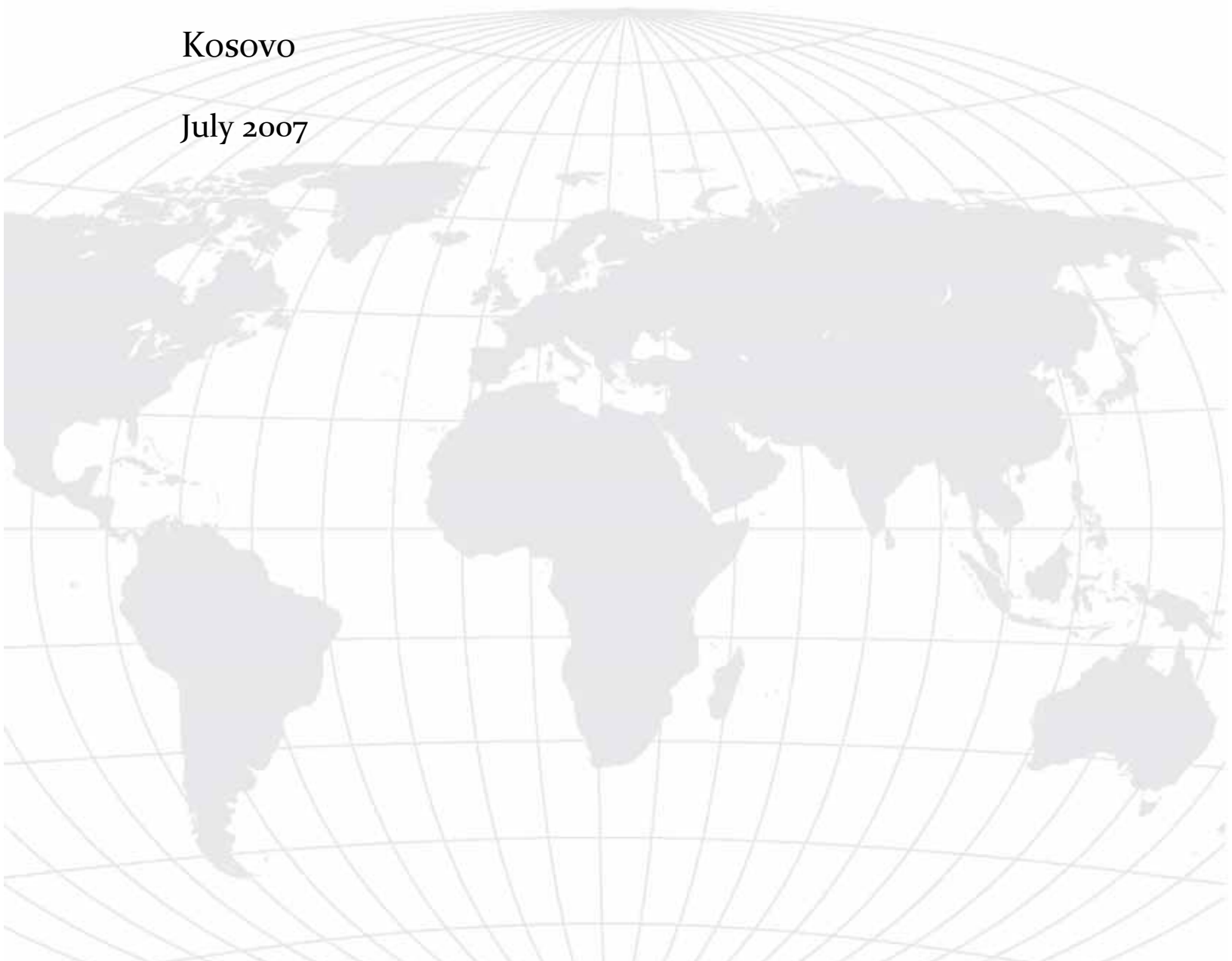


LISTENING PROJECT

Field Visit Report

Kosovo

July 2007



This document was developed as part of a collaborative learning project directed by CDA. It is part of a collection of documents that should be considered initial and partial findings of the project. These documents are written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across a range of situations. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people at the time when it was written.

These documents do not represent a final product of the project. While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project's findings cannot be made from a single case.

CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time, experience and insights for these reports, and for their willingness to share their experiences.

Not all the documents written for any project have been made public. When people in the area where a report has been done have asked us to protect their anonymity and security, in deference to them and communities involved, we keep those documents private.

Background on the Listening Project

CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA), with a number of colleagues in international NGOs and donors, has started the Listening Project to undertake a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the ideas and insights of people who have been on the recipient side of international assistance. Those who work across borders in humanitarian relief, development assistance, governance, human rights, peacebuilding and other efforts are learning a great deal by listening to the analyses and judgments of local people as they reflect on the immediate effects and long-term outcomes of such international assistance efforts.

Over a period of three years, the Listening Project will visit up to 20 locations, with Kosovo being the eighth. The Project will gather people's experiences and reflections in all the locations, identify patterns and themes across locations, and highlight important implications to improve the effectiveness of international assistance efforts.

The Listening Teams were composed of staff from international aid agencies and CDA facilitators, and did not work from pre-set questions, surveys, or an interview protocol. Rather, we told people that, as individuals engaged in international assistance work, we were interested to hear from them how they saw these efforts. We asked if they would be willing to spend some time with us, telling us their opinions and ideas. In this way, we held open-ended conversations about their concerns and reflections on the successes and challenges to effective international assistance, without pre-determining specific topics.

Many conversations were held with one or two individuals, but in other cases, larger groups formed and what began as small-group dialogues became, in effect, free-flowing group discussions. In several cases, conversations were not pre-arranged, and a Listening Team would travel to a community and strike up a conversation with whomever was available and willing to talk, including those who had not received international assistance. Appointments were also made with government officials and other local leaders.

A collaborative learning process such as this depends entirely on the people who took time to share their thoughts with us, and on the involvement and significant contributions of the participating organizations. Those who were involved in Kosovo deserve great appreciation for their general logistical support and the insights and dedication of all the agencies and staff members who participated in and supported the effort.

The Listening Project in Kosovo

The Listening Project in Kosovo involved a 10-day field effort in June/July of 2007. CARE International, Catholic Relief Services, Danish Refugee Council, Mercy Corps, Movimiento por la Paz el Desarme y la Libertad (MPDL), and Partners Kosova collaborated with CDA in arranging for, and carrying out, the field work. Each of these agencies provided staff, funds, and other in-kind support (logistical support, transportation, hospitality, etc.) to the effort, and CDA sent 4 representatives to facilitate this listening exercise with the 21 staff of participating agencies and translators.

Seven teams of “listeners,” composed of Kosovar and international staff from the different aid agencies, international facilitators, and local translators, focused on the regions of Prishtinë/ Pristina, Mitrovicë/ Mitrovica, Gnjilane/Gjilan, Peja/Pec and Prizren.¹ Within these areas, the listening teams visited communities in almost all 30 municipalities and held more than 190 conversations of varying length and depth with approximately 300 people. The teams tried to gather as wide a range of perspectives as possible and thus spoke to a variety of people from different walks of life (e.g. farmers, housewives, government officials, policy makers, civil society representatives, business people, teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc.). The listening teams also listened to people from all ethnic groups in each location when possible, and talked to a variety of people which included older people and youth, and people in urban and rural areas.

The Listening Teams should be commended for many hours of dedicated listening and traveling, enabling coverage of most of Kosovo. However, despite our efforts to reach a broad range of people, we know that what we heard represents only a small fraction of the opinions and suggestions of the people of Kosovo. While not conclusive, we feel that the information presented here draws on a wealth of perspectives and speaks to people’s general concerns about international assistance at the time. It should be noted that the views and analysis below do not represent official views of the participating agencies.

