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ECONOMIC RECOVERY STANDARDS

AN ONLINE SPEAKER'S CORNER FACILITATED BY TRACY GERSTLE AND LAURA MEISSNER. THE DISCUSSION WAS HOSTED ON WWW.MICROLINKS.ORG.

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CONTENTS

DAY ONE: CROSS-CUTTING AND OVERALL STANDARDS 2
Welcome to the Economic Recovery Standards Speakers Corner 2
Day 1: Cross-Cutting and Overall Standards--Discussion Questions 3
DAY TWO: FINANCIAL SERVICES AND ASSETS PROGRAMMING 12
Day 2: Economic Recovery Standards 12
DAY THREE: EMPLOYMENT CREATION AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT 14
Day 3: Economic Recovery Standards 14
Speaker's Corner Wrap-Up 20
CONTRIBUTORS' LIST 22

DAY ONE: CROSS-CUTTING AND OVERALL STANDARDS

WELCOME TO THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY STANDARDS SPEAKERS CORNER

Post by: Tracy Gerstle

We appreciate your interest in the Standards and the effort they represent by 40 practitioners from over 25 international relief and development organizations to improve the quality of economic recovery and livelihoods programming in countries affected by natural disasters or conflict.

Our intention is for these Standards to become a companion module to the Sphere Handbook for Humanitarian Relief, which is widely recognized among the international disaster and crisis response community for providing guidance on the minimum quality of actions expected in humanitarian responses in crisis-affected areas. We are coordinating closely with Sphere's Board in preparing our application.

In the spirit of the Standards—which seek to align economic recovery interventions with the needs of affected populations and effective market demands—this discussion will be demand-driven. We expect you, the contributors, to guide the discussion based on your experiences and insights, enabling us to continue to improve upon the content in the Standards, while ensuring that they are developed with the participation of the widest possible audience. In addition to this online event, the SEEP Network is vetting the Standards in a number of international and local forums with a wide variety of stakeholders, including other practitioners, donors, crisis-affected individuals, and national and local government agencies that oversee crisis response and economic recovery. This public vetting will ensure the broad buy in to the Standards, ensuring greater acceptance of what they advocate for as the minimum quality standards for economic recovery responses.

In order to ensure full participation in this Speakers Corner and to capture all of your valuable contributions—we offer the following guidance on how best to participate in the Standards discussion:

1. Include an introduction to you and your organization when you make your first submission

• Where do you work? What types of programming do you manage? Why are you interested in this topic and particularly the Standards?

2. Contributions on the questions under discussion may be submitted at anytime over the three days of the Speaker Corner.

• Whereas we've set up specific days to discuss certain topics, feel free to contribute on any of the topics in discussion at anytime.

3. Contributors should feel free to introduce new, closely related topics to the discussion

• Feel there is another important aspect to the discussion or theme that should be considered in promoting economic recovery? If so, please bring it up.

4. Where ever possible, please root your comments in direct experiences or examples you know of programming in the field

• The Standards are based upon practical, universal experiences and lessons that we can all agree upon—therefore a focus on actual practice is greatly appreciated.

We and many of the other authors of the Standards will be participating in the conversation. We much look forward to the discussion with you over the next three days.

We'll post our first questions in a separate message.

Regards,

Tracy Gerstle and Laura Meissner

Facilitators for the Economic Recovery Standards

P.S.—In the coming year, we will be looking for organizations that are interested in testing the Standards in the field, as well as hosting feedback meetings. If your organization is interested in either of these opportunities, please send us an e-mail to meissner@seepnetwork.org

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DAY 1: CROSS_CUTTING AND OVERALL STANDARDS--DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Post By: Tracy Gerstle

Today, the main focus of our discussion will be on a number of overarching themes covered in the Standards—with topics specific to the technical areas of the standards (financial services, enterprise development, access to assets and employment creation) discussed in days 2 & 3. If there are other relevant topics to the Standards you feel we should be discussing—please do bring them up.

Additionally, if you have read the Standards, available at http://communities.seepnetwork.org/econrecovery, and wish to comment on specific sections, please do so at any time throughout the discussion.

To kick this discussion off—let's start by looking at these key questions:

1. When operating in unstable environments, what are the minimum requirements for effective assessments prior to initiating a response as well as in monitoring ongoing program relevance and results? Areas to consider in your response might include: scope and types of information collected, participants, timing and dissemination, etc.

2. What universal standards apply regardless of the type of intervention (e.g. financial services; enterprise or value chain development; asset transfers; employment) and the circumstances of the crisis?

3. Often economic development programs use indirect targeting (e.g. working to develop services, products, institutions and the enabling environment) rather than direct assistance as a means of promoting scalable, market-based responses. Is indirect targeting appropriate when working with crisis-affected populations?

Post by: Laura Meissner

Dear Speaker's Corner participants,

I'd like to second Tracy's welcome to you all. We are looking forward to a very lively discussion!

Question 3 for today, on the use of indirect targeting, seems to be one that may raise particular debate.

In developing the Standards and working with other initiatives in this field, many seemed to feel that direct interventions were most appropriate for responding to the needs of people severely affected by conflict or disaster. Yet microenterprise programs are used to working through markets and value chains, to offering financial services to all rather than to only a small population. What's appropriate in this context?

Post by: Lafir Mohamed

Dear All

Re: Q-03

I would rather propose that, in the case of the post conflict affected situation, realizing the economic development needs with the primary community is the key, while having the broader target of developing the market system for the community or the sector rather. When we get the real picture of the primary community we would be in a position to facilitate the process of development through the means of development of services, products, institutions and the enabling environment.

Other than that, the tailor-made programmes like, cash for work, direct economic transfers etc has worsened the situation rahter than developing the livelihoods of the communities affected by conflict or crisis..

Post by: Laura Meissner

Dear Lafir,

These are interesting points you suggest. Is the importance then in doing an effective assessment of the community, before embarking on our programs? What would be the minimum requirements for an assessment to be useful and effective?

Your comments on the ineffectiveness of cash-for-work and direct transfers is also interesting. What real-life examples do you or other participants have of where these have or have not worked in a crisis-affected situation?

Post by: Mayada El-Zoghbi

Dear Laura and Others,

I think you are capturing one of the biggest debates that we face while working in conflict countries. There has always been an assumption that it is an either/or thing -- either we focus on those most impacted by conflict or we work with enterprises and financial institutions that can have broader economic impact that "trickles down" to those impacted by conflict.

I would argue that many programs are able to achieve both objectives simultaneously and a focus on just one, to the exclusion of the other, does not serve the broader peace-building and economic recovery agendas that are at the heart of our work in these contexts.

While we are probably not yet ready to make this double objective a minimum standard for working in conflict-affected countries, it is important that we go beyond just seeing it as an impossible achievement. I believe the draft standards attempt to take us to this next level...I wonder if it is enough?

