

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

1. ETC UK was commissioned to carry out the first real-time evaluation of humanitarian assistance in Albania. The request came from the Danida Evaluation Secretariat, which, as part of the Danish Foreign Ministry, is currently undertaking an evaluation of complex emergencies from 1992 to 1998 across the world. The reasons for asking for real-time evaluation in the case of Albania are broadly twofold:

- i. All agencies were involved in a complex emergency where there was adequate precautionary and contingency planning for an emergency;
- ii. Agencies were concerned that evaluations did not capture the complexity of procedural decisions but only focused on programme and planning elements.

2. This real-time evaluation took place in week five of the Kosovan emergency. All of the major UN agencies were observed as well as most of the major NGOs. The term ‘agency response’ is used in this summary to collectively refer to the major UN relief agencies, namely UNHCR and WFP. NGOs will be either referred to collectively or by name.

Care must be taken with the findings and judgements of this evaluation report. It is a snapshot in week five of the Kosova bombing campaign when NATO’s humanitarian role was just beginning to be defined and where some UN agencies were not yet heavily involved. This length and timing of the evaluation mission generate limitations in coverage and reportage.

Findings

3. There has been a very positive response from donors to the emergency both in cash and kind and this assistance is continuing to arrive and increase. For example, in the last week (week six) Canada has pledged USD 35 million, Denmark, USD 20 million, the United Kingdom pledged USD 65 million and France pledged USD 8 million for the relief effort. This generous provision means that resource shortage has not been a problem for the major agencies, as it has in other emergencies, and as a result, no refugees are dying from food or water shortages. This means that maximum performance is expected from all agencies involved in delivering emergency assistance. UNHCR, however, continues to stress a cashflow crisis arguing that donor pledges are not cash-in-hand.

4. Although the emergency response is now in its sixth week after the start of the NATO attacks, the UN agencies were slow to operationalise. The major efforts began three weeks into the emergency, which can be considered late in relation to the emergency forecasting. However, once started, the agency response has been rapid and it is still gathering momentum, with last week being a

critical point in this ‘take-off’ period. This ‘take-off’ period has seen attempts to co-ordinate operations of the major UN agencies, NATO, the Government of Albania and the (I) NGOs.

5. UN agency co-ordination capacity is, at the moment, variable and requires focusing and strengthening in several instances. Co-ordination of procedures (i.e. logistics and relief operations) within certain agencies, namely WFP, is very strong as a result of the placement of a highly skilled group of staff. Other agencies, including UNHCR, have been slow to co-ordinate logistics operations and there seems to be some confusion over programming and operational responsibilities. Levels of co-ordination on a programme and planning levels between agencies has also been poor but there are signs of improvements. A major opportunity exists in the form of the Emergency Management Group (EMG) which is composed of six individual desks: food, shelter, health, transport, information and administration to ensure programme and planning co-ordination. The EMG manages the emergency effort at a national level and the evaluation team recommends it as a model of good practice for co-ordinating activities at regional and prefecture level. For donors, at the level of the national EMG, there is need to know planned activity and output on a weekly basis so that planning and achievement can be accurately monitored.

6. The Government of Albania has demonstrated a full commitment to the relief effort and is central to the present success of humanitarian activities. It has been particularly successful in the location of refugees with host families, an aspect to this crisis which makes it unique (out of the 400,000 refugees in Albania, 260,000 are housed with host families). At the prefecture level, the local authorities have been severely stretched and they have struggled to register and relocate the refugees although their management of information is strong. They are in need of co-ordinated support from the UN agencies to increase capacity as they make up the central element of this relief effort. The Albanian government should seek to show that it is lead manager in the total operation with a strengthened UNHCR and NATO as its partners. It is possible that the quality of information from prefecture level will deteriorate as local authorities condone an emerging practice of exaggerating the number of refugees with host families to access cash payments and other benefits.

