

Developmental Humanitarian Assistance

– a concept paper

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Foreword

Humanitarian assistance works in an environment which has undergone great changes during recent years. The work takes place in complex contexts. One major feature of humanitarian assistance is the large number of parties involved. To facilitate the dialogue with the parties providing humanitarian assistance, Sida's Division for Humanitarian Assistance has drawn up this document on developmental humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian assistance is the generic term for assistance provided in situations of conflict and disasters. A large proportion of the humanitarian assistance is aimed at victims of civil wars and thus closely linked to a return of peace and to the reconstruction of social and physical infrastructure. There is reason to assess closely the initial stages of short-term emergency interventions, in order to certify they are planned in a manner which promotes long-term aims. The long-term perspective is equally important in cases of natural disasters.

This document shall provide a brief description of the concept of Developmental Humanitarian Assistance. Our working hypothesis is that a greater focus on the long-term effects of humanitarian assistance will make it possible to improve the quality, achieve a higher degree of sustainability and effectiveness.

At the same time as recognizing the importance of assessing the developmental effects of humanitarian assistance, one should bear in mind that humanitarian actions are primarily governed by the fundamental humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, access and the responsibilities of the parties concerned.

Developmental humanitarian assistance;

- * focuses on the problems rather than on periods of time and time schedules
- * has a legal perspective
- * is based on knowledge and analysis of local conditions,
- * takes into consideration the long-term effects in the short-term perspective.

Much is currently being done to improve our knowledge of this area. Sida's work will therefore continue. We welcome comments and contributions to the debate.

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Developmental humanitarian assistance¹

Developmental humanitarian assistance is a form of assistance which, in an acute situation, helps to provide long-term solutions of the acute problems and needs of those affected - solutions which are accepted and supported locally. It sees the acute needs as a part of the whole life situation of those affected. This is also the case when humanitarian assistance is given during phases of early reconstruction or during protracted crises. Developmental humanitarian assistance is based on both an immediate needs assessment of those affected, and an analysis of the entire life situation of those affected. This assistance covers basic physical needs and rights such as food and clothing, social needs such as safety and security and those needs provided for in international law, for example in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is a form of assistance which sees the long-term needs in the short-term interventions, not the short-term needs in the long-term interventions. Humanitarian law and the humanitarian imperative to assist the suffering constitute the cornerstones of this form of assistance.

Background

The concept "developmental humanitarian assistance" has its origins in the debate of the 1980s when, due to the drought in Africa, disaster relief projects were placed in relation to long-term development projects. The focus on the relationship between cause and effect was often based on disasters created by nature. Internationally concepts such as "Linking Relief and Development" (LRD), Developmental Relief etc have been coined. In connection with the end of the cold war the concept has received renewed interest but with other overtones and in another context. The earlier, more common description of natural disasters, limited in time and with various degrees of social causes, has been changed in many cases to a description of disasters in a context predominated by conflicts of varying intensity and with different structures.

The earlier term "disaster relief" has been changed to humanitarian assistance as a result of this change, among other things. This is the case both at Sida and internationally. Today international humanitarian principles have been given greater prominence in this form of assistance. The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has drawn up a

¹ This is a brief version of a document (in Swedish) on developmental humanitarian assistance produced by Sida, Department for Cooperation with NGOs and Humanitarian Assistance, in 1998

humanitarian policy strategy which gives humanitarian assistance a specific framework.

Organisationally there is a tradition which influences both theory and practice in this area. For a long time disaster relief projects and development projects have been two separate instruments which have had their own organisational structure and even their own separate methods. This has been the case both in governmental assistance and in the assistance provided by non-governmental organisations. As the interaction between acute interventions, chiefly in conflict situations, and long-term stability and development has attracted great focus, this organisational division must be overcome in various ways. This area which is now in focus could be called an organisational and methodological grey zone. At the same time humanitarian assistance has its specific mandate linked to a humanitarian imperative and humanitarian law which necessitates organisational clarity.

The concept "developmental humanitarian assistance" is naturally relevant both in cases of conflicts and in natural disasters since its effects are dependent on the social and economic structure of the community involved.

