

Ama Krushi Transition Insights Report

April 2025

Ama Krushi
The Farmer's Companion



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Overview

In 2018, Precision Development (PxD) entered into an agreement with the Indian state Government of Odisha, Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment (DAFE) with the support of the Gates Foundation (BMGF) to create what is now known as Krushi Samruddhi, a customized, two-way digital advisory platform serving smallholder farmers across the state of Odisha. The service was conceptualized as a Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) program, where PxD would build, iterate on, and scale this service to reach steady scale over 3 years, following which implementation and funding would be handed over entirely to the government.

Designing an effective service typically involves high upfront research and development costs to ensure it is targeted to user needs, and can be scaled quickly without compromising quality. However, at a steady scale, the cost of adding an additional user to the service at scale is extremely low. Governments can, and often are willing to, pay for the long-term implementation costs to run and grow these services, but may not be willing or able to pay the upfront capital required for set-up and experimentation. Under this BOT program, GF provided the upfront capital to build the service, while DAFE covered ongoing implementation costs.

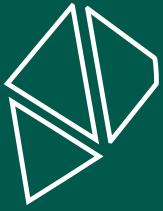
The program was transitioned to government ownership in 2022 after a period of training and handover between PxD and a new local management team, selected through a public procurement process. Overall, the transition has been successful, with the service continuing to evolve and, as of 2025, reaching close to 7 million farmers (from 3.2 million farmers at the time of transition). This is proof of a model that can promote local ownership of similar services, while reducing dependence on philanthropic funding in the long-term.

This report provides a deep dive into this transition and subsequent lessons learned from navigating an unfamiliar, first-of-its-kind service handover. Our hope is for this report to function as a primer on how to approach similar exercises, for other implementers, governments, and funders in the wider development ecosystem.



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Key Transition Insights



1. Define service handover expectations at the outset

A critical feature in the success of a service transition is agreement on the terms and conditions defining a “transition”. While every stakeholder agreed on the fundamental principle of this transition, the nature of this transition remained undefined. For instance, the early assumption was that local operations teams would be managed by Odisha government personnel. Instead, on the advice of the government in Year 3, the management of the service was contracted out via a procurement process that invited bids from implementing agencies. With more time, we would have prepared our local teams better for this management transition.

We recommend that the implementing organization(s) and the government outline service handover expectations right from the outset. This includes defining: (i) which components will be transitioned, (ii) when the transition will begin, and (iii) who will take on the implementation of the service post-transition. Over time, it will be critical to figure out additional parameters, like how the service will be funded post-transition, but we recognize that such questions may not be answerable when the transition is conceived initially. Having capacity on the team of someone who understands government procurement processes will allow parties to lay out the procedures that need to be followed to carry out this kind of transition. For instance, the entity managing the procurement was different from the entity responsible for implementation, and it required several meetings to lay out the systems and processes before the government could begin the procurement process.



2. Transition begins on Day 1

We focused most of our efforts on building and scaling the service in the first two years, and to approach the question of transition only in Year 3. In hindsight, we could have done things differently from Day 1 to embed the transition into the minds of the government and our teams. We recommend two critical actions at the outset:

- a. **Identify the chief people to liaise with the government:** It is critical to embed someone within the government to follow the administrative trail and ensure that real-time inputs are being communicated effectively. This is in addition to standard status updates and reporting requirements, and establishes an “organizational face” with callback value to foster trust. Additionally, having someone from the government embedded within the service from the beginning would have helped navigate leadership changes within the government, push forward transition requests, and ensure that systems are built keeping the government infrastructure and processes in mind.

- b. **Framing service design for a “government-run product”:** While PxD built Ama Krushi, it would have helped the transition process to think of Ama Krushi as something operating within the government from the get-go. For instance, we should have built the technology within the government system from Day 1 – even simple things like hosting the service website on a government-owned domain could have saved time and effort down the line. Similarly, as the technical and research expertise of PxD would not continue to be available, we could have defined an ongoing monitoring and learning function much earlier in the transition process.



3. Budget for Hidden Time and Costs

- a. **A service that works well will be expected to do more:** While the original emphasis was on delivering a voice-based service for 1 million rice farmers, as the program grew in size and reach, it evolved to include additional delivery channels (SMS, WhatsApp, live call center, radio, in-person hybrid models), partnerships across new content areas (women’s groups, kitchen gardens, livestock, fisheries), and new features (collecting feedback about extension worker performance, schemes). Similarly, unforeseen events and dynamic requests ate into projected timelines. Buffer periods are always advised. We also recommend planning for additional flexibility in staffing and funding over and above the core unit that focuses on day-to-day programming – this will ensure that the team is well-positioned to support program expansion and meet the evolving needs of our partners.
- b. **Set service expansion thresholds:** While budgeting for flexible capacity is advised, the implementing agency should decide how much can be done without sacrificing service quality and/or transition success. We recommend framing communications and setting expectations to reflect these limitations. Depending on the volume and nature of requests, we recommend requesting additional resources and funding, where necessary. For instance, when planning to expand the service to advice on livestock and fisheries, we knew this would involve spending time on research, technology, content development, and program teams, in addition to hiring sector-specific experts, expanding telecom capacity and navigating an entirely different government department. Discussions with government partners for significant cost increases could unlock critical additional funding, and we recommend making the request to ensure program quality and functioning.