A Note on the Context of International Assistance in Kosovo

The Yugoslavian province of Kosovo was placed under a United Nations protectorate in June 1999, after the NATO-led bombing campaign which ended the armed conflict between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Serbian armed forces. Prior to the NATO intervention, over 260,000 K-Albanians² were displaced within Kosovo and 200,000 became refugees. During the NATO air strikes (March – June 1999), around 10,000 people were killed, mostly K-Albanians killed by Yugoslav forces, approximately 863,000 civilians sought or were forced into refuge outside Kosovo, and an additional 590,000 were internally displaced.³ Most K-Albanians returned to their homes within weeks of the end of the bombing, and subsequent violence in the immediate aftermath of the deployment of the NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR) led to the flight of over 150,000 K-Serbs and Roma to northern Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro, or mono-ethnic enclaves within Kosovo.⁴

¹ This document uses both Serbian and Albanian spellings for the names of municipalities, as is consistent with most official reports and documents of donors and agencies. Albanian spellings are first, followed by Serbian.

² Throughout the report we refer to all Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs as K-Albanians and K-Serbs, respectively.

³ Independent International Commission on Kosovo, *Kosovo Report: Conflict, International Response, Lessons Learned* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 90.

⁴ “Efforts of Interaction Member Agencies in Kosovo”:

<http://www.interaction.org/kosovo/index.html#backgroundsummary>; Humanitarian Issues Working Group, Update on the Situation in Kosovo, 11 September 2000, HIWG/00/3, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=SUBSITES&id=3c63edc67>

Since this time, Kosovo has received more than 3 billion Euros in international assistance.⁵ From 1999 – 2001, international assistance was focused on direct aid to help those whose homes and communities had been destroyed (e.g. food aid, house construction, agriculture/livestock support, firewood and other non-food items, microfinance, etc.), as well as on providing security and governance. After this initial humanitarian phase which largely targeted the majority K-Albanian community⁶, aid programs shifted toward recovery and support for the return of refugees and IDPs (internally displaced people), primarily those from minority communities who had fled after the NATO bombing. Significant amounts of donor funds were also invested to support and reform the economic, political, and judicial structures, under the guidance of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) particularly.⁷

A decision by the U.N. Security Council on the future status of Kosovo was expected at the end of 2006 and has been delayed repeatedly in an effort to negotiate an outcome which the Kosovar and Serbian governments and the international community will support. As a result, it is still unclear how the resolution of the status will occur—and how that will impact the future of international assistance to Kosovo’s people and institutions.

Amidst this uncertain climate, the nature of international assistance is also changing. There has been significant downsizing of programs and funding on the part of donors and international NGOs, and the UNMIK administration is transitioning to a smaller European Union body⁸. Poverty and unemployment are also pressing issues given the approximately one million youth with no job prospects.⁹

What We Heard

The themes that emerged from the Listening Teams’ conversations about international assistance in Kosovo are presented below in two broad categories: cross-cutting and general. Three themes – status, peace and security, and corruption – permeated the discourse regarding almost every issue. In the interest of space and a concise analysis, the Listening Teams decided that rather than discuss all of the examples related to status, peace and security, and corruption, within each separate theme, it was better to acknowledge them as critical and cross-cutting issues that were

⁵ There are varying estimates of how much international assistance Kosovo has received. A presentation made to UNDP by the Kosovo Ministry of Economy and Finance (accessible at <http://www.devoid.org/index.cfm?module=Library&page=Document&DocumentID=5705>) puts donor expenditures between 1999 and 2005 at more than 2.3 billion Euros. The Kosovo Human Development Report 2006, however, indicates that in 2002 alone donor support reached 900 million Euros. The Kosovo Early Warning Report #15 puts the figure of international assistance in 2006, by which point aid had already declined sharply, at 465 million Euros. (<http://www.kosovo.undp.org/respository/docs/EWR15FinalENG.pdf>). None of these figures include aid from NGOs and other private sources. Taking account of the higher figures, plus private funding and military spending, the total amount of foreign assistance in Kosovo is likely much, much higher than 3 billion Euros.

⁶ The population of Kosovo is commonly estimated to be 90% ethnic Albanian, and 10% Serbian and other ethnic minorities.

⁷ United Nations Development Program, 2006 Human Development Report: <http://www.undp.org/kosovo>

⁸ International Crisis Group, Kosovo Final Status page: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3225&l=1>

⁹ Fast Facts on Kosovo Early Warning Report #13, June 2006, UNDP, page 1.

mentioned in nearly every conversation. Additional reflections and analysis from the Listening Team members follows each theme.

A Note on Generalizability

The themes below emerged from the Listening Teams' conversations held with various people in Kosovo, and represent a snapshot in time. They are grouped according to an analytical framework that the Listening Team thought would best allow for their systematic consideration. The examples chosen, in the form of quotes or stories, are offered because they are representative of many more like them. It is, however, critical to note that a diversity of views, sometimes directly in opposition to each other, from various regions and people, were expressed, most often along K-Albanian and K-Serbian lines.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Status

When asked about the impacts of international assistance, the issue of the status of Kosovo and whether or not it will be granted independence is clearly foremost in people's minds. Frustrated at the delay and the way the status determination has been handled by the international community, many K-Albanians said things such as:

"Now we just want the status to be resolved. We are not satisfied with the way this is being handled. We have been disappointed many times and we are worried we will be again. Something has to be done – there has been too much waiting."

"It is like when you are a student and graduation is all you have in mind."

"When the status is resolved... there will be more foreign investment and the economy will improve; there will be less confusion in terms of bureaucracy because there will only be one set of laws; it will be possible for those laws to be more effective and more tailored to the needs of people within Kosovo..."

"Everything depends on status and independence...with independence, we can show the world we know how to lead, show how we can organize a state."

From the K-Serbian viewpoint, the issue of status is also a major source of frustration and contention, given their desire for Kosovo to remain a part of Serbia. Many K-Serbs are also dissatisfied with the handling of the status decision, with many saying things such as:

"I disapprove of the international community's work in Kosovo because they do nothing to make Serbs return or to solve the Kosovo Status problem in a right direction."

"Stick to the UNSC [UN Security Council]. Bypassing will cause Serbs to leave... no unilateral decision should be allowed to happen."

“There has been no return process for eight years... [UN Security Council Resolution] 1244 has not been fulfilled... and a third issue is ethnic cleansing. The influence of the international community... it has done nothing.”

“A month ago an international organization offered help, but people realized that it was status related and we rejected it... multi-ethnic programs are ineffective because they really depend on the status... a while ago I felt right about talking in Albanian in multi-ethnic meetings, but since the status came back to the fore I can't.”

Members of other ethnic minorities also expressed concerns about the final status, namely related to whether or not a Kosovar state would be equally responsive to all of its citizens. While there is more stability now, there is still a lack of trust and concerns over whether minority rights and property would be respected, and whether the government would be inclusive.

A few people were concerned that the international community has not done a satisfactory job of helping them prepare for different scenarios. Some said that they did not have accurate and timely information on the plans for determining the status and the likely ramifications of the different options for resolving the status of Kosovo. As one municipal official said,

“When there is no transparency, there is always space for doubt. Take the Status Negotiations: I would also like to know from the top level what is really going on.”

Others noted that the delay in the status decision has furthered their identity crisis and held up progress on many other issues. People were frustrated that the delay in determining the status had resulted in inconsistent enforcement of laws and confusion about which ones applied—UNMIK regulations or Serbian laws. People in all communities talked about problems in accessing pensions and the challenges of dealing with parallel structures of governance and administration (Kosovar, UNMIK, and Serbian). Others talked about what they saw as the unjust distribution of assistance to K-Serb and K-Albanian communities, noting that the donors' funding patterns often forced projects to include minorities; and, even within minority communities, this caused problems by “lumping” all minority groups together. Each of these issues is elaborated upon in various sections below.

A K-Albanian Member of Parliament noted that because of the lack of political will from the international community to resolve the status, other types of international assistance have been less effective. People noted a myriad of ways in which the status issue affects almost every other, and it has pervasive consequences for the prospects of future international assistance. In conversations with various people, there was an overarching sense that development progress would hit a glass ceiling, or perhaps would not ultimately even be possible, until the status of Kosovo is resolved.

