

Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Some observers consider each complex humanitarian emergency unique. The implication is that past experience is not applicable to future crises. By contrast, evaluation analysts tend to look for common themes—even when assessing the effectiveness of interventions in response to complex emergencies. Their underlying premise is that past experience is, in fact, relevant for future crises. On the basis of the three country case studies (Haiti, Mozambique, and Rwanda) and evaluations of other complex emergencies, at least six common themes and four recommendations emerge. Implications specific to the Kosovo crisis are summarized in annex D.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

1. Saving lives. *Emergency assistance programs funded by USAID and implemented by American nongovernmental organizations appear to deliver sufficient assistance to ensure the survival of a country's vulnerable poor, though inadequate monitoring makes it difficult to quantify results.*

One-half million to 1.3 million Haitians (as many as one in seven) received food aid during 1991–96. In Mozambique an estimated one third of the population of 16 million depended on food aid for 60 to 70 percent of their food needs in 1989. In late 1996 and early 1997, 1.3 million refugees were repatriated to Rwanda from neighboring countries and received food aid. Without massive infusions of predominately U.S. emergency assistance, more Haitians would have fled Haiti seeking refuge in the United States. Massive starvation and human suffering would have occurred in Mozambique and Rwanda. Emergency assistance clearly helped save lives and alleviate suffering. However, except in Haiti, data collection and monitoring were not done (or were done poorly), so it is difficult to quantify results.

2. Relief distribution. *Effective distribution of emergency assistance requires organization and control to limit theft, minimize abuse, guard against political manipulation, and protect beneficiaries.*

Distributing relief supplies was a problem to some extent in all three countries. The large quantity of food aid, in particular, became a source of violent competition—not only for its value as food for consumption but also as a source of political power for those controlling access. In Haiti, fighting among beneficiaries sometimes erupted when food was distributed. Distribution points used to stockpile food supplies were looted and supplies were hijacked. Local authorities some-times used food to favor certain political factions or for their personal aggrandizement. In Mozambique as well there were reports of corruption, theft, and political or personal favoritism in food aid distribution. Target populations did not always receive timely and sufficient food aid. In Rwanda the military and former government leaders controlled much of the relief distribution. Thus they were able to divert food from the intended beneficiaries for their own purposes.

NGOs were mainly in charge of relief distribution in Haiti. They addressed these problems by stocking and distributing food aid in neutral settings (schools, factory yards), using ration cards to track the receipt of food aid, and having NGO personnel

and occasionally police present to monitor distribution. These measures limited diversion to less than 10 percent and helped reduce violence. In Mozambique the government emergency relief agency lacked the technical expertise to plan, organize, and manage the distribution of massive supplies of relief aid. Leakage was typically 30 percent, and at one point 50 percent was lost, stolen, or diverted. In response, donors, NGOs, and the private sector took over much of the distribution, and losses dropped to under 5 percent. In camps in Tanzania and Zaire, more food aid was supplied than was necessary, and more than usual was misappropriated. Some NGOs suspended their operations because they knew they were assisting people guilty of crimes against humanity.

3. Political and social unrest. *Emergency assistance can help maintain social calm and mitigate political instability. Conversely, it can exacerbate political tensions. Rarely is it politically neutral.*

The international community provided massive quantities of emergency assistance to Haiti, Mozambique, and Rwanda. The political effects of the assistance varied. In Haiti, food aid reduced the probability of food riots during a period of political and economic stress and may have had a dampening effect on political tensions; but it also may have resulted in a political status quo that enabled the de facto military regime to stay in power longer. In Mozambique, external military assistance provided by the Soviet Union and by South Africa fueled the war. Food aid, by comparison, had relatively little effect on the country's political dynamics, although food diverted to soldiers may have contributed to the war effort. In Rwanda, where genocidal killers were mixed with legitimate refugees in camps, humanitarian assistance served to prolong the emergency.

4. Demobilization. *Demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration of armed forces is vital in ending a complex emergency and beginning a period of recovery.*

Demobilization of Haiti's armed forces removed one source of violence in the country. However, many of the demobilized soldiers retained their arms, and because most were unemployed owing to the weak economy, they are believed to have caused at least part of the post-1994 rise in theft and street violence. In Mozambique, demobilization of Renamo and Frelimo armed forces and their reintegration into civilian life was essential for the transition from relief to recovery. As in Haiti, though, many weapons were not turned in and that contributed to a rise in crime. In Rwanda, soldiers and militia loyal to the former government remain armed. They are still trying to destabilize the present government of Rwanda by using a campaign of propaganda and terror to destroy the political and social structures of the country, beginning in the northwest.

