

From emergency to development: assessing UNDP's role in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Since the Dayton Peace Accords of December 1995 ended three and a half years of conflict, UNDP has worked in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) to facilitate return of displaced people, consolidate peace and lay the basis for long-term development.

The Office of the High Representative (OHR)¹ administers BiH. BiH is divided into two equal-sized entities, the Republika Srpska (which forms a semi-circular shape around the north and east) and the Federation (mostly populated by Croats and Muslims), both of which nominally work under the auspices of a weak State government. Security has returned and there is full free movement of goods and people throughout the territory. The international NATO forces are in the process of decreasing to half their strength by year end and a small European Observer Police Mission remains. As UNDP's latest quarterly early warning system report shows, the fear of a return to war, even if international forces pull out, has reduced drastically.

Just under half of the two million people who were internally displaced or made refugees have returned to their areas of origin. The fact that since 2000 most of those returning have been minority returns (i.e. people returning to areas where they belong to an ethnic minority) is a positive indication of the level of stability, security and reconciliation. Over 90% of claims for restitution of property have been settled.

In the early post-Dayton years, UNDP - like other organisations - focused on housing. However, UNDP did try to use more integrated approaches that stressed the need to ensure sustainable return from the onset. As such it introduced the area-based approach which linked local economic recovery, job creation and support to returnees as complementary activities to housing reconstruction. Infrastructure, microcredit and income generation projects were prioritised in municipalities along the inter-entity boundary line to provide rapid

job creation and encourage divided communities to work together around projects of common interest.

In 2001, as the perception grew that the humanitarian response to conflict in BiH was over, UNDP began designing medium-term strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of return. These have involved integration of support at State, entity and local government level and fostering a new partnership between government, civil society and the private sector. In a complex governance structure the main focus has been on enhancing the capacity of local government.

In January 2004 the BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) and other federal authorities took full control of the return process. They are now facing the related challenges of ensuring the safe return of the estimated 300,000 people shortly expected to return and promoting sustainable development. MHRR has developed a database with return-related information on all 147 BiH municipalities. Priorities are now determined by the BiH authorities and not the international community.

RMAP - local level rights-based development for all

The Rights-Based Municipal Assessment and Planning Project (RMAP)², a UNDP pilot project in partnership with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the BiH State Ministry for Human rights and Refugees (MHRR), is one of the first practical initiatives since the Secretary-General called on UN agencies to define and develop rights-based development approaches. Rights-based development places people as active participants and owners of develop-

ment and works to incorporate and respect human rights at every stage in the development process.

RMAP began with the reality that there was no meaningful dialogue between duty and claim holders, i.e. those charged under Dayton with responsibility for facilitating return and those with legitimate claims to assistance and restitution. Municipal development plans were not being developed on the basis of the needs and priorities of citizens, and coordination between municipalities, the Federation's cantons and entity agencies was often non-existent.

RMAP's original aim was to assess the capacity of governance institutions to contribute to policy dialogue. However, it was realised that assessment alone is not sufficient for promoting human rights and that rights-based development should include three phases: assessment, planning and implementation. The primary objective shifted towards employing the assessment process itself to encourage local governments to consult their citizens and to initiate dialogue on crucial human rights and development issues between all interested state and non-state actors.

A decision was made to work more slowly and to reduce the number of municipalities in RMAP from 48 to 25. Local and international development and human rights specialists liaise intensively with the staff of a particular municipality to assemble information on civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Issues range from women's equality and political participation to workers' rights and equal access to public services.

Rights-based assessments have now been carried out in eight Federation and eight Republika Srpska municipalities. RMAP is now being implemented through two parallel processes: assessments are continuing in additional municipalities while

trained staff in others are starting to prepare rights-based strategic development plans. Municipalities will formulate their own participatory development plans while RMAP teams will facilitate dialogue between the duty bearers and claim holders as well as build the capacity of the municipalities in terms of human rights, gender and development planning.