Peace and Security

Many people talked about international efforts to promote peaceful coexistence and multi-ethnicity, particularly in mixed ethnic areas and North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica (a predominantly K-

Serb area). In most areas, there was a common feeling that international assistance favored one group (K-Serb versus K-Albanian) over the other—depending on with whom we spoke—for example:

“We are all Kosovars, laws should be the same for all ethnicities and be applied the same. I don’t like the words: ‘especially for Serbs.’ Why are the tables in Albanian schools marked in both Albanian and Serbian, but those in Serbian schools only in Serbian?”

“The international community hasn’t treated equally Serbs and Albanians. All their investments have been given to the Albanians. We should’ve been treated equally.”

Several people mentioned efforts made by international agencies to promote peace, inter-ethnic coexistence and reconciliation. In some areas, people felt that these efforts facilitated their professional work and gave them tools to work with those from a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds, enabling an environment of greater diversity. However, in other areas, people felt that peacebuilding workshops and projects were a waste of time.

People in most communities also talked about security and freedom of movement. Several K-Albanians noted that a major achievement of the international community was in establishing security, and that KFOR had played an important role. However, some noted that trafficking in women and drugs had become an issue due to the large international presence, which was not in Kosovo before 1999.

In several places, minorities said they now felt safe traveling across ethnic communal lines and highlighted this as an indicator of the international community’s effectiveness, particularly the work of KFOR in providing security. However, in other K-Serb communities, particularly in North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, people talked about the lack of access to facilities and resources, as well as lingering feelings of doubt as to their safety, such as:

“Days go by and people need to feel safe to stay and live in Kosovo. In some way, there is no visible progress. We still have restricted freedom of movement in enclaves, lack of fundamental human rights...some of my friends who live in enclaves have problems they have never reported to KPS [Kosovo Police Service] because they are afraid of the consequences. We live in a corrupted society so people don’t expect too much.”

“If there is freedom of movement in Kosovo, then how come every time I need to go to Pristina, I have to ask for a drive by internationals? How come I cannot travel by local bus or use my Serbian plates on my own car? How come every time I go somewhere with internationals they have to sign the paper which says they don’t have any responsibilities for my life?”

“International organizations have connected us with donors and helped with NGO registration, but all the main things happened in Pristina.”

“There is no reason to stay for kids... there is an imprisoned people’s syndrome.”

“Southern side of Mitrovica has a bus station, railway station, sports stadium, museum, cinema, theater, and the Northern side has got nothing.”

“People in the Northern area do not find the international community as a resource.”

Accompanying this disappointment with the international community was also the frequent remark that it is now “too late,” and there is “no way back.”

Corruption

Corruption surfaced frequently in conversations in all regions and with people of all ethnicities. Most suspicions and allegations involved Kosovars, or Kosovar staff of international assistance agencies, though in certain cases people complained about the actions (or inaction) of expatriates. People were frustrated with the high-level officials in the international community, saying that they should have monitored programs effectively, encouraged more transparency, and enforced rules and regulations to prevent corruption and set a better example.

Regarding alleged corruption in project funding, Listening Teams heard stories such as:

“This one [international NGO] is like the mafia. It invited proposals from one local community, and allegedly obtained some 2 million Euros from donors. But that local community was later told that this organization does not work in the Prishtina region.”

“Often NGOs work with this and that amount of money, but then actually work with less and pocket the rest. For example, a returnee received a chainsaw that cost at the most 400 Euros in the market, but he was billed for 1,000 Euros.”

“I see the work of international organizations here as ‘Money Washing.’ For example, one organization has invested three times in the same project. A donor has been funding the work of these NGOs, but their investment is nothing but money washing.”

“There are many NGOs that exist by having only one member, without having a proper office, plans, or even a computer, and they are making contact for their own need, because many donors do not know the real truth.”

Noting that corruption was not new in Kosovo, but that the amounts were substantial and that expatriates were even more sophisticated in cheating the system, one person said,

“If the amount was 7 digits, it was an expat, if it was 6, then it was a Kosovar.”

A number of people noted that there had not been as much positive change as they had expected from all of the international assistance that came to Kosovo because corruption was allowed and not dealt with effectively. Several people of different ethnic backgrounds recommended that there be foreign audits of assistance that has been provided to international and local agencies and the government, saying that they do not trust locals themselves and that this could help

enforce standards and ensure quality assistance. Noting the challenges ahead, one community member said,

“Corruption is ingrained in our culture. Internationals cannot change that. Kosovars must take responsibility. We must make sure we have the right incentives not to be corrupt. The transition [from the UNMIK administration] will be difficult because the laws can be confused...more oversight from the international community would help this problem.”

The issue of corruption is specifically addressed in a few places below. However, these instances were reflective of a problem that was mentioned ubiquitously, with tremendous effects on the quantity, quality, and efficacy of the assistance that was provided by the international community in Kosovo.

General Themes

I. On How Assistance is Provided

In the Prizren and Peja/Pec regions – areas in which significant amounts of international assistance have been provided particularly for the K-Albanians after the NATO bombing – Listening Teams heard a number of positive comments about the impact and efficacy of international assistance. Particularly members of K-Albanian communities said that while some of the problems mentioned below existed, they were very satisfied with and grateful for the presence of the international community and the support they provided, especially during the emergency phase (1999 – 2001).

People in K-Albanian communities were often less satisfied in subsequent years, while K-Serbian and other minority community members were generally pleased with the assistance they had received more recently – possibly reflecting the shift in funding priorities towards support to minorities. In the Prishtinë/Pristina, Gnjilane/Gjilan and North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica regions, where there is more ethnic diversity, there was a stronger sense of discontent with international assistance, and many of the challenges below were expressed more frequently.

People in many places were very grateful for what they had received, saying:

“It saved our lives. I simply don’t know where to start, to whom to say thank you...”

“I and other people here are happy. People have better living conditions.”

However, there were also very commonly mixed feelings involving disappointment, as captured by the words of one government official who said,

“Without aid, we could not survive and there would be no life in Kosovo. It is not fair to say that no difference was made; but, what was possible was not exactly what was done.”

Several issues emerged related to why “what was possible” was not fully realized. These can be disaggregated by looking at comments people made regarding: a) *People and Organizations* that provided assistance; b) *What* assistance was provided; c) *Coordination, communication, and participation* regarding assistance; and d) *Accountability* of those who provided assistance.

A. Organizations and People Who Provide Assistance

In general, many people had positive comments about the international staff with whom they had worked, and their presence in their communities. However, there were a few critiques of international organizations and donors, particularly regarding their over-reliance on foreign staff and experts, and concerns that they invested too many resources in staff, overhead, meetings and visits, and not enough in communities. The Listening Team found that these perceptions cut across all regions and ethnic groups.

In one group discussion, people hypothesized that in one international multi-lateral agency, half the money was spent on salaries and administration, the partner agencies spent another third on their overhead, and as a result, the communities/beneficiaries only saw a small portion of the allocated funding. Others made similar comments such as:

“From when help arrives until it trickles down, only 10% reaches the ground... it is too time-consuming, too many workshops...”

“A huge amount of money was spent on administrative tasks, consultants and bureaucratic procedures.”

“A lot of money went into fuel and staff and only 10% of the money went to programs”

“NGOs promised return, but nothing happened... They had concept papers... but said ‘there is nothing to do here.’ By then, they had already used too much money on visits and dialogues.”

“One expat[riate] expert costs more than an entire department of local staff. Money could have been used to increase local institutions’ salaries so that they have more qualified people there.”

A number of people discussed the logical connection between low local salaries and the incentive to engage in corruption. Further, there was some disappointment in the quality of some of the international staff working in Kosovo. For example, several people said that, particularly given their high price tag, people expected more expertise that could not just as easily—and possibly more competently—be offered by a local Kosovar. Others were upset that so much international assistance funding had gone back to the countries that provided it through the large expatriate salaries and reliance on outside consultants and contractors.

Others were offended by the arrogance of some of the expatriates who worked for international agencies, noting that some of them did not understand how developed Kosovo was and how educated the population it had, noting that they often felt treated like “primitives.” A few

people mentioned that in general there were very good expatriates in the emergency phase, but that as time went on less competent, professional and committed expatriates were assigned to Kosovo by international organizations.