Discussion

The international debate and research in the area is lively. This provides an opportunity and the momentum for new thinking in an important area which can reasonably be said to concern all international development cooperation. The discussion on developmental humanitarian assistance thereby involves the possibility of discovering new perspectives which can also be of importance for development cooperation in its entirety. In the interaction between development projects and emergency projects new questions and answers come to the fore which influence the planning of both types of projects. For example, mention can be made of the need of making conflict analyses even as a basis for long-term development projects.

The term developmental assistance emanates, as mentioned above, from the situation which prevailed during the mid 1980s. Therefore there are inbuilt theories (for example in the form of established concepts) which were created in this situation. An example of this is the division of a crisis into distinct periods of time in the form of "before-during-after" and return to normal. There can occasionally be a need to use these concepts even in the humanitarian crises of today. However since humanitarian assistance moves in a different environment today, the use of this time approach can easily lead to one-track thinking and the concept is thus of only limited value. Usually there is no simple "before-during-after" perspective in internal conflicts and disintegrating states.

Instead issues relating to methods are being given higher priority. This means that there are approaches and methods which can be used throughout a humanitarian crisis regardless of the position of the crisis in a planned time cycle. One example of an available method can be to strengthen local capacity and thereby decrease the intensity of the conflict in the area in question, another can be to work to strengthen the principles of international law.

However, this does not mean of course that the time aspect is totally immaterial for developmental humanitarian assistance. For example a peace agreement between warring factions can stipulate clear borders for a "before and after" situation which affects the conditions for this assistance.

OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) writes in a document²: "Contrary to many past assumptions, we have found that a sharp distinction between short-term emergency relief and longer-term development aid is rarely useful in planning support for countries in open conflict." "For the purpose of analysis, the transition from emergency crisis to long-term development has often been described as a "continuum". This does not, however, conform to actual situations which follow no set pattern, chronology or order. Emergency relief, rehabilitation work and development assistance all co-exist in time of conflict and crisis, and they interact in innumerable ways. The challenge is to overcome the functional disfunctions of the various agencies involved and to integrate, rather than merely co-ordinate, relief, rehabilitation and development objectives within the framework of a long-term strategy."

The concept "developmental humanitarian assistance" is an approach and a method. Within its framework issues relating to the environment, equality and conflict management etc can be integrated. It could be said that the developmental perspective is the sum of all the parts, while the environment, equality and conflict management etc are parts of different sizes in this sum. Consequently developmental humanitarian assistance is not a separate activity, additional to other forms of humanitarian assistance. On the contrary, the concept implies that all humanitarian assistance shall have a developmental objective.

Despite the close methodological link between long-term development assistance and humanitarian assistance, there are certain clear differences. For example it can be mentioned that the starting point of a humanitarian assistance programme is almost always a crisis which is so

² Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation on the Threshold of the 21st Century, OECD, DAC, 1998 (pp 8, 17 and 48)

serious that the community involved cannot cope with it at that specific point in time: for instance the severe consequences of a natural disaster or the sudden spread of an internal or international armed conflict. In situations of armed conflict international conventions also lay down specific conditions for humanitarian assistance. One consequence of this is that the group of countries receiving humanitarian assistance is much wider and sometimes different in such situations than in programmes of long-term development assistance.

The concept has been criticised in some respects. For example it is said to be based on the concept of social engineering which makes it possible to change the social behaviour of people with the aid of strategic plans and thus reduce the degree of conflict. This criticism concerns two issues which are independent of each other, partly social engineering as such and partly focusing assistance on internal behaviour and attitudes in each country without giving more consideration to major geopolitical and global economic issues. It has even been stressed that "the merging of relief and development has tended to fold humanitarian aid into the framework of development conditionality." (Mark Duffield³) This means that developmental humanitarian assistance could obscure the focus on "pure" humanitarian needs as the decisive factor for the implementation of a project.

As a further example of the debate on these issues, mention can be made of the tension between the humanitarian imperative - to give assistance to those in need wherever they may be - and the intention to give assistance which is strategic in a long-term perspective. In one report⁴ this is formulated in the following way: "The dangers of allowing a conflict resolution strategy to jeopardise the impartiality of humanitarian assistance was set against the argument that root causes can no longer be ignored."

Even if much of the international debate on developmental humanitarian assistance concerns areas in which armed conflicts are taking place, the concept is also relevant for natural disasters. The effects of natural disasters are always dependent on social and economic factors. Therefore in natural disasters humanitarian assistance must also take social and economic factors into consideration and have a long-term perspective.

