

# Strategic Issues in Global Health Program Transitions

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## Opportunities for capacity development and learning on programmatic transition

Ligia Paina and Sara Bennett

### Introduction

**Programmatic transitions occur increasingly often and are likely to have system-wide ramifications beyond any one development partner.** More and more global health programs are initiating transition processes – when they change their eligibility criteria for funding allocation to recipient countries for key programs, and significantly reduce support or stop it altogether. For example, Gavi<sup>1</sup>, the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria (GF)<sup>2</sup>, and PEPFAR<sup>3</sup> are all currently implementing transition policies in some shape or form. Several bilateral development partners, such as USAID, DFID, and SIDA are also beginning to speak about transition.

Within countries, key stakeholders might not have sufficient knowledge about what transition could mean for their programs and what strategies are available to minimize potential negative effects. Learning among stakeholders, both within and across countries, is also key because transition is likely to have system-wide effects that span beyond the specific activities supported by the transitioning development partner. Furthermore, development partners' transitions are likely to happen concurrently in certain countries and learning about

interactions between these processes may be particularly important.

**Development partners, governments, civil society and research organizations are currently not adequately prepared to address transition effectively.** As transition is a new process for most development partners and recipient countries, insufficient development partner technical staff and implementing partners – who will increasingly need to facilitate and manage transition – currently have experience with understanding and carrying out this process. Furthermore, there are insufficient opportunities for learning from ongoing transitions, especially across development partners, raising the risk that transition policies will be developed and implemented in siloes and that opportunities for harmonization and coordination will be missed.

While development partners' transition policies are still evolving, they often do not have an explicit learning or capacity development strategy integrated within them. For example, the GF and Gavi have initiated a call for proposals to develop a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gavi.org/about/governance/programme-policies/graduation/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.theglobalfund.org/documents/board/33/BM33\\_](http://www.theglobalfund.org/documents/board/33/BM33_)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/237669.pdf>

network of experts to support a variety of transition-related activities (e.g. transition assessments). However, it is not yet clear whether and how these experts would be able to learn across contexts, or whether there would be benefits from different development partners supporting more shared approaches to assessing transition readiness, and monitoring and evaluating transition. Country stakeholders (i.e. current and former recipients of development aid) might struggle with understanding the process of transition and the range of possible related effects – both in terms of how transition might affect development partner-funded programs and the health system overall, as well as in terms of the consequences of not increasing domestic resources for previously development partner-funded programs.

Country stakeholders might also not be able to develop adequate strategies to mitigate undesired consequences and to ensure effective communication among relevant country partners, including civil society. Finally, all actors currently lack access to a comprehensive body of knowledge around programmatic transition and to platforms for sharing lessons, challenges, and opportunities – across development partners, across countries, and within countries.

***Failing to focus now on developing the capacities and learning opportunities to manage transition could compound future negative impacts of transition.*** Poorly managed transitions risk undoing the progress that has been achieved during the past couple of decades. Because the effects of transition are thought to be system-wide, services that were not supported by development partners could also suffer. Further, in the future, as more countries transition or as multiple transitions take place in one country, the complexity of transition and of its effect on the health system may increase. Without adequate development partner, implementing partner, and country partner capacity to understand and act in a transition, these risks will be exacerbated. Without proper

learning channels, to facilitate development partner-to-development partner, country-to-country, and stakeholder-to-stakeholder exchange of ideas, tools, and solutions to common challenges, we will miss a collective opportunity to strengthen transition processes.

## Key challenges for learning and capacity development

Several challenges exist linked to making progress on capacity development and learning about transition.

***Transition processes differ across development partners and countries, but there are commonalities that need to be identified and studied to increase everyone's knowledge.*** Transition unfolds differently in every country – the timing of transition is not consistent; the relationships between development partners and country stakeholders vary, and can influence the effectiveness of the transition process; some countries undergo multiple transitions at once, while others do not; some countries are well prepared in terms of political commitment, domestic financing, managerial capacity, information systems, etc. while others are less prepared. Because of the diversity in the circumstances through which transition happens, it is tempting to think that there are no commonalities and limited potential for learning from one context to another. However recent frameworks<sup>4</sup>, analytical papers<sup>5</sup> and even similarities across development partner approaches to transition suggest that learning is feasible both across countries and different types of transition.