Post by: Tracy Gerstle

Posting this for Tim Nourse from AED who is out on assignment in Ramallah, West Bank and having trouble posting:

Hi All,

Good question here, Mayada. I wouldn't say its an either/or proposition, as I think all three approaches (those that target a conflict-affected population directly, those that focus on a broader approach that will benefit a larger swath of the population, including the target population, and those that take a broader approach in conjunction with services focused on the target population) are possible. However, each program would need to assess what is most appropriate and which it is most capable of doing as some will be better suited to target directly, others indirectly, and others both.

That being said, I don't think there's enough thought by implementers as to what are the different approaches and which is most suitable. Instead, the tendency of many working in this sphere has been to focus directly on the target population and ignore broader approaches that can benefit a larger segment of the population (including the most-affected). That's why we (I participated in the group) included the emphasis on looking at indirect means besides direct means (common standard 4).

I'm curious though - do others read this standard as advocating just an either/or, or does it encompass all three possibilities as I've described above?

Post by: Tony Pryor

Hi! This is Tony Pryor with International Resources Group (IRG). Besides working with QED to support Microlinks, IRG is also actively involved in a range of post-conflict, post-disaster situations. We are also though very concerned about defining pre-conflict, pre-disaster planning approaches and issues; what do people need to think through/plan for/protect against in these situations?

I'd like to ask a couple of initial background questions first. How do you define "standards"? The term for me can mean many things - best practices, a floor or minimum set of conditions, or specific design, input and output parameters - all could be encompassed by the word "standards". What in this instance are you defining as a standard? In reading the background material, I think it's a bit like

the various standards of behavior prepared by Chambers of Commerce or others - essentially a voluntary description of approaches and content which most feel are common and proven.

The problem for me though is that the terms "standards" and "standardization" have a degree of rigidity and specificity to them that I think can be interpreted differently from your intent. Saying that income generation and humanitarian relief should be intertwined is less of a standard than a commonly accepted good practice. And I don't think this is just a question of semantics; while certain things can be put into a checklist, some of this is very site- and economy/ecology-specific.

I think what one CAN do is to outline best practices of end results one should aim toward, some of the paths that can get there, and some of the road maps (tools, etc.) that have been shown to help people get to those results. But for me the use of "standards" risks having some view this process as nothing more than a recipe, or a cookie cutter; all programs need an income generating activity, a health focal point, a...

Again, I say this more as a development person than a humanitarian assistance expert, where the use of standards may be far more commonplace.

Post by: Tracy Gerstle

Hi Tony,

Thanks for your thoughtful response and cautionary note on the risks of Standards resulting in cookie-cutter approaches to economic recovery responses. Many of the authors of the Standards wanted to avoid just that, since among many groups discussing this topic currently there does seem to be a desire with concepts such as "the relief to development continuum" to prescribe a sequence and even types of interventions that should always be used. Instead, in the intro to the Standards we advocate that economic recovery responses need to be very contextual depending on the factor conditions and nature of the conflict or crisis.

The goal of the Standards is to both advocate for and build consensus around what should be the minimum end results we should aim for and these results have to be somewhat universally accepted---e.g. sustainable financial institutions, longer-term jobs, enterprises that are not harmful to the environment, but to not necessarily advocate for any one approach.

To provide further background--I provide here Sphere's definitions for a standard, indicator and guidance note.

Regards,

Tracy

Defining Standards, Indicators, and Guidance Notes

Standards: These are qualitative in nature and specify the minimum levels to be attained in the sector. There are not a set number of standards for each sector or subsector, though they should be the minimum that address the key thresholds you seek to attain in the given sector. You may have just one standard for a sector or subsector, or you may have several.

Key indicators: These are 'signals' that show whether the standard has been attained. They provide a way of measuring and communicating the impact, or result, of programs as well as the process, or methods, used. The indicators maybe qualitative or quantitative.

Guidance notes: These include specific points to consider when applying the standard and indicators in different situations, guidance on tackling practical difficulties, and advice on priority issues. They may also include critical issues relating to the standard or indicators, and describe dilemmas, controversies or gaps in current knowledge. Guidance notes always relate to a specific key indicator, and the link is signaled in the text. Key indicators should always be read in conjunction with the relevant guidance note. Not every indicator needs a guidance note, but no indicator can have more than one guidance note.

RE: DAY 1: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Post by: Tony Pryor

Many thanks, and I found those documents very helpful. As we move to the second day, let me just follow up with a response from the first exchange.

Clearly, at some level of crisis it's essential to develop (and agree upon) a set of twenty steps to take, five things to bring, the type of analytic tool needed to define the causes of conflict and the roles of different groups and stakeholders, etc.. The problem comes when you move further from a space which needs to be controlled and variables limited (so that people's lives are saved and options for normalcy kept in play for the future) - to a world where people who have been under crisis, under conflict believe that they and people they trust have legitimacy and the degrees of freedom to solve their own problems.

As Ambassador Khalilzad said at the SID Conference this year, the people in Kabul don't just want the streets cleaned, even if the Army Corps can do it quickly and effectively; they want THEIR government, their leaders, their folk, if you will, to be responsible for those cleaned streets, even if the job's not done as well.

And therein, for me, lies the problems with standards as you go further out from disaster relief to stabilization to recovery and development - success comes from letting go, from minimizing the roadmaps and maximizing the degree of empowerment. Donors and implementers can weigh in to help put in place certain enabling conditions that help trend the situation a certain way, but eventually as one gets back to a "normal" situation it's probably counterproductive to think that intervention "standards" can indeed exist.

I applaud your efforts, and I very much appreciate your subtlety in addressing these issues. I think the trick, as always, will be to get those more interested in relief, and those more interested in sustainable development to understand that both sides need to "let go" and to be humble in addressing the worldview of the other.

One problem, with the idea of a continuum, came up in that SID speech, where Ambassador Khalilzad essentially put into question the idea of a nice linear continuum. He argued quite forcefully that BOTH the pacification/stabilization crowd and the sustainable development crowd were missing a key variable, one that had to be put in place right at the beginning, if normalcy stood a chance. And that's the legitimacy and political will on the part of the local populace and its institutions (whatever those may be). In his view, often the humanitarian community (and the military) tend to ignore legitimization (there's a crisis, step aside - we'll feed those people) while the sustainable development folk always say that these are tasks that take time, that are indeed generational, that one should be patient, very patient, He'd say, no - that if legitimacy and governance aren't addressed in the beginning, then the prospects for transitioning to a more sustainable future are diminished; that economic growth has a hard time to grow and prosper without such political empowerment.

(And parenthetically, one could probably argue that any gains in Iraq over the last months probably come from General Petreaus's clear understanding of this logic, as much if not more so than from additional forces...).

Would be interesting to read more on that continuum. But I think that implies a change in what "standards" mean as you travel along it.

I think you're on the right track and I look forward to reading more over the next two days.

Post by: Laura Meissner

Hi Tony,

I found your comment very important and wanted to second Tracy's explanation that we do not mean the Standards to be endorsing any type of cookie-cutter response. The actual term "standards" is used by the Sphere project in their handbook, which has built wide consensus in the humanitarian field, so we are using that same terminology.

