

TRANSTEC



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FINAL REPORT

TRANSTEC's TEAM

Mr. Antoine Eric de HAULLEVILLE, Team Leader
Mrs. Kristien VLIAGEN, Food/Supply Expert
Mr. Philippe LOTHE, Water and sanitation Engineer
Dr Carole PEIGNOT, MD Nutritionist – AEDES

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Researchparc 75 Avenue de Tyras B-1120 Brussels/Bruxelles/Bruselas Tel. +32.2.266 49 50 Telefax : +32.2.266 49 65
BTW-TVA BE 425.684.302 E-mail : TRANSTEC@TRANSTEC.be - Website: www.transtec.be HRB-RCB 459.055

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ACRONYMS

AAH-UK	Action Against Hunger - UK
AAH-USA	Action Against Hunger - USA
ACF	Action contre la Faim
ACF-FR	Action Contre la Faim - France
ACH	Acción Contra el Hambre
AIDCO	European Aid Co-operation Office
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AMI	Aide Médicale Internationale
ANC	Anti Natal Care
ARV	Anti Retroviral Therapy/drugs
ASF	Danish People's Aid
BMI	Body Mass Index
CAP	Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal
CAP	Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal
CBN	Cost of Basic Needs
CFW	Cash for Work
CTC	Community Therapeutic Centre
DCA	Dan Church Aid
DRC	Danish Refugee Council or Democratic Republic of Congo
ECHO	European Commission, Humanitarian Aid Office
F 5	EC Food Security and Thematic Support (AIDCO)
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation, United Nations
FCA	FinnChurchAid
FEI	Food Energy Intake
FFW	Food For Work
FOMI	Funds of obligation of medical insurance
FP	Family Planning

FPA	Framework Partnership Agreement
FRD	Fund for restoration and development
FS	Food Security
GIS	Geographic Information System
HE	Household Economy in Chechnya
HEA	Household Economy Assessment
HI	Handicap International
HAV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HoM	Head of Mission
HQ	Head Quarter
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross and red Crescent
IDA	International Dispensary Association
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IMC	International Medical Corps
IR	Islamic Relief
LM	List monitoring (ACF system)
LRRD	Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
MaSoSo	Maize, Sorghum, Soya
MCH	Mother & Child Health
MDM	Médecins du Monde
MOH	Ministry of Health
MONUC	United Nations Mission In Congo
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières
MUAC	Mid Upper Arm Circumstance
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs

OFDA	Office of the United States of America Foreign Disaster Assistance
ORS	Oral Re-hydration Salts
PDLM	Post distribution list monitoring (ACF system)
PDM	Post distribution monitoring (ACF system)
PHC	Primary Health Care
PINF	People in Need Foundation
PLWH/A	People living with HIV/ AIDS
PNC	Postnatal Care
RRs	Russian Rubbles
RUTF	Ready to Use Therapeutic Food
SARC	Saudi Arabic Red Crescent
SFC	Supplementary Feeding Centre
SFI	Social Forsknings Instituttet
SHA	Swiss Humanitarian Aid
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
THB or TB	Tuberculosis
TFC	Therapeutic Feeding Centre
TOR	Terms of References
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
USA	United States of America
Watsan	Water and sanitation
WFP	World Food Programme

W/H	Weight / Height Ratio
WHO	World Health Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

The consulting team's main objective is to assess the capacities of ACF-FRA to respond to humanitarian crises and subsequently to analyse the past and future partnership relations between ECHO and ACF. ACF's global strategy was mainly evaluated in ACF's HQ in Paris. The operational strategy was evaluated in the field in South Kivu and in Northern Caucasus. Conclusions and recommendations are based on the lessons learned.

2. Main conclusions and recommendations on the global strategy

ACF's overall performances far exceed the average and in some areas may be considered a benchmark. The association has constantly shown in the last 25 years that it can be trusted as a faithful and dependable Partner with high standards of professionalism, as well as rigorous management and technical rules and regulations. ECHO can benefit greatly from the Partner's experience. The Partner also can benefit from the demands of the new FPA. The match between the experiences and the demands will guarantee a solid partnership.

ACF's vs. ECHO's global strategy

ACF's Charter and ECHO's mandate (1257/96) closely coincide. The coherence and complementarity between ECHO and ACF is therefore properly ensured.

ACF centralism

In spite of the creation of 'sister' associations (USA, SPAIN and UK), ACF is still a much centralised organisation. The overall strategy is fixed and agreed in Paris, avoiding the sort of centrifugal force that has plagued other similar initiatives by large NGOs. The creation of sister associations has also provided a wider base for recruitment and fund-raising activities. Thematic specialisms are now introduced, – with watsan in Spain; training in the UK; training, and nutrition (partly) in the USA. No fundamental issues are raised by ACF subcontracting some of its contracts to sister associations.

Human resources, recruitment and training

Although most of the main NGOs also face recruitment difficulties for experimented personnel due to the rapid increase in humanitarian crisis (e.g. Darfour) recruitment is a very serious issue for ACF, in terms of its implementing capacities. Recruitment of staff members and of paid-and not paid volunteers is becoming increasingly difficult due in part to a conservative salary and contractual policy coupled with very strict recruitment criteria. Recruitment difficulties are not directly linked to the number of contracts implemented with ECHO funds as the number of such contracts remained stable in the last three years (45 in 2001, 44 en 2002, 45 in 2003). Training is provided along professional lines with the participation of other leading NGOs, and is followed up in the field.

Technical capacities

ACF has identified five fields of competence for its activities:

- **Nutrition.** ACF is the recognised leader in nutrition. Feeding protocols were established in the 1980s and they have been constantly updated. Current protocols are universally applicable and used by all organisations working in the area of nutritional treatment (World Health Organisation- WHO- and United Nations Children Fund- UNICEF). Sphere standards also follow ACF's protocols and recommendations.
- **Food aid and food security.** ACF is relatively clear in its definition of food security vs. food aid concepts and tends to consider that the two terms are complementary, with food aid a first level in food security activities¹. Saving lives is food aid, while food security is about saving livelihoods.

¹ ACF' strategy is discussed in Annex III.2

ECHO's concept of food security is also a somewhat grey area. Where does ECHO stop and where does AIDCO's Food Security and Thematic Support (F5 Unit) take over? Thematic debate is open within the Commission. Food security could usefully be linked with LRRD.

- **Health.** Currently, the main thrust of ACF's policy is to fill gaps. Whenever and where ever other NGOs with recognized expertise in health are willing or able to deal with health issues, ACF provides a package of primary health care in addition to nutrition activities. It is always mindful of the need to involve the local staff and existing health structures. ACF is currently discussing the extent of its specific mandate in the health sector, including mental health and psycho-social matters.

- **Watsan.** ACF's approach is very professional. Thanks to a good local knowledge based on its extensive database and the experience of HQ technical staff, ACF is able to quickly conduct professional needs assessments enabling the design of sound and practical technical and financial proposals for short-term interventions. ACF has published its own handbook on WATSAN issues. It is considered a basic technical compendium and is widely recognised and utilised in the field by other NGOs and organisations.

- **Reporting and data analysis**

The quality of reporting is not always up to the standards required. Qualitative analysis is weak or missing, with a bias towards quantitative results presented without analysis. There is a basic dichotomy between the wealth of data collected and the processing. This is mainly due to the lack of a statistical analysis department and staff in HQ. ECHO requires answers to some indicators which are listed in the Global Plans/Decision documents. Usually ACF's matching indicators that indicate the impact of a contract's implementation are hidden in the mass of data collected. Since there is no analysis of this data, ECHO's desk officers find it difficult to sort out the indicators.

Logical framework

ACF does not feel comfortable with the logical framework approach. As a result, the presentation of ACF's logical framework is not optimal. Criteria and indicators presented are often not explained nor put into perspective or commented upon; sometimes they are simply missing.

Monitoring

ACF maintains a close technical and financial supervision of the contracts it implements. Contracts implemented by sister organisations are entirely run by them.

Logistics and procurement

ACF has a very strong and technically able logistics department and a warehouse in Paris that will shortly centralise all ACF's procurement needs. Procurement for ECHO contracts is run according to ECHO's rules and regulations.

Security

Security is paramount. Very strict security rules apply, many of them confidential, and they permeate all ACF activities. The association considers that such rules and their strict observance protects the humanitarian workers to the degree possible.

Recommendations

Human resources, recruitment and training: ACF is at present reviewing its employment policy, with the aim of setting up career-development objectives for its personnel; this may include a revision of the salary grids. As soon as this policy is approved by ACF's board, it would be advisable to discuss it with ECHO as a basis for transparency.

ACF must reinforce its HQ human resources in the field of Water and Sanitation. (In 2004 the priority was to nutrition and health).

The new FPA allows for an innovative presentation of breakdowns for direct costs, a format that should be utilised.

The exact job description of local senior staff and their relevance to the tasks must be clearly identified in the financing proposal and in the logframe analysis, in order to avoid additional costs.

Technical capacities: ECHO should clearly indicate that Sphere standards are not contractual, in contradiction with some of ACF's staffs' opinion.

There is a gap between ACF's technical skills which are of very high standards in their field of competence and the capacity of ECHO's staff to enter into a high level technical dialogue. There is no health or watsan engineers in ECHO's HQ and the ones based in Nairobi are responsible for too many projects to be able to fully monitor ACF's health activities in Kivu.

Data Analysis ACF must create a data-analysis section at HQ, in charge of designing a data-processing program, in accordance to ECHO's requirements on criteria, indicators and benchmarking.

Sisters organisations: ACF must state clearly its relationships with sister associations and inform ECHO accordingly, including the reasons for these relationships and the advantages for Donors.

Logical framework ECHO cannot change its basic requirement for logical framework presentation and consequently must insist on it. The FPA applies to all NGOs and it is not possible to make exceptions.

Logistics and procurement: All ECHO's procurement rules and regulations must be applied: derogations must be exceptional and duly justified before they are actually granted. ACF's foreseen policy of concentrating all procurements in one central unit must be encouraged, as the traceability of goods will be easier, and costs to ECHO lowered.

LRRD With respect to LRRD issues, ACF must draft its proposals by taking into account the possible spin-off for development of its emergency intervention. Such spin-offs should become a compulsory entry in the proposal form.

Local NGOs In places where crises are likely to last, it could be relevant to support the efforts of the partners for starting up local NGOs. ECHO cannot with its mandate finance them, but AIDCO could through the decentralised cooperation budget line.

Timeliness Timetable deadlines for reporting must be strictly enforced. Both ACF and ECHO should factor an automatic reminder into their computer systems.

Phasing out Phasing-out criteria, indicators and scenarios must be discussed explicitly in each of the proposals, including for extensions or renewals of contracts.

3. Main conclusions and recommendations on the operational case studies

3.1. South Kivu

Nutrition

ACF interventions have always been strong in the area of nutrition and this continues to be the case. The various criteria of success in Kivu are well above the Sphere standards. ACF helped to draft a national Congolese protocol of management for malnutrition, which is now followed by all stakeholders in DRC. The performance of the Therapeutic Feeding Centres (TFC) is excellent in terms of weight gain and death rates. However, the proportion of abandon is relatively high, although still below the Sphere standards on average. It is obviously linked to the insecurity, the difficulties of access and some ingrained cultural factors. The population of the TFCs and SFCs often includes a high proportion of adults who are obviously in a poor state of nutrition and who sometimes suffer from various diseases. New strategies need to be devised to best assist them, without overcrowding the TFCs. The follow-up by home visitors, although not perfect, is working well and could help in the devising of new strategies such as community prevention, screening and treatment of malnutrition. Home visitors could also contribute to a long-term follow-up of a sample of families. Community Therapeutic Care (CTC) may be an interesting complement to TFCs, helping to limit the length of

stay of beneficiaries away from home. More experience is needed to assess the feasibility of CTC in various contexts, such as conflict, and more information is needed on its cost-effectiveness. The IEC (“Information, Education et Formation”) component appears to be unusually strong, which is remarkable in African countries. ACF helped to draft a national protocol of management of malnutrition, which is now followed by all stakeholders in DRC.

Food security

Food security is not funded by ECHO, but by the Office of US Foreign Assistance (OFDA). ACF’s food security integration into ECHO’s funded activities must be improved. At present there are two programmes running in parallel (nutrition ACF and OFDA food security).

Health

Health services are provided by Aide Médicale Internationale (AMI) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in South Kivu. Systematic medical treatment is given to all beneficiaries in the TFCs (measles, vaccination, care of malaria and tuberculosis). Improvements are needed for malaria protection and tuberculosis isolation. Mental health is now considered a priority and some IEC messages and activities have started in this regard.

ACF pays incentives to keep its contracts running in accordance with its policy of installing TFCs in existing hospitals and utilising the services of existing civil servants. Incentives are very often the only payments that the local staff members receive, as normal statutory salaries have not been paid for months or even years.

There is a major national problem of financial access to health care in the country: the rates are generally unaffordable to the patients but thanks to the negotiations of MSF/AMI, rates are now much more accessible in the facilities managed by the two NGOs.

Sexual violence

Although it concerns mostly women, sexual violence cannot be called gender-based violence, because men and young boys are also victims. It would be more accurate to call it ethnic violence. As usual, women are the most affected by such violence. TFCs are not only a place to take care of their children’s malnutrition (or that of the affected women), but also a safe haven where women can escape violence and catch up with health and education gaps and men can escape forced enrolment and various abuses. However, as soon as the beneficiaries shift to SFCs –carrying substantial amounts of food on their way home every fortnight- they are at risk again.

Non-State actors

Various churches are playing a major role in assisting all kinds of vulnerable people. They could take over the nutritional follow-up, with responsibility for continued IEC, growth monitoring and supplementary feeding.

Conclusions

Relevance

ACF’s activities match the criteria for humanitarian intervention, i.e. saving lives and alleviating suffering. Most of the health, nutrition and development indicators of the regions where ACF operates are the worse in the DRC and indeed in Africa. For example, current mortality rates are outrageously high, as stated in the TORs, and maternal mortality is probably the highest in the world, infant and child mortality are also extremely high as shown by UNICEF. Years of intense and protracted civil war have resulted in a downward and ever-worsening situation for the local civil population. ACF’s multipurpose intervention is especially relevant in the DRC, where all possible causes of malnutrition can be found together and must be addressed at the same time.

Effectiveness

Immediate nutrition and health effectiveness is excellent and proven in quantifiable figures. The high rate of cure and the low rate of death are based on ACF's strategy of feeding and curing all children in the best possible way and educating the mother to adopt a better nutritional approach and better care in the future. Other NGOs work from a different principle. They state that not every malnourished person should be taken care of in a large and lasting emergency, but only those who, in the long term, have the best chances of recovery. This is called 'triage' and is not only technically difficult – who can tell with any certainty who will still be alive at any given point in the future? – but also ethically debatable. Unfortunately, triage is what actually happens, since only the people who have access to aid benefit from it. And no operation, however good it may be, can save everybody. The best way forward in future if the security and political situation allow for it is to provide families with food security mechanisms based on self-production and not on food aid.

