

FOOD AND  
NUTRITION  
TECHNICAL  
ASSISTANCE

**Program Graduation and  
Exit Strategies: Title II  
Program Experiences  
and Related Research**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACDI/VOCA	Agricultural Cooperative Development International and Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse-Midwife
AWC	Anganwadi Center
AWW	Angandwadi Worker
CBO	Community Based Organization
CHW	Community Health Worker
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSB	Corn Soy Blend
CSR4	Cooperating Sponsor Results Report and Resource Request
DAP	Development Assistance Program
FACS	Food-Assisted Child Survival
FANTA	Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project
GOI	Government of India
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
INHP	Integrated Nutrition and Health Project
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCHN	Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition
MOH	Ministry of Health
NHD	Nutrition and Health Day
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PCI	Project Concern International
PVO	Private Voluntary Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Program
WV	World Vision

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An exit strategy for a program is a specific plan describing how the program intends to withdraw from a region while assuring that the achievement of development goals is not jeopardized and that further progress toward these goals is made. The goal of an exit strategy is to assure sustainability of impacts and activities after the program has departed. "**Exit**" refers to the withdrawal of externally provided program resources (material goods, human resources, technical assistance) from the entire program area. "**Graduation**" refers to the withdrawal of resources from particular communities, program sites or program activities. The "**strategy**" is an explicit plan that includes the following:

- Specific criteria for graduation (of communities) and exit (of the program from the region);
- Specific and measurable benchmarks for assessing progress toward meeting the criteria;
- Identification of action steps to reach the stated benchmarks and of the responsible parties to take those steps;
- A time line, recognizing that the time line, especially in early stages, needs some flexibility; and
- Mechanisms for periodic assessment of progress toward the criteria for exit and for possible modification of the exit plan.

This report is based on interviews with key individuals and reviews of the available literature on exit strategies and the experience of programs --- primarily USAID- PL 480 Title II food aid programs, which are required to include plans for exit in their Development Assistance Programs (DAPs). This review has examined specific Title II program experiences and strategies in India up to April 2003.

In their review of exit strategies, Lvinger and McLeod (2002) identify three types of program exit: *phase down*, *phase over* and *phase out*. *Phase down* simply refers to the gradual reduction in program inputs prior to phase out or phase over. *Phase over* refers to the transfer of responsibility for program-related activities to organizations or, sometimes, to individuals that will remain in the project area. *Phase out* refers to the withdrawal of program resources without transferring responsibilities to other institutions or groups.

The choice of a specific approach to program exit depends on the nature of the interventions. One possibility is that changes brought about by the program may be **permanent and self-sustaining**, so that continued impact requires no further program inputs or activities, allowing for phase out. Examples include behavior change (if results are visible and beneficial, so that the change is maintained and others emulate it), livelihood interventions (if their perceived profitability assures the continued use and expansion of livelihood strategies) and the creation of permanent infrastructure such as roads (recognizing that maintenance will be required). Other interventions require **community take-over** of activities. Successful community take-over may be achieved through the creation or strengthening of **community groups**, which can include **community-based organizations (CBOs)** or **community networks**, such as mothers' self-help groups, farmer cooperatives, and watershed associations, or **key individuals** within the community. A third approach is to transfer responsibility for program activities to a

**government entity or other permanent organization.** These approaches are often used in combination.

Exit after a permanent and self-sustaining change requires (by definition) no further program input. However, continued inputs from the community or government may be needed to assure the maintenance of changes. For example, water systems and roads are permanent infrastructure, but the maintenance of these assets requires continued activity over time.

Community take-over by means of a community group is the most commonly documented exit approach and there are many examples of such activities still functioning effectively years after program exit. An exit strategy relying on community take-over requires appropriate training and capacity building and gradual transfer of responsibility from the PVO to the community group, so that prior to exit the community group has a track record of independent functioning. Empowering key individuals for take-over of a program also has some record of success. This approach is used particularly in the case of community health workers (CHWs) but also for agricultural extension. Success depends on individual motivation, which can be increased by community appreciation and the individuals' own sense of effectiveness. Economic incentives may also be effective, but after exit these must come from within the community or from a local or national entity. Vertical and horizontal linkages among individuals or organizations in the community increase commitment and sustainability.

Transfer of responsibility to the government (or other entity) has a mixed record of success. In some cases, expressed commitment was not backed by needed resources. This approach seems to be most commonly used in the case of health interventions, where community health workers need to be linked to the public health system for the provision of material goods, refresher training and referral, but it has also been used to provide support to agricultural extension volunteers. Government take-over does not assure sustainability, though, unless the government entity has the commitment, technical capacity and (perhaps most importantly) resources to support the necessary activities.

Not all programs require the **continued input of financial and material resources**, but for those that do, the exit strategy must identify the mechanism for ensuring that these resources will be available. The major approaches are:

- Establish activities based on a **business model** whereby the activities themselves generate the needed resources;
- Seek **community contributions** of food, money, time, or other needed inputs;
- Implement **user fees** to offset the cost of the services provided; and
- Seek **external donor funding** to replace resources originally provided by the PVO.

The business model has a good record of success but can be used only with the kinds of interventions that lend themselves to this approach (e.g., livelihood strategies such as new crops, new marketing arrangements, small enterprise development). Community contributions have been successfully sought to maintain school feeding programs and some agricultural interventions, but not all communities have the resources to donate. User fees may be effective if participants need and value the services, but this approach risks excluding the neediest

potential users of the service. Little evidence was found on the success of seeking alternative external donor funding; several programs included this approach in their plans, but follow up evaluations, where they existed, either indicated no success or were inconclusive.

There are special issues involved in the maintenance of programs that depend on **food as an input**. In many cases, it may be possible to reduce or eliminate the use of food while maintaining progress toward program goals. When food is used as an incentive for participation in a specific intervention (e.g. growth monitoring and promotion), other incentives may be substituted, or the inherent value of the services, once people have experienced them, may provide sufficient incentive for continued use. Where food is used to prevent malnutrition or to rehabilitate malnourished children, nutrition education and/or other food security interventions may be able to achieve the same goals. If food is essential to achieving program goals, a reliable source of food or the funds to procure it must be identified.

Developing and implementing an exit strategy involves the following steps:

- **Identify exit criteria.** These may include a fixed end date, achievement of impact targets, or progress toward sustainable phase over to the community, the government or other entities. Impact indicators can suggest which program elements are effective and sustainable, but for most programs, readiness for phase over, not achievement of specific impact targets, is the most relevant criterion.
- **Develop benchmarks.** These are the operationalized, measurable indicators of achieving progress towards exit. Measurement of benchmarks should be included in program M&E systems.
- **Identify the groups/organizations, key individuals or entities that will be responsible for program activities.**
- **Establish a clear time frame.** The time frame for exit should be established in the earliest stages of the program, though some flexibility is needed.
- **Plan for exit from the beginning.** Stakeholders should know from the beginning of the program that exit is planned; specific criteria, benchmarks and time frame should be developed as specific program activities are implemented.
- **Implement exit in a gradual, phased manner.** This allows groups or individuals to take increasing responsibility and have experience of operating independently prior to exit. Gradual phasing of exit also allows adjustments and improvements to be made as the exit progresses.
- **Maintain clear communication with all stakeholders** to ensure they are not surprised by program exit but are active participants in planning for it.
- If possible, **conduct post-program evaluations** to assess exit approaches in terms of extent to which key program impacts have been sustained following program exit.

## Title II Programs in India

India's Title II programs are currently planning for program phase down. CARE's Integrated Nutrition and Health Program (INHP) is unusual in that it is closely linked to and operates in conjunction with the Government of India's Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS). CRS operates a more typical Title II program through dioceses and community based NGO service

providers, focusing on maternal and child health, education, watershed development for agriculture and general relief. Food is used in the INHP program as an incentive as well as a nutritional supplement; in the CRS program it is used primarily as an incentive (Cogill, 2003a, b).

Food is considered an entitlement in the ICDS and the Indian Supreme court has recently confirmed the “right to food”, making the elimination of food from the ICDS unlikely. The requirement for continuation of food means that the exit strategy needs to be based on a transition to other sources and systems for reliable food delivery. Supporting the Government of India in the identification and establishment of alternative food sources can help strengthen the sustainability of the Title II program impacts.

CARE is currently planning graduation from specific program areas, and its plans include many of the "lessons learned" that this review of program experiences identified. CARE is identifying explicit, measurable benchmarks that it will use in planning for graduation, including independent implementation of program activities and demonstrated reliability of systems of provisioning (for example, one benchmark is fixed number of months with no stock-outs).

In the INHP, an important criterion for graduation is that key best practices from successful program sites have been replicated in other sites, assuring that management capacity is in place. Sustainability depends on key individuals (Change Agents) drawn from the community, on community groups such as mothers' groups, and on integration of key practices into the government's ICDS system. Significant attention is given to providing adequate technical assistance and capacity building and phasing over gradually to allow for a period of independent functioning. A concern, though, is ensuring adequate supply of food and effective systems for its delivery following withdrawal of CARE support. Provision of food needs to be included in exit plans, either through identifying reliable sources or developing approaches that reduce (not eliminate) the use of food to match available supplies. CARE is working with the Government on this issue, and continued efforts are needed to establish these systems adequately.

The CRS Title II program has not yet developed the explicit elements of an exit strategy for its program components, but it has identified goals, an important first step.

India's Title II programs are implementing phased, gradual strategies for graduation. With adequate monitoring and evaluation, the experience of early-graduating sites will provide guidance on effective strategies to be incorporated into subsequent exit plans. Systematic assessment of specific alternative approaches could also be tested in the course of implementing program exit, providing valuable information for programs in India and elsewhere.

## **1. OBJECTIVES OF REVIEW**

The objectives of this desk review are: 1) to review global experience in designing and implementing graduation and exit strategies, with a special emphasis on food-assisted maternal and child health and nutrition (MCHN) programs; 2) to identify well-designed and successfully implemented exit strategies that have been employed by food-assisted development programs; and 3) to extract lessons that may be relevant to the Title II-funded programs in India. The purpose of the review is to inform the development of exit strategies for development programs and to offer recommendations for the design and implementation of these strategies.

