

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

i. Introduction

The main purpose of the evaluation is to provide an independent assessment of the effectiveness, impact, relevance and sustainability of the past activities of the Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme in Burundi since 2004, in order to facilitate the elaboration of an enhanced programme lay-out. This is a mid-term evaluation, and therefore the goal is to provide the ICLA Programme Manager with useful information, analysis and recommendations, thereby enabling the NRC to engage in effective policymaking, planning, programming and implementation with respect to the continuity of the programme, identifying any core strengths, areas of weakness and recommendations for possible changes in intervention strategies.

The evaluation used a combination of strategies, including interviews, direct observation of programme activities, review of reports and programme documentation as well as workshops with programme staff. The evaluation team attended at the ICLA Burundi offices from 17th November to 30th November 2007, and conducted its assessment in four locations: Bujumbura, Bujumbura rural, Makamba and Musinga. During the field assessment, more than 50 individuals were interviewed, including programme managers, staff of the ICLA programme, collaborating international agencies, local government officials and traditional authorities, national community based organisations and beneficiaries, including recipients of training and counselling and advice services.

ii. NRC's intervention

NRC has been engaged in activities in Burundi since 1997. Its programme in Burundi serves the overall objective of the organisation to promote and protect the basic rights of returnees, IDPs and refugees and to facilitate voluntary return or reintegration as a durable solution. NRC's activities in Burundi include: Shelter (construction of shelters/houses and classrooms); Education (provision of basic education to out-of-school children and providing access to basic literacy and skills training); Camp Management (the management of several refugee camps); and Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA), the focus of this evaluation.

iii. Impact Assessment

ICLA

ICLA is a core activity of the NRC designed to assist persons displaced due to conflict to achieve durable solutions and to fulfil their rights, and to enable them to make free and informed decisions. The programme has its historical roots in two NRC projects: 1) INCOR; Information and Counselling on Repatriation, in Norway and 2) CRP; the Civil Rights Project, in former Yugoslavia, and has been adapted to a range of country situations since that time. The programme is achieved through the provision of information and free legal assistance to remove legal and other obstacles to return or other durable solutions, coupled with advocacy and other activities designed to complement individual assistance work. The programme is designed to tackle the lack of information that refugees and IDPs regularly experience, as well as the legal obstruction, abuse, discrimination or simply lack of action by governments that hinder return or local integration.

In Burundi, a precursor to the ICLA programme (the Protection programme) was established in 2001, to ensure the dissemination of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement throughout the country. The ICLA programme started in 2004. The programme has three specific objectives:

1. To assist in peaceful conflict resolution through counselling and legal assistance and by strengthening local capacity on human rights

2. To raise awareness on the socio-economic and humanitarian situation of returnee, IDP and host populations among local and national administrative authorities, the humanitarian community, and other NRC projects, contributing to a better coordination of humanitarian and