

Chapter 1 : Sustainable Development Goals | Haiti | LiveBeyond

UMCOR's Sustainable Development Unit works to facilitate long-term community development and empowerment in areas of great need. Many development issues and opportunities are interrelated. Because of this, UMCOR uses integrated solutions to address the root causes of specific problems.

However, many stakeholders believe that humanitarian aid has been unsuccessful in delivering on these promises through lack of coordination and duplication of services. This results in a failure to meet the needs of those meant to benefit. Indeed humanitarian aid with its diverse mandates, roles, people, time lines and funding, as well as the absence of clear definitions to describe specific identities purpose, principles , presents a chaotic and confusing image to the public, host governments and recipients, as well as ongoing challenges for agencies and aid workers. Since appreciable donor finances total billions of dollars annually, these critiques present serious credibility and survival issues to agencies that depend on donor funding in order to save and improve the lives of the vulnerable. It is for this compelling reason that it is important to deconstruct the roles of and linkages between emergency, relief and development aid, identify problems that impact effectiveness and sustainability, and also acknowledge progress and successes both past and present. Planning and actions are designed to produce rapid results through immediate treatment and life-saving activities provided by medical care, potable water, shelter, food, clothing and security. A causal relationship exists between the crisis, requirements for survival, treatment and outcome. It is this relationship that through the media largely defines aid to the public and in turn translates into generous contributions from governments and the private, public and corporate sectors. Hence activities are targeted toward enabling positive outcomes for the target population through the provision of basic necessities, advice and mentoring with regard to health, education, equity, governance, infrastructure improvement and security. Information exchange between stakeholders pertains to the country mandate, strategies, goals, time frame and accomplishments real and planned and how activities and strategies can be smoothly blended to best serve the evolving needs of the target population. Transition must be flexible in response to changing situations on the ground that may require different services, personnel, knowledge and resources. The underpinning that is vital to a successful transition is a seamless merging of all information from the outgoing to the incoming agencies and communication and collaboration in the case of an overlap Fig. Although these issues are situation-specific, stakeholders who are willing to collaborate to support a flexible transitional model and understand clearly their role within it can effectively contribute to the establishment and maintenance of strong and effective linkages. This requires the provision of adequate resources to carry out assessments, identify priorities, and create and implement a plan of action. THREATS Donor Accountability The flow of funding requires a high profile public image frequently fueled by exploitation of beneficiary vulnerabilities, consequently there is a tendency to emphasize weaknesses and threats and de-emphasize strengths that is, the more serious and numerous the problems the more likely the proposal will be funded. Conversely, once funding is disbursed donors expectations are that positive reports regarding progress will be forthcoming. Unfortunately, this expectation often encourages implementers to work on situations with positive marketable outcomes in order to ensure future funding, and creates a disincentive to tackle difficult, entrenched problems. It is crucial that there be a balanced assessment of the target population since there is evidence that many beneficiaries despite being exposed to a difficult life situation possess admirable resiliency and coping skills. There are currently no enforceable criteria outlining who can form an implementing agency. Hence it is important for a the donor to ensure that contracted agencies possess the legitimacy, appropriate background, experience, and an understanding of humanitarian principles and the host country culture and context. Prior to funding a proposal, donors must require information that clearly outlines the project or program goal and objectives, a detailed plan of activities, needed resources and the time periods required to complete the short or long-term activities months to years. The donor must be made aware of beneficiary needs as well as what agency can effectively deliver the appropriate services short- or long-term. Hence in order to ensure cost-effective quality service, donors must not only investigate agency legitimacy before approving proposals, but also encourage a balanced