A recent report assessing RMAP's work in the assessed municipalities³ identifies key issues in seven sectors of public administration, civil society, economy, social protection, education, health and justice.

The report recommends that UNDP and others in the international community should:

- do more to ensure equal multi-ethnic access to all municipal services and decision-making processes
- promote reform in the sectors of education, health and justice
- more clearly define duty bearers' and claim holders' responsibilities
- guarantee extended and continuous levels of support to municipalities: without financial and moral support from higher levels of authority and donors, municipalities will be unable to fulfil their obligations and will not break free of constraints imposed by ethnic-based politics.
- encourage municipalities to fulfill their obligations even when support from higher levels is less than perfect.

According to the RMAP Project Manager: *"Change needs to start from within - not from outside. It needs to start from changing the attitudes of both the duty and claim holders."*

Empowering local authorities to oversee refugee/IDP return

The Sustainable Transfer to Return-related Authorities (SUTRA) project⁴ is a joint, innovative initiative of the EU, UNDP and MHRR undertaking, in cooperation with entity line ministries, to transfer the management of return to local authorities at central and municipal level. Seven pilot municipalities (Brod, Derventa, Dobo, Lukavac, Mostar, Travnik and Tuzla) are being enabled to coordinate, stra-

The most mined country in Europe

An estimated 670,000 anti-personnel mines and many types of unexploded ordnance (UXO) are scattered across 10,000 sites which together constitute 4% of BiH's land area. The mine threat in BiH is arguably among the most complex in the world given the fact that it is widespread, low density and has to be tackled in a complex governmental environment. Dangers are particularly acute in former front-line areas to which displaced people have been returning.

Responsibility for mine clearance is carried out by a number of bodies - Entity Armed Forces, commercial demining companies, international and national NGOs and Entity Departments for Civil Protection. The BiH government has been unable to generate sufficient resources to finance annual mine action targets. Limited funding has resulted in difficulties in obtaining de-mining gear and equipment, hampered the implementation of school-based mine-risk education and restricted provision of adequate assistance to landmine victims. The presence of mines inhibits the return of refugees and IDPs and restricts agricultural recovery, tourist potential and environmental rehabilitation. Though mine deaths are decreasing, in 2003 there were 23 fatalities.

UNDP has two major initiatives. The first is a national medium-term framework that supports a continued, coordinated approach to mine clearance at agreed levels throughout BiH. It is complemented by the Direct Demining Project (DDP) which provides for the restoration of access to, and functionality of, high-priority areas through mine clearance and/or area reduction in the Sarajevo area, while decreasing the number of mine related incidents and reinforcing indigenous mine-clearance capacity. However, funding shortfalls are a reality and much remains to be done if BiH is to achieve its target of becoming mine-free by 2010.

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tegitally plan and successfully manage the return, thus preparing them for full ownership of the process.

SUTRA, which was approved by the Peace Implementation Council (the international body that oversees the peace process in BiH) in December 2002, marks a historic departure. For the first time since Dayton, elected BiH representatives - rather than the OHR, UNHCR or NGOs contracted by donors - are setting the priorities for return assistance. Whilst all funding for return and reintegration projects used to come from outside, 54% now comes from BiH budgets. This is a major breakthrough in a country accused of typifying the dependency syndrome. The Swiss Foreign Ministry has noted that SUTRA's design, as a medium-term support facility for management and technical assistance, is an example which should be replicated to support the hand-over from international to national structures in other sectors.

The current SUTRA has led to a number of lessons learned and has

bolstered the confidence of the national authorities and the collaboration of the various government structures. The aim has now been to draw on this and to formulate a SUTRA II that fully reflects the experience to date and is both based on and reflects effective national ownership. SUTRA II has been shaped by an extensive stakeholder-driven process, led by the MHRR with support from UNDP. The process has worked in particularly close partnership with municipalities involved in Phase 1 and with civil society organisations. The fact that SUTRA II has reflected lessons learned should hopefully dispel the mistaken perception on the part of some decision makers, especially at municipal level, that SUTRA is primarily a return and reconstruction project.

