9. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this evaluation involved first an investigation of relevant documents acquired from the Emergency and Humanitarian Aid Section of DGIS. The team also acquired and consulted documents from Netherlands Red Cross, ICRC Geneva, delegations, sub delegations and field offices of ICRC.

On instructions from Geneva, no access was allowed to SITREPS but other documents were made available on request and some other documents were recommended for perusal. It was argued that the confidential and sensitive nature of some of the SITREP information relating to protection and tracing activities made it unsuitable for external evaluators to see them. The denial of access to SITREPS, which have proved valuable in other evaluations, meant that use had to be made of secondary information and the necessarily partial information from interviews. The issue of availability of SITREPS is discussed in section 14.4, and a recommendation on access to SITREPS in included in section 16.

Initial interviews were then carried out in the Netherlands with the Emergency and Humanitarian Aid Section of DGIS and with the International Department of the Netherlands Red Cross, and in Geneva with staff at ICRC headquarters. At the same time all the available institutional documents were reviewed.

Once in the field, interviews were held with as many of the key actors as possible, including staff at the ICRC delegation in Tbilisi, other agencies (ECHO, The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, AICF), local government and programme beneficiaries. Rapid Appraisal (RA) methodology was used throughout in relation to the field interviews with beneficiaries.

RRA gained prominence in the late 1970s as a reaction against the way in which external researchers collected data for development projects. RA, which has been promoted by the
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Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at Sussex University, is a field-based approach based on the belief that project beneficiaries possess a great deal of relevant knowledge and the evaluator is operating from a position of "optimal ignorance" (Eade and Williams, 1995). The principles of RRA methodologies are summarised in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1. Principles of RRA Methodologies (originally in box format)

Utilising indigenous knowledge - Learning from women and men directly, in their own environment, drawing on their physical, technical and social knowledge. Respecting what local people know, say and do.

Learning on the 'job' - Listening to what people say, following their line of thought, improvising**.**

Making best compromises - Analysing the usefulness of the information in terms of quantity, relevance, accuracy and the time taken to gather it.

***Cross checking* (triangulation)** - Using a range of methods, types of information and disciplines (e.g. village mapping, village transects, seasonal calendars, wealth ranking.)

Seeking diversity - Looking for, noticing and exploring contradictions, anomalies and differences within communities, groups or households.

Source: Adapted from Eade and Williams (1995)

RA techniques can often highlight the contradictions between the hierarchical, top-down structure of development agencies, and their stated development aims. RA can be used whenever it is important to gather information, especially in the preliminary stages of project planning and in subsequent monitoring and evaluation. Eade and Williams (1995) indicate that RA techniques can be focused either on a social grouping, such as a neighbourhood or specific organisation; or on a subject or topic, such as health issues. They can also be used in conjunction with other evaluation techniques. Table 9.2 indicates the strengths and weaknesses of RA techniques.
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Table 9.2. Strengths and weaknesses of RA (originally in box format)

Strengths

1. Access to less literate people within groups
The flexibility and range of techniques enable illiterate or semi-literate people to share in the systematic collection and analysis of information. As a result, the viewpoints of women and men who are otherwise marginalised may be articulated and taken into account.

2. Reveals differences within communities groups and households
RA is better able than traditional methods to draw out sensitive information, since the techniques rank rather than measure the power and resources which different people enjoy. This can help to expose and differentiate between the perspectives of women and men at community level and within the household.

3. Good basis for planning
The qualitative and detailed assessment of local realities which RA provides are a good basis for sensitive project planning

4. Flexible
RA can be combined with formal appraisal. planning, monitoring and evaluation methods and can often enhance them. It is more culturally adaptable than most approaches.

Weaknesses

1. High level of expertise required
Whilst RA techniques appear simple, the approach needs to be learned, cannot be improvised and is difficult to do well. The right attitudes and behaviour are crucial to its success.

2. Site-specific date
In focusing on the particular, RA is site-specific and, unless it is thoroughly integrated into the working methods of a project, may also be time-bound. The data it produces offer only limited opportunities for comparison between different situations. This may constitute a weakness for NGOs which need to make comparisons in order to monitor and evaluate their

own work.

3. Exposes, but does not deal with, conflicts
The purpose of RA is to reveal and explore the dynamics within communities, groups or households. This may not be possible in situations of extreme social distrust, in particular for the people who are most vulnerable to reprisals or discrimination.

Source: Adapted from Eade and Williams (1995)

The evaluation team adapted and employed participatory evaluation (PE) methodology in relation to interviews with ICRC personnel. Eade and Williams (1995) state that PE emerged in reaction to the donor-controlled and project-centred approach, which was seen
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to be more concerned with policing the performance of NGO interventions than with either the intended beneficiaries, or the broader social processes in which they are immersed. With its stress on qualitative information and intangible impacts of relief interventions, PE is often able to draw out and interpret the different perspectives and dynamics of specific interventions.

However, PE is difficult to do well. Problems have often occurred as a result of the paternalistic, impatient, directive or insensitive attitudes of outside personnel. Deliberate efforts have to be made to overcome the range of constraints on people's participation and to help people to tackle difficult issues in a non-confrontational way. In addition, the internal structures of donor agencies and local NGOs may not be set up to respond adequately to the full implications of the PE approach.

Using an adapted PE approach, key actors were asked to participate fully in the evaluation process. In some cases this involved structured interviews, more usually they were informal, recursive and open, with the intention to make the evaluation formative. As far as possible the interviews were participatory and open rather than inquisitorial. Where possible, factual information and opinions were cross-checked with other respondents and with documentary information. Typically, interviews with key actors lasted about one and a half hours. Several people were interviewed more than once, with the key ICRC staff interviewed on many occasions A list of interviews is included in section 19.

Other information was gathered from numerous informal conversations and *Non-Participant Observation and Description.* This involved gaining access to areas where behaviour and interactions could be observed and described., and largely took place when accompanying ICRC workers into the field. Throughout each day, observations were continually described and recorded in a detailed diary.
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It had been intended to visit the ICRC Delegation at Barda in Azerbaijan (the main recipient of this particular tranche of Netherlands Government aid) but security conditions made this inadvisable. The evaluation team therefore decided to concentrate upon two specific case-studies of ICRC activities in Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia. This enabled an evaluation of two specific phases of ICRC relief activities, the acute (Abkhazia) and the post-acute (Karabakh). Concentration on the two main areas of operation biases the report to the direct experiences of the team in those areas.

In Karabakh, the team visited villages involved in the distribution programme and interviewed local administrators and ICRC beneficiaries. The team was able to form impressions of the living conditions and livelihood opportunities and constraints of the beneficiaries. On these, and other occasions, they were able to observe a range of beneficiaries and the broader community (Mission Itinerary, Section 19).

In Abkhazia, the team visited a number of canteens"production units (Sukhumi fish factory and Agro production units) and observed a rural distribution. Interviews were held with regional and local administrators and with beneficiaries. Discussions with administrators concentrated on the effects of the programme (both positive and negative), relationships with ICRC, the nature of the current situation and implications for the future. Discussions with beneficiaries focused on their personal situations and survival mechanisms, and the impact of ICRC programmes on their own lives. There was also a visit to the ICRC warehouse in Sukhumi, Sukhumi market, and interviews with AICF staff' and beneficiaries. (Mission Itinerary, Section 19).
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