You wrote in your comment, "certain things can be put into a checklist, [but] some of this is very site- and economy/ecology-specific." Our goal for this event, and for other dissemination and review events we are holding in the coming months, is to find and remove those parts of the document that are NOT applicable in every situation - we want to pare the Standards down to the essential, minimum standards that apply in every crisis-affected situation. If you see any standards that you don't feel are universally applicable for their technical sector (http://communities.seepnetwork.org/econrecovery), please let us know.

Best regards,

Laura

Post by: Masood Ul Mulk

Hi,

Sitting here in Pakistan on the fringes of FATA in the North West Frontier Province, I think conflict situations are a period of great uncertainty. There are already millions of dollars that have arrived here waiting to move into the notorious FATA to make up for decades of neglect; wonderful programmes on livelihoods, value chains and marketing, micro finance, small infrastructure etc. The resources seem to have been gathered and the teams assembled. But the dark part of it is that there is so little information on the FATA, its livelihood, the likely response of the communities, can one even set foot in it because of the lawlessness. Someone was talking about setting up milk chilling plants there but there was little realisation that little grass grows over there. This is not an unusual situation it's pretty common to conflict areas where a lot of us want to come in and help. In this uncertain situation what does one do? I don't think we have much choice but to avoid blueprints and instead go for an approach that is based on the people in the area and what they want. Most of the places that are in conflict are harsh places where people have survived for centuries under difficult conditions using their own capacity for self help. Can we tap into this? We need institutions that are learning, adaptive, flexible and responsive to do this. Expecting institutions that did not do this in the last sixty years to do it overnight now is wishful thinking. Can we create them or are we locked into project proposals developed miles and miles away with very little relevance to these places. I find it that many of the local institutions that do well in the circumstances have very little knowledge about international standards etc in development and humanitarian aid. But if we scrutinise them carefully they are pretty good and could compete with many of those coming from outside the area because they seem to be driven by a value to change the place. So I would stress social learning and adaptive planning as an important hallmark of this kind of work. In the absence of knowledge and in times of great uncertainty and chaos what choice do we have? It probably needs turning many of the things we do on their heads. When this is said many agree but then how do you explain all this to congressmen or governments obsessed with aid effectiveness? We all need to do a great deal of thinking on this.

The question posed on microfinance in conflict prone environments is also very interesting. Why call it microfinance at all? Microfinance is about financially sustainable institutions that can recover their costs and thereby ensure that access to finance is ensured for the population on a long term basis. Is this really possible in conflict prone environments? We had some very good microfinance institutions running good microfinance programmes here. But in the last few months so many of their staff have been kidnapped that it is impossible for them to go out to recover their outstanding loans. All of them realise that it's becoming impossible to run a microfinance programme without running huge losses and paying endless ransom money to the thugs. None of these institutions has access to endless equity capital to share the risks. Cost of delivery tends to go up enormously in such areas. Under such circumstances you can perhaps run some kind of disciplined credit programme to ensure that the population has access to finance. But this could be a form of social protection and it should not be called microfinance because it does not aim to recover the costs and it also avoids confusing everyone. Calling it microfinance keeps one stuck to this false notion that microfinance is the panacea for every problem, which it certainly is not.

Post by: Tony Pryor

You've raised a wide range of issues, a lot of which I guess could be summarized by the lack of knowledge sharing of examples and experiences that fit the unique situation of the Frontier. (From the point of view of standards, I would then say the "standard" is to seek out ways to promote peer-to-peer sharing of experiences in places of similar culture, experience, risk, etc., rather than saying that the "standard" necessarily is to support microfinance institutions).

By the way, your last paragraphs (about the appropriateness of microfinance in some situations) reminds me of a really interesting intervention - by you? or someone else? - About 4 Speakers Corners back. It addressed a long-time conceptual debate between the military advisors in Afghanistan and the NGO community, concerning whether micro grants were counter-productive. One of the microfinance advocates argued that grants are essentially unsustainable, and do not build upon the types of beliefs and actions which one wants to promote in the longer term. The respondent noted that this was a good concept in the abstract, but in some

circumstances such as the Frontier Province, at the height of conflict and risk, grants may indeed be the only way to go. Now of course there are a lot of ways to give out grants (see the interview with Carmen Velasco, where her micro-credit program was undercut by grants being given out as a prelude to elections by various political parties: http://www.microlinks.org/multimedia/carmenvelasco/player.html) but this is an example where the "standard" is probably less the type of intervention, and more the effort to mold the intervention to the socio-cultural realities of a given time and place.

RE: DAY 1: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS - ROLE OF LOCAL ACTORS, AND MICROFINANCE

Post by: Laura Meissner

Dear Masood,

Thank you for sharing your perspective from the field. As you say, too many programs are developed "miles and miles away with very little relevance to these places" where they will actually take place. Our Standards stress the importance of interacting with local communities and collaborating with local institutions, but do we go far enough?

Tony Pryor made this comment as well earlier today - stressing the entire point is for local institutions to be responsible for implementing and maintaining improvements. We have tried to put in the Standards the importance of having a transition plan for sustainable operations when the program ends or when international staff leave. But, as a situation moves from immediate post-crisis instability to a more stable environment, is there consensus on whether and when international organizations should leave entirely?

I'm also concerned with how realistic and feasible it is for NGOs or other actors to truly understand the situation on the ground, even when they are there. You note that programs are developed for FATA that do not correspond to local reality (e.g. the milk chilling program). But, you also mention that it is difficult and dangerous for international staff to go out and see this reality. In these situations, what is our responsibility? With funds and people at the ready, what should our next step be in situations like this? You mention the success of local organizations, and supporting them is one option.

I think your comments on microfinance are very thought-provoking as well. I would love to hear supporting or dissenting opinions on the question you raise.

Post by: Tony Pryor

One small clarification; it's not necessarily the case that at some point there is no need at all for an international organization, It's rather that their role may change as one travels along the "continuum", from the provider of last resort of services and assistance, to eventually the supporter, friend and peer of local initiatives and institutions.

But there's also the question as to just what "assistance" means in this age of peer-to-peer exchange, Google searches and a highly interconnected world, The MD Office is in fact grappling with that now, through the new KM project that has taken off from AMAP. Its title is no mistake - "Knowledge-driven microenterprise development". Believing that knowledge-driven development implies some different approaches to the development process (or at the least some tweaking of existing strategies), the project is exploring just how "knowledge sharing" as a development tool in and of itself can lead to significant change.

Post by: Carlton Jones

Laura and Masood.

Indeed, the argument for social learning, adaptive planning, and perhaps grant mechanisms which allow the integration of local NGOs and staff to implement (or assist with implementation) are critical in post crisis environments.

As Masood mentions, if the environment is too difficult (dangerous) for international NGOs to enter, we must consider viable alternatives which account for the skills on the ground[1] to assist with program implementation. Similarly, adaptation is important to ensure well designed programs have the flexibility to respond to the ever-changing environment on the ground.

Regarding microfinance, my limited experience in Goma, DRC working with ex-combatants suggested that perhaps small grant programs are more effective than micro-loans. Recognizing the reality of a high likelihood of non-payment, I have observed programs which provide small grants to those that participate in livelihood training, (tied to vouchers) with an expectation that as the target beneficiaries become less transient, the likelihood for microfinance is possible as the environment becomes more stable.

