

Guideline

EXIT STRATEGY FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTORS IN THE CONTEXT OF COMPLEX EMERGENCIES

2003

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Introduction

1. The exit strategy is primarily a process of moving from emergency to rehabilitation and development addressing a change in the roles of the UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations in the country, thus affecting the functions their respective staff may play in the country.
2. This paper addresses the exit strategy from the stand point of an emergency requiring a humanitarian response and considers the conditions to be met in order to proceed with such a strategy. While not debating the issue, it takes for granted both possibilities of an emergency affecting an entire country or even a number of countries in a region as well as a situation where the emergency affects only a part of a country.
3. While the establishment of a humanitarian coordination arrangement on the basis of the Resident coordinator system provides a structurally advantageous condition to move more swiftly from an emergency to a development situation, it does not eliminate the need to address a strategy for exit of humanitarian actors after a complex or major emergency. Strategic and operational coordination are still required until humanitarian actors have completed their work.

General Policy

4. General Assembly Resolution 46/182 states that emergency assistance must be provided in ways that will be supportive of recovery and long-term development activities. It is part of the functions of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator at the field level and the IASC, under the leadership of the ERC, at the global level, to ensure that these systemic links are made and continually refined.

5. The exit strategy from a relief operation will be better guaranteed where and when the Government's capacity is in place to take over the care of the victims of complex or major emergencies. This capacity should not be limited to the provision of humanitarian assistance but must include the protection of the victims.
6. The Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator should be charged with determining, in consultation with the in-country team and the Government, whether the conditions are met to proceed with total or partial exit strategy.

Specific Conditions

7. Too quick an exit from a humanitarian assistance programme may be as damaging as one that is too late. Early exit may result in resumption of the conflict if survival conditions have not been reached among the victims and/or security guarantee for the population is not in place. Also, if the risk of unrest remains it may constitute a basis of recruitment for those who entertain a political objective and wish to re-negotiate the peace agreement. Late exit may have the same result if the beneficiaries have become dependant upon humanitarian assistance and have expectations that the Government may not be able to satisfy.
8. One should carefully evaluate whether the conditions are ripe for executing the exit strategy. Those conditions include:
 - The reduction of a significant number of civilians affected by the emergency.
 - A successfully negotiated peace settlement bringing about the cessation of hostilities.
 - The resumption of normal social, political and economic activities.
 - The Government's capacity to resume its obligation towards the population, in particular the victims of the conflict.
 - A resource mobilization strategy should be in place that covers the strategic framework for post-conflict activities.
9. The timeliness of an exit strategy is crucial in order to avoid dependance and false expectations. But the time of an exit may not be identical for each sector and agency. The determination of the appropriate time requires an evaluation of the situation at geographical and sectoral levels and should be undertaken by an

inter-agency forum under the leadership of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator.

Operational Principles

10. The exit strategy should be an integrated part of the strategic plan developed to provide humanitarian assistance and preferably prepared before the above conditions are met.
11. Where possible, and as soon as the parties to a conflict can agree, the social and/or humanitarian affairs authorities of the respective parties to a conflict should be encouraged to address the humanitarian issues of the affected population. Such principle may be a priority concern of the Humanitarian Coordinator through the exercise of the strategic coordination function.
12. The Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator, in close collaboration with the UN agencies should identify and see to the application of conditions for a different coordination arrangement under the Government leadership. Such basic conditions may include the existence of a signed peace agreement, the acceptance of the parties to the conflict to the principle of free circulation of people and goods in the areas of conflict, the recognition by the parties to the conflict of the Government authority, the full participation of representatives of the parties to the conflict in humanitarian coordination mechanisms and the agreement to a mechanism by the parties, with the UN as a possible arbitrator, to negotiate settlements to any breach that may occur to the agreement.
13. The country's professional capacity regarding planning, programming, and management of humanitarian programmes should be evaluated as soon as feasible in order to be ready to move as quickly as possible into a national capacity mode to address the humanitarian issues and eventually those regarding reconstruction and rehabilitation.
14. Long lasting conflicts normally result in the development of coping mechanisms among affected populations and institutions, which could constitute a basis for rehabilitation and reconstruction. Humanitarian actors must draw the attention to these mechanisms to those organizations who will be involved in the planning and programming of economic and social recovery activities.

15. Immediately after the signature of a peace agreement, if one is signed, the humanitarian coordination mechanism in place should be revisited and agreed upon within the overall plan for the implementation of the agreement. The review of the mechanism should focus on the need to bridge humanitarian assistance with rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes which might be foreseen within the framework of the peace agreement.
16. In cases where the emergency situation has affected only a part of the country, there may exist planning and coordination mechanisms aimed at developmental activities in areas not directly affected by the conflict. Those mechanisms should be taken into account for the exit strategy.

Impact on Humanitarian Coordination

17. The strategic coordination will need to be revisited in order to address the exit strategy. Most UN operational agencies have both humanitarian and development programmes capacity. While providing humanitarian assistance to save lives, they will increase their concern for infrastructural issues to address the sustainability of social services and productive activities. The basis of the advocacy function may become more related to agreed principles for security and safety as developed in the peace agreement and constitution than on the internationally recognized humanitarian principles provided the latter is consistent with the former.
18. The monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the humanitarian programme will aim at verifying that the conditions are in place to substitute foreign agencies and organizations by local ones.
19. Inter-agency needs assessments undertaken in the later stages of an emergency, especially concerning the living conditions in communities where IDPs are relocated, refugees are repatriated, and war-affected populations are resuming normal life may become most valuable information for longer-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and development process.
20. As important is the review of coordination in relation to specific sectors, with regard to geographical areas or beneficiary groups to ensure their respective inclusion in the new national plan effort.

21. Where the coordination office(s) in place during an emergency was staffed with personnel whose qualifications and expertise could facilitate the implementation of rehabilitation or reconstruction programmes, efforts should be made to retain their services even after the exit of the humanitarian actors.