



## Workshop on Durable Housing Solutions (DUSO) 01 – 03 June 2004 in Muri / Berne, Switzerland

### 1 Purpose of the Workshop

Since 1992, SDC's Department for Humanitarian Aid (the Europe and CIS Division) has been implementing durable housing solutions in the Western Balkans. From 2001 onwards, these programmes have predominantly focused on the residents of collective centres. As SDC's activities in the Balkans are currently being drastically reduced, SDC has decided to organise a workshop on Durable Housing Solutions in order to make the accumulated experiences available to other actors and to explore their replication in the Caucasus. The following objectives have been defined for the event:

- Participants are familiar with the DUSO approaches applied in the Balkans by different organisations  
*Comment: Objective achieved*
- Participants know from where they can receive further information on DUSO approaches  
*Comment: Objective reached and further enhanced through this CD*
- Participants agree on 3 successful approaches (e.g. housing, income generation etc.) to be further developed  
*Comment: Partially reached. The approach on privatisation will be further explored.*
- Information exchange amongst the different DUSO actors has been discussed  
*Comment: Objective reached. It has been agreed that a newsletter on Durable Solution will be distributed twice a year by SDC.*
- A joint action plan for a future DUSO programme in the Southern Caucasus is discussed – based on the Balkan experience  
*Comment: Partially reached. A joint action plan already exists between UNHCR and SDC in Armenia. In Georgia, there is a joint working group on the so called New Approach headed by UNDP. There is a need for further co-operation between the different actors in parts, the North – and the South Caucasus.*

**Participants** in the workshop represented multilateral organisations, NGOs of the partner countries and from Western Europe, and, evidently, SDC (see list of participants under "General"). They all have in-depth experience in durable (housing) solutions and gladly accepted the invitation to the workshop. Toni Frisch, Head of SDC's Department for Humanitarian Aid, thanked the organisations represented for their participation and stressed the importance of the event and of the topics discussed. Swiss Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Georgia, presented a paper on the lessons of the Balkans and the challenges in the Caucasus (see "Key notes"). Udo Janz, representing the UNHCR in Bosnia and Herzegovina, provided additional information and experience from a multilateral perspective (see "Key Notes").

## 2 Topics Discussed

The workshop allowed for the presentation of a large number of projects and programmes designed to implement durable solutions in the Balkans and in the Caucasus, mainly in the area of housing. Based on these presentations, various topics were addressed in plenary discussions and in working groups. The following paragraphs briefly reflect discussions held throughout the workshop.

### The concept of Durable Housing Solutions

The concept of durable housing solutions is not clearly defined and is evolving in time. In the context of this workshop it was understood as the search for permanent **housing** solutions for refugees and displaced persons in the Balkans and the Caucasus. UNHCR prefers to use terms like repatriation, reinstallation (in third country) and integration. SDC has used the term Durable Housing Solutions more restrictively, by limiting it to the creation of housing facilities for refugees and IDPs, mostly living in temporary accommodation facilities like collective centres etc. This limitation was intentional in order to focus the activities. It is, however, understood that the housing issue is only one component of a series of measures (including; income generation, access to basic infrastructure and services etc.) that favour durable solutions.

The participants of the workshop agreed that the success of Durable Solutions projects does not depend only on technical aspects but requires the synergy of various disciplines. Some programmes are therefore situated at the interface between humanitarian aid and development programmes and aim at a more comprehensive improvement of the **livelihood** of target populations. They include -to varying degrees- components to improve the socio-economic conditions of the target population. In other programmes, such issues are tackled by parallel ventures.

### Duration

“How long is «durable»?”, was a question asked during the workshop. Different aspects are to be taken into account when dealing with “durability”. Among them are the following:

- ⇒ Planning for the **medium term** is usually fair enough. Target groups also do their own planning, they implement their own strategies.
- ⇒ **“Durable” is not “self-sustainable”**. Continued inputs (by beneficiaries, possibly also by donors) are therefore necessary to guarantee lasting solutions. A useful basis for continued inputs is sound concepts for the maintenance of houses and flats provided. Such maintenance concepts are to define responsibilities (for owners and users) and necessary resources.
- ⇒ Projects alone cannot guarantee durability. **Minimal framework conditions are necessary to make solutions durable**. These conditions include political and social stability, the possibility to register property etc. They also include the issue of refugees’ and displaced persons’ legal status and, obviously, the political situation.
- ⇒ Sufficient **funding** and the participation of the local authorities are also required for durable solutions.

### Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge Sharing, the topic of a presentation by Heiner Gloor and of a working group was clearly a concern of all participants. All agree on the necessity for improved knowledge management on durable solutions projects within and between organisations

In the **working group** (see "Durable Solutions in the Caucasus" 6) several key issues were discussed as the importance of motivating everybody to document relevant experiences, process into a succinct form and make it accessible to interested parties. Good examples mentioned were handbooks (Caritas, NRC), electronic platforms (BASIN network, ICRC) or CD's (Virtual library DUSO). Major constraints mentioned were loss of knowledge and difficult access to the various sources. Sharing of knowledge might be facilitated by adapting similar, comparable approaches, exchange of staff and creation of accessible platforms.