Finally, while I agree that there are many nuances that should be considered with this discussion at large, the idea of Standards is not to be cookie cutter, but to provide guidelines for consideration in any crisis response.

Post by: Mayada El-Zoghbi

Hi Masood,

There have been many examples of MFIs that are able to adapt their methodologies and outreach channels to deal with conflict situations. I encourage you to peruse the www.microlinnks.org website for specific cases of MFIs.

The issue is not whether we should change the name of microfinance in conflict affected countries, but why organizations working in conflict prone areas do not learn from experiences elsewhere and adapt their approaches.

I think that the point behind these SEEP standards is to highlight what is acceptable as a minimum standard. While conflict affected areas certainly need different approaches, I would strongly caution against lowering our standards. There is certainly enough experience out there that should be adapted and it's no longer sufficient to let the failures set the bar.

Post by: Timothy Nourse

To work off of Carlton's response and link it to one of today's questions...

I agree with Carlton that small grants at times can be an effective response to the needs of a particular target group and in certain situations where financial services can not be provided sustainably. This doesn't take away from the notion that financial services can be provided sustainably in crisis and post-crisis environments though, but instead just underlines that financial services in crisis environments (as they are in normal situations) aren't for everyone, but instead need to be designed to serve those who have the best capacity to avail of them. I think this is one of the points that the standards try to address - that if financial services are to be provided, they should be done sustainably and if an organization doesn't have the resources or skills to accomplish this goal, they should conduct other activities (or get out of the environment!)

As one goal of this discussion is to improve the standards, I wonder if there are any specific recommendations for reviewers to improve those that address financial services - for example, do they effectively address the range of financial services that can be provided or the different types of actors that can provide them?

Post by: Laura Meissner

I'd like to second Tim's request for recommendations. The Standards have two separate sections, one on financial services and one on asset transfers, to avoid the very confusion and mixing that we've been discussing here. I suspect that many organizations do small grants, but few talk about it (for the very reasons mentioned - they are seen as unsustainable and not promoting entrepreneurial behavior). Perhaps by bringing this activity out in the open, we can better understand what good practice is with small grants. So, I would request suggestions for improvement for both sections - financial services and assets.

I think the biggest risks for grants undercutting microfinance are when grants and loans are given out in the same community with no coordination, or when grants are "disguised" as microfinance - that is, given out with little to no intention of actually trying to get the money back with interest. I have a suspicion that this happens when there is large pressure to "get the money out the door," and these activities are called "microfinance" because it is a popular term.

Perhaps too it has to do with differing motives and timelines - in the long term setting up a profitable MFI has a high and sustainable impact, but in the short term it seems easier simply to give out the money.

Post by: Laura Meissner

Dear Tony,

You make a good point - SEEP itself is founded on the belief that knowledge and learning do increase the effectiveness of development programs. We do have a standard on local staffing and transitions, and we have another standard on collecting and applying learning. This one, though, does not include any specific language about sharing specifically with local institutions and with establishing a peer-to-peer role with them. What do other readers think - should language like this be included?

A huge challenge as always with knowledge management is finding ways to make sure that, even once the knowledge is documented and published, that it actually gets into the hands of the people who need it, and then is put into practice. This is true with any situation but especially so with post-crisis economic development, and the pressures and compressed timeline that often occur with it.

Post by: Mayada El-Zoghbi

Thanks Laura for tying this discussion back to the standards.

I wonder if we need something additional on the "Standards Common to All Categories" about truth in reporting or using appropriate names and definitions or what have you.

I recognize there is already a bit on transparency and differentiating economic recovery from relief work in common standard 3, but perhaps this needs more visibility in the standards.

Post by: Sophea Touch

Hi all,

I agreed. Target group is very important for relief or development. WVC have just conducted several research on conflict analysis using Local Capacities Fore Peace framework; we found a lot of problems related to target and transparency. One of the results is that some part of development activities strengthen culture of conflict in communities; increasing suspicion among community members.

We also combine Sphea training and Local Capacity for Peace. Some part of these frameworks are similar. It contributes each other.

Post by: Sophea Touch

Yes. In doing program in community, we should conduct assessment focusing on SWOT. For WVC, we utilize livelihood framework to analyze the situation of the community. In addition, several of assessment questions are centered on conflict, social network in the communities. They can survive before NGOs start working in the area. In recently, we conducted social impact of the our project using Local Capacities for Peace. It is interested results emerging from the research.

RE: DAY 1: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Post by: Lafir Mohamed

Dear Laura and friends

1. Yes there should be an effective participatory assessment (SWOT, PRA, PMM of PMSD or any other participatory problem analysis tools) with the targeted community. Where they can realize the state of their livelihoods and may be in a position to plan their development with the help of the facilitators. Becoz we believe the livelihood systems of the communities are geographical, community, political and context specific which defers community to community and palaces to places.

2. Direct transfer in the name of "economic development" without analyzing and identifying the correct package is the problem in the post crisis situation. It has to be handled very carefully. There were certain ground examples

> 1. Organizations just provided a cash grant (10,000 SLR) as a livelihood support for the community members without considering their livelihood pattern. Which was neither sufficient to start their livelihoods nor to get further assistance from other agencies. (If the other agencies see some org is working they didn't duplicate. The assistance from the organization made this community away from other organizations and spoilt their livelihoods as well.
>
> 2. There were instances where community was provided with the handicapped solutions, eg: fishing nets were provided not the other accessories (fishing net is cheap and can be bought very easily in big quantities, but the other equipments are the crucial), small canoes not suitable for the conditions of the areas.
>
> 3. There were also certain interventions where these direct transferred worked to build the livelihoods of the communities. Where these things were part of a livelihood development package not in isolation..

The following were the key challenges faced in the livelihood development interventions.

- Less awareness of the Disaster resistance sustainable livelihood approaches.
- Confusion of the three instruments that are used in livelihood development and their use in different time frames.
- Less attention on knowledge transferring, more focus on donation of physical assets.
- Less attention on value chain development, mostly concentrating on surface matters.
- Less consideration of inclusion of disabled, gender sensitivity, conflict sensitivity, etc.
- Optimistic views on beneficiaries, try to change everything at once
- Lack of technological experiences and know-how
- Lack of experience on participatory technology development within the community

So before starting the programmes it is very essential to have a clear assessment of the community and consider the above things.

Post by: Jayantha Gunasekera

Hi all,

I would like to contribute some thoughts towards the day 1 discussion.

Q 1:

We have gathered experience from working is Post Tsunami context in Eastern and Southern Sri Lanka, Post conflict context in Eastern province of Sri Lanka and Post earth quake context in Kashmir in Pakistan. With our experience I suggest pre-intervention investigations should cover a few main areas.

1. In the first place, we should try and understand about main livelihood options of pre-disaster conditions. Next we should learn how the market systems have operated before. The actors of the market chain, the service providers, the business environment within which the systems operated. This is very essential to design our interventions not to distort the system but to bring back the system to its basic operations. This will also help us to understand more long outstanding development issues of the livelihood market systems so that we make sustainable interventions.

