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Concept Paper: Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD)

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Observations on LRRD

Value of Concept

Even though conceptual thinking about Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) already started in the 1980s, surprisingly, there still appears to be no common understanding of the nature, scope and practical relevance of the concept. The most broadly associated idea with LRRD is that both humanitarian relief and development assistance should be structured in ways that reduce the need for humanitarian aid and promote developmental objectives before, during and after emergencies. This is intuitively plausible. However, apart from general agreement on this ostensibly ‘political’ objective of LRRD, there seems to be a lack of consensus as to how best translate the concept into concrete practice. In fact, some have questioned whether the LRRD concept has any practical value altogether as it is deemed “too vague and general to have a real utility” for aid programming and implementation. Rather than clinging to an abstract notion of LRRD, aid agencies and government authorities on the ground have to take context-specific actions in relation to key needs of affected populations which may or may not be in line with the broader objective of LRRD.

Such discussions notwithstanding, there clearly is a need to more transparently define what LRRD is – potentially – all about. The answer should be: populations affected by crises. It is for that reasons that recipient-centered concepts such as livelihood protection and vulnerability reduction have been proposed as unifying frameworks for any LRRD approach. Under that reading, a LRRD focus spans short-term efforts to protect lives and livelihoods with long-term concerns to strengthen and reinforce livelihoods. The challenge is to save lives, including through relief, while encouraging self-reliance at the earliest moment possible, thereby lessening aid dependency. Accordingly, one possible indicator for determining e.g. an implementing agency’s LRRD record could be its capacity to make the (timely) shift from the phase of protecting and saving livelihoods to that of strengthening and reinforcing livelihoods. We argue that if adopting a general LRRD focus is conducive to such practical outcomes at the field-level, the LRRD concept – as general as it may be – bears validity, especially from the perspective of recipients.

LRRD and Different Crisis Contexts

There is overwhelming consensus now that LRRD is not (just) about ensuring the linear transition from the relief phase to that of development, a notion which originally inspired the thinking on LRRD (“continuum model”). If ever, relatively straightforward transition may be most possible in contexts of stable development which are exposed to natural disasters, and in which governments dispose of relatively strong (emergency) response capacities. In such contexts, relief and rehabilitation may be temporary measures necessary for returning to a pre-existing level of development (cooperation).

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1 For an overview on LRRD thinking, see Margie Buchanan Smith and Paola Fabbri (Tsunami Evaluation Coalition): *LRRD – A Review of the Debate*, 2005.
2 See the findings on LRRD by the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition; Hugh Goyder, Cowan Coventry, Jerry Adams, Tania Kaiser, Suzanne Williams, Ian Smilie: *LRRD Policy Study* (2006).
3 Buchanan Smith/Fabbri (2005); TEC Policy Study (2006), p. 35.
LRRD in Natural Disasters

Even in clear-cut natural disasters with strong government response, however, transition is hardly ever linear in the sense of rehabilitation succeeding the relief phase, followed by that of development. Rather, practice and research suggest that in such situations LRRD is best pursued if rehabilitation and (return-to) development measures are implemented immediately after the start of and alongside relief activities. Findings of the LRRD studies undertaken by the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) have made a case in point for the response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami which was dominated by relief-type responses for too long. The idea of simultaneously applying relief, rehabilitation and development measures (over space and time, and in different or all parts of a country, depending on the crisis context) has led to rethinking the original “continuum” approach to LRRD, and is now commonly referred to as the “contiguum” model of LRRD.4

LRRD in Conflict-Related Crises

Compared to natural disaster settings, linear progression from relief to development is even less likely in conflict-related emergencies. Here, the relief phase may well be protracted and affected populations are likely to have different needs (that may be best catered to by a mix of relief, rehabilitation and development interventions) at the same time and/or across different parts of a region/country. Also, once hostilities cease, moving into recovery and early-development type assistance may be hampered by a lack or incapacity of local authorities, and the prevailing need for socio-psychological coping with the past. Under such circumstances, achieving LRRD, even in the more flexible ‘contiguum’ version, remains a particular challenge. Last but not at least, as there may be well-grounded risks attached to engaging in development-type operations in the ‘classical sense’, as e.g. official government involvement – even where possible – may result in aid agencies losing support from parts of the population critical towards government authorities.