## **2. KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS**

In this report the term "graduation" refers to the withdrawal of program resources (food, other material resources, technical assistance) from specific program sites or activities. The systematic graduation of project sites has several advantages. If a development program plans to leave one area while continuing activities in nearby areas, private voluntary organization (PVO) staff may be available to provide guidance and technical assistance to "graduated" communities, on a reduced basis. Community volunteers and community groups in "graduated" communities may become involved in providing training and assistance to newly entering communities in the same or nearby areas, giving them recognition for their accomplishments as well as a mechanism for maintaining their skills and commitment (Rogers 2002). Graduated areas can also provide timely "lessons learned" for graduation in the new areas and for exit, in general.

"Exit" refers to the withdrawal of externally provided resources from an entire project area. An exit strategy for a program is a specific plan describing how the program intends to withdraw from a region while assuring that the achievement of development goals is not jeopardized and that further progress towards these goals is made. An exit strategy may use graduation from specific project areas as steps towards the eventual total withdrawal of resources, or exit may take place at one time across a program area. Either way, the underlying goal of an exit strategy is to ensure sustainability of program impacts after a program leaves.

It should be noted that sustainability of impact or of progress toward development goals does not necessarily mean continuation of the same specific activities carried out by the PVO under the original program. Programs evolve over their funding cycles, often with the modification of activities as the situation changes. Different program elements lend themselves to different approaches to assuring sustainability. If the provision of resources is integral to program impact (e.g., immunization, supplementary food), then alternative arrangements will need to be made for providing them. When permanent infrastructure is created, often only maintenance needs to be continued. Some changes, such as behavioral changes or new production techniques, may be permanent without the need for any continued input.

Sustainability is often addressed in Title II Development Assistance Program (DAP) planning documents, and recently, USAID has begun requesting that DAPs explicitly include strategies for exit. But the exit strategies outlined in the DAP proposals have been relatively unspecific. An explicit exit strategy includes the following elements:

- Specific criteria for graduation (of communities) and exit (of the program from the region);
- Specific and measurable benchmarks for assessing progress toward meeting the criteria;
- A time line, recognizing that the time line needs some flexibility;
- Identification of action steps to reach the stated benchmarks and of the parties responsible for taking those steps; and
- Mechanisms for periodic assessment of progress toward the criteria for exit and possible modification of the exit plan.

In their review of exit strategies, Levinger and McLeod (2002) identify three approaches to exit: **phase down**, **phase over** and **phase out**. They point out that **phase down**, the gradual reduction of program inputs, is the preliminary stage to both phase over and phase out. **Phase over** refers to the transfer of responsibility for activities aimed at accomplishing program goals (current activities, or other activities aimed at achieving the same outcomes) to another entity. Many of the Title II program plans reviewed identified capacity building within a community as the main mechanism for ensuring sustainability. This is, of course, a phase over approach, with a transfer of responsibility to community groups created or supported and strengthened by the Title II program. Phase over may also involve the transfer of responsibility for achievement of program outcomes to an existing organization (e.g., an arm of local, regional or national government, a local or indigenous national NGO or another international donor). **Phase out** refers to the withdrawal of program inputs (food, other resources, technical assistance, service provision) without making arrangements for the inputs or activities to be continued by another organization.

Whether to use the phasing over or the phasing out approach depends largely on the nature of the program activities. Interventions that require continued activity and an entity to take responsibility for oversight of the activity suggest a phase over approach. Interventions that create permanent changes in communities and do not require the ongoing provision of services or resources are suitable for phase out. Other factors also affect the decision whether to take a phase over or phase out approach: the time frame for exit, available funding and available human, institutional, financial and physical resources in the area from which the program is departing. Ideally, though, the time frame of the program should be planned in such a way that it allows for a feasible exit plan. Program implementers should take responsibility for working with communities to ensure that appropriate resources are available for ongoing activities. That is, choosing phase out rather than phase over simply because there is no time left for appropriate capacity building, or because resources have not been identified for implementation of appropriate activities, is less than ideal, to say the least, and is very likely to be unsuccessful. But this can be avoided by appropriate exit strategy planning early in the development of a program.

### 3. REVIEW OF PROGRAM EXPERIENCES

This report is based on a review of available literature, including program documentation (DAP proposals, Cooperating Sponsor Results Report and Resource Requests (CSR4s), program evaluations and other available program documents from Title II programs globally and in India) and research related to graduation and exit strategies. The report also makes use of personal communication with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and PVO staff and with consultants and researchers who have worked on this topic. This review has examined specific Title II program experiences and strategies in India up to April 2003.

This review of planning and evaluation documents found many program documents that addressed the issue of sustainability, but far fewer that explicitly spelled out an exit strategy. Similarly, the recent Food Aid and Food Security Assessment (Bonnard et al., 2002) found that most food security DAPs lacked a clearly defined exit strategy including benchmarks, action steps, a time line and identification of key actors at each stage. A recent CARE review of Title II program evaluations (Goldenberg, 2001) states that only 36% of projects included goals or objectives that explicitly referred to sustainability. Yet the same study found that 83% of the *evaluations* explicitly dealt with the issue of sustainability and of these, 54% said that there were indications (and 20% showed "strong" indications) that the projects or their impacts were sustainable.

However, most of these evaluations were conducted at the end of the project activity. They were not based on a return to communities some time (even as little as one or two years) after program withdrawal, which would provide stronger evidence of what activities continued and what impacts were sustained after program exit. There are a few exceptions (Goldenberg, 2001), but in general, post-exit evaluation is rare. The present review of program documents must be interpreted in this light: the success of exit strategies cannot truly be assessed without post-exit evaluation. If sustainability after exit is a priority for development programs, evaluation based on a return to the community at least one or two years after exit should be undertaken to assess the sustainability of changes in target communities and what factors predict long-term sustainability. One reason such evaluations are rare is that project funding cycles typically do not allow for a return to project sites after the end of the cycle. A serious commitment to the development of appropriate exit strategies necessitates funding for systematic evaluations of programs post-exit. As Goldenberg (2003) states, "Only a post-project evaluation can effectively determine the long term viability of an intervention."

#### 3.1. Exit Approaches

Certain conditions that may exist in a program environment or that the program may have caused or strengthened suggest certain approaches to exiting. These are summarized below.

- Changes brought about by the program are self-sustaining; once they are achieved, outside inputs are discontinued, but their impact continues. This suggests a phase out approach.
- The community is capable of taking over program activities, either through community groups and organizations or through key individuals. This is one type of phase over.

- Other institutions (e.g., local, municipal, state, or national government, indigenous NGOs, or possibly other donors) are well-positioned and willing to take over activities aimed at achieving program goals. This is another type of phase over.

### **3.1.1. Permanent and Self-Sustaining Changes in the Community**

Permanent changes that are self-sustaining can happen in a variety of program areas. Examples include outcomes related to the construction of infrastructure, behavior change, improved production and marketing practices in agriculture, microenterprise, and other economic spheres.

Infrastructure changes that are frequently the focus of developmental projects include the construction of roads, latrines, wells or piped water systems, water retention structures, watershed improvements and reforestation. The construction of infrastructure, while seemingly permanent, is likely to require maintenance over time. Unless provision is made for maintenance, there is always the possibility that the infrastructure will deteriorate and the change will not be lasting. For this reason, planning for sustainability often involves the creation or strengthening of community groups to take responsibility for the infrastructure---an approach that more properly fits under the rubric of community take-over (see below) rather than self-sustaining change. In these cases, the exit strategy includes both reliance on the permanence of the change and a plan for phase over to organizations or individuals in the community for maintenance of the infrastructure.

Interventions to bring about behavior change focused on health and nutrition and child caring practices through education and behavior change communication (BCC) may result in permanent change, without continued PVO activity. These changes are likely to be self-sustaining among those who receive the education if the benefits are perceptible and the changes feasible. However, if the goal of the program is to see continued expansion of beneficial changes after program exit, systems for further dissemination may need to be put in place as part of the exit strategy. Such systems may depend on community health workers (CHW) or health volunteers trained as part of the program, with support from the public health system, or they may depend on informal networks of mothers interacting with other mothers in their communities. These informal networks can be both effective and sustainable. A post-project evaluation of the Hearth Model intervention of Save the Children in Viet Nam found that several years after program exit, participant mothers were continuing to use the improved practices they had learned, to the benefit of their younger children born after the termination of the intervention. Even more striking, the anthropometric status of children whose mothers had not been in the Hearth program also improved in the post project period, suggesting that the practices were being disseminated on a continuing basis, with no further program involvement (Berggren and Tuan, 1995).

Another type of intervention that can produce self-sustaining changes without the need for continued outside inputs or activities is the establishment of improved agricultural production and marketing practices or other economically profitable activities such as agricultural diversification that result in increased production and income. In these cases, farmers are likely to continue the practices, and other farmers are more likely to emulate them. Examples include the introduction of new seeds (CARE /Mozambique) or new, profitable crops (WV/ Kenya) and the establishment of new marketing relationships such as producer cooperatives and revolving

credit funds (Africare/Chad/Mali; CRS/The Gambia; WV/Kenya, CRS/Nicaragua; WV/Malawi, TechnoServe/Ghana; ADRA/Mozambique; CARE/Mozambique; CRS/Nicaragua; CARE/Peru). Certainly the experience of the gradual dissemination of high-yielding crop varieties over the decades following their introduction demonstrates that profitable innovations can be extended widely and do not always require explicit promotion. To be self-sustaining, the activities must be both feasible and profitable, or otherwise demonstrate clear benefits to adopters.

Another example of sustained and expanded change after the end of a project was the Flood Proofing Pilot (FPP) Project in Bangladesh, a project that helped families to raise their houses on plinths in order to protect them from flood damage. The project was in effect from 1997-99, and CARE/Bangladesh evaluated the impact of the project in 2001-02. They found that six *non-participant* households had raised their homes during the life of the project and another 30 had done so since the project ended. The obvious benefits of this infrastructure improvement motivated households to flood-proof their dwellings without continued intervention by CARE, though CARE's inputs and technical assistance were critical to initiating the change (CARE/TANGO, 2002). However, others reported that they were motivated to raise their homes but lacked access to the capital needed to do so. This same evaluation (one of very few that actually returned to a project area some years after exit) found that Local Project Societies organized by the program continued to function in all the program areas and continued to promote the activities that had originally been part of it (homestead raising, home gardens, hygiene), as well as maintaining links with local NGOs.