It is necessary to make a critical examination of the concepts developed within all activities, including those in humanitarian assistance. Where

³ M Duffield, "Post-Modern Conflict: Aid policy and Humanitarian Conditionality", July 1997

⁴ Principled Aid in an Unprincipled World: Relief, War and Humanitarian Principles, ECHO/ODI Conference Report (p 3), April 7, 1998, London

the issues of social engineering and consideration of the major geopolitical and global economic issues are concerned, they are relevant to most international assistance, and not merely humanitarian assistance. They are therefore part of a wider discussion. However, the need to focus on direct humanitarian needs can easily result in a simplified form of helpfulness which does not take the circumstances into consideration. Experience has shown that this is very risky and has sometimes been the cause of severe, negative side-effects. An important outcome of this debate is the realisation that it is only through a good understanding of the implications, potential and weaknesses of the concepts that they can be a good instrument for the activity they serve. In addition good interaction between the parties involved in development cooperation and diplomatic initiative should focus on "both" and not "either or".

Summary

Developmental humanitarian assistance is a form of assistance which, in an acute situation, helps to provide long-term solutions of the acute problems and needs of those affected - solutions which are accepted and supported locally. It sees the acute needs as a part of the whole life situation of those affected. This also applies when humanitarian assistance is given during phases of early reconstruction or during protracted crises. Developmental humanitarian assistance is based on both an immediate needs assessment of those affected and on an analysis of the entire life situation of those affected. This assistance covers basic physical needs and rights such as food and clothing, social needs such as safety and security and those needs provided for in international law, for example in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is a form of assistance which sees the long-term needs in the short-term interventions, not the short-term needs in the long-term interventions. Humanitarian law and the humanitarian imperative to assist the suffering constitute the cornerstones of this form of assistance.

This means, *inter alia*

that developmental humanitarian assistance is a question of focusing on problems which require special support and methods rather than on periods of time and time schedules. The breakdown of a time schedule into concepts such as post-conflict resolution, rehabilitation etc, limits the perspective - with the consequence that it does not include the contexts which should be in focus. The difference between development cooperation and developmental humanitarian assistance is not always evident. Here it is a question of formulating a strategy, based on an assessment of the needs of people and the socio-economic context, which is as consistent and relevant as possible and which has a long-term bearing on the situation. Since planning and preparations often

have to be made rapidly in this type of assistance, a policy and an approach, which have been considered in depth in advance, are of great importance. Follow-up and evaluation are important for the development of this policy and approach. .

that developmental humanitarian assistance has a legal perspective. To uphold the rights of people in acute and conflictive situations in accordance with international law, for example the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is an important aspect of developmental humanitarian assistance. In concrete situations support to ensure greater observance of an existing constitution can be of vital importance to enable an area or an entire country to cope with, for example, an acute regional drought. Corruption, hidden political agendas and illegal economic interests often exert a substantial influence on the possibility of a country or region to overcome acute situations.

that developmental humanitarian assistance is based on knowledge of local situations linked to an external analysis, or critical distance. Many international contacts in, for example, churches or Red Cross societies, have been built up within organisations which have cooperated with each other over a long period of time. This cooperation creates a profound knowledge in certain parts of the organisations which is of immense value in acute situations. But since these organisations on which the work of cooperation rests are also a part of the community they live in, the organisations can also be a part of the problem. A challenge in this situation is to find possible combinations, and even a division of work, between living close to the problem, possessing profound knowledge of the situation, and having well established contacts, and at the same time having a high profile in the fora where important decisions are taken, for example in international conflict resolution circles as well as political and diplomatic circles. This combination of closeness and knowledge and the international political agenda is a clear challenge in the field of developmental humanitarian assistance.

that developmental humanitarian assistance is a form of assistance which in a contradictory world takes into consideration the long-term effects of the short-term interventions as far as this is possible. The influence of different political agendas and major economic interests are often difficult to distinguish clearly in a turbulent situation. It is therefore of value to ensure that it is not merely, in the first place, the parties involved in programmes of humanitarian assistance which have to safeguard the principles of humanity, but it is a challenge for all the different sectors in international society.



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