

- For a one-year Recovery Program (SYAP) it is critical to develop your Exit Strategy **within six weeks** of your program's inception.
- Implementation of Exit Strategy activities, including monitoring, should start as soon as the strategy is developed.
- Conducting quarterly reviews of your progress and the results of your monitoring activities is advised.
- The review process, other learning and changes in the political and environmental context may inform necessary revision of the Exit Strategy.
- Conceptual strategy modifications may be warranted, however, more often, specific Exit Strategy activities and benchmarks will need adapting along the way.
- Modifications should be made and shared with stakeholders.

OR

④ Developing and Implementing the Flexible Exit Strategy Timeline (5-year program):

- For a five-year Development Program (MYAP) it is advised that you develop your exit strategy **within six months of your program's inception**.
- In the first two years of the project, activities are implemented, steps for program exit and benchmarks continue to be identified and perhaps modified, and ongoing monitoring is conducted.
- Quarterly reviews of progress and results of monitoring activities are necessary to initiate shortly after program start up.
- The quarterly reviews and the midterm evaluation, other learning and changes in the political and environmental context may inform ongoing adjustments and revisions of the exit strategy.
- Over time, conceptual modifications may be warranted, particularly after the midterm evaluation. Specific exit strategy activities and benchmarks will also then need adapting. Any modifications in the strategy should be shared with stakeholders.
- During years three to five, the graduation and exit process is underway. Ideally, communities and activities are graduated sequentially while the sponsor observes and assesses the phase over/out process to draw and apply the lessons learned to the ongoing exiting process.

Important points to remember for your Timeline:

- ✓ Planning for Exit Strategies is a process. Once you have developed and begun implementing your plan, you will need to continuously re-assess where you are and measure progress towards the benchmarks. Be sure to build this into your timeline!
- ✓ How does your Exit Strategy relate to the other levels of Exit Strategies, i.e. other consortium partners strategies, the program Exit Strategy, the Exit Strategy of the consortium, etc.?
- ✓ How does your Exit Strategy link with other partners and stakeholders, such as the government or WFP? In areas where an exit is not feasible to phase out, is it possible to phase over the program to partners such as WFP?
- ✓ Has advocacy (i.e. for further donor support or government participation) been included as a component in your Exit Strategy? If yes, have partners been identified to participate in this effort?
- ✓ Wherever possible, utilize your local partners to collect monitoring information. This will increase their capacity and lessen the sponsor's work over time.
- ✓ How will you maintain contact, and support phased-over activities after exit?
- ✓ It is critical to share your Exit Strategy plan with your staff, as well as your partners and their staff. Early planning of an exit can help organizations transfer staff to other programs and assist those losing their jobs to find other work.

THE WAY FORWARD: LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Lessons Drawn

Although the field of Exit Strategies is relatively new, especially in the developmental relief context, lessons can be drawn from C-SAFE's initial experiences, as well as from WFP's case study review of exits from emergency programs. Not surprisingly, many of these findings are similar to those articulated in the FANTA and EDC documents mentioned throughout this document.

Firstly, as noted repeatedly, planning and implementing Exit Strategies from program inception will reduce many of the operational challenges noted here, and improve program outcomes. This requires integrating Exit Strategies into all aspects of programming, including assessment, program planning and design, implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation. In designing programs, initial assessments (baselines), along with recent (as well as past) survey data to established norms will provide valuable information for selecting appropriate interventions and setting benchmarks to monitor progress toward an exit (or the triggers for formulating program transitions and longer-term strategies). Involving partners in this process and communicating the exit plan early in the program cycle is vital to success.

For many NGO staff, Exit Strategy thinking and terminology may be fairly new. However, it is important to remember the basic premise behind developing Exit Strategies is encouraging sustainable program outcomes. The concept of 'sustainability' is, moreover, familiar to most of us, and in our FFA programming in particular, we have repeatedly emphasized building resilience and sustainability.

As is extremely common in humanitarian programming, the C-SAFE program did not develop coherent Exit Strategies, Exit Strategy activities, a timeline and benchmarks to monitor progress at program inception. The Exit Strategy learning events in Lusaka and Harare enhanced understanding about the need for effective Exit Strategies and provided some guidance for moving forward -- a positive first step towards remedying the situation. However, a concerted effort by the member agencies is needed during C-SAFE's fourth and final year to strengthen current Exit Strategies, through re-conceptualization where needed, and to develop and monitor benchmarks for progress towards exit.

Additionally, with an eye towards producing sustainable outcomes, Exit Strategy activities will often require funding for capacity building of local partners and post-project monitoring to allow for follow-up with those partners and to gauge the success of the Exit Strategy (i.e. the sustainability of the program's outcomes). Sufficient resources to implement such exit activities need to be planned and budgeted for, with fundraising from 'other donors' potentially necessary.