Conflict-related emergencies also pose a particular challenge to “implementing LRRD” in that conflict dynamics can be highly volatile. Usually there exist few clear indicators for sociopolitical transition, i.e. whether and when it will materialize and, if it does, whether it is sustainable. Some of today’s major emergencies, especially in Africa, have been described as “pendulum situations,” where transition seems possible at one moment – either due to the end or low-intensity nature of conflict – and is again made impossible, when the region slips back into full-scale emergency setting, due to the exacerbating impacts of climate-related events and/or the resumption of armed hostilities. In such contexts, the principle question is whether a LRRD approach is applicable at all, and if so, in what form.

Thinking about how to apply the essence of LRRD to (post) conflict-related crises, especially those of a protracted nature, has essentially culminated in the somewhat blurry realization that relief, rehabilitation and development measures may in some form or the other have to be simultaneously applied over an extended period. What remains to be discussed is which actors should provide such measures, how, and under what conditions. There e.g. are protracted crisis situations in which humanitarian agencies essentially perform ‘humanitarian plus’ type operations, either because there is no official government or existing government authorities demonstrate no capacity or political will to take over international assistance efforts (a case in

point may be international assistance to refugees in southern Chad). In such situations, withdrawal of humanitarian agencies may very quickly lead to a deterioration of living conditions and a full-fledged humanitarian crisis, (again) making “classical” humanitarian relief necessary. Hence, the challenge is to strengthen self-reliance and crisis-resilience of beneficiaries, including through activities traditionally provided by development cooperation, but in a context different from those of traditional development cooperation.

Donors, Definitions and LRRD

This challenge poses problems not only for implementing agencies, but also for donors funding them. Donors have traditionally maintained budget and funding lines for humanitarian relief and development cooperation, and also have created internal institutional structures which cater either to the humanitarian or development ‘sector’. It appears that (funding) support from these donor structures is still heavily inspired by sequence-type thinking, e.g. it is the humanitarian aid department providing initial funds during the immediate crisis, followed by support from the transitional aid and then the development department and their relevant budget lines once the crisis is no longer “humanitarian in nature”. Faced with a non-sequential crisis situation, e.g. one in which a humanitarian agency has been meeting the basic needs of a refugee population (e.g. food, water and shelter) for some time in a non-emergency context and in the absence of any other support, what thus arises frequently is a desire to “classify” that context – and therewith the institutional responsibility of respective donor institutions (and aid agencies) to respond to ‘their’ respective focus area, with ‘their’ respective means and with ‘their’ respective conditions attached the support provided.

Yet in such a situation, aspiring to link relief, rehabilitation and development phases, each with their own separate characteristics and conditions as classically understood, is set to remain a rather artificial exercise. What would be needed, it appears, is an understanding of beneficiary needs, and how they can be met in the most effective and sustainable manner. Respective response measures may have to borrow from both ‘classical’ humanitarian and development approaches, and may be delivered under a mix of conditions familiar to both approaches. Paradoxically, it thus seems that subscribing to the essence of the LRRD (beneficiary-focused!) idea would first and foremost require not to become entrenched in rigid definition attempts of those very different phases the concept verbally seeks to “link”.