approach to assessment that recognizes strength, coping and resilience as well as challenges. Implementing agency accountability in honestly reporting outcomes can only be accomplished with donor support that includes acknowledgement and acceptance of ongoing challenges and partially-met objectives as well as celebration of successes. Since needs are constantly evolving, flexible but predictable release of funds by the donor that are timely and sustained is vital, particularly in development, with its time frame for sustainable change that frequently extends beyond five years. It has been estimated that these latter expenses meant for beneficiaries can total almost half of the entire amount disbursed. One size does not fit all when there are dramatic differences in culture, infrastructure, economic conditions and governance capacity. Furthermore regional specificities and related categories of services require a budget and accounting details that defy comparison. In this regard, a first step toward enhancing transparency and accountability of all parties is through the recruitment of a competent financial officer familiar with the country, culture and aid industry, in addition to regular independent audits. The way in which humanitarian situations are individually assessed should determine the source of funding, the scale of resources allocated, the form of response, the planning time frame, and the way in which organizational roles are determined. Equally important is that donors and implementing agencies recognize that the recipient country possesses a vision that can best identify the needs and direction of programming, projected costs and the transfer of funds that will increase the possibility of success through mutual understanding, appropriate planning, policy coherence and governance issues. In sum, aid disbursements must consider all of the above factors in deciding who receives what assistance, when and how with clearly defined short and long-term categories that point to and support institutional arrangements for distributing resources appropriately and equitably. Such negative perspectives of the inexperienced aid worker frequently results in miscommunication and seriously impaired collaborative relationships that affect team function, the delivery of quality services and recipient capacity development. An effective and timely humanitarian operation has the capacity to save thousands of lives even within an environment with difficult access to beneficiaries. To successfully accomplish the many and varied tasks necessary to deliver effective quality care requires professionals with management experience, diplomatic skills and the abilities to objectively assess the situation, prioritize needs and multi-task. The initial task of aid workers is to establish rapport with the national government, beneficiaries and other stake holders and in collaboration assess recipient needs, construct a plan that is culturally sensitive, equitable, affordable, feasible, and satisfies the mandate of the donor, a delicate balancing act indeed. Administrative responsibilities are to secure office space and to hire staff. It is the responsibility of the implementing agency to carry out a complete and thorough vetting of each expatriate applicant to ensure that standards will be upheld and front line workers are stable and possess the appropriate skill set, knowledge, experience and ethical motivation to deliver cost-effective services to the host country and the aid recipients. For example it is much easier to assess and measure road building and water-wells that have definite budgets, starting and end points to completion than health and social issues that have biological, behavioral and emotional components that are in constant flux. Although there have been measurable gains across developing countries what has been missing is a systematic way to determine what kind of aid works best. While this might be true in some cases, anecdotes prove very little and are often disregarded by donors who require reliable results in order to continue funding. Furthermore if there is inadequate information pertaining to the starting line and ongoing process, then endpoint analysis will reveal little useful information regarding achievements and lessons learned. Unfortunately, there can be problems to achieving what appears to be a simple and straightforward strategy. The first is approval of donor funding since time, cost and the necessity of personnel with special research expertise are added to the budget. The second challenge lies in the reliability of the baseline population figures denominator. In many developing countries, reliable census figures are difficult to obtain due to capacity, compounded by poor access to rural areas that often results in sketchy and unreliable vital registration data including mortality, morbidity, births etc. Results, as opposed to anecdotal information, point to successes based on indicators that are the road map to effective interventions over a specified period of time. Although acquiring donor funding and reliable data present formidable challenges, a convincing case to donors can be made by emphasizing that personnel with solid research skills can draw reasonable conclusions based on

collated evidence and on levels and trends on which to establish a baseline. Results-Based Management RBM is a popular tool that measures and monitors progress through determination of how input, output, outcome, and impact contribute to short, medium and long-term results. It is unfortunate that frequently the framework and components of RBM, related logical frameworks and SMART objectives specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound are not well understood or agreed upon by implementers, a situation that results in a struggle to master the technical aspects that overshadows the context. If the instrument is the focus, then aid is reduced to a technical exercise in which beneficiaries remain peripheral to the process, results will be unreliable and resources wasted. Rather than following the latest fad to measure progress no matter what the goal of the project or program, the aims based on beneficiary need and staff capacities ought to dictate the measure. What would be more beneficial is to determine the capacities of staff, and if it is found that implementing the popular measure will elicit unreliable results, then thinking outside of the box becomes a necessity. It appears that the simplest way to achieve this is to design a tool that will collect relevant and reliable data based on indicators but that staff can easily understand and feel confident working with. Unintended Consequences Exclusionary assumptions of implementing agencies, based on a failure to recognize and include the community in planning and delivering services, can push recipients into a dependent state and negatively impact confidence, building capacity and future sustainability. These outcomes prolong the need for donor resources- a troubling development if donor fatigue takes hold and aid is either drastically reduced or terminated. Furthermore, as agencies compete for the brightest and most skilled workers, salaries become increasingly inflated, as do aid budgets. When aid is reduced or withdrawn, the inability on the part of the host government to sustain the unrealistic high salaries often results in brain drain as professionals abandon the country to work in developed countries that are experiencing staff shortages. In this rather peculiar turn of events, developed countries are giving aid with one hand but robbing host countries with the other by siphoning off their most precious resource of trained professionals. These disruptions can occur short-term in an emergency when hundreds of workers arrive on the scene with personal and administrative needs, but can also be disruptive in the long term as expatriate workers continue to contribute to the economy. While large amounts of aid are a positive force to the host countries and its people through employment generation and increased consumption, the creation of a false economy can be disastrous to recipient government sustainability strategies when donor money is reduced or withdrawn. In order to avoid the traps presented by overly exclusionary and inclusionary tactics, a balanced approach must be achieved based on collaborative strategies that tackle these issues head on with the host country and other stakeholders. In this regard, an increasing number of donors now collaborate with recipient countries to set salary scales in line with what would be earned at the same or similar jobs in-country, and to encourage building a structure that can be sustained when aid is reduced or no longer available. Tracking these strategies over time will reveal their effectiveness, but both are aimed at ensuring that countries will be placed in a position of strength in terms of capacity and finances to assume future responsibility. Although the LRRD concept is broadly endorsed by many policy-makers to connect short and long-term measures, there remains a lack of consensus on how best to translate the theory into practice. Implementation of LRRD requires knowledge and skills pertaining to time, scope and agenda that are context specific and not readily interchangeable. It is this situation that has resulted in a confusing and unproductive debate about where activities should be placed and accounted for within either a linear or a contextual model to improve alignment. Promoting transition at the most appropriate stage requires flexibility that will accommodate the unique nature of each situation, and successfully achieving this continues to present a particular challenges in policy, operational, and funding terms. First and foremost, a common understanding of the nature, scope and practical relevance of LRRD is a requirement for successful implementation. In spite of increasing commitments to LRRD, the complexity of putting commitments into practice and the bureaucratic and administrative constraints pertaining to different categories of funding continue to undermine many strategies. Nevertheless the ongoing development of LRRD is a worthwhile strategy that will increase the effectiveness of aid both now and in the future. Although all four characteristics are vital to efficiency between stakeholders and host countries, communication represents the most difficult but single most important task faced in the daily work of host countries and stakeholders to

