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IFSP

Unintended Impacts of Development Aid

Workshop Documentation

INTEGRATED FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME
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Content

1 Introduction

Background

Methodology

2 Summary of findings

Local economy and resource distribution

'Losers and winners'

Political dimension

Project: coordination and communication

3 Discussion

Relevance for the project

Methodology

Subjectivity of impacts

Unintended negative impacts

The critical look

Aim and reality: how to distinguish?

4 Open questions

Annexes

1 Documentation of group work: analysis of unintended impacts of IFSP

2 Questionnaire on unintended consequences of aid

3 Agenda of the workshop

4 Background paper

1 Introduction

Objectives

Unintended impacts of aid are consequences of project interventions that had not been planned and intended. Unintended impacts could be positive, negative, long-term, short-term, direct or indirect. Such unplanned impacts are not easy to monitor and assess since they are to be found everywhere in the project environment ('searching in the dark').

The analysis of unintended impacts of aid is part of the guiding principle '*do no harm*'. This is an important principle for IFSP. In order to avoid '*doing harm*' with project interventions it would be important to first identify the possible harm a specific project could do and secondly to analyse and assess the negative unintended impacts.

While working in a conflict affected social environment the assessment of unintended impacts of development aid becomes even more important. The '*walking on the edge*' between the efforts towards contributing to stabilisation and development on the one hand and the risk of contributing to aggravating conflicts on the other hand is even more evident. Assets a project is explicitly and implicitly creating (rural infrastructure, social infrastructure, access to services, employment etc.) may support certain groups of the regional society and may at the same time leave others out. It could be argued that in the context of conflict and war this might sharpen already existing gaps between groups and people. On the other hand, project interventions also could contribute to counteracting the negative consequences of war and support affected and marginalised groups, which would demonstrate the chances for development even in conflict. This paper on unintended impacts of aid is based on an analysis that was conducted with community mobilisers, engineers and IFSP management in a half-day workshop on 18 May 2001. The aim of the workshop was twofold:

- To introduce the subject of unintended impacts of aid and discuss it for the impact monitoring of IFSP, and
- to analyse unintended impacts in the context of the ongoing work programme of IFSP.

At the beginning of the workshop, main ideas of impact monitoring and unintended impacts of projects were presented and discussed. In the second part, participants analysed possible unintended impacts of IFSP. The workshop built upon a previous workshop on impact monitoring that was conducted earlier for IFSP staff by the Project Impact Monitoring Unit Colombo (PIMU).

Methodology

For the analysis the participants of the workshop applied a 'checklist on unintended consequences of aid'. The checklist was developed by a GTZ consultant for the Sector Network Food Security Africa 2000. It consisted of a number of questions related to the economic and political context as well as to co-ordination and cooperation with various stakeholders. The questions were grouped in four broad categories: i) local economy and resource distribution, ii) "losers and winners", iii) political dimension, iv) project coordination and communication. The questionnaire was applied in a number of food security programmes in Africa. The respective projects had found the application useful and had suggested modifications and improvements.

2 Summary of findings

Local economy and resource distribution

The workshop participants noted that projects supported by IFSP fit very well into the local and regional economy. IFSP support packages fit into the needs of communities in the 'uncleared areas'. Here, the project fills gaps since government services are hardly present with food-for-work FFW and other measures.

The fact that IFSP creates temporary employment through the large number of infrastructure projects was assessed very positive. The impact of the project on the labour market was seen as positive since IFSP is providing employment for unskilled and skilled labour and during the off-season. No distortion of local labour markets was observed.

'Losers and winners'

The overall perception of IFSP by the village communities was rated as positive and generally good. Participants analysed that IFSP generates benefits. However, it was stated that in some cases benefits for certain target groups may represent losses for other groups. Losses may occur for certain groups but are thought to be few and are outnumbered by benefits for the village community, either for specific war affected and food insecure groups or by all villagers. As an example, community mobilisers mentioned possible loss of profits for contractors due to mobilising village communities for infrastructure works which were earlier contracted by government. Contractor may experience IFSP as a kind of competitor.¹ It was noted that intendedly or unintendedly IFSP benefits other groups. For example, the families the owning the land around minor and medium tanks profit from the many tank rehabilitation projects in the medium term.

