



QSA Notes

people, places & projects

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Sustainable development has been defined as 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. QSA works with project partners for them to become self-sustaining and independent of foreign aid as much as possible, recognising that this can require a long term relationship based on the development of mutual accountability and trust and a commitment to learning and capacity building. Sustainability for QSA means that it is able to ensure support of its project partners and the communities where they work and meet commitments to them and all other stakeholders. QSA considers that sustainable change and utilisation of resources ensuring the community's best interest are two key principles to achieving development effectiveness.

How can this be assessed? When is it the right time to 'move on'? These are complex questions, and so far, with more than fifty years of development experience, there is no one answer for every project and situation. Very few of QSA's development projects and programs are on-going – the majority have specific and definite time frames, activities to achieve clearly defined objectives, and a budget. There is however an awareness that at the end of a project there may still be tasks left to do to satisfy community needs and expectations. An exit plan drawn up by QSA and the project partner could reflect a graduated withdrawal of funds for project activities, provided there exists a plan for how funds will be raised by them in the future, and if possible this means generating their own income not swapping one donor organisation for

another. QSA encourages its partners to be independent, self-sustaining and to determine their own future direction. QSA would like to satisfy itself as far as possible that the partner organisation has the capacity to continue its work for the community in such a way that enables the organisation to survive, grow, address more complex issues and to evolve. So what does this mean for QSA in the way it manages its projects? An annual assessment of each project partner looks at a number of criteria, with capacity and self-sustainability being among them. QSA asks project partners to assess themselves, and in turn, they assess the communities with whom they are working about how self-sustainable they are and when is the right time for the project partner organisation to move on. Some examples include ability to manage financial record keeping in a transparent



Candidates for community based committee explain their ideas to the rest of the committee ahead of the election voting. Photo credit Khmer Community Development



Local government agricultural extension officers with garden group, Zimbabwe. Photo credit Dabane Water Workshops

manner and micro credit loans to members within the group, as the photograph on the previous page, taken in Tamil Nadu shows – all transactions happen in full view of everyone. Photo credit QSA.

How are decisions made? In Prek Chrey community in Cambodia, close to the border with Vietnam, a number of community based committees have been formed around the management of savings, cow and rice banks. With successful elections for office bearer positions held recently, the committees are self-reliant and no longer need the training and support from the project partner, who is free to move to other work in the community though is still around if needed. As with QSA, closure of a project or activity with a group or community does not mean the end of the relationship and interest in their wellbeing.

Sustainability can also mean revisiting

a community may years later. Dabane Water Workshops has worked with rural communities in Gwanda, Zimbabwe for many years. Initial work involved establishing communal gardens and groups near a water source accessed by a Dabane-designed simple sustainable hand-pump for water harvesting from a sand river or dam. Over time it became clear to Dabane that the ageing, chronic health concerns and frailty of many of the members (85% women) had affected their ability to provide the physical labour required to use the hand pumps and was creating disharmony in some of the groups with their inability to pump perceived as 'laziness'. Women's ability to manage and make decisions about the water resources available was also weak due to gendered cultural and social norms, with men felt to have greater responsibility for water resources and decision making despite women being the primary users. A new

QSA supported project (2013-2015) providing portable solar powered pumps, coupled with community and group training which is enhancing women's access, management and control of this new technology and water resources in their communities, has revitalised and strengthened these garden groups. The involvement of youth in the community through mixed age garden groups; the development of their skills in project management, sustainable farming practices and livelihood activities, group dynamics and leadership, and women's active role in decision making of water resources at group and community levels, will hopefully better ensure long term sustainability for these communities into the future.

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QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development, and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The Purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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