Efficiency

ACF's interventions are expensive. Strict security measures increase substantially the cost of an operation. The local staff members are numerous and could probably be reduced. In some instances (Shabunda) all the equipment and the food is air-lifted in. In this case, oddly enough, ECHO's desk officer proposes to waive the calculation of the monthly cost per beneficiary, as there is no other alternative to (costly) air-lifting². Based on the contractual records, an attempt has been made (table 4) to estimate the cost per beneficiary. It is extremely difficult to produce an exact figure, as often there is a co-financing Donor (e.g. OFDA, WFP or UNICEF) or others Partners involved (e.g. MSF or Tearfund). It is also difficult to avoid double-counting of beneficiaries, as may occur between TFCs and SFCs. However, with the exception of air-lifting, the cost per beneficiary is rather low and does not change very much. It is notable that the indirect costs (overheads), equivalent to the administrative cost of the new FPA, are within the maximum eligible 7%. However, the contractual records also show that ACF systematically overprices its services and inputs and readily lowers the estimations when asked to do so. Overpricing is usually due to the high number of staff members and equipment. What is more worrying is that ECHO does not have specialists in ACF's field of competence (nutritionist, health specialist, watsan engineer and agronomist) and cannot therefore assess in depth the validity of the financial and technical aspects of project proposals. The comparison with other Donors in the same area and in the same sector of intervention would have required an in-depth analysis of their financial records. That was not possible in the scope of this mission.

Impact

The overall objectives were undoubtedly achieved in the short term, at least for the population that managed to get to the TFCs and SFCs or who were screened by home visitors. These goals included reduction of suffering, saving of human lives, increased knowledge of nutrition and care among mothers, and increased capacity of health staff to further improve the situation. Long-term impact should be significant in terms of capacity-building of the health staff and of increased knowledge among families of nutrition, care practices and probably improved farming techniques acquired through food security programmes (OFDA) integrated into ECHO-funded programmes. There will also be an impact in terms of child-care assertiveness thanks to an improved knowledge of the women in child care and possibly a positive psychological impact on the mitigation of war trauma: women are given new responsibilities in TFCs, are free to express themselves and invited to do so, share each other's experiences and ideas and establish a dialogue. Unintended negative happenings may unfortunately occur time to time such as mothers or other carers leaving the SFCs or the TFCs with a two-week food ration and being easy targets for armed groups: food may be stolen and women raped on the way back home as commented by some beneficiaries interviewed at random by the evaluators.

² The cost is currently \$ 87 per ton.

Sustainability

Several factors are likely to maximise sustainability.

- **Training of local staff.** Staff members are trained in various important nutrition and health issues. Provided that the health system returns to a functional state, the local staff can take over; experience has shown that this happened in several countries where ACF withdrew.
- **Policy support** at national level. This is expressed by the development of an agreed-upon national protocol.
- **IEC of mothers** is paramount to an improvement of the health and nutrition status of children.
- **Diversification of the diet** with foodstuff that is more nutritious than the traditional staple food (cereals or soy instead of manioc for example). Although no long term study was done on the sustainability of such new habits, one can hope that at least some proportion of the population will keep them and influence others.
- Isolation wards for THB patients are required.
- Western style latrines are provided. Maintenance system are not (water, toilet paper)

Recommendations

Data analysis Data collected by ACF must be analysed in a more systematic way. This will lead to key decision-making information in the project proposals submitted to Donors and help to set achievable indicators.

Quality control ACF must improve its quality-control mechanisms. ECHO could ask for quality-control results to be included in the reports it receives. A reporting quality control function in ACF headquarters to centralise reports, review/rewrite and closely link with the new requested statistical position would greatly help in streamlining the issue.

Information, Education and Information (IEC) sessions should be organised at food distribution centres. Likely topics could include HIV/Aids and condom distribution, food security, simple Primary Health Care (PHC), and open thematic discussions generated by the beneficiaries themselves.

Adult treatment One alternative option to adult treatment could be to apply stricter criteria for admission to a Therapeutic Feeding Centres and send more adults to Supplementary Feeding Centres. In surveys conducted by ACF there is no entry for the adults. There should be one.

Tuberculosis Regarding tuberculosis, ACF must make an agreement with an NGO dealing with TB and WFP to respectively provide drugs and food) after the initial phase in TFCs.

Family Planning Contact must be established with the United Nations Family Planning Agency (UNFPA) or another Reproductive Health organisation (Population Council, etc....) for the quick implementation of an emergency Family Planning (FP) programme, based for instance on injectable contraceptives.

Home Care There may be a whole range of care between strict TFC and full home care where the treatments are delivered to the patient on site. All these options need to be tested in the field by ACF. Calling on the principle of 'humanitarian corridors', if applicable at all in the region concerned, testing of options could result in the development of innovative strategies.

Food security ACF must review its food security strategy and make clear the relationship with food aid and nutrition concepts.

Advantage of NGOs In a technical area such as nutrition, especially in a challenging context like Kivu, a 'specialised' NGO has a definite advantage over a UN organisation or other NGOs.

3.2. Northern Caucasus

ACF Strategy

ACF has not substantially changed its food aid strategy in Chechnya or in Ingushetia, arguing that the situation has not changed. This is no longer the case and an amended strategy is now urgently needed. Such a strategy must be reflected in the forthcoming concept papers presented to ECHO.

Voluntary return

Most organisations and NGOs are currently opposed to returns, which they consider 'forced'. ACF is very firm on the humanitarian law principle stating that repatriation must be voluntary.

Targeting beneficiaries for humanitarian assistance or blanket distribution

One of the main concerns for most NGOs is the targeting process. Until now the international community has not agreed on the standardised targeting criteria and the method for selecting beneficiaries. ACF in Chechnya does not have a targeting strategy but a blanket distribution system that certainly calls for an in-depth review in the present rapidly changing environment. This review is scheduled to take place in September 2004

Household's economy surveys

Many household economy surveys have been undertaken in the last few years. The latest was funded by ECHO and carried out by DRC (Household targeting in Chechnya, 2003). This survey immediately became controversial. There were criticisms of its academic approach and the income criteria utilised. At a time when many question food aid targeting and the matching of needs and beneficiary, the survey concluded that the potential beneficiaries are somewhat higher than the present ones and that some of the areas selected are not where the most vulnerable people are to be found. Even after several meetings with the main Donors (WFP and ECHO), the parties concerned could not agree on the subject. Discussions are still on-going.

Remote control

ACF's remote control is a double remote-control system (Moscow-Nazran and Nazran- Chechnya), which demands heavy monitoring and a centralised line of command which allows for little flexibility in implementation planning. However, recent increases in violence in Inghushetia and Ossetia justify the present management set up.

Data collection

ACF assumes that lessons are mainly through the constant analysis of qualitative information collected through numerous staff debriefing and ad-hoc qualitative field assessments), so as to adjust better the programmes and the actual field situation. The management of the date base is another important tool for this purpose. Although ACF has a good database, it can be considered pretty useless as it is not periodically updated and utilised as a management tool. As a result, 'lessons-learned' process can be improved.

Human resources

There appears to be too many local staff for just three blanket food distributions in Chechnya per year.

Food aid

Due to slight improvements in the economic situation in Chechnya, food aid is now justified as a contribution to livelihood improvements and no longer as a life-saving issue. As a result, the rationale for the objectives has shifted to a more economic approach, which insists that food aid provides economic support to the mountainous population (by helping to save cash money that would otherwise being used to buy food). Despite this change in the rational, the policy of food aid has not

changed in the last four years. The same geographical area is still targeted, and the same system of blanket distribution still applies. There is very little adaptation to possible changes and fine-tuned targeting has yet to take place. Other areas which could be targeted, with other vulnerable people, have not been considered seriously.

Water and sanitation

Since the camps are being successively closed, there are too many watsan local staffs and their number is to be reduced.

Conclusions

Relevance

Four years into the war, the situation of the population in Chechnya and the IDPs in Ingushetia is still critical. It has shifted from acute emergency coupled with global insecurity to a more chronic emergency, characterised by violations of individuals' human rights, destroyed infrastructure, irregular government support, loss of manpower and decreased work and agricultural production opportunities.

Given this context, food aid is still highly relevant – provided it is directed towards properly targeted vulnerable people and not according to a blanket distribution system.

The continuation of watsan activities is conditional on the closure of camps and the possible closure of spontaneous settlements; phasing down should be seriously considered.

Food security programmes can only be implemented in rural areas of Chechnya and they could gradually replace food aid activities.

The relevance of ACF's activities in the Northern Caucasus and the relevance of ECHO's funding depend on an in-depth review of the strategy and the objectives of food assistance in the region. The current intervention criteria are no longer fully relevant for the situation.

Effectiveness

Overall ACF has implemented its activities very effectively. The inputs are delivered in a timely manner and are in line with cultural food habits. In the context of remote control, ACF has established a close and effective monitoring system. The lists of beneficiaries are closely scrutinised. Much data are collected and compiled on the food security situation and on the programme's implementation. But there is little correlation of these data with other sources, mainly due to the remote-control system. Moreover, there is little analysis of the data collected. The involvement of local structures and NGOs is rather limited. ACF claims that the impartiality and neutrality of the latter are not properly insured.

Efficiency

ACF is targeting all resident populations in southern Chechnya with a ration that covers approximately half of the daily minimum requirements. In general, 25-35% of the association's work time is spent on distributing inputs. Approximately half is spent on registration and monitoring of the distribution lists, and 10-20% on the post-distribution monitoring.

The cost of personnel, 23% of the total budget, seems rather high. In 2003, food aid costs were 48% of the total budget, logistical costs 14% and security and non-food items 2% each. The balance 11% relates to overheads and miscellaneous.

Impact

It is not easy to measure the impacts of the interventions, as baseline data – for example on food security and nutrition – are largely missing.

- **Overall impact.** Most stakeholders agree that the basic food needs would still be globally met if food distribution was phased out. However, as vulnerable groups would of course remain (the

elderly, children, handicapped persons, city inhabitants and returnees), they would still need targeted assistance.

- **Economic Impact.** A study conducted by ACF in Ingushetia in 2002 showed that the prices of basic commodities e.g. flour on the local markets were directly linked to the humanitarian distributions. The wholesalers' costs decreased just after the distribution. If supplies were better a permanent decrease in the cost of these items would probably happen.
- **Human resources development.** Local staff members have been properly trained and are now fully able to run the entire ACF contract on their own in Nazran. Should they decide to start a local NGO with their own human resources and donor support, they could take over the management – if and when ACF phases out. ECHO could not finance them, but AIDCO could through the decentralised cooperation budget line.

Sustainability

International food aid humanitarian assistance is not really sustainable, except if a national entity takes over. This is not the case in Chechnya where, after an initial presence, Russian federal organisations are now absent. A shift from food aid to food security would help to strengthen the sustainability of the strategy that aims to improve livelihoods

Recommendations

Blanket Distribution and geographical area of activities ACF must revise its policy of blanket distribution. ACF should base this revision on an in-depth targeting analysis that uses available surveys and other Partners' experiences. ACF should also consider moving to other parts of Chechnya, places that have so far been overlooked, e.g. the central plains. It should also assess its food security alternatives.

Data analysis ACF needs urgently to analyse existing data, tables, facts and lessons learned and to standardise some indicators used by different agencies for comparisons. Instead of conducting more new surveys, a consultant must be fielded to compare and integrate the existing data.

Operational centre ACF must move its operational centre from Moscow to Nazran. However recent events (June and September 2004) will delay with good reasons such a move.

Local staff number ACF must provide due justification to ECHO for the large number of local staff members involved in 'watsan' activities in Ingushetia and in other activities. There appears to be too many local staff for just three distributions per year, the completion of the camps closures in Ingushetia, and the foreseen overhaul of the blanket distribution system in Chechnya (see budgetary composition figures given above). ACF should take into consideration these new factors and analyse in depth the consequences on local staff responsibilities, numbers and profiles. Justifications should be given to ECHO.

Watsan For watsan activities, ACF must present to ECHO a quick phasing down plan and possibly a phasing out plan for watsan activities in Ingushetia.

MAIN REPORT

INTRODUCTION: OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

Global objectives of the evaluation

1. The evaluation's main objective is to assess the capacities of ACF-FRA to respond to humanitarian crises, in light of the newly promulgated Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) as well as the thinking behind the organisation's intervention. This evaluation includes the assessment of the Partner's technical know-how in its main areas of competence and the application of this know-how in the field. It aims to review the past relationship between ECHO and the Partner and to analyse the prospects for the future, highlighting the technical added value that a specialised NGO offers for the implementation of contracts compared with the work of other humanitarian organisations.

Specific objectives

2. The specific objectives are:

- To evaluate ECHO-funded ACF operations in two regions over the period 2000-2002: the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (South Kivu region) and Russia's Northern Caucasus. This approach includes an analysis of ECHO's strategies, as expressed in its Decisions or Global Plans, and the ability of ACF to implement ECHO's strategies.
- To assist ECHO in establishing its partnership strategy which is based on an improved dialogue with its Partner. This strategy will result in a better mutual understanding of the implementation constraints. The conclusions and recommendations are based on the lessons learned through this evaluation and will assist in conducting similar assessments of other Partners. They should also contribute to the building of a best-practice approach expressed in benchmarking and the design of a paradigm applicable to other evaluations.

CHAPTER I: ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM'S GLOBAL STRATEGY AND ACTIVITIES

1.1 Background

3. ACF was created at the initiative of a group of French intellectuals. It started its activities in 1979 in the aftermath of the Afghan crisis, with the exclusive and direct aim of fighting hunger worldwide. ACF would do this by “conducting actions, informing and carrying out surveys to address hunger” that focused on nutritional and medical issues related to hunger and on water and sanitation improvements. Food security and more recently advocacy matters were added to the global objectives of ACF. In addition, the NGO conducts major fund-raising activities that give the organisation a large degree of financial independence for the financing of its overheads. ACF is a French not-for-profit association that meets ECHO's 1257/96 Council regulation, article 7. The NGO went through very serious crises in 1991 and in 2001, provoked by the dilemma of shifting towards development activities or sticking to its original emergency nutrition activities. After half of the staff resigned, ACF decided to keep its emergency approach. To prevent such mishaps in the future, a ‘Charter’ was drafted. This document sets out ACF's strategic objectives, to which staff and ‘sister’ organisations are asked to adhere. It is the basic link between them all.

1.2 ACF strategy

4. ACF strategy³ is expressed in the Charter⁴ which is in full accordance with ECHO's principles and mandate. ACF's strategy is defined according to the vulnerability. Once the needs are identified ACF looks for funding from donors who may fund the implementation process. The main constraint identified by ACF is that its proposals must match Donors strategies. When several donors are involved, these strategies may vary, causing misunderstandings or even conflicting objectives within the same contract.

Coherence and Complementarity

5. Notwithstanding the remarks made above, the coherence of ACF's strategic orientation with ECHO's is largely ensured. ACF's traditional fields of intervention – nutrition, infant therapeutic feeding, water and sanitation, medical and lately food security – match effectively ECHO's strategies. In particular, needs assessments are professionally conducted and ensuing proposals are based on solid ground. The complementarity of ACF's activities is also properly ensured, not only with ECHO but also with other stakeholders in the humanitarian field: e.g. ACF's nutrition protocols have been adopted by many Organisations and NGOs.