Political dimension

The workshop participants did not see an active role of IFSP towards counterbalancing 'bad' governance. Instead, they described the behaviour of IFSP towards what they perceived as 'bad' governance in its immediate environment as: 'toleration, negotiation, ignorance'. Obviously, more awareness on the mandate of agencies engaged in development cooperation would be needed. The motivation of local partners of IFSP centred on personal development, mobilisation of resources and promotion of capacities for their respective institution. The effect of IFSP on local partners was viewed rather ambivalent. The workshop participants assessed the capacity of local partners increasing through the support received from IFSP. On the other hand it was mentioned that local partners feel somehow threatened and their importance reduced since IFSP has developed a comparatively high level of professionalism and has resources at hand, partners may not be able to mobilise. The interaction with local partners about the possible positive and negative effects of cooperation are rarely discussed. Project staff regarded their own role rather critical. They analysed that "local people might perceive that IFSP staff is more concerned about their personal development than about rural development".

Project: coordination and communication

One of the two working groups viewed the prime objective of IFSP, to contribute to food security "as a measure of replacement of other government institutions who are unable to

¹ IFSP is not implementing projects but rather promotes community based organisations, government departments and NGOs in their capacity to better plan and implement projects. Strengthening CBOs could result in an increased demand for services and goods/facilities and in turn benefit local traders/contractors and hence, have a stimulating effect on the local economy.

handle ...". If evaluated correctly this could mean that project staff perceives IFSP as 'filling the gap' and replacing government structures rather than supporting and complementing existing, however, due to the conflict rather weak structures.

With respect to communication with other agencies on the security situation and political and social issues, the participants of the workshop had different perceptions. One of the working groups had hardly any knowledge of other organisations and institutions on the socio-political dynamics of the region. They had little information about their programmes and activities. The other working group stated that there is some informal periodic exchange of information with other institutions working in the district. They were of the opinion that the exchange of general information might be more frequent than the exchange information on more sensitive issues. The newly initiated Trincomalee Dialogue was seen as one step towards more and better exchange of information and thoughts. During the discussion it became quite obvious that IFSP staff is not aware of contingency plan for deteriorating security situations. However, contingency planning for daily operations is practices.

3 Discussion

Relevance for the project

Participants considered the discussion of unintended impacts very relevant for the project as such and for impact monitoring. At the present stage of project implementation participants were of the opinion that monitoring mainly referred to activities and results-impacts. A stronger focus unintended impacts was considered important.

Methodology

The checklist was considered an adequate tool. It was also mentioned, that so far, the staff is lacking simple and effective tools for impact monitoring. The openness of the questions allowed broad brainstorming. Assessing unintended impacts is considered a '*search in the dark*', therefore, questions need to be open. It was discussed that open questions may bear the danger of vague and open responses. Consequently, some of the questions were answered vaguely or very idealistically. However, the workshop participants argued that open questions are adequate since though tight or close questions might lead to more specific answers but may also narrow the view specificity.

Subjectivity of impacts

It was debated whether unintended consequences of a project can be positive and negative. It was concluded that the assessment of a negative or a positive impact involves a rather subjective judgement.. Impact, if compared to inputs and outputs, are difficult to measure. They are not only a result of project interventions but depend on a wide range of factors. At a certain level it is difficult to measure, which reasons and factors have lead to changes that were observed ('contribution gap'). Since the confirmation of impacts could partly be based on speculation, objectivity is difficult to apply. It was mentioned that the exchange of subjective impressions is nevertheless important. Looking at impacts, it is difficult to come to clear 'wrongs' or/and 'rights'. Monitoring project impacts in this sense is to be understood as a process, which requires exchange of perceptions and impressions.

Unintended negative impacts

During the group work, some unintended negative consequences were identified (e.g. better off farmers benefit from tank rehabilitation). Some unintended results might not be very 'harmful' and the project can and has to live with consequences that could not be considered very positive. It was discussed that some negative impacts are unavoidable to allow that more positive impact are safeguarded. However, it was agreed that it would be important to monitor such impact for the guiding principle 'do no harm'.

IFSP staff considered negative consequences could be the result of specific perceptions, interests and positions: If IFSP promotes participation of the communities and active involvement in the construction of infrastructure projects, local service providers as well as construction companies and local CBOs, used to either implement top-down activities or to receiving straight forward government contracts, may perceive this as a negative impact, viz. either a threat or a loss of business opportunities. Service providers in particular may perceive the competence and capacity of a project as a severe threat since they are in many cases not in a position to match the resources a project generates. The workshop participants agreed that a project has to analyse possible negative impacts, weigh them against the intended positive benefits and undertake efforts to minimise and monitor them.

