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MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO RETURNING HOME - EVALUATION OF Sida' s INTEGRATED AREA PROGRAMMES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA -

The evaluation is a comprehensive 180 pages analysis of the relevance, impact and sustainability of Sida' s Integrated Area Programme (IAP) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The programme has reconstructed houses and homes for some 50 000 displaced persons, repaired and installed some infrastructure, provided start up support and some income generating activities mainly in agriculture. A secondary effect of these returns was that houses/flats in the towns were emptied and the owners of these could return home. Sida' s programme is still ongoing but is now entering its last "exit" period 2006-2007.

The evaluation is interesting as it gives a predominant attention to the beneficiaries and their perceptions and opinions of the support, illustrated by one reconstruction case. This gives the reader a deepened knowledge of certain aspects of the IAP programme.

The comments start with some general remarks.

The Evaluation questions the sustainability of the IAPs due to the economic difficulties the beneficiaries encounter in the remote villages. This is a central question and it is therefore important to emphasize the context of the IAPs. The return of the displaced people to the homes of origin has however been and still is, the only alternative. Even with the knowledge that most of the villages spread out in isolated rural mountain areas, do not have any realistic economic future, due to the generally destroyed and changed economic environment (from planned to market economy), there is no alternative of habitat yet – as a new economy has not developed. The returns in the present economic circumstances are on the level of survival rather than on the level of development. In the home villages they survive with difficulties but with at least some satisfaction of being home and independent. Where they were living as displaced they were dependant on humanitarian or social assistance or families and friends and living under humiliating and psychological stress. Important however is the fact that with the reduction or elimination of the number of displaced and a minimum guarantee of survival of the returnees, resources are relieved for development of the economy of the country.

More specifically the evaluation report pays a lot of attention to the sustainability of the agriculture/income generating components of the IAPs and criticizes these for not being sustainable and also for not having been clearly explained to the beneficiaries. (Possibly referring also to the statement under paragraph 4 below). On this issue there seems to have

been a misunderstanding by the evaluation team of the role of the agriculture components, which has lead to wrongly pronounced questions to the beneficiaries. The evaluation team seems not to have been fully aware of the role of these components in different periods of the IAP programme. The first years the agricultural component was given as a survival tool to all returnees and later on it was given as development assistance but only to returnees who had a potential and interest to be involved.

Below follow comments on the lessons learned as formulated in the last chapter of the report.

Lessons learned

Sida agrees with five of the six reflections made by the Evaluation (pages 130-131) on what has been learnt during the ten years of work with the IAP programme.

1. “The IAPs have been successful in promoting sustainable return mainly because of the way the programmes were implemented – assisted self help with transfer of agency to village committees. This implementing strategy...bears the characteristics of a rights-based approach... It involved them as actors rather than passive recipients of aid.”

Sida fully agrees with this reflection of the Evaluation. In line with the recommendation above Sida already at the start apply a self-help method in order to involve and activate the returnees, to cut the costs for reconstruction, to increase the number of beneficiaries and to fulfil the objective of contributing to the permanent return of as many house owners as possible (rather than repairing a maximum of houses). The use of NGOs instead of private construction firms was also essential for the self-help method and also for the selection of beneficiaries.

2. “Another important success factor of the programmes has been their flexibility. ...stakeholders have developed different perceptions ...An effect of this has been a fragmentation or ‘projectification’ of assistance. These ... programmes need to allow flexibility, but at the same time this requires that overall goals and strategies of the programmes are constantly reformulated, stipulated and documented in participatory stakeholder processes.”

Sida agrees that flexibility has been important. However, Sida does not agree with the view of the evaluation that the programme has suffered from ‘projectification’ and that changes in guidelines were not formulated and communicated. Sida has during all the periods of the programme and its development put a lot of effort to ensure that the most important principles is guiding the implementation at all levels, and especially with regard to methods of reconstruction and selection of beneficiaries. Nevertheless Swedish development co-operation emphasises the

ownership of the partner country and it is inevitable that partners experience different situations and needs, and hence want to try different method. This has been part of the flexible model that Sida has accepted. Goals and visions of each of the projects might differ with the geographical area and the actual situation, but the overall goal of Sida for supporting the IAP projects has always been to promote the return of displaced people. Sida set up the principal criteria for reconstruction, well coordinated with the international agents responsible for the return and reconstruction processes, and respecting the special competences and characteristics of each partner organisation. All along the years the partners were coordinated by Sida who promoted exchanges of experiences and best practises. Certain flexibility was allowed to adapt to the reality in the field. As the basic goals prevailed during the period, changes in guidelines has been communicated to the Sida partners principally through seminars and meetings.