1.3 ‘Sister’ organisations

6. ACF has created three other national ‘sister’ organisations. Each has its own board of directors and is organised according to the laws of the countries in which they are incorporated. They are Acción contra el Hambre (ACH, Spain) and Action against Hunger (AAH, UK and USA). The Charter (Annexe 11), which each NGO has signed, is their working reference and regulates their professional activities, ensuring a common approach and strategy. ACF's decision to assist in the creation of sister organisations is designed to increase its own absorption capacity, in respect of administrative, financial and operational matters. Increasing its absorption capacity and achieving economies of scale are ACF's main challenges for the years to come. More specifically, these new organisations will improve the recruitment base and extend fund-raising outreach. The next step, already being gradually implemented, is to diversify their four thematic specificities and distribute the operational responsibilities between the sister associations.

³ Annexe I.1.

⁴ Annexe I.4

AAH-USA-executed contracts

7. Concerns have been expressed by ECHO that some EU-funded ACF contracts are implemented by AAH-USA (or other sisters). Some other large NGOs routinely subcontract to local subsidiaries, e.g. Caritas Catholica and Oxfam. ECHO's rules and regulations do not rule out subcontracting. However, there is an important ambiguity in the fact that ACF-FR is the responsible Partner – it does not directly implement the contract, nor does it subcontract it to a local NGO, but it subcontracts to a subsidiary instead. Consequently, reporting at various levels has first to be channelled through the implementing party's HQ (AAH), then validated by ACF-FR, and finally transmitted to ECHO. This is a long process, which explains in part the delays in submitting the final contractually required reports. Much more worrying is that no direct contacts are possible between ECHO and AAH at HQ levels. ECHO is sometimes under the impression that the full picture of project implementation is not fully addressed and has been filtered in Paris. The consulting team has encountered the same issues, to the extent that AAH staff had to travel to Paris in order to answer for itself certain questions advanced by the team's members. The situation is radically different at field levels, where close and professionally satisfactory relations are maintained between ECHO and AAH through their respective field representatives. However, the issue has to be put into perspective. AAH technical staffs are highly professional and keep a tight control on the contracts they implement. Nevertheless, there is a definite ambiguity here: ACF is the interlocutor of ECHO, yet the implementation is the responsibility of AAH.

AAH/ACF compensations?

8. A normal spin-off of subcontracting to another association in the same group is the issue of transferring some of the costs – or benefits – to the fiscally most advantageous balance sheet. Whereas this is perfectly legitimate, the new FPA calls for greater transparency, in order to promote a stronger partnership. Subcontracting within the family to an association with possibly lower overheads would appear to benefit both associations and to 'inflate' the cost for ECHO. ACF was asked if this was the case and vehemently denied it. It is, however, noticeable that to date the cost of the trainers time in Paris have not been invoiced by ACF to the sister companies. However each HQ pay for the travel, accommodation and food expenses of their staff. Expatriate are paying some of their training material (mainly the books).

1.4 Fund-raising and financial sustainability

9. ACF's fund-raising activities are vital for the association. These funds finance overheads and allow prefinancing of contracts when donor funds are slow to arrive. About 30% (€10-11M) of ACF's total financial resources are generated by the Department of Communication and Development. A reduction in the proceeds from fund-raising would have a disastrous effect on ACF's liquidity and cash flow; its contracts turnover would have to be severely reduced. Fund-raising is the strength of the association but, in common with most NGOs, is also its financial Achilles' heel.

10. The number of ACF's ECHO-funded contracts has been stable in the last three years. The financial amount of these contracts represents in average 30 % of ACF's annual turnover. Table 5). The percentage is not critical. ACF has always fulfilled its financial obligations without problems. ACF has been audited several times. The last audit was conducted by ECHO in 2003 and has not shown any concerns about ACF's financial standing. There should be no financial worries in relation to the number of contracts that ACF can implement for ECHO. However ACF is reluctant to pre finance contracts with Donors and usually only starts the implementation processes when the contractual advance funds are actually received. This policy has sometimes delayed the commencement of projects.

1.5 Recruitment

11. Historically ACF's human resources⁵ were heavily based on not paid volunteers (25% of the total workforce in Paris – which is 65 full-time equivalent staff and 75% of the total workforce and on paidvolunteers, in the field- which is 187 volunteers and 16 coordinators in 16 countries⁶).

12. Recruitment of headquarters staff is extremely selective: it is estimated that only five in 100 applications are successful, in spite of the high number of spontaneous applications received. Volunteers are quite young, with an average age of 30. The strict recruitment procedures, together with rather poor remuneration limit considerably the opportunities for recruitment. Yet the filter is efficient: the vast majority of the staffs are dedicated and very professional.

13. Turnover of staff is high. At HQ it is barely satisfactory: time served at headquarters averages 3.5 years, with an average age of 35 years. Important HQ positions remain unfilled, resulting in a very high workload for the existing staff; this further aggravates the level of staff turnover. The field situation is worse still, with less than one year of effective time in the field, taking into account HQ training. This is not sufficient and the obligation to serve two contractual years – which field staffs usually sign for – is not normally enforced. The main reason given for such short time served is the stress endured in difficult situations, which is very often correct. That said, a frequent change of Head of Mission (HoM) or key personnel is very detrimental to the management of longer-term contracts. Gaps in the replacement of field staff are increasing. In addition, a HoM often manages several contracts from various Donors. It would make sense for the costs to be distributed on a pro-rata basis between the Donors, but this does not appear to happen.

1.6 Remuneration

14. In France, volunteerism is based on benevolent acts where jobs receive low lump-sum remuneration. The volunteers get one of the lowest salaries in the humanitarian sector (around € 850-1,000 net of taxes each month plus accommodation on a community basis and an insurance package). The conditions remain the same, whatever the length of experience or seniority within the association. Such a level of remuneration makes it difficult to plan a career in the association. This is the main difference from large Anglo-Saxon NGOs like OXFAM or Save the Children, which pay more attractive salaries and have staff career-development plans. It is no wonder that many ex-ACF staff members continue their careers in Anglo-Saxon NGOs or international organisations such as ECHO, where at present at least six ex-ACF persons are staff members.

1.7 Training

15. Training procedures⁷ are extremely well developed at HQ level. They mainly consist of in-depth training sessions and simulations organised over several weeks and which are supported by an abundant documentation. Training is custom-delivered, according to the level of responsibilities given to the volunteers/staff members: pre-departure training for all staff, skills development, technical logistics for coordinators and HoM training. It is entirely financed out of the association's own funds. Training is not delivered exclusively by ACF staff; a few specialised humanitarian NGOs are guest speakers (MSF, MdM, HI, OXFAM⁸, etc.). In 2002, 180 training sessions were organised for the first departures and 36 for the HoM and Co-ordinators. Specialised institutes or training schools are also called upon, e.g. Bio Force. Staff recruited by the sister associations are, with a few exceptions, trained in Paris. Most of the training is now delivered in English, reflecting both the diversity of recruitment and a commendable adaptation to the non-French-speaking countries where ACF is active.

16. Expatriates in the field organise ad-hoc workshops and seminars on a variety of topics for the local staff, alone or in collaboration with other NGOs and international organisations. It is an important activity for the local staff, coupled with on-the-job training. This curricula development of local staff members' personal careers is important: it may persuade some people to stay with ACF, in

⁵ Annexe II.2.

⁶ Data 2002

⁷ Annexe III.5

⁸ OXFAM trained 20 HoM in the new FPA procedures in 2003.

spite of the low salary policy and alternative opportunities to take better-paid positions with other organisations.

Training continuum of senior local staffs

17. Many contracts are extended or renewed, because an emergency lasts from one contractual period to another.⁹ Local staff members are much more stable than the expatriate volunteers, who tend to come and go more often. Many of the local staffs who joined ACF were not ‘first mission’ staff, i.e. their prior experience was welcomed by ACF. They had already been trained in the national network or by other NGOs. It is not clear whether there is a need to introduce continued training throughout successive contracts: usually high local training costs are invoiced in the renewed contracts budgetary breakdown.

1.8 Project proposals and reporting

Project technical proposals

18. ACF’s technical project proposals¹⁰ are very good, thanks to the organisation’s extended networks, its long presence in many of the most problematic countries, and proven experience in its basic field of competence. ACF’s long-standing relationship with ECHO may also give it an advantage over other NGOs, enabling the association to understand faster and more comprehensively ECHO’s strategies. This advantage allows ACF to adjust its proposals.

19. ACF defines its operational strategy according to an in-depth analysis of the needs assessments of vulnerable people. Like other leading NGOs, ACF had in previous years taken for granted that ECHO was satisfied with its implementation processes – as long as financial management was transparent and the impact of the contract was measurable in quantitative terms. ECHO has now widened its demands in terms of accountability and achievements and has promoted the presence of ECHO experts in the field, resulting in the creation of some uneasiness regarding implementation. Some misunderstandings may have appeared in the field due to some necessary adjustment for ACF to fulfil the contracts in respect of the new ECHO policies and/or due to lack of technical skills from the ECHO experts.

20. Notwithstanding, ECHO lacks specialised technical skills at HQ, in terms of watsan, nutrition, food security, and health. ECHO has some technical assistance staff with relevant technical skills in its regional HQs, e.g. in Nairobi for nutrition, but these staff are so overworked that they are not in a position to monitor contracts on a regular basis. The dialogue between these organisations is, therefore, sometimes difficult when it comes to technical matters or policy.

Project financial proposals

21. Under the former FPA, ECHO had little opportunity to evaluate the financial aspects of a project proposal. Now that much more sophisticated FPA tools are operational, the financial aspects of different project proposals can be compared with one another on the basis of common criteria. For instance, variations in the unit cost of the equipment and services provided will be much easier to analyse. A stricter presentation of budgetary breakdown detail will also reduce the request for budgetary changes during project implementation.

Logical framework

22. ACF is not fully conversant with the logical framework approach. As a result, the presentations of ACF’s logical frameworks are not optimal. Criteria and indicators presented are often not explained nor put into perspective or commented upon; sometimes they are simply missing. Weak logical frameworks will no longer be accepted under the new FPA. ACF claims that a ‘problem-tree’ approach is better suited to volatile emergency situations. A problem-tree approach is based on options and scenarios that can change according to circumstances. The problem tree is still a tool ACF can use internally for the preparation of the logical frameworks, which is now a compulsory requirement.

⁹ Some of the contracts in Kivu have been renewed continually over the last seven years.

¹⁰ Annexe III.3.

Sphere standards

23. The Sphere standards were revised in 2003. They now include food aid, nutrition *and* food security (set out in one chapter) and combine aspects common to all sectors. ACF contributed significantly to the revision of the new version of the handbook, especially the chapter on food aid and water & sanitation. ACF supports the principle of setting standards as technical guidelines. But the NGO fears that these standards could be used as contractual conditions with donors, authorities and other agencies, when standards often have to be adapted in accordance with the specific local conditions context-specific programming. ACF is also concerned that the focus on technical indicators does not take into account the diversity of cultural, political and security contexts in which the NGO operates, thereby hindering the development of original and adapted responses.

Procurement

24. ECHO's rules and regulations are well known and correctly applied. However, ACF requests derogations from ECHO on an ad-hoc basis, in order to waive some or all of the provisions setting out local procurement rules (e.g. a low-profile policy in Ingushetia that would not be in line with transparency and publicity requirements for procurements). For ACF, procedures and tools are defined in Paris (centralism) and executed by Paris for New York, Madrid and London, free of charge for the time being. Two central stock facilities are situated in Madrid and in Paris and act as buffer stocks for emergency issues. Transportation is in accordance with the Donors' policy. The procurement activities are performed according to internal 'how to' manuals and detailed procedures manuals at HQ levels; these activities have to be implemented and adapted by the logistics officers in the field. Equipment is managed with care and properly maintained.

ACF's reporting system and data collection

25. ACF's reporting is very time-consuming. HQ requests a long list of reports and information, partly because of the centralised system of management. In the case of ECHO, contractual delays in the submission of ACF's reports are not often respected especially when they are first drafted by AAH-USA. In addition to meeting its contractual requirements, ACF produces voluminous statistics on all aspects of its implementation processes. These statistics far surpass the basic requirements of ECHO and don't ease the analysis by ECHO's desk officers.

26. Storage of data is very well organised: any request for information can be cross-checked and produced in a matter of minutes. Data collection seems to be done for the sake of data collection and moreover, ACF rarely shares its data with others. Yet although there are many opportunities for analysis, which could be very helpful, data are not properly exploited; which is often due to a lack of computerised analysis programs. In view of planning the standardisation of its database, ACF recently purchased a new computer package, Le Sphinx, to facilitate analysis of the data.

27. According to ECHO requirements, NGOs must collect indicators which are listed in the Global Plans/Decision documents. It is not uncommon for ACF to carry out its own surveys, e.g. nutrition surveys or food security updates, conducted in parallel with but not always shared with another organisation, except with some universities for research purposes. The main significant advances are promoted through articles in specialised reviews. ACF reports show the basic indicators as mentioned in proposals, according to international guide-lines. However, in most cases, ACF's matching indicators, which indicate the impact of a contract's implementation, are hidden in the mass of data collected. A lack of analysis by ACF of the crude data makes it then difficult for ECHO's desk officers to sort out the indicators. As a result, it is difficult to assess the impact of the activities, because there is more quantitative data than qualitative data.

ECHO's feedback on reporting

28. ACF regrets that it receives little feed-back from ECHO, after having submitted its reports. This is stark contrast with the fruitful dialogue established at the project proposal level. ACF feels that ECHO sees reports mainly as a way of controlling ACF's activities and expenses.

1.9 Relations with NGOs and organisations

ACF has long enjoyed excellent relations with specialised international organisations such as UNICEF and WHO, as well as with ‘think tanks’ (Sphere). It also maintains close contact with the most important NGOs working in similar areas. Together they often discuss thematic issues and carry out mutual training (AIDS with Oxfam, primary health care with MSF, advocacy with AMI and HI¹¹, and of course nutrition by ACF). In the field, close contacts are also maintained with other ECHO Partners, with three objectives: the first is to increase the efficiency of ACF’s own activities through complementarity (e.g. MSF and ACF in the DRC); the second is to find a possible relay for activities that ACF plans to discontinue; the third is based on phasing-out strategies - to identify who can take over once the decision to close down is taken. However ACF is weak in data sharing.

1.10 Security

29. ACF has extremely tight security measures¹², resulting in one of the best security records among leading NGOs. Staff members receive special training before departure. In the field there is a local security officer to oversee all security matters. Such matters are reviewed every morning and the day’s activities are set up in accordance with the security level set. Manuals are adapted to every base’s particular situation, detailing the security rules and regulations; these are kept highly confidential, for fears of leakage to hostile parties. Activities and contracts are suspended when insecurity is rising, to be reactivated when security is improving. These security measures are commendable. ACF endeavours to keep open a dynamic and proactive dialogue with factions involved in conflicts. One of the tasks of the security officer is advocating to the conflict players ACF’s strategy and objectives and underlining that ACF is an impartial and neutral humanitarian organisation. Positive results have been achieved in many instances.

