

RESILAC*

*LAKE CHAD INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL RECOVERY



KEY MESSAGES

Illiassou ADAMOU
Niger expert

Alexis KANGATLAM
Cameroon expert

Yodé MIANGOTAR &
Alexis NGARMBATEDJIMAL
Chad experts

Abdoul NASSER
Nigeria expert

Patrick IRIBARNE
Multi-country Quality expert

Supervised by
Michael CARRIER,
Researcher,
Groupe URD

**INTERNATIONAL
AID AND THE CHANGING
FACE OF CRISES
GOOD MANAGEMENT
AND COOPERATION
PRACTICES IN COMPLEX,
PROTRACTED CRISIS
CONTEXTS**

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INTRODUCTION

The following key messages are drawn from the full study which is available at www.resilac.net or www.urd.org

Context

As crises become protracted, this brings new challenges for international aid actors. Whereas it is more and more difficult to implement development programmes in contexts that are increasingly unstable and insecure, emergency relief programmes meet certain needs, such as providing immediate assistance to save lives, but are often unsuited to complex, long-lasting crises.¹ Today, numerous 'extended partnerships' are established to combine short-term relief and long-term reconstruction in these contexts. These require specific capacities:

1. The capacity to manage the implementation of a multi-actor and multi-sector operation;
2. The capacity to change the posture of the international aid sector and to take action differently by supporting local actors.



1. HEM 2018 - Adaptive management and programming: the humanitarian perspective – Alice Olbrecht

RESILAC Pilot Project

The RESILAC project (Inclusive Economic and Social Recovery Around Lake Chad), implemented in the Lake Chad region between 2018 and 2022, is a large-scale experiment in concretely responding to protracted crises. It is a multi-country, multi-sector and multi-party project that aims to reinforce the triple Nexus of 'humanitarian aid, development and peace'. The complex regional context affected by a high level of insecurity and the global COVID-19 health crisis has meant that certain operational methods have had to change, due to constant adjustments being made, teleworking, the increased role of local actors, etc. As a result, the implementation of the RESILAC project was a veritable challenge and unique learning opportunity for the organisations involved, and also for the international aid sector as a whole.

Study

This study aims to understand the influence of operational methods on the effectiveness of a multi-actor and multi-sector international aid project in a complex and protracted crisis context. It is aimed at any person or organisation who is looking for an answer to the following question: **What factors, in terms of management and cooperation, can help to implement a combination of short-term relief and long-term reconstruction activities in a complex, protracted crisis context?**

This study was carried out from October 2020 to March 2022 using a qualitative approach based on feedback from over 150 key informants both within and external to the RESILAC project. It is primarily aimed at people and organisations who are involved in implementing, steering or supporting multi-actor and multi-sector aid operations in complex, protracted crisis contexts. It is addressed particularly at those who are concerned with:

- **'Strategic issues'** - What 'systemic' changes need to be made so that the international aid system adapts to the way crises have changed?
- **'Operational issues'** - What 'technical' solutions are required so that people and organisations involved in multi-actor and multi-sector aid programmes are able to meet the needs of people affected by complex, protracted crises in a responsible manner?

PART 1 – HOW TODAY'S CRISES ARE AFFECTING AID

Because organisations interact with the other stakeholders within a given context, the external factors that are capable of influencing the operational methods of an aid project need to be analysed. This involves: 1. identifying global external trends and initiatives that have an impact on the international aid sector; 2. defining the concept of an 'aid ecosystem' in order to improve understanding of the relations between aid actors; and 3. analysing how crises are influencing local, national and international actors' operational methods and roles, via the concept of 'organisational resilience'.

International aid

Several external macro-trends have a direct or indirect influence on aid management and cooperation. The context of a global crisis means that we need to rethink the operational methods of the international aid system. Globally, power relations are evolving. Western countries' 'soft power' and multilateralism, which have contributed to the NGO movement, have been called into question by new powers. The actors involved in aid delivery are evolving in a globalised world that is itself changing profoundly: with the new technology revolution, we are moving from a hierarchical world to a networked world.² Given these trends, there are growing demands for reform of the international aid sector. However, this desire for change comes up against the inability of the sector to question its own practices and the growing complexification of international aid mechanisms.