### **3.1.2. Community Takes Over Activities Directed Toward Development Goals**

The phasing over of a program to a community can mean the handing over of responsibility for program activities to community-based organizations (CBOs), informal groups or networks (such as mothers groups, farmers cooperatives or watershed associations), or key individuals. In such a phase over, a community's likelihood of maintaining the desired outcomes without continued support from an outside entity depends on a number of factors that include:

- Commitment on the part of the community or community group;
- Proven value and quality of the activities, as recognized by community members;
- Visible and valued outcomes of the activities (e.g. bigger harvests, fewer deaths due to diarrheal disease);
- Ownership by and empowerment of individuals, communities and service providers to demand quality services that result in the outcomes desired;
- Transfer of skills and knowledge to community members, community groups and service providers to make the desired outcomes happen;
- Institutional capacity of community-based organizations and health facilities and capacity of key individuals in those organizations to support achievement of the desired outcomes;
- Adaptability of community-based organizations and health facilities in face of unpredictable political, environmental and social changes; and
- Explicit plans for resource generation when physical resources (e.g. medicines and immunizations; seeds and agrochemicals; food for school feeding) are needed to sustain impact, including:
  - Revolving credit or business model;

- Community contributions;
- User fees or cost recovery; and
- External donor support.

In general, the most widely cited plan for sustainability of Title II-supported development programs is to develop (either creating or strengthening) community organizations that will take over responsibility for activities to support program goals. There are many examples of this approach. The success of these organizations depends on their management capacity, their mastery of the necessary technical skills and their ability to obtain the financial and other resources needed to maintain their activities. All three of these criteria - technical skill, management capacity and resources - must be met for a community organization to be fully functional and capable of sustaining development activities. In many cases, such organizations need legal empowerment as well. Several Title II DAPs cited explicit benchmarks for demonstrating the institutional capacity of these groups as part of their exit or sustainability strategies, and such benchmarks should be part of the exit strategy of any program that depends on community groups to continue its work.

Such community organizations may be formed through the efforts of the PVO, or they may be groups already functioning in the community. Choosing to work with an existing community organization or to form a new one clearly depends on the local situation. Where community organizations exist and are functioning well, there may be distinct advantages to working with them: they may already have established credibility and may be more likely to continue functioning after PVO exit. A possible disadvantage is that they may have their own agendas that compete with those of the program. Another disadvantage is that they may already have political alliances that include or exclude certain groups. Of course, working with local government organizations, as CARE/India does with the *panchayati raj* institutions, has the advantage that these are permanent and empowered bodies capable of carrying out programs and plans. TechnoServe/Ghana, for example, worked with a number of farmer groups, some of which they formed and some that already existed (Scott Clark, personal communication, 2003). TechnoServe reports that many of the farmer groups that they formed or strengthened, including cooperatives and businesses, continue to function. Some of these have expanded and diversified their agricultural and marketing activities and some are considered as not "thriving" (defined as expanding their activities into new areas). There appears to be no systematic difference between groups that were started by the PVO and those that were already in existence when the program started (Scott Clark, personal communication, 2003).

Current and past program experience with using community organizations to ensure the sustainability of program goals points to several "lessons learned" on assuring their success. First, programs that work with community organizations should involve them from the very beginning of the program cycle. Transfer of responsibilities to the community organization should take place gradually, with the PVO role reducing over time to advisory and, finally, to no role at all.

Sustainability and effectiveness of community-based organizations may be enhanced by the establishment of horizontal and vertical linkages to other organizations. Horizontal linkages are networks of similar groups in neighboring communities. Regular contact among similar groups in various communities may be a source of mutual support and assistance; there may be

possibilities for economies of scale in some activities (e.g., purchasing of goods and services); regular contact may also keep morale and motivation high.

Vertical linkages are those in which local community organizations participate in and receive assistance from governmental or other organizations at higher levels. Explicit formal arrangements for support, supervision, provision of resources, training (e.g., from area health agencies, area agricultural extension agents) can be critical for the continuation of activities aimed at achieving program goals. This type of linkage with the Ministry of Health (MOH) at the central and local levels is particularly vital for MCHN programs that require provision of consumable supplies as well as ongoing training and supervision. A study of CHWs found lack of adequate supervision and the inability to do their job due to lack of supplies were major factors leading to attrition among CHWs, whether paid or unpaid (Bhattacharyya et al., 2001).

Identifying key individuals as point persons within communities is also useful. Particularly for MCHN programs, developing the skills and commitment of individual CHWs and assuring their effectiveness in their communities, increases the likelihood of long-term functioning, though formal linkage to the public health system is also critical (Bhattacharyya et al., 2001). Support by community groups or government facilities helps to strengthen these individuals in a variety of ways: by maintaining their level of commitment and motivation, refreshing their skills and also by having a mechanism in place to replace individuals that can no longer function in this role in their communities. CARE India's IHNP II program supports "change agents" in local communities and sets specific levels of accomplishment as criteria for graduation (CARE/India 2002). CRS/Nicaragua (2001) trained farmer-promoters with the intention that they be a permanent local resource. And the use of the Hearth Model in Viet Nam (described in the previous section) resulted in dissemination of improved childcare practices through demonstrations led by mothers after Save the Children completed its work (Berggren and Tuan, 1995).

As mentioned in the previous section, planning for the sustainability of permanent developmental changes frequently requires the use of a community organization for maintenance. The ACDI/VOCA/Cape Verde watershed maintenance program organized and trained Watershed Maintenance Organizations, and their management performance was established as a benchmark for program exit. These associations still continue to operate in the project sites and have even expanded into other community economic activities (Adrian Ng'asi, personal communication, 2003). Latrines and boreholes, as well as irrigation systems, were constructed as part of the World Vision health program in Kenya. To ensure the maintenance of these assets and sustainability after exit, the World Vision/Kenya DAP included the organization of local, elected committees set up to be independent, sole operators of the irrigation systems, with full accountability and the right to enforce regulations (WV/Kenya, 2001). This approach appears to have been quite effective. As of this year, the organizations are functioning effectively and seem poised to continue indefinitely (Charles Owubah, personal communication, 2003).

The goal of an exit strategy is not only to maintain benefits achieved, but also to enable further progress toward development goals addressed by the program. Ideally, an exit strategy sets in place a system whereby the benefits expand beyond the original beneficiaries and their

communities. Expansion of benefits can be reflected in an exit strategy by explicitly planning for the dissemination of these innovations through the training of community-based promoters. This is the case of CARE/Honduras, where local Farmer Promoters are responsible for training new farmers in their communities in the production techniques they learned. It is not known whether they will continue to perform this role once CARE's staff is no longer involved, but that is the objective of providing Farmer Promoters with the skills to be able to train others.

### **3.1.3. Establishing Formal Linkages or Phase over to Government or other Permanent Organizations**

A third approach to exit is to seek to have the program taken over by a permanent institution. Most often, this "phase over" approach looks for integration into existing government programs. In many ways, getting government commitment to maintain a program seems ideal, especially in the case where continued resource, staff, or infrastructure inputs are needed. Such integration may be particularly important where user fees are not possible for legal, cultural, or economic reasons, so that resources need to be provided by other means. This approach implicitly assumes that the government will be able to support activities aimed at accomplishing and expanding program goals, but many developing country governments have found it difficult to provide the necessary resources. In Paraguay, the Ministry of Education expressed its commitment to taking over school feeding after WFP exit, but because of the poor economy, lack of resources and possibly the lack of political commitment within the Ministry, no domestic food procurement was implemented (WFP/Paraguay, 2002c). In Cape Verde, the national government similarly committed itself to taking over the WFP school feeding program, but the commitment was based on its intention to seek an alternative source of external funds, not on commitment of its own resources. As a result, at the time of program evaluation 75% of students had moved to a program managed by the government, but that program was in disarray, providing only a snack instead of a meal, and was eventually terminated in 2001 (WFP/Cape Verde 2002a). In contrast, the Jamaican school feeding program was able to continue, fully funded by the national government, after WFP withdrew its food, due in part to the Jamaican government food production facilities that supplied the school feeding program.

The Food-Assisted Child Survival (FACS) Program run by CRS in Gambia (2000b) planned to integrate its program with the MCH programs provided by the Department of Health and established the Gambian Food and Nutrition Association within the Department of Health as a mechanism for this integration. Under FACS, 80% of the funding came from monetization of Title II food, and at the time of evaluation the Gambian Food and Nutrition Association was unsuccessful in finding other sources of funds. These examples demonstrate that despite stated intentions, some official entities do not have the technical capacity, political commitment and access to resources that are necessary for a sustainable take-over. An exit strategy that involves phase over to the government must be based on a realistic assessment of government capacity, commitment and resources. Equally important, the PVO should develop a partnership with the relevant government agency or agencies in order to build both commitment and technical capacity prior to exit.

In developing an exit strategy that will rely on phase over to a government entity, an important question is the level of government at which it is appropriate to partner. The proposed exit

strategy for CARE's program in Honduras includes plans for community participation in municipal government, because this level of government is most readily influenced by local community needs and an effective municipal government structure is in place (Rogers, 2002). A number of countries are pursuing governance policies of decentralization, devolving responsibility for local programs to the municipal or area level. For example, in Peru, Area Health Agencies are being established, with community members trained in needs assessment and program planning as well as contracting procedures, program monitoring and management of budgets. Where decentralized government entities are functioning effectively and have some resources, including these entities in plans for program exit may achieve the dual purpose of continuing program goal-related activities and possibly strengthening local government. The decision about what entities and levels of government are appropriate for partnership as part of an exit strategy should be based on careful analysis of the authority, resources and technical and management capacity of the different levels---an analysis that will surely vary widely from one country to another. In many cases, multiple levels of government will need to be involved---for example, the central government may provide legal authorization and, possibly, funding, while the local government unit may be responsible for implementation.