4. Buy-in from local teams is critical to success

Under the transition arrangement, the service implementation teams (call center, field, content, administrative) would continue to operate under new management post-transition. Building robust implementation teams that work relatively autonomously is critical to ensure the service continues to function smoothly even as management changes. For this



to continue to happen without disruption, staff need to understand and buy in to the transition process. We reflect on some of the learnings from internal staff management below:

- a. **Communicate earlier:** Local teams must be informed of the transition from the very beginning and be contracted in a way that works with this timeline in mind. While we talked about transition as a team, the specifics were clearer only much closer to the handover, leading to some concerns among the team about expectations from the new management, job security, and changes in work culture, among others. Discussing scenarios with the staff well in advance could prepare them well for this change.
- b. **Ensure internal teams are consulted frequently about transition structure:** Local teams and the institutional knowledge they hold are pivotal to operations. Ensuring that the transition process follows a bottom-up approach will put core operations front and center, and incorporate smaller, yet vital and sometimes overlooked, aspects into the larger strategy. For example, our call center teams had been operating remotely for a year (due to the pandemic). With the capacity handover, they were then expected to be back in the office. The call center manager, aware of the potential disruption this could cause, presented a plan for agent rotation that would allow agents to continue daily operations while also participating in the capacity handover with no interruption in service delivery.
- c. **Prepare succession plans:** For critical positions or functions in the operational team, we recommend putting succession planning in place. Irrespective of how successful the transition will be, some attrition is to be expected. Proactively training multiple staff members for critical tasks, and identifying junior positions that could grow into leadership roles could help hedge against this risk.



5. Document institutional knowledge

Ama Krushi/Krushi Samruddhi is made up of the technology that enables it, and the teams that drive it. However, institutional knowledge is often hard to extract. There were two major

constraints: (i) limited understanding of what degree of detail would be needed by the new agency, and (ii) limited time and attention devoted to documentation when there seemed to be more pressing tasks, especially given the government's priorities. We recommend early consultation to map out the different processes that need to be cataloged; ongoing documentation rather than a time-consuming one-off exercise towards the end of the project; and version control given the constantly evolving workstreams. During the overlap period we had with the new agency, the protocols we had developed were critical reference material.



6. Build capacity to develop a dynamic service as part of the transition

The service outlined in the original MoU and the service transitioned looked quite different from each other. As the service grew in success, we co-developed several new features that would make the service more effective in catering to a larger farmer base and disseminating more diverse content; these extensions required a significant degree of content testing, and technical changes, which necessitated hiring new staff. All of this was happening as we were documenting existing service protocols and training operational staff members in preparation for the transition. We had initially planned to finalize the service design at least a year prior to the transition. However, this proved infeasible, and adjustments were ultimately made during the core capacity handover. This experience led to two key lessons learned:

- a. **Minimum viable product:** Teams working on the transition and those engaged in feature requests must be highly synchronized and keyed in on expectations. This requires determining a basic service threshold, i.e., the last stable configuration of the service, thus essentially making space for service evolution while also ensuring the service is tested well, before transitioning.
- b. **Building for technology capacity:** The teams taking over will be working with unfamiliar systems, and the service will continue to evolve, which requires a deep understanding of the technological architecture. The quickest way to build system comprehension is to work together with the new agency on augmenting service functions during the capacity handover period. For example, we rolled out several new features in partnership with the agency during the handover period as part of training.



7. Government and donor buy-in is critical for transition momentum

Leadership buy-in from the government and funding partners, and the direction they provided in changing circumstances were at the core of this transition. The transition strategy was devised in collaboration with DAFE, and driven largely by the transition committee appointed and overseen by the Principal Secretary. The government's commitment to delivering the



transition was best reflected in their succession planning, as key decision makers changed throughout the cycle with each successor building on and actively contributing to transition planning. Additionally, government support was invaluable during the procurement process, particularly in expediting requests to offset pandemic-induced delays. Most significantly, the bridge funding offered by GF during this period of volatility made it possible for PxD to continue serving our growing farmer base while successfully completing the transition.



8. Not all components of a program transition have equal success

While the service implementation can proceed without interruption, aspects such as program monitoring, quality control, iteration, and innovation may not always keep pace. Some ways to address this include:

- a. **Skill and capacity mapping to inform realistic expectations:** In order to prepare for the transition, the team worked to automate as many reporting tasks as possible. This included the addition of backend protocols to provide regular engagement metrics, the use of a program dashboard for easy performance reporting, and the development of an easy-to-use interface. While improving the process strengthened the system, some aspects of service delivery require specialized skills including expertise in specific software, and also in monitoring, learning and innovation. It may not always be realistic to find one entity that can absorb the different capacities that are required to run multi-faceted programs, and highlighting potential gaps from the outset would have helped manage what we might expect from a successful transition.
- b. **Outlining a potential consulting role to support the new agency at critical points in the program:** Building in a clearly defined consulting role – focused on monitoring,

research, and complex-technology support – at the outset of the transition would have helped maneuver around ongoing government requests, most critically those that required significant alterations to the core model. For future government transitions, PxD is exploring the inclusion of a clause early in the partnership that formalizes a division of responsibilities—where the government assumes day-to-day implementation, while PxD maintains a light-touch role focused on innovation and support, with partial cost coverage by the government. This alignment up-front between different stakeholders could allow quicker feature deployment, ensure that the service continues to innovate and generate evidence on what works and what does not, and allow us to share learnings easily, based on insights from other settings.



Conclusion & Way Forward

The Krushi Samruddhi service transitioned successfully from PxD to the Government of Odisha, growing from serving 3.2 million farmers at handover to over 7 million farmers by 2025. This demonstrates how governments, foundations, and development organizations can effectively collaborate to support smallholder farmers at scale. What began as a voice-based advisory for rice farmers evolved into a multi-platform service across multiple value chains and government departments, fully integrated into Odisha's extension system.

The service has continued to innovate post-transition, including developing an AI-powered chatbot. This successful Build-Operate-Transfer model proves that well-designed digital solutions can achieve local ownership while reducing dependence on philanthropic funding long-term.





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