Additionally SUTRA is playing a important role in defining the BiH arrangements for this sector and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the different government layers so that the architecture of governance is maximally compatible with the future

requirements of European Union Structural Funds.

Srebrenica - litmus test for the return process

Srebrenica, site of the world's first UN Safe Area, saw Europe's worst post-World War II genocide. In July 1995 the Bosnian Serb army took control of the small spa town and over a period of five days systematically murdered over 7,000 men and boys. After the war, Muslim homes in Srebrenica were populated by Serbs who left areas - particularly around Sarajevo - which had become part of the Federation.

The UNDP Srebrenica Regional Recovery Programme (SRRP)⁵, UNDP's most significant and complex ongoing area-based initiative, represents an integrated, holistic approach aiming at laying the basis for local recovery and sustainable return to Srebrenica and neighbouring towns of Bratunac and Milici. SRRP links support for two-way return by promoting socio-economic recovery, restoring multi-ethnic communities and strengthening local government structures.

Since implementation began in October 2003 SRRP has worked to:

- support municipal government capacity to deliver customer-

oriented, efficient, effective, transparent and accountable local administration

- create conditions for sustainable economic growth
- strengthen the capacity of civil society to voice concerns and advocate for their constituencies in dialogue with local government
- integrate gender equity into all aspects of the society, ensuring active participation of women and men, different groups, social classes and age groups
- assist efforts to build a memorial centre and cemetery for massacre victims.

Most Serbs illegally occupying property have now been evicted and have left Srebrenica. As in other areas of eastern Republika Srpska returns of Bosniaks (Muslims) are particularly problematic and traumatic. However, dramatic progress has been made in the last year. According to UNHCR statistics, by March 2004 2,286 Bosniak ex-inhabitants had returned to Srebrenica, 2,337 to Bratunac and 1,290 to Milici. 42% of returnee families are female-headed.

Caught between the huge expectations created by SSRP and the slow arrival of pledged donor funds the programme team initially prioritised Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) to respond to the immediate needs of

vulnerable returnees and promote reconciliation. QIPs and follow-up Quick Impact Economic Projects (QIEPS) have laid foundations for medium- and long-term cooperation with the local authorities, civil society organisations and communities. All proposals have been reviewed, contracts tendered and money disbursed through transparent procedures which have made the three municipalities equal partners with international organisations. QIEPS have boosted the economy by funding small business development, providing vocational and business skills training. Twenty-six local organisations - including citizens associations, returnee associations, women and youth organisations and associations of persons with special needs - have received SRRP financial help. Roads, water supply, power grids, public buildings and other infrastructure have been rehabilitated. Additionally, UNDP has managed to raise funds for a project which will soon start offering micro-credit specifically tailored for female entrepreneurs.

Though Srebrenica remains haunted by its past, growing numbers of people are succeeding in their ambition to return to their land of origin. While security has tremendously improved in the last few years, mass unemployment, economic stagnation and the lack of a social welfare



system constitute today's grave threats to peace and reconciliation in Srebrenica region. Around 90% of municipality residents live below the poverty line.

Challenges and priorities

While security is no longer a problem, lack of economic development and weak municipal governance seriously hamper peace building, re-integration and reconciliation in BiH. UNDP and other agencies cannot, by themselves, solve the more structural economic and political issues which continue to hinder return.

BiH has maintained macro-economic stability. Inflation is less than 1% and the economy is estimated to have grown by 5% in 2003. The currency is stable, the banking sector is seen as a regional model and foreign direct investment increased by 70% in 2002. Remittances account for some 15% of GDP and significantly bolster the economy and prevent wider levels of poverty. Of crucial significance to future membership of NATO's Partnership for Peace is the fact that a federal defence ministry has been established with a unified chain of command for the country's three armies.

