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Linking Complex Emergency Response and Transition Initiative (CERTI): Executive Summary of Assessment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

USAID's Africa Bureau's Linking Complex Emergency Response and Transition Initiative (CERTI) addresses cross-cutting issues surrounding the problems of conflict and complex emergencies in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This activity supports a consortium of institutions to continue to develop state-of-the-art tools for use by USAID, other donors, and indigenous African institutions, and then to see that these tools and approaches are field-tested. This report is an assessment of the first year of the CERTI program in order to determine whether its activities and products are appropriately focused and useful. It reports on the strengths and weaknesses of the CERTI program, and outlines recommendations for future CERTI actions.

PRINCIPLE FINDING

The CERTI program (1999 – 2001) includes the following objectives:

1. Provide analytic and strategic support to improve policies, programs, and strategies related to human security in conflict, crisis, and transition settings.
2. Support the Africa Bureau's Office of Sustainable Development (AFR/SD) leadership in identifying good practices and developing policy and programming tools.

CERTI is implemented by Tulane University's Payson Center for International Development and Technology Transfer in partnership with various "consortium" members including the Johns Hopkins University, George Washington University, Harvard University, the Civil-Military Alliance, the International Center for Migration and Health in Geneva and the University of Maryland. As CERTI begins the final phase of its two-year program, it has already achieved remarkable results. Tulane University has proven that it is responsive to AFR/SD's priorities, and that it is a good partner in providing technical assistance and state-of-the-art materials and methodologies.

The impact of the program includes:

Impact #1: At the end of the first phase of CERTI, a number of seminal complex emergency-related documents and reports have been produced. CERTI has devoted its resources to developing a "toolkit" for practitioners of manuals, reports, and policy papers for responding to complex emergencies. This was a good strategy and allowed CERTI to produce some of the most innovative and needed materials.

Impact #2: The health-related material produced by CERTI is superior. CERTI consortia members and staff pursued a variety of issue areas during the first phase of the initiative's

strategy. Many of these products still need field-testing and vetting by practitioners in appropriate African countries. In the interim, complex emergency experts and practitioners laud the health-related contributions by CERTI as being “cutting edge” and “superior.”

Impact #3: The CERTI toolkit materials are positioned to become mainstream complex emergency response methodologies by donors and practitioners. In the last few months, USAID field offices and African institutions have begun to request copies of materials as well as additional technical assistance from CERTI. This bodes well for the last phase of the initiative, which focuses on providing assistance to USAID field offices and disseminating information about CERTI and its activities.

Impact #4: The CERTI website, toolkit and other media are effective and comprehensive resources on complex emergencies. CERTI did not prioritize dissemination of information or website development during its first year strategy. Nevertheless, practitioners and academics have already been using the libraries, bibliographies, and links made available on the CERTI website and mirrored on the CD-ROMs. Many users have noted that they rely on the CERTI as a sort of one-stop source for reference and training materials on complex emergencies.

Conclusion of CERTI Impact

CERTI was flexible in its approach to developing products related to responding to complex emergencies during its first year of operation. This allowed it to build on the comparative strengths of its staff and consortia partners. By the end of the initiative, the results will probably be significant. However, it is clear that in order to remain at the leading edge of responding to crisis in sub-Saharan Africa, USAID will need to continue to invest in CERTI for the second phase of the program. Because CERTI has identified and been linked to some of the technical leaders in conflict-related expertise, it would behoove AFR/SD to consolidate its investment by building a follow-on mechanism so that USAID staff can continue to access such expertise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CERTI Strategy and Objectives:

- Redefine the framework for CERTI. The competition between the theoretical “human security” and de facto “health” frameworks for CERTI is a problem that needs to be rectified before the next phase of the initiative is completed. The impact of CERTI will be undermined if the framework for the initiative remains unclear. Therefore, health should be adopted as the official framework for CERTI.
- Narrow the strategic focus of CERTI to a few priority areas during phase two. Those tools and products that have been identified by users and CERTI-related experts as “state-of-the-art” should be the focus of the targeted field-testing, modification, and dissemination efforts in phase two of the program. Most of these tools would be related to health. Such a targeted

and prioritized effort would improve the impact of CERTI – in the field and in policy-making circles.