Although implementing Exit Strategies in the acute phase of emergency operations has been identified as a challenge, WFP found that selecting triggers for transitioning food assistance programs early on in emergencies contributed to improved program outcomes and better exits. In program areas with a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, acknowledging the constraints to exiting, monitoring for them, and building the constraints into exit plans may be necessary. Advocacy for continued programs and complementary resources, especially given the HIV/AIDS context, may become important components of Exit Strategies as discovered by WFP. Lastly, as C-SAFE members continue to enhance their Exit Strategies, support to document and share this learning is vital to the process of improving the quality of our Exit Strategies in the future.

2. Recommendations

- ▶ Advocacy and education of donors on the importance of Exit Strategies is needed. Their engagement is necessary to allow for more flexibility in food assistance programming, provide additional funds to support Exit Strategy activities and post-program monitoring, and to ensure smoother transitions between current and follow-on programs.
- ▶ Immediate follow-up is recommended to assess the effectiveness and draw lessons learned from C-SAFE's exit from the 15 districts in Malawi at the end of 2004. As this information is gathered it should be immediately disseminated and applied as the other three C-SAFE countries continue to develop and implement Exit Strategies.
- ▶ Follow-up to the April learning events in Zambia and Zimbabwe is needed to encourage and promote the ongoing development of Exit Strategies for each of the country consortia. As C-SAFE enters its fourth and final year, there is an invaluable opportunity to ensure that existing Exit Strategies are strengthened, and monitoring is enhanced to guide each country towards a successful exit and more sustainable program outcomes. A mechanism for providing training and technical support (on Exit Strategies) to the C-SAFE members, and their local counterparts is warranted.
- ▶ The C-SAFE regional Learning Spaces initiative should continue to identify lessons learned and better practices in developing and implementing Exit Strategies, with an emphasis on sharing this learning for immediate application in the C-SAFE countries.
- ▶ A toolkit on how to operationalize Exit Strategies in the development relief context, utilizing the information provided thus far from C-SAFE's experience as well as what will be captured over the next year, should be developed for country office and field staff. A toolkit would be useful not only to the C-SAFE members in southern Africa, but to the members on a global basis since practical guidance on developing Exit Strategies is generally not available.
- ▶ C-SAFE should continue its Exit Strategy collaboration with WFP and others partners wherever possible. This will provide further opportunities to share experiences and increase Exit Strategy learning.

Final Thoughts

The planning and implementing of Exit Strategies is admittedly not an easy task. The relative newness of the subject matter, particularly for an emergency context, provides few lessons learned or better practices to apply. Conversely, Exit Strategies are part of good program planning and thus their basic premise (promoting sustainable program outcomes) and components should not be entirely foreign. With a bit of practice, over time they can be "mainstreamed" into all aspects of programming from assessment, planning and design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It is hoped that this document will encourage and promote that process among practitioners both within the C-SAFE membership, as well as among external stakeholders and partners.

Annex 1 — Acronyms

ADP	Area Development Plan (under World Vision programming)
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency International
AREX	Agriculture Rural Extension Services
ART	Anti-retroviral Therapy
ARVs	Anti-retrovirals
ASO	AIDS Service Organization
C-SAFE	Consortium for Southern Africa Food Security Emergency
CBO	Community Based Organization
CHS	Community and Household Surveillance
CHWs	Community Health Workers
CI	Chronically Ill (a proxy indicator for symptomatic PLHA under C-SAFE programming). Defined as <i>“A person who has had persistent and recurring illness during the last three months that has reduced his/her productivity.”</i>
CLUSA	Cooperative League of USA
CRAIDS	Community Response to HIV/AIDS in Zambia (World Bank funded).
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CU5	Children under Five
DAP	Development Assistance Program
DAPP	Development Assistance from People to People (local NGO)
DOTS	Directly Observed Therapy Short Course
ECHO	The European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid Department
EUM	End-Use Monitoring
FANTA	Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance
FFA	Food for Assets <i>“FFA denotes a shift in emphasis from the ‘work’ being done in order to receive a food ration (Food For Work) to the ‘asset’ being created that will benefit the community. While FFA strategies still involve exchanging food for labor, they emphasize the creation of assets that are owned, managed and utilized by the household or targeted community.</i>
FFW	Food for Work
GFD	General Food Distribution
GMP	Growth Monitoring & Promotion
HBC	Home-based Care
HEPS	High-energy Protein Supplement
HH	Household
M & E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MACO	Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives
MOH	Ministry of Health
MYAP	Multi-Year Assistance Plan
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NSG	Nutritional Support Group
LISTEN	Livelihood Strategies Eliminating Needs
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PLHA	People Living with HIV/AIDS
PMTCT	Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (of HIV)
PVO	Private Voluntary Organization
RPU	Regional Program Unit
SO1, 2 & 3	Strategic Objectives 1, 2 & 3
SYAP	Single Year Assistance Plan
TB	Tuberculosis
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
TFA	Targeted Food Assistance
PRRO	Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (under WFP programming)
WFP	World Food Program
WV	World Vision

