

Aims, process and methodology

This report derives from an extensive analytical process that has included a 'real-time' evaluation in the field and a 'learning workshop' in Geneva, as well as a review of relevant documentation and detailed consultations with key stakeholders on the author's initial findings and recommendations. The primary objective of this process has been to determine the effectiveness of UNHCR's response to the Sudan/Eritrea crisis of mid-2000 and to assess more generally the adequacy of the organization's emergency response mechanisms.

A real-time evaluation (RTE) is a timely, rapid and interactive analytical endeavour, undertaken as an emergency operation unfolds. The immediate impetus for the RTE in Eritrea and Sudan was the 'Plan of action for strengthening UNHCR's capacity for emergency preparedness and response', introduced by the organization in the aftermath of the 1999 Kosovo crisis. The plan of action recommended that the organization 'introduce real-time evaluations in order to be able to undertake rapid, analytical evaluations of ongoing emergencies, and provide suggestions for improvement, as appropriate, while they can still make a difference.'

The RTE notion is not, however, a new one. In 1992, for example, a review of UNHCR's performance in the Persian Gulf crisis recommended that future emergency evaluations 'be undertaken in the initial phase of an emergency operation by UNHCR staff members and consultants who are not burdened with operational responsibilities.'

This RTE involved a combination of individual and group interviews with stakeholders (staff of UNHCR, UN agencies, governments and NGOs, as well as displaced persons) in Sudan, Eritrea and Geneva. It also entailed site visits in the field and participation in the crisis cell established in Geneva for the Sudan/Eritrea emergency operation. The author of the report followed the work of the crisis cell from 31 May 2000 and undertook a mission to Sudan (Khartoum, Kassala and Es Showak) and Eritrea (Asmara, Tessenai and Akordet) between 13 and 27 June 2000.

Initial outputs from the RTE included a debriefing session with UNHCR staff-members in Asmara, in which a first version of the report was disseminated, and the presentation of the review's findings to a meeting of the crisis cell in Geneva. A third and revised RTE report was then distributed to key stakeholders.

A number of stakeholders have commented constructively on UNHCR's first attempt to undertake a real-time evaluation. In view of the potential importance of the RTE as a UNHCR evaluation tool, a short paper on this methodology will be prepared. It will reflect upon the pilot RTE, and develop suggestions for a revised RTE framework.

Another innovation associated with this evaluation was the convening of a 'learning workshop' in Geneva, chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner. This event provided around 25 key internal stakeholders, from Headquarters and the field, with an opportunity to take stock of the operation and to engage in a detailed discussion of the recommendations presented in this report. The recommendations herein reflect the consensus of this workshop.

While the report itself has attempted to assimilate and reflect the different viewpoints expressed at the workshop, this report is an independent production of the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. The evaluation was undertaken by Arafat Jamal, Operational Policy Officer in UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. It has been reviewed and edited by Jeff Crisp, Head of EPAU.