A number of people in different regions also talked about how they did not trust the local staff of international assistance organizations, and that they needed to know someone inside to get assistance or employment. Some said that they would have preferred more international and fewer local staff, believing that assistance would have been provided more fairly if expatriates had been more involved in the decision-making at the community level.

In North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica in particular, the people with whom we spoke expressed more wariness and disappointment towards the presence of the international community. As one person said when asked about K-Serbs' impressions of international agencies,

“The first reaction, and that is a negative view, is one of distancing, that it is associated to KFOR and the U.S. There is a lot of need for confidence-building between us and the international community. A lot of internationals did not spend time to gain the respect of the community.”

K-Serbs spoke often of their disappointment in what they perceived to be international NGOs' lack of sensitivity and action in addressing their concerns:

“We are not certain about our future in Kosovo. Serbs don't feel like citizens of a Kosovar community because we are treated like minorities. The problems of Serbs are neglected and that is the reason why people are annoyed and have negative attitudes towards internationals...because they have projects, they visit people, they listen to them, but they all say the same thing: ‘It is not up to us, we will put it down on paper but we can't promise you anything because, you know, we are individual non-governmental groups and your problems are supposed to be addressed to higher level positions.’”

Reflections of the Listening Team on Organizations and People Who Provide Assistance

In conversations and in the analysis of the Listening Team, it was evident that respect, cultural awareness, and good relationships with the staff of international assistance agencies were very important to community members. It is logical but a good reminder that people want their concerns and ideas to be taken into account and listened to. Assistance recipients would like there to be a sense that what they feel to be the unique challenges facing them and their communities are understood by international staff and agencies, and that this is reflected in their programming.

B. What was Provided

People frequently said that the international assistance provided, particularly during the emergency phase of the conflict, was appropriate, necessary, and had saved lives. In certain majority K-Albanian areas, such as Prizren, people almost uniformly commented that the presence of the international community was received with tremendous gratitude. There were

many comments about the importance of the material support for reconstruction of homes, food, etc. provided, as well as the international community's "non-tangible" assistance, through its presence and the sense of solidarity and accompaniment it provided.

A school director, pleased with the tangible material assistance he had received, went on to say,

"We also received mental health training, which helped us a lot. It affected families in making their relations better. It also had positive effects on children, helping with relationships between teachers and students, between husbands and wives. We also had trainings on the rights of children – All of these had a very positive effect on our lives."

A young woman Chief Executive Officer (Mayor) of a municipality spoke about how the training and capacity building she and the municipal officers received relating to civil society, urban planning, and local economic development had been tremendously useful to her as a leader. She further credited the gender balance and women's empowerment work done by international organizations with a large part of her ability to hold a high elected office in her community. Another municipal official responded that particularly conflict resolution trainings had been a positive outcome of the international community's presence, saying:

"[conflict resolution training] helps me bring people together during the return process...[in one 3-day seminar] government officials of different ethnicities were together around a table and created relationships, learned to work together...without the dialogues and trainings, we wouldn't be drinking coffee together and gradually making the conflict softer."

In a few conversations, people spoke of the efficacy of engaging youth in sports, particularly as a mechanism for bridging diversity, and the good work of the international community in supporting such activities:

"Everything goes well with sports. Yesterday we had a delegation of Serbian youth and they are very welcome here. Sports have more impact than just dry conversation."

Further, although there was some discrepancy in opinions about the sequencing of assistance delivery, there was also a general consensus that the shift from direct aid to more capacity building and training was appropriate and helpful.

However, many people gave multiple examples of the incongruities between the "needs" of and the assistance provided to communities. This gap took many forms, including the distribution of inappropriate goods, providing assistance with political motives, and offering training that was not useful.

There were many instances where groups or organizations were given products or equipment that could not be used (e.g., expired medicines). One man described how his wife was given a sewing machine but no training. She had no idea how to use the machine and subsequently broke it. Another young man described how a health center had been built by a bi-lateral agency in his

community. When asked how the work was going there, he confessed that it sat dormant because there was no one in the community to staff it:

“The donor agency never asked us what we actually needed or wanted, and the community did not want to refuse a generous offer even if we could not use it now. We hoped that one day, there would be a doctor sent to the community and then the center could open.”

In another case, a community member described how an international NGO from a Middle Eastern country:

“...gave tins of paint to schools and then they gave banners for the children to hold up. These posters were in Arabic so we didn’t understand them. They wanted the children to go away for religious training. They built a mosque rather than houses. What is the point of a mosque when you have nowhere to live?”

In addition, some people mentioned that there have been countless one-, two-, and three-day trainings and workshops, yet they estimated that there was still a 50% unemployment rate in Kosovo. In one conversation, a woman made the further point that the training offered was at times “useless,” commenting,

“...these hairdressing projects--that was crazy--training 50 women in one village with no market.”

Expressing an insult to their intelligence, a few people said things such as,

“The international community misunderstood that we are a civilized people. Some of the seminars were pointless – we learned nothing new and they were a waste of funds...Money should have been better invested in education.”

“We have an educated population, fully literate. Most advice was not necessary. Sometimes, the knowledge of the people who came to provide the trainings was not adequate.”

People often said that what they really needed was longer-term, systematic support in the development of their skills, and, of course, sustainable economic opportunities, as opposed to one-off trainings.

C. Issues of Coordination, Communication and Participation

People repeatedly asked, “Where did all of the money go?” Their ideas about how funding from the international community was spent varied: in some cases, people said the answer was in corruption; in others, it was the fact (discussed above) that many international organizations absorbed some of the assistance to cover their own expenses. However, most people felt that much of the funding in Kosovo had not been used effectively due to poor coordination and communication.

Coordination and Communication

People almost uniformly were of the opinion that communities should be better integrated into the coordination and assistance delivery process, although contradictory opinions were expressed about whether or not and the degree to which local NGOs and municipalities should be involved. People had varied opinions as to whether or not local municipal authorities functioned effectively, and there was often frustration that money and assistance was not flowing from local government offices to communities. Listening Teams heard repeatedly,

“[International agencies] need to work directly with the people because otherwise there is a big risk of corruption.”

Many people were critical of the international community’s efficacy in distributing aid and that organizations seemed to push their own agendas, often without local buy-in. One local political advisor said,

“NGOs involved in reconstruction did a good job but donations ran out very early. Many households did not get their houses repaired. Except for returns, there was not much coordination and a huge amount of money was spent on administrative tasks, consultants and bureaucratic procedures. There has been a lack of initiative from municipal authorities while returns were pushed by internationals.”

There were also widely expressed opinions that not even the returns-related assistance was coordinated effectively. In one region, a woman felt that the resources should have been sufficient for all people to have houses in her municipality, stating,

“Many families were left without houses and if there had been better management, this wouldn’t have happened. The international community should have paid more attention to finding the right people [in communities] who are honest and wouldn’t misuse funds. Those who are poor know the poor.”

These criticisms were often linked to a lack of monitoring (discussed further below) by international agencies and donors. People said that international staff did not spend enough time in the field seeing the situation for themselves and talking with people, and often relied too much on local staff and local bodies (e.g., village councils, municipal authorities or local NGOs), which in the end were corrupt and/or influenced by political considerations. We heard repeatedly that one needed to know the right people in order to get assistance—sometimes referring to local officials and at other times referring to local staff of international agencies and local NGOs.

A number of people said that if they could have talked to international aid agency staff directly as opposed to dealing with intermediaries, they would have gotten more effective assistance. In one conversation, a man stated,

“Villagers are not powerful enough to decide the projects. Internationals should work directly with the local people. Sometimes, the municipality manages to lose money. Internationals should come here directly to discuss what work is needed.”

A former government minister noted that,

“Money was spent on coordination between internationals, but no Kosovars were there!”

Another person succinctly described the results of both good communication and participation:

“If people are included, they feel empowered. I think when there is transparency, communication, and collaboration, then people will feel good.”

