

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present evaluation by two independent consultants was requested by ECHO with the purpose to appraise and evaluate 1999's and current ECHO's aid to Cuba; to specifically assess the pertinence and coherence of such intervention in the light of the humanitarian situation and needs; and eventually, to recommend an exit strategy according to the LRRD policy.

After a briefing in Brussels with all relevant staff members (from ECHO-3, ECHO-5 and DG DEV), the field work was undertaken in April and early May (approximately, four weeks).

Taking into account the large scope of objectives of the evaluation main emphasis was put on meeting stakeholders at all levels in different geographic settings. Visits to samples of institutions, projects, provinces and meetings with key people, were combined with focused groups interviews and qualitative techniques to have a crosscut and comprehensive information feeding mechanism.

Due to the well known historical and political circumstances, Cuba was highly **dependent** upon the former URSS / East block. The latter represented 85% of Cuba's trades and subsidies were a common pattern. After the disintegration of the COMECON and asphyxiated by the US embargo, the economy of Cuba started to decline at the end of last decade; from 1989 to 1993 Cuba's GDP declined to 35% while the generous subsidies disappeared. This led to the "**Special period**" during which survival was the only objective for most Cubans.

Since that time and after the peak of the crisis in the first part of present decade, and partly due to timid concessions to the market like development of the dollar market and tourism, Cuban economy at macro level is **slowly recovering**. At the same time social contrasts become dramatically tangible: those having and not having access to the dollar market.

Moreover the coping mechanisms of the Cuban population have been weakened by the "feeding bottle" policy, induced by both the URSS and the Cuban State.

"Health for all", together with education, has been and still is a cornerstone and political priority for the Cuban regime. The **health status** of the population is comparatively talking acceptable. The **Health System** though, has deteriorated over the last years due to the lack of investments and maintenance; and overall, is oversized and overstaffed. Efficiency is clearly its main weakness and the management poor.

In this context, **ECHO's intervention in Cuba** over the last seven years has **assisted** the country to maintain a certain level of basic health and social services. And it has also **supported** an important number among the most vulnerable people to be assisted by the health and social public services. Indeed, such intervention (mainly through the Global Plans) has been very peculiar compared to other ECHO programmes, and might be understood as an indirect support to the MINSAP budget. However, the rigidity of Cuba's centralised policy and the exceptional situation, Cuba is confronted with, made that the intervention of ECHO was a feasible alternative to provide humanitarian aid to the population.

In relation to **the 1999 Global Plan**, the **stated objectives have been reasonable achieved**. Nevertheless, some operational problems identified in previous evaluations have not been solved (delays in transport and in the production of drugs). The excessive centralised approach, and the lack of a firm dialogue with local counterparts are in our opinion key weaknesses of the program.

Concerning the **microprojects**, in general they **have improved** significantly the situation of the health and social institutions covered through small-scale interventions. However, the

variety of projects in terms of geographical location and fields of intervention, may have reduced their global impact.

Criticisms on the comprehensive intervention would be: the “**humanitarian dependence**”, **lack of innovation** over the time, **questionable sustainability** and the lack of a clear and negotiated **strategy**. Although it must be admitted that the Cuban authorities **did not facilitate** the dialogue up to now and were reluctant to innovations.

In any case, it is advisable to take advantage of the above-mentioned dependency for future negotiations.

Concerning the other EC services: their presence in Cuba is modest compared with ECHO's program. International actors in the field observe a lack of co-ordination, even in some cases coherence, among them.

On the other hand, the consulted European Member States follow a general tendency to decrease their humanitarian assistance and to increase their rehabilitation/development programmes. The other international Organisations and Donors share the same pattern.

Therefore and in the light of the above considerations, it is possible to summarise that there is a consensus about the idea that **Cuba is not anymore in an emergency situation**. However, the situation remains very **fragile** and can **reverse quickly** due to natural disasters (such as cyclones, hurricanes and the “silent drought” in the poorer East of the island), and political and economic unpredictable changes both internal and external.

There is also a **wide consensus** about the evidence that in Cuba currently exist important **pockets of humanitarian needs** and the **most vulnerable people** (basically those excluded from the dollar circuit), suffer an extremely **precarious** situation in humanitarian perspective.

An **abrupt withdrawal of ECHO** can seriously **affect** the vulnerable in the health and social sectors, and cause an additional stress for the health system as long as alternative solutions are not prepared. Besides, an important part of the positive impact of the past EC intervention by ECHO could be wasted.

