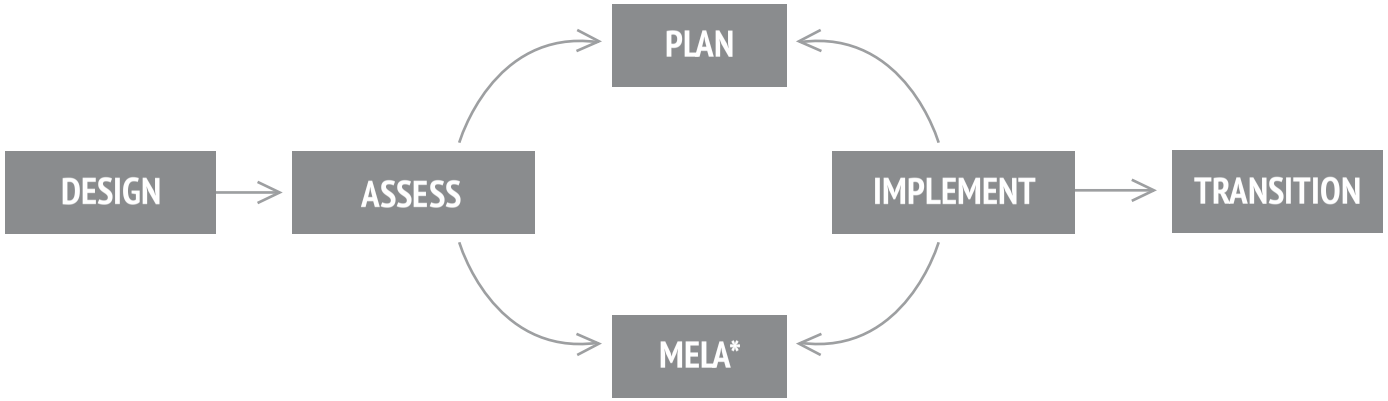
Project Cycle Verification Checklist Using a Sustainability Lens



*MONITOR, EVALUATE, LEARN, ADAPT

STAGE 1: DESIGN			
ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES for integrating sustainability into project cycle processes	**ILLUSTRATIVE DETAILED STEPS**	✓	**NOTES**
1. 1. Substantively involve key stakeholders in project design process, and align project design with local perspectives	**a.** Conduct stakeholder mapping and analysis and identify partners, including those who will help ensure sustainable impact and measurement post-project. The analysis should include an assessment of gender considerations, local needs, priorities, desires/aspirations and opportunities related to readiness and potential for sustainability, as well as confirmation of interest in investing in local capacity strengthening, as needed. **(Note: "Stakeholders" include civil society, government, and members of the community, including women, men, and youth.)**		
	b. Invest sufficient time to discuss the transition strategy, sustainability objectives, and project/funding parameters with local partners and stakeholders from the beginning of the project and in defining and agreeing to roles, responsibilities and investments regarding sustainability readiness.		
	c. takeholders define and agree to roles and responsibilities with regard to project transition and sustainability plan/activites in writing (such as in an MOU).		
	d. Involve key stakeholders in significant consultation, substantive feedback, and direct participation throughout the assessment and design phase.		
2. Develop an operational definition of program sustainability and "readiness" from the beginning.	**a.** Jointly discuss and agree to an overall vision and operational definition for program sustainability, including criteria for sustainability readiness, together with partners and stakeholders.		
	b. Identify responsible local entities and champions, and plan for the realistic transfer of responsibilities by the end of the project.		

STAGE 1: DESIGN			
ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES for integrating sustainability into project cycle processes	**ILLUSTRATIVE DETAILED STEPS**	✓	**NOTES**
3. Identify a program transition strategy from the beginning of the project	**a.** Develop a transition strategy with key stakeholders based on defined criteria.		
	b. Develop readiness checklists for different stakeholders.		
4. Develop a results-based sustainability strategy and reflect sustainability objectives throughout the entire project	**a.** Reflect sustainability readiness as a cross cutting result in the Results Framework or Log Frame.		
	b. Include output and outcome indicators related to sustainability M&E framework and processes (such as quality circles) and plan for a post-project sustainability study if possible (perhaps via cost-share).		
	c. Ensure the budget, staffing structure, and partnerships have sufficient resources to achieve sustainability and transition objectives.		
	d. Develop a plan for securing funds for post-project sustainability research.		
	e. Develop a work plan & timeline that includes activities related to sustainability and a gradual transfer of responsibility to local partners over time.		
	f. Include a clear transition strategy in the proposal and a plan to increase sustainability readiness over the life of the project.		
5. Include capacity strengthening as an integral part of project design	**a.** Include organizational capacity strengthening with local partners as an integral element of the design, transition/sustainability planning, and assessment process.		
	b. Assess and strengthen project stakeholders' capacity to advocate for sustainability, as necessary.		

