



LINKING RELIEF TO REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TODAY?

The idea of linking relief and development is not recent. The wording can be traced back in the international policy-related literature more than 20 years ago. But what does Linking Relief to Rehabilitation and Development mean today and how can this concept be implemented when the world is faced with complex crises?

Linking relief and development – under various forms - was an important issue which came out of the analysis of the food crisis in Africa in the eighties. In 1987, LRRD was adopted as a central “pillar” in the national disaster prevention and preparedness strategy, which the Ethiopian government subsequently ratified. It is worth noting that, for a long time, the name of the public body in charge for the victims of famine in that country was the “Relief and Rehabilitation Commission”.

The “jargon” of external aid is filled with a variety of words and concepts which result from both practical field experiences and analytical exercises. The LRRD, or Linking Relief to Rehabilitation and Development, is one of these concepts and is very familiar within the international aid community. “(...) *The basic idea is simple and sensible*”, states the Food Security Unit of the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University. According to the Institute’s 1993-94 Annual Report, “*emergencies are costly in terms of life and resources. They are disruptive of development. They demand a long period of rehabilitation and they have spawned bureaucratic structures, lines of communication and organizational cultures, which duplicate development institutions and sometimes cut across them. By the same token, development policy and administration are often insensitive to the risk of drought and to the importance of protecting vulnerable households against risk*”, the Report continues. For the Institute, the LRRD concept is very operational: “*If relief and development can be “linked”, these deficiencies can be overcome. Better “development” can reduce the need for emergency relief, better “relief” can contribute to development, and better “rehabilitation” can ease any remaining transition between the two*”, concludes the Report.

Over the years, international non governmental organizations (NGOs), aid agencies and main donors have been categorizing aid interventions into two main areas: emergency relief and development. It is a fact that these two kinds of intervention often require specific skills, approaches and, most of all, specific timings. Saving the lives of people exposed to immediate risks due to natural or man made disasters is the ultimate goal of any relief intervention. Development strategies aim at introducing structural changes in a given context. Their objective is to strengthen livelihood security and to reduce vulnerability. In principle, the distinction between relief and development aid – each with its own logic - is clear but it does not stand against the variety of contexts where aid is needed. This explains why the LRRD concept has become increasingly “popular” over the last decade.

Concrete examples

In geographical areas repeatedly threatened by famine, aid agencies frequently intervene by providing food aid. In many circumstances, such aid appears to be the only kind of intervention able to meet the risk of massive starvation. At the same time, both local governments and aid agencies are aware that a long term solution to famine can only be come by reducing the dependency to rain fed agriculture (for instance by increasing the use of irrigation and the diversification of local rural economy). In other words, the ultimate answer to food emergencies is development. In this perspective, LRRD is more than a “fashionable” academic concept; it is an effort to reduce the distance between external aid and the field reality.

Except for very few cases, areas in need of aid can not be described as “100 % relief” or “100% “development” areas. Some contexts are subject to frequent emergencies due to the lack of development. This demands immediate relief action, as well as long term development strategies. This is easier said than done. The challenge is how to define effective relief interventions which benefit the victims of an emergency crisis but do not jeopardize development strategies. There is a risk that relief generates a dependency “syndrome” within the affected population; if prolonged over the years, relief interventions tend to be

perceived by the beneficiaries as a structural solution to their problems. In some cases, food aid can create such a risk.

The tricky coexistence of the two types of aid has been kept in mind by the aid community. Over the last ten years, LRRD has been envisaged not only diachronically (first relief, then rehabilitation and finally development) but also synchronically. In other words, it has been recognized that relief plans need to use typical development methodologies in order to be effectively “development oriented”. Concretely, this approach may include enhancing local human resources and institutions, the role of local actors and a participatory approach in the identification of priorities and strategies.

Aid agencies and NGOs – both international and local ones - have elaborated relevant and concrete sets of indicators to assess how far relief interventions are conducive to development and how far development plans have contributed to reduce the risk of emergencies or to strengthen the local capacity to cope with these emergencies. LRRD can now be assumed as a criterion in project appraisals. On the other hand, should the above concepts be translated into concrete action, LRRD has to be fully incorporated in the various steps of the Project Cycle Management, in particular in the identification phase and in the formulation of the project¹.

What is rehabilitation?

If LRRD is considered in its synchronic dimension, rehabilitation is not simply the “ring” linking relief and development. It is primarily a strategy which is owned by local actors and supported with external aid.

According to the European Commission, rehabilitation may be defined as “(...) *an overall, dynamic and intermediate strategy of institutional reform and reinforcement, of reconstruction and improvement of infrastructure and services, supporting the initiatives and actions of the populations concerned, in the political, economic and social domains, and aimed towards the resumption of sustainable development*”.²

Others sources give different definitions of the concept of rehabilitation. A recent paper produced by the Overseas Development Institute³ gives account of various definitions, but which have one common element: the focus on the strategic dimension of rehabilitation. This means that rehabilitation is a strategy which deserves the attention of a variety of actors with different mandates but who share the will to integrate their respective efforts.

Many of today’s main humanitarian emergencies find their roots in the lack of political stability and in armed conflicts. Looking at contexts such as Somalia, Iraq, Palestine or Afghanistan, it is clear that rehabilitation represents a dramatically difficult and uncertain challenge. It is also quite obvious that, in these areas, a rehabilitation strategy requires the combination of different types of intervention (humanitarian, political and economic) to overcome the problems which are at the basis of war, instability and insecurity.

The question is then: what impact can external aid alone have in such circumstances? Aid can certainly alleviate suffering. This is not an easy task and demands sustained and extended efforts. At the same time, a real, sustainable and acceptable rehabilitation process clearly requires other means and efforts.

At the end of the day, the European Union is facing a major challenge: strengthening its capacity to propose integrated and coherent answers to the main world crises, through an effective coordination between the European institutions and an alliance with the European civil society organizations and non governmental organisations.

Paolo Dieci
Director of CISP -
Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli
(International Committee for the Development of Peoples)

¹ The format designed by DG ECHO to formulate projects is in coherence with this idea and includes a section on LRRD.

² See *The changing roles of agricultural rehabilitation: linking relief, development and support to rural livelihoods*, by I. Christoplos, C. Longley & T. Slaymaker (ODI, July 2004).

³ See *The changing roles of agricultural rehabilitation: linking relief, development and support to rural livelihoods*, by I. Christoplos, C. Longley & T. Slaymaker (ODI, July 2004).