3. “ Lacking any overall strategy, the international housing interventions were implemented according to presumptions.... In this respect Sida stands out. Their field perspectives were drawn up by professional planners. And this shows. “

Sida used professional and experienced planners and Sida agrees that this is a learned lesson for future reconstruction programmes, especially in a post-war situation. All along the programme Sida ensured competent and professional monitoring of the implementation. Good local knowledge was needed before starting up a reconstruction program and during the whole implementation phase. As Sida was involved in constructions of collective centres already during the war time in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation of the displaced people, the internal markets of construction material and the political environment was well known. This was an advantage when Sida started up the reconstruction phase. One of the early lessons learned during the war was the long time span needed for the reconstruction. It was therefore necessary to engage NGOs rather than consultants as implementers in order to guarantee a transfer of the institutional memory of the implementation over time.

The IAP programme has passed several phases. The immediate after-war period was characterized by high tensions and great security risks for Sida' s partners and for the returnees. The following periods of the IAP implementation were calmer and when the property law PLIP, is starting to get implemented around 2002, the minority returns increase effectively and new areas open up for reconstruction, as in Srebrenica and Eastern Bosnia. The different implementation periods and the changing working environment have not been reflected upon in the evaluation, important aspects for work with post-war reconstruction.

After nearly ten years the national government is now prepared to take over the responsibility for the remaining returns and reconstructions. As one of the main actors in reconstruction, Sida was requested to assist in this transfer of responsibility and will continue to do so at least also during

2006. Sida's partners will during their exit phase 2006-2007 be very much involved in this process, especially on the municipality level.

In general Sida chose to reconstruct only parts of the houses of a village, with the idea that a critical mass was needed to make return sustainable and to encourage return by those who could afford reconstruction without external assistance. Sida also wanted to spread out its support, maintaining focus to certain geographical areas.

The evaluation does not reflect much on the roles of the national and international actors, the overall steering mechanisms around the general return movements, the obstacles, the pulling factors and the selection of areas to reconstruct, political key factors in any post war reconstruction programme. In this context Sida could not have managed this large IAP programme and the complicated return process without very professional and experienced partners.

4. "NGOs and donors need to be better at listening to their clients ...IAPs were often successful in these respects and produced good results and positive side effects. But whenever stakeholders were excluded from decision making then problems such as misunderstandings and lack of co-operation arose. "

Sidas agrees that the IAPs have been successful with respect to listening to their clients. Sida agrees that excluding stakeholders from decision making can create misunderstandings and lack of co-operation. Sida does not find any concrete example of such exclusions in the evaluation report and cannot therefore respond to the finding.

5. "Credits or work based development challenges people to be partners rather than passive beneficiaries."

Sida agrees to this view, as this was also our chosen method. The method was facilitated by the self construction traditions in Bosnia. A family could always find some relative who had some experience of construction. Those who had no experience were advised by Sida partner experts. During the last years each partner always included a low percentage of so called social cases, who needed full assistance with the reconstruction. This group increased with the return to Srebrenica and Eastern Bosnia, where the returnees in general are lonely widows with no man power in the house.

6. "Re-establishing people in their former homes does not mean that reconciliation will follow. "

Certainly Sida agrees with this view. As regards the effects of the IAP programme on reconciliation, Sida fully agrees with the conclusions of the report. People are now living side by side and even talking to each other, but the full ethnic reconciliation is not yet there and it will probably take a long time. The IAP projects have been conflict sensitive and have

managed to avoid increased ethnic tensions, which could have been the effect of the returns. The IAP programme has succeeded in providing a precondition for future development and eventual reconciliation.

Finally Sida would like to add to the Evaluations conclusions, that the programme has also had an impact on a more general and national level, as part of and maybe as one of the principle pullers in the general return and reconstruction process.