1.11 Technical follow-up in the field

30. The technical follow-up by HQ staff is of a good quality, but it is not sufficient. This is because the technical services in Paris lack sufficient staffs to assure a thorough and close follow-up of the field operations. However, the new FPA allowing to budget as duly justified direct costs, the technical supervision back stopping of ECHO-funded projects, HQ staff could be reinforced on this basis.

1.12 Conclusions and recommendations¹³

Capacity to deliver

31. In a steadily changing environment, there is a risk that changes in the activities’ load alter the internal logic and balance of the system’s components. Restructuring measures need to be introduced and failing to do so could lead to loss of effectiveness and ultimately to disorganisation. ACF is at the crossroads between “business as usual” and further expansion and has to make basic policy decisions, if the association wants to continue developing and expanding its activities to meet head-on the challenges of humanitarian assistance. The main issues concern the human resources recruitment, the remuneration policy, the reporting and monitoring quality and the clarification of its food security policy. ACF has developed with great professionalism its nutrition and partly its watsan methodologies. ACF must now shift its professionalism to health and food security.

Human resources

32. ACF’s human resources are generally excellent, both at HQ and in the field. But the growing number of contracts managed by the ACF group worldwide is stretching its human resources to the limit, resulting in few possibilities for providing additional qualified staff. Some departments at HQ are overworked and many staffs in the field are ‘first mission staffs’. As a result, there is a danger that the quality of HQ management and supervision may decrease. This overwork situation could also affect the way the association looks at new proposals, since a shortage of time and proper professional back-up can often lead to a lack of innovation.

¹¹ On 10 March 2004, a press conference was organised in Paris debating Chechnya (‘Return to hell’).

¹² Annexes I.2 and I.3.

¹³ Conclusions are in plain normal font and recommendations in bold italic font.

33. ACF has been only moderately successful in setting up a policy that would entice the volunteers/staff to consider a career development within the association. The level of salary is not the only issue. Of equal importance are the type of contracts and career prospects. In the field, the situation is very different for local staff. In some cases, they are just too many. Field staff is dedicated, professional and is well trained by ACF. In remote-control situations, they can and do function on their own. If ACF phases out at short notice, the local staff would be able to take over immediately and efficiently and still be effective. In most cases, local staff would be a viable alternative for handing over of any activities... provided funds are available.

34. Expatriate staff training is excellent and constantly updated and adapted to circumstances. Local staff training is budgeted for each new contract without clear justifications. Very often the local staffs have already been properly trained in previous similar contracts.

ACF is at present reviewing its employment policy, with the aim of setting up career-development objectives for its personnel; this may include a revision of the salary grids. As soon as this policy is approved by ACF's board, it would be advisable presenting and discussing it with ECHO as a transparency dialogue basis. The new FPA allows for an innovative presentation of breakdowns for direct costs, a format that should be used.

At headquarters, ACF must reinforce its HQ human resources for Water and Sanitation and statistical analysis. The statistical function will define data-collection policies, processing and output format, and meet ECHO's requirements on criteria, indicators and benchmarking.

The exact job description of local staff and their relevance to the tasks must be clearly identified in the financing proposal and in the logframe analysis, in order to avoid superfluous costs.

The staff can easily be employed by long-term development NGOs which can further evolve in local NGOs, but it is not ECHO's mandate to finance long lasting institutional capacity building efforts.

Administrative capacity

35. ACF's administrative capacity¹⁴, for delivering the required services, is excellent. The overall administrative organigram is regularly updated, following internal meetings and suggestions from the field. It has an integrated approach, thanks to systematic close coordination and information. Administrative relations with the field offices are regularly maintained through a state-of-the-art communication system. However, the following points need more attention:

- **Delays in reporting.** True partnership calls for ECHO to be informed quickly and in a timely fashion about project implementation issues. ACF's reports from the field are often slow to come to HQ and reviewing them before sending them on to ECHO only lengthens the delays. The situation is even worse for subcontracting reports from the field to AAH.

Timetable deadlines for reporting must be strictly enforced. Both ACF and ECHO should factor an automatic reminder into their computer systems.

- **Administrative relations with sister associations.** ACF's exact relations with its sister associations are unclear to ECHO.

ACF must state clearly its relationships with sister associations and inform ECHO accordingly, including the reasons for these relationships and the advantages for Donors.

- **Dependence on fund-raising is high.**

¹⁴ Annexe II.1.

Logistical capacity

36. The ACF group has a good logistical capacity, based on a buffer stock in Paris for ACF and AAH-USA, in Madrid for ACH-Spain and in London for AAH-UK. Internal procedures are detailed and applied. ECHO's procurement policy is usually respected.

Derogations to ECHO's procurement rules and regulations must be exceptional and duly justified before they are actually granted. ACF's policy of concentrating all procurements in one central unit must be encouraged, as the traceability of goods will be easier, and costs to ECHO lowered.

Complementarity

37. ACF's Charter and ECHO's mandate closely coincide, both in their principles and objectives. But there is one exception: ACF also intervenes in transitional situations between emergency and development. This dual approach is not properly reflected in the proposals.

ACF must draft its proposals by taking into account the possible spin-off for development of its emergency intervention (LRRD). Such spin-offs should become a compulsory entry in the proposal form.

Logical framework

38. ACF does not feel comfortable with the logical framework approach. As a result, the presentation of ACF's logical frameworks is not optimal. Criteria and indicators presented are often not explained nor put into perspective or commented upon; sometimes they are simply missing.

ECHO cannot change its basic requirement for logical framework presentation and consequently must insist on it. The FPA applies to all NGOs and it is not possible to make exceptions.

This requirement should, however, not prevent ACF from presenting additionally alternative methodologies (problem trees or scenarios) that would better fit some of the volatile situations the NGO is facing

Incoherence issues can only be spotted through the timely analysis of relevant indicators on submission of reports. The Logical framework indicators should not only be listed but also commented on by ACF. This will enable ACF and ECHO to engage in a fruitful dialogue.

Exit strategy

39. The difficulties of planning an exit strategy in some contracts dealing with recurrent issues should not be a pretext for ignoring such a strategy. Proposals usually do not analyse a plausible exit strategy and the modalities for phasing out. In general, the more a contract is renewed or extended, the less an exit strategy is discussed. The reverse should be the case.

Phasing-out criteria, indicators and scenarios must be discussed explicitly in each of the proposals, as well as extension or renewals of contracts.

Reporting and monitoring quality

40. The quality of ACF's reporting is uneven and depends greatly on the individual drafter. In general, ACF reporting is not very good or up to the standard expected from a professional NGO.

ACF now follows the new reporting format that has been requested by ECHO. Both ACF and ECHO must now also expand into a more proactive dialogue that will streamline the potential ambiguities of a too rigid format. A reporting quality control function in ACF headquarters to centralise reports, review/rewrite and closely link with the new requested statistical position would greatly help in streamlining the issue.

Data analysis

41. The wealth of data collected in most cases is not professionally exploited, due to a lack of skills and time but should be improved very soon thanks to a significant software investment (Sphinx).

ACF must create a data-analysis section at HQ, in charge of designing a data-processing program and running it.

Standards

42. ACF also applies its own standards in food aid and in watsan activities. The way these standards are applied in the field illustrates the gap that may exist in benchmarking between a theoretically sound approach and the realities in the field. ACF seldom applies Sphere standards to the full. Trying to do so would unduly slow down the association's activities or the objectives. ACF fears that ECHO would consider Sphere standards as contractually binding for ACF.

ECHO should clearly indicate that Sphere standards are not contractually binding. But ECHO should be strict enough to check qualitative parameters on a regularly basis, either through the hiring of additional ECHO experts (watsan engineers + other specialists) and/or the organisation of technical evaluations.

CHAPTER II: ACF'S TECHNICAL CAPACITY

ACF centres its activities on five main fields: Nutrition, Health, Water & Sanitation, Food Security, and Advocacy.

2.1 Nutrition¹⁵

Nutrition experience

43. ACF's nutritional experience goes back to the late seventies (1979), when its fight against malnutrition started in Afghanistan. Everything stemmed from the principle that hunger was unacceptable. In 1994, ACF created a scientific committee, comprising several recognized specialists in the area of nutrition, to assist it in implementing the latest advances in nutritional treatment. This prompted the development of the F100 formula. The formula was not patented and thus became available for universal use. Since 1995, F100 has been officially acknowledged by the World Health Organization (WHO). The industrial processing of this therapeutic milk has enabled a significant increase in quantity, from 26 tons in 1993 to over 2,000 tons today, benefiting over 300,000 children annually. ACF has continued its work and contributed to several other major advances. These include the update of nutrition protocols based on lessons learned, development of new commodities, (F75, ReSoMal...), attention to malnutrition in adults, participation in the establishment of Sphere nutrition standards, implementation of a transition phase in nutritional rehabilitation, development of the supplementary suckling technique for infants under six months, development of RUTF (Ready to Use Therapeutic Food), and improvements in medical treatment such as management of anaemia.

Publications and pioneering works

44. ACF has developed its own nutrition process or adapted some from other organisations such as UNICEF. It has written and frequently updated several manuals on nutrition for use by expatriate staff, drafted innumerable tools to support the training of local staff on nutrition, primary health care, Information-Education-Communication (IEC) and basic management. ACF published a detailed and very practical manual, 'Assessment and Treatment of Malnutrition in Emergency Situations', available in English, Spanish and French. This is a reference document for professionals and technicians in all humanitarian organisations. ACF also conducted practical research on various issues, based on field experience, aimed at providing more efficient, higher quality, and more appropriate nutritional services. An update on nutritional protocols, when appropriate / relevant, is communicated to the field via "info nut" (internal tool on technical communication, between HQ and field) in order to maintain a good quality, and to guarantee a common way of programme management. Scientific evidence of the fall in mortality led the WHO to recommend that ACF's pioneering programme be implemented on a global scale.

Nutrition surveys vs. nutrition assessments

45. Nutrition surveys aim to evaluate the prevalence of malnutrition at a given time in a given population – and the results of the nutrition surveys are valid only in this specific context (nutrition baseline survey). The target population usually comprises children of six to 59 months – since they are generally the most affected by any crisis. Nutrition surveys are a part of the needs assessment process. Nutrition assessments are conducted on a regular basis at various times during any operation, allowing comparisons (nutrition benchmarking): (i) during the initial assessment and at periodic intervals throughout the operation, in order to monitor the current situation and evolution of the context and the evolution of the overall food situation, and (ii) before withdrawal.

46. ACF has accumulated a wealth of information through the numerous surveys it has undertaken. However, the surveys are sometimes done without a precise objective and are therefore only partly integrated into a general strategy. Though these surveys are extremely useful for needs assessments, they are not always carried out at the completion of a given contract. As a result, the tool (baseline survey) is under-utilised.

47. Another weak point of the nutrition survey concerns the analysis of the collected statistics. The methodology and the collection of data are faultless, but the narrative comments are often not up to standard though ACF is currently updating its guidelines used for nutritional surveys according to the

¹⁵ Annexe III.1.

SMART conference – Washington 2002. HQ (AAH or ACF) has few human resources¹⁶ for carrying out statistical analysis. When data was shared with ECHO, it used to be passed on in a ‘raw’ format. The shortcomings of this system became apparent recently, following the imposition of the new reporting format linking basic criteria with the project proposal logframe.

2.2 Health¹⁷

Health by default

48. Currently, ACF’s policy is mostly to fill in gaps in health provision. In cases where no other NGO, with a recognized expertise in health, is willing or able to deal with health issues, ACF provides a package of primary health care. This is done in terms of nutrition activities, focusing on involving local staff and using the existing structures. The current package includes:

- Mother and Child Health (MCH) services: Antenatal Care (ANC), Postnatal Care (PNC), uncomplicated delivery, vaccination, growth monitoring, and treatment of diarrhoea by Oral Re-hydration Salts (ORS).
- Information-Education-Communication (IEC) on various basic issues
- Basic curative care based on essential drugs.

The specific mandate of ACF in the health sector is now under discussion and must be clearly stated in the following months. Issues such as the extent of the care to be provided, according to local circumstances, will be clearly defined, while allowing some flexibility in the field. A new form, collecting health data in the same way as nutrition data, is being designed and will soon be available in the field.

Chronic diseases

49. To date, chronic diseases have not been included. But staffs are trained to screen for diseases such as tuberculosis (TB) and to refer patients to the nearest health centre, where they can get appropriate treatment.

Drugs procurement

50. Drugs are procured through the IDA (International Dispensary Association, a drug and medical equipment procurement foundation based in Amsterdam, which has a good reliability record) and occasionally, in cases of emergency, bought locally. If any problem suggests that the drug being used is not efficient, a check is done.

Emphasis on mental health

51. Now that the ‘hard’ technical aspects of nutritional rehabilitation are being well managed, the time has come to integrate ‘softer’ issues, such as a social care environment. ACF has focused over the last few years on the mental health of beneficiaries. It has had several objectives:

- Mitigate the psychological impact of war and various related acts on the population, especially on mothers and therefore on their children; and prevent developmental delays in children whose mothers are temporarily unable to properly care for them.
- Reinforce the capacity of communities to cope with psychological disturbances (such as depression or excess anxiety) and social restructuring by themselves.
- Provide IEC to staff and mothers on the requirements of child development and reinforce the impact of IEC by better understanding possible resistance to advice given.

Participatory methods

52. A noteworthy aspect of ACF’s training of local staff is that a better knowledge of psychological issues may contribute to a better (warmer, friendlier, more understanding) relationship between the local health staff and the patients in general. This is a major issue in Africa. Participatory methods help to build a sense of ownership of external assistance and increase the self-confidence of communities.

¹⁶ An overworked epidemiologist works in Paris.

¹⁷ Annexe III.1.

2.3 Water & Sanitation¹⁸

Timing of intervention

53. ACF's interventions in water and sanitation do not take place in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. It is not a 'first wave' NGO, in so far as watsan activity is concerned. Drinking water needs in emergency situations are generally met by NGOs specialised in those challenges, examples being the Red Cross, MSF and others. Temporary facilities such as pumps, treatment, products, fuels, etc. are in general extremely expensive, but they meet the immediate drinking-water needs of thousands of people. Temporary solutions rarely involve the beneficiaries in decision-making. ACF provides longer term solutions, with community-based involvement whenever possible. ACF rarely contracts out the work to local contractors or other NGOs, with noticeable exceptions (e.g. Ingushetia). As in health, ACF intervenes only when there is nobody else operational in this field, i.e. when there are no other watsan organisations present. However ACF intends to intervene in emergency and is part of the watsan emergency group with ICRC, Oxfam and MSF and participates in any coordination meeting when a crisis occurs.

Technical concept of watsan

54. ACF's approach is very professional. Thanks to a good local knowledge based on its extensive database and the experience of HQ technical staff, ACF is able to quickly conduct professional needs assessments enabling the design of sound and practical technical and financial proposals for short-term interventions. ACF has published its own handbook on watsan issues¹⁹. It is considered a basic technical compendium and is widely recognised and utilised in the field by other NGOs and organisations.

Technical staff

55. The technical staffs are recruited using the same strict recruitment criteria that apply to all ACF staff. There are consequently very few mishaps. But there are not enough staffs at HQ to carry out the numerous tasks for which they are responsible. One of the reasons given by ACF for this shortcoming is that the cost of field supervision by HQ is not covered under FPA's regulations and that it has to come from ACF's overheads. In fact watsan staffs at headquarters supervise all the watsan activities implemented by ACF whether funded by ECHO or by other donors. The part of the cost of supervision directly related to the implementation of the ECHO-funded project can be covered by the FPA as direct costs with due justification and consequently has little to do with overhead concepts.

