

Preliminary Field Report

This report is a preliminary field report which documents immediate observations in Kosovo during the period from June 22 to July 11, 2004. The report was prepared by Fred Cocozzelli, as Mellon Fellow for the Inter-University Consortium on Security and Humanitarian Action, for Mercy Corps – Kosovo. This report was written during the field visit to Kosovo and should be considered a draft. Any comments will be incorporated into a final version.

Summary

Kosovo in mid-2004 is marked by contradictions. So far this year, mostly because of the violence of 17-18 March, has been one of the most difficult of the five years of the international intervention. The violence in mid-March was significant in scale and intensity. It highlighted serious failing in the key areas of maintaining order and security. The primary embodiment of the intervention, UNMIK, is in a state of suspended disarray, awaiting both the arrival of a new SRSG and possibly an organizational restructuring. NATO's element of the intervention, KFOR, although still enjoying local support, has been sharply criticized. If current local and regional trends continue, the elections scheduled for October of this year will most likely result in the lowest rates of participation yet, challenging the very core of the effort to promote democracy.

In the face of these very negative factors, a number of positive aspects appear to be coalescing. Frustration with the pace of progress in Kosovo has finally reached enough of a head that it is forcing entrenched institutions and actors to rethink their positions and methods. The violence in March, and in particular the poor response of UNMIK and KFOR, has legitimated the frustration felt by many Kosovars, on both sides of the ethnic divide. UNMIK, the Contact Group, the Belgrade authorities and local political parties all seem to be finally making real efforts to begin substantive negotiations over status. The local political scene may be about to experience significant electoral shake-up that could only benefit the province as a whole.

The most significant problem that this report identifies is the lack of positive popular political action. There is an extraordinary reluctance for Kosovars to engage

the political process with the goal of social or economic change. This reluctance is particularly acute in the NGO sector where operational goals have overshadowed explicit and critical commitments to social justice.

Overview

Kosovo has changed dramatically over the past five years. In the spring and summer of 1999 Kosovo was the largest on-going humanitarian operation. The province was emerging from a major violent conflict. The international NGO community, with its local counterparts, was struggling with the return of more than 800,000 displaced Albanian Kosovars. KFOR was scrambling to protect Serbian and other minority communities that were under immediate daily threat to life and limb, while simultaneously attempting to neutralize any potential security threat from the remnants of the armed Albanian opposition and impose order. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was barely established, with only a minimal presence on the ground and receiving mounting criticism for its slowness to deploy and take control of the situation. At the time UNHCR was by far the most well established of any of the UN agencies. Ethnically motivated arson, murder and other acts of violence were nightly occurrences.

The progress that Kosovo has made since then is a mixed bag. Certainly it can be confidently said that Kosovo has improved significantly. The province is now relatively calm. Although water and electricity service is still occasionally inconsistent, they are more often working than not. Political institutions that did not even exist five years ago now clamor for more responsibility. Political parties remain underdeveloped, but a plural party system does exist. Elections were held in 2000, 2001 and 2002, with another round expected to be held in October of this year. The Serbian and other minorities still suffer under insecurity, however until March of this year there had been steady progress toward re-integration. In summer 2003 there was a re-emergence of multi-ethnic activities in a number of municipalities. Prizren and Gjilan, two cities that suffered particularly in March, were both notably experiencing better ethnic relations in 2003. The riots of mid-March, however, highlighted the risks that still exist, even in locations that appear to be making improvements.

Analysis of the March riots is an on-going process with the most important reports only now being released, however, it seems already seems clear that among international actors, KFOR and UNMIK are receiving the lion's share of the blame. Among local actors, the media is receiving harsh, and just deserved criticism. Local politicians, with the notable exception of the Prime Minister, Bajram Rhexpi (PDK), have been criticized for their tepid responses that focused mostly on the damage done to the Albanian cause rather than the harm done to Serb Kosovars. The Serbian community itself, both based here in Kosovo and in Serbia proper has escaped much of the criticism. Despite the obvious fact that it was the Serbs of Kosovo who suffered the most in the March violence, Serbian leaders should not be spared criticism. Belgrade has spent most of the past five years undermining UNMIK authority in Serbian dominated parts of Kosovo. This certainly had an effect on UNMIK's, and eventually KFOR's ability to re-establish order in the face of large scale violence. Local Serbian political leaders have rarely publicly expressed a long-term commitment to work with their Albanian counterparts. The Kosovar Serbs are undoubtedly the victims of the struggle over Kosovo, both in terms of their manipulation by the Belgrade political establishment and their treatment by their fellow Kosovars – the Albanian Kosovar community. That being said, in order for the situation in Kosovo to improve, the Serbian community will have to be a responsible, active and good-faith participant.

