

## **Executive Summary**

### **1. Introduction**

1. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to pursue economic and social policies that no longer have close parallels elsewhere. The political, social and economic environment has profound implications for international agencies working in the country.

2. The country underwent serious economic decline in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1995 floods destroyed a good part of the harvest, and for the first time in its history the country appealed for international assistance. Further natural disasters in 1996 and 1997 exacerbated a situation which was already very serious, leading to famine and starvation.

3. 1998-2002 saw only limited recovery of an unreformed economy and only gradual improvement in the humanitarian crisis. Economic reforms introduced in July 2002 have led to comparatively rapid change, and the partial development of a market-oriented economy at local levels. The loosening of price controls has increased the vulnerability of groups whose incomes have not increased accordingly.

4. A new crisis over the nuclear issue in October 2002 led to cuts in oil imports and in food aid, though two years later donors were once again meeting the food needs as estimated by WFP. Child malnutrition was still serious in late 2002, though significantly improved from four years earlier.

5. Humanitarian programmes are greatly hampered by restrictions on access and data-gathering and the secrecy or unavailability of even basic information. Steady improvements in this environment may have stopped or gone into reverse in late 2004.

6. ECHO has responded to the humanitarian crisis in DPRK since its beginning in 1995 and continues to do so despite the nuclear crisis. To date €75 million has been allocated for humanitarian assistance, primarily in the fields of health and nutrition, water and sanitation, and food. Additionally the EU has allocated more than €90 million under the food security budget line.

### **2. Purpose and Methodology**

7. The purpose of the evaluation is 'to assess the appropriateness of ECHO's interventions since 2001 ... and to produce recommendations for improving the effectiveness of future operations.' Evaluation methodology focused on documentary research and interviews with primary stakeholders. The evaluation team spent three weeks in DPRK, spending about half our time on field visits to ECHO-supported projects.

8. We have organized our findings primarily by sector, and have divided our report into three sections:

- (A) Background, context and general or global issues
- (B) ECHO-supported interventions by sector
- (C) Cross-cutting issues

The purposes and methodology of the evaluation are elaborated in Section A1 below, and the Terms of Reference are appended as Annex A.

### **3. Principal conclusions**

#### **General**

9. The humanitarian emergency in DPRK continues. The economic reforms of 2002 have created winners and losers, extending the ranks of the vulnerable.

10. Restrictions on information and data gathering make objective assessment of humanitarian needs exceptionally difficult in DPRK. However national nutrition surveys, and informal data on the household economy, illustrate the continuing seriousness of the situation.

11. ECHO's response to this longstanding humanitarian emergency has been broadly appropriate, both in terms of institutions supported and sectors addressed.

12. Since DPRK institutions are not in a position to provide accountability, ECHO has been right to support UN agencies and Red Cross societies, and to support and promote European NGOs.

13. Since the beginning of the emergency in 1995 international agencies have worked under severe restrictions in DPRK, with limitations on access and very limited accountability. These restrictions eased gradually over the years but increased again from September 2004.

14. Agencies have generally been unable to work with technically qualified Korean counterparts, limiting opportunities for training and capacity building.

15. On 15th September 2004 the DPRK government announced its intention to impose further restrictions on the activities of international humanitarian agencies, including visits to projects for monitoring (in practice for any) purposes. Although the short term impact has been limited, the long term implications, though uncertain, are likely to be very considerable - especially for international NGOs, of whom ECHO is the principal sponsor.

16. There are no genuinely independent or non-governmental agencies in DPRK, though there are three or four agencies with a degree of autonomy, notably the DPRK Red Cross, who provide exceptional opportunities for collaboration. Such collaboration greatly increases impact.

## **ECHO-supported projects and programme issues**

17. The provision of essential drugs and medical supplies has been appropriate, even though the commitment has been long term and open-ended, with uncertainty as to when the government will be able to take over.

18. The rehabilitation of health institutions, children's homes and schools is also appropriate. Lack of knowledge about the overall reasons for the institutionalization of children in DPRK is an important concern.

19. Support for improved reproductive health and safe delivery is believed to be particularly relevant, though the programme would benefit from better geographical focus.

20. Projects for IVF production and blood banks are effective and popular with DPRK authorities. Comparison with alternatives would determine their degree of relevance. Sustainability may be problematic.

21. Current work in support of the handicapped provides an excellent model for collaboration between an international NGO (HI) and a Korean agency (KASD), second only to the case of the Red Cross (IFRC and DPRKRC). The sustainability of the work in prosthetics would improve with the identification of additional donors.

22. Despite uncertainties surrounding the assessment of needs, the evaluators believe ECHO's support to WFP for food aid has been justified, as well as an affirmation of humanitarian principles in a highly politicized arena. Food aid is comparatively well targeted in DPRK.