5. Relief to development. *Emergency assistance that enables people to protect their livelihoods (as well as meet immediate needs) helps reduce dependency and contributes to long-term economic development.*

In Haiti many urban factory workers lost their jobs, and some farmers were obliged to sell their agricultural and household assets to survive. Numerous farmers in Mozambique and Rwanda also lost their productive resource base when they fled their villages. These people became dependent on emergency relief. USAID and the NGOs responded—not only with food assistance but also with agricultural inputs

(seeds and tools) and household goods. That assistance encouraged refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their villages. It enabled them to resume food production and decreased their dependence on food aid. NGOs in all three countries also implemented food-for-work programs that created short-term jobs and helped rehabilitate productive infrastructure (roads, irrigation) needed for economic development. Often, though, the infrastructure was not maintained.

6. Donor coordination. *A clearly designated, agreed-upon central authority can make the delivery of humanitarian assistance more effective.*

In Haiti the United Nations officially designated the Pan American Health Organization as the coordination point for overall health planning and services during the U.S.-led embargo. That enabled numerous NGOs to deliver medical supplies and food to vulnerable populations more effectively. In Mozambique, by contrast, donor efforts at times overlapped or worked at cross-purposes. One donor was giving free seed while another was selling it; one donor was shifting to development assistance while another was still providing grant relief. That confused beneficiaries and undermined efforts to reduce dependency. Similarly, lack of donor coordination was a serious problem in Rwanda.

Recommendations

Four key recommendations emerge from these six conclusions and lessons learned. They are mainly management oriented.

1. Monitoring and evaluation. *Establish a central monitoring and data-collection unit to serve all donors during the early weeks of a complex emergency.*

Baseline data for socioeconomic indicators (e.g., malnutrition rates, food prices, population displacement) can help managers identify appropriate kinds of emergency relief, target its distribution, and subsequently measure and evaluate its effectiveness. Close monitoring enhances donor coordination and is essential for assessing aid needs, avoiding work at cross-purposes, identifying recipient groups no longer needing emergency aid, shifting from relief to reconstruction and development, and designing and adjusting economic policies.

2. Adverse political consequences. *Be alert to potential undesirable political or social effects that relief aid may cause.*

Emergency food distribution, in particular, can have unintended and undesirable political consequences. Control over final distribution often has reinforced the power of local authorities or political factions. It has strengthened their relative position during or after the conflict and facilitated their self-aggrandizing, often exploitive, behavior toward the intended noncombatant beneficiaries. Decisions to continue, withdraw, or modify aid distribution should be made as a matter of deliberate policy on a regular basis by each individual donor.

3. Reducing dependency. *Give refugees incentives to return home and impose disincentives on those remaining outside their country of origin.*

Generally, the longer encampment or temporary foreign residence lasts, the less willing refugees are to return home. A combination of “push” factors (such as terminating free food

distribution) and “pull” factors (such as including seeds and tools in resettlement packages) is likely to accelerate the repatriation process. But for reasons of political and bureaucratic self-interest, local governments may not remove from the rolls those no longer needing relief. Therefore, donors must monitor each situation closely, recognizing that both relief and development assistance may be needed if some areas remain in emergency status while others stabilize more quickly. After populations have been repatriated and are settled, the agricultural base begins to be reestablished, dependency on free food distribution drops, and long-run food security is enhanced.

4. Capacity building. *Train technocrats to manage the post-conflict economic transition, and train others in skills for which there is employment demand.*

Complex emergencies seriously weaken the capacity of governments to provide basic public services. Economic recovery requires a cadre of high-level technocrats with both management and conceptual skills, especially in macroeconomic and sectoral policy formulation. Such skills are likely to be in short supply, especially if preconflict professionals and the intelligentsia were targeted for deliberate elimination or have permanently left the country. Recovery also needs to be dovetailed with post-conflict economic realities. Job training is fruitless if unemployment in the depressed economy remains high. Training is especially critical for de-mobilized soldiers who, because they often remain unemployed, tend to turn to destabilizing criminal activity.