

Integrated Approaches for Complex Global Challenges



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WHAT IS INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT?

FHI 360 defines integrated development as an intentional approach that links the design, delivery and evaluation of programs across disciplines and sectors to produce an amplified, lasting impact on people's lives.

THE PROBLEM

From Myanmar to Mozambique, and Peru to Papua New Guinea, families living in poverty face an array of complex challenges to securing a better life. Disease. Limited access to a quality education. Paltry health care. Violence. Weak governance. Scant opportunities to make a livable wage. Even more, the obstacles that prevent progress for many in developing countries are increasingly compounded by large-scale global transformations, such as rapid urbanization, climate change and endless technological shifts. These roadblocks to a healthy, productive life do not fit neatly into their own distinct categories. Instead, they often overlap. They are interrelated. And they cannot be solved with a single approach.

To keep pace with the intractable challenges families around the world navigate, international development practitioners and donors must evolve their thinking and practices. This requires an essential shift in how development interventions are funded, designed and delivered. Specifically, efforts that strive to improve the quality of life and opportunities for people in underserved communities need to better reflect the interconnected nature of those people's experiences.



Doing so will also accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a framework to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and reverse climate change by 2030. The goals emphasize the need to integrate previously distinct aims and “balance the three crucial dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.” Indeed, an analysis of how each of the SDG targets is related to others reveals a web of interrelated factors, illustrating the need to approach each particular development goal from several angles simultaneously.

However, the current international development architecture does not support this notion. Although calls for aid effectiveness and harmonization have been agreed upon in Accra, Busan, Paris and Rome, the international development community is falling short on implementation. That is because over the past four decades, it has created a global enterprise of services that are laser-focused on single issues. A majority of practitioners work in one narrow, highly specialized area of expertise, such as agriculture, health or the environment. At the same time, development initiatives remain uncoordinated, overlapping or duplicative, which wastes valuable limited resources. This current landscape, coupled with funding mechanisms that hamper the design of more holistic, integrated programs, continues to restrict the scope of solutions for meaningful, sustainable development.

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OUR PROMISING SOLUTION

To effectively tackle the interconnected nature and root causes of global problems, the development community's approaches need to be as multifaceted as the challenges experienced by individuals and families. An integrated development approach is a potential means to this end, rather than a goal itself. FHI 360 defines integrated development as an intentional approach that links the design, delivery and evaluation of programs across disciplines and sectors to produce an amplified, lasting impact on people's lives. At its core, integration refers to activities in which actors from different sectors deliberately coordinate their work to maximize impact and progress toward common or complementary goals. Integration is most effective when it purposefully leverages opportunities to reach more people, offer better services or reduce costs.

There are several types and levels of integration beyond what immediately comes to mind with integrated implementation of program activities. For instance, integrated development can happen at a national level through a comprehensive, thoughtful and planned approach to blending multiple services across systems, such as ministries or regions. Examples include joint strategic planning, pooled financing, shared indicators or coordinated supply chains. Or, it can involve the more straightforward approach of planning for co-location, coordination or collaboration among programs in different domains, such as health and education.

To be sure, the integrated approach is not a silver bullet; it alone cannot remedy every development challenge worldwide. However, there is enough evidence demonstrating that integration can make a difference in a diversity of settings. This alone justifies routinely considering the approach and creating the structures to support it. Fostering such an environment requires significant cultural and behavioral shifts in international development — shifts that will encourage risk-taking and proactive planning, failure and adaptation, more innovative funding models and nontraditional partners.

MOVING FORWARD

Achieving the vision of the 2030 global goals requires a departure from the status quo. Recognizing this, FHI 360 for the past three years has led a global conversation

about the power of integrated, multisector approaches. Although integration is not a new concept, we believe the development community is now better poised for success than in the past because of significant improvements in data, technology, capacity and guiding principles. To that end, FHI 360 is developing new tools and resources to support practitioners in carrying out high-quality, impactful integrated programs. And, we are synthesizing and building the evidence on integration to help inform the efforts of international development policymakers and implementers.

In 2016, FHI 360 brought together a diversity of global development practitioners and donors to address how development practice needs to evolve to create the conditions in which the design, delivery, evaluation and funding of integrated approaches are considered, supported and carried out when deemed viable. What follows are key recommendations that grew from these conversations and are meant to serve as a starting point for how the development community can move toward thinking and operating in a more integrated fashion.

Adopt a shared vocabulary and agenda for integrated development

Integrated development is often also referred to as holistic, cross-sectoral, multisector or multicomponent approaches. Likewise, how organizations define integration can vary. The global development community must develop a common definition for integration as well as common language around integration, both across and within sectors. Doing this will aid in bringing together stakeholders to develop solutions to global challenges. Integration should never be in blueprint form, but at a minimum, we need this shared language so discussions can start in earnest and eventually lead to meaningful and customized action. Finally, public and private funders should strive to create a shared agenda for integrated development and co-create with implementers a set of evaluation measures for integrated programming. Over time, the integration agenda may be decentralized and carried out increasingly at the local level.

Design and plan for deep engagement with local communities and governments

Integrated programming should begin with the individuals, families and communities that global development serves. It is imperative that practitioners develop — and donors allow for — pragmatic ways to establish deeper roots in communities. By better engaging local communities in a purposeful manner, organizations gain a stronger understanding of people's multifaceted needs and how they are addressing them, as well as the contexts in which they live and the unseen externalities that can both impact the quality of interventions and factors that need to be measured. Such meaningful engagement throughout the life of a project will result in development solutions that are likely to be more holistic, authentic and enduring.

Develop creative contracting mechanisms that permit more flexibility, adaptation and learning

Designing and delivering complex integrated programs that make a lasting difference in people's lives requires time and flexibility. True integration involves co-creation, pooled funding, shared learning and more — and that demands a certain level of risk that donors and practitioners must be willing to undertake. To achieve this means reimagining current funding systems so interventions are less prescriptive and focused more on responsive adaptations than fixed outcomes. Contracts should make room for practitioners and their local partners to reflect, learn, adjust and apply lessons throughout the life of a project by developing more adaptive management systems

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About FHI 360: FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. Our staff includes experts in health, education, nutrition, environment, economic development, civil society, gender, youth, research, technology, communication and social marketing — creating a unique mix of capabilities to address today's interrelated development challenges. FHI 360 serves more than 70 countries and all U.S. states and territories.

to react to community needs as well as more iterative planning tools. Incorporating longer start-up periods for integrated programs is also critical. This provides space to build critical relationships across sectors, communities and governments; understand how all parties involved will collaborate; and collectively design the best approach for sustainable programming. Finally, more funders need to consider supporting mixed method and multiyear evaluations. This will allow for more strategic follow-up to assess whether integrated development approaches add value or produce synergies as a result of integration. Such findings will be critical to deepening the integrated development evidence base as well as to informing the design of funding, policies and programs.



Jessica Scranton/FHI 360

Break down siloes within organization and cultivate a new kind of development workforce

Organizations interested in carrying out complex, multisector programs should reassess their own internal structures in order to eliminate silos where they exist and work toward building an environment that supports collaboration and learning across different sectors. This self-assessment will call for developing strong management structures that share a common language. At the same time, the global development community should invest in cultivating a cadre of development professionals who at once understand several technical areas of work and are skilled at encouraging collaboration among groups that do not traditionally work together. Organizations would be wise to begin creating incentives for today's young professionals to begin honing these characteristics. As the SDGs unfold over the next 15 years, these professionals — in both developed and developing countries — will ideally grow into positions where they can lead the systemic and policy changes necessary to support integrated development approaches.

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