The strategy of transferring responsibility for program support to the government seems particularly common in the case of health/nutrition programs that depend on volunteer CHWs. Typically in these programs, community health volunteers are trained by the program, and they provide health services in the community including growth monitoring of children, nutrition and health education, immunizations, simple medicines and ORS, vitamin-mineral supplements, and (importantly) referral to public health clinics. Often a system of counter-referral is also in place whereby clinics may refer patients to the local CHW as well (examples include Nicaragua, Cape Verde, Gambia and Honduras, among others). Explicit linkage between the community health volunteers and the public health system are important because, first, most governments do have a functioning public health system (though, of course, of varying effectiveness). Community health volunteers trained by an outside NGO represent a resource that Ministries of Health can use to expand the coverage of the health system and so the MOH may be motivated to adopt responsibility for them. In return, the government can, if conditions are right, offer a reliable system of supply provisioning. The volunteers, or the clinics they are associated with, typically provide consumable inputs to beneficiary households --- inputs such as immunizations, medications and vitamin/mineral supplements (iron, folate, vitamin A) as well as food (sometimes used for nutritional rehabilitation). Medications, vitamin/mineral supplements and immunizations may be supplied through government health services, though few have the resources to provide supplementary food at the levels supplied through PL 480 Title II.

Another benefit of the involvement of the government health system in supporting community health volunteers is that these volunteers most likely require periodic in-service training to refresh their skills. The government health system may also provide an impetus for identification of new health volunteers and a mechanism for training and provisioning them, to replace health volunteers who leave their positions in the community. Government commitment may offer a level of legitimacy to the community health volunteers as well. It is important to develop partnerships and linkages with the health system in the very early stages of the program and gradually to transfer responsibility for supervision and provisioning from the program to the Ministry of Health, with formal agreements when appropriate. When communities graduate,

they can still provide some support to neighboring communities, but vertical linkages to the health system will be essential to sustaining the CHWs and other health activities after exit.

It is not only health programs that propose to ensure sustainability through links to government programs. TechnoServe's food security program in Ghana has established close partnerships with several government ministries: Food and Agriculture, Trade and Investment and Social Welfare. In the judgment of the TechnoServe program planners, the government of Ghana is effective and has a strong track record of fulfilling its commitments. The Ministry of Food and Agriculture has provided agricultural extensionists, some of whom have worked hard to support the goals of the program; the Ministry has also fulfilled its commitment to help farmer groups to obtain loans, although there has sometimes been a problem with timeliness of disbursement (Scott Clark, personal communication, 2003).

### **3.2. Generation of Alternative Resources**

A key to sustainability of development activities and goals being supported by countries is the ability to generate resources when needed. While some activities (e.g., community-based health and nutrition education by CHWs) depend primarily on community and individual initiative, others (e.g., provision of curative care and immunizations, school feeding, provision of agricultural inputs) may require continued resource inputs.

The major approaches that have been used to assure adequate resources are to:

- Establish the organization or service as a business, using a revolving credit or business model;
- Seek community contributions (again, this depends on the community's perception of the value of the activities);
- Establish user fees or charges for cost recovery sufficient to maintain the activities; and
- Seek alternative institutional (external) support from government or private donors.

#### **3.2.1. Business Model**

The revolving credit or business model is a proven one, as the great success and wide replication of the Grameen Bank approach has certainly demonstrated. The attractiveness of this exit option is obvious: it creates community self-reliance, generates a flow of revenue that may be used to advance program goals, and may enable establishment of a permanent entity requiring no new donor inputs of money, material goods, or training and technical assistance. Such business models are, of course, subject to the perils of any business. In the case of CARE/Peru's Sustainable Food Security micro-enterprise program, economic recession caused business failures and resulted in beneficiaries defaulting on their loans, which in the long run could jeopardize the entire program. In the case of Counterpart/Senegal's micro-enterprise program, funds were obtained from local NGOs to initiate the program, but the funds were not always used to support the activities originally anticipated in the program (Counterpart International/Senegal, 2000). A problem with the revolving credit model is that especially needy women may be reluctant to take loans, because of their fear of being unable to pay them back, as was the case with World Vision's micro-lending program in Bangladesh (Webb et al., 2002).

This business model has been used particularly and is probably most appropriate for interventions that involve livelihood promotion: micro-credit and micro-enterprise development, agricultural and marketing innovations -- activities that lend themselves to a business model. In the appropriate context, this approach has had significant success. Examples include the farmer marketing cooperatives in Ghana through TechnoServe's program (Scott Clark, personal communication, 2003) and the community watershed associations in Cape Verde through ACIDI/VOCA's program (Adrian Ng'asi, personal communication, 2003) among others. The advantage of this model is that it has the potential to continue and expand, as economic opportunities dictate.

### **3.2.2. Community Contributions**

The strategy of seeking community contributions seems to have been used particularly in the case of continuation of school feeding after program exit, possibly because school feeding is such a visible program, with obvious and concrete benefits for children. The example of CRS's school feeding intervention in Benin is instructive: in Benin, local donations of food were sought from the very beginning of the program (CRS/Benin, 1999b). The school feeding program relies heavily on the parent-teacher association (PTA) for canteen operations and management, and parents contribute substantially to the supplies needed for the canteen, both in cash and in kind. It is hoped that this high level of early parental involvement will result in long-term sustainability because the shift from depending (partially) on externally provided food to depending on local participation will not be so abrupt.

In Kenya, World Vision's food security intervention depended on farmer contributions of labor and materials to the construction of water systems (World Vision/Kenya, 2001). In these cases, the expectation of community contributions was incorporated into the program early, making this a more feasible component of an exit strategy than if no community contribution had been required prior to withdrawal of program resources. Clearly, a strategy of seeking community donations to sustain program goal-related activities is feasible only where the community supports and values these activities and where the community has resources to donate. The strategy may not be applicable in the most desperately poor settings, where households feel too constrained to make donations, but there are no data explicitly addressing this question. The strategy of seeking community contributions even in such settings may create a feeling of community solidarity and may attract participation if households feel they are getting something of value for their contributions. This would be a promising area for empirical investigation, to determine in what contexts community contributions represent a feasible approach to resource generation.

### **3.2.3. User Fees**

The imposition of user fees is another strategy for supporting sustainability of activities after program exit. To be effective, though, user fees must be collected systematically and there must be systems to enforce payment. In Cape Verde's school feeding program (WFP/Cape Verde, 2002a), it was estimated that only about 50% of parents actually paid the required fee, and the management of the revenue that was received was poor. The lack of operational capacity, coupled with the lack of resources, resulted in the demise of the government's school feeding

program in 1999/2000, even as the WFP school feeding program continued to function effectively. In Jamaica, parent contributions were required as part of the program under WFP, but contributions declined significantly after WFP withdrew.

One risk in imposing user fees is that the neediest households may lose the ability to benefit from the program activities. In Swaziland, fees for school meals increased by a factor of five after the withdrawal of outside program resources, and a significant number of households dropped out of the program and, ultimately, out of school (WFP/Swaziland, 2002d). The program evaluation concluded that the increase in fees was what permitted school feeding to continue after program exit, but it would have been worth exploring mechanisms to prevent the drop-out of the poorest families. Fees might have been increased gradually rather than abruptly; fees might have been set on a sliding scale. It might be that informing families well in advance might have prepared them for the increase in fees. There have been cases, though, in which imposition of user fees actually *increased* the use of health services, because the fees were used to provide medicines and supply health centers, so the quality of the service improved (McSweeney, 1979).

User fees may be used for partial cost recovery, in order to reduce if not eliminate the need to seek external funds. TechnoServe's program in Ghana planned to collect fees for consulting, management and loan guarantees from farmers seeking technical assistance and credit for their production activities. However, they estimated that fees would not cover the cost of the activities they hoped to continue and they planned to (continue to) seek external funds from other donors, international (World Bank) and local (NGOs, religious organizations) (TechnoServe/Ghana, 1996). It is not clear why the program planners did not set fees at a level that would allow the program to support itself without external funding, since the activities supported under the program were all intended to be economically profitable and self-sustaining.

#### **3.2.4. External Donor Funding**

A number of Title II development program plans suggest a strategy of positioning community-based organizations to seek external funds themselves. Africare's program in Chad and Mali planned to organize food security committees that would seek local, national, or international funds (Africare/Chad/Mali 2002). Similarly the CRS program in Ghana expressed the hope that community-based organizations would be able to link to potential outside donors. CARE's food security program in Peru planned to train participants in order to give them "the capacity to maintain relationships that make external inputs available". One program plan suggested developing an endowment fund that would provide an ongoing flow of resources to support program activities (CARE/Peru, 2001). It would be useful to return to some of these program communities to assess the success of this strategy.

A number of food security programs focusing on agricultural production and marketing, fisheries, or other livelihood interventions include in their plans the involvement of the appropriate ministry. This seems to be a reasonable strategy, but its effectiveness depends on the capacity and level of resources of the ministry in question. The same considerations that apply to identifying funding resources for the activities of community-based organizations (own revenue, contributions and donations, cost recovery through user fees) apply to identification of funding on the part of the government. Its sources of revenue may be different from those

available to community organizations, but the need to identify explicitly the sources of funding and the responsible organization for particular activities is the same.

### 3.3. Special Considerations Regarding the Use of Food in Development Programs

Food is a central element in many development programs, particularly those funded wholly or in part through the provision of PL 480 Title II food. The use of food in development programs raises special considerations in planning for program exit. Food, like medicines or vitamin/mineral supplements, is a consumable good; if the effectiveness of an activity depends on the provision of food, some means of funding procurement of the food needs to be identified as part of an exit strategy. In planning for exit, it is important to evaluate critically the need to continue food provision as a means of accomplishing the priority development goals after exit, since provision of food may be particularly difficult to maintain after graduation or exit.

In MCHN programs, food is used according to one of three models (FANTA, 1999): in the **recuperation** model, food is used like medicine to rehabilitate children who are suffering from malnutrition (as measured anthropometrically); in the **incentive** model, food is provided in order to encourage mothers to take advantage of prenatal and post-partum care and child health interventions; and in the **prevention** model, a take-home ration is provided to households with children at risk of malnutrition.

Program dependence on food varies according to the model used. In a program providing a recuperation component, the food is integral to the program. In some settings, education of the mother about appropriate uses of the household's own resources may substitute for the direct provision of food, but in others, there may be no effective alternative to providing supplementary food.

A number of programs that include the use of food in a recuperation model simply do not describe their plans for assuring the supply of food (e.g., World Vision/Malawi, CRS/Benin, CRS/Nicaragua, CRS/Gambia). As programs mature and the specifics of exit strategies are developed, explicit plans for resource provision are essential for the continuation of the program. In some settings, substituting education for the provision of food in very food insecure households or communities will not be effective, at least in the short run. Programs for recuperation of malnourished children need food, and in these programs it may be important to continue the provision of food after external resources are withdrawn. In these cases, it is clearly important to have a system of food provisioning identified and functioning prior to program exit.