7. The NGO response to the emergency has been without parallel in any other emergency, particularly in the volume of cash raised from the general public. There are currently 114 NGOs (mostly international) operating within Albania. They have been integrated within the EMG, represented through their own co-ordinator, and their operations have largely been a success when they receive adequate instruction and direction from the major agencies. For, example, WFP has chosen to work through seven major International NGOs as their lead agencies in the prefectures. UNHCR has yet to do this. A registration process has been set up for new NGOs as they arrive and this needs to be reinforced through the de-registration of non-performing NGOs and tight protocols for operating NGOs. Larger (I) NGOs, with a history of good professional practice, should be directly engaged in camp management; smaller foreign NGOs should be welfare programme targeted and be urged to seek partnerships with local NGOs and organisations.

8. There is a continuing need for a range of contingency planning to cover, among other things: a large increase in refugees from Kosova and surrounding countries; the impact of a possible ground war on facilities to deliver humanitarian assistance within Albania; and the consolidation of current emergency actions into a two year operation.

Individual Agency Performance

9. **UNHCR.** UNHCR has been slow to operationalise and has shown poor performance, being over-stretched on shelter, non-food items and overall programme and planning co-ordination. It has begun to mobilise key staff from other regions to improve activities. There is a need to concentrate on programming/planning co-ordination and clarify responsibilities governing operations. It would be useful if there was a more visible and powerful head of the UNHCR operation linking programming/planning issues much more strongly to donors. UNHCR's operations have also been hampered with a rapid staff turnover, as key personnel sometimes only stayed for two weeks. This leads to little institutional memory, local inexperience of staff and poor external relations.

10. **WFP.** WFP co-ordinated team approach, with the correct mix of technology and reportage, has proved to be very effective. WFP has an extremely sophisticated and effective communications technology including operations guided by Deep Field Connectivity and Commodity Tracking. This has enabled high levels of preparedness and the ability to increase the effectiveness in targeting needs. It remains short on pre-positioning food for contingency in the event of the increase in refugees. The experienced staff may move out of Albania to return to their original stations or move into Kosova, which raises questions of a transition in Albania. WFP has managed to cover the full range of commodities in the food basket. The deployment of experienced staff raises questions of the impact that the removal of key personnel from their original stations that have on-going crises, e.g. the Great Lakes and Afghanistan.

11. **UNICEF.** UNICEF has a major part to play in the relief effort as a result of the large numbers of traumatised children. As children make up a major proportion of the refugee camps, UNICEF should concentrate on schools and service provision for children, including the employment of Kosovar teachers. UNICEF was relatively slow in preparing an operational response.

12. **WHO.** WHO has attempted to respond to a worsening health and sanitary situation in the refugee camps. It has embarked upon a vaccination programme but this has included refugees only. There is a need to carry out blanket immunisation of both refugees and Albanians. Female refugees are extremely vulnerable, having experienced the loss of male relatives and undergone sexual atrocities, and need focused and intensive support in the form of community and psycho-social counselling and gynaecological facilities. This is insufficient at present. WHO need to concentrate on co-ordination and not operations.

UNFPA was not contacted during the evaluation mission.

13. **NATO.** This is the first time that the military have become directly involved in a relief effort in such large numbers and, as such, this represents a significant learning opportunity. It has only been in the field for 10 days but is rapidly becoming involved in many logistical activities, including camp construction, transport and road building. NATO is supporting NGOs and UN agencies in their activities and is proving to be approachable and supportive. As they operationalise, its performance will probably outshine that of UNHCR and the international NGOs. NATO should concentrate on support for the rehabilitation of buildings, roads and bridges, as well as support to camp construction, in addition to transport services. It is likely that tensions will be generated between NATO and (I) NGOs over the meaning of humanitarian assistance.

14. **OSCE and MAPE.** These groups have been very useful for pre-positioning and early running (first 18 days) of the EMG. They were thus instrumental in the development of the relief effort so far and staff members have been of a high quality. The quality of OSCE intelligence briefings remains good although material from Kosova itself is deteriorating in quality.