Annex 2 – Reference List

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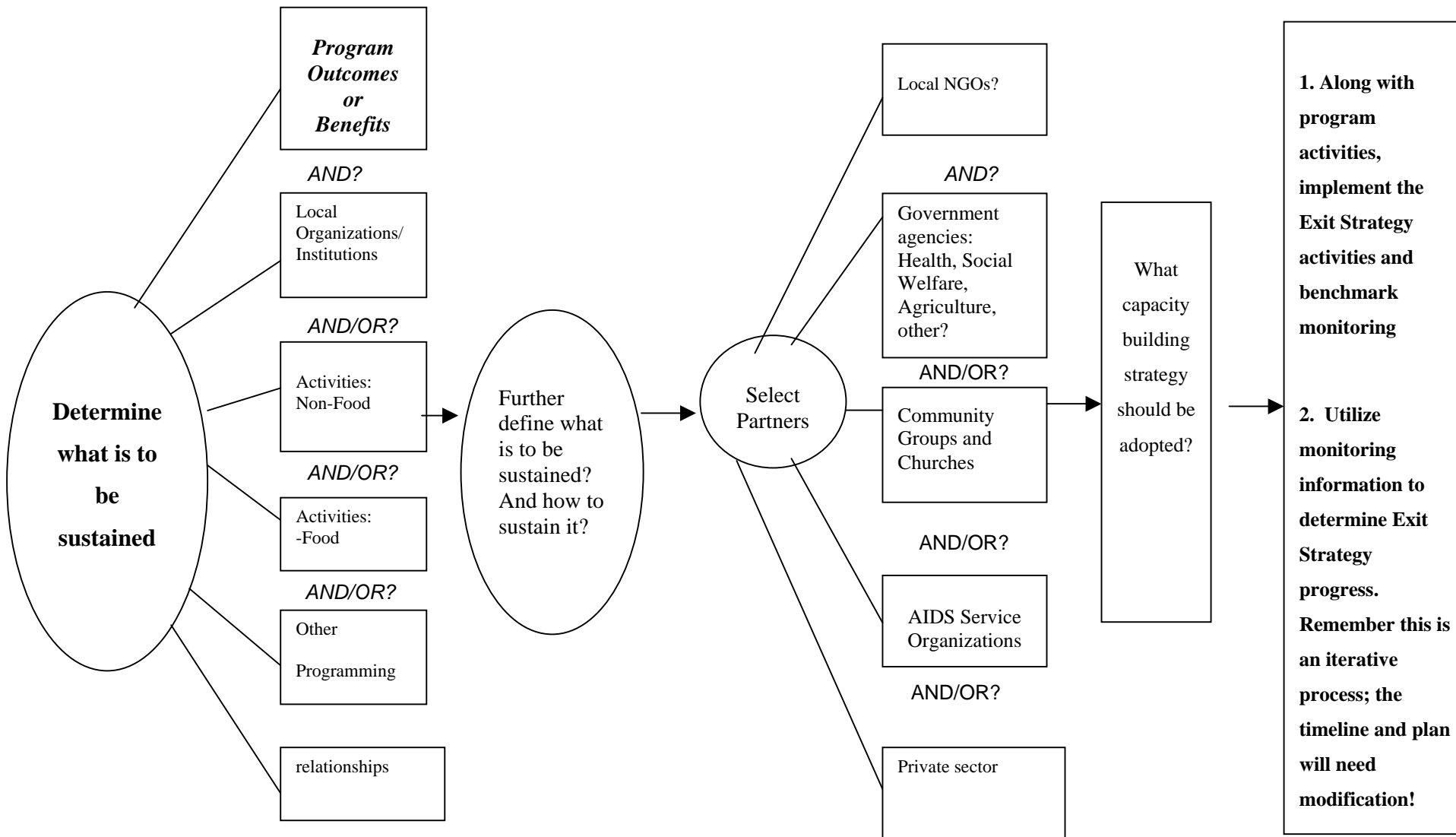
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Annex 3 – Planning Exit Strategies Diagram²²



²² Adapted from: "CRS Next Phase Planning Tool", CRS Program Quality and Support Department, Education, Catholic Relief Services, Baltimore, MD; and Levinger, Beryl and McLeod, Jean, "Hello, I must be Going: Ensuring Quality Services and Sustainable Benefits through Well-Designed Exit Strategies", Education Development Center, Inc., Newton, MA, October 2002.