Costs transparency

56. The cost transparency analysis shows that the indirect costs can vary widely. If the unit prices for the direct costs (materials, fuel, etc.) in the contracts seem acceptable, the indirect costs considerably increase the budget, up to 150 % on average (300 % in Contract TPS/210/2003/01002 in Sierra Leone). This means that the direct costs represents between 36 and 52 % of the total costs. Also, in some situations, when some operations are repeated every year, there are unexplained price differences in the detailed budgetary breakdown (for example in Uganda where the drilling of a borehole cost 964 € in 2002 and 2 983 € in 2003 without any explanation). A unit cost analysis is made in the watsan Annexe.

Watsan short-term vision

57. In the numerous cases where activities become repetitive and annual, e.g. Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda, there is no evidence of longer-term solutions made in project proposals. ACF claims that recurrences in crises create recurrence emergency interventions. The daily preoccupations of field work and the constraints of security apparently absorb most of the field staff's time. They lack the time and probably the experience to make innovative technical proposals. There are too few professional personnel at HQ to develop a longer-term strategic vision. Indeed, this work requires very regular travel to the field, in order to grasp the technical, political and humanitarian situation. The opportunities for LRRD (Linking Relief and Rehabilitation to Development) are not really often given any consideration, until very recently. However, in many countries ACF develops long term /

¹⁸ Annexe III.4 and IV.5

¹⁹ 'Alimentation en Eau Potable des populations menacées' by Eric Drouart and Jean-Michel Vouillamoz HERMAN, Editions des Sciences et des Arts.

development projects with EU for instance: Myanmar, Laos, Afghanistan, and Sierra Leone (one three-year project signed with LRRD components, and a second one under discussion). The association has probably reached a critical size in watsan activities, as the situation stands. Further growth would require a change in the organisation's size and call for major investment in intellectual, physical and human resources.

2.4 Food security

Food aid vs. food security

58. Actually, ACF is considering food aid as food distribution. Therefore food aid has to be viewed as a particular food security activity the others being food security surveillance, seeds and tools distribution, income generating activities, training. For ACF, there is no reason to oppose food security versus food aid since food aid is only one of the answers to food insecurity situations. Such an approach is confusing. ACF is not alone in its lack of clarity: Until a few months ago, even Sphere had no entries for food security.

- **Food aid.** This must flexibly address well-defined problems involving immediate food shortage. The aim is to save lives, protect livelihoods and assets of the poor vulnerable social groups affected immediately or chronically by natural and man-made disasters and to protect and support complementary and synergistic efforts to improve their resources when food shortage is a major constraint. "Food aid should be provided only when it is the most effective and appropriate means of assistance."²⁰ The definition is very appropriate for the food aid activities undertaken by ACF in the Northern Caucasus.
- **Food security.** "Food security exists when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preference for an active and healthy life".²¹ Food security includes the individual level, related to food use and nutritional adequacy. At household level, it is related to food availability and access in a household. At national level, it is related to the supply of food nationally, including production, stocks, markets, transport and imports. Given the necessary commitments and objectives, it is clear that one partner alone cannot address all food security interventions. What is required is a commitment of different stakeholders over a long term. The big questions, in the case of emergencies, are how and what?

ECHO's food security strategy

59. Over the last four years, ECHO has funded approximately 40 contracts managed by the food security department of ACF, representing € 25.5 million. Thirty-five percent of the budget was spent in Russia and 14% in Afghanistan. ECHO has a comprehensive understanding of food security issues. This view includes nutrition, food aid distribution, food for work, crop extension services and production, irrigation, water provision for animals and practically anything that involves food production. Humanitarian Aid Decisions frequently involve food security concepts. The scale of the coverage demonstrates that the concept of food security concept is a somewhat grey area in ECHO. Would it be better to include longer-term food security issues in AIDCO-F5, which is responsible for development of food security programmes? Or should management of the food security programme be moved to ECHO? The debate is not part of the TORs of the present mission. LRRD can be very relevant for food security, as ECHO would fund a food security programme in an emergency context, under the explicit condition that such as programme includes and facilitates a long-term development vision. A serious limitation is that ECHO HQ does not have a food security officer. Success on food security approaches depend significantly on the previous field experience of the desk officers. The new reporting format, linked to internal contract master-record keeping, should assist in building institutional memory.

²⁰ Berlin Statement

²¹ World Food Summit Plan of Action

ACF's food security strategy²²

60. The ultimate aim of all ACF's programmes is to enable the beneficiaries to regain their autonomy and self-sufficiency as soon as possible, without depending on external assistance. The starting point for the analysis of the context is based on the conceptual framework of malnutrition²³. In turn, the ACF programmes work on the immediate causes, such as inadequate food intake and diseases, and on the underlying causes, such as household food security, social care environment and public health and hygiene.

61. In the last three years, the ACF family has increasingly focused on saving livelihoods (ACH Spain is also active in addressing the basic causes). Just as the association has become the reference point in nutrition, it now aims to become the operational reference point for the fight against malnutrition. This includes the treatment and prevention of malnutrition, in which food security plays as important a role in saving livelihoods as food aid does in saving lives (Strategic Orientation Plan 2004-2006). ACF does not intend to lead in food security matters; but it is keen to participate actively in food security benchmarking. Food security is also seen as a key element in ACF's 'continuum of intervention' approach, as a tool to prevent emergencies (including malnutrition and diseases) and to avoid relapses. In this holistic approach to malnutrition, ACF refutes the distinction between emergency and development, arguing that the terminology creates barriers instead of bridging the activities. Where food aid and food security are concerned, emergency/development semantics are more a distinction between funding sources than objectives. ACF tries to link the different technical strategic activities. It also tries to link food security projects with other activities: irrigation and soil conservation with the provision of water for livestock; complementary nutrition with the provision of seeds and tools to families with malnourished children.

ACF's food security activities

ACF is currently managing contracts with a strong food security component in several countries. These contracts include the distribution of agricultural inputs (e.g. seeds, tools and fertilizers), livestock support, distribution of food and non-food items and household food economy support through diversification of income or agriculture activities. ACF's food security interventions in the Caucasus are insignificant (experimental bee raising with 12 families)

Food security surveillance system

62. Another very important activity established within ACF's food security department is the food security surveillance and early warning system. This system aims to analyse the situation, measure vulnerabilities within different zones and the follow-up of changes to the situation in those zones. The food security surveillance function is relevant especially in geographically or politically isolated areas. ACF uses the information for defining its strategies and for advocacy to other agencies. However, the short-term implementation period of most food security interventions cannot guarantee the sustainability of the established surveillance systems, especially if local structures are not involved in the data collection and analysis.

2.5 Advocacy

63. ACF has developed an advocacy²⁴ package for the parties to conflict. The package explains to the local factions the objectives and the rationale of ACF's intervention for vulnerable people and the neutrality, independence and impartiality of humanitarian assistance. It could also be used to promote ECHO's visibility. This advocacy has certainly helped ACF to remain in locations where all other humanitarian stakeholders have left. It is a very effective security measure.

2.6 Conclusions and recommendations

Technical capacities in general

64. There is not enough HQ staffs to carry out the overall technical supervision and support. ACF should strengthen its watsan, statistical, monitoring and food security units. In past ACF proposals,

²² Annexe II.2.

²³ Adapted from UNICEF Conceptual Framework of Malnutrition, 1997

²⁴ Annexe I.3.

cost transparency was not properly ensured. Wide variations existed from year to year – in the same region or even in the same project – for the same work.

A provisional list of unit price costs should always be annexed to the proposal, with a comparative list of unit price costs from the previous contract(s) in case of renewal/extension.

Nutrition

65. ACF's technical capacities in the field of nutrition are good if not outstanding. This has been demonstrated time and time again. However analysis of statistics from nutritional surveys is under-exploited. ACF built up an internal data base with all nutritional surveys done in the past 12 years. This capitalization work can be used for studies in collaboration with some universities. ***A statistical section able to analyse the nutritional data and to make in-depth analysis is imperative as well as developing or strengthening a capacity to work in collaboration with others organisations / institutions such as specific university (Aberdeen, London School of Public health, ...).***

Health

66. ACF is mainly involved in health activities, by default in primary health care. ACF is at present discussing internally a wider involvement. Results are expected shortly.

Water & sanitation

67. ACF does not usually link its interventions to a longer term vision. There are many opportunities in watsan that can qualify for an LRRD approach. Most of the time, these opportunities are not identified by ACF, due to a lack of staff at HQ.

ECHO should request that ALL watsan proposals include an analysis of the possible link with development activities and agents or in case of urgent interventions at least an outline of options. ACF's HQ must reinforce its watsan human resources capacities. At least one more watsan staff member is needed at ACF's HQ.

Food aid and food security

68. Food aid distribution capacities have been proven by decades of services. These services are constantly being improved, in line with lessons learned and the Donors' policy. However, the difference between ACF's food aid policy and its food security policies should reflect better its policies.. Food aid helps to preserve life and food security helps to preserve livelihoods while ACF is considering that food security helps these two objectives and food aid is an answer (an activity) which contributes to reach these two objectives.

ACF must better advocate its food aid vs. food security strategies. This approach need to be presented in Proposals that include food distribution activities in order to highlight the intervention logic of each, and the links between the two strategies. Proposals that include food security measures must always include an LRRD link. Such proposals must always carefully weight the emergency focus for ECHO's considerations.

CHAPTER III: ACF'S OPERATIONAL STRATEGY IN KIVU²⁵

3.1 Background

Major funds (€ 4,270 M) have been channelled to ACF for activities in Kivu over the last three years (2000-2002). Audits of these funds have been partly carried out by ECHO's Budget Unit. The beneficiaries of ACF's assistance are mainly the infants. In Kivu however adults are accepted in Therapeutic Feeding Centres. This issue continues to feed a debate between ACF and ECHO 3.

3.2 Needs assessments

69. Eastern Congo has been labelled a 'forgotten crisis', which is probably untrue given the amount of money that has been directed towards the region in the last four years. What is true is that the country has turned out to be an immense humanitarian issue, partly ignored by the media and abandoned for political reasons by most of the development players, including the development instruments of the EU. Insecurity has prevented many NGOs and organisations from staying in the region. ACF is one of the few that did stay, with an uninterrupted presence since 1996. Despite ups and downs due to security difficulties, this long presence has given ACF a very good knowledge of humanitarian assistance needs and the conditions under which such assistance can be provided. ACF has identified the following most pressing needs: nutrition, health and food security issues. Watsan was not considered a priority concern, except when linked to Therapeutic Feeding Centres (TFCs) and Supplementary Feeding Centres (SFCs).

3.3 Nutrition

Focus on feeding children

70. ACF's activities in Kivu are mainly concentrated on what it does best: feeding. This strategy focuses on children therapeutic feeding at TFCs and a follow-up three months after discharge in SFCs for the families of the discharged child. TFCs are opened in local hospitals and SFCs in more decentralised locations, as soon as the security situation allows this. Usually MSF or AMI run the hospital, which makes referral much easier.

Nutrition surveys

71. Between April 1998 and October 2003, ACF conducted eight nutritional surveys. They showed alarming global malnutrition rates, ranging from 3% to 21% (table 1). The main feature of the DRC is that *all* possible causes of malnutrition can be found together. Acute malnutrition is the direct result of war happening in a context of chronic malnutrition – linked to widespread poverty after decades of political mismanagement, as well as a general lack of knowledge of nutrition and child care. The DRC is the second example of the development of a national protocol in the middle of an emergency (a similar protocol was developed in Burundi). The protocol is the result of a joint effort of UNICEF, ACF, SCF, Malteser, Caritas, MOH and local NGOs at ACF's initiative. It is now used nationwide in Congo.

Targeting

72. Infants and their carers present themselves spontaneously in TFCs where the admission process takes place. In addition, ACF has arranged for and trained teams of 'home visitors' and local NGOs that constantly screen potential patients in communities or health centres. They are trained in basic health and nutrition matters, as well as management. They also have some training in farming and receive seeds and tools for distribution.

Admission and discharge

73. Anthropometric criteria are used along with clinical criteria (associated disease, general health status). Criteria may be slightly adjusted according to the circumstances, for instance they may be stricter in times of massive influx and vice versa. The criteria have been tested over the years and weight for height (W/H) is now used along with Mid Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) in children, as MUAC is the best predictor of death. The same applies to Body Mass Index (BMI) in adults.

²⁵ Annexe III.1.

Indicators

74. The **recovery** rate is 87.4 % on average. The overall achievements of ACF are quite impressive, especially given that most patients arrive in the last stage of malnutrition and disease, and that the staffs have worked under conditions of constant threat for several years. The criteria of success are well above the Sphere standards. **Death** rate is around 2.3% on average. A survey in March 2003 on a sample of TFC and SC patients shows that **relapse** affected 3% of the children, 10-15% of the adult women and 20-25% of the adult men. The rates concern only former patients *who were found* by the survey. They say nothing about those who were not found. If food security has not steadily improved, relapses will occur. There are many reasons why parents/carers **abandon** the SFC at one time or another; most of them are unfortunately beyond the power of ACF. The abandon rate in SFCs has remained at high levels, with ups and downs in relation to the political situation. In spite of a critical overall situation, the rate of **failure**²⁶ remains fairly low at around 3%.

Treatment of adults

75. The population of the TFCs in Kivu often includes a fairly high proportion of adults who are obviously in a poor state of nutrition (not a single case of abuse or mistaken admission could be seen: people with terminal illnesses, such as cancer, seem to be a very small minority) and who sometimes suffer from various associated diseases. Most are, however, genuinely malnourished patients. It is assumed that the vast majority of adult patients are malnourished because they have no access to decent food. The presence of many adults in nutritional centres is not a negative feature for ACF notwithstanding the opinion expressed in ECHO 3. It just shows the severity of the overall nutrition problem and of the humanitarian situation.

3.4 Health

Activities

76. Health services in South Kivu are managed by MSF or by AMI. The cooperation and coordination with those other health ECHO Partners is excellent, as shown by the organisation of transfers and the systematic visits made by the staff in both places. This cooperation and coordination is flexible and reliable, based on a set of rules as well as on mutual trust and a common vision. The cooperation does not appear to raise any problem. Financial arrangements have been made for the various organisations to take care of each other's patients.

Systematic medical treatment

77. Systematic medical treatment is given to all beneficiaries in the TFCs.

- **Vaccination.** The TFCs visited during the field trip all seemed to vaccinate on a regular basis (not upon admission as is the rule in a camp, but during a weekly session). UNICEF has contributed to the campaign in South Kivu by providing vaccines to AMI, ACF's health partner.
- **Malaria.** Malaria is the main killer disease in Kivu, especially among pregnant women and babies. (WHO statistics show 374,000 deaths from malaria in 2003 in Congo). The population in the TFCs and SFCs of the Ruzizi plain includes IDPs, many of whom live at higher altitudes and have little protection against malaria. Anti-malaria treatment is given to the patient. For a small additional cost, this treatment could be given to the carer as well, especially when it is a mother and especially if she is pregnant. The strategy of distributing mosquito nets has been used by UNICEF, though the nets are not widely used (30%), indicating that Information, Education and Communication (IEC) was not efficient. This lesson must be kept in mind for up-coming projects.

