

»» Transitional aid: link between humanitarian aid and long-term development cooperation

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In many donor countries, a relatively clear institutional separation between humanitarian aid and longer-term development cooperation with structural effects exists: while humanitarian aid is generally dealt with by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), church aid organisations and UN agencies, development cooperation is carried out predominantly by (official) bilateral and multilateral development agencies.

Specialisation promotes gaps

This division of labour has many advantages: in particular, it allows for the specialisation and professionalisation of respective stakeholder groups and thus a high degree of efficiency within each field. The downside is, however, that this specialisation tends to weaken the link between these two forms of aid. The differences between the two instruments become visible in the following areas in particular:

- Different objectives: In the case of humanitarian aid, the goal is to provide relief to local populations in acute need as soon as possible; by contrast, development cooperation focuses at reducing the causes of crises and underdevelopment in a sustainable way over a longer term.
- Different ways of working: Humanitarian aid generally tends to be short-term, selective and directed to those most in need; shortcomings in terms of local capacities are normally replaced by external and non-state actors and resources. Development cooperation is primarily concerned with structural effects and broad-based promotion of local, mostly state-run structures: the aim is to permanently strengthen the performance of local structures by means of long-term investments in basic infrastructure and capacity development. Both instruments normally involve separate funding sources, authorisation procedures, implementation cycles and evaluation processes.

- Different guiding principles: Humanitarian aid is intended to be an instrument that can be implemented flexibly and pragmatically (i.e. unconditionally) regardless of the political situation and the causes of the crisis at hand, while development cooperation is an instrument for regular intergovernmental cooperation and as such is both subject to and the result of intensive political dialogue.

As a result, the coordination of the transition between humanitarian aid and longer-term development cooperation is often hampered by such differences in a crisis context. The victims are often the local populations.

From continuum to contiguum approach

This challenge has long been discussed at an international level under the heading of “transitional aid” or “Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development” (LRRD). Initially, LRRD was understood to be a linear sequence: emergency aid should be followed by reconstruction, and later longer-term development cooperation. In the 1990s and 2000s, however, it became clear that this division into clearly distinguishable, consecutive phases is often artificial: the continuum was abandoned in favour of a contiguum approach, thus placing the focus on the simultaneous, complementary use of the various instruments. The aim here is not only to close a gap between different phases, but also to better coordinate humanitarian aid and development cooperation approaches overall and to interlink them in a proactive way.

Quicker stabilisation and avoidance of discontinuities at the interface

The basic idea of transitional aid is firstly to avoid discontinuities by creating a more systematic link between short- and long-term measures, and also to establish the conditions for successful long-term development cooperation by means of stabilisation measures. For example, short term humanitarian aid measures to provisionally repair destroyed water supply systems could be

accompanied and eventually replaced by the parallel reconstruction of an organised drinking water supply and wastewater disposal system.

However, such longer-term measures require fairly functioning and legitimate state structures. These are often not in place immediately following crises (and their development is not an aim of humanitarian aid either). This is the second core task of transitional aid: stabilisation measures (e.g. the rapid restoration of basic public services in the areas of health and education or employment-generating measures) can help to restore the capacity of local structures and the population's confidence in the state. Longer-term development cooperation can then begin on the basis of the resultant (continually) increasing legitimacy of public authorities.

Improve coordination of instruments while keeping the benefits of specialisation

The challenge of managing successful transitions in the context of crises is nothing new. However, with the increases in armed conflicts, extreme weather-related events, fragile statehood and the accompanying realisation that crises might be “the new normal”, this challenge is particularly relevant today. Important steps towards an optimised overall system would include:

- A common conceptual framework for humanitarian aid and development cooperation;
- The effective coordination of measures on the ground;
- Increasing the flexibility of existing procedures and patterns of thought and action without giving up the advantages of specialisation;
- Strengthening long-term measures to combat the causes of crises, as well as improving short/medium-term crisis prevention, and the crisis resilience of the affected population. ■