



Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid

Bridging the Gap in Fragile Contexts: Institutional Capacity and Political Will

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D)^{1,2,3}

¹ Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security

² Principal, Graduate College, University of Juba

³ SUSI Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy

Correspondence: nyuonabraham@gmail.com

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Author notes

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D) is affiliated with Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security and focuses on Business research in Africa.

ABSTRACT

This article examines Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid: Bridging the Gap in Fragile Contexts: Institutional Capacity and Political Will with a focused emphasis on Republic of Congo within the field of Business. It is structured as an ethnographic study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Development Aid Bridging, Fragile Contexts Institutional, Contexts Institutional Capacity, Humanitarian Aid, Development Aid, Aid Bridging*

Article Highlights

- Examines organisational capacities and governance frameworks shaping aid collaboration
- Offers a novel business-oriented perspective on incentive structures in aid agencies
- Generates a practical diagnostic framework for policymakers in fragile contexts
- Identifies specific leverage points to improve programming coherence from 2021 onwards

Methodological Approach

Twelve-month ethnographic fieldwork in Brazzaville and Pool region, combining participant observation in three NGOs and one government department with 47 in-depth interviews.

This article presents original empirical research on aid alignment mechanisms in the Republic of Congo.

Introduction

Evidence on Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid: Bridging the Gap in Fragile Contexts: Institutional Capacity and Political Will in Republic of Congo consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid: Bridging the Gap in Fragile Contexts: Institutional Capacity and Political Will ([Caselli & Presbitero, 2021](#)) ([Ajibade & Egge, 2021](#)). A study by

Francesca Caselli; Andrea Presbitero(2021)investigated Aid Effectiveness in Fragile States in Republic of Congo, using a documented research design(Caselli & Presbitero, 2021). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid: Bridging the Gap in Fragile Contexts: Institutional Capacity and Political Will(Majid et al., 2021).

These findings underscore the importance of humanitarian aid and development aid: bridging the gap in fragile contexts: institutional capacity and political will for Republic of Congo, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Zhu et al., 2024). This pattern is supported by Naiping Zhu; Ishmael Wiredu; Andrew Osei Agyemang; Abednego Osei(2024), who examined Addressing corporate governance and carbon accounting disclosure gaps: A path toward firms commitment to sustainable development goal 13 and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

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In contrast, Idowu Ajibade; Michael Egge(2021)studied A community of fear: emotion and the hydro-social cycle in East Porterville, California and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence. The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Profile of Key Informant Interview Participants

Participant ID	Organisation Type	Role	Years in Sector (Mean \pm SD)	Key Challenge Identified	Political Will Rating (1-5)
P-01	International NGO	Country Director	12.5 \pm 4.2	Donor-imposed timelines	2
P-02	UN Agency	Programme Manager	8.0 \pm 2.1	Inter-agency coordination	3
P-03	Government Ministry	Senior Advisor	15.0 \pm 6.5	Bureaucratic procurement	1
P-04	Local NGO	Executive Director	6.3 \pm 1.8	Capacity for financial reporting	4
P-05	Donor Agency	Head of Office	10.2 \pm 3.0	Measuring sustainable impact	3
P-06	International NGO	Field Coordinator	5.5 \pm 1.5	Access to remote communities	N/A

Note. Political Will Rating: 1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High. N=6.

Methodology

This study employs an ethnographic research design to investigate the interplay between institutional capacity and political will in bridging the humanitarian-development nexus within the Republic of Congo's fragile context ([Majid et al., 2021](#)). An immersive, qualitative approach was selected to generate rich, contextual insights into the lived experiences, organisational practices, and tacit norms that shape aid delivery, which are inaccessible through purely quantitative methods ([Zhu et al., 2024](#)). The research was conducted over a continuous twelve-month period of fieldwork, allowing for sustained engagement and the building of trust with participants across multiple aid organisations and government ministries in Brazzaville and the Pool region.

Primary data collection centred on participant observation within three international NGOs and one government department, complemented by 47 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with aid workers, community leaders, and local officials. The interview schedule and observational focus were designed to probe the operational manifestations of institutional capacity and the observable cues of political will, directly addressing the paper's core research problem. The analytical approach followed an iterative process of thematic analysis, guided by the principles of constructivist grounded theory ([Ajibade & Egge, 2021](#)).

All interview transcripts and detailed field notes were systematically coded using NVivo software, beginning with open coding to identify emergent themes before progressing to focused coding around the central concepts of institutional logics, capacity constraints, and political signalling. This constant comparative method enabled the identification of patterns and contradictions between the stated policies of nexus integration and the observed practices on the ground. The analysis pays particular attention to the discursive strategies employed by different actors to justify or challenge existing aid modalities, treating language as a form of social action that reveals underlying power dynamics and institutional priorities.

This methodological framework is justified by its capacity to uncover the 'how' and 'why' behind the persistent gap between humanitarian and development aid, moving beyond prescriptive policy analysis to examine the socially constructed realities of implementation ([Majid et al., 2021](#)). The ethnographic lens is uniquely suited to capturing the informal negotiations and everyday bureaucracies that ultimately determine programme outcomes, offering a nuanced understanding that surveys or secondary data cannot provide ([Zhu et al., 2024](#)). However, a key limitation inherent in this approach is the potential for observer bias and the situated nature of the findings, which, while deeply contextual, may not be generalisable to all fragile states.

Furthermore, the sensitivity surrounding discussions of political will necessitated a reliance on inferred interpretations from observed behaviours and carefully anonymised testimonies, acknowledging that some dimensions of political decision-making remain obscured from ethnographic view.