Sexual violence and AIDS

78. Sexual violence has been an appalling feature of the Congolese conflict. Although concerning mostly women, it cannot be called gender-based violence but rather ethnic violence – since men and young boys are also victims. Women have to cope with the psychological shock and various medical problems such as fistulae and incontinence, chronic pain, being HIV-positive or suffering from various infectious STIs. Moreover, women are often rejected by their husband if not by the whole family. Associations are doing advocacy to prevent repudiation through home visits, but the rate of success remains quite low (around one third are an immediate success). The impact of sexual violence on economic life is huge: women fear to go out, even in groups and stop going to the fields,

²⁶ Failure means the treatment did not work, abandon is when the treatment was not finished because the patient left.

markets, water points, etc. This further paralyses daily life. Sexual violence seems to be decreasing with the improvement in the political situation, but it still happens and the comprehensive joint UN programme that was recently designed to help victims in all aspects has yet to start. Concerning AIDS, the percentage of HIV-positive children is not known, but it is clear that infected children admitted for nutritional rehabilitation show a slower weight gain, hence a slower recovery and a higher death rate. Malnourished children living with AIDS – unless they are at a terminal stage – must be cared for regardless of their HIV status if they meet the admission criteria as stated in the Sphere standards. The debate is going on internally at ACF's HQ to design an AIDS policy. There is also a dire need of and demand for a family planning programme. Almost nothing exists yet except for limited numbers of condoms available in health centres.

Mental health

79. A new avenue in ACF's war-environment strategy is mental health. Work on this has not yet started in DRC, but some preliminary activities conveying IEC messages have shown that a mental-health component would be very useful and would mitigate mothers' and children's stress. Some initiatives, such as dancing and singing sessions, are a first step in this direction.

Health staff incentives

80. The debate on incentives ('primes' in French) in the European Commission is long-standing. Incentives are not encouraged and used to be forbidden by EC Financial Control. ECHO reluctantly has had to accept that ACF pays incentives to keep its contracts running, in accordance with its policy of installing TFCs in existing hospitals and utilising the services of existing civil servants. Incentive payments are very often the only payments that the local staffs receive, especially when normal statutory salaries have not been paid for months or even years. Staff do not receive the incentives directly as they are paid to MoH. This can result in mismanagement of the incentives. One could say that ACF is 'franchised' and is paying a rent for this situation. This policy is applied by all other Partners, except MSF, who takes over a hospital and runs it entirely from its own funds and according to its own policy. The payment of incentives, of course, clashes with sustainability objectives except if the situation is well understood as being transitional. For the time being, due to the lack of professional staffs there is no other way to face the issue. The staffs also receive training which has a positive impact on sustainability.

Health Cost Recovery

81. Co-operation with the local health authorities has been difficult from the beginning mostly because of financial matters. There is a major problem of financial access to health care in the DRC: the rates are generally unaffordable. While a single visit costs € 0,80 to € 1,60-a rate already high-and up to € 80 for a caesarean section only, ACF/MSF/AMI managed to agree on a lump sum for each single visit (50-70 Congolese francs equivalent to less than € 0,40) and a lump sum of CF100-equivalent to less than € 0,80- covering Prenatal care (PNC), delivery including caesarean section if need be, and IEC.)

3.5. Food Security

Strategy

82. In Kivu, the food security component in ECHO-funded projects is not funded by ECHO but by OFDA (Office of the United States of America Foreign Assistance). The food security part of OFDA is integrated into the AAH activities. One volunteer is based in Uvira and the other in Baraka. The strategy is very well defined and comprehensive. It is based essentially on the provision of tools and seeds, and fishing assistance. The implementation of the strategy is less efficient. Implementation is supported by local state agronomists, who are also supposed to provide technical guidance and extension. Beneficiaries are selected through a community mobilisation process that involves exclusively the head of village and his friends. They are seen as a local NGO, whose members (all males) are currently the only beneficiaries of the programme. So there is little involvement of the rest of the population and there is no beneficial return, ownership, empowerment and accountability – especially when community works are asked for (e.g. labour-intensive irrigation works).

Nutrition and food security

83. The link between nutrition and food security is weak, though this link is intrinsic to the holistic strategy approach of ECHO. A small kitchen-garden programme, with demonstration plots, is piggy-backed to TFCs. Some demonstrations for carers take place before they are discharged with their patient baby, noticeably through IEC techniques. However, the demonstrations are relatively useless, as the crop cycle of production is generally longer than the stay in TFCs, and often results are not seen by the carers.

3.6 Water & Sanitation

Strategy

84. ACF's water & sanitation activities in North Kivu are very limited. The only watsan activities undertaken have been in relation to the drinking-water needs of TFCs and SFCs. It is probably right to concentrate watsan activities on TFCs and to a lesser extent on SFCs, where investments made are sustainable, because the SFCs are located in state social infrastructure that will outlast ACF's emergency measures. Another ECHO Partner, Tearfund, concentrates on watsan activities in the region. These activities are based on community works and are part of a limited watsan programme.

3.7 Human resources

85. The expatriate staff showed a good degree of competence and a high level of dedication. But most of the staff members are 'first-mission staff members' and they have to adapt immediately to the realities of a civil war – very different from the training they received in Paris prior to departure. First-mission staff would need closer supervision from HQ, which was not possible in 2003. First-mission staff members want to be assessed, to know if they are on the right track. There seems to be some room for improvement in the area of patient monitoring: not all local staff fully understand that severe malnutrition is a medical emergency as well as a potentially lethal disease. Close monitoring of the infants in particular – and the way they are cared for by carers – could probably save some lives in the critical days following admission. The longest-serving local staff member, a nutritionist who has seven years' experience with ACF, has chosen to stay with the association, in spite of being offered much better salaries with other organisations. The reason given for this decision is that "the level of training and its scientific content compensate for the low fees" This view is shared by most of the local staff. The local staff is convinced that on-the-job or overseas training is a personal investment, which will serve them later in their professional life. ACF has therefore built up a very dedicated and professionally well-trained local staff roster, which greatly contributes to the excellence of its implementation process.

3.8 Coordination with other partners

ACF/other Partners

86. ACF has excellent relations with other Partners. Some relations are professionally very close, e.g. MSF or AMI, such that in most cases the objectives are integrated, for example the referral system in TFCs and hospitals or the epidemics (AMI in the village of Fizzy, cholera). The poorer relations with WFP are due to misunderstandings. WFP, or UNICEF to a lesser extent, is not always in a position to deliver the required food in agreed quantities or specifications. Timeliness is essential here, as ACF – and other Partners – are often facing a *fait accompli* situation, with little leeway to cope. WFP argues that it is heavily dependent on quantities delivered by Donors and that the routes from Darussalam to Kivu are long and difficult. Whereas the latter argument is true, the former indicates a lack of proper strategic planning. In view of this gap in the delivery of food stuffs, ECHO has authorised a budgetary reserve in the financial proposal breakdown. This reserve allows ACF to purchase or to replace the defaulting delivery of food²⁷. Though this will help in coping in the short term, it may send a wrong signal in the long term to WFP or UNICEF: they may feel less concerned if a fail-safe mechanism lessens their responsibilities.

²⁷ Equivalent to one month of therapeutic feeding and five tons of therapeutic milk

3.9 Pros and cons of NGOs vs. multilateral international organisations

87. Distribution of food and watsan activities performed by large professional NGOs, such as ACF, has definite advantages for international organisations.

- **Outsourcing.** Even if WFP, UNICEF or ICRC are entrusted with distribution responsibilities, they also outsource or subcontract to local or international NGOs. This introduces an additional intermediary into the system, resulting in cost increases.
- **Cost breakdown.** International organisations have a cost breakdown that is much higher than NGOs (their management fees are in the double-digit range and the cost of their human resources is far higher than for NGOs).
- **Transparency.** International organisations' accounting methods and activities are not transparent, due to a distinct institutional memory inherited from the UN.

International organisations show the following advantages over NGOs:

- **Volume of food.** UN specialised institutions are capable of moving very large amounts of food or equipment in a very short space of time. However, they then need NGOs to distribute the food.
- **Stock.** International organisations are able to stock large amounts of food and equipment in warehouses, then to clear them to various NGOs for distribution.
- **Financial strength.** UN organisations have a much larger financial capacity, allowing them to have prefinancing programmes.

Instead of choosing between NGOs and international organisations in the deliverance of services, it is much more effective to get them sharing responsibilities and to encourage their collaboration and coordination through complementary financing.

3.10 Non-state actors

Churches

88. Various churches are playing a major role in assisting all kinds of vulnerable people. They are probably the best organisations to take over the nutritional follow-up, as they can offer continued IEC, growth monitoring and supplementary feeding if necessary. Churches have come a long way over the last decade and the danger that they will preach is no longer perceived as a threat.

3.11 Cross-cutting issues

Women's organisations

89. Various local organisations assist women that have been victims of sexual violence. Their efforts have raised awareness of the issue, resulting in less fear and shame, and more complaints and lawsuits. These organisations also liaise with various NGOs or international organisations, to take care of the medical problems. But their primary aim and interest is to offer compassion, moral support, information and as much material help as possible. MONUC (Mission des Nations Unies au Congo) has lately also taken an interest in the matter, but has not taken initiatives so far.

Children

90. Children, especially those under five years, are the main beneficiaries of ACF's intervention. They tend to be the first victims of malnutrition, malaria and other diseases, lack of health care and psychological trauma. There is no specific plan yet for the education of IDP children. This is due to a situation in which many families are almost constantly on the move, preventing most children from attending school. Child soldiers are a common feature (30,000 according to UNICEF), from the age of six onwards.

LRRD

91. SFCs are a suitable location for the social marketing of locally manufactured and appropriate weaning food, such as MaSoSo (Maize, Sorghum and Soya). But there are still problems with quality control. Such food has not yet been tried by ECHO as a part of LRRD, as it is seen as being outside of ECHO's mandate. Micro-credit could help farmers or mothers engaged in income-generation activities. Given that only a rather small proportion of food is self-produced and a major proportion is

purchased, it may be more efficient to invest in micro-credit than in distribution of seeds alone. The positive experiences gathered by ACF in Kinshasa, following the setting up of cooperatives, indicate that micro-credit investment may be successful. The OFDA experience shows that LRRD can be run concurrently with humanitarian assistance. However it is not ECHO's mandate to finance credit schemes. AIDCO could finance this through the food security programme. In addition, there is nothing more complicated than the setting up of credit schemes. To be successful, credit schemes need to be set up by finance-specialised agencies and not developmental agencies, since there is a main dichotomy between delivering aid and recovering credits.

3.12 Evaluation criteria

Relevance

92. ACF's activities match the criteria for humanitarian intervention, i.e. saving lives and alleviating suffering. Most of the health, nutrition and development indicators of the region where it operates are the worst in DRC and indeed in Africa. Such a dramatic situation makes the intervention very relevant. Years of intense and protracted civil war have resulted in a downward and ever-worsening situation for the local civil population. ACF's multi-purpose intervention is especially relevant in DRC, where all possible causes of malnutrition can be found together and must be addressed at the same time.

Effectiveness

93. Immediate nutrition and health effectiveness is good and proven in quantifiable figures. The high rate of cure and the low rate of death are based on ACF's strategy of feeding and curing children and educating the mother to adopt a better nutritional approach and better care in the future. Other NGOs, including for instance Valid International, work from a different principle. They state that not every malnourished person should be taken care of in a large and lasting emergency, but only those who, in the long term, have the best chances of recovery. This is called 'triage' and is not only technically difficult – who can tell with any certainty who will still be alive at any given point in the future – but also ethically debatable. Unfortunately, triage is what actually happens, since only the people who have access to aid benefit from it. And no operation, however good it may be, can save everybody. The best way forward in future is to provide families with food security mechanisms based on self-production and not on food aid. But the effectiveness of the food security mechanisms implemented by ACF in Kivu is questionable.

Efficiency

94. ACF's interventions are expensive. Strict security measures increase substantially the cost of an operation. The local staff members are numerous and could probably be reduced. In some instances (Shabunda) all the equipment and the food is air-lifted in. In this case, ECHO's desk officer proposes to waive the calculation of the cost per beneficiary, as there is no other alternative to (costly) air-lifting –²⁸. Based on the 'ficheop', an attempt has been made (table 4) to estimate the cost per beneficiary. It is extremely difficult to produce an exact figure, as often there is a co-financing Donor (e.g. OFDA, WFP or UNICEF) or others Partners involved (e.g. MSF or Tearfund). It is also difficult to avoid double-counting of beneficiaries, as may occur between TFCs and SFCs. However, with the exception of air-lifting, the cost per beneficiary is rather low and does not change very much. It is notable that the indirect costs (equivalent to the administrative cost of the new FPA) are within the maximum eligible 7%. However, the contractual records also show that ACF often overprices its services and inputs and readily lowers the estimations when asked to do so. Overpricing is usually due to the high number of staff members and equipment. This is not unusual, as the contract is subject to negotiation. What is more worrying is that ECHO does not have specialists in ACF's field of competence (nutritionist, health specialist, watsan engineer and agronomist) and cannot therefore assess in depth the validity of the financial and technical aspects of project proposals.

Impact

The overall objectives were undoubtedly achieved in the short term, at least for the population that managed to get to the TFCs and SFCs or who were screened by home visitors. These goals included reduction of suffering, saving of human lives, increased knowledge among mothers, and increased

²⁸ The cost is currently \$ 87 per ton..

capacity of health staff to further improve the situation. Long-term impact should be significant in terms of capacity-building of the health staff and of increased knowledge among families of nutrition, care practices and, if the OFDA programmes are strengthened, possibly improved farming techniques. There will also be an impact in terms of gender assertiveness and possibly a positive psychological impact on the mitigation of war trauma. More knowledge helps women to feel more assertive in addition to being better child carers. Unintended negative happenings may have occurred, such as the stealing of the food ration by armed groups after mothers or other carers leave the SFC. Such side effects are however out of ACF's control.

Sustainability

95. Several factors are likely to maximise sustainability.

- **Training of local staff.** Staff members are trained in various important nutrition and health issues. Provided that the health system returns to a functional state, the local staff can take over; experience has shown that this happened in several countries where ACF withdrew.
- **Policy support** at national level. This is expressed by the development of an agreed-upon national protocol.
- **IEC of mothers** is paramount to an improvement of the health and nutrition status of children.

3.13 Conclusions and recommendations²⁹

Knowledge management

96. ACF has an excellent knowledge of the situation in South Kivu, thanks to its continuous long presence in the region (around seven years) and the wealth of data collected in that period. However, the data collected could be analysed in more depth. Needs assessments are properly conducted; strategy and operational conclusions are sound and well founded.

Data collected by ACF must be analysed in a more systematic way. This will lead to key decision-making information in the project proposals submitted to Donors and will help to set achievable indicators.

Quality of the food aid services delivered

97. ACF's food distribution is well integrated in the strategy of the TFCs and SFCs. Targeting is directly linked to TFC patients. The quality of the services delivered by ACF is much better than average.