The **CD on virtual library of best practices**, documenting succinctly relevant experiences of SDC in the Balkans and the Caucasus, was presented by Heiner Gloor (see "Knowledge sharing") and distributed to all participants.

## **Balkans and Caucasus**

SDC and other actors are involved in programmes targeting durable (housing) solutions both in the Balkans and in the Caucasus. There are aspects common to the two regions but there are also differences in the frame conditions. Two working groups (see "Durable Solutions in the Caucasus" 4 and 5) discussed these issues.

- ⇒ Both regions are facing the problems of transition with wide spread poverty, unemployment and a large number of people suffering from unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- ⇒ The "Balkans approach" cannot just be blueprinted in another region but the lessons learnt can be adapted to the specific conditions of the Caucasus
- ⇒ Important are the development of national strategies, the involvement of the authorities and the capacity building of local partners.

## **Politics**

Just as the economic situation and the social conditions, politics are an important framework for durable (housing) solutions. Not all **political stakeholders** have an interest in durable solutions; some may prefer the problem (that they even might have created in the first place) to continue.

- ⇒ Durable (housing) solutions projects need to know political stakeholders' **agendas** and to take them into account when planning and implementing activities.
- ⇒ Projects are to be **in line with national strategies** – if these are in place and if they are viable.
- ⇒ Participation in **strategy definition** of local authorities on durable solutions is a possibility for donor agencies to contribute to solving problems.
- ⇒ **Support on the political level** provided by donor governments and by multilateral organisations is an essential contribution that can greatly increase the success of durable solutions projects.

## **Local Partners, Implementing Partners, Beneficiaries, and their co-operation**

Projects for durable solutions can only be successfully implemented if they adequately deal with the different types of partners and beneficiaries.

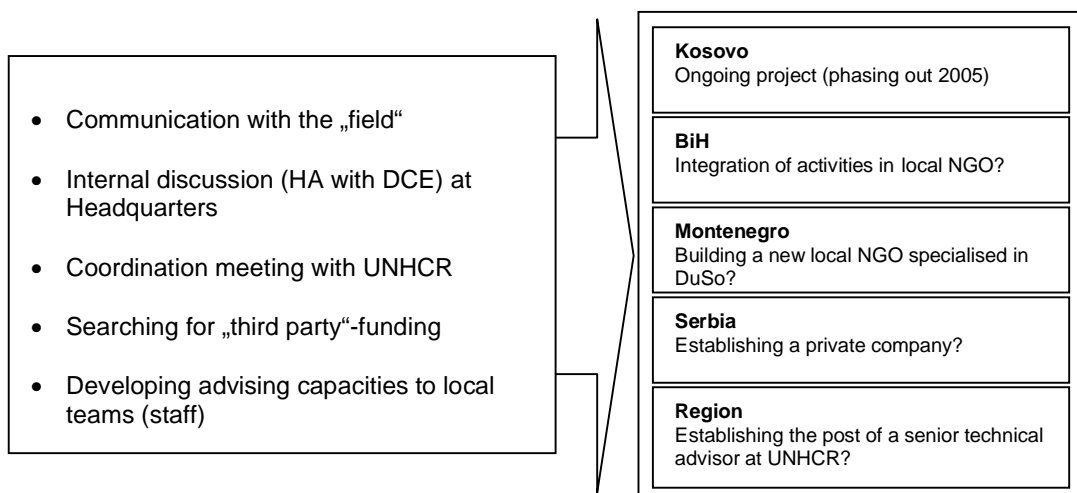
- ⇒ Appropriate **choices** of implementing partners (multilateral agencies, local NGOs) are required.

- ⇒ Durable (housing) solutions projects should always contribute to the **partner organisation's capacities**. Capacity building should be included before or during implementation.
- ⇒ Local partners have **resources** (financial, others more probably - and knowledge) **and limitations** that are to be considered when implementing projects.
- ⇒ The **commitment** of local partners to the activities of projects is necessary for their successful implementation.
- ⇒ Different international and local actors should **join their efforts** whenever possible and harmonise their approaches and programmes or projects.
- ⇒ Whenever possible, **existing infrastructures** are to be used for durable solutions (cf. the examples of the Southern Caucasus).