2. Then a damage assessment of the particular sector to understand what are the critical livelihood assets (Individual and community level) that needs urgent attention in order to put the system back in operation.

These two actions will be able to prompt us to immediate responses we should make in order to put the markets systems back into operation. It also will give us which institutions or individuals should be involved or assisted to make sure the interventions are sustainable. More importantly our interventions can be targeted at addressing the un-attended development issues of the market system while making sure the immediate livelihood needs are addressed.

Q 2:

Once the post crises context is identified, in our opinion there is not much deviation from the standard interventions. The focus should remain on market system development/value chain development, business service enhancement etc. Only difference would be the replacement of damaged livelihoods assets mean while ensuring these replacements can meet the challenges of the modern market systems (present and future). It is also important to note that post crises situations create new market opportunities and livelihood opportunities. These opportunities can be used as interim options till the affected communities revert back to their original livelihoods or new and diversified livelihood options that address a particular gap in the system that was existed and/or of future.

Q3:

The interventions should be a combination of direct and indirect. The crises context creates a need for direct intervention as well. But one thing we have to be careful is that these direct interventions should be strategically linked with a sustainable system (organization or mechanism).

DAY TWO: FINANCIAL SERVICES AND ASSETS PROGRAMMING

DAY 2: ECONOMIC RECOVERY STANDARDS

Post by: Tracy Gerstle

Thanks to everyone for the thoughtful posts to date.

To build on a thread from Mayada's, Tony's and Tim's comments is there consensus as to whether interventions aimed at promoting the re-emergence of livelihoods and effected economies can and should be pursued at the same time as humanitarian relief?

Tony notes that this is commonly accepted practice, whereas Mayada and Tim question what is the consensus?

Tell us what you think. What have your experiences in these environments illustrated as to the possibilities of conducting both types of interventions staged or simultaneously? How does it impact targeting of those affected?

Post by: Tracy Gerstle

Laura and I would also like to introduce two more questions to the discussion, while reminding everyone that we also welcome continuation of yesterday's discussion, if there are questions you would like to pose to the group, or thoughts and examples you would like to share:

Today's new questions are:

How sustainable and market-based can financial services provision be in crisis and post-crisis environments?

What pre-crisis planning are microfinance and other financial services institutions responsible to undertake?

Post by: Naoise Mac Sweeney

Naoise Mac Sweeney. PSD in Conflict-Affected Environments Project, the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED). The DCED is a consortium of donor agencies working for sustainable poverty alleviation through development of "the private sector".

Dear All,

Firstly, I'd like to thank Tracy, Laura, and all the other authors of the 'Standards' for their sterling work in moving this field forward. As Mayada suggested, we are still some way from getting universal agreement on minimum standards for intervention in post-crisis situations, but it is an important first step to open up the discussion!

On the issue of 'Standards' themselves: As Tony points out, the 'Standards' are broad and qualitative, and embody good-practice principles rather than being concrete indices of impact. In an ideal world, we would be able to set standards with quantitative, reliably-measurable results. However, methods of results measurement and M&E in 'normal' situations are themselves far from standardised, and are further complicated in a post-crisis environment by issues of the 'relief-development' nexus, problems with data collection, and peacebuilding needs (when the crisis in question is violent conflict). Until we have developed reliable impact

assessment methodologies, tailored specifically to post-crisis situations, it is impossible to set any firm standards. The SEEP 'Standards' therefore reflect the current state of knowledge, and are a good foundation on which to build.

As regards target populations: This is not just a big debate for those working in conflict countries, but also within private sector development (PSD) as a whole. In conflict-affected environments, the issue of target populations becomes especially crucial, as it has implications for peace-building and conflict-prevention. Conflict is closely connected to horizontal inequalities between groups in society, and we can potentially reduce these by targeting certain groups within the population. However, this can backfire as targeting groups can sometimes reinforce divisions within society. There are really no easy answers here.

I look forward to more lively discussion!

Post by: Mayada El-Zoghbi

Dear Naoise and others,

I am very interested in your statement that we need impact assessment methodologies before it is possible to set firm standards. Experience from the microfinance sector would refute this statement.

Much of the "standards" that have been set in this industry have come from years of experience, without sound impact assessment measurement. Rather, the industry has established standards through self-reported data by hundreds of microfinance institutions. Through this data we have come to realize what is possible and in a sense that has become the "minimum standards". Although we do not have a comparable set of standards as the SEEP or Sphere standards, there is a somewhat informal "code of conduct" or norms that are widely accepted in the industry.

The process to get there started with what was termed "best practices" at the time and this included things like setting cost-recovery interest rates. While they were termed "best practices" in a sense they can be viewed as similar guidelines or minimum standards as those established by the SEEP standards. The next step was an agreement on what would be the indicators to measure these minimum standards and then a forum or place where this information could be transparently reported (the MBB).

While in an ideal world we would have more accurate impact information to help us set the standards for economic recovery programs, I do not believe we need this to move toward better practices.

I'm interested to hear what others think about this issue.

Post by: Naoise Mac Sweeney

Re: Day 2: Economic Recovery Standards

Dear Mayada and others,

I think you are absolutely right when you say that our current sense of standards derives from years of experience, lessons learned and best practices. I also agree that guidelines such as the SEEP 'Standards' are an important way of crystallizing best practices into a widely-accessible framework. Developing indicators to measure these standards are another step on from this, as you say.

Reliable impact assessments would, however, enable the more objective judgment of best practices, and in the current climate of public accountability and targets, there is an increasing amount of pressure for us all to point to tangible results. Having said that, I agree that indicators and assessments are not strictly necessary to move forward. I imagine we still have a fair amount of work to do on collating and analysing best practice first, before we move on to indicators.

Echoing Mayada again, it would be great to hear others' views on this subject.

Post by: Laura Meissner

RE: Day 2: Economic Recovery Standards

Dear Naoise,

On the issue of targeting, what do the readers think of Tim's question? Does our standard which encourages direct as well as indirect methods to reach beneficiaries "read ...as advocating just an either/or"?

If we are in consensus that both direct and indirect (e.g. market interventions) methods can be appropriate, then I wonder if there is guidance we could include in the standards on when which approach might be more effective. Currently, a guidance note on the issue says that actors in a market who have only been slightly affected may benefit most from indirect assistance (e.g. strengthening the entire value chain), whereas if a population has been very hard-hit, they will need direct assistance. Yet in other situation (for example, an MFI providing financial services to a refugee camp), as Naoise points out, only providing services to the target population alone will cause resentment among non-refugees in the area, and is not a very sustainable way of running an MFI (the Standards point this out as well).

Do we have clear "signals" from the environment that point to direct versus indirect interventions, or is every situation different?

DAY THREE: EMPLOYMENT CREATION AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

DAY 3: ECONOMIC RECOVERY STANDARDS

Post by: Tracy Gerstle

Thanks everyone for day 2 of the discussion. Laura and I appreciated the comments from Jayantha, Lafir and Sophea regarding criteria and tools for field assessments—particularly the lessons from Sri Lanka on the need to map what existed before and the damage sustained. Tony and Masood's comments stirred some excellent conversation regarding the need to work with and through local institutions and help them to re-establish and/or maintain legitimacy.