STAGE 2: ASSESS			
ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES for integrating sustainability into project cycle processes	**ILLUSTRATIVE DETAILED STEPS**	✓	**NOTES**
1. Assess organizational capacity of local partner(s) and identify and prioritize essential capacities to program sustainability	**a.** Use an evidence-based methodology to assess local partners' baseline level of technical capacity, management capacity, partnerships, linkages, diversity, inclusion, gender responsiveness, reputation, and resources needed to continue program services and results in the short and long term.		
	b. Use participatory approaches in the assessment porcesses such as self-assessment, risk assesment, and locally-determined prioritization of capacity strengthening.		
2. Based on an agreed-upon criteria for sustainability readiness, perform a sustainability "readiness" assessment to establish a basis for developing a transition plan	**a.** Establish criteria for "sustainability readiness" that include local capacity strengthening and gender equity.		
	b. Conduct a sustainability readiness assessment that contributes to the achievement of sustainability-oriented results, as reflected in the project design frameworks.		
	c. Identify resources, capacity, linkages, and other gaps that are actionable, measurable, and achievable.		
3. Emphasize local ownership and demand-driven assessment approaches and priorities	**a.** Facilitate stakeholders identification of capacity strengthening needs and understanding of the relationship between the program's long term sustainability and organizational capacity.		
4. Integrate sustainability related measures into existing assessment plans and instruments	**a.** Integrate sustainability readiness measures directly into existing assessment processes and instruments (e.g. baseline assessments, organizational capacity assessments, etc.). Analyzed and disseminate sustainability findings alongside other project measures rather than through stand-alone processes.		
5. Promote a sense of urgency and momentum among key stakeholders through active involvement, clear communication, and timely follow up	**a.** Communicate assessment results to key project stakeholders and then link assessment results directly into participatory action planning with the same group who participated in the assessment, promoting continuity, accountability, and a sense of ownership for change.		

STAGE 3: PLAN			
ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES for integrating sustainability into project cycle processes	**ILLUSTRATIVE DETAILED STEPS**	✓	**NOTES**
1. Develop an action-oriented transition plan that is results-based, linked to assessment findings, and is realistic and measurable	**a.** Develop an action-oriented implementation plan with local partners and stakeholders based on the information gathered during the 'assess stage', including a detailed transition plan.		
	b. Identify clear strategies to phase out external intervention and/or phase over responsibility for continued project outputs to local entities, and to strengthen relevant technical and management capacities to enhance readiness for sustainability.		
	c. Include Specific/Strategic, Measurable Attainable, Realistic and Time bound (SMART) output and outcome indicators for sustainability readiness as well as benchmarks, actions to be taken, people responsible, a timeline reflecting program transition in phases, and resources required to implement the plan.		
	d. Include risk management steps in the plan, including those raised in the gender analysis, as well as budget/financial strategy, as necessary.		
	e. Ensure the transition plan is logical, linked to sustainability objectives and directly addresses gaps identified through assessments and evaluations.		
2. Designate a responsible point person and execute timely management of decisions to overcome implementation barriers	**a.** Designate staff (e.g., a project coordinator and deputy coordinator) to oversee the implementation of the sustainability strategy and make key decisions in coordination with local partner(s)/stakeholders and the "team of champions" (see below).		
	b. Make and follow through on critical decisions in a timely fashion to avoid obstacles to plan implementation.		
	c. Identify and allocate financial, technical, human and material resources on time, according to the plan and approved budget.		
	d. Effectively implement and manage the transition and sustainability readiness plan.		
3. Identify, mobilize, and equip a "team of champions" to overcome barriers to implementation	**a.** Identify a few strong and committed individuals who are formal or informal leaders within each local entity; link the individuals to form a "team of champions" to include gender and local capacity strengthening champions who will keep their stakeholders/organizations accountable to the transition plan.		
	b. Assess and build the capacity of champions to understand their role as catalysts and drivers and support champions to be inclusive, encourage diversity, and strengthen the gender lens approach to sustainability (i.e. they do not see their role as secondary to their other organizational functions).		
	c. Establish a skills building plan to develop the leadership, communication, and management capacity of champions during the project period and to train new staff as they come onboard.		