### 3 (SDC) Perspectives on Durable Solutions

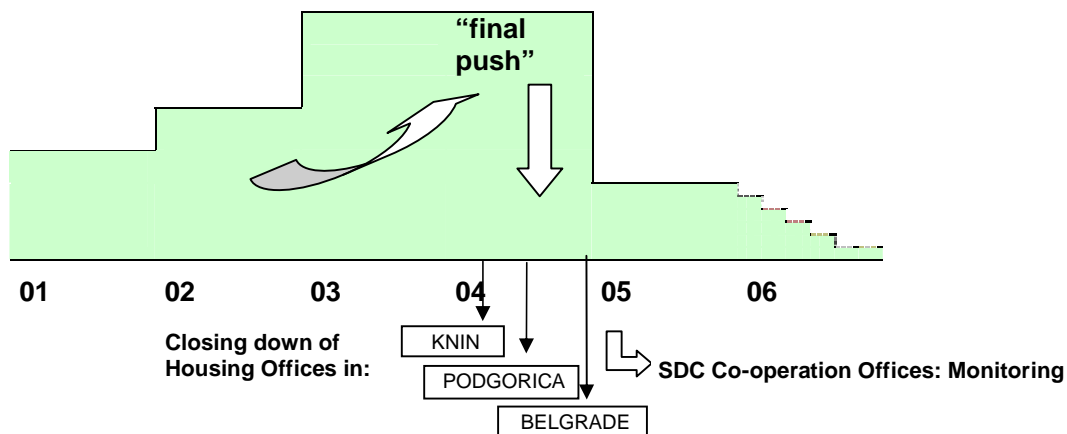
Hans-Peter Lenz, Head of SDC's Humanitarian Aid Division "Europe and CIS" presented a brief outlook on SDC concerns and future perspectives concerning durable housing solutions. He informed about the general trend of SDC activities for durable solutions in the Balkans and about the exit strategy.

#### The Future of SDC's Durable Solutions Projects in the Balkans

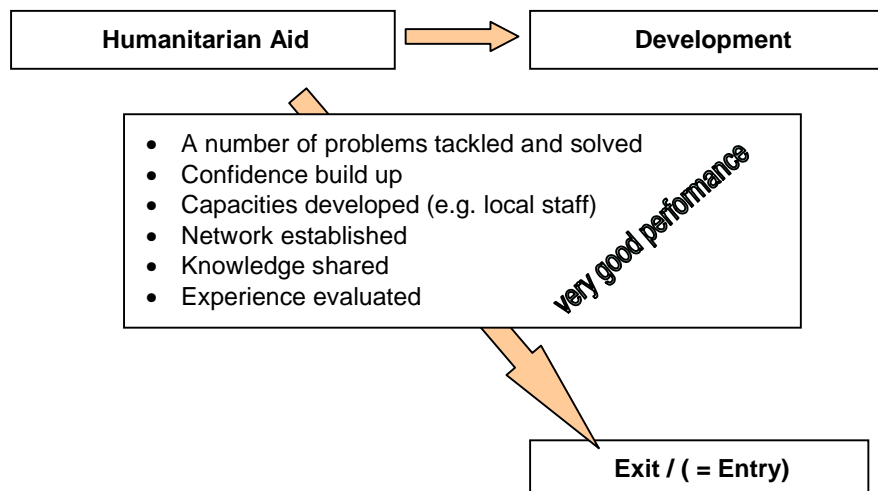


## SDC / HA: Exit Strategy Concerning Durable Housing Solutions

The evolution of the budget available for SDC durable housing solutions (2001-06)



## Durable Solutions: Exit and / or Evolution into Development



## 4 Next steps

The following measures were defined and agreed upon during the workshop:

- Participants in the DUSO Workshop **will transmit information** on the workshop in Muri within their organisations  
*Comment: responsibility of each participant*
- SDC's **lessons learnt from the Balkans** are condensed in appropriate form and **provided to actors in the Caucasus**  
*Comment: the SDC internal Project Team DUSO analyses approaches in the Balkan and the possibilities of their transfer to the Caucasus.*
- SDC provides **copies of evaluation reports of DUSO projects in the Balkan** on request to participants of the workshop
- SDC will **explore the possibilities of a project for social housing in Georgia and Armenia.**  
*Comment: Provided that their decision makers agree, the representatives of Save the Children, Georgia, and UNHCR, Armenia, expressed their willingness to carry out feasibility study on the implementation of Social Foster Housing in their respective countries. The results of these studies will be available at the end of the year. SDC will look into the possibilities to make funds available for the implementation in 2005.*
- **SDC and Caritas** consider the opportunity and the possibilities for **joint post-evaluations** of DUSO projects **in the Balkans.**  
*Comment: Both organisations have the intention to evaluate projects in the Balkans; they expressed their willingness to carry out a joint evaluation, possibly in Kosovo.*
- A possible **next workshop** may be held in the Caucasus in 2005, on the topic of **maintenance.**  
*Comment: It was proposed that another workshop should be organized on one specific topic. One of the urgent problems is the maintenance of buildings (private houses and public buildings). A workshop on maintenance could be held in the Caucasus in 2005. The development of **maintenance concepts** contribute to the durability of solutions.*