One issue that came up yesterday, but around which there was less consensus was the question of asset transfers—and what are the challenges of doing them well. As Tony noted, in the case of ProMujer and Carmen Velasco, grants undermined the institution's ability to collect on loans. In the Standards we have a entire section on asset transfers. The main messages of this section underlines the need to consider the short and long term impacts of these transfers so as to meet immediate needs, while strengthening but not undercutting other economic interventions.

Do participants have practical experience with environments where there were both asset transfers and commercial loans simultaneously? What were the impacts? Was there any coordination between the two activities, and if so what was the result?

Post by: Tracy Gerstle

Laura and I would also like to build on the prior two day's discussions, but posing two new questions that ask in the context of job creation and enterprise development if it is possible to blend short term responses with outcomes desired in the longer term. Namely:

How well can transitory work provision feed into longer-term employment possibilities?

How should considerations of enterprise competitiveness in the long-term factor into identifying and supporting enterprises in the short term?

Post by: Laura Meissner

RE: Asset Transfer and Value Chains

Dear Lafir,

Your comments give us a bridge between yesterday's discussion on assets and the discussion questions today on enterprise support and competitiveness. You write that there is "Less attention on value chain development, mostly concentrating on surface matters."

Your examples show all too well that when programs provide assets without understanding beneficiaries' role in the larger value chain, the asset itself is wasted (for example with the fishing nets) or may even be detrimental (as with the cash grants that were too small to affect participants' livelihoods and in fact kept other organizations away from investing in the community).

The Standards try to address the importance of considering the effect on the local market even with short-term asset programs, and about not competing with financial services. However, perhaps it might be helpful for us to include language on ensuring a market assessment and understanding what destroyed assets are needed most, and what other goods and services are needed for people to re-start their market activities. What do you think?

Finally, I am interested by your listing "Confusion of the three instruments that are used in livelihood development and their use in different time frame" as a challenge. Can you say more about this?

Post by: Laura Meissner

RE: Day 1: Discussion Questions - Role of Local Actors, and Microfinance [Economic Recovery Standards Discussion]

Hi Mayada,

I'd like to put this question out to the other discussants. The common standards include language about being transparent and sharing the results of assessments and learning with the external community. Should we also include strong language on using appropriate terms and definitions (there is a glossary in the Standards) to ensure that practitioners and donors can better understand and make use of the knowledge that we are sharing?

Post by: Sarah Bailey

Hello all,

I am Sarah from the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute. We undertake research with a goal of influencing humanitarian policy and practice. Much of our research concerns transitional contexts, fragile states and protracted crises.

Much ground has been covered (good work, SEEP!). My comments will be broadly related to this day 3 question ('Do participants have practical experience with environments where there were both asset transfers and commercial loans simultaneously? What were the impacts? Was there any coordination between the two activities, and if so what was the result?'). My focus here is on grants/cash transfers, though distribution of other commodities and assets are also forms of income transfers.

I think it's quite telling that the humanitarian and development spheres have developed different language regarding grants in crisis and post-crisis contexts (humanitarian guidelines and reports typically use the term 'cash transfers' or 'cash based responses'), whereas development tends to frame such activities in relation to financial institutions, and in particular, to microfinace. But essentially we are talking about giving people money, without the obligation to repay. My understanding is that grants can be controversial in development because of important reasons already given in this Speaker's Corner, namely that they may undermine repayment of loans and therefore endanger sustainable provision of financial services. Cash transfers have been (somewhat) controversial in humanitarian action for completely different reasons: they are quite a shift from the model of in-kind assistance (giving people food when they lack food, giving people seeds when they need to plant...) to giving people the money to meet their needs, rebuild their livelihoods, construct houses, etc. They invoke questions of whether aid recipients make the right choices, whether they can cause inflation, if they disadvantage women, and a number of other 'fears' that generally are not realised in practice. On the whole, cash transfers are gaining force as an acceptable means of assisting people in the wake of crisis (when appropriate) and also as a part of social protection strategies - regular transfers to vulnerable households to assist them in meeting basic needs, much as we do in developed world through pensions, food stamps and welfare programmes. A few examples of cash grants in emergency/recovery contexts are:

Cash grants in China for temporary shelter construction and basic needs (following the earthquake in Sichuan, the Chinese government has reportedly distributed cash to all the affected survivors, using both monthly grants (for basic needs) and one-time grants (for households to build temporary shelters); Cash for basic needs and livelihoods in Niger (in response to the 2005 food crisis in Niger, the International Federation of the Red Cross and British Red Cross distributed $240 to 5,713 households with the

objectives of meeting immediate needs, avoiding coping strategies and restocking herds); Cash grants in Pakistan following the earthquake (the government of Pakistan launched the Livelihood Support Cash Grant programme in March 2006 in order to support the livelihoods and immediate needs the most vulnerable households, distributing $300 to 267,402 households, Save the Children gave 5,100 households $190; 375 village shopkeepers received cash transfer of up to $380 to facilitate the reconstruction and re-stocking of shops; Catholic Relief Services provided cash grants in addition to the distribution of shelter materials so that households could spend the money on other costs associated with rebuilding); Grants to tsunami-affected households in Aceh (the British Red Cross gave $1,000 to households in Aceh, allowing a range of expenditures that included assets, education and services); Cash transfers for Disaster Risk Reduction in Niger (In 2008, CARE began distributing cash grants of $178, paid in two installments, to vulnerable households as part of its Disaster Risk Reduction programming); Cash for basic needs, housing assistance and property repair following Hurricane Katrina (as of May 2006, payments made by the U.S government totaled $7.6 billion).

It's not evident to tease out from the above examples contexts where commercial services were also occurring. One can assume that they are in the USA, China, Pakistan, and probably the Aceh context. There is likely something to learn about looking at responses where grants did not impact commercial services and ones where it has, and it's important to separate out causality: that non-repayment or harm to financial services has to do with the distribution of grants, and not the debt accumulation and loss of assets caused by the disaster or crisis. In tsunami responses, this issue was specifically raised in Lesley Adam's review of cash-based responses: The concern voiced by many microfinance institutions (MFIs) that cash grants would negatively affect the microfinance markets was justified. This fundamental problem had two apparent causes: first, the absence of links between grants and microfinance agencies; and, second, the failure to adequately separate grants from microfinance. Relief agencies failed to realise that cash grants for livelihoods recovery were taking them beyond the limits of their capacity or expertise, and MFIs failed to appreciate that many of their clients needed a product that was not in their usual portfolio, that is, their clients needed a grant not a loan. (http://www.odi.org.uk/hpg/papers/BGP_Tsunamilessons.pdf).

There is also evidence that some evidence that cash grants in emergency/recovery contexts can help restart flailing credit markets because they are often used for debt repayment.

Meeting the immediate needs of vulnerable populations recovering from crisis and supporting long-term strategies are not incompatible, but funding/coordination systems (and our programming mindsets) aren't set up to make combined strategies a straightforward task. There are also hard choices, given limited resources, about reaching the most vulnerable as well as those who have the capacity to rebuild and pursue productive livelihoods. Above all, it's important that we not forget that crisis and recovery contexts have unique and complex features where we can't move forward with development or humanitarian paradigm's uncritically; assessments and understanding the context is critical to implement appropriate responses.