Food aid distribution centres can be useful in other ways, enabling staffs to engage in activities not directly related to food (like HIV/Aids and condom distribution, food security, simple PHC, and open debates generated by the beneficiaries). ACF does not sufficiently exploit this opportunity in food distribution.

Quality of food supply

98. The quality of food supply depends on the chosen supplier. ACF is responsible for checking this quality, but has not done this systematically.

ACF must improve its quality-control mechanisms. ECHO could ask for quality-control results to be included in the reports it receives.

Nutrition

99. Nutrition has always been the strong point of ACF's interventions. The various success criteria in Kivu are well above the Sphere standards.

- **Home treatment** is a useful alternative to TFCs, but this is only just beginning in South Kivu.
- **Adult treatment.** The presence of many adults in ACF's nutritional centres is not a negative feature. It simply underlines the severity of the overall nutrition problem and of the humanitarian situation faced by ACF. Moreover, many of the adults are also child-carers.

²⁹ Annex III.1. lists very detailed recommendations.

One alternative option could be to apply stricter criteria for admission to a TFC and to send more adults to SFCs. It would solve in parts the opposition of ECHO in treating adults in TFC, but vulnerable adults may be left un-treated in the process. Small scale trials should be done wherever possible and analysed right after to determine which alternative is acceptable/unacceptable/cheaper/ etc...

Food security

100. This component is piggy-backed to ACF but is not properly integrated into ACF's activities in Kivu and not given the importance it deserves. The programme is managed very conservatively with no proper supervision.

ACF must review its food security strategy and integrate it with its ECHO-funded operation. .

Infectious disease

101. ACF is working in existing health structures and has to deal with sub-optimal conditions in terms of space, light, isolation of potentially contagious patients (mainly with tuberculosis), sanitation and protection from mosquitoes.

ACF must investigate the issue of TB and make an agreement with health NGOs (dealing with TB) and WFP to take care of TB patients (respectively provide drugs and food) after the initial phase in TFCs.

Reproductive health

102. There is a dire need of – and demand for – a family planning programme. Almost nothing in this field exists. Too close pregnancies are one of the causes of chronic and acute malnutrition in children.

Contacts must be established with the UNFPA and other reproductive health organisations (Population Council, etc...) for the quick implementation of an 'emergency' Family Planning (FP) programme.

Home treatment

103. *There may be a whole range of care between strict TFC and full home care. All these options need to be tested in the field by ACF. Some tests were conducted and abandoned due to violence against the people (women and children mostly) moving from house to food centres. Calling on the principle of 'humanitarian corridors', if applicable at all in the region concerned, could help developing innovative strategies.*

Timeliness of humanitarian action

104. ACF is not a fast-reaction NGO. The association reacts better to slow-onset emergencies, when malnutrition appears over several weeks, than to acute disasters. Before any interventions, ACF conducts a needs assessment and puts in place the logistics – a process that can take some time. Once the NGO is up and running in the field, its reactions are fast, well timed and properly organised. If there is an evacuation, ACF is usually the last NGO to leave and close its base. However, security issues often slow down ACF's process of (re)opening new bases. It has also been suggested that ACF is slow in (re)opening new bases due to a lack of additional trained human resources and its requirement in term of programmes' quality.

Pros and cons of ECHO funding for NGOs or UN organisations

105. Unlike NGOs, the UN specialised agencies are not usually emergency implementing agencies. So it makes little sense to compare them. The UN system lacks the field staff required for field implementation and it often subcontracts with various NGOs in the case of emergencies. It is also not possible to compare the cost of NGO volunteers with the cost of UN workers. In a technical area such as nutrition, especially in a challenging context such as Kivu, a 'specialised' NGO has a definite advantage over a UN organisation.

CHAPTER IV: ACF'S OPERATIONAL STRATEGY IN NORTHERN CAUCASUS

4.1 Background

The conflict has taken on a new dimension in the last few months. In March 2003, a referendum was held in Chechnya on a constitution. General elections were held in October 2003, resulting in the election of Chechnyan President Akhmad Kadyrov³⁰. The President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, proclaimed an end to the war, transferring the responsibility for maintaining civil order and the rule of law from the Russian Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of Interior, relegating the Chechen rebels to the role of 'terrorists'. The referendum and the elections, as well as the voting results, are considered by the international community to have been rigged and fraudulent. Nevertheless, official international political protests have been scarce and cautious. 'Realpolitik' and hidden agendas mean that the Chechen crisis is not forgotten but is certainly overlooked. **'Normalisation'?**

106. The official Russian and Chechen line is that the Republic of Chechnya now has a working government, tackling a terrorist threat which is subsiding. The same line says that, as a result, IDPs have no reason not to return to their homeland. NGOs and international organisations dispute vehemently such an argument. Security is far from being guaranteed, government militia have free rein outside the rule of law, reconstruction/rehabilitation of dwellings has barely started, social infrastructure and safety net services are in disarray – with the exception of primary education, social utilities are barely working, and to top it all the civil population has almost no confidence in the government structures. On the positive side, most observers agree that the overall economic situation is improving a little, though these qualitative opinions are disputed by the results of numerous recent surveys, the results of which are also disputed. The current Chechnyan government is doing its best to prove that the situation is returning to normality; while NGOs and most of the international organisations are doing their best to prove that this is not the case. Recent events support the latter opinion.

4.2 Strategies

ECHO's strategy

107. ECHO's strategy has remained basically the same since the second war started (1999). Decisions have been constantly renewed, amounting to a comprehensive total of approximately 93 Million € (1999 – 2002). Over the period 1999-2002, ECHO funded ACF programmes in Ingushetia and in Chechnya for a total of 7.115 Million €³¹.

108. The strategy focuses on meeting the humanitarian needs of IDPs in Chechnya and Ingushetia. It includes basic interventions in the sectors of food/food security, medical care, relief items, shelter, water and sanitation, and protection. In the near future, the concrete form of aid will adapt as the conflict evolves, including potential returns to Chechnya and the consequently evolving needs.

ACF's strategy

109. ACF concentrates its assistance on three of its four fields of competence: food aid / food security (including supplementary feeding), water and sanitation and advocacy at a small scale. Health is left to other NGOs present in some of the regions. In Ingushetia medical help is limited to drugs distribution (MSF-B and ICRC); the Nazran polyclinic is supported by ICRC; and in the mountainous region of Chechnya, where ACF is present, medical support is also limited to drugs distribution (MSF). Support to the household food economy in Ingushetia essentially addresses infants through the provision of locally bought infant farina and food aid in southern Chechnya, although the latter is now focused on economic support to households. Food aid relates to blanket food distribution of half rations. Water and sanitation activities are directed at IDPs in Ingushetia in

³⁰ Assassinated on 9th May 2004

³¹ The present evaluation covers the period 2000-2002, during which ECHO funds to ACF operations in the region amounted to 7.115 Million €. ACF operations funded by ECHO in 1999 mainly concerned the Russian Federation and not the Northern Caucasus.

camps or spontaneous settlements, and advocacy permeates the dialogue with other Partners/international organisations and with the few contacts maintained with the national authorities.

Assistance or presence?

110. ACF's Northern Caucasus strategy for 2004 states that the global objective for Ingushetia is to "help to guarantee that the Chechen population has the choice to stay in Ingushetia within decent and dignified conditions." For Chechnya, the goal is "to ensure a humanitarian presence, in order to guarantee a minimal coverage of the humanitarian needs while sensitising opinion leaders to the Chechen war's reality." In both cases, the ultimate goals are to contribute to provide assistance to the Chechen populations, through the implementation of programmes based on needs' assessment and through the documentation of the humanitarian situation based on programmatic data and analysis..

111. The assistance needs are obvious and cannot be criticised. The objectivity is guaranteed by the documentation of humanitarian needs (existence of a water and sanitation data-base in Ingushetia that is updated on a permanent basis; living conditions in IDP's settlements and associated needs; qualitative and quantitative assessments in the mountains that aim at monitoring food accessibility).

112. After five years of war, the needs have shifted: humanitarian interventions now have to be reassessed both spatially and in their content. The association is having difficulties reconciling both issues, as they may lead to fundamental changes of policy. Examples of this include the possible downgrading of its watsan activities in Ingushetia, (contested by ACF who claims that the level of needs in Ingushetia, as evidenced by their data base, still requires their intervention), moving into 'forgotten' areas in Chechnya, upgrading of its food security policy and re-orientating its blanket distribution policy.

Remote control

113. Remote control is an alternative to free access. It can be organised by outsourcing the humanitarian activities to a local NGO. It can also be organised directly by the Partners, who then keep a tighter control on implementation. This is the method chosen by ACF – which has a (partly) double remote-control method: all expatriates reside in Moscow, with relatively frequent short (maximum three days for administrative local authorisations) visits to Nazran in Ingushetia. This is where its local staff members organise project implementation in Ingushetia and in neighbouring Chechnya. Since the start of the second war, ACF has organised only one expatriate's to visit to Chechnya in 2002..

114. Remote control implies enforcing very strict and detailed supervision, monitoring and reporting measures, as have been designed by ACF and which are running smoothly. Once a remote-control process has been established and is found to be efficient and effective, changes to the system are made with reluctance. For example, abandoning blanket distribution for more fine-tuned targeting objectives would involve a complete revision of the established system. ACF stated that the blanket distribution will be evaluated in September 2004 and expects that the number of beneficiaries will be reduced from 18,000 to 10,000 as a result of a new targeting system.

115. Another disadvantage of remote control is that it lessens considerably the dialogue and cross-fertilisation that take place with other NGOs and organisations present in Nazran. There is a marked contrast here between ACF and ECHO. ECHO has long tried to have the authorisation to open a sub-office in Nazran, while ACF has steadfastly resisted such a move for its expatriate staff. DRC, WFP, OCHA, PINF all have a permanent presence of expatriates in Nazran and more are to come. Handicap and MdM though still based in Moscow travel very often and regularly to Nazran. ACF considers that security risks in Ingushetia, including the specific risk of kidnapping of expatriates, are major constraints for establishing a permanent presence of expatriates in Nazran as evidenced by the recent and spectacular attack that took place unpredictably in June 2004 in Nazran and in September in Baslan, in neighbouring Ossetia. The added value of having permanent expatriates presence includes serious risks for their lives and therefore for ACF programmes in Ingushetia. At present ACF claims that their expatriate staffs spent approximately 50% of their time in Nazran, which seems somewhat exaggerated as each stay cannot exceed 72 hours for residence permits' reasons.

Voluntary returns

116. Is returning an option for IDPs? Movements from Ingushetia to Chechnya occurred mainly from the official camps, but also from spontaneous settlements ('compacts' in Russian) and from among those IDPs hosted by local residents. The main reasons for the movements are the same: pressures exerted by authorities on IDPs and a lack of alternative accommodation. IDPs in Ingushetia are moving back to Chechnya because facilities, precarious as they are, are being destroyed. They are not eligible for compensation at Chechnya's Temporary Accommodation Centres (TACs) if they do not move back. There are no other places to go into Ingushetia. Basic facilities (watsan) do not exist or are not sufficient in spontaneous settlements where there is an opportunity to move. Last but not least, IDPs are suffering from fatigue and psychological tiredness. In short,³² "the activities of the humanitarian community have not been effective in offering the IDPs a long-term realistic choice of remaining in Ingushetia."

117. ACF is not opposed to the return of the IDPs in Chechnya but tries to make sure, through the provision of adequate assistance in Ingushetia and advocacy towards stakeholders, that the displaced population has the choice to stay or to leave. ACF is not opposed to provide assistance to other categories of populations in Chechnya, including the returnees' population, but has not yet identified non-covered needs that could be efficiently addressed through its field of competence, taking into account its operational constraints (remote control). ACF is open to adapt its programmes to the outputs of further needs' assessments that should be launched in the coming months. Nevertheless these objectives have not yet been activated.

4.3 Food aid

Food aid in Ingushetia³³

118. There are no recently quantified data available on the nutrition situation in Ingushetia. This lack of data is astonishing, because ACF is a world reference point in nutrition and usually conducts in-depth analyses on the nutritional states of vulnerable populations. ACF's food aid activities in Ingushetia only concern baby food rations (Malish), which are distributed monthly to the children of IDPs as a supplementary food programme. The programme is very popular and currently concerns 1,800 children in the age tranche of 6 to 24 months, a rather small number. Some eligible children probably do not benefit from the Malish programme because to be eligible the children need some kind of identification proving that they are within the age bracket (formerly they were registered by the Danish Refugees Council -DRC- since no IDP registration is done by the local authorities since 2001, but lists need to be updated). The evaluators noted that some parents were denied access and asked to go and get a birth certificate with the local authorities first as ACF has no listings of his own. ACF however claims that very few children are left unlisted.

Needs assessments

119. ACF conducted a needs assessment in 2001. The country's mountainous area was selected, due to the vulnerability of its population (located in rebel areas and therefore subject to retaliatory attacks by Russian troops) and the absence of other humanitarian organisations. At the time, food aid was considered the main strategy to cover the basic needs of the local population. In other words, for restoring sustainable livelihoods and addressing the highly restricted and sporadic access to the area, the volatility of the security situation and the limited cultivatable area available due to widespread mining. Thanks to the very comprehensive monitoring system put in place by ACF, food aid needs assessments are conducted almost continuously. Nevertheless, the food aid distribution policy has not changed in the last four years. The same geographical area is still targeted, and the same system of blanket distribution still applies. There is very little adaptation to possible changes and fine-tuned targeting has yet to take place. To date, other possible areas within Chechnya with potentially other vulnerable people have not been considered seriously.

³² ACF's watsan final ECHO J report, February 2003

³³ Annexe III.3.

Food aid as economic support

120. Thanks to slight improvements in the economic situation, food aid is no longer considered a life-saving issue. ACF has, however, conducted several 'food security' assessments at household level. The last one, in January 2004, includes interesting information on food income and cash income at household levels. The figures indicate that there are still cash reserves in mountainous areas. Qualitative assessments made by organisations with a firm grip on reality (Memorial and Vesta) acknowledge that the economic situation is improving slowly but steadily. The monetary value of the food ration is about 500 Rr (17\$)/month/family³⁴, compared to an average household food expenditure of 2,000 Rr/ month. The thinking behind the food aid objectives has shifted towards a more economic approach, insisting that food aid would help to save cash money that was otherwise being used to buy food and provide economic support to the country's mountainous population. The argument is weak, as some economic and financial improvements are noticeable in this geographic area. ACF must now revise its food aid strategy and conduct a new needs assessment survey integrating the wealth of data collected and using the numerous existing household surveys.

Food aid distribution

121. Distribution used to take place on a quarterly basis and has now been reduced to a four-monthly distribution. From Nazran, sealed trucks leave in convoys to Chechnya. The food rations are individually pre-packed for each beneficiary and carry an ECHO label. No losses along the way have ever been noted. The distribution of food rations to the beneficiaries (18,000) takes place under the supervision of ACF monitors. Less than 1% of rations are not collected on the day of distribution. In total there are 37 distribution points.