***Development partners supporting global health programs typically face time pressures to implement transition policies, but these should not be allowed to obstruct learning and capacity building.*** To-date there has been limited interest in and funding available for monitoring and evaluation of

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<sup>4</sup>Bao et al. Monitoring and Evaluating the Transition of Large-Scale Programs in Global Health *Glob Health Sci Pract* 2015;3(4):591-605. <http://dx.doi.org/10.9745/GHSP-D-15-00221>

<sup>5</sup>Oberth G, Whiteside A. What does sustainability mean in the HIV and AIDS response? *African Journal of AIDS Research*. 2016:1-9. doi:10.2989/16085906.2016.1138976.

transition, but we need to recognize that transition is a process that is still not understood well. Learning in the early phases of transition could support latter phases, as well as future transitions in the same or different settings. Furthermore, development partners supporting global health programs, not just countries, have a need to learn internally, both at headquarters level and in-country, in order to smooth the process and work in partnership with countries. There are currently relatively few individuals with experience in working with or researching transition and not all of these individuals are connected. To our knowledge, transition-related training programs or specialized teams/personnel in countries do not exist. However, Gavi and Global Fund are recognizing that they need to strengthen their capacity to respond to transition. As of this year, they began, through separate processes, short listing other firms and policy research organizations which may have a chance to do technical support to countries and GHIs on transition this year and beyond.

***At the country level multiple actors are involved in transition: for transitions to be successful effective leadership, coordination and capacity are required.*** Within countries, a key challenge is the diversity of actors engaged in the process of transition, the often weak capacity to respond to transition policies, and the political nature of the development partner-recipient relationship. In practice, this means that different actors within a particular country require different types of capacity enhancement strategies (ranging from strengthening strategic planning capabilities within Ministries of Health, to enhancing advocacy capacity in civil society). Transition processes often involve extensive negotiations both among in-country partners, and between country stakeholders and development partners. Such negotiations are most likely to go smoothly when there is clear leadership and strong coordination from the country.

***Harmonization among development partners is needed to better coordinate with one another and with countries.*** Increasingly, global and country stakeholders are recognizing the risks

associated with simultaneous transitions, such as the “financial cliff” and the need to better think through approaches to coordinating transitions. This is particularly true at the country level. For example, Ghana and Vietnam are currently in discussions about Gavi graduation and PEPFAR re-prioritization. The Ministry of Health of Ghana has decided to take a broader sector-wide perspective on transition, but this attempt to promote harmonization across development partners has not yet been documented. While in-country development partner coordination platforms may provide a forum for such harmonization discussions, it is not clear that they are currently being used in this way. At the global level, through the Equitable Access Initiative and other meetings, discussions have started among PEPFAR, GF, UNAIDS, World Bank and Gavi<sup>6</sup>, but it is not yet clear whether a mechanism to sustain such discussions needs to be developed.

## Creating opportunities for learning and capacity development

There are multiple possible different entry points for strengthening learning and capacity for transition. We outline an array of possible strategies based on our team’s collective experience – in the hope that these stimulate further thinking and proposals about how to support stakeholders to implement transition more effectively.

### Strategies for learning about transition

#### Understanding and sharing experiences around the “nuts-and-bolts” of on-going transitions

While transitions will vary depending on the development partner policies from which they originate and the context in which they are implemented, understanding and learning from the similarities across processes and contexts could contribute to improving the process of ongoing and future

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/equitableaccessinitiative/>

transitions, as well as the periodic updates of development partners' transition policies. To facilitate this learning process, it will be important for development partners to allow clear, timely, and transparent access to transition-related information (i.e. policies, procedures, timelines etc.). It will also be important for development partners to harmonize, where possible, the tools and technical resources necessary to carry out transition-related tasks (e.g. transition readiness assessments, development/use of coordination mechanisms for transition, provision of technical assistance). Development partners might set up a facilitated learning process – led by one development partner (e.g. Gavi for all its eligible countries) or organized by a disease area (e.g. HIV/AIDS, where both PEPFAR and the GF could be brought together). For example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is currently providing support for the exploration of a collaborative peer learning network for Gavi transitioning countries. The network intends to connect Gavi countries from a range of world regions and in various phases of Gavi transition. It will act as a platform for countries to share knowledge and experiences and to participate in the co-development of practical solutions as they transition away from Gavi support to fully self-financing immunization programs. While the scope of this initiative is currently limited to Gavi transitioning countries, it could represent a model for similar learning opportunities in the context of other development partner transitions, as well as a platform for capacity development.

#### Monitoring and evaluating the transition process

Monitoring and evaluating (M&E) the process and impacts of transition is a very important learning opportunity that development partners and countries should consider, despite the time pressures generally associated with transition. Rigorous and independent evaluations of transitions can help development partners understand how to adjust their policies in order to minimize the risks of transition to sustainability (financial, organization, programmatic). Furthermore, they can provide evidence for development partners and country stakeholders for adjusting strategies of transition implementation. Researchers – globally and in-country

– will play key roles in designing and implementing M&E of transition, as well as synthesizing results and communicating through adequate channels – so as to reach development partners and country stakeholders. Monitoring the transition process can provide development partners and country-stakeholders with on-going information about how a transition is occurring. Evaluating the transition process can provide insights on both the health and health system impacts. Early evaluations of transition could contribute to the development of a framework for evaluating transition, which can be adapted across contexts and development partners to guide future similar evaluations. They can also contribute a set of tools and approaches for prospective or retrospective transition monitoring.