The aid ecosystem

The concept of the 'ecosystem' has been adopted in several sectors to refer to a number of entities that interact in a given environment. Based on the different definitions of these metaphorical ecosystems, the following definition is proposed for the 'aid ecosystem': *the coalition of formal and informal groups who provide assistance, and*

their internal and external stakeholders (target populations, civil society, public authorities, implementing agencies, technical and financial partners, etc.), who are structured into networks and guided by the shared desire to take action in crisis situations. Using this concept helps to reinforce a systemic perspective and increase understanding of the many direct and indirect ties that an aid organisation establishes with the different stakeholders in a given environment. The study focuses on the RESILAC project to analyse the following key points:

- **Aid** - What 'aid' mechanisms exist in particular territories? What similarities and differences exist between them?
- **Leadership** – What is the role of the international aid system in relation to other forms of aid?
- **Interactions** – How are the roles of different aid actors, and the relations between them, evolving in response to crises?

Organisational resilience

Organisational resilience (referred to in the corporate sector as 'business resilience') is 'the capacity of an organisation (...) to cope with a hardship, an incident or a setback and to overcome this despite unfavourable conditions'. The COVID-19 crisis has shown that organisational resilience concerns all levels of aid actors and not only local organisations. As organisations cannot anticipate every situation, reinforcing their organisational resilience is essential to their survival (Williams and Shepherd, 2016).³ This notion raises two key questions:

- **Resistance** – What crises require adjustments? What different forms of vulnerability and reactions exist between different aid actors?
- **Adjustments** – How are today's crises affecting the roles of different aid actors and the relations between them?

2. *Repenser le modèle humanitaire : de l'efficacité à la résilience.* David Manset, Lubica Hikkerova, Jean-Michel Sahut
3. Wikipédia, *Résilience organisationnelle*

Part 2 – MANAGEMENT AND COOPERATION PRACTICES

Next, we need to study the internal workings of a multi-actor and multi-sector aid response in a complex, protracted context. Looking at the RESILAC project's management and cooperation practices, we focused on three areas: 1. Leadership & governance – How is a multi-actor and multi-sector aid response structured and managed? 2. Implementation – How are integrated activities implemented in a complex, protracted crisis context?; 3. Support – How are shared resources managed?

Leadership and governance

Working in a consortium can be an appropriate way to deal with the increasing scale, frequency and complexity of crisis situations by pooling a broader range of resources and competencies. It can increase complementarity and geographic coverage, and help to meet the needs of targeted populations. However, working in consortiums often raises questions as it involves numerous constraints that are taken on by operators: it makes operational and validation circuits more complex, increases the time required for management, reduces the ability of an operation to adjust rapidly to changes (in terms of context, needs or resources), adds an extra level to the operational chain, allows few, if any, economies of scale and is often less accessible to local operators. The leadership and governance practices that are explored in this chapter have to do with the way an aid project is structured and managed. Through the example of the RESILAC project, they raise questions about the way of articulating different levels of decision-making and responsibility between the different partners and the different levels of coordination (field, country, region and headquarters).⁴

Implementation

In crisis contexts, operational methods play an essential role in ensuring the continuity of activities in at-risk areas. When external actors only have limited access to an operational area, participation is no longer simply an option, and becomes an obligation to continue implementing activities. As such, local stakeholders can no longer be considered to be 'passive' actors who receive goods or services. They represent the only possible relay to allow these

activities to be implemented, or to directly implement them. An integrated consortium also requires that the 'interoperability' of an operation should be reinforced, that is to say, reinforcing coherence between the different partners and their different operational methods. The aim is not to standardise partners' implementation and monitoring systems but to ensure that they can interact and contribute together to the implementation of a response. Lastly, implementing long-term reconstruction activities in areas where the majority of aid actors are focused on short-term relief implies being able to overcome several operational challenges for implementing partners. This part looks at the practices that are central to aid organisations' activities. It describes how they fulfil their implementation mandate by addressing 'red lines' that are essential to distinguish between an unpredictable but feasible operation and a chaotic and impossible operation in complex, protracted crisis contexts.

