

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

LESSONS LEARNT FROM AVERT'S LOCALISATION JOURNEY

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THE LOCALISATION CONVERSATION

Across the sector we talk about:

- shifting power and decision making
- locally led solutions
- sustainable development
- equitable partnerships

But progress towards the commitments made at **2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain**, remains **uneven and slow.**

Few organisations fundamentally change their structures or control of resources.

ABOUT AVERT



Avert (1986-2025)

- UK-based HIV and sexual health organisation
- global digital health information platforms
- reaching **millions of users annually**

Core products included:

- **Be in the KNOW** - integrated platform sexual health brand
- **Boost** (community health worker digital job-aide)

Over time, much of our work focused on **sub-Saharan Africa**.

THE STRATEGIC QUESTION

In the context of strong evidence for the ongoing need for our work and a changing aid sector, we asked ourselves:

Where should this work live in the future?

If the goal is locally led development:

● Should the work remain within a **UK charity**,
or move to organisations **closer to the communities served?**

Are there not others who can do what we do?

AVERT'S DECISION

In November 2023 the Board decided to:

Transition Avert's work to organisations in East and Southern Africa and then close the UK charity.

This decision was taken:

- while the organisation was still financially healthy
- after **38 years of successful operations**
- with the goal of sustaining impact through locally led organisations.

FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL LOCALISATION

Before transitioning work we identified four critical foundations:

1. Impact and relevance

Programmes needed to be performing well

2. Trusted partnerships

Local organisations capable of taking ownership and strategic fit.

3. Adequate time

Enough runway for a meaningful transition.

4. Financial support

Funding for the first year after handover.

The transition process

Once the decision was made, we developed a structured transition process

- engaging staff, donors and partners
- raising funds for the transition plan
- identifying takeover partners
- transferring knowledge and systems
- managing legal and financial obligations.

Within six months we had raised **over \$700k to support the transition**, demonstrating strong donor support.



SUPPORTING PEOPLE THROUGH TRANSITION

A transition like this is not just technical – it is human.

Key priorities included:

- honest communication with staff
- strong engagement with donors and partners
- protecting continuity for users of our platforms

As a result **90% of staff remained throughout the 18-month transition process**, helping ensure knowledge transfer and continuity

KEY LESSONS

Some reflections from Avert's journey:

- mission should come before organisational survival
- proactive decisions are easier than reactive ones
- transparency builds trust with staff and donors
- partnerships can amplify impact
- closing an organisation is **not necessarily failure**

A well-planned ending can allow the work to continue in new forms.

TIMELINE

- 2022 – Strategic reflection and sector analysis, including donor engagement and financial scenario planning

Nov 2023 – Board decision to transition and close

2024 – Partner selection and knowledge transfer

2025 – Avert closes and work continues with LVCT Health in Kenya, OPHID in Zimbabwe and Kenya Comms Hub in Kenya!

- 2025 – Avert celebration event, publication of legacy report and transition learning report

RESOURCES

- [Avert website](#)
- [Avert Transition Report - PLANNING FOR A GOOD ENDING: A reflective case study on localisation and proactive closeout](#)
- [Avert Legacy Report - Avert's contribution to the global HIV response 1986-2024](#)

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

We will now explore four questions together:

- 1 - What does localisation mean in practice for your organisation
- 2 - How do organisations know when it is time for major strategic change?
- 3 - How can Boards and staff engage in transformational decisions?
- 4 - How do organisations assess risk while protecting their mission?