Food aid quality

122. Predelivery quality control is only organo-leptic. In 2003, canned tuna was spoiled and provoked nausea and tummy-ache in those who ate it. This could have been avoided if stricter and costly controls were routinely performed before shipping. There are qualified laboratories in Moscow and elsewhere in Russia, so there is no need to conduct controls in France, as was the case with this tuna delivery. ACF conducted its control in France suspecting that corruption could influence the results.

4.4 Food security

123. ACF has no real food security activities in Chechnya in the strictest sense of the term. Food aid is not food security. ACF is not interested for the moment in distributing seeds and tools; ACF feels that these items are not a priority, as seeds and tools are readily available and inexpensive in the markets or they can be borrowed from neighbours. The only concession that ACF is making to food security is in starting an apiculture project in spring 2004, with just 12 families. This activity was introduced as a pilot small-scale project, and lessons learnt from this implementation is to be used by ACF for determining further similar projects.

4.5 Selection of beneficiaries

124. The only criterion is to be a Chechnya registered resident of the 'oblast' (an administrative and territorial division). Lists are established with the assistance of the local authorities and checked against ACF monitors' own lists. Checking the eligibility of beneficiaries and food deliveries is extremely burdensome, as this process is carried out at four different levels (list monitoring, post-distribution list monitoring, distribution monitoring and post-distribution monitoring). ACF says this complex monitoring system stems from the fact that neither the local administration nor the beneficiaries can be trusted³⁵. If this is the case for blanket distribution, then the system would be more complex still for targeted distribution. There is little added value from a comprehensive monitoring system like that used by ACF, and the extra costs are not worth the effort (additional human resources salaries, transport, accommodation, etc). The system however has permitted to avoid the 'loss' of 6000 rations in the past. Part of the justification is to be found in employing

³⁴ A household has five members on average.

³⁵ In southern Chechnya stricter controls reduced the number of beneficiaries from 24,000 to 18,000.

existing distribution staff members, who would otherwise be idle between the four-monthly distribution periods. But keeping them all on the payroll increases substantially the distribution costs.

Targeting³⁶ beneficiaries for humanitarian assistance

125. Various targeting criteria and selection methods are utilised by the Partners and other NGOs and international organisations present in Ingushetia and Chechnya; these different criteria can be confusing. Each Partner has a different definition of target criteria, ration, distribution cycles and implementation methodologies. Economic criteria are often used on the assumption that the Chechen economy is based on cash (as it used to be). Targeting methods are therefore mainly based on quantitative economic data and not on actual needs assessment. Many studies and surveys have been conducted in this field. Discussions are still ongoing between the humanitarian community to come up with standardised targeting criteria and a standardised selection process. As a result, there is a common feeling among NGOs and international organisations alike that not all the vulnerable households are included in the database. They also believe that non-vulnerable households are being included and that in some areas the number of beneficiaries is too high. Targeting is a very sensitive issue, because in many parts of Chechnya, targeting the poor is seen as a social discrimination by the beneficiaries themselves on the basis of cultural and traditional barriers.

126. ACF has not included wealth ranking into its food aid assessments, because it assumes that the total population was vulnerable. This assumption made targeting processes irrelevant and implementation easier in the sense that all socio-economic categories in the mountains had been affected by the consequences of the war. In this respect, it was assumed that food aid was used to cover the food needs of the poorer and to support the household food economy of less vulnerable categories. While ACF does not deny that wealth differences exist in the mountains, ACF is sceptical on the feasibility of targeting on the base of socio-economic criteria, since this strategy poses the problem of the verification of identified wealth indicators in the field and consequently may create problems of acceptance and subsequently increase security risks.

Community targeting

127. Involvement of other stakeholders, such as religious committees or community groups, to establish lists based on community targeting is not feasible. That is the view of most NGOs/international organisations. They claim that community structures, especially in cities, have been destroyed by the war and that the clan system would prevent community-based targeting from being effective. Local authorities also resist community-based targeting, fearing that it would mean fewer beneficiaries receive assistance and that it would revive inter-clan tensions.

Household targeting in Chechnya

128. ECHO commissioned in 2003 the Danish Refugees Council (DRC), another of its Partners, to conduct a survey. The result, Household Economy in Chechnya (HE), aimed to reach a consensus on targeting. The Household Economy survey's objectives were to conduct an in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis of the population's needs and to formulate critical conclusions and recommendations for ECHO's future strategy in the food aid/food security sector. It was to pay special attention to the targeting processes and to identify a threshold for household expenditure to improve food aid targeting in Chechnya. The study initially sought to compare the effects of using different poverty-line indicators on the number of poor families in Chechnya. Food Energy Intake (FEI) was suggested as the most obvious criterion for measuring poverty.

Food Energy Intake (FEI) criterion

129. The FEI criterion is based on a minimum daily-required energy intake of 2,150 kcal³⁷ and relates this intake to the monetary value of expenditure needed to achieve that goal. However, the definition of expenditure is not clear in relation to coping mechanisms. For instance, a 'poor' household might consume cheaper and lower quality kcal. The FEI criterion assumes that the poorer the beneficiary the more vulnerable he is and the more he needs food aid. The report is not user-friendly. It is mainly based on the academic pros and cons of the various statistical methods used; only a professional statistician will fully understand the report. It has no conclusions or

³⁶ Targeting is the word commonly used by NGOs as a substitute for selection.

³⁷ The Sphere criterion is 2,100 kcal.

recommendations, except that more analysis on the methodology might be useful. The report fails to give an answer and practical indications on targeting issues.

4.6 Water and Sanitation

130. Watsan activities are now conducted in Ingushetia and in socio-medical institutions of Chechnya (rehabilitation works only). They involve the construction of latrines and ‘banyas’ (Russian sauna/steam bath), connections to water, gas and electricity networks, and some sanitation activities that are linked essentially to garbage collection. Watsan activities are closely linked to shelter construction/rehabilitation carried out by DRC, IRC and MSF (France, Belgium and Netherlands). During the last contract (1 December 2002 to 31 October 2003), ACF’s water, sanitation and IEC activities in official camps and ‘compacts’ supported by ECHO benefited 25,000 IDPs. Construction works were above targets except for garbage.

131. The constraints of the programme are:

- **Linkages with shelter construction.** Ingush authorities are increasingly reluctant to grant permits to build/improve shelters. The policy is consistent with their decision to close down the camps and then the spontaneous settlements. There are times when such authorisation is refused point blank. ACF criticises UNHCR and OCHA for not being firm enough in trying to secure authorisation for watsan infrastructure and shelters. ACF claims, rightly so, that shelter issues are a protection issue coming under the mandate of the two UN organisations. Efforts to get an authorisation are very often negative and consequently watsan staffs are often under-employed.

- **Maintenance.** Any construction must be temporary. Cement is banned in camps, but not in spontaneous settlements, but wood is tolerated. As the derelict state of IRC’s wooden facilities shows, wood does not last long in the Caucasian climate; wood is also easy to steal, a frequent occurrence here. Beneficiaries resist fiercely any request to maintain the latrines and ACF consequently has to ensure this service on top of its initial investment. (MSF pays an incentive for maintenance, while ACF refuses to do this in small settlements). As water, gas and electricity are delivered free of charge, there is little room for sustainability or maintenance.

- **Closure of the camps.** ACF claims that upon closure of the camps the existing watsan needs in Ingushetia are still high, mainly in the spontaneous settlements. It covers sites where other NGOs had built wooden facilities which are already out of service and need to be replaced; sites with increasing concentration of IDP due to the arrivals of people coming from the ex-official camps, where new watsan structures must be built in order to reach acceptable standards and sites where there have never been water and sanitation infrastructures previously, mainly in small settlements. This analysis has been evidencing that non-covered needs were still high in Ingushetia and required ACF further interventions

4.7 Advocacy

132. The main advocacy issues concern free access to beneficiaries and respect of IHL.

4.8 Human resources

133. The expatriate team has excellent professional skills and is very dedicated. The fact that none of them is a “first-mission person” certainly helps. The team’s morale is above average and work objectives and methodology are positively supported, thanks to close personal relationships. Similarly the local staff’s professionalism is way above average. Fifty-eight percent (25 persons) of the total local staff members (43 persons) work in coordination or direct support to the food aid programme. This is a very large number of staff to run three four-monthly interval blanket distributions per year for 18,000 beneficiaries in 37 sites and one-monthly distribution of Malish for 1,800 infants. The number of staff in the watsan department is also rather high: 9 persons to run very simple works (latrines, banyas and connections to the water, gas and electricity network) which are subcontracted to local contractors. The job description of the watsan team includes statistical collection on general living conditions in IDP’s settlements. This task is directly linked to the water and sanitation objectives and is necessary to adapt the programs to the needs’ evolution. Still there is little direct marginal added value in keeping such a large number of local staff on the pay roll and their number should be reviewed. .

4.9 Coordination with other Partners

ACF collaborates fully with other NGOs – most of them funded by ECHO – as well as with other organisations. However, the difficulties associated with remote control prevent expatriates from regularly attending the field coordination meetings, which take place once a week in Nazran; local staffs do attend these. The added value of these meetings concerns essentially security updates and mutual information on the implementation of programmes, but the area where ACF is active in Chechnya is not shared by any other NGO/international organisation. Little is exchanged on strategies, except for food distribution and watsan in Inghushetia where coordination is more active, particularly with DRC: the two organisations exchange comments on their beneficiary listings.

4.10 Evaluation criteria

Relevance

134. Four years into the war, the situation of the population in Chechnya and the IDPs in Inghushetia is still critical. It has shifted from acute emergency coupled with global insecurity to a more chronic emergency, characterised by violations of individuals' human rights, destroyed infrastructure, irregular government support, loss of manpower and decreased work and agricultural production opportunities. Given this context, food aid is still highly relevant – provided it is directed towards properly targeted vulnerable people and not according to a blanket distribution system. The continuation of watsan activities is conditional on the closure of camps and the possible closure of spontaneous settlements; phasing out should be seriously considered. Food security programmes can only be implemented in rural areas of Chechnya and they could gradually replace food aid activities. It is premature in the present situation. The use of advocacy should be carefully balanced, so as to avoid it becoming a pre-conceived political issue. The relevance of ACF's activities in the Northern Caucasus and the relevance of ECHO's funding depend on an in-depth review of the strategy and the objectives of food assistance in the region. The current intervention criteria are no longer fully relevant for the situation. ACF is addressing the issue as recommended by ECHO prior to this evaluation and was already mentioned in ACF Update on Food Security Report issued January 2004

Effectiveness

135. Overall ACF has implemented its activities very effectively. The inputs are delivered in a timely manner and are in line with cultural food habits. In the context of remote control, ACF has established a close and effective monitoring system. The lists of beneficiaries are closely scrutinised. Much data are collected and compiled on the food security situation and on the programme's implementation. But there is little correlation of these data with other sources, mainly due to the remote-control system. Moreover, there is little analysis of the data collected. The involvement of local structures and of other NGOs is rather limited.

Efficiency

136. ACF is targeting all resident populations in southern Chechnya with a ration that covers approximately half of the daily minimum requirements. In general, 25-35% of the association's work time is spent on distributing inputs. Approximately half is spent on registration and monitoring of the distribution lists, and 10-20% on the post-distribution monitoring. The cost of personnel, 23% of the total budget, seems rather high. In 2003, food aid costs were 48% of the total budget, watsan costs 34%, logistical costs 14% and security and non-food items 2% each.

Impact

137. It is not easy to measure the impacts of the interventions, as baseline data – for example on food security and nutrition – are largely missing.

- **Overall impact.** Most stakeholders agree that the basic food needs would still be globally met if food distribution was phased out. Vulnerable groups would of course remain (the elderly, children, handicapped persons, city inhabitants and returnees), so they would need targeted assistance.
- **Economic Impact.** A study conducted by ACF in Inghushetia in 2002 showed that the prices of basic commodities (e.g. flour) on the local markets were directly linked to the humanitarian distributions. The wholesalers' costs decreased just after the distribution. If market supplies were better, this would have a direct beneficial impact on prices.

- **Human resources development.** Local staffs have been properly trained and are now fully able to run the entire ACF contract on their own in Nazran. Should they decide to start a local NGO with their own human resources and donor support, they could take over the management – if and when ACF phases out. Vesta (a Chechen NGO) started in a similar way, taking over some of UNDP responsibilities.

Sustainability

138. International food aid humanitarian assistance is not really sustainable, except if a national entity takes over. This is not the case in Chechnya, where after an initial presence Russian federal organisations are now absent. A shift from food aid to food security would help to strengthen the sustainability of the strategy that aims to improve livelihoods, but this is premature in the current situation.

4.11 Conclusions and recommendations

Food aid

139. The validity of blanket distribution and ACF's presence in certain areas are now being questioned. Malish distribution criteria applied by ACF in Inghushetia are too rigid

Malish should not be refused on the spot to women who are not fulfilling the criteria of registration. A grace period until the next distribution should be granted.

In spite of its principled decision to oppose the return of IDPs, ACF must revise its policy of blanket distribution. ACF should base this revision on an in-depth targeting analysis that uses available surveys and other Partners' experiences. ACF should also consider moving to other parts of Chechnya, overlooked or insufficiently covered by other donors . It should also assess its food security alternatives.

Data collection, analysis and use

140. An amazing amount of data has been collected through different surveys, but the interpretation of the data, operational conclusions and specific recommendations are very often missing.

ACF needs urgently improving quality of the collected data, to analyse existing data, tables, facts and lessons learned and to standardise some indicators used by different agencies for comparisons.

There is great confusion about the criteria for selecting the beneficiaries. The survey conducted by DRC with ECHO's funds did not clarify the matter and did not provide any operational recommendations.

Instead of conducting more new surveys, a consultant must be fielded to compare and integrate the existing data.

Remote control

141. ACF implemented a double remote control system: Moscow and Nazran.

Due to recent events in Inghushetia and Ossetia and in spite of the value added of residing in Nazran, this is not advisable to change the system for the moment being. Notwithstanding, depending on the evolution of the political situation, ACF should revise its intervention modality by adopting a direct presence in Inghushetia when and if a more stable situation will prevail.

Water and sanitation

142. Water and sanitation is an important tool for humanitarian assistance in camps and spontaneous settlements; ACF is good at providing them. Watsan is directly linked to shelters. Works are being hampered, due to politics linked to pressure exercised on IDPs to return to Chechnya. There are presently too many water and sanitation local staff members. Now that all the tented camps are closed down, the water and sanitation expatriate engineer has only the spontaneous settlements and a few institutions to take care of. The presence of an expatriate engineer seems superfluous, though both ECHO 2 and ACF contest this , being of the opinion that the activities in spontaneous settlements still justify the presence of the engineer .

ACF should reduce the number of local staff members involved in watsan activities in Ingushetia and turn down the presence of an expatriate engineer now that camps are closed. ACF to present to ECHO a quick phasing down plan and possibly a phasing out plan for watsan activities in Ingushetia.

Advocacy

143. ACF is not opposed to the return of the IDPs in Chechnya but tries to make sure, that the displaced population has the choice to stay or to leave. Priority must be given to the most vulnerable people: if they decide to go back to Chechnya, the humanitarian assistance activities must follow them, security being the only limitation.

ACF must now consider providing assistance by remote control within Chechnya for returnees that are increasingly going back.