STAGE 3: PLAN			
ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES for integrating sustainability into project cycle processes	**ILLUSTRATIVE DETAILED STEPS**	✓	**NOTES**
4. Ensure emphasis on local ownership and accountability is included throughout the implementation and transition plans	**a.** Use participatory approaches that substantively and inclusively involve key stakeholders, including men, women, and youth in the development of the transition plan.		
	b. Identify capacity strengthening priorities of local partners and key stakeholders that are most essential for sustaining program outputs and outcomes.		
	c. Propose a high degree of responsibility by local entities in the plan.		
	d. Set ambitious but achievable targets in collaboration with local partners/stakeholders.		
	e. Ensure clarity among local partners/key stakeholders about roles and responsibilities during and after the project to achieve sustainability objectives.		
	f. Translate the implementation/transition plan into the local language.		
	g. Disseminate plan to key stakeholders and commence implementation immediately, maintaining momentum and a sense of urgency for change.		
5. Ensure buy-in of local leadership	**a.** Ensure that leaders of local stakeholders are inclusive, gender-sensitive, committed, and engaged with the implementation and adoption of the sustainabiltiy plan.		
6. Integrate capacity strengthening priorities identified in the transition plan into the program's overall capacity building strategy	**a.** Prioritize the development/strengthening of technical and management capacities that have been identified as the most essential for sustainability.		
	b. Reflect sustainability readiness in capacity strengthening tools, interventions, and measures.		
7. Ensure transition plan is a key component in the overall project plan and partnership agreements	**a.** Integrate the transition plan components into overall project planning documents including activity plans, timelines, operating budget, monitoring and evaluation plan, and relevant staff job descriptions and work assignments.		
	b. Integrate roles and responsibilities related to program transition and post-project sustainability into partnership agreements and MOUs with key stakeholders.		

STAGE 4: IMPLEMENT			
ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES for integrating sustainability into project cycle processes	**ILLUSTRATIVE DETAILED STEPS**	✓	**NOTES**
1. Institutionalize the program's sustainability strategy into regular project implementation processes by building adequate opportunities to discuss and monitor progress of the transition plan	**a.** Establish a project steering committee/advisory committee and include 'champions' for sustainable impact in the group.		
	b. Include a review of progress against the transition plan as a standing agenda item at project meetings, and included in all progress reports so that it becomes institutionalized as a normal practice and part of overall program performance.		
	c. Regularly and openly discuss transition plan in various formal and informal settings throughout the project cycle.		
2. Ensure that all key stakeholders have a clear understanding of the program's transition strategy and roles and responsibilities	**a.** Consult with key stakeholders to be sure they have a clear understanding of the components of the transition plan (e.g., what results they are aiming to achieve, why, how and with what resources).		
	b. Ensure key stakeholders have a clear understanding of their individual roles and responsibilities to achieve sustainability results in the short and long term.		
3. Provide any necessary training and technical support to equip key stakeholders to implement the transition plan in a timely fashion	**a.** Consult with all key stakeholders to be sure they have clear mandates, and the time, authority, and necessary resources to implement the planned transition plan activities.		
	b. Train stakeholders to ensure technical competence to bring about the necessary changes to achieve sustainability.		
4. Identify and celebrate "short-term wins" to maintain morale and momentum	**a.** Regularly monitor transition plan with timely feedback loops.		
	b. Revise/modify transition plan as project evolves.		
	c. Build ample opportunities to recognize accomplishments into the project implementation cycle.		
5. Document promising practices and challenges	**a.** Assign specific individuals to be responsible for documenting best/promising practices, challenges, etc..		
	b. Disseminate promising practices and document challenges and possible solutions.		

