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Linking relief, rehabilitation and development: towards a more efficient institutional setup

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Executive summary

Overview

In this study, we examine how the institutional integration of humanitarian and development units within a donor's public administration can enhance their cooperation on the ground. Recently, many countries have undertaken considerable efforts to implement the principles of linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD). However, many practical obstacles impede the process, particularly the historical divide between humanitarian and development assistance, which is entrenched in the aid agencies' cultures as well as in their institutional setup. The study at hand examines if and how cooperation can be enhanced by bringing the two types of aid closer together institutionally.

Background

Following a series of discussions between the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the University of Zurich, a small team of graduate students was asked to investigate the link between institutional integration and cooperation among humanitarian and development actors. In our report, we attempt to combine a theoretically and methodologically sound approach with a solution-oriented analysis.

Method

To evaluate the link between institutional integration and cooperation, we examine in depth the institutional setup of several donor countries and how they act in specific contexts. For this purpose, we choose five donor countries – France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom – and seven recipient countries – Afghanistan, Guinea, Haiti, Liberia, Nepal, Sierra Leone and Somalia. We select the donors to represent different degrees of institutional integration as well as small and large agencies. The choice of the recipient countries reflects three different types of contexts: natural disasters, epidemics and civil wars.

The collection of information on the donor countries' institutions and engagement in the contexts is based on two pillars. Firstly, we rely on written sources, including not only scientific literature and reports but also information from websites and official documents. Secondly, we use interviews with humanitarian and development experts for each case.

Findings

Contrary to our expectations, we find that the institutional setup does not directly influence cooperation in the field. Donors whose humanitarian and development agencies are strictly separate generally display no less cooperation on the ground than those in which the agencies are integrated. However, the cooperation in the latter appears to be more *efficient*, as humanitarian and development agencies benefit from an institutional environment geared towards supporting cooperation between them.

We identify several *institutional features* that are particularly important in facilitating cooperation efforts: shared office spaces that promote communication, common strategies and guidelines that increase coherence and mutual understanding, clearly defined roles to provide clarity in cooperative projects, long-term planning, shared budgets, common implementation partners and decentralised decision-making. Due to these institutional features, which partly follow from formal institutional closeness, more integrated agencies face less time-consuming bureaucratic obstacles and have more capacity and freedom to transcend the humanitarian – development divide.

We also find that humanitarian staff and development staff cooperate *in every context*. However, the challenges and requirements of each context are different and shape the ways in which collaboration takes place. This underlines the relevance of an institutional framework that offers a sufficient degree of flexibility to react to changing circumstances.

Finally, we find that all actors are *highly aware* of the importance of the humanitarian and development nexus. It may be for this reason that collaboration projects are realised even in institutional environments that render cooperation rather troublesome.

Conclusion

In sum, more integrated organisational models do not lead to more cooperation but to more efficient implementation of cooperation, thanks to the institutional environment supporting such practice. Gradual improvements in efficiency are possible even without a full-fledged institutional integration of development and humanitarian assistance within the same government agency. Optimising is also possible within formally integrated agencies.

Switzerland, for instance, has a rather favourable institutional environment, with both the humanitarian and development actors belonging to the same ministry and agency. However, there is still room for further improvement. It seems to us that the recently introduced job rotation system and the plan to locate the humanitarian staff and development staff in the same building point in the right direction.