

Sustainability: How to exit emergency programs?

Round table // International cooperation



Moderator

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Speakers

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Executive summary

The sustainability issue was raised by NGO development programs. This includes both the issue of sustainability when programs are delegated to local actors, and the difficulties in progressing from emergency to development programs.

The speakers first underlined the main differences between emergency programs and development programs in terms of donors, actors, modus operandi, and purposes. Emergency programs do not necessarily lead to development projects as frequently observed during humanitarian crisis. Moreover, an emergency can arise in a context of development. This connection has not been made yet.

Development programs are implemented with local partners, which is more difficult to do in emergency situations. Partnership is essential for the sustainability of development programs, even when the organization leaves. Institutional and political relations are important; however, in certain countries a higher priority is given to support the civil society as corruption often exists, along with the absence of the State. It is critical to integrate the country's civil society and know-how into development projects.

Synthesis

The topic of this workshop was the sustainability of development programs initiated by “development actors” such as NGOs, UN agencies, foundations, and businesses, as well as partnerships with the public/private/voluntary sectors and international/national/local groups which will decide of the success or failure of these programs. How should projects be implemented to become sustainable and be supported by the communities after the development actors have left? Besides, what is the link between emergency and development? What are the difficulties in moving from emergency to development efforts?

Anne Héry from **Secours Islamique France** recalled the principles that NGOs abide by during crises: independence, impartiality, and neutrality help them reach the whole of the targeted population. What drives their action is to save lives, not to meet the strategic needs of a particular stakeholder. Yet relationships with local actors are necessary; they are even essential to the sustainability of the projects. Hence arises the first obstacle.

Early emergency aid programs and development programs are different: their purpose, objectives, procedures (direct and immediate work for emergency programs / research and fund raising in development) as well as the players and the donors involved are different. It is easier to fund a 6 month emergency plan than a 3 year long-term development plan. A linear evolution between emergency and development does not exist either, as the context is constantly changing and can therefore switch between one and the other. This requires NGOs to deliver two kinds of activities. In Haiti, what looked like the end of the emergency state was upset by a cholera epidemic.

The notion of partnership is key, but it must be regarded distinctively in the two cases. Working with a local partner in development often requires strengthening capabilities, but it is hard to work in the same way in an emergency situation. The partners’ responsiveness is often weak and the activity is different. This can damage relationships. Partners can also be manipulated or threatened in the event of a conflict. The coordination system in both contexts is not the same – in the emergency business a specific coordination system applies, which is led by the UN and focused on international actors, and leaves little room for local players.

Anne Leymat of **Handicap International** (involved in emergency, post-emergency, and development) drew from her experience that emergency situations do not always lead to development: the stakes are different and the idea is to gradually disengage and hand over as soon as possible to local partners. Handicap International established the Principle of Operational Differentiation which applies to the emergency, development, and mine departments. Each department has a specific *modus operandi* which adapts to their activities. The principle of coordination with actors and partners is a means to achieve Handicap International’s social mission. The development of local actors’ capacity guarantees sustainability.

Xavier Boutin from **IECD** recalled that emergency raises questions in terms of development. For example, the countries that are neglected before a crisis suddenly come to light. Regarding financing, partnerships

are necessarily conceived in the long run, but the financing horizon is short (paradoxically) and makes it difficult to implement long-term plans with inadequate financing. **Xavier Boutin** insisted on partnerships saying that they result from the mobilization and dynamic development of the local civil society (associations, village communities, etc.).

However, it must be ensured that the local civil society can bear and keep the project running. This is the critical issue when launching a development project. The partner can be an institution, a cooperative, or an association. The project is an opportunity to reinforce local actors, a tool for institutional strengthening. The partnership allows local ownership of the project. **Xavier Boutin** mentioned an agricultural training project in Côte d’Ivoire as an example. We must link the country’s know-how with the development project. To develop potential economic actors, NGOs must identify local expertise.

Sustainability also means that no conflict with local authorities can arise whatsoever, bearing in mind that the elites’ interests are not necessarily the same as the people’s interests or the NGOs’. Action is needed so that the project contributes to strengthen the civil society. Above all, local authorities must participate, especially in financing matters. Developing partnerships with private businesses is also necessary. Economic actors benefit from young people being trained in the fields of education, health, and vocational training.

Self-financing is crucial to sustainability. Bringing all stakeholders around the table, in order to ensure autonomy and financial stability, is vital. To achieve this, institutional strengthening and assistance are needed. It is necessary to stop thinking only of the financial determinants of a project. A project must be carried on until public institutions can take over, and the donors need to change their financing methods to adapt to this reality.

Olivier Gilbert from **Veolia Environnement** stated that, regarding outsourcing contracts for the delegation of water utilities, energy, transport and sanitation management, Veolia must increase access to these services for all the inhabitants in the territories where the group operates, regardless of their financial capabilities. This is a public service mission and local authorities’ and population’s expectations encourage constant innovations in order to adapt business to the needs and capacities of the poorest inhabitants. Veolia has been active in developing countries for the past fifteen years. The contracts that connect Veolia to the cities in these countries include more and more clearly stated objectives in terms of access to essential services. This applies as well to developed countries where innovation allows people going through dire times not to be excluded for financial reasons. Several programs are thus implemented abroad as well as in French cities, in collaboration with local authorities.