23. Support for nutrition work should be a priority, but at a local level remains limited. F-100 fortified milk is being used inappropriately and (as we show in the report) possibly harmfully. Support for micronutrient premix is highly appropriate.

24. Drinking water supply provision has been a large and successful area of ECHO support. Impact has been considerable though often offset by the absence of wastewater management. Assessment is greatly hampered by the lack of data on water quality.

25. Provision of sanitation to institutions has generally been justified, though impact is difficult to assess. Provision of domestic sanitation has followed models which are not affordable to householders, making the interventions ineffective and unreplicable.

26. ECHO management has been very capable, and current staffing is appropriate. Interagency coordination has been good. Relations with central authorities however are often problematic for ECHO partners. Agencies with a sub-office or regional base have been able to develop much better relationships with local authorities. Tendering and procurement has often been problematic and caused delays but the situation is improving.

#### **4. Principal recommendations**

*NB These are not listed in order or priority but follow the same sequence as the conclusions above, and of the report itself. Detailed recommendations can be found at the end of relevant sections of the report.*

- R1. The evaluation supports the continuation of ECHO's programme in DPRK, broadly along current lines. If DPRK government policies and ECHO finances permit, the evaluators would support the expansion of the programme.
- R2. Priority should continue to be given to a wide-ranging dialogue with relevant stakeholders, with a view to maintaining and developing an objective view of the opportunities and constraints of working in the exceptional environment of DPRK.
- R3. Despite recommendation R1 above, particular care needs to be taken continually to adapt the programme to changing circumstances, especially since the rate of change in DPRK may accelerate considerably in coming years.
- R4. Distribution and monitoring regimes relating to the supply of essential drugs and equipment should be standardized as far as possible, and if possible upgraded to conform with WHO guidelines should the necessary funding become available.
- R5. An external review should be undertaken of the programmes distributing drugs and essential medical equipment, as implemented by UNICEF, the Red Cross, UNFPA and WHO...
- R6. Coordination between all agencies involved with the distribution of drugs and medical supplies in DPRK should be further improved, with a view to standardizing approaches as far as possible. If possible a central database should be established.
- R7. Serious efforts should be made to find out the reasons for the institutionalization of babies and children in DPRK, despite the difficulties involved..
- R8. Local/regional distribution of IVF should be promoted. Traditional IVF production should be evaluated. New donors should be sought for long-term provision of consumables to the IVF and blood bank projects.
- R9. New donors should be sought to promote the sustainability of work with the handicapped.
- R10. ECHO (and/or other EC instruments as appropriate) should continue to consider the provision of support for food aid, particularly if shortfalls recur.
- R11. WFP should be encouraged to analyse and disseminate relevant data in its possession relating to nutritional vulnerability. .

- R12. Interventions in nutrition at a local level should be promoted, if possible through the introduction of appropriate NGO partners.
- R13. Efforts should be made by ECHO and its partner agencies to find out more about the effectiveness of the treatment of malnourished babies and children both in institutions and in hospitals, particularly in provincial paediatric hospitals. The provision of F100 fortified milk should be reviewed in the light of these findings. Infant formula and/or proper milk sources should in any case be substituted for F100 where appropriate.
- R14. If feasible, assessment of micronutrient deficiencies should be incorporated into any future national nutrition survey.
- R15. ECHO should continue to support the provision or rehabilitation of drinking water supply systems. Gravity-based systems should continue to be preferred, and should be given even greater comparative priority. Urban rehabilitation projects should continue to be considered.
- R16. Water supply projects should always include training and capacity building for Korean technicians. Projects should not be implemented where local technicians are not available.
- R17. Wastewater management should always be given priority consideration in the planning of water supply projects, and incorporated where feasible. Projects should never be undertaken where lack of wastewater management is likely to negate the impact of the project.
- R18. An external evaluation of UNICEF water supply projects should be undertaken.
- R19. ECHO should continue to support initiatives in institutional sanitation, prioritizing hospitals and residential institutions.
- R20. ECHO should only support domestic sanitation infrastructure if the costs are low enough to be borne by householders and so can be replicated. Hygiene promotion should continue to be prioritized, despite the difficulties associated with this.
- R21. ECHO should encourage partner agencies to take fully into account the logistical implications of working in the far north-east of the country, and the consequences on their overall impact and efficiency.
- R22. In appropriate cases ECHO should continue to encourage international agencies to establish regional sub-offices as and when this becomes feasible, if necessary through the provision of financial support.
- R23. External part-time technical support for project appraisal and assessment should be promoted, particularly in the fields of nutrition and sanitation.
- R24. As a prominent donor and leading humanitarian player ECHO should continue to give priority to and if possible upgrade further its liaison and advocacy with the DPRK authorities, particularly at the highest levels.