The harsh criticism of UNMIK and KFOR for their response to the March violence signifies an important change in the political discourse of Kosovo. Over the past years, in particular since the establishment of the Provisional Institutions for Self Government (PISG) in 2002, there has been a building sense of tension between UNMIK and local institutions. In 2003 that tension was most noticeable amongst international expatriate staff who expressed tremendous frustration with their local counterparts. This frustration is generated by the very process of UNMIK led political development in Kosovo. Briefly put, the more the political institutions in Kosovo development, the more tensions grow between the local actors and the international administrators.¹ The frustration that was expressed by internationals at the time was certainly being felt by the locals as well, however, it was still somewhat difficult for public expressions of

¹This dynamic is more expressly addressed in my paper from last year “Kosovo at the Crossroads:

these feelings to find resonance. When they were expressed, the international community in Kosovo often reacted with varying degrees of indignation, dismissal or condescension. In the aftermath of the March violence, and what was clearly a dismal performance by the UNMIK and KFOR, frustration with the international presence has become legitimate. To its credit, UNMIK and the larger UN appears to be accepting this round of criticism as legitimate and healthy. Organizational changes seem to be in the offing for UNMIK.

More important than the reaction in New York, has been the local reaction to this new found ability to be openly critical of the institution that has been the dominant political actor in Kosovo since 1999. There are some promising signs that this opportunity is being grasped in a constructive manner. The Albanian Kosovar political scene is poised to produce an electoral surprise, with the LDK in a position to lose its dominant position. The major party is being challenged by on two fronts. An up-and-coming PDK has seen continued success in improvements in party cohesion, and general reputation. Independent Veton Surroi is also entering the electoral process for the first time this year. Although it is unlikely that he will win a majority of votes, of the various parties that he will take votes from, the LDK is in, by far the weakest and most vulnerable position. Without putting too much stock in the any particular individual, Surroi's entrance into the electoral arena has the potential to spark a new dynamic in the political debate. Surroi appears to be planning to build on the relative success of a number of local "citizens' initiatives" in the elections of 2002. The PDK, in the person of the Prime Minister, is also increasingly moving toward a more constructive public discourse. The prominence of positive references to PM Rhexpi since the March violence is noticeable. The SRSG has decided that the next elections will continue with closed party lists. Under this system, the prominence of party or coalition leaders is extremely important for electoral success. In addition, the election of Boris Tadic of the Democratic Party as President of Serbia, has a potential to positively impact the situation in Kosovo. Tadic and his party have their attention squarely fixed on furthering integration with the European Union, leading to an expectation of a more cooperative administration in Belgrade. Taken together, despite the tragedy of March,

Competing Solidarities, 2003", available at www.ssrc.org

there may be an emerging political constellation with positive potential.

If there is one aspect of Kosovo that is still very negative it is the lack of positive popular political action. In Kosovo, politics has very negative connotations. Too often interpreted either strictly along party or ethnic lines, political discourse is extremely weak. Politics in Kosovo is rarely interpreted in terms of ideological preferences.² International organizations, especially in the NGO community, often avoid expressing clear ideological positions for a variety of reasons, some of which are detailed below. International NGOs, however, are very often strongly infused with commitments to social and economic justice that can only be described as ideological. These commitments provide guidance for the NGOs in the interaction with the powerful interests that they must interact with, such as donor nations and organizations. In the international context, NGOs often form the leadership of broad social movements. In Kosovo, local NGOs need to adjust to a new role as active members of a critical civil society that is positively engaged in the political process. International NGOs, which have played such a significant role in the province over the past five years, need to provide assistance in taking on this new role.