“Social” innovation has four drivers:

- Social engineering (or social marketing) aims to create dialogue among the targeted populations, to design future services with their participation and to develop a socio-economic evaluation of the context. It

is the most important step because it determines to what extent recipient populations will be able to recover the ownership of the project.

- Financial innovation consists in raising funds that are required to develop missing services (suburban connection to water and sanitation for example), then ensuring their economic sustainability. This requires working with the authorities that are responsible for the service and developing specific tools, namely social funds, modeling, mobilization of external aid (including international aid), etc. This is important because bringing a service to deprived neighborhoods (mostly in the peripheral areas) generally costs more than to do so in the city centre. Furthermore, the required investments are not provided by local sources of funding.
- Legal or administrative innovation means stabilizing targeted households, which often lack the necessary documentation to be granted public services, such as property titles, rent receipts, etc. What is at stake is to avoid setting a precedent that could make city management impossible (land and administrative obstacles are real constraints in a city). Naturally, this part must be worked out with the relevant public authorities.
- Technical innovation generates adapted solutions to local contexts, whose objectives are to overcome all the barriers that poor neighborhoods are faced with.

A final innovation can be added, which refers to work organization. In order to achieve project sustainability, it is necessary to partner with NGOs, local authorities, donors, experts (sociologists, socio-economists, etc.), but above all with the targeted population itself and its local forces (doctors, local leaders, women associations, etc.) to avoid “missing out” on good solutions and socio-cultural constraints.

Finally, once the project is completed (water supply in an unregulated area for example), one condition for sustainability is governance. The responsibilities as to the local management of new services must be as clear as possible and accepted by a majority of the beneficiaries.

Thierry Mauricet from **Première Urgence – Aide médicale** spoke of his organization which was recently created to bring two separate organizations together in order to improve emergency relief operations. In most cases, this organization replaces local authorities. No partnership is possible whatsoever, beyond administrative partnership (work permits, etc.). The organization ensures that people regain their previous standard of living, although their action is not driven by development. Première Urgence – Aide médicale recognizes that a downturn occurs when the organization leaves and raises concerns on the gap that is left, notably in agricultural recovery programs. They consider the possibility of getting closer to some other NGOs before leaving the field.

Development projects are much more difficult and take longer to develop. By the time the people in charge take control of the situation, leadership is missing. It is difficult to hand over to local NGOs as they are often financially constrained. They do not have access to the same international assistance opportunities as they are often unable to meet their requirements (transparency, etc.). In addition, truly capable actors are hard to come by.



Questions

What could be improved?

Locals must be given ownership of the project, which is difficult in a crisis as the State is often absent. Hence there is a system that drags development programs away from local actors (transparency, donors, internationalization, etc) although in some cases this gap managed to be narrowed.

Secours Islamique France stressed the example of water projects within villages in Chad. They develop relationships with the communities based on cultural proximity; as communication is eased the rate of sustainability lasts longer.

Handicap International then described their experience in Indonesia after the tsunami. Keeping the same donor for 3 years allowed them to go beyond emergency relief and empower local authorities. A definition and participatory diagnosis must also be carried out.

When it comes to financing, can you provide any solutions or recommend specific donors?

The question that must be asked is: what is the business model like? The quality of local and international management teams is very important. On-site technical assistance is central and goes hand in hand with the search and identification of local talents. Financial partnerships are diverse; we can think of marketable services within non-marketable structures such as NGOs, selling production services (such as selling training to economic actors), or developing sponsorships between European families and local students or businesses.

Another member of the audience then raised the issue of the programs' cost-effectiveness. **Veolia** used the example of drinkable water supply projects in Niger. The idea is to create very small businesses in rural areas allowing families to generate income from family farming and use it to set up quality services and pay for subsequent expenses. The link between local partners (NGOs, socio-economists or social entrepreneurs) is thus essential in finding the proper economic model.

Which partnerships with local authorities exist to take down obstacles when the project starts, including obstacles related to corruption?

Veolia answered that, with respect to their contracts, the group is always working in partnership with public authorities who have been entrusted with the management of the services for a predetermined period of time in order to bring about specific changes included in the contract. While some responsibilities were delegated to Veolia such as the organization of

services, daily management, facilities operation, or the transfer of expertise to local agents, others such as investment related decisions, pricing, or service discharge are not. Each stakeholder thus plays its own part. This is important to understand how services are managed. The operator must ensure proper service management, while delegating authorities make important decisions and deliver adequate police enforcement.

As for obstacles, they must be addressed as a whole. For example, to prevent potential local corruption problems, Veolia is developing procedures and raising awareness on ethics. If problems still occur, sanctions are taken through the delegating authority. Moreover, regarding proper service management, Veolia must ensure fair treatment for all service users. Thus, favoritism cannot be accepted and all users must pay for their connection to the service or pay a standard fee. As operators, they must collect the payments that have been approved and voted by the authorities and circumvent local lobbying aimed at privileging certain clients to the expense of others. Their independence must be preserved to carry out the missions that they are assigned, in the interest of the general public.

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