Post by: Laura Meissner

Sarah, your point about causality (is it really the grants that are undermining loan repayment, or is it simply that clients don't have the money to repay?) is an important one, as well as the realization that small grants may even be used to repay loans, thereby bolstering the climate of repayment.

I think your further comments really relate to today's questions, too. You write, "There are also hard choices, given limited resources, about reaching the most vulnerable as well as those who have the capacity to rebuild and pursue productive livelihoods." I think this gets to the heart of our discussion question for today about choosing whom to support. Is it acceptable, even good, for enterprise development organizations to work with those businesses and markets that are most likely to be profitable and successful long-term, even though these may not be the people hardest-hit by crisis?

There is also the question of traditional livelihoods versus new, more profitable activities. The Standards say that "New activities should not undermine traditional livelihoods" and cautions that households and businesses entering into new economic activities (presumably at the suggestion of the international agency) should understand the risks involved, and that households and businesses need to be empowered through access to information about the different choices open to them and the risks and benefits of each. As practitioners, what responsibilities do we have in terms of promoting profitable value chains or economic activities in a post-crisis environment? How can we best fulfill them in a way that is realistic in a post-crisis situation?

Post by: Alison Griffith

This looks as if it has been a rich discussion and I am sorry not have joined in sooner. Before it closes I wanted to make a couple of very quick points from Practical Action's perspective. My colleague Mike Albu has been involved in the SEEP Standards and would have participated in this discussion but had a baby girl yesterday!

The first point we would make is that to be useful the standards need to be shorter or at least made more accessible. We cannot see time-pressed practitioners having the time to going through them in the current form.

Through our work with Oxfam and IRC we have recently been involved in piloting a tool for market assessment in emergencies (for use in the very early stages) called EMMA. The pilots are indicating that there is a need to find practical ways to invest in building capacity of practitioners for understanding and analyzing markets. These are not skills that many agencies involved in humanitarian work have in-house. Do people have experiences of training and mentoring that would help develop that capacity?

Looking forward to hearing what others think.

Post by: Mary Morgan

Alison's point is critical to the process of developing standards. The standards have emerged from economic development practice (microfinance and market development). They are generic yet applicable across contexts and regions--therefore they are too detailed or under detailed. And the idea is the standards will become the compass to define how organizations work post conflict for international NGOs headquarter staff, country level country directors/chief of parties, senior managers, middle managers and field staff. That is a pretty long chain of command in which everyone needs to know what market failure is, what market development is, what are the pros and cons of cash grants versus loans, etc. Capacity is key, all along the chain of command.

Economic recovery is a post conflict/disaster phase. When we look at how the proposed standards are laid out the assessment and analysis standards are a means on how to determine the opportunities for market development which embraces: enterprise development, financial services which is a support market for market development, employment creation, and the use of assets to promote market development.

Alison you are right, no one who lands on the ground is going to take these standards and start checking them off as they develop programs. BUT when you do land on the ground to initiate and facilitate economic recovery the assessment and analysis standards do provide guidance (although in economic terms which can be intimidating) in how to analyze the supply and demand of markets--financial service markets, commodity, service and manufactured goods markets.

The capacity question is one that our field really needs to look at...we are asking NGOs to plan projects and field level staff to execute the projects with very little-to-no technical support training. and then we wonder why goods and money are just handed out, markets are distorted, loans aren't paid--thus the idea that maybe standards could shift economic recovery efforts from being supply driven to market driven.

Capacity building is another discussion altogether. Maybe if we start with coming to some sort of agreement on what the standards should be to guide us as the first step. Then the next step is how do we enforce it, and if the standards are going to be enforced, then how can NGOs get ALL their people to understand the content of standards in order to implement the standards.

Just a couple of thoughts, and a bit of a ramble :)

Post by: Laura Meissner

Thanks, Alison, for your important suggestion that the Standards be shorter and/or more accessible. This is something the writing team has struggled with, trying to balance the need to include important information with the need to be brief so that practitioners can access the information they need in a short amount of time.

Mary, you suggest that the terminology and language can also be a barrier - this has been another challenge for us. The field's terminology can be quite difficult for a non-expert to understand, and even for those "in the know" some terms overlap, while others come into or out of vogue.

Participants - how can we ensure that the Standards have all the necessary information and are technically correct, yet are accessible to non-specialists? Is the language too technical as it stands? How can we do better?

Post by: Borany Penh

This is another great discussion on Microlinks. There are so many different threads already covered, I'd just like to simply ask a few questions.

Re: the capacity development aspect, it can be a real constraint to actualizing results on the ground. Should the international community be more proactive about training people and organizations to provide economic recovery assistance? It may be a next step in the development of the Standards to provide training on them. But are there already some good training programs in this area that we need to be aware of?

In regards to enforcement of the Standards - how would their use be realistically enforced? Are there lessons from the SPHERE guidelines?

I would also think there should be some periodic review of these Standards in case contexts change or show us something new we didn't realize before. This area of expertise is still evolving in my view and we haven't fully understood what works and what doesn't in post-crisis environments.

Post by: Mary Morgan

RE: Day 3: Economic Recovery Standards

Good point about the periodic review---

In our world, enforcement is usually aligned with donors who provide the funding--in order to get the funds you need to present a proposal that indicates you will meet the standards. Somewhat how the MF industry has grown. CAMEL came in 1989 and from there proposals for funds to develop MF programs had to illustrate how they would evolve into a financially sustainable institution within a prescribed period of time.....

Post by: Laura Meissner

Dear Borany and Mary,

Regarding capacity building: Regarding Sphere's lessons, they have indeed created a full training curriculum (available as a free download) as well as a TOT, and they offer periodic trainings in conjunction with partner organizations. (For readers not familiar with Sphere you can visit www.sphereproject.org).

Currently our initiative does not include support to develop a training course, but it is definitely a long-term objective for us.

You have a good point that many quality training programs already exist (though many may be in-house). Does anyone have suggestions for us on possible training partners or existing training in this field?

Periodic review: This is definitely crucial, especially as we recognize that this is an emerging area of knowledge. We have been working with Sphere for guidance since the beginning of this process, and a periodic review process is in fact one of the requirements for applying to join the Sphere "family" of standards (which we plan to do). As the home for this initiative, SEEP is looking for continuing support so that we can ensure this will happen. Look for a post from us tomorrow as we wrap-up, sharing our next steps and ways for everyone to get involved and ensure that these Standards represent the most current knowledge and good practice in these environments.

Enforcement of the Standards: I think this is one of the toughest issues to figure out! Mary suggests that standards gain enforcement through donor conditions on funding (as with microfinance). However, standards also take time to be universally accepted in a field. In that way, too, enforcement is tied into gaining buy-in - when standards are accepted as legitimate by a critical mass of donors and practitioner organizations, there will be pressure on non-complying organizations.