Local and International NGOs in the Political Process

Mercy Corps International – Kosovo and the Mother Teresa Society have a long history together, starting their initial partnership in 1993. Although there are only limited records of the early MCI-MTS collaboration available here in Pristina, anecdotal evidence suggests that MCI-Kosovo was involved in agricultural assistance to communities in the Drenica region in 1994. Mother Teresa activists in Skenderaj recount MCI agricultural programs as having effectively introduced the use of plastic greenhouses in the municipality in that year. A Mercy Corps Kosovo website dated April 2003, touts MCI – Kosovo as having begun its collaboration with MTS in 1993 with work “in north-western Kosovo, comprised of advocacy, economic assistance, and food distribution.”³

In the early 1990's, MTS was the primary Albanian civil society organization in

²For more analysis on difficulty of political parties in Kosovo to move beyond arguments over status and into ideological debates, see my article “Political Parties in Kosovo, 2003”, GSC Quarterly, Winter 2003, at www.ssrc.org

³<http://www.mercycorps.org/kosovo/e-news/>

Kosovo. It was a major, although unofficial, component of the parallel institutions that stood in opposition to the Belgrade government. Having begun operations at the same time as the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), MTS has traditionally “cooperated very well”⁴ with the LDK. Politically the two organizations have been close since their founding. They have both followed similar strategies vis-a-vis the Belgrade regime during the 1990's and vis-a-vis the international community since the 1999 intervention. During the 1990's resistance, both MTS and the LDK were part of a larger strategy to organize Kosovo Albanian society in opposition to Belgrade's dominance. The strategy was to build parallel social structures – including schools, clinics and political institutions – as if Kosovo was already independent. By creating a de facto Republic of Kosova, the Serbian government would lose Kosovo by default. Since the intervention both organizations have similarly pursued a strategy of defensive cooperation with the international community. In the immediate aftermath of the NATO air strikes, both MTS and the LDK attempted to project a sense of entitlement to control over the emerging institutions. Both the 1990's strategy and the post-intervention strategy have had mixed results. In neither case did the LDK or MTS emerge with control over Kosovo's political or social institutions. In both cases the organizations are still considered important actors, but in neither case are they considered dominant or even likely to become dominant in the future. To the contrary, both organizations seem to be having difficulty maintaining their current positions.

From the initial MCI – MTS partnership in agricultural assistance, a larger relationship was built. By 1998, when the violence in Kosovo was beginning to reach a head, the international community began to make large-scale humanitarian assistance. The World Food Programme began humanitarian relief operations, and MTS found itself involved in the bulk distribution of commodities. These operations continued through the conflict and reached a peak at the conclusion of the NATO-led air strikes and assumption of political authority by UNMIK in 1999. In the summer of 1999 the international community was responsible for food aid distributions to the majority of Kosovars. MCI has a major implementing partner in this operation, jointly managing the US AID Food for Peace pipeline with CRS and hold responsibility for all

⁴Interview with Zef Shala, July 8, 2002

food distributions in the Peje region. MTS was the largest local distribution partner in Kosovo. It worked with all of the major food agencies, and was most often responsible for final distribution in Albanian communities. International NGOs partnerships with any other local agency were by far the exception.

It is difficult to underestimate the impact of this organizational history on MTS. In the space of about 15 years it has gone from a fiercely oppositional, and highly politicized, dissident organization, to a massive local NGO with operational partnerships with some of the world's largest international NGOs and Intergovernmental Organizations. From that position, it has now become an organization held in suspicion by some of its former international partners, and popularly perceived as something of a historical artifact. It is an organization dominated by local, older men, often with beauracritic, Eastern European “intellectual” backgrounds, working in a field that is dominated by international NGOs with relatively young operationally oriented international staff, and often even younger local staff who are increasingly being moved through modern training programs. Add to this the fact that its dominant political partner and patron, the LDK, is increasingly on the defensive. Overall, it is a testament to the activists that MTS maintains the projects that it does. On the provincial level, it has managed to identify some viable projects including cooperation with OSCE on inter-ethnic dialogue, and as the UNHCR local partner for the Plementina Displacement Camp. At the local level, in some municipalities, such as Suva Reka it does have activists that appear to be legitimately interested in using the organization as a vehicle to improve their communities. However, in some places it may be simply a matter of inertia that keeps MTS operating at all. Indeed in some locations, such as Skenderaj, the office of the organization seems little more than an old men's social club.