However, poverty and social hardship are widespread. Official per capita GDP (\$1,250) is only half the level of 1992. Estimates of the proportion of the population who are unemployed range between 16% and 44% and could worsen as privatisation accelerates. People are worried about the economy and doubt whether the government can improve things. A fifth of the population is estimated to live below the poverty line with Serbs, pensioners, middle-aged unemployed people, returnees, youth and Roma most affected.

The Dayton objective of reversing ethnic cleansing has yet to be achieved and may never be. While minority returns have increased significantly in recent years, a million people have not come home. It needs to be remembered that people were emigrating from BiH even before the war, particularly from Croat areas of what is now Republika Srpska. Many who have permanently settled in third countries will not exercise their right to return. The return of expelled Croats to northern Republic Srpska is particularly fraught with difficulties due to economic stagnation

and lack of access to adequate health and education facilities. While efforts to restore property have been generally successful it has become clear that in itself property restitution does not ensure socio-economic reintegration.

With some local exceptions, the participation of civil society in public affairs and their capacity to advocate and network is limited. The idea of partnership between civil society organisations and municipalities is very much in its infancy. Blame for slow progress in engaging civil society can be apportioned to the international community and weak and often dysfunctional government structures which have used community-based organisations mainly as an alternative service delivery mechanism. The legacy of the past Communist era lives on as locals are accustomed to heavy-handed intervention from the authorities and unused to engaging them in dialogue.

A key challenge is that while Dayton guaranteed the right to return it was silent on the right to stay. There is little point encouraging people to go back to unproductive areas or places they do not want to return to for obvious psychological reasons, yet there are few mechanisms to support people to stay put. This can lead to the emergence of a new marginalised class, particularly in urban areas.

Other significant challenges are:

- Fiscal decentralisation - a prerequisite for sound local governance - has barely begun.
- Lack of transparency and discriminatory practices in hiring practices especially affect minority returnee populations.
- Ethnic politics continue to influence development policies and ethnic identities still shape people's lives.
- Although the BiH Constitution includes basic international human rights guarantees there is no coherent, clear and binding legal framework indicating who is responsible for what when it comes to human rights issues.
- It is cumbersome and expensive to maintain the many tiers of government structures established by Dayton.
- Municipalities still lack resources and capacity to guarantee even fundamental rights and many

remain unwilling to take proactive action to support the return process and assist vulnerable minorities.

- Despite successful reforms the rule of law is weak and corruption, favouritism and influence-peddling are widespread.
- In many areas court structures and prosecutors' offices remain mono-ethnic.
- Newspapers, radio and television target the majority ethnic group and programming reflects the culture of the dominant group only.
- Education systems retain names, symbols and textbook contents which reinforce intolerance of cultural differences: decisions about the languages of instruction deter minority enrolments.
- Returnee families, particularly those which are female-headed, are often unable to provide educational basics for their children or access health services.
- Information is lacking about the demographic profile and socio-economic status of those who have returned.

Successful long-term consolidation of peace, development and formation of a multi-ethnic state inside the European Union will require continued high levels of external assistance. However, international assistance of \$270m to BiH in 2004 is only about a third of the level of the post-Dayton years. Without significant support there is a risk that Bosnia will continue to be a source of instability for the region and for Europe.

This article is authored by five UNDP staff members in order to highlight the difficulties and the constant need for cooperation in a country office that works in an ever-shifting and changing political and funding environment.

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¹ See www.ohr.int

² See: www.undp.ba/shprojects.asp?idItem=9

³ See [www.undp.ba/Publications/RMAP/Consolidated%20Report%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.undp.ba/Publications/RMAP/Consolidated%20Report%20(English).pdf)

⁴ For further information about SUTRA, see www.undp.ba/shprojects.asp?idItem=4 or contact Armin Sirco. Email: asirco@undp.ba

⁵ For more information, visit the SRPP website: www.srrp.undp.ba or contact the Programme