Two conversations the Listening Team had illustrated how easily communication can falter. A group of local NGO staff told of a community center funded by a foreign organization:

“The internet was supposed to be free, but people were still being made to pay for it. When I asked [the foreign organization] ‘why are you making our kids pay,’ they said the fees went to maintaining their office.”

When the foreign organization in question was asked about this community center, the staff took out documents indicating that the community center was funded by multiple donors, and in fact it was another donor who funded the internet component. Their understanding, however, was that the fees went to *the community center’s office*, to maintain its sustainability, NOT to the foreign agency’s head office.

In addition, people discussed several instances of duplication of efforts resulting from a lack of coordination amongst donor agencies. The most ubiquitous of these related to Kosovo’s electrical power system (KEK), an example that seemed to have become emblematic of these issues with poorly managed assistance and was mentioned in several conversations. People described the process of repairing the electrical system as a “band-aid” solution, with different donors and agencies giving funding, materials and technical support for different parts of the system. However, due to a lack of coordination, the system still did not function effectively and numerous people speculated that the entire system could likely have been rebuilt with the funds used to date.

One government ministry official involved in harmonization of aid suggested that the lack of coordination and “fragmentation of aid” resulted in:

“1) Unfair competition between agencies and NGOs; 2) many ‘black holes’ with no assistance, while other areas had a lot of organizations working there; and 3) no ‘bridging’ programs to link emergency and development phases of assistance.”

He noted that another serious problem was that many agencies did not have exit strategies and that when their funding was cut, they disappeared, even though people were expecting more assistance. People then asked the local government to fill the gaps, but often they were not

informed of the projects or did not have the experience or budget to continue projects started by NGOs.

Participation and Partnership

Regarding community involvement, a few people said that less participatory processes were appropriate during the emergency phase when communities did not have the capacity to be involved; however, afterwards, they felt that assistance efforts should have been more inclusive and people stressed the importance of their participation. A village council member stated,

“It is necessary for the international community to stay in Kosovo for the foreseeable future. But they should try and share responsibility amongst Kosovars – this didn’t happen before. We wanted to be consulted more. We have a proverb: [You] can’t make a good deal without the owner.”

People frequently spoke about how this was an appropriate time of transition in Kosovo for assistance to shift from direct aid to more sustainable forms and processes of development, at times using the term “partnership.” One ministry official suggested that “project implementation units (PIUs)” used by many donors should be eliminated as they functioned as enclaves within institutions that would later have to maintain the projects even though they had not been involved in the implementation. He suggested that international agencies needed

“to work more within institutions, never for them.”

Another official said,

“We appreciated the direct assistance and we needed it at one point, but now we can handle things ourselves. Now we need partners, not handouts.”

A number of comments also suggested that participation and partnership, at least for local governments, went beyond merely “being in the room when decisions are made.” A municipal official in Gnjilane/Gjilan region described a project where the municipality was present at the negotiation, but aid still went to the wrong people because, in his opinion, the municipality was not sufficiently involved. A donor contractor who sat regularly in meetings between municipalities and foreign donors and aid agencies explained that, in his opinion,

“Even when they are sitting in the meetings, the locals don’t really have a voice.”

People talked about the large number of international and local NGOs that were operating in Kosovo, especially in the emergency phase, and that there was little control over them. In a number of conversations with community leaders and one with the local staff of an international NGO, they explained that municipalities and village councils now had to clean up a lot of the “mess” that was created by the lack of coordination, communication and community participation. This “mess” included the use of low-quality construction materials and the perception of unequal distribution of assistance with different agencies offering different “packages” with varying types and levels of assistance. In several areas, the local governments

and leaders do not have any records of all of the assistance that has been provided and by whom, yet communities now expect them to maintain the infrastructure and projects started by aid agencies. This “mess” was made particularly challenging for the municipal governments as they had no recourse years later after hundreds of aid agencies had left.

Several people did mention cases where they liked the way organizations worked, such as when agencies went door-to-door in communities to identify and help people. Another specific example of effective coordination and partnership that stood out involved the planning process for a village secondary school. The head of the municipal department of education and a local school principal described how in 2004 they had engaged in a “visioning” process which involved all of the stakeholders connected to the principal’s school: teachers, parents, ministry officials, and donors. The principal noted that this strategy had helped the school identify clear priorities which had both helped improve the students’ performance as well as made it easy to communicate with donors and NGOs:

“We have a list of priorities and a long-term plan readily available. All we have to do is coordinate with the municipality and the donor and it is clear what we need to improve our school.”

In addition, people offered examples of effective three-way communication and partnerships between communities, a municipality, and NGOs in which the community worked together with the NGO to prioritize projects and carry out the implementation. The community and municipality also played an active role in the selection of contractors, and all stakeholders within the community were expected to contribute to the cost of implementation, be it with financial support or in-kind support. It was mentioned many times that communities appreciated such participatory methodologies. As one person said about a school reconstruction project in which the community contributed 30% of the labor and funds,

“Our participation was very valuable – we wanted to own it. Even if we didn’t always have the material support, we gave the moral support. That was always, always there.”

D. Issues of Accountability, Transparency and Follow-Up

There was an almost unanimous sentiment in conversations with various people in all regions of Kosovo that more accountability, transparency, monitoring and follow-up on the part of donors and international assistance agencies were necessary. One man spoke from his perspective as a community member, stating,

“When Internationals bring their money here, they should be careful where they spend it and who they give it to. They need more internal controlling...I have no power. I have no access to the municipality and no way to examine financial records.”

A municipal official attributed the lack of transparency to ineffective coordination and consultation with the different offices within the municipality that are responsible for providing services in communities. When describing different aid projects related to street lighting, returnees and agriculture equipment, he noted,

“There is a problem with the harmonization of projects...This was because NGOs did not consult with us but instead worked with the [municipal] office for communities.”

In general, people were unsure to whom to address problems with the assistance they received. A typical situation involved the use of poor quality construction materials that later collapsed, but the agency or NGO that provided the assistance was often long gone by the time the construction proved faulty. Further, there was a general sense that agencies “passed the buck,” meaning the municipality would blame the contractor, and the contractor would blame the international agency that funded the project. As one person explained,

“When things have gone wrong, we have complained to the international community. They say it is the government, so we complain to them and the government says it’s the international community. We don’t know who to talk to!”

Across communities, we heard people question over and over again,

“Why didn’t anyone come back? Why didn’t they come and see how the money was being spent, the quality of the materials used, and who was getting them?”

The people with whom we spoke further criticized the fact that project designs were often not transparent, meaning that the communities themselves were unfamiliar with the goals, target beneficiaries, implementation strategy, etc., and thus could not effectively play a role in monitoring the implementation. People were frustrated that donors were so far removed from the assistance process, seemed unfamiliar with specific projects, and did not bother to come to communities to see how their money was being spent—and whether or not it matched the needs of the intended beneficiaries.

Intertwined with the aforementioned issues of coordination and communication, there were differences of opinion as to whose responsibility it was to monitor and follow up on projects – leading people to question exactly who was accountable. People often linked the issues of accountability to corruption. As one elderly man explained,

“Municipalities should hold the power. However, internationals give money to the municipality to give to another NGO. With this process, the possibility is there to take some money. The mayor should take responsibility for solving this. We cannot see where the mayor gets his money from nor where he spends it. I have a story for you. When Franz Ferdinand went to the front, he saw that his troops were complaining about having no food. He asked the person at the back of the cavalry to make a snowball and pass it forward. By the time it reached the front, it was much smaller than when it set off.”

He likened Ferdinand’s snowball to corruption in the assistance process in Kosovo, and lamented that when the community members complained to the municipality, it said it could not do anything, and so on up the chain of assistance.

Reflections on what these themes mean for international assistance agencies

The reasons for the “chinks” in the delivery chain of assistance in Kosovo described above seemed to be caused by a number of factors, including: the politicization of assistance; pressure to spend funds quickly without a focus on sustainability; the large numbers of and competition between aid agencies; and an inherent tension between the need and desire to build the capacity of local institutions by involving them in the implementation and monitoring of assistance, and their ability as nascent structures to do so effectively.