Aim and reality: how to distinguish?

While discussing the impacts it was observed that participants found it difficult to clearly and critically distinguish between the aims and ideals of IFSP (support of war affected and food insecure poor groups, fair selection of target groups for project support) and the reality of their day-to-day work which include all the problems and challenges of communication, planning, organisation and support for implementation.

It became quite clear that it is hardly possible to openly discuss constraints and problems. In an open discussion there was a tendency to praise the approach and ideals IFSP is pursuing rather than to look at the incurred problems of community mobilisation and facilitation of project implementation. As an example the question "who profits from the projects IFSP is supporting?" was answered immediately with "the vulnerable groups". vulnerable". In a discussion, however, it became clear that a number of people benefit directly or indirectly from the project without belonging to the target group: the construction company that is employed for levelling work at a tank site and for digging wells, the local garage where cars are frequently serviced, the skilled labour who is constructing the toilet under food-for-work programme and local partners whose reputation is improving.

A critical view

The workshop participants noted that it is not easy to critically look at one's own work and openly discuss possible negative impacts of project activities since oneself is involved and oneself is part and parcel of the project. The critical look of project staff towards their work is often influenced by the employer-employee relation and is further shaped by the identification of the staff with the project. Critically looking at impacts where oneself is heavily involved requires the ability to question one's own work. To critically discussing possible negative impacts of own activities requires confidence in the colleagues and in one's own goals. Finally, it would require courage. There is a tendency to critically discuss technical issues of project implementation but exclude broader social or political issues associated with the project and the own work.

From an outside perspective some critical areas of IFSP interventions could be identified such as the question of sustainability of project interventions after the phasing out of the German contribution, the role of IFSP as "filling the gap" which government has created and being perceived as to a limited extent competing with the private sector by creating employment and managing the allocation of project resources. On the other hand, a war affected environment may require very specific interventions for development. Here IFSP's have a comparative advantage against any other project type.

4 Open questions

During the discussion some points and questions were raised which were left open and might be discussed in future:

- What consequences imply the fact that local people may think, IFSP staff think more about their personal development than about village development? How would such a perception fit into the 'mobilisation' approach and the intended success of the very commendable work of the community mobilisers?
- There was little information on exchange with other agencies. What are the reasons for the reluctance of information sharing and cooperation? Is there an interest to improve information sharing and involve more agencies and IFSP staff? How could cooperation be promoted?

Annex 1

Documentation of group work

Question/Topic	Answers Group 1	Answers Group 2
1. How does the project actually fit into the local and regional political economy?	Food basket and FfW, health and nutrition, rehabilitation of tanks, IGA Especially for uncleared people, short-term (FfW), more links with service providers, more assistance esp. for remote areas, increment on production, food is more accessible in some areas, not for long term (FFW), direct beneficiaries are rich farmers (in some areas) Sustainability?	Local (village)- great extend Regional (Trincomalee District) – to some extend
2. What does constitute a project-related – political, economic, social – resource in the project context? (jobs, credit, training, land, transport, hand-outs ...)	Jobs, credit, land use, transport, training, hand-outs for selected groups	Human Resource Development Physical capacity building
3. How are these resources distributed? (mechanism, selecting person)	PNA approach Working through institutions	Participatory manner in Needs assessment & project implementation by partner institutions
4. What were the criteria for selecting or targeting?	Poverty code ranking (PNA villages) Wealth ranking (beneficiaries selection)	Poverty code based on income, war affectedness
5. To whom are these resources distributed (in terms of existing identity categories, such as ethnic, regional, religious, political – but also in terms of income groups)?	Vulnerable groups with ethnic balance	Land lords (unintended)
6. To what extent are project partners involved in this?	Planning, implementation and monitoring	CBOs, villagers: very high GO, SP: high
7. What is the impact of project resources on the local labour market?	Off season employment	Increased in employment opportunities in skilled and unskilled
8. What are common perceptions about project-related gains?	Positive	Generally good
9. Are there any perceived or real losses for different individuals or identity groups through the project?	Yes, tanks redistribution of lands of displaced Tamils of different ethnic groups	Little
10. How - if at all – does the project react to, bad governance' in its immediate environment (be it local or	Loss of profit to contractors (structural work)	Tolerate, negotiate, ignore