Unfortunately in one area where MCI invested a significant amount of work with MTS there has been little long term reward. Through the transition from humanitarian relief to social assistance, MCI, along with the other lead food agencies, agreed to work on capacity building with both the local Centers for Social Work and the Local Distribution Partners (LDP), of which MTS was by far the largest.⁵ At the time the LDP

⁵Other LDP included the Red Cross of Kosova, and the Yugoslav Red Cross. Many of the minority and

were suspicious of the transition of responsibilities to the CSW's, fearing that they would eventually be cut out of the process. MTS was right to be concerned – transferring social assistance responsibility to a public (UNMIK) agency, and away from private, politicized local NGO control was a priority. However, local NGOs which had been involved in final food distribution, which meant especially MTS, were also needed for the actual transition process. In order to facilitate the complicated role that these local NGOs would play MCI initiated a series of capacity building projects.

There was an underlying assumption that this capacity building would diffuse some of their concerns of exclusion, and promote their emergence as a legitimate, service oriented NGOs. MCI was to assist both MTS and other Local Distribution Partners in providing assistance to the local CSW in identifying local residents with social assistance needs and in organizing for future social service activities.⁶ Ideally, the emerging state sponsored social welfare agencies would be complimented by LDP. In its essence this was a fundamental effort at building democratic civil society. The prior Yugoslav socialist had built a system of single party dominance that, as in other socialist states, extended beyond the political sphere and into the social and economic. This included social welfare. The Albanian resistance built parallel systems that did not seek to compliment the state systems, but to serve as replacement institutions. At the time of the humanitarian aid to social assistance transition, the goal was to build up both the public social welfare capabilities in the CSW and the private, civil organizations such as MTS as *complimentary* agencies. In retrospect it is difficult to assess how far the awareness of creating a pluralist social welfare sector permeated the transition process. Certainly this process was discussed informally, and creating CSW – MTS linkages through participation in the institutionalized Field Level Transition Meetings was a major priority. Building a plurality of complimentary agencies was definitely a point of discussion in MCI and Catholic Relief Services

some of the majority communities were served by local “Emergency Committees” which did not have a formal structure. There was an effort to help some of these groups become more established local NGOs, but it did not seem to have any longterm impact with the exception of the Dragas municipality where the Helping Hand of Dragas was established. I have no information about the organization's current state.

⁶See the “Operating Framework for UNMIK, UNWFP, UNHCR, Implementing Partners, CSWS and Local Distribution Partners with regards to the Transition from Emergency Food Assistance to the Social Assistance Scheme”. (Unfortunately the only version of this document immediately available

(CRS) AOR at the time. Building capacity at the CSW level in the MCI and CRS AOR (Peja and Prizren, respectively) fell mostly to CRS in cooperation with ICMC and ADRA. MCI was responsible for capacity building with MTS and other LDP in the two AORs.⁷

Regardless of responsibilities at the time, there is little evidence to suggest that there is an awareness of the differing roles of public and private agencies in social welfare on the local level in Kosovo. The CSW cooperate only informally with their local NGO counterparts. Former LDP, in particular MTS, remain fixated on providing commodities as the most appropriate response to poverty. Commodity distribution is, however, no longer considered a viable option in Kosovo – international and domestic resources are not available for these kinds of operations. This is particularly difficult for MTS because their long and successful history in many communities makes them an identifiable resource for the poor. Local MTS activists regularly report being contacted by poor and vulnerable citizens looking for help. Local leaders including at the municipal level will often send refer needy community members to the MTS office. When local activists do identify other options for addressing local poverty it is usually along the lines of obtaining project funding for a proposal which they have developed. Identifying community based self-help projects which can be locally initiated without external funding is extremely rare. Despite having very deep local roots the leading former LDP, MTS, does not act as an organization that either represents or serves local communities. Rather, they attempt to operate as a service contractor for the international NGO community. In a sense they are continuing the strategy of a parallel organization – operating as independent institutions with an eye toward external funding. They are not engaging the local population in developing responses to poverty that make use of available local resources.