Although at present ECHO is probably not the most adequate instrument for a needed sustainable co-operation with Cuba, it is the only one that can support right now the most vulnerable people. Once it is decided to use other EC instruments for the co-operation with Cuba and taking into account the differences in timing, procedures and flexibility, this type of co-operation will not be in place nor functional in the near future.

It is also worth to consider that ECHO's aid accounted for about 80% of the total EC co-operation with Cuba in 1999 and approximately 65% for the period 1993-99.

Consequently, the first general recommendation is to **maintain temporarily ECHO's aid to Cuba** but establishing a **clear exit strategy** coherent and co-ordinated with the other EC Services (LRRD): a **prudent and progressive phasing-out** is recommended.

Secondly, to undertake a **strategic inflexion in ECHO's** intervention for this –in principle- last period, as an important element of the exit strategy.

In this sense, it is recommended to approve a **last ECHO aid package** (reduced to **half** of the previous) in a two year implementation period during the years 2000 and 2001.

It has to be focused towards the most vulnerable both interned in social institutions and the ones living in the community. This programme would have two components:

1. A *last direct supply transition* project could cover the prioritised and identified needs for approximately one year and the current pattern should be in our view reduced by half.

This last donation should be directed to the social institutions of MINSAP and the total amount should not exceed 4 MEURO. Some criteria are suggested for the prioritisation of items to minimise dependency and a stronger application of vulnerability criteria.

2. An *integrated programme* aiming to assist and support the extremely vulnerable people. The rationale behind this relates to the relevance of performing urgent rehabilitation by improvement of the quality of life of the most vulnerable and by facilitating the transition towards a medium and long term development strategy. In this way, the experience of some previous microprojects is used but frame them in an operational strategy and comprehensive approach.

This programme would include a short term and small scale rehabilitation (in the context of the humanitarian Council Regulation), basic equipment and furniture for the prioritised social institutions (elderly homes and houses, institutions for mentally and physically disabled people, collective centres); as well as the support to home care services for the most vulnerable living on their own. And the total amount might be around 6 MEURO

The *key concepts* of this programme are: community orientation (preventing institutionalisation, promotion of coping mechanisms) and decentralisation. The whole should be locally and participation based (including participation in-kind by the institutional beneficiaries).

The **new strategy and approach recommended** to ECHO **requires changes at all levels:** in the *relation with the Authorities* (a more firm position is suggested), the *type and role of the implementing partners (NGOs)* (several criteria are suggested); for the *duration of the contracts* (longer contracts of one year are suggested); and the *structure, profile and functions of the ECHO office in La Havana*.

In terms of timing, it is recommended to approve the last direct supply transition package in June 2000 on the one side and on the other side the integrated social programme in September 2000, after the needs have been identified and prioritised (see further details in proposed methodology).

Moreover, some suggestions are made to improve the visibility of the intervention and a general communication policy.

For the **NGOs** and because of identified problems they face in their daily work, it is recommended to firmly **renegotiate** the TOR for ECHO (20.04.94), applying the same recognised conditions for ECHO to the partners working with the EC.

At a higher level, a common agreed position between the EC and the European Member States is recommended to negotiate the NGOs status and role.

The above mentioned **phasing-out of ECHO** implies the phasing-in of other EC instruments in key areas to optimise past intervention, minimise the negative impact of ECHO's withdrawal and achieve the greatest global impact. Based on this and LRRD logic, a **European Commission global strategy** is recommended in the frame of the EC available instruments present in Cuba.

Besides that, the different actors should develop operational strategies and action plans in a coherent and co-ordinated way.

Preliminary suggestions for other EC Services are: to add a close and medium/long term Technical Assistance (TA) to MINSAP (Economic Co-operation); to include water supply for remote and vulnerable communities (new strategy of co-operation with civil society; Co-financing of NGOs projects); and a decentralised programme to support the production of basic food for the population (Food Aid and Food Security).

A **Cuban Task Force** both in Brussels and at field level is suggested in order to make the common strategy operational. This Task Force can prepare and propose a global and coherent EC operational strategy for Cuba and discuss and agree upon the different instruments'

interventions. So it will accomplish complementarity, synergies and long term maximum impact.

A joint working session with all the consultants involved in on-going missions to Cuba at present is also suggested in order to feed technically the work of the CTF.

Finally, a **reassessment** of ECHO's withdrawal is recommended in the case that the situation changes significantly or the scenario recommended in this report would lose its sense.