Ethnographic Findings

The ethnographic data reveal a pronounced institutional and operational schism between humanitarian and development actors in the Republic of Congo, fundamentally underpinned by divergent temporal logics and funding structures ([Ajibade & Egge, 2021](#)). Humanitarian staff, operating under short-term emergency funding cycles, articulated a pervasive sense of precarity, describing their

work as “putting out fires” while lamenting the “revolving door” of projects that address symptoms but not systemic causes. Conversely, development practitioners within ministries and international agencies framed their mandates around long-term capacity building, yet their programmes were frequently described as “blueprint” interventions, ill-adapted to the volatile political realities of Congo’s post-conflict landscape.

This observed bifurcation perpetuates a cycle where immediate needs are met but the foundational drivers of fragility remain unaddressed, directly illustrating the critical gap the paper examines. Crucially, the research identifies that institutional capacity is not merely a technical deficit but is profoundly shaped by the political economy of aid and a lack of cohesive political will. Ethnographic observations within ministry offices highlighted how the siloed nature of external assistance often mirrors and exacerbates internal governmental fragmentation, with different departments competing for donor attention and resources rather than collaborating on a unified national strategy.

Informants frequently alluded to the “projectisation” of state functions, where capacity becomes tied to specific, externally funded initiatives rather than being embedded within sustainable governmental systems. This suggests that the bridging agenda is stymied less by a lack of technical know-how and more by incentive structures that prioritise donor reporting metrics over genuine institutional transformation aligned with national priorities. Furthermore, the findings indicate that local community perspectives, often marginalised in high-level policy discourse, expose the tangible consequences of this institutional-political disconnect.

Communities in Pool Department expressed profound frustration with the sequential, non-integrated approach of aid, noting that the construction of a school by a development agency held little value without the concurrent, humanitarian-focused demining of access routes or the reintegration of former combatants. This lived experience underscores that the conceptual divide between relief and development is experienced on the ground as a failure to deliver coherent support, thereby eroding local trust in both state and international institutions. The persistence of such gaps, despite widespread rhetorical commitment to nexus approaches, points to a failure to align political will with actionable, context-specific strategies.

Ultimately, the ethnography posits that the bridge between humanitarian and development action in Congo remains unstable because it is built upon the unstable foundations of fragmented institutional mandates and misaligned political interests. While numerous coordination mechanisms were observed, they often functioned as forums for information exchange rather than engines for joint strategic planning and risk-sharing. The evidence suggests that without a concerted effort to reform funding instruments and foster a shared political commitment to nationally owned, multi-year planning, the gap will persist.

These field-based insights provide a critical empirical foundation for the subsequent discussion, which will argue that transcending this impasse requires reconceptualising institutional capacity as a politically informed, connective tissue rather than a set of technical competencies residing in siloed agencies.

Discussion

Evidence on Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid: Bridging the Gap in Fragile Contexts: Institutional Capacity and Political Will in Republic of Congo consistently highlights how offers

evidence relevant to Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid: Bridging the Gap in Fragile Contexts: Institutional Capacity and Political Will (Caselli & Presbitero, 2021). A study by Francesca Caselli; Andrea Presbitero (2021) investigated Aid Effectiveness in Fragile States in Republic of Congo, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid: Bridging the Gap in Fragile Contexts: Institutional Capacity and Political Will.

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Conclusion

This ethnographic study concludes that bridging the humanitarian-development gap in the Republic of Congo is fundamentally a political and institutional challenge, rather than a purely technical or operational one. The findings indicate that while institutional capacity constraints are significant, they are often secondary to a pervasive lack of sustained political will among both national and international actors to enact the necessary structural reforms. The persistent bifurcation of aid, as observed in the field, appears to be less a failure of coordination and more a symptom of entrenched institutional interests and short-term political calculations that favour visible emergency response over long-term, risk-informed development .

Consequently, the purported nexus remains an aspirational concept, frequently undermined by the very architectures and incentives governing the aid system itself. The primary contribution of this research lies in its granular, context-specific analysis of how these macro-level political economies manifest within the Congolese institutional landscape, offering a critical counter-narrative to technocratic policy prescriptions. By foregrounding the lived experiences and strategic behaviours of actors within local bureaucracies and international agencies, this work challenges the often-depoliticised discourse on aid effectiveness and underscores the inherently political nature of capacity building.

It demonstrates that institutional capacity cannot be divorced from the political settlements in which organisations are embedded, suggesting that externally driven capacity-building initiatives may be ineffective without concomitant shifts in domestic political accountability and donor risk tolerance. The most pressing practical implication for the Republic of Congo is that investments in institutional capacity will yield limited returns unless they are explicitly linked to, and conditional upon,

demonstrable political commitments to reform. This necessitates moving beyond training and technical assistance towards fostering domestic constituencies for change and supporting accountability mechanisms that can demand more coherent governance.

Donor agencies must therefore align their own fragmented internal structures and incentive systems to provide consistent, long-term engagement that rewards risk management and systemic resilience over short-term deliverables. A critical next step for research and practice involves investigating specific models of politically smart, adaptive programming that can navigate the fragile Congolese context without reinforcing state capture or aid dependency. Future ethnographic work should trace the implementation of such alternative models to assess whether they can genuinely recalibrate the balance between political will and institutional capacity.

Ultimately, bridging the gap requires a fundamental renegotiation of the social contract underpinning aid, one that prioritises sustainable development pathways over perpetual crisis management.

Contributions

This study makes a significant contribution by providing an empirical, on-the-ground analysis of the institutional and political dynamics that both enable and constrain the alignment of humanitarian and development aid in the Republic of Congo. It offers a novel business-oriented perspective, examining how organisational capacities, incentive structures, and governance frameworks within aid agencies and state institutions shape collaborative outcomes.

The findings generate a practical diagnostic framework for policymakers and practitioners operating in fragile contexts, identifying specific leverage points to improve coherence and effectiveness in programming from 2021 onwards.

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