

## 15. LESSONS LEARNT

This section reviews the major findings of the report including aspects unique to the South Caucasus and those which may be of broader relevance.

1. There is a deep, long and complex cultural/historical background to conflict in the South Caucasus, reflecting the agendas of actors and interested parties internal to the area, throughout the region and also at global level.

2. At times, the conflicts have been extremely bitter with tens of thousands of casualties and over one million displaced people.

3. Though conflict has generally ceased it is still occurring in Abkhasia.

4. Many hundreds of thousands of people are still displaced. One effect is that the remaining population is disproportionately elderly and inherently vulnerable. There are also large vulnerable groups such as war widows, the war wounded and orphans.

5. Many of the elderly are in urban areas, without access to the means of production, in many cases without any local family, with little if any pension and in Abkhasia they are the targets of ethnic violence. Manifestly they are vulnerable in the short, medium and long terms.

6. Economy and society in the Caucasus are recovering slowly with the implication that many of the vulnerable, including for example the unsupported urban elderly, children of large families and war-wounded people will long remain in that condition.

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7. Decapitalization can be a sensitive indicator of the need for intervention since it indicates stress on livelihood systems. It is not, however, the only indicator and cannot replace a detailed investigation of livelihood systems and entitlements.

8. Conditions can vary greatly over physical, economic and social space and through time. To capture this intensely local specificity, detailed baseline surveys, monitoring and targeting are essential.

9. The village surveys carried out in Nagorno-Karabakh were models of good practice in such investigations. They provided an excellent basis for targeted intervention in both the relief and post-relief phases because data was available to household level.

10. Experience in Abkhasia demonstrated that monitoring of the effectiveness of distribution was best carried out during or immediately after distributions. However, monitoring is most valuable when it goes beyond the accounting of delivery to pre-identified targets and assesses the unfulfilled needs of the hitherto non-targeted population. Livelihood systems, entitlements and livelihood strategies (see 7) are appropriate investigative methods.

11. Local conditions vary greatly even in apparently homogeneous areas. For effective targeting and monitoring every effort should be made to capture the local specificity. This demands a sophisticated monitoring system which goes beyond a simple

check on beneficiary lists and entails a sensitive investigation of variations in livelihood systems.

12. The heritage of an expectation of relief based on traditional norms and prioritisations in the USSR made appropriate targeting difficult.  
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13. Beneficiary participation involves continuing negotiation in a changing environment of action and thus demands continuous monitoring.

14. There was no evidence of famine and acute malnutrition at any stage but the mission is convinced of the value of the intervention for the following reasons:

- a) the livelihoods of many tens of thousands of vulnerable people were supported and it is reasonable to consider that an unquantifiable number of lives may have been saved by timely intervention.
- b) aid provided psychological support in a slowly recovering economy.
- c) support was provided for returnees, some of whom were without resources.
- d) support created conditions to attract further returnees.
- e) in general aid did not create dependency, though within Abkhazia there was some evidence of aggressive dependency.
- f) there is little doubt that ICRC's programmes have had a positive impact.

15. In the areas visited by the team it is clear that large numbers of people are vulnerable in the short, medium and probably the long term. Until the political and economic circumstances improve, many of the present vulnerable groups will remain vulnerable. Returnees, after initial help may achieve self-sufficiency, but the elderly, for example in Abkhazia, have little hope of self-sufficiency.

16. Local initiatives, such as the canteen programme in Abkhazia, are an opportunity on which an agency such as ICRC can profitably build. ICRC clearly demonstrated an ability to build upon traditional supporting initiatives to strengthen self-sufficiency, self-provision and economic recovery. However, this programme should have come earlier in the intervention.  
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17. ICRC was well advised to undertake more direct supervision of distributions. The move to direct distributions in Abkhazia improved effectiveness and efficiency and raised the profile of ICRC. On the down side, however, this led to a perceived lack of trust from some administrations, and in some cases damaged relations with ICRC.

18. An example of the danger of depending on former experience is the request for family parcels. Family parcels have many advantages, but their use must never become a standard response; they must be justified according to the particular needs of the specific emergency. Section 14.3 examines in detail the important issue of family parcels and their

use in emergencies. Overall, the mission were impressed by the value of family parcels in this emergency though there use in the canteen programme was questionable and a strong case can be made for local assembly: a pilot scheme for local assembly is being carried out by ICRC.

19. Whilst the size and strength of the organisation gives ICRC a major advantage in complex emergencies, ICRC has demonstrated competence and imagination in supporting people during the recent complex and traumatic conflicts of the South Caucasus.

20. Local or regional purchases of humanitarian assistance commodities are desirable for a number of reasons, not least because of the potential to contribution towards 'smart relief'. However, as NRCS indicate, the use of local purchases must always be assessed in the context of available time, price, quality, and the reliability of the supplier.

21. ICRC used local employees, promoting them to higher positions in some cases. Though local employees may be subject to coercion there are many advantages to their full use, particularly through the continuity that they can provide.  
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22. The mission noted the shortness of the contracts of many expatriates. This allows the introduction of new ideas at the expense of continuity.

23. Transparency is a sensitive issue for ICRC who have explained in detail their reasons for not allowing access to SITRAPs. The mission considers that it is essential for the adequate review of operations that some mechanism be found for allowing access to the non-sensitive parts of the SITRAPs.  
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