The Listening Team noted that people in communities tended to focus more on the tangible forms of international assistance in conversations, particularly those they had received during the emergency phase. They suggested that there was less recognition of the investment in capacity building of local organizations and institutions, possibly because these efforts were both ongoing and less visible.

Further, while people generally discredited the local municipal governments as being corrupt, inefficient and unreliable, Listening Team members noted that it is possible that these institutions have become the system’s “scapegoats.” The fact that they are facing the challenging task of not only building their institutional capacity to meet the needs of their constituents, but also cleaning up the mess created by international and local organizations which did not plan and coordinate their work in communities effectively, makes their jobs very challenging. This feeds a cycle of undermining local institutions and mistrust between them and communities, and perpetuates the dilemma for the international community regarding with whom and how to work.

II. On Who Gets Assistance

A. Political Factors influencing Who Gets Aid

One of the issues people raised related to the politicization of the assistance process, especially when local authorities are involved. As one K-Albanian said,

“If you are not a member of a political party or you do not have any friends or family in the municipal administration, then you struggle to get any assistance. You have to be a [political party] member to get any assistance. Initially aid goes to the members of the political parties, then to Roma people, then to Serbs.”

This sentiment that you had to have connections to get assistance was ubiquitous. Although international staff were not usually implicated in these issues, they were indirectly held responsible due to the lack of monitoring of national staff and local partners, and physical presence in the field. As another person stated,

“I have lots of connections, but I waited for internationals to fix my house. The way they made the decision of who got what was not transparent. If you have connections then it is easier to get assistance. I expected there to be some supervision or a committee to review the decision, but I did not see that.”

B. Aid Favoring Specific Ethnicities, Multi-Ethnic Communities, or Returnees

People in all regions talked frequently about aid favoring certain ethnicities, multi-ethnic communities, and returnees, saying they often felt excluded and that assistance was not based on the needs of people. Many people talked about the shifting priorities of donor agencies and INGOs to favor certain groups, especially after the emergency phase. For instance, K-Serbs often felt that K-Albanians got all the funding, while K-Albanians felt that K-Serbs were now the primary beneficiaries of international assistance. Others felt that returnees were unfairly prioritized, saying:

“The families that were never displaced are very frustrated as they are not part of any projects – returnees are helped but those that stayed are left aside. They are unsatisfied and think no one cares for them.”

Another person said,

“Five months ago we went to talk to [an international] agency. We asked them to help poor families that were not displaced but we were told that this was not possible. We said, ‘Well what do we have to do to get assistance, leave Kosovo and come back again?’”

Representatives of smaller ethnic minorities also found the international community partial to K-Serbs:

“If the Serbs open one organization, they will get funds...I do not know of any Ashkali organization that has received a car, but I know of Serbian ones that did.”

Some minority representatives said that Serbs were getting double assistance, both from UNMIK and the Serbian government, while Ashkalis could not, for example, access their Serbian pensions despite having paid taxes for years.

One Ashkali group leader said he was frustrated that several minority ethnic groups were “lumped” together by donors and aid agencies, commonly referred to by the abbreviation “RAE.” In response to whether or not there is a common RAE identity, he responded,

“There are 3 nationalities. On one hand, there are the Ashkali and Egyptian, and then the Roma. The first two have nothing in common with the Roma, except the economic and social problems...it is a mistake, a violation of our human rights to group us together. We feel offended. It is as if you put Serbs, Gorani and Turks together. We Ashkali just want to represent ourselves, but we are forced by donors to represent everyone in the RAE communities.”

He went on to express the opinion, echoed by others, that proposals were only funded if they included all 3 communities, so they were forced to present problems on behalf of the 3 groups. At the same time, an Ashkali NGO suggested that one could meet the RAE “quota” often

required by international agencies by merely including or hiring members of one minority group, which was not a true representation of the diversity donors said they wanted to support. Other members of minority ethnic communities added:

“There are no employment opportunities for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians (RAE) in municipal institutions...No one cares about us being employed. We have our office for a RAE representative in the municipality since the time when UNMIK was the administrator, but there has been no progress.”

Another issue that came up very frequently was of aid targeting multi-ethnic communities, often to the neglect to mono-ethnic ones. As people in one community said with some amazement:

“To get aid, not only does your community have to have many ethnic groups, they have to have problems with each other too!”

Others talked about multi-ethnicity and reconciliation as simply another “rule of the game” to get assistance. A K-Albanian community council member told the Listening Team about a delegation they sent to convince displaced K-Serbs to return to the village. When the Listening Team asked him why they were eager for the K-Serbs to return, he said matter-of-factly,

“because then we could get more things.”

Two other shop owners talked about the school, health clinic and electrical grid the village received, saying,

“We got all this aid because the village was ‘multi-ethnic’. The NGOs were fulfilling their own conditions. We heard this on TV.”

Many people talked about the distribution of assistance between groups and communities in terms of “fairness” and “justice.” One recommendation we heard several times was to distribute assistance justly, although, of course, the determination of what was considered “just” was subjective. Quite a few people made the point that perceptions of unjust distribution of resources impeded reconciliation efforts and had the potential to fuel further conflict. One K-Albanian suggested,

“If you build 50 Serb houses then they should also build 50 of the Albanian houses burned by those Serbs. The Albanians were given roofs, doors, windows, some floors. The Serbs were given everything – income generation, food and homes. It is difficult to reconcile if the situation stays like this... We are not against the Serbs getting help, but we want the help to be provided equally.”

However, there were also those who regarded the multi-ethnic goal of aid as positive. A few people felt that the international community had an ongoing role in teaching people to value diversity and live together effectively, and that coexistence may have to be imposed in the short-term. One K-Serbian religious leader suggested that,

“International organizations should tell Albanians that for them it is better if there is a multiethnic environment. The international community should tell Albanians that if Serbs return and work, then even for Albanians it will be better...in Kosovo every day there are less Serbs, they sell their wealth, people don’t see any reason to live here. A reason should be found, a way to encourage them to stay, I think!”

On the other side, a K-Albanian who was displaced and still has not been able to return to his village, said:

“Unless Albanians return, Serbs won’t be safe!”

Reflections on who gets assistance

One of the K-Albanian Listening Team members agreed with the need for international assistance to promote multi-ethnicity and of the deep importance of Kosovo’s diversity to him personally, saying that without Serbs, Kosovo would

“be like a country where people only drove Volkswagen cars! Can you imagine how boring?”

The Listening Team suggested that the problem with targeting of assistance had much to do with transparency and the need for more discussion of funding priorities and project plans, so that people do not misperceive agencies’ intentions. From the perspective of the international aid agency directors with whom we met in Kosovo, the shifting of funding priorities is normal, but they expressed the danger that it can create big gaps in which people who need assistance may not get it.

III. On Economic Development

In almost every conversation, people talked about the need for more sustainable economic development, and that providing youth with jobs and engaging them in professional, meaningful work was among the paramount priorities facing Kosovo today. As one person lamented,

“Youth in Kosovo, they are sitting in cafes, not doing anything, their coffees paid for by parents. They have no reason not to leave to find hope, find employment, but we want them to stay. For our future, we have to find ways to give them jobs so they stay.”

Unemployment is commonly estimated at around 50% in Kosovo, and around a third of the population lives in poverty.¹⁰ Many people pointed out that unemployment led to economic migration, both to the capital Prishtinë/Pristina, as well as outside of Kosovo. Many people in Kosovo still rely on remittances and economic support from family who are working in Europe, the US, and other countries. One ministry official who dealt with members of the K-Albanian Diaspora said that,

¹⁰ Kosovo Human Development Report 2006 http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/hdr_eng.pdf

“...many [in the Diaspora] are tired of sending money to Kosovo, since they have been doing it for about 20 years, and they are now telling their families that they need to help themselves... Some of them want to invest in businesses and to create jobs, but there are no rules yet to guarantee their investments.”