- Narrow the target users for CERTI products to a few priority customers. In effect, the second phase of the CERTI strategy infers this narrowing of the users – to USAID field offices. Targeting mission staff will allow Tulane and AFR/SD to field test key products, ensure that the materials are relevant and useful, and pinpoint future possible follow-on activities.
- Increase the communication between CERTI and other programs managed by the AFR/SD. Because of the significant overlap between CERTI and the Conflict and Conflict Prevention program’s objectives and activities, and because of gaps in information sharing within AFR/SD, these two programs need to be integrated better within the Africa Bureau.
- Update the promotional description of CERTI products, purpose and audience to reflect the consensus about its new focused mission and priority tools.

AFR/SD Strategic Plan:

- Move CERTI to the IR level within the AFR/SD SO 10/22 Strategic Plan. This would improve the awareness of the program’s impact, as it would more easily fit within the R4 and other reporting systems currently in use within the Africa Bureau. It would also reduce the implication that CERTI is a higher-level program than the existing IRs. And, it could improve the links between CERTI and the other IR activities. Finally, this would improve the CERTI performance indicators by grounding them to the activity and not to the entire SO.
- Suggested impact indicators for CERTI at the IR level include: (1) Increased access to and demand for CERTI resources by USAID field offices (measured by requests for TA from USAID field offices, requests for materials); (2) CERTI materials integrated into other AFR/SD/CMR activities; (3) Dissemination of CERTI resources outside of USAID (measured by hits on the CERTI webpage); and (4) Institutionalizing a feed-back system so that the initiative’s efforts continue to be relevant and “leading edge.”

Information Dissemination:

- The materials produced by CERTI need to include a “how to” and “why use” section to introduce each product. Explanations of what each product’s use is, how to use the product, under what circumstances will the products be relevant, and contact information for how to reach CERTI partners and staff will help users apply the materials. This information should introduce the materials on the CERTI website, as well as introduce the hard copies of documents. Tulane University might also consider adding a feedback form to each of the materials, in order to improve communication users, fine-tune the materials, and receive information on impact.

- Link the CERTI website to AFR/SD web pages. Provide a clear link to the CERTI website from Conflict Web and any other internal or external USAID web pages that are appropriate.
- Define the primary target audience for CERTI dissemination efforts. Such efforts should distinguish between audience types and ways each audience would use the CERTI materials. For example, audiences could include partner organizations, Washington and Africa USAID staff, and the world community. The audience could then be split by level of participation in CERTI consortium or product development activities. Each audience would then have its own dissemination strategy.
- Survey the potential target audience. Technology limitations may preclude the use of the website or CDs by some of those most interested in CERTI. Have the audience suggest the best solutions for resource and information dissemination. Ask the target audiences if they have any technology issues that have impeded their use of the website or CD.
- Accommodate various CERTI website audiences through open user registration. One method to accommodate users according to their needs is to require registration for use of parts of the website. For example, registered users who are on a pre-determined list of CERTI partners or workshop participants could be given access to specific sections of the website dedicated to discussions in their area of interest. Registered users who are not on the pre-determined lists could be given minimal access to take part or view public discussions.
- Expand and broaden the network of CERTI event participants beyond “the usual suspects.” To date, CERTI participants and partners have been associated with Tulane University and/or USAID for many years. The products and methodologies produced by CERTI are a unique contribution to complex emergency and conflict situations – and should be available to a new audience of practitioners and researchers.
- Include the materials produced by CERTI in the USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) database. To date, no CERTI materials are available on the DEC database. This could be due to the fact that the DEC takes a considerable amount of time to include new material. However, Tulane University should make sure to submit hardcopies and softcopies of CERTI documents in order to make them more available to USAID staff and partners around the world.