Chapter Event: The Future of Project Implementation in International Development

EVENT SUMMARY

Online via Zoom
Thursday, May 28, 2020 12:00 - 1:30 PM

Moderator
Sarah Rose | Policy Fellow, Center for Global Development

Speakers
Jon Cooper | Partner, Itad
Annie Killefer | Senior Technical Advisor, Humanitarian Assistance, Blumont
Jennifer Poidatz | Vice President for Humanitarian Response, Catholic Relief Services

Event Description

How will COVID-19 affect the way implementers deliver programming? As the international development community continues to grapple with the current COVID-19 reality, organizations are starting to prepare for the future and the need to pivot programming, rearrange priorities or adapt to drastically different conditions and requirements. What will the new normal look like for international development project implementation? What does this mean for programming? SID-Washington discussed COVID-19’s effect on the international development community and heard from several organizations about how they are adapting their programming. Our panel included INGOs, contractors, and think tanks.
Key Takeaways

1 Adapting programming to address crises
Jennifer Poidatz (Catholic Relief Services) began the discussion by emphasizing the importance of being flexible, making adjustments, and supporting newly vulnerable populations within large scale development programs during the COVID-19 pandemic and other disasters. To link humanitarian aid response with more long-term development efforts, Ms. Poidatz discussed the opportunities provided by cash programming and e-vouchers. Especially in times of crisis, cash assistance can be linked with state-supported social protection systems to aid both development and immediate humanitarian needs. Relationships with local actors have also shifted, as the pandemic affects travel restrictions and donor spending. Ms. Poidatz underlined the role of partnerships that are grounded in mutual understanding of respective strengths, accountability, and risk mitigation. Faith-based health networks are especially essential in a pandemic response context where the formal health network is not as strong. Coordination that promotes inclusion and local leadership has always been critical and becomes even more so in a global health crisis.

2 Humanitarian aid for refugees in the context of COVID-19
Annie Killefer (Blumont) spoke about project implementation from the perspective of camp management and refugees. She framed the current context as an emergency within an emergency, or a pandemic on top of an existing humanitarian crisis. Displaced persons have a unique vulnerability to COVID-19, as factors such as close proximity in camps, limited water supplies, decimated health systems, and a dependence on humanitarian aid all exacerbate enduring inequalities. Ms. Killefer emphasized building relationships with local leaders as a way to reach remote, displaced communities. She specifically discussed the handing over of activities such as resource distribution to trusted local partners. To scale up the humanitarian response with an increase in donor funding, implementers can leverage existing projects and relationships to benefit their clients.

3 Developing technology for monitoring and evaluation
Jon Cooper (Itad) provided perspective on monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) programming in international development. He cited the use of technology, such as phone surveys, interviews, machine learning, and artificial intelligence as future avenues for capturing evidence and evaluating the success of aid programming. He characterized Itad’s role as an interface between developers of new technology and stakeholders, translating their language into conclusions for local clients. Similar to Ms. Poidatz and Ms. Killefer, Mr. Cooper affirmed the importance of equitable partnerships with local actors and capacity building efforts – in this case to properly collect data. Flexible programming must include integrated MEL that matches the specific needs and material resources of a community. To successfully adapt MEL to existing programs, Mr. Cooper discussed building social capital through collaboration, experimentation, and sustained incremental change.