15. **Government of Albania.** GoA has demonstrated a very strong performance at national level through the EMG. There is a very real sense that there is ownership and control of the operation by competent national authorities. Within EMG, the sense of which desks are 'Albanian' varies: there is need for strong Albanian management to be demonstrated at desk level. At prefecture level, reliable information is available on the refugee flow but the quality of information might deteriorate with the temptation to exaggerate numbers and, by implication, need. Information management competence at local level is not matched by administrative competence. The prefectures need to develop a computerised e-mail system of daily reportage, which includes: status, problems and requests. Serious consideration should be given to establishing parallel EMG structures at local level and providing those structures with sufficient computer and communications equipment.

16. **NGOs.** There is a need to select lead NGOs and to strengthen the NGO information centre. UNHCR needs to select lead NGOs, parallel to the practice of WFP. As this emergency is likely to last over one year, NGO contracts should be offered on a minimum three-month basis. There is also a need to recognise that NGOs can usefully feed information to the EMG; standard forms, requesting information on a weekly basis should be devised; non-provision of information from the field should lead to NGO de-registering.

Issues

17. **Refugees.** This crisis is unique in the characteristics of the refugee population, i.e. they are mobile and they are made up of not only farmers, but also teachers, journalists, university professors, engineers, etc. (all the constituents of a normal society). As such they offer potential for being integrated into the relief effort to provide services for their own population. The placement of refugees with host families has been largely spontaneous and has proved to be a very cost efficient and effective mechanism for settlement. However, this situation becomes problematic as the host families must be seen to directly benefit, in cash and kind from their offer of shelter. This creates its own problems. The International Federation for the Red Cross has been given the responsibility of serving the

needs of the host families and has already experienced problems. WFP has already provided some support to the IFRC and there is continuing concern that the latter may not be able to cope with the complexity of the situation.

18. Refugee Camps. There are problems along the border areas where refugees are reluctant to leave as they wait for relatives coming from Kosova or they are waiting to return. The latter case is becoming less relevant as the war continues. The concentration of large refugee populations is a security risk, i.e. they are easy targets near the border, and it becomes problematic to service incoming refugees. This situation is not helped by the high quality of the refugee camps nearest the border. It is recommended that the quality of border camps be lowered to facilitate the movement of refugees deeper into Albania. More stable camps need to look beyond basic needs to service provision as populations lack stimulus and activities. For example, there is need for the provision of a 24 hour radio information service. There have been implications of Mafia control within camps and further sexual exploitation of already vulnerable women. It is vital that this is prevented and monitored. It is likely that health and sanitation will become more problematic as the summer months progress.

19. Lost Harvest. As the disaster response is unlikely to be over before the harvest in 2000, i.e. in 16 months, early preparations for a transition from commodities to cash, for both refugees and local families offering shelter to refugees must be addressed quickly. Therefore preparations are needed for no harvest in Kosova and the hardships of the ensuing winter. Action needs to be taken in response to this situation, which implies a long stay in Albania. Actions include: the rehabilitation of buildings, drainage and sewerage systems, the provision of electricity and space heating, and employment provision for the refugees.

20. Goods. Non-food goods coming into Albania, especially from (I) NGOs, as gifts must to be standardised. The non-standardisation of non-food goods is causing distribution problems, i.e. how are a mixed range of non-food goods targeted and distributed? Their often unannounced arrival into Albania is also causing port blockage and therefore hampering the arrival of essential items. The standard list should be distributed to donors and NGOs to ensure compliance. Warehouses should also be cleared of non-uniform materials to increase storage space. The non-uniform materials should be distributed, via the prefectures, to host families.

21. Staff Exhaustion. It was found that the ability and performance of agency response was compromised by the exhaustion of many critical staff members. Key personnel (and support staff) were often working more than 100 hours per week with no breaks. It is recommended, for reasons of performance, that staff be obliged to take regular rest periods.

22. Co-ordination. There must be an insistence that UN agency response is focused on programming/planning issues and not on operations. NATO and (I) NGOs are well placed and appropriate to take care of operational issues.

23. For the Albanian Government. As the Government of Albania is critical to the emergency effort, it is recommended that the GoA issue customs and Waybill instructions are given to the Embassies; convene prefecture meetings to ensure authority over NGOs; and programme to ensure that the host country benefits, i.e. plan now for a 2 year operation centred on Albania.