This is not a situation that is unique to the organizations that were formerly involved in the food distribution network, such as MTS. Throughout Kosovo there is a chronic problem of participation, as the new UNDP Kosovo Human Development Report makes clear. Kosovo organizations are failing to accurately represent their constituent citizens. This failure is most often decried in the political sphere –

is a Draft copy. Attached.)

“Kosovo's political parties are not addressing the needs of the citizens. The politicians are only interested in deals and power.” The fault for this lack of political development is often placed at the feet of UNMIK as the primary international political actor on the scene. In the words of the Human Development Report, “As a major power-broker in Kosovo today, UNMIK also must assume a primary responsibility for promoting more participatory and representative approaches to governance in Kosovo.”⁸

But this responsibility for promoting participation also extends to the NGO community, both local and international. Local NGOs are operating in a manner that mirrors the operations of the international NGOs. International NGOs in Kosovo can be seen as primarily adjuncts of the dominant international institutions and donor countries. Because of the unique situation of Kosovo, where these same international institutions and donors are so deeply involved in the actual process of governing in Kosovo, the international NGO community has become an adjunct that process. This is not to say that the international NGOs are the adjuncts of the government in the form of the PISG. Instead the NGOs are part of the interaction between the international community and the local political process in the form of UNMIK and the donor community and the PISG. The UNMIK and the donor community often express their policy positions through funding and support for international NGOs. The projects that the NGO community are implementing are concrete expressions of the policies of the intergovernmental organizations and major donors that support them. In most cases these are good projects that are being supported because of good policy – the promotion of minority returns, agricultural development, or improvements in local education. Often these projects do have a large degree of local involvement in the form of matching contributions of local fund or in-kind labor.

The programs are often problematic in that they are implementation of the policy goals of the most powerful actors in the local political constellation – the UN, the EU, the United States and other donors. Just as the local NGO community is not approaching their particular situation critically, international NGOs in Kosovo are not approaching their role in the province critically. There should be no surprise that the

⁷Although there is nearly certainly documentation on this project, it is not readily available.

⁸UNDP Kosovo, *The Rise of the Citizen: Challenges and Choices: Human Development Report Kosovo 2004*, (UNDP Kosovo, Pristina: 2004), 51

local NGO community has the same orientation as the international NGO community in Kosovo. The local NGOs look toward the internationals as an example and guide for their own actions. Local NGOs are often “service-oriented, organized around short-term, donor-funded projects, and without strong constituencies”⁹ because that is the model that they see from the international NGO community. Neither local NGOs, nor their larger international counterparts, on whom they heavily rely for leadership, are developing alternative policy paths for Kosovo.

In particular the international development NGOs, such as Mercy Corps, have become very cautious about their role as critical advocates for the most vulnerable. Self-confident that their strong sense of mission is keeping them internally grounded, these NGOs have not been reluctant to organize and lead social action publicly in Kosovo. Most NGOs have adopted what could be called a quiet approach to fulfilling the demands of their noble public commitment. As an example, economic justice is promoted through grassroots economic development in the form of micro-credit programs. These programs, although often successful in providing the resources to vulnerable entrepreneurs, do little to challenge the fundamental injustices in financial resource distribution. The most ambitious aim is to create an alternative financial resource base by leaving behind a local micro-credit organization, usually in the form of an NGO. Ironically this is in some ways similar to the strategy of parallel institutions that the Albanian community embraced in its opposition to the Belgrade regime of the 1990s. In both cases, the action is meant to provide functioning and self-contained institutional alternatives

A radical option is to promote mobilization not only on the project level, but also on the political level. Many international development NGOs, including Mercy Corps have a strong commitment to social and economic justice. This commitment nearly universally extends to opposing ethnic, racial or religious discrimination, as well as injustice based on gender. These commitments are actualized in programming and projects. Political promotion of these commitments are less common, often because international NGOs are reluctant to become involved in what is perceived as local politics. There are certainly risks involved as well. In many countries, taking an

⁹UNDP, p 54

oppositional stance to the government would lead to a quick expulsion of the organization, and perhaps even physical risk to the organization's personnel. However, the point is not to engage in local party politics, although at time it may be necessary to work with local partners that are publicly aligned with a given party.¹⁰ What is more important is the clear expression of political preference in terms of responding to the demands of the organization's constituency. If international NGOs are aligned in solidarity with the world's poor and vulnerable, they must be willing to express that solidarity at the political level.