Supports

resource management during an aid operation is generally organised around **support services** (finance, logistics, and administration), the management of 'sensitive' aspects (security, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud and corruption), and technical expertise. For each of these resources, the concept of 'support' includes a control mechanism that ensures compliance and a means of supporting staff on the ground. This part focuses on a project's support processes (finance, logistics, human resources, technical support, security, etc.). It describes how these processes help to carry out activities properly, respect commitments and achieve objectives.

These three areas call on different forms of **know-how**: 1) **operational** – how do we encourage the flexible implementation of operations and minimise obstacles to adjustments?; 2) **cooperative** – how do we ensure that stakeholders participate sufficiently, promote synergy between partners and act in an interdependent way with other ongoing operations?; and 3) **behavioural** – how do we reinforce the human aspect in processes and encourage flexibility among the members of an organisation? These are set out in the table below.

4. MADAC, *modèle d'autodiagnostic et d'amélioration continue, adapté du modèle d'excellence EFQM 2010, F3E, Coordination Sud, Patrick Iribarne, p. 18*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the global crisis, the way that civil societies are evolving everywhere around the world and the decline of the western model, international aid actors no longer have a choice. The aid system can not be effective without reviewing its current operational model and taking all forms of aid into consideration. As such, we need to move from the traditional 'aid' posture to an approach based on mutual reciprocal aid. This will allow us to establish an ecosystem that can respond to crises in a more relevant, sustainable and ethical way.

In order to contribute to this change, which is both necessary and vital for international aid organisations, we have outlined a number of areas to explore to establish an alternative operational model, and the technical and systemic changes that this would imply:

Recommendation # 1 **Awareness**

Aid actors need to discuss the limits of the current forms of international aid. By repositioning local actors within the aid ecosystem, debates about 'localisation' could be an important way to raise awareness.

Recommendation # 2 **Willingness**

Aid actors need to imagine new forms of aid and fully engage with these. We can not change the international aid sector without the involvement of the technical and financial partners who established its current rules. This implies raising awareness among donors and the whole funding chain, from the head of funding to auditors, via political representatives.

Recommendation # 3 **Know-how**

Aid actors identify the changes that need to be made and how to achieve them.

The current aid system cannot be changed without **revising the control mechanisms** imposed by technical and financial partners. The increasingly high management costs related to compliance are not justified in terms of the accountability demanded by technical and financial partners. As is the case in other sectors and for a lot of bilateral cooperation funding, other forms of control could be put in place. This could be done by rebalancing demands in terms of means and

results (e.g. reducing the monitoring of resources to give more room to the monitoring of results), or by reducing monitoring demands and giving evaluation mechanisms another role (e.g. the evaluation of issues related to screening beneficiaries).

International NGOs also need to review their core mandate by combining (or replacing) an implementation and fund management capacity and (by) cooperation and influence mandates: cooperation, to reinforce the complementary nature and capacities of different aid actors; and influence, to adopt a more political role if an operation goes wrong, whether in terms of corruption or political manipulation by governments. The current funding system, the professionalisation of the sector and the generalised crisis contexts that have become more common mean that more technical and apolitical international NGOs have become dominant. However, the aid ecosystem needs bolder and more political profiles to continue going forward.

Recommendation # 4 **The ability to act**

Aid actors mobilise the means and competencies that are needed to bring about change.

No change can happen without recognising and mobilising **civil society**. In crisis contexts, national civil society organisations need to be represented more within national coordination and representation platforms, and international representatives can no longer limit themselves to a purely operational role. In addition, national NGO platforms need to campaign in favour of this change in the international aid system in the countries where the technical and financial partners are based.

Recommendation # 5 **Reinforcing action**

Aid actors mutually reinforce each other and draw lessons from changes for the future.