Where food is used as an incentive (e.g. for participation in health care services), there might be other forms of incentive that would work as well. Indeed, Project Concern International's (PCI) expressed goal for its MCHN program in Bolivia was to raise community awareness of the implicit benefits of using health services so that, as the availability of food aid declined, the need for food as an incentive would decline as well and mothers would use the services because of their recognized value (Bessenecker, personal communication 1999). This approach applies generally to cases where food was provided in the past as an incentive to encourage use of

programs such as health care or schooling. However, there is the risk that providing food as an incentive will create an expectation and withdrawing it will reduce participation.

Another approach to the withdrawal of food as an incentive is to substitute another incentive for participation, one that is within the power of the community to provide. In CRS's Food-Assisted Child Survival (FACS) Program in Benin, credit and savings services were offered as an incentive for participation in health services, while the use of food is expected to be restricted to supplementing pregnant and lactating women and malnourished children (CRS/Benin, 1999b). These services were provided instead of food starting with the 1996-2000 DAP, which represented a transition from MCH center-based to community-based services. They were included not only as an incentive to make use of MCH services, but also as a mechanism for reducing malnutrition by promoting food security through increased household income. The Concept Paper for the 2001-2005 DAP suggests that access to credit will continue to be offered as an incentive for use of MCH services (CRS/Benin, 1999a).

Food provided in a school feeding program is essential to the nature of the program. Food in school is not only an incentive to enrollment and attendance (the incentive function can be accomplished in other ways), but it also alleviates short-term hunger to enhance attention and learning. To continue a school feeding program, alternative sources of food---whether from the community, the government, or other donors---must be found. Of course, to the extent that the goal of school feeding is to increase school enrollment and attendance, improving the quality of education and raising parents' recognition of its value through the program may sustain these outcomes without continuation of food.

Where food is used as pay in FFW construction projects, the need for food should end when the asset is constructed. If the asset has recognized benefits to the community, it should be possible to organize a system for maintenance of the asset without the need to provide food as pay.

Even where food is provided to vulnerable households as a means to prevent malnutrition, complementary interventions to increase household food security have the potential to make the direct provision of food unnecessary. Such interventions include: the promotion of home production, income generation schemes or improvements in methods of feeding or food preparation. For example, CRS/Nicaragua has a Food-Assisted Child Survival (FACS) Program in which the food ration for children is targeted based on nutritional status (recuperation model). In order to ensure sustainability of program results, there will be a shift from direct provision of food to an education/behavior change approach in which households are taught to make better use of their own food (CRS/Nicaragua, 2001). CARE/Honduras is linking health and nutrition interventions to agricultural production interventions in the same households, so that as direct provision of food is withdrawn, the household has developed the means to increase its own food supply, reducing the need for externally provided food. The CHW will be able to promote appropriate child feeding practices, knowing that sufficient food will be available without direct provision of a supplement (Rogers, 2002). CRS/Gambia also plans to move from the provision of food as an incentive for improved caring practices to a program of education/behavior change without the use of food.

These examples indicate that the design of an exit strategy for a food aid program does not have to include food in all cases, and planning exit from food programs needs to involve an analysis of whether continuation of food is required.

In addition to how food is being used in a program, a cultural sense of entitlement may also play a role in whether the food can easily be withdrawn. CARE's Integrated Nutrition and Health Program (INHP) program in India supports the government's Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) program, and food is considered to be an entitlement in the ICDS (CARE/India, 2002). A recent decision of India's Supreme Court confirmed the right to food in these programs, making the withdrawal of food from the ICDS sites where INHP operates an unrealistic option.

### **3.4. Exit Criteria and Benchmarks**

Not all program plans indicate specific criteria for program exit. Among those that do, the "triggers" for exit vary by program. Exit criteria options fall into three categories:

- A fixed time limit;
- Achievement of specific levels of program targets (impact); and
- Achievement of benchmarks indicating progress toward feasible phase out or phase over (process).

All development programs have time limits dictated by the program funding cycle, and in many cases programs either exit at the end of the cycle or are continued in the same places in essentially the same form over multiple cycles. An explicit exit strategy that is built into program design from the beginning should include a specified time line for the exit process, making it less likely that programs either withdraw without proper preparation or simply roll over from cycle to cycle. For example, a program that has a fixed time limit may increase its focus on establishing systems for continuing activities to achieve program goals, using the time frame to guide the process.

Assessment of impact can be used to target efforts at phase over by focusing efforts on those program components that have been effective. The use of impact indicators as criteria for exit does pose risks. First, the targeted level of impact may not be achievable in the desired time frame for exit. A second concern is the possibility of creating perverse incentives: if communities know that reaching a given level of impact will trigger the withdrawal of program benefits, this may reduce community members' motivation to achieve that impact. Nevertheless, impact should be a consideration in planning for graduation or exit, but a policy of committing to stay in a community or a region until impact targets are met is not recommended. The level of accomplishment of impact may provide a sense of an appropriate time frame for exit and may also suggest which particular program goals should be the focus of efforts to achieve sustainability in an exit strategy and which might, due to lack of impact, be given less attention. Rather than set inflexible impact targets as graduation or exit criteria, it makes more sense to establish an explicit time frame, though one with some flexibility built in and to link it to the achievement of process-related benchmarks (Levinger and McLeod, 2002; Rogers, 2002).

Benchmarks for progress toward meeting the criteria for exit are simply the operationalized, measurable indicators of the criteria. If a criterion for exit is "a functioning agreement between the CHWs and the Area Health Agency", benchmarks might be "At least 25% of CHWs have received a supervisory visit in the past six months", or "CHWs have reported no shortfalls in availability of supplies for the past year." Benchmarks should be clearly linked to the specific elements of the program that are to be phased out or phased over. For example, a benchmark for phase over to a community group in Mozambique responsible for maintaining a plant nursery included the following benchmark: "At least one representative of each farmers' group groomed...to assume full managerial responsibility for the nursery" (ADRA/Mozambique 2001).

Specific performance indicators are even better. As an example, the ACDI/VOCA/Cape Verde program proposed as a benchmark for exit "a minimum of three years of clean audits" for its watershed management associations. An impact benchmark suggested for the phase out of a road construction project in CARE/Honduras was "community is accessible by road in every season, at least by a 4-wheel-drive vehicle" (Rogers, 2002). In this case, an impact benchmark made sense because the change brought about in the community was a permanent one, although the establishment of a system for regular maintenance of the road would be essential for benefits of the road to continue. In the same program, a benchmark for exit from the health component of the program was to have official written agreement with municipal health offices to provide supplies and supervision for community health volunteers.

The selection of benchmarks for exit should be based on an analysis of the aspects of the program that are effective and show promise and on identification of the indicators that would best show progress. The process of benchmark indicator identification should include program managers and field staff, because they are aware of the situation in their communities. Periodic meetings during the first year or two of the project should be planned to update the list of indicators as the program evolves.<sup>1</sup>

Identifying individual communities for graduation is sometimes a part of the process of exit and in these cases, follows from identification of exit criteria. In addition to time frame, the PVO should look at impact (to see what is feasible to sustain) and should try to achieve specific benchmarks for the establishment of systems for sustaining appropriate development activities. A criterion for exit, therefore, might be that a certain critical number of communities have successfully (that is, sustainably) graduated. Ideally, this critical mass of communities could form the basis for an expansion of development activities to communities that were not originally part of the program.

In the case of Honduras, specific criteria for graduation were developed based on the likely mechanisms for sustaining activities in each of three sectors--MCHN, sustainable agricultural development and participatory governance. For example, one benchmark for MCHN graduation is the establishment of formal links between the CHWs and the public health system, to assure both provision of consumable goods (e.g., medicines, immunizations) and continued supervision and refresher training. For agriculture, one benchmark is that each farmer/promoter has trained at least three additional farmers, with the idea that this makes continued participation in training

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<sup>1</sup> Levinger and McLeod [2002] report that USAID's Office of Transition Assistance reviews exit ("hand-off") strategies every six months, recognizing that circumstances can change during the life of a program.

and continued implementation of improved methods more likely. The graduation plan includes the involvement of both farmer/promoters and CHWs in training counterparts in newly entering communities as a way of cementing their skills and establishing horizontal linkages among communities that may develop into an expanding network of support, even after the program has exited from the area.

One option CARE/India is exploring for its graduation strategy is to establish, as a benchmark for program graduation, the successful replication of its health program activities in neighboring communities (Bailey, 2002). The experience of replication under the leadership of CARE staff should make further replication more likely after CARE's exit. Since the program is graduating, the mechanism for replication or dissemination in principle should be independent of inputs from the program and should phase over to a different provider of inputs (such as State Governments) is an alternative.

In the case of the development of community-based organizations, measures of institutional capacity might include indicators of management capacity such as making contracts, keeping adequate records, enforcing their own rules, continuing activities started under the program and undertaking at least one new activity or expanding to at least one new project site independently of PVO input.

### **3.5. The Role of Program Monitoring and Evaluation**

Program impact evaluation also plays a role in the design of an exit strategy. We have suggested that impact targets should not be the sole triggers for graduation or exit, but measures of impact can suggest which elements of a program should be the focus of an exit strategy and associated efforts to assure sustainability. Impact measures can also suggest levels of overall success that may indicate that it is appropriate to start the process of graduation or exit.

Ongoing monitoring of the processes not only of program implementation, but also of progress towards reaching the benchmarks for exit or graduation is key to a successful strategy. Monitoring of benchmark indicators should be incorporated into the normal systems for project monitoring. Monitoring systems normally include measures of outcome (e.g., number of CHWs trained; number of children immunized; number of communities in which watershed improvements were completed), as well as impact, which may be the same benchmarks needed to plan for exit.

To obtain information on the effectiveness of graduation strategies, assuming graduation of some communities takes place prior to program exit, these graduated communities should be maintained within the program's monitoring and evaluation system. This allows for continued measurement of benchmarks, outcomes and impacts. In this way it will be possible to identify program elements and exit approaches that appear sustainable. If different communities use different exit approaches (e.g., phase over to community organizations in some and to informal networks of individuals in others), comparative analysis of alternative graduation approaches could be performed and inform subsequent decisions regarding graduation and exit. The information can then be used to modify the design of exit strategies in later-graduating communities.