Study Focus: Donor Capacity to Promote LRRD

The study group adopts a donor perspective on LRRD, asking: to what extent can the EC and the US, as the most important donors of humanitarian and development aid, promote LRRD outcomes at the field-level? The underlying premise is that adopting a LRRD focus, spanning policy formulation, as well as response planning and funding decisions in times of crises, can increase the effectiveness of donor assistance strategies. Increased effectiveness in that sense may mean that: livelihoods of affected populations are more effectively protected; dependency on relief assistance decreases at an earlier point of time; coping strategies of affected populations are more comprehensively enhanced; and affected populations are made more resilient to future shocks.
So far most policy research and evaluations concerning LRRD, including those commissioned by donors themselves, have focused on the ‘LRRD quality’ of aid projects by implementing aid agencies. Studies have mostly focused on LRRD by sector (e.g. food security, shelter, water and sanitation), by project region or a combination thereof. Given the often high numbers of relief agencies on the ground and the corresponding challenge of proper coordination, this focus on implementing agencies is understandable. At the same time, the extent to which donors, as one important actor group in humanitarian action, may be able to promote LRRD objectives – particularly through their funding mechanisms and decisions – remains understudied.

The study group therefore seeks to assess the enabling or prohibitive impact concrete donor assistance strategies and decisions may have on reaching LRRD outcomes in a specific crisis context. To this end, it compares EC and US headquarter policies and strategies as well as field-level activities, identifying what may be best donor practices with regard to promoting LRRD. It is assumed that best practices for promoting LRRD are context-specific, i.e. what may be an appropriate LRRD strategy in ‘pure’ natural disaster settings will differ from the kind of LRRD strategy required for conflict-related emergencies. The study group will thus specifically look at the way different contexts of emergencies are reflected in donor HQ strategies and are responded to by donors through funding and other assistance schemes.

In general, identifying best donor practices for promoting LRRD in specific crisis contexts is expected to contribute to institutional learning by both the EC and the US, particularly as regards the importance of coordination between the two actors at HQ and field level.

Field-Level Case Studies

Field-level case studies will shed light on the guiding question to what extent donors – primarily through providing funding – have been capable of promoting LRRD objectives, particularly in (post-)conflict-related crises. The LRRD case studies will compare EC and US assistance strategies towards specific crisis contexts and analyze to extent to which each has been conducive to outcomes along the LRRD logic. Case studies are expected to identify possible obstacles to donors promoting LRRD, including insufficient institutional coordination (internal and external) and inadequate funding (timely and needs-responsive). Thus, case studies will not primarily examine whether aid agencies have achieved LRRD outcomes in their specific sectors of aid, but whether donors have been/are well-prepared to support agencies’ and local governments’ efforts in their attempts to do so.

Four case studies will be done on (post-)conflict-related crises, which vary in severity, intensity and complexity: eastern DRC, Afghanistan, southern Chad, and Southern Sudan.

As with the analysis of general donor LRRD strategies and policies, case studies focus on assistance strategies and funding provided by the European Commission (DG ECHO, DG Development, EuropeAid, DG RELEX) and the US Administration (especially Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Office for Transition Initiatives, Department of State, Department of Defense, where applicable).

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Other bilateral actors (e.g. EU Member States), multilateral donors/agencies (e.g. World Bank, UN humanitarian and development agencies) major international and local NGOs may be included if particularly relevant for aspects of EC/US coordination and donor harmonisation (division of work).

**Expected Outputs**

The study group will produce five outputs: four case studies (see above) and one framework study on EC and US support to LRRD in conflict-related crises, including related challenges and opportunities. The LRRD framework study will place case study findings into a broader analysis of the enabling or prohibitive impact EC and US assistance strategies have on reaching LRRD outcomes in specific crisis contexts. In particular, the LRRD framework study will:

- identify the strategic and institutional approaches to LRRD by the EC and US, as well as the corresponding enabling or prohibitive ‘LRRD potential’ of these approaches;
- document best practices by the EC and US in promoting LRRD at the operational level, aggregated per crisis context;
- analyze the extent and potential of EC/US cooperation and coordination in the promotion of LRRD both at the strategic and operational level.

Based on such analysis, concrete policy proposals as to how the EC and the US can (better) promote LRRD, particular in conflict-related crises and transition contexts, including through mutual learning and cooperation, will be made.