In a situation like Kosovo the need for political engagement by the NGO community is especially acute because the political development of the province has been stunted. The inability of the international diplomatic community to resolve the question of Kosovo's status has left the local political dynamic with a structural obstacle. The question of status permeates nearly the entire political spectrum, obstructing progress on other fronts in a variety of ways. In terms of political party development, promises to resolve the question of status dominates the political legitimacy claims of the parties. The lack of a status resolution strongly encourages the sense of legal, economic and social uncertainty, which blocks progress in establishing the rule of law, financial investment and the creation of social solidarity. Compounding the structural obstacles that have been created in the political system because of the unresolved status question, there are aspects to Kosovar culture, both Serbian and Albanian, that impede representative democracy. Albanian Kosovar culture is in the midst of a transition that involves, amongst other aspects, traditional sources of authority at the local level, such as the immediate and extended family, being challenged. These challenges are still occurring, and it is not certain that what could be termed 'democratic sources of authority' will prevail. Serbian Kosovar culture is undergoing a similar transition, although because of the more extensive integration of the Serbian population into the Yugoslav socialist system, many of these changes are more closely linked to the post-socialist experience. In both cases the cultural transitions involve confusion and contestation over representation. Most international NGOs are participating in these transitions, whether or not they are conscious of their

¹⁰This happens regardless, however, in the current context those alignments are hidden and considered

impact.

International NGOs are agents of modernization. At times they may seem to be confused agents, at one moment promoting new life choices, and at other times seeking to protect traditional livelihoods. For example in the local context for Mercy Corps, the tendering process is a rationalized market-based activity. It highlights the need for accountability in making use of local resources, regardless of such traditional concerns as family connections, or village affiliation. At the same time, other aspects of Mercy Corps' programming, such as the insistence on local in-kind contribution in partial repayment of financial support, promotes greater local integration in a manner that can reinforce traditional social solidarity.¹¹ At this particular juncture in Kosovo, it is vital to remove at least some of that ambiguity by incorporating more explicit demands for justice in NGO programming. With so much of the Kosovar society – both Albanian and Serbian – in flux, strong demands to orient the transition toward establishing just institutions and structures are necessary, and may potentially be extraordinarily effective.

somewhat taboo.

¹¹See the World Bank Social Assessment, *Conflict and Change in Kosovo: Impact on Institutions and Society* by Gloria La Cava, et al. (World Bank: December 2000), especially the discussion on “bridging vs. bonding social capital”.

Recommendations / Ideas:

General:

- Explicitly renew the organizational commitment to Social Justice and analyze that commitment in the context of Kosovo today
 - Organize an internal retreat or strategizing session to determine where Mercy Corps' social mission fits into programming choices
 - Produce a Mercy Corps vision of what a just society in Kosovo would look like
 - Determine where Mercy Corps – Kosovo fits into making that vision a reality
- Determine who Mercy Corps seeks to represent
 - the poor
 - the vulnerable
 - disenfranchised
 - others...
- Raise internal organization consciousness
 - Organize in-house discussions and roundtables on social justice and social action
- Introduce an element of “Old-School Organizing” to the organization's programming
 - Seek to organize at least one project that purely a community self-help campaign that involves either no or only minimal outside funding
- Seek to form alliances with like minded organizations
 - Note that this is not advice to form partnerships – allies share the moral and ideological goals of Mercy Corps – operational partners implement projects

Specific:

- Consider carefully a renewal of the association with the Mother Teresa Society
 - If MC seeks to form an alliance with MTS, there will need to be a heavy emphasis on changing their internal organizational ethos – placing MC supported activists within the MTS may be effective, but the mandate for change has to be agreed upon with MTS leadership
 - If MC seeks to form a partnership with MTS, be aware that this arrangement will most likely be formal and more like a subcontracting position