Post by: Masood Ul Mulk

Hi, why should capacity be restricted to training? One aspect of capacity in microfinance which has struck me is the risk taking capacity that needs to be built in organisations delivering microfinance. Here on the frontier in Pakistan, some of the multilaterals established huge credit lines for micro credit almost Rs 1.2 billion. Although it was lying around for four years, not a penny was utilised because the institutions did not exist on the ground. They expected that some of the NGOs already on the ground would readily jump in to use the credit line. But none was willing to use it because the dispersed nature of the population, the poor state of infrastructure, subsistence nature of the livelihoods and the presence of grass root movements against interest based systems all combined to multiply risk many times and increase the cost of delivery. A few institutions in the region that had that capacity built up by donors or government have managed to do pretty well in managing the risks. A good example of the risks were the institutions that lost a large part of their portfolio in the earthquake of 2005. The only institutions that survived this were those that had the risk taking capacity and not the ones that had the best trained staff. Where capacity was restricted to trainings or improving the systems in a few years all the good staff were gone and the systems continued to lie idle.

Post by: Tony Pryor

Actually, a brilliant comment on the meaning of capacity, not just related to this Speaker's Corner. It's become almost entirely shorthand for personal skills and capabilities. But the idea that it reflects the overall ability/potentiality of an institution to do its job is interesting. Of course, at some point the term covers so much territory its utility drops. But it's gotten me thinking. Fascinating.

Post by: Borany Penh

RE: Day 3: Economic Recovery Standards

I agree that all these aspects of capacity building are related. We should also be thinking about the incentives and trust relations that are necessary to enable organizations on the ground. But as it relates to the Standards, the impetus seems to have been the existence of uneven knowledge or conflicting opinions on what to do in economic recovery. So assuming the Standards are sound, we do need to think about the learning and application process, which training can be a large part of. It's the application and operationalizing of learning and new knowledge that always seems to be hardest part of "lessons learned." This is why I would like to know if there are model training programs in this subject area - model in the sense of content and behavior change.

Post by: Mary Morgan

Hey Masood,

I'm curious as to how the institutions with stronger capacity gained that capacity if training wasn't the way... risk taking capacity would require leadership and skills somewhere in the chain of command.... wouldn't it? How was that capacity built?

SPEAKER'S CORNER WRAP-UP

Post by: Laura Meissner

Dear Speaker's Corner Participants,

Thank you all for a great discussion! We covered quite a lot of ground, including:

- Debate on implementing economic recovery activities at the same time as humanitarian relief. Is there yet a consensus that this is achievable and good practice?
- The need to work with and through local institutions, enabling them to re-establish and/or maintain legitimacy. When should international agencies step back, and what is their role then?
- Targeting: Agreement that programs can target their beneficiaries directly, reach them through market-wide or broader mechanisms, or do both - and ideas about when each is appropriate and what the risks are involved for each strategy.
- The importance of assessments, broadly: assessing the market and understanding what was there before and what happened during the crisis; understanding what interventions will be necessary and what complementary activities are needed; ensuring that services are demand-driven. We also had some discussion on the lack of a strong evidence base in this field, and on the need for more impact assessments to confirm which interventions and strategies are truly the most effective.
- The importance of capacity building (of local institutions), and what form that takes: training; knowledge gathering and sharing; and even building up the risk capacity of local institutions to do microfinance or other activities.
- Microfinance in a post-conflict situation: Although it's generally accepted that commercially sustainable microfinance is possible even in very difficult situations, we had a lively debate on here about this issue.
- Grants and microfinance: when cash transfers are detrimental to financial services, but remembering that grants don't always compete with loans and in fact can be complementary. The terminology we use and the view of using small grants depends on the background of the implementing organization (humanitarian versus microfinance).
- Asset transfers and value chain assessments: the importance of understanding the role that your beneficiaries play in the value chain; and of understanding which destroyed assets are hardest to replace or what complementary assets are also needed.
- The Standards themselves: how to make them accessible to non-technical-experts - all up and down the chain of implementation, from donors to international staff to local staff? Suggestions for developing training on the Standards; how to enforce the Standards; periodic review to ensure the Standards reflect the most current knowledge and practice.

The discussion doesn't end here! Stay involved with our efforts to build consensus and good practice:

- First, you can continue to post your replies and comments here through Friday. You'll be able to read the conversation at www.microlinks.org/sc/econrecovery even after the discussion ends.
- Read the draft Standards on SEEP's website: http://communities.seepnetwork.org/econrecovery.
- Share your comments at any time, at http://communities.seepnetwork.org/econrecovery/discussion.
- Attend the draft Standards dissemination and intensive review at SEEP's Annual Conference on Tuesday, November 4. Register at http://www.seepnetwork.org/conference.
- Starting in 2009, your organization can field-test the Standards or co-host a consultation - stay tuned to our site (http://communities.seepnetwork.org/econrecovery) for details!

Post by: Anna Van der Heijden

Dear All,

On behalf of the microLINKS team, many thanks for participating in this forum. Of course a special thank you goes to Laura Meissner and Tracy Gerstle for hosting this online discussion and guiding it with their questions and input. We had 93 participants from 13 different countries join us -- with even more reading the postings on the Website. We hope you were all able to learn about new projects or approaches, share your own experiences, and meet other professionals in your field.

We will develop a "compilation document" that captures all the messages, and share it on the Speaker's Corner page at www.microlinks.org/sc/econrecovery, among the other resources already shared by the hosts and participants.

Next month, October 14-16, we're holding a Speaker's Corner on Poverty Outreach, titled: "Microfinance and Enterprise Development: Effective Tools to Eradicate Extreme Poverty?". More information and sign-up information will be published this coming week on the microLINKS Website.

If you are interested in updates on future microLINKS events and new resources, please sign up for the monthly microLINKS newsletter, Connections, at www.microLINKS.org/connections.

CONTRIBUTORS' LIST

TRACY GERSTLE
tgerstle@chfinternational.org

LAURA MEISSNER
The SEEP Network
meissner@seepnetwork.org

LAFIR MOHAMED
Practical Action
lafir.mohamed@practicalaction.org.lk

MAYADA EL-ZOGHBI
Banyan Global
melzoghbi@banyanglobal.com

TONY PRYOR
International Resources Group
tpryor@irgltd.com

MASOOD UL MULK
Sarhad Rural Support Programme
khushamadu@yahoo.co.uk

CARLTON JONES
J.E. Austin Associates
cjones@jeaustin.com

TIMOTHY NOURSE
AED
tnourse@aed.org

SOPHEA TOUCH
World Vision
sophea_touch@wvi.org

JAYANTHA GUNASEKERA
Practical Action
jayantha.gunasekera@gmail.com

NAOISE MAC SWEENEY
DCED
nm277@cam.ac.uk

SARAY BAILEY
Overseas Development Institute
s.bailey@odi.org.uk

ALISON GRIFFITH
Practical Action
alison.griffith@practicalaction.org.uk

MARY MORGAN
mmorgan@economicsunplugged.com

BORANY PENH
USAID
bpenh@usaid.gov

ANNA VAN DER HEIJDEN
International Resources Group
avanderheijden@irgltd.com