deliver cost-effective services Fig. The many diverse mandates that add to the complexity of successful communication require ongoing patience, diplomacy, transparency, listening, clarifications, confidence and lack of assumptions. In turn, these skills necessitate characteristics that include experience, academic preparation, a clear understanding of the program objectives and of humanitarian aid at the micro and macro levels. While poor communication risks working relationships potential or ongoing and impedes progress toward meeting objectives, quality communication has ongoing challenges that have to be assumed by every stakeholder individually and within a consortium in order to improve and maintain the effectiveness of aid. Although humanism is recorded in the earliest annals of history, organized humanitarian aid began with the rebuilding of Europe post-World War II, and has been characterized by constant evolution and attempts on the part of all players to tame a fast-moving target. The aid industry is still struggling not only with some past, unresolved issues but equally with many new challenges. Although governments, agencies, organizations, corporations and aid workers are running as fast as they can, in the current ballooning aid industry it is extremely difficult to keep on top of fast-moving events. Existing challenges include a failure to support and generally include local stakeholders due to insufficient analysis of local situations, culture and capacities before program implementation and a lack of clear transition and exit criteria strategies. Coordination of projects and programs in a developing country is a daunting task and requires the support of all stakeholders to ensure that mandates are recognized without expensive duplication of services. In this regard, coordinators must be well trained in management and facilitation techniques and be action rather than process orientated. The Good News The goal of the Cluster Approach, implemented by the UN is to improve stakeholder and host country communication, cooperation, coordination and collaboration in order to minimize expensive duplication and conflicting activities through maximizing the exchange and flow of information. The specific aims are to strengthen partnerships and ensure more predictability and accountability in aid responses through clarification of the division of labor among involved agencies national and international and definition of their roles and responsibilities within key sectors. A Humanitarian and Emergency Relief Coordinator manages all incoming information, and cluster leads with relevant expertise and capacity are appointed to facilitate the work of each cluster that includes I NGOs and UN agencies and other stakeholders. This relatively new and expensive system encountered problems in the early roll-out stages, resulting in confusion and ill will among some stakeholders. However, according to evaluations carried out in and in selected settings, the initial investment has generated benefits over time that outweigh costs and shortcomings with initial opposition considerably lessened. Most importantly, the approach has significant potential for improvement of humanitarian aid and the well-being of beneficiaries. Some early findings are that coverage of needs has improved in some areas, gaps in aid are better identified with duplications reduced, peer review has increased the ability of humanitarian actors to learn and move forward, predictable leadership has led to improved coordination, partnerships have been strengthened and the planning and quality of funding proposals has been improved. In sum, the Declaration represents a commitment from all signatories to uphold these principles in order to increase the positive impact of cost-effective aid by assisting developing countries to formulate their own plans according to national priorities, using their own planning and implementation systems. Hence in this rapidly-evolving field there are numerous strategies in progress, initiatives that represent hopeful beginnings toward improved, effective and sustainable aid. For example, East and Southeast Asia were substantially dependent on Overseas Development Assistance ODA in earlier years, but were able to achieve remarkable growth in the s and s, effectively terminating their dependence on aid. Moreover, between and nearly half a billion people escaped extreme hardship and global poverty was halved. Global immunization of children has steadily increased and targets in primary school education, use of mosquito treated nets, and polio eradication is close to realization. Fresh ideas from lessons learned continue to emerge. For example, a recent proposal by the British Government to look beyond debt relief for developing countries or incremental increases in aid and instead to provide assistance through increasing trade and removing barriers to increase GDP will decrease dependency, free up wealth, create enterprise and save more lives than either of the other two initiatives alone. Although reaching targets has been uneven across countries, the support by many stakeholders has made an impressive impact on improving health and reducing poverty. The delivery of

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effective and sustainable aid within the fast-changing world continues to present ongoing challenges to stakeholder communication and collaboration, keys to delivering quality services in a cost-effective manner. Although achievements in humanitarian aid amid ongoing change are impressive, there is a need on the part of donors, governments, aid workers, and the public to develop a clearer understanding pertaining to who does what, when, where and how. Clarifying differences between the emergency, relief, rehabilitation and development spectrum and the need to establish linkages as part of a flexible response to changes based on diverse roles, mandates, time frames and inevitable unfolding events is a vital first step.

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