### **3.6. General Principles for Program Exit Time Frames**

Several general principles regarding timeframes have emerged from the review of the literature on program planning, sustainability, graduation and exit. These include the following:

- Establish a clear but flexible timeline, linked to the program funding cycle:
  - Use the first two or three years of the funding cycle to develop the activities included in the program and based on these activities identify benchmarks for progress toward meeting the criteria for graduation. (In some cases benchmarks can be identified earlier in the program cycle.)
  - Use this same time period to monitor the program's impact on various outcomes, as a means to decide what goals should be the focus of sustainability efforts and what will be a feasible time frame for exit that does not jeopardize continued accomplishment.
- Incorporate plans for exit from the beginning of the program's implementation.
- Implement exit plans in a gradual, phased manner, gradually transferring responsibility to the organizations, groups, or individuals who will be responsible for activities to advance program goals after graduation of the community.
- In some situations programs may plan exit based on successful graduation of a sufficient number of communities (and possibly, establishment of linkages among them).

#### **3.6.1. Establish a Clear Time Line Linked to the Program Funding Cycle**

Along with specific process-related benchmarks, there should be a stated time line for exit, so that program staff and communities know they are working toward a deadline. Performance evaluations of program staff should be based on progress toward sustainability benchmarks as well as on progress in achieving desired outcomes and impacts. Flexibility is important, but time lines should not be extended indefinitely, or the motivation to make progress toward exit may be reduced because of skepticism about the intention of the donor to withdraw, particularly in the case of long standing programs. For example, in Paraguay, WFP implemented a school feeding program in 1978 with an explicit plan to phase over to the national government. WFP reversed its stated decision to turn over the program to the government so many times that the government became skeptical and was unprepared for the actual phase out when it happened (WFP/Paraguay, 2002c).

Donor funding constraints may prevent extensions of exit timeframes. It may be useful to link the time line for exit with the program's funding cycle. In a typical five year activity, the first two or three years may be spent identifying priorities, implementing and monitoring activities, defining specific benchmarks and establishing the time frame for exit. This process should be completed by the time of the midterm evaluation, when more explicit measures should be undertaken to move toward meeting the criteria for exit. In the case of a program that has been in existence for some time, it should be possible to complete this process more quickly, because the activities that form the program are already determined and their relative effectiveness has been demonstrated over time.

The graduation or exit process can then be implemented over the final two years of a five year cycle. If it is possible to graduate some communities while the PVO is still able to observe and

assess the phase over or phase out process, this may provide valuable insights for sustainability. The PVO can, of course, be initiating work in other communities, but can still be available for advice and technical assistance and can still be monitoring the graduation process to be sure that activities and impacts are maintained.

### **3.6.2. Outline a Plan for Exit from the Beginning of the Project**

It is recommended that exit strategies be built into the design of programs from the beginning. However, many programs target a mid-point in project implementation for the development of specific exit criteria and details. For example, one of the program objectives may be to improve livelihoods, but the exit strategy may depend on whether the most effective livelihood focus turns out to be improved livestock production, organization of a marketing cooperative, or the introduction of new varieties of seed. For example, the Africare/Chad-Mali program plans to define its strategy more fully at the point of preparing for the midterm evaluation (Africare, 2002), when it has had an opportunity to determine what livelihood activities are feasible, effective and sustainable. Or if there are several potential community groups that might take responsibility for project activities in a phase over, time may be required to identify which group appears to be most promising for long-term sustainability. For these reasons, the specific action plan for exit may need to be developed gradually over the first couple of years of the program's operation. CARE/Honduras's overall program strategy for graduation is to devote the first two years of their five-year DAP cycle to program implementation, the next two years to progressive implementation of the exit strategy and the last year to gradual phase out or phase over (Rogers, 2002).

### **3.6.3. Exit Should be a Gradual, Phased Process**

Exit should involve the gradual disengagement of PVO staff and resources from the development activities initiated by the program. The process should be phased, so that local institutions or individuals gain increasing technical capacity and management expertise to be able to continue activities on their own. Not all program activities need to be phased out or phased over at the same time. PVOs should have the opportunity to observe whether the systems that have been put into place are capable of functioning independently. For example, the phase out of supplementary food in an MCHN program may occur before the phase over (to the health ministry) of CHW training and supervision is complete. Part of an exit strategy might be for the PVO to depart from the community, but maintain contact and availability by means of their presence in nearby communities. By the time of program exit, systems should be functioning independently, and any necessary institutional linkages and agreements should be formalized.

An advantage of the gradual phase out or phase over of program activities, whether the phasing is geographic or by specific goal or activity, is that lessons may be learned in one setting that may be applied to make the process of graduation run more smoothly as subsequent communities or activities are included in the process. Frequent and close monitoring of the exit process is essential to assure that the process is working as expected and to identify and resolve problems.

### **3.6.4. When Possible, Plan for Program Exit Based on a Sufficient Number of Graduated Communities in the Area**

Among the criteria for exit that may influence the timeframe for exit is having a certain number of communities already graduated. As mentioned above, when communities have shown themselves capable of meeting the benchmarks for graduation they may be more likely to be in a position to offer support to other nearby communities. If a program's strategy is based on having a pre-defined percentage of graduated communities at the time of exit then this must be taken into consideration when determining the timeline for exit.

### **3.7. Communication with Stakeholders**

Issues of communication are not frequently dealt with explicitly in program plans. Nonetheless, establishing clear communication with the community -- beneficiaries, community-based providers of services and other stakeholders -- about the program's eventual departure is clearly a central element in a graduation or exit strategy. Communication is important because it can prepare the community for graduation, so that the withdrawal of services is not seen as unanticipated or abrupt. Communities should be aware from the start of the program that the PVO will not remain indefinitely. This may eliminate a sense of dependence on the program and encourage communities to become self-reliant through the creation or strengthening of community groups or other mechanisms. It may reduce the risk of resentment of the withdrawal of resources and disaffection with the services provided by the program. It can also generate greater ownership of the sustainability components, as community members are involved in planning at an early stage.

When a program has been operating for a long time in a community, it may appear to be permanent. In such cases, clear and consistent communication about plans for exit is particularly important. All stakeholders need to be informed of plans for exit and regularly updated about program progress, so that they understand the rationale for graduation, recognize that it will happen, and contribute to the process.

### **3.8. Evaluation of Exit Strategies**

The primary measure of success of an exit strategy is that after a PVO has ceased working in an area, program impacts have been maintained or, better still, have improved and expanded to other communities. The test of an exit strategy is that the goals of the program continue to be met and expanded, that relevant activities are continuing (possibly modified as a result of changing circumstances, but still in the service of development goals) and that organizations and individuals trained or empowered by the program continue to function effectively. For any exit strategy, the specific measures of successful exit will relate first to the impact indicators measuring progress toward the project's original goals and second, to the process benchmarks for exit established as part of the strategy. The latter indicate that the community groups, linkages and support systems continue to function, contributing to communities' flexibility in responding to changing circumstances.

The only way to do a rigorous evaluation of the success of an exit strategy is to return to the program area some fixed time after exit and determine whether sustainability was achieved. Perhaps one or two years would be reasonable, but longer-term evaluations should also be implemented for some proportion of programs. To determine the effectiveness of having an exit *strategy*, as opposed to the sustainable success of the program itself, one would need to compare programs in which no systematic exit strategy was employed, with programs in which a systematic exit process was implemented.

That being said, an evaluation design comparing programs with an exit strategy to programs with no explicit exit strategy may be infeasible in most cases. Some programs (such as Title II programs) are now *required* to have exit strategies, so a concurrent comparison of strategy versus no-strategy is not possible. Another concern is that programs and their contexts vary so widely that it would be difficult to disentangle the success of the exit strategy itself from the other factors related to sustainability. Comparing the relative effectiveness of different specific approaches to exit would require a significant body of evidence from a sufficient number and range of programs and there would still be questions of comparability.

Still, the idea of returning to program areas some fixed time after exit is a powerful one, one that should be incorporated into the overall concept of program evaluation. Most evaluations take place at the end of the program's funding cycle, and few evaluations address the question of whether impacts and processes were maintained, whether new areas not originally covered by the program experienced benefits from expansion of the program or from emulation of services and practices promoted originally by the program. If such post-program evaluation were to be institutionalized, then in fact it might be possible to determine whether programs that undertook the steps needed to develop an exit strategy showed, across a range of programs, better sustainability than those that did not, allowing lessons to be derived that could be applied to future development of exit strategies. That is, post project evaluations are valuable in their own right, providing information about programmatic factors leading to sustainability, and would also shed light on the role of the exit strategy in that process.

### **3.9. Implementation of Exit Strategies: Summary**

- Identification of exit approaches to be used for different program components (i.e., phase out versus phase over)
- Design of exit plan
  - Determination of benchmarks
  - Establishment of time line
  - Identification of activities and responsible individuals/groups
- Communication with all stakeholders regarding exit plans
- Exit plan implemented starting from the time of program entry or as soon as program activities are sufficiently identified to permit planning
- Development of partnerships and local capacity
- Exit plan and benchmarks modified and revised at the time of the mid-term evaluation
- Mobilization of resources
- Final detailed design of exit strategy and timeframe
- Implementation of exit strategy

- Monitoring and evaluation
  - Monitoring progress toward benchmarks established to demonstrate progress toward institutionalization of processes that will assure sustainability
  - Evaluation of continued impact and of ongoing activities in support of program goals, some fixed period of time after program exit. Evaluation of exit strategies is based on:
    - Process is functioning effectively
    - The level of accomplishment of impact is maintained in the community, improved in the community, expanded to other communities
- Follow-up
  - Long-term sustained services and/or benefits. This must be evaluated by return to communities after exit
  - Follow-up during the process of graduation: as program staff leave to work in other areas, periodic return to communities to provide support and advice. In later stages, program staff may be available for technical assistance if requested by the community organizations
  - Assessment of effectiveness of exit process and lessons for future efforts

## **4. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE TITLE II INDIA PROGRAMS**

### **4.1. Title II Programs in India**

Title II programs in India are administered by CARE and CRS, and the two programs comprise the largest overall country program in the Title II development portfolio.

