Time to Listen:
Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid

February 13, 2013
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Local people are seen as beneficiaries and aid recipients
“There was too much assistance too fast, and international agencies should be slower in their distribution. People should help themselves first and only request and receive assistance when they cannot help themselves. By giving out so easily, you are turning them into beggars. Some villages received too much to stop and think of the value of all the things they have been given.”

Policeman in Thailand
In a Collaborative Aid System

Local people are seen as colleagues and drivers of their own development
Aid providers focus on identifying needs
“Donors look at immediate needs, but may not be aware of why there’s a problem. Why is the child sick? They need to stay longer to get an idea of the real problems.”

A person in Kabul, Afghanistan
In a collaborative aid system

Aid providers would focus on supporting/reinforcing capacities and identifying local priorities
Aid providers use pre-planned and pre-determined programs
“Donors want to put communities into the same mold. Instead of adapting project activities to fit the funding, the funding should be adapted to meet our needs…donors should be tuned in to our needs and priorities. They should not impose. They should ask for input from the bottom, from the grassroots level. Projects that parachute from on high will not succeed.”

Staff of a government-run rural development program in Mali
In a collaborative aid system

Context-relevant programs would be developed jointly by recipient communities and aid providers
4. In the externally driven aid delivery system

Aid providers drive decision-making
“Participatory planning is just a phrase. Money and time are limited from the donor side and an agenda has already been set long before agencies go into communities.”

Local government official in Sri Lanka
There would be collaborative decision-making by aid providers and recipients.
Aid providers focus on spending on a pre-determined schedule
“The lack of flexibility and short time spans for projects creates difficult conditions. Short-time approaches are one of the main factors that instigate failure. In spite of this, the donors ask for sustainability!”

*Government official in Afghanistan*
In a collaborative aid system

Aid providers would fit money and timing to strategy and realities on the ground
6. In the externally-driven aid delivery system

Staff are evaluated and rewarded for managing projects on time and on budget.
“Donors demand task focused work. Staff would love to have more time to talk to people in the camp, to spend the night in the camp, but we have reports due, with facts, and numbers and it needs to be right to keep the funding coming. The donors are not helping us be respectful because they come with their new ideas, trends and we have to jump…we end up with ridiculous time frames to do things. We cut out the process and spend the rest of the year doing damage control.”

Director of an INGO on the Thai-Burma border
Staff would be evaluated and rewarded for quality of relationships and results that recipients say make lasting positive changes in their lives
7. In the externally driven aid delivery system

Monitoring and evaluation is done by providers on project spending and delivery of planned assistance
“What impact are you talking about? The impact is just spending money. Goods are delivered with no sense of social development. There is no interest to develop people; it is all reduced to practicality. Just know how to write a report. The focus is on skills put into the framework of outputs with no reflection included.”

Director of a Lebanese NGO
In a collaborative aid system

Monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up would be done by providers and recipients on the results and long-term effects of assistance.
There is a focus on growth
“Many people view interventions as a money-making business, and the humanitarian as well as volunteer spirit that was the driving force has disappeared as most actors have become materialistic.”

Director of a local NGO in Kenya
In a collaborative aid system

Aid agencies would have a planned draw down and mutually agreed exit/end of assistance strategy
By efficiently providing tangible and intangible inputs, international actors can effectively cause, catalyze, or support positive economic, social and political change in other countries.
The role of international assistance in promoting positive social, political and economic change is to expand the range of options that people in a society can consider, to engage with them in weighing the costs and benefits of each option and, from this, to co-develop and co-implement a joint strategy for pursuing the changes they seek.
We can start to shift the paradigm by changing what we control:

- Policy development and use
- Procedures
- Allocation of resources
- Who we hire and work with
What can you do to help shift the paradigm:

• In how you do your job?
• In how your department or program works?
• Across USAID?
• With your partners and stakeholders?
• As a prominent and powerful member of the aid system?
Thank you for joining us!

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The Thought Leaders in Learning Speakers Series is presented by PPL/LER and is supported by the USAID Knowledge-Driven Microenterprise Development (KDMD) project.