Aid sector staff, and sometimes international aid organisations, manage to propose innovative solutions and develop a genuine culture of learning, but in order to be able to use these experiences in all situations, research bodies also need to take part in change by providing a critical analysis of the sector and promoting influence strategies.

Operational framework

| Key processes / Cross-cutting principles | Leadership & Governance | Implementation | Support |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|

OPERATIONAL KNOW-HOW – How do we encourage the flexible implementation of operations and minimise obstacles to adjustments ?

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Adapting to the operational context <i>Complex thought/ Accepting complexity</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define a management and cooperation framework that is specific to the operational context Plan the means to analyse and monitor the context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct continuous monitoring of the context Conduct in-depth analysis of contexts / carry out studies | Find and manage the resources / capacities / complementary aspects that are adapted to the context and allow flexibility |
| Acting and reacting in response to crises <i>Agility</i> | Define a clear set of authorisations that is known by all | Give the ability to adjust operational methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steer resources Measure the effects |
| Resisting crises <i>Organisational resilience</i> | Promote the organisational resilience component (linked to sustainability) | Define red lines between aid projects that are flexible and those that are impossible/ chaotic | Provide specific support to human resources |
| Thinking about ways to improve <i>Learning</i> | Support a culture of learning | Share lessons between the stakeholders of the response | Define the framework and tools for learning |

COOPERATIVE KNOW-HOW – How do we ensure that stakeholders participate sufficiently, promote synergy between partners and act in an interdependent way with other ongoing operations?

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Place aid beneficiaries at the centre <i>Participation</i> | Define a shared governance framework with beneficiaries at the centre | Reinforce beneficiaries' capacity to express themselves and to influence the response | Monitor the quality of relations/perceptions |
| Take action interdependently <i>Aid ecosystem</i> | Analyse the actors that are present and the relations between them – Understand the aid ecosystem | Promote and facilitate collaboration between aid actors within networks | Monitor all the operations within a given territory |
| Implement projects that are as local as possible and as international as necessary <i>Partnerships</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aim to establish complementary partnerships Define principles – or rules – governing collective decision-making, giving priority to achieving a consensus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that there is interoperability between partners Invest time and resources in monitoring partnerships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse and optimise the cost-benefit ratio of different levels of partners Show how the collective result is greater than the sum of individual projects |
| Think 'long-term' <i>Build</i> | Define a governance framework and particularly the role of local/national actors in the long term | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combine operational and advocacy activities in order to influence the institutional and political environment Implement Nexus operational principles and good practices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforce partners' capacities Adopt a political stance |
| Do no harm <i>Ethics</i> | Define a security framework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse and take into account the impact of adjustments Avoid/refuse 'risk transfer' | Measure the potential negative effects |

Key processes / Cross-cutting principles

Leadership & Governance

Implementation

Support

BEHAVIORAL KNOW-HOW – How do we reinforce the human aspect in processes and encourage flexibility among the members of an organisation?

Place the human aspect at the centre of processes

Establish the right balance between formalisation and human relations

Ensure that decision-making takes place as close as possible to the response

- Assurer l'équité dans la gestion des Ressources humaines
- Accepter les échecs et les transformer en source d'apprentissage

Reinforce mutual trust, equity and responsibility

Encourage and cultivate open communication within the team

- Consolidate mutual trust
- Adopt a listening posture

- Establish relations of trust
- Protect staff

Accept uncertainty and an appropriate level of risk

Be flexible and encourage flexibility

- Encourage critical thinking
- Encourage and cultivate anticipation and analysis capacities

Accept uncertainty and change



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For more information on the RESILAC project,
please contact H el ene Ronceray,
Regional Coordinator
coordoreg@resilac-actioncontrelafaim.org

**For more information on RESILAC surveys,
evaluation and studies,**
please contact Paloma Casaseca,
Adaptive Management and Learning Advisor
refpilier4@resilac.org

For more information on the RESILAC project,
please visit our website: www.resilac.net



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