#### **4.1.1. CARE's Title II Program**

CARE's Title II program is called the Integrated Nutrition and Health Program (INHP), now in its second five-year funding cycle. The INHP is unusual among Title II programs in that it is closely tied to the Government of India (GOI) Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), a national-scale program administered largely through state governments. Through ICDS, the INHP reaches nearly 7 million women and young children in approximately 100,000 villages. INHP supports the ICDS in service delivery through community based, government-run Anganwadi Centers (AWC) operated by Anganwadi Workers (AWW). The close integration with the GOI's major maternal and child health and nutrition program makes the INHP somewhat distinctive among Title II MCHN programs and has implications for program graduation and exit. Phase over to the government in this case is a natural strategy for program exit, but this entails specific considerations and constraints related to the government's fiscal and administrative capacity at national, state and local levels. Opportunities may also exist to complement transfer to the government with a phase over of aspects of the program to community groups. While phase over to the government is the primary approach, phase over to CBOs and other community groups for some program elements is also likely.

The components of INHP II include improving the quality of MCHN services through: provision of supplementary food; provision of health/nutrition education; facilitating access to immunizations and vitamin-mineral supplements; and strengthening systems of supply of inputs, training and information management. These components are delivered at AWCs by AWWs, the Ministry of Health Auxiliary Nurse-Midwives (ANMs) and community-based volunteer Change Agents (CA). A key component of the program is regularly scheduled Nutrition Health Days (NHD), at which supplementary food is provided to pregnant and lactating women and children under age three, along with immunizations, growth monitoring, antenatal checkups, or other health services.

Title II food is generally provided to these beneficiaries in the form of a take-home ration that is explicitly intended as an incentive for participation in other health services (CARE/India, 2002), but which also serves as a nutritional supplement for at-risk women and children. CARE had been providing Corn Soy Blend (CSB) and refined, vitamin-A enriched vegetable oil to the AWCs in the INHP program area, but due to the GOI's decision not to allow import of CSB due to concerns about genetically modified organisms, CARE now provides only oil, and the State Governments provide dry commodities in program areas.

As part of planning for graduation, consideration was given to the feasibility of implementing the INHP program without food -- by substituting other interventions, such as increased nutrition

education on appropriate infant feeding practices. But rulings by the Indian Supreme Court in 2002 and 2003 asserting food as a basic right of citizenship have made the withdrawal of food from ICDS infeasible. The food supplement in the ICDS program has taken on the character of an entitlement, and there may be political and legal obstacles to withdrawing it.

The INHP II program explicitly planned in its operational strategy for graduation of 10% of INHP sites by the end of the funding cycle in 2006, and in 2003 CARE revised this to a planned graduation of 25% of program sites by 2006. Graduation implies withdrawal of both CARE-provided technical assistance and Title II food inputs, while working to assure sustainable independent functioning of the MCHN systems. Components of the graduation strategy CARE proposes include (a) a shift in responsibility to the state government ICDS program for activities and resources that INHP has supported; (b) strengthening of community networks, including local governance groups, CBOs and women's groups, as well as strengthening of individual volunteer CAs; (c) intensifying capacity building in information, training, and supply management; and (d) identifying alternative sources of food for the program.

A high priority for graduation is to ensure that the health systems and networks implemented under the INHP continue to operate as a "platform" for other USAID-supported health-related activities, including planned programs in the area of HIV/AIDS and Family Planning/Reproductive Health (Cogill et al., 2003b). This is a priority because despite plans for INHP graduation and eventual exit, other USAID-funded activities and technical assistance are expected to continue in some program areas, such as through the Chayan HIV/AIDS/Reproductive Health project.

#### **4.1.2. CRS's Title II Program**

The CRS Title II program, in contrast to CARE's program, is administered through various partners, including dioceses and NGOs. It uses Title II commodities in four programs: community-based maternal health and child survival; watershed improvement and agriculture; food for education; and general relief (Cogill et al., 2003a). Other than the general relief activities, Title II food is used primarily as an incentive for participation in development-related activities, although the food also serves as a nutritional supplement. The commodities currently distributed in the CRS programs are refined, vitamin A-enriched vegetable oil and bulgur wheat. The program had been using a small amount of CSB as well until the GOI prohibited its import due to concerns about genetically modified organisms.

In its most recent DAP, CRS anticipated graduating 50% of communities from its maternal health/child survival program and 40% of the communities in its agricultural programs. Graduation is planned based on reaching program targets. CRS has not planned to change overall beneficiary levels of the program, since coverage and outreach will be expanded in the non-graduated communities (Cogill et al., 2003a). In the case of the watershed programs, plans for exit include strengthening community watershed associations and establishing better linkages with appropriate water agencies within the GOI and among the multilateral agencies.

### **4.1.3. Plan for Accelerated Phase down**

As reported in recent documents, “USAID/Washington has stated the need for an accelerated phase down for the Title II program in India. This position is based on several factors that include India’s recent emergence as a food aid donor, severe constraints placed on Title II resources by emergencies in sub-Saharan Africa and increased commodity prices in the US (Cogill et al., 2003a,b).” An additional factor is the recent decision on the part of the GOI to prohibit the importation of CSB because of concerns about foods containing genetically modified organisms. The U.S. Government was unable to certify the CSB as being free of genetically modified organisms. CSB, representing about 60% of the dollar value of total Title II resources in India, had been an important component of the food resources provided in the INHP program and a significantly smaller component of the CRS Title II program. This import restriction has focused attention on the need to deal with a significant reduction in program resources, providing additional impetus for accelerated phase down (Cogill et al., 2003a, b). The reduction in total Title II commodity resources reduces not only the amount of food available for distribution, but also the counterpart funds provided by the GOI, which are proportional to the tonnage of commodities provided. The significant resource reduction provides an impetus to accelerate the planned phase down, though such acceleration may require increased inputs in the short run in order to ensure sustainability.

## **4.2. Implications of International Experience for India's Title II Programs**

### **4.2.1. CARE’s Title II Program Graduation and Exit**

The CARE INHP II program is unusual in that it builds on and supports GOI maternal and child health activities in ICDS and corresponding government services by promoting improvements in service delivery and health/nutrition education and by supplying Title II food. This implies that the strategy for graduation and eventual exit is based on ensuring that service improvements are maintained within the ICDS. The sustainability of the AWCs and the network of AWWs and ANMs is assured, since these are elements of ongoing government programs, mandated by law. Sustainability of INHP II program activities and outcomes refers to continuation within ICDS of ‘best practices’ developed with CARE’s assistance for delivery of food, immunizations and vitamin/mineral supplements; provision of health and nutrition education; and training and information management. Sustainability of INHP II also involves replacement of CARE-supplied Title II food with a reliable source of food to meet the needs of the ICDS program. The sustainability of the ICDS structure itself is not in question; the focus is on the range and quality of services provided. Note that this contrasts with many Title II programs, in which program activities are delivered within the context of the PVO, its NGO partners, or community groups or individuals.

The INHP II program appears poised for successful (i.e., sustainable) graduation and eventual exit. Several of the "lessons learned" from international experience with graduation and exit are reflected in the draft graduation strategy outlined for the INHP II program (CARE/India, 2002) and in the options suggested for accelerated phase down (Cogill et al., 2003b).

First, the plan to graduate a certain proportion of communities by 2006 was built into the proposal, so that all program planners, donors, and stakeholders were aware of this goal at the time the program's second cycle was approved. Acceleration of this graduation means that continued communication with stakeholders is necessary. Second, there is a strong emphasis on capacity building of local stakeholders for independent management of the food and other material inputs, as well as management of training, supervision, and program information. The draft strategy assigns specific responsibility for the various elements and delineates possible targets for technical assistance and capacity building. The strategy focuses on the graduation process as being a path to sustainability of key activities and outcomes.

Third, CARE is identifying specific criteria for deciding that a site is ready for graduation, as well as explicit benchmarks to determine whether the criteria have been met. Both the operational plan (CARE/India, 2002) and options suggested for accelerated phase down (Cogill et al., 2003b) identify some clear benchmarks to assure that activities are capable of being sustained independent of CARE inputs. One benchmark suggested in CARE's strategy to indicate readiness for graduation is that best practices from one site have been fully replicated in at least one other site and are being implemented independently in that second site. Explicit benchmarks are given for the definition of "functioning" including reliable stocking of food and vitamin/mineral supplements, monthly NHDs and other clear, measurable indicators.

Along with benchmarks, establishing a clear time line is an important component of planning graduation and exit. No time line is presented in the draft graduation strategy, but it is clearly contemplated; program planners are aware of the need to elaborate a time frame for reaching the benchmarks and for graduation of program sites. Establishment of a clear timeline incorporating the appropriate benchmarks is essential for successful implementation of the plan.

Fourth, the focus of CARE's graduation planning for the current DAP is on phase over (rather than phase out) to an existing government program (ICDS) that is fully committed to providing services. Phase over to government has had mixed success in the programs we reviewed, but phase over of the INHP II support activities to ICDS has several elements that increase its probability of sustainability. The GOI values the contribution of the INHP; government entities are aware of the indicators of success the program has achieved. Furthermore, the government is committed to the goals of the INHP; INHP and the government already work in partnership, with each contributing resources (funds, food, human and physical resources) toward common objectives, so a shift to greater government responsibility will neither be abrupt nor catastrophic. The fact that there are legal requirements for food to be provided through the ICDS and for the food to be of specific nutritional value increases the chances that the Government will provide food resources in place of CARE's food contribution following graduation.

Fifth, as discussed earlier in this document, community-based organizations in many cases have had a good record of enabling sustainability after program exit. CARE's plan to work closely with community groups (including local governance groups, women's self-help groups and CBOs) is essential. Experience shows that the factors promoting sustainability of such groups include: (a) technical and management capacity; (b) establishment as a recognized legal entity capable of entering into contracts (which may not be relevant for all types of groups); (c) assured access to resources needed to carry out their functions. Networks of community volunteers such

as the INHP Change Agents have also had success in other settings. The sustainability of their participation appears to be enhanced by: (a) a sense of their own effectiveness; (b) the clear value placed on their services by the community; (c) participation in support networks of similar individuals; (d) access to adequate supervision and refresher training. Some of these elements are addressed in the CARE plan, which recognizes that sustaining the best practices and technical inputs promoted by the CARE program is as important to successful graduation as sustaining material inputs.