#### Developing a repository of curated resources about programmatic transition

The literature on programmatic transition and its potential impacts is growing. The tools and assessment approaches that development partners are using to facilitate the transition process (e.g. communications, assessment approaches etc.) are also probably being developed. Currently, however, a repository of these resources and tools does not exist. Establishing a repository of curated resources about transition could contribute to learning across contexts and transition types, and could promote harmonization among development partners. Additionally, these resources could also contribute to increasing the knowledge of in-country stakeholders about this topic. For example, stakeholders in countries that will undergo transition in the future, might be interested in the dimensions that are assessed as part of a transition readiness assessment. Those that are currently in the process of transition, might be interested in understanding what dimensions to track while monitoring and evaluating the process. Illustrative resources that could be included in this repository include: peer-reviewed literature on transition, project reports and evaluations, transition planning and implementation tools, transition readiness assessment approaches, templates, policy briefs on different aspects of transition, study protocols and instruments.

## Strategies for developing capacities for transition

### Strengthening the capacity of country stakeholders to undertake transition

We recognized above the different types of capacity development needs for different country stakeholders – ranging from strengthening of government procurement mechanisms, to enhancing civil society advocacy. Development partners might wish to explore whether it makes sense to coordinate in particular key transition areas for example to develop more collaborative approaches to capacity strengthening for some functions, or ceding responsibility to another development partner in others. While development partners are actively grappling with the questions of what types of in-country capacity are needed for effective transition, the voice of recipient countries (governments, NGOs, civil society) has perhaps not been well heard in this discussion and opening up opportunities for recipient country stakeholders to express their concerns may be productive. The collaborative peer learning network for Gavi transitioning countries, as mentioned above, represents one example for how to bring country stakeholders together.

### Enhancing country level coordination platforms around transition

As noted above, strong country leadership and coordination is likely to facilitate transition, especially when multiple development partners are involved. Different development partners operate through different country coordinating mechanisms (the Global Fund CCMs, Gavi ICC etc.). While sector-wide coordinating mechanisms exist, it is not clear what role they are currently playing in coordinating country responses to transition. Institutional assessments that map current coordinating platforms and reflect on how coordination can best be managed and coordinated may be helpful.

### Enhancing development partner capacity to manage transitions

Based on recent calls for proposals from Gavi and the GF, these two Global Health Initiatives are beginning to develop rosters of short-listed experts to be deployed in response to country requests. Through the proposed fora, development partners could engage the short-listed experts to provide the necessary support, responsive to country requests. Sharing learning between consultants working for different agencies on transition may also be helpful. In addition it may be possible to develop online training courses, perhaps using the case material already collected by partners working in this space, to help train both agency staff and the technical experts whom they work with on transition.

### Harnessing collective expertise across programs and countries through a Joint Learning Network/Community of practice for knowledge exchange and training

As the number of individuals – at the country and global level – with transition expertise increases, it will become possible and important to connect them in order to facilitate joint learning and capacity development. One option might be to model an initiative of this nature on the existing Joint Learning Network for UHC – a global community focused on developing practical approaches to achieve universal health coverage,<sup>7</sup> as well as on the afore-mentioned collaborative peer learning network for Gavi transitioning countries. A Joint Learning Network on Transition could bring together development partners, consultants, country stakeholders, and researchers, among others. The network could have a virtual portal – to house the resource repository, facilitate knowledge exchanges, as well as online training courses. The network could also have a periodic face-to-face component, which could help bring together a community of practice for consultations, knowledge exchange and learning, and joint capacity development.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.jointlearningnetwork.org/>

## Conclusions/Next steps/ Outstanding questions

In this brief, we outline the rationale for why capacity development and learning on transition is important and present key challenges or barriers to learning and capacity development on transition. We also initiate a discussion around potential strategies to overcome current gaps in capacity and learning. The list of strategies is not intended to be comprehensive or final. Our hope is that we can build upon it through collaborative dialogue.

- What are the key priorities at the country level for capacity development and learning?
- What should be the process of identifying topics to learn about – how can we make it more responsive?
- What is the extent to which the proposed strategies match the current gaps in capacity?
- How should these and other strategies be implemented?
  - a. Which actors are best suited to implement these and where?
  - b. What type of resources are necessary to support these?
  - c. What resources are available to support these and other emerging approaches to learning and capacity development?