He and others link the lack of economic development to the delay on finalizing the status of Kosovo, noting that investors want to see the status finalized so that the legal status of their investments can be clear. Some people noted that corruption and organized crime, including trafficking in goods and persons, and insecurity and political uncertainty have also decreased the confidence of potential investors. Several people felt that the government of Kosovo (and the donors that support it and the recent economic reforms) needed to do more to protect small businesses and especially farmers who could not compete with other countries' cheaper products. Farmers also said they had no insurance or means of protecting themselves against catastrophic or natural disaster, which could destroy their livelihoods.

People also discussed issues with the privatization process overseen by the international community, suggesting that factories should be re-opened and expressing concerns that the valuation of state-owned assets had not been accurate. People noted that there were some tracts of land and facilities which still belonged to the state, and thus could not be used to create more economic opportunities until the status of Kosovo was resolved.

The majority of the people with whom we spoke talked about how the priority of international development agencies should have shifted from housing to the creation of economic opportunities sooner. As one person suggested,

“A better contribution would be to build factories. More jobs make a better standard of living. Organizations build 20 houses, then another builds another 10, but without jobs it is difficult. You cannot eat your house. The Municipality and KEK's [the power company] relations are not good. We cannot make KEK hire people so we have youths on the street which creates more problems. We need to occupy the youth. There is no financial assistance for education. We had better conditions in the former Yugoslavia. Parents are losing jobs. We would avoid this problem if internationals would invest in factories and not just houses.”

A. Inappropriate and insufficient economic opportunities

As previously discussed in terms of international assistance not matching the local needs, there was some mention of inappropriate job training which was provided by aid agencies, such as hairdressing training for more than 50 women in a village. A number of people said that these training programs did not create the opportunities hoped for, and further, people were disappointed and to some degree even humiliated by them, saying:

“This was all the international community thinks we are capable of?”

Others said they were insulted when international NGOs brought in pre-packaged assistance, such as microcredit loans of only 50 Euros and training programs based on work in less

developed places (many people named African countries as examples). They were disappointed that aid agencies had not taken the time to understand the local resources and capabilities, and to design their programs appropriately:

“The intentions were good, but the NGOs never made assessments or evaluations—the money could have done more if it was used correctly.”

A few people mentioned that although micro-credit had become a popular source of international assistance and had created access to capital, in reality, the interest rates associated with these loans were prohibitively high and the loans themselves were often too micro. One person pointed out,

“They offer us 2,000 Euros for a business expansion project... [He points to a machine]...I paid 12,000 Euros for this T-shirt printing machine that could employ 5 people. When I ask for 10,000 Euros, they turn me down but then they are willing to provide 15,000 Euros for a conference that only produces recommendations. There are too many trainings and too few loans!”

Many people said that there needed to be more investment in medium-sized businesses that would allow entrepreneurs, farmers, etc. to create jobs. On the positive side regarding micro-credit, some noted that these funds were at least more egalitarian and more transparent than the grants available through the municipalities.

Procurement of goods was also an issue, with some people noting that the international community had done a good job of stimulating the local economy by relying on resources from within Kosovo. However, others discussed how international contractors often brought in equipment and supplies purchased in their home countries (mostly in Europe), and that a serious opportunity had been missed by not instituting policies requiring procurement from within Kosovo. On the link between economic development and long-term stability, a number of people suggested,

“In the future, I think we should get better in all aspects. We need higher employment. If we want a state we should all work and not just some of us. The state is built by people, not by politics.”

“The best approach for reconciliation is economic investment and multi-ethnic employment opportunities, not talking about minority rights.”

B. Issues with parallel structures

Many people complained that those who work in the parallel institutions supported by the Serbian government (municipal officials, teachers, etc.) receive much higher salaries. For instance, a K-Serb who was employed in an UNMIK-supported municipal office explained that his colleagues who worked in the Serbian government-supported municipal offices got around 1,000 to 1,500 Euros/month, while he only got around 350 Euros/month from the Kosovar government (supported by UNMIK). When asked why he worked for less when he did not have to, he said he enjoyed the multiethnic environment/work, and while he was seen as a traitor in

the K-Serbian community for working in the UNMIK-supported municipality, there were others who wanted his job. He also acknowledged that the higher payments from the Serbian government seemed unfair and that there are a lot of K-Albanians who were living in bad conditions, even though many of them had “paid into” the Serbian system for many years.

A K-Albanian woman, frustrated that K-Albanian teachers (paid by the Kosovar government) were only paid about 200 Euros/month, while Serbian teachers were paid around 800 Euros/month¹¹, said:

“Yesterday they had everything, and today they have everything.”

Several people blamed the international community for permitting double standards in the distribution of pensions and social assistance by the Serbian and Kosovar governments, saying they expected international agencies to do more to ensure just access to resources and opportunities. For instance, one middle-aged K-Albanian man who worked in a state-owned factory before the war, complained that the K-Serbs who worked there with him were now getting their pensions (around 300 Euro/month) from the Serbian government as well as payments from UNMIK, while he was only getting about 40 Euro/month in social welfare from the Kosovar government and had no access to his pension.

In stories the Listening Teams heard elsewhere, a middle-aged K-Albanian man explained that he had applied for social assistance, but needed to have children below the age of 5 to qualify, and thought this was unfair since he worked for the railroads for 41 years and paid into the pension system from which he was now receiving no benefit. He and others said that they expected these issues to be resolved when the status of Kosovo is determined, and that in the interim the international community should ensure equal access to pensions and other assistance.

C. Hiring practices of international organizations

Regarding employment created by international assistance organizations, several people expressed concerns with the way in which international agencies sent people to work in regions that they were not originally from. They noted that this creates multiple problems, including: that jobs are being taken away from locals; people with different allegiances and (often deficient) understanding of the communities are working there; and the way international agencies employ people is on a project-to-project basis, which provides little job security or stability for local staff.

Others mentioned the disparity in salaries that international agencies paid compared to what the local government paid, noting that a false economy had been created which would be difficult to sustain as international assistance diminished. Members of the Listening Team who were local staff of international NGOs noted that they personally saw many benefits to their interaction and employment with international agencies no matter how long it lasted. They noted that they had

¹¹ We could not confirm the 800 Euros figure she suggested. A 2003 OSCE report on parallel structures states that K-Serb teachers can be paid as much as 500 Euros if payments from the Serbian and Kosovar Governments are combined. http://www.osce.org/documents/mik/2003/10/698_en.pdf (p. 32). Another UNESCO report in 2004 confirms the 500 Euros figure: <http://www.unesco.org/iiep/PDF/pubs/kosovo.pdf>. (p. 124)

learned new languages, been given opportunities for acquiring new skills through training, developed a different work ethic, traveled, and built relationships across cultural boundaries.

D. The role of local capacities and efforts

The investments of Kosovars themselves in rebuilding and developing the economy have been tremendous, with many K-Albanians returning from Europe and other places to set up businesses. Many who have had opportunities to study or work abroad have also come back to Kosovo. For example, one K-Albanian recipient of a fellowship to study in the U.S. said that all of the other fellows had also returned, indicating that there was a real commitment to make a difference and help build a “new Kosovo.”

Several people noted that there is a tremendous commitment and capacity on the part of youth that needs to be tapped into. One community member pointed out,

“We have the youngest population in Europe and we need to utilize that.”

Another middle-aged lawyer suggested,

“More money needs to be invested in young people who can change more – older people are set in their ways and they won’t change. Why not let young and old compete based on merit? It is time to change things now.”

The general sentiment that international assistance has saved lives but not addressed “systemic problems” was heard in Kosovo, as in other Listening Exercises. Some people note that it is very important to develop the economy now so that when a status decision is made, people are not disappointed when the economic situation does not change quickly, thus increasing the chance for violence. As one prominent leader suggested,

“Nothing works better than jobs to nourish development and ambition.”

IV. On Institutional Development

A. Government Capacity Building

Many people were frustrated with the poor functioning of Kosovar governmental institutions, which have been the target of much international assistance. People spoke of widespread confusion over laws and regulations between the local and provincial levels, and complained of problems with decision-making, a lack of transparency, and bureaucracy.