Sixth, given the large scale of the INHP II program, a gradual and phased implementation of graduation is planned, offering the opportunity to monitor graduation in some sites and to incorporate lessons learned into the graduation strategy in subsequent sites. There is an opportunity for full-scale monitoring and evaluation be continued not only in continuing program sites, but also in sites that have graduated, in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in the graduation strategy as implemented.

There are a couple of areas related to INHP II graduation that give cause for concern. Perhaps most important is the need to ensure a system for reliable delivery of sufficient food to replace the Title II resources. As discussed earlier, possibilities often exist to replace food with other resources or approaches after exit of a Title II program. In the case of the INHP II, though, it seems clear that withdrawal of the food resource from the ICDS program is not feasible. In addition to the legal issues, loss of food could jeopardize the attendance at MCH clinics and NHDs, reducing the effectiveness of the program (Cogill et al., 2003b). CARE and USAID are aware of this and are taking steps to minimize the disruption to the phase down.

Several approaches have been suggested for assuring the substitution of Title II food in the program as it is phased over to the government. The original INHP II operational plan (CARE/India, 2002) suggests a "local food processing model" for at least some of the graduated communities. This is a model whereby the processing of food for the program would be taken over by local community enterprises (possibly women's groups) as a means of providing employment. This model is promising, but begs the question of where the food for processing will come from. Similarly, the Public Distribution System (PDS) through the Food Corporation of India is identified (with some caveats as to its logistic and administrative capacity) as a possible source of food, but the question of funds for procurement remains. The current plan is for state governments to provide the food, but there are questions about the adequacy and reliability of this source; interrupted delivery could reduce the incentive function and thus reduce use of other health services. It is acknowledged that some government sources will face challenges (Cogill et al., 2003b).

If the experience of other programs demonstrates anything, it is that explicit and realistic plans for assuring needed resources are essential for sustainability. Approaches to resource generation that have been successful in other programs include community contributions, imposition of user fees to raise funds, the establishment of services on a business model, and the identification of alternative donors -- national or state governments, NGOs, or bilateral or multilateral donors. The appropriateness of each of these approaches is dependent on the existing circumstances and environment. Given that the inputs provided by the INHP are being phased over to the ICDS, a government-funded program, the model of identifying government funds as the source of

resources for the program is most appropriate, but it depends on the willingness and ability of state or national government to allocate the needed resources, and these may not be fully assured (Cogill et al., 2003b).

In the case of the INHP, community contributions might theoretically be feasible if the communities are sufficiently invested in the program and appreciative of its benefits to be willing to make the contributions. But given that these are government services, this approach may be difficult. User fees for MCHN services would probably not be feasible, since the ICDS is committed to providing these services free, and ICDS services are provided free in all non-INHP areas. Also, a goal of the program is to encourage and promote the use of these services, and user fees might pose a barrier. A business-model approach is appropriate to production and marketing interventions that have the potential to be economically self-sustaining. The INHP (and the ICDS) are programs focused on the delivery of services (including the provision of consumable supplies); the business model is not appropriate to this kind of intervention.

If possible, it may be useful to try alternative approaches to phase over in different program sites to see which shows the greatest promise. For example, community contributions might be tested in some sites. If political and legal constraints permit, perhaps the no-food model could be tested as well, although this is unlikely.

#### **4.2.2. CRS's Title II Program Graduation and Exit**

The CRS Title II program is implemented by partners consisting of dioceses and NGOs and works in areas and among populations not generally covered by government services. The program is not explicitly linked to a government program. Decisions about phase out and phase over therefore need to be made based on the criteria discussed in Section 3.1. Phase over to the government is not necessarily the clear choice, as it is for CARE's program. Plans for graduation are included in the CRS DAP, but the explicit strategy is less well developed for the CRS program than it is for CARE's program. CRS has graduated its Title II program from southern India, where it earlier operated.

Earlier in this document, the importance of identifying explicit, measurable benchmarks to measure progress toward readiness for graduation is highlighted. In the FANTA report on accelerating phase down of the India Title II program, CRS benchmarks for graduation are noted for the watershed/agriculture component of their program: programs that have reached 100,000 beneficiaries and have "demonstrated strong progress in terms of watershed management, community mobilization, ground water retention and women's participation" (Cogill et al., 2003a). Several possibilities are suggested for organizational linkages between the community and government or multilateral agencies. But for the other components of the program, specific plans for graduation are not described.

The implications of international experience with graduation and exit are clearly applicable to the CRS program. The graduation strategy needs to be developed individually for each program component. Benchmarks should focus on process (having systems in place that will sustain program-related activities) as well as coverage and impact. Criteria and benchmarks should be

placed in the context of a time line that considers progress toward the benchmarks, but identifies a definite endpoint for graduation if benchmarks are not met after reasonable time and effort.

The choice of approach depends on the specific context of components, but based on the experience of other programs, it would seem that maternal health and child survival might appropriately seek phase over to the government's public health system and to community-based groups and individuals; watershed improvements might be made self sustaining, but maintenance could be phased over to community groups; food for education would need to be taken over by an entity that can continue to provide food, possibly the Ministry of Education. General relief presents different issues: providing food to the indigent is a charitable program that depends on the continued renewal of the food resource that is, of course, consumed. It makes no claims to be able to become self-sustaining. Phase out in such a case would simply mean that this source of relief to the poor is no longer available; phase over means finding another agency or institution with the resources to continue this kind of support -- government, non-governmental, religious or secular. In fact, this is not so different from graduation of other programs in which the impact is dependent on continued provision of a consumable resource. Sustainability means identifying an alternative source of the resource, with the capacities -- financial, administrative, technical -- to continue the activities.

### **4.3. Recommendations**

Several of the lessons described above that emerged from the review are applicable to the India Title II programs. Three areas are highlighted below: monitoring and evaluation, choice of approaches, and communication.

#### **4.3.1. Effective Use of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)**

Finalizing plans for graduation of INHP sites will involve finalization of benchmarks for identifying sites that are ready to graduate. Once these benchmarks -- the measurable indicators of the graduation criteria -- are selected, they should become part of the overall INHP II monitoring and evaluation system, not limited to those sites that have been targeted for graduation.

Among the indicators that have been suggested are many that are no doubt part of the M&E system already: management systems in place; monthly NHDs held for a set number of months with no CARE input; functioning supply chains (e.g., set number of months with no 'stock-outs'; reliable supplies of food [Bailey 2002]). Impacts and outcomes should also be part of the M&E system: weight-for-age of children, coverage by various components of the health system (percent of target group receiving prenatal care, immunizations, vitamin/mineral supplements, food supplements; percent following recommended child care practices).

As program sites graduate, they should still continue to be part of the M&E system, so that explicit assessment can be made of the sustainability of different program components. If graduated sites are dropped from M&E systems, then it will not be possible to link exit strategy approaches to sustainability over time. Information from the system will be used to assess graduation strategies and modify the approach, as indicated by the data, in subsequent graduating

sites. That is, the M&E system will provide information on the continued level of achievement of outcome indicators and on key process indicators (e.g., functioning community based workers and CBOs, reliable management and input supply). Specific attention should be given to the following elements of the graduation strategy, to see whether they should be modified in light of information derived from the M&E system:

- Time frame for phase over;
- Degree and type of technical assistance needed;
- Specific issues regarding the continued functioning of specific actors:
  - Change agents;
  - Anganwadi workers and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives;
  - Panchayati Raj health committees; and
  - Other community groups, women's groups.
- Reliability of selected indicators of independent functioning;
- Length of time that independent functioning is needed to assure reliability; and
- Reliability of formal commitments by the government and other organizations.

While the CRS Title II program graduation strategy is less specifically developed, the same principles apply to its activities as well: identifying specific indicators relevant to each program component and site and incorporating these into the ongoing M&E system.

If possible, a post-exit evaluation should be planned for both programs at least two years after exit to assess the extent to which key impacts have continued.

#### **4.3.2. Phase Over versus Phase Out**

Plans for graduation must involve, as a first step, identifying which program components are appropriate for phase over, and which can be phased out such that program goals are met without continued inputs. For components that will be phased over, the plan needs to identify what institution, group, or entity will take over each program element. For example, in the case of the INHP II, local entities such as the *Panchayati Raj* health committee may take over the advocacy role, while the state-level ICDS may take over provision of food and technical inputs and training.

The process of planning for graduation requires formal, explicit agreements specifying who is responsible for what actions and specifying resource needs and sources. It is critical to identify the appropriate organization and, especially in the case of the government, the appropriate level (local, state, national) at which agreements should and can be made. It is important to make a realistic assessment of the administrative capacity and resource availability of the organizations identified for phase over.

There is a possibility that a careful and realistic assessment of the government's capacity to take over the program (management capacity, resources, mandate) might find that capacity is inadequate in certain specific areas. Clearly, this poses a problem for successful graduation. In such cases, planners will need to try to identify alternative organizations for phase over – other donors or NGOs – or identify the specific gaps in the government's capacity that require

strengthening and identify mechanisms to help build capacity. Capacity of community groups taking responsibility for certain program components may also need to be built.

The scale of the INHP and its links to the ICDS suggest that the government is the logical entity to take primary responsibility for the program. The government is already involved at the national, state, district, and block levels. In planning for graduation and, eventually, exit, the capacity at each of these levels must be assessed, so that mechanisms can be identified for addressing gaps, whether by identifying other organizations or by strengthening the capacity of the governmental organizations. From the funding perspective, higher levels of government might have more access to resources than lower levels. If some states are unable to provide funds for food, for example, the national government might appropriately become involved in providing resources to those poorer states.

If none of these institutional arrangements appears to be feasible, then alternative program designs will need to be considered during the graduation process – designs that establish priorities for different program elements based on both effectiveness and feasibility. The range of successful models for graduation discussed above should be considered in these cases and applied as appropriate to each specific context.

In the case of the CRS Title II program, a similar assessment of organizational capacity would be needed, but the focus of the assessment would be on the NGOs, dioceses, or other partners, in addition to various levels of government.

### **4.3.3. Communication**

Finally, the review has identified the importance of maintaining communication with all stakeholders: donors, counterparts, collaborating institutions and individuals and beneficiaries. These groups should be included in graduation planning and in the dissemination of information from the M&E system so that they are aware of progress toward reaching the benchmarks for graduation and thus are not surprised when the site is graduated and responsibility for the program is transferred.

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