district government, administration, traditional authorities, or project partners)?		
11. What are the exact interests and motives of project partners (individuals, administrators, organisations) in relation to the project and its planned impacts?	Organisations: Resources from external Capacity building of institution Individual and administrators: training, incentive, equipment	Assistance, personal development
12. How are their interests and motives being perceived by local people?	Availability of services	Local people might perceive that officers think more of personnel development than rural development
13. In what way are the political or economic strategies of local players affected by the existence of the project?	Contractors; random beneficiaries selection, priority to party political involvement	Local players feel threatened and their importance in reduced Their capacity is increased through support
14. What is the impact of project resources on neighbouring, bordering areas?	Does not make any major difference	Serving as a model Availability of products Sometimes envy
15. Are these interactions communicated to the aid organisation's national office or headquarters? If so, how does this affect planning?		Do not know, no
16. Are these interactions part of the dialogue with local project partners? If so, how do they affect relations?		In some cases
17. Which administrative, communication or other processes prevent a conscious recontextualisation of the project to the regional or national situation? (i.e. what type of mechanisms further technocratic fixation to the 'interests' of the project and impede a look beyond the immediate project area?)	Communication, explaining ethnic balance to other areas expansion of certain projects in those areas (17. And 18.)	Reasonably flexible
18. How can these limitations systematically be overcome?		N/a
19. What are the immediate prime objectives of the project (as defined by head of project and staff) and how do they relate to the current political situation (local, national)?	Food Security: as a measure of replacement to other government institutions who are unable to handle	Food security Food insecurity is closely related to political situation/conflict
20. What is the nature of information exchange with other agencies or offices with regard	No idea	Informal, periodic exchange. Exchange more on general issues than on socio-political

to the socio-political dynamics of the project region?		exchange
21. How is non-project related information (such as socio-political etc.) from the different projects in one region or country processed within headquarters?	N/a	N/a
22. How is contradictory or inconsistent information on the project environment being reconciled at headquarters and by the national office?	N/a	N/a
23. Are there any contingency plans or strategic options at project level (or at the level of the national office) to respond to a deterioration of the security situation in the project environment?	Project staff are trained to face sudden security problems (short term), communication and security pass	Contingency plans for daily operations
24. If so, what is the aim of these plans / options?	Personnel security for the staff and project	

Questionnaire: Unintended Consequences of aid

Local economy and resource distribution

1. How does the project actually fit into the local and regional political economy?
2. What does constitute a project-related - political, economic, social - resource in the project context? (jobs, credit, training, land, transport, hand-outs ...)
3. How are these resources distributed? (mechanism, selecting person)
4. What were the criteria for selecting or targeting?
5. To whom are these resources distributed (in terms of existing identity categories, such as ethnic, regional, religious, political - but also in terms of income groups)?
6. To what extent are project partners involved in this?
7. What is the impact of project resources on the local labour market?

'Losers' and 'winners'

8. What are common perceptions about project-related gains?
9. Are there any perceived or real losses for different individuals or identity groups through the project?

Political dimension

10. How - if at all - does the project react to 'bad governance' in its immediate environment (be it local or district government, administration, traditional authorities, or project partners)?
11. What are the exact interests and motives of project partners (individuals, administrators, organisations) in relation to the project and its planned impacts?
12. How are their interests and motives being perceived by local people?
13. In what way are the political or economic strategies of local players affected by the existence of the project?
14. What is the impact of project resources on neighbouring, bordering areas?
15. Are these interactions communicated to the aid organisation's national office or headquarters? If so, how does this affect planning?
16. Are these interactions part of the dialogue with local project partners? If so, how do they affect relations?
17. Which administrative, communication or other processes prevent a conscious recontextualisation of the project to the regional or national situation? (i.e. what type of mechanisms further technocratic fixation to the 'interests' of the project and impede a look beyond the immediate project area?)
18. How can these limitations systematically be overcome?

