

Lessons learnt

The basic learning from my interviews is that DRC generally made a valuable contribution to the international response to the Kosovo crisis in all three countries I visited, Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo. DRC's efforts in Serbia and Montenegro are part of the total picture of its response, but are not part of this report. DRC was and is generally well known, and known for working well, be it as implementing partner for major donors such as UNHCR and ECHO, as a DANIDA financed operational organisation in its own right and with its own projects, or through secondments to the UN system. Its comparative advantages were many, but among the most obvious were its longstanding, varied and interrelated experience in the region since its first engagement in 1992, and its presence in the region and more particularly in Kosovo at the outbreak of the bombings of Serbia. It had a large pool of experienced and committed people, and an ability to be flexible, and to select "the right people at the right time for the right job", as one donor said.

This basic learning is the backdrop of the present lessons learnt report. It is noteworthy that DRC's achievements in the Kosovo crisis coincided with the disappearance of most of its integration department and thereby a solid basis to carry all administrative functions of DRC, not least the International Department. Thus, operational strength was at times challenged by lack of an adequate administrative underpinning.

The report will inevitably deal with the areas in which the DRC could do better. It is clear that the DRC's excellent record had its flaws, that the achievements had their price, and that a good reputation is not earned once and for all. But the report will also include the organisation's comparative advantages and ways in which they could be further strengthened.

Suggestions

The suggestions I put forward should be seen as a way to assist DRC in improving its preparedness for international refugee assistance by maintaining its strengths and reducing its shortcomings. My suggestions centre around the following points:

Integrated Approach: The basic assumptions forming the philosophy of the DRC are meant to permeate all its efforts, including international refugee assistance. This integrated approach to refugee assistance is one of DRC's comparative advantages and should be further operationalised in DRC's international work, for example by the integration of protection and information elements in all international projects / programmes.

Human Resources / "Talent Bank": Another comparative advantage for DRC is its people, and its capacity to select them. This advantage could be further strengthened through the development of an extended roster or "talent bank".

Training / Institutional memory: The new roster should be supported by a training programme including the development of guidelines on strategies and methods within the field of international refugee assistance the DRC chooses as its priorities. A system to maintain the organisation's institutional should be established. Manuals should be updated.

Project / programme priorities: Priorities should continue to be linked to refugee integration in Denmark, and also contain elements pointing towards long-term re-construction. The traditional implementing partnership with UNHCR in selected areas should also continue.

Emergency response: The competent organs of the DRC should consider to what extent, and through which kind of projects, acute emergency response should be an operational priority as it was in the Kosovo crisis. If DRC decides to keep it a priority it involves greater emphasis on training for emergency response at all levels involved in the response including the general support structures of the DRC such as finance and personnel.

Administrative re-structuring: The International Department as a whole needs re-structuring in order to improve its collective preparedness for international refugee assistance, including rapid emergency response, for example through

Consolidation of professional and managerial capacities;

Development of a fast and flexible financial and administrative support system both at ID and at field level, e.g. regarding budget control and reporting.

Improvement of communication lines between Copenhagen and the field

Strengthening of the Department's institutional memory.

Relationships with donors and partners: These should be reviewed in view of improving the capacity for rapid response at all levels and with all stakeholders. Relationships with operational partners need continued monitoring and organisational transparency. Co-operation with local communities and local capacity building should (continue to) be encouraged in all types of projects / programmes, but the dilemmas and complexities involved need further study.