People also spoke of the inefficiencies of the judicial system and trouble with accessing records, as well as the need to change the mentality within the system, shifting from a socialist frame-of-mind with tremendous bureaucracy, lack of initiative, issues not being resolved in a timely manner, etc. to a more outcome-oriented attitude. Several people blamed the international

community for setting up this political system, and expected UNMIK to use the powers it has to enforce the laws and prevent abuses of power.

Many people said they do not trust or have much confidence in the institutions or the politicians, due to many of the issues discussed in this report: corruption, lack of transparency, poor communication and coordination, politicization of assistance processes, etc. As a village mayor noted,

“There has been a lot of excellent work done in terms of multi-culturalism. We feel safer, we can move freely, we have no problems living together. Now, the problem is between the communities and the institutions. That is where a lot of trust-building work yet needs to be done.”

People are frustrated with the current political system and this makes them feel disengaged and less likely to participate in political processes. A few K-Albanians felt that the closed party list system (in which people vote for parties, not individual candidates) is ineffective because it affords a diffusion of responsibility, in which people are able to blame the party rather than holding individual politicians accountable. As some K-Albanians said,

“Politicians in municipalities talk about what they can get, not what to do.”

“No one feels representative or represented. For example, the mayor of Prishtinë/Pristina is not even from there.”

“Democratization was a false assumption--they have not created a system that people can use. Parties chose who will benefit them, not the people. There is a war between the political parties which is reflected in the population.”

The head of a local think tank noted that in both the Albanian and Serbian languages, there are no separate words for “politics” and “policy.” He noted that when he trained some of the political parties,

“When asked what do political parties produce?’ no one said ‘policies.’”

While quotas for women’s participation in political parties have increased the numbers of women in politics, several women in and outside of government pointed out that this was only a superficial nod towards gender equality because in reality, they were still limited in terms of power and influence. They noted that there are few women in senior leadership positions and that there are no women represented on the Unity Team negotiating the final status with the Serbian government and the UN.

Additionally, a few people noted that while some bureaucrats in the civil service have gotten training, without higher salaries, many have left and are leaving, and institutional memory is being lost. One ministry official said that while a lot has been spent on training by the international community, these investments will be lost and that,

“There will be 10 times the corruption if they work for business because they know how the administration works and they know people and will use their connections—this is a high risk!”

B. The International Administrators

There is widespread discussion of and much has been written about the successes and failures of the UNMIK administration. Many people were frustrated with the slow handover of responsibilities from internationals to local staff and institutions. At the same time, the lack of trust in local institutions and those within them caused some to assert that the presence of the international community remains necessary. A few of them suggested that international staff should still serve as *“supervisors,”* while most said they should be present only as *“advisors.”*

These issues also related to the confusion created by having multiple parallel systems of administration and governance operating simultaneously (e.g., UNMIK, Kosovar, and Serbian). There were concerns that in the confusion, people used whichever set of laws or regulations were most convenient for them and there were no mechanisms for streamlining the regulations and holding people accountable to one standard. Further, some people stressed that Kosovo was unique, and they felt that the international community had just imposed an administrative structure, particularly the legal system, that did not take into account the specific issues and needs of the Kosovar setting. Others noted that there often was competition between American and European legal experts, who did not seek enough local input when making or reforming the regulations.

C. Civil Society Development

A few people felt that the sequencing of donor funding for civil society had been “off”, highlighting that there were fewer resources available now when there was greater capacity, and that earlier when there was more funding of local NGOs, they could not absorb the funds fast enough. A researcher and policy advisor noted that with the emphasis of international agencies on funding local NGOs to implement projects,

“A project society has been developed, not a civil society”

He added that there should be a focus now on developing advocacy/watch-dog organizations in addition to local NGOs who implemented projects and provided services, and that this would strengthen civil society and governance in Kosovo.

Some people felt that trainings related to the development of civil society and political parties had been positive; however, they emphasized a need for more focus in these areas, as well as, again, on advocacy and watchdog capacities within civil society. As one community member noted,

“We must work on building foundations of democracy and stability. Institutions sometimes cannot do much unless the population cooperates and supports their work... [the international community can] help people to live in safety, give them employment, work on reconciliation and there won't be problems.”

In North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and in Serbian enclaves, several people described the logistical and bureaucratic problems of getting funding for local organizations from the international community. These included the fact that the funding must pass through many bodies before it reached local organizations, which people found time-consuming and tiresome. Others noted difficulties in establishing NGOs in these areas:

“It is difficult to register in Prishtinë/Pristina and we need to register to be considered by donors. It is also difficult to be registered in Serbia...and we do not have Serbian donors [other than the State].”

Other Serbian NGOs said there were few “joint projects” as were promised and they:

“Often felt used, like the 13th pig, which had to go. International NGOs wasted our time and it would be better to work in partnership.”

Several people noted that before the influx of international assistance which began in 1999, there was an active civil society which played the role of the state through the parallel K-Albanian institutions that were funded largely by the K-Albanian population and Diaspora. Now people expect the “state” to fund support of local needs and organizations. One head of a prominent local NGO noted that since many former civil society leaders are in the government now,

“There is some individual philanthropy for individual charitable cases, but there is still not much institutional support and less understanding of the role of civil society.”

Others noted that the tradition of community solidarity and contribution was lost after the influx of international assistance, which led to a lot of competition for aid. Many people noted that the volunteer spirit which existed in the K-Albanian community was further eroded by some donors and organizations that paid “volunteers” to participate in projects and committees.

Some people suggested that one of the main contributions the international community can make going forward is further investment in the development of civil society. One person observed that the most productive role for the international community in the future would be to:

“...create awareness among citizens [and] serve as a bridge between civil society and the Kosovo government.”

Final Reflections and Further Questions

Several general themes and ongoing questions emerged from this listening exercise related to improving the effectiveness of international assistance in general. These are challenging questions with no immediate answers; yet, we raise them as ongoing and critical places for those engaged in this work to focus their thinking:

- There is an inherent tension between strengthening local capacity, particularly institutional, and meeting the immediate needs of communities. How do you work with local institutions in a way that is effective, given issues of capacity, lack of coordination, and corruption?
- These conversations point to the question of how to change deeply-rooted political cultures in post-conflict settings. Team members noted that the Balkans raises some particular challenges in shifting from the mentality of the former Yugoslavia, in which there was a diffusion of individual accountability and tremendous bureaucracy, to a democratic system functioning with appropriate checks and balances. They wondered what this might mean in terms of changes in individual and collective behavior and attitudes, which then affect shifts within the environment (e.g., workplace, community, etc.). More understanding of these shifts and how they relate to the process of development and work of the international community are necessary. They are massive cultural transitions, and as the Listening Team pointed out, they take time.
- Another type of cultural shift that also came up in a few conversations involved dependency, and the perception that what was previously a culture of volunteerism changed after the NATO bombing and the influx of aid agencies, especially when so many agencies gave things for free. Thus, the question raised was: how do you meet community needs, particularly in an emergency phase, without creating dependency and affecting traditional and positive values in a society?
- It is critical to take into account people's capacity to "participate" during different phases of assistance. The Listening Teams referred to the prevalence of "stomach" thinking, and to the fact that many K-Albanians were traumatized and humiliated during the emergency phase by the painful experiences of becoming displaced and fleeing to neighboring countries. The same thing happened to many K-Serbs as they were pushed out or fled the retaliation when the K-Albanians returned. These traumatic experiences impacted their capacity to participate and assist themselves, the way they behaved as recipients, and possibly the need to hoard, and a sense of entitlement -- a logical human reaction to expulsion and trauma. The question is thus, how do you respond to emergencies in such a way that: 1) lays the groundwork for sustainable development and deep social change; 2) does not destroy volunteerism and other positive societal qualities; and 3) Does not create dependency, while at the same time acknowledging the emotional state of people who have suffered and their capacity to engage in participatory processes?
- There is a need to think about the impact of politically targeted assistance and to not to "lump" members of ethnic minority groups together indiscriminately. A further cultural shift that several people noted is the need to focus on the creation of a "Kosovar" identity. Peacebuilding should be a cross-cutting issue. As one Listening Team member suggested, the international community should "*Focus on society building, and not necessarily peacebuilding.*"