STAGE 5: MONITOR, EVALUATE, LEARN, ADAPT

ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES for integrating sustainability into project cycle processes	ILLUSTRATIVE DETAILED STEPS	✓	NOTES
1. Establish performance benchmarks and monitor progress against them	**a.** Identify performance benchmarks related to sustainability readiness.		
2. Regularly monitor sustainability output and outcome indicators	**a.** Establish a systematic and regular process to monitor progress against targets for output and outcome-level sustainability indicators in the project's overall M&E system. Revise M&E system as needed.		
	b. Establish sustainability, replicability and scalability indicators.		
	c. Assess how activities can be brought to sustainable scale.		
3. Integrate sustainability into all program evaluations	**a.** Integrate an assessment of the level of sustainability readiness and progress against transition plan into the scope of work for all project evaluations.		
	b. Review evaluation recommendations, including gender analysis, in a participatory manner together with local partner(s) and key stakeholders (including champions), and implement adjustments to transition plan approaches, targets, etc. in a timely fashion.		
4. Substantively involve local entities in monitoring and evaluation processes and promote local ownership and accountability of project data	**a.** Substantially involve local partner(s) staff and key stakeholders (including government) in project monitoring and evaluation processes.		
	b. Ensure that local partner(s) collect project data and have access to project databases, participate in data analysis and reporting, use project data to improve decision making, and identify best practices.		
	c. Establish types of data, data collection instruments, databases, and systems to access and utilize data in a format that can be easily mainstreamed into existing data management and information systems after the project ends.		
5. Create regular opportunities for internal and external organizational learning and exchange	**a.** Implement routine "learning events" to facilitate collective reflection, learning and dissemination, appropriate adaptation, and improved performance.		
	b. Plan learning and exchange opportunities with stakeholders and local partners; ensure they are linked to sectorial networks, communities of practices, and civil society and/or government forums to share promising practices, lessons learned, and influence policy.		

STAGE 6: TRANSITION

ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES for integrating sustainability into project cycle processes	ILLUSTRATIVE DETAILED STEPS	✓	NOTES
1. Implement a staggered/phased approach to program transition	**a.** During the final year of the program, intensify monitoring activities and define activities with greater specificity.		
	b. Graduate program sites based on a phased approach, starting with well-performing sites that meet established graduation criteria.		
	c. Following each graduation phase, integrate lessons learned into the next phase in order to continually improve the transition process.		
2. Manage internal and external perceptions about project close-out and ensure clear, consistent communication by all stakeholders	**a.** Ensure project staff, local partners, and stakeholders actively anticipate and manage perceptions about the end of the project, including project staff concerns about job security, local partner concerns about increased responsibility and resource needs, and other stakeholder concerns about capacity and preparedness to continue program services/activities after the end of the project		
	b. Ensure that leaders maintain clear and unified communication regarding project closeout and program phase over steps.		
	c. Ensure that key staff, opinion leaders, and champions actively communicate a positive perspective about the transition and actively address colleagues' and other stakeholders' concerns.		
3. Intensify the transfer of substantive responsibility to local entities	**a.** Intensify the "learning by doing" approach during the final project year through increased joint, experiential learning opportunities (e.g., site visits and capacity assessments, trainings, stakeholder and donor meetings, and exchange visits).		
	b. Define, agree, and clearly communicate the "accompaniment" role of project staff.		
	c. Transfer substantive responsibilities, assets, and information to local entities in concrete ways, with project staff increasingly performing an "accompaniment" role.		
4. Clarify intent to collaborate beyond the project period to promote an effective program transition	**a.** Local partner(s) and key local stakeholders develop MOUs or terms of reference for any future collaboration to facilitate the phase over of programmatic elements to local entities.		
5. Advocate and seek resources to conduct post-project studies to assess long-term program impact and sustainability	**a.** Execute last phase of donor engagement to secure buy in for post-project study(ies) to assess the sustainability of the program's results/outcomes and generate learning for future programming.		
	b. Revise MOUs with key stakeholders to mobilize support for post-project sustainability study(ies), as necessary.		
	c. Integrate a post-project sustainability study into the local partner's scope of work beyond the project period.		
6. Manage the administrative closeout and program phase out/over in a systematic fashion	**a.** Manage administrative closeout and program phase out/over in a coordinated fashion.		
	b. Execute administrative closeout requirements associated with the end of a grant period in a comprehensive and timely fashion.		