Project: communication and co-ordination

19. What are the immediate prime objectives of the project (as defined by head of project and staff) and how do they relate to the current political situation (local, national)?
20. What is the nature of information exchange with other agencies or offices with regard to the socio-political dynamics of the project region?
21. How is non-project related information (such as socio-political etc.) from the different projects in one region or country processed within headquarters?
22. How is contradictory or inconsistent information on the project environment being reconciled at headquarters and by the national office?
23. Are there any contingency plans or strategic options at project level (or at the level of the national office) to respond to a deterioration of the security situation in the project environment?
24. If so, what is the aim of these plans / options?

Developed by Dr. Ulf Engel, University of Leipzig, on behalf of the Sector Network Food Security Africa, May 2000

Workshop: Unintended consequences of Aid

Friday, 18 May 2001, 2- 5.30 p.m.

Agenda

Welcome

Part 1:

Presentation of main ideas of unintended impacts of aid

Discussion of unintended impacts of aid

Part 2:

Analysis of unintended impacts of IFSP presentation and discussion of results

Participants: IFSP management, community mobilisers, engineers

Facilitation: Gita Swamy

Annex 4

Background paper on the workshops “Conflict analysis” and “Do no harm”

Conflict Analysis

Conflicts are part of human life and society. Conflicts as such are not negative. In most cases it is the way conflicts are dealt with that makes them destructive and negative.

Development projects often take place in conflict situations. Development projects can also create conflicts by mobilising for change and supporting marginalised groups. However, conflict as one aspect of development projects and as one component of frame conditions has not yet been incorporated into development concepts and planning. Development interventions often still take place without fully incorporating broader conflict set up or potential conflicts. The systematic analysis of conflict in the context of development project can be seen as one step towards a better incorporation of conflict issues.

On a conceptual level, discussions are going on to what extent a development project can actually contribute to the peaceful management of a conflict. This is particularly relevant for projects who work in the midst of social-economic or ethnic conflicts and whose target groups or partners are more or less involved in the conflict. As some observations have shown, the possibilities of IFSP to actively contribute to the management of the macro-conflict in Sri Lanka are limited (see article from Bigdon et.al). However, some suggestions are made regarding the role of community mobilisation, participation and capacity building. To think of possible positive impacts of development activities on the way a conflict is executed, the conflict has to be analysed first. A well thought through analysis will allow better planning and impact monitoring.

A wide range of different instruments exists to analyse conflicts and to deal with conflicts. One instrument, which is thought to be easily applicable, is the so-called A3 method. It analyses a conflict along the lines of its Arena, Actors and their Agendas. It gives the participants a good insight into the causes and manifestations of a conflict and allows them to develop strategies to deal with it.

“Do no harm” or “unintended consequences of aid”

The “do no harm” approach seeks to design project interventions in such a way, that they do not lead to unintended negative consequences. Every outside intervention in a community will automatically have impacts. And each intervention aims at certain impacts. To plan impacts of project interventions is often very difficult since the actual impact depends on a variety of factors and frame conditions that might not be foreseeable or expected. Some interventions might also have impacts that have not been intended and which are also not wanted.

Intervening in a war-affected environment is even more sensitive than “normal” projects environment. The war itself shapes the environment and is perceived as dividing communities, marginalising certain groups and favouring others. Outside activities in such an environment can lead to effects or perceived effects that increase existent inequalities or create new conflicts.

In order to avoid that, conflicts have to constantly ask themselves about its impact in the social-economic and conflict environment.

There have been a number of instruments developed for projects

- to systematically ask about a projects (perceived) unintended consequences (Checklist on unintended consequences of aid) and
- to analyse whether a project is supporting “dividing” elements in a community or “connecting” elements.

Ideas for IFSP

It is suggested to introduce conflict analysis and the approach of “unintended consequences of aid” to IFSP. This could be done in a two-step approach:

- conduct a conflict analysis workshop (half day) by applying a conflict mapping approach (so called A3 method: Analysis of Arena, Actors and Agenda)
- analyse unintended consequences of aid by applying the checklist of unintended consequences together (half a day).

It is suggested to do these two analyses with the community mobilisers, since they constitute one group within IFSP. It could also be done at the IFSP management level, but due to time constraint in the next weeks this is thought to be difficult.

The aim of these analyses is to

- sensitise the community mobilisers on the issues of conflict analysis and possible ways of dealing better with conflicts in the district (conflict as it concerns the local set up)
- sensitise community mobilisers on unintended consequences of projects – as part of their impact monitoring
- provide systematic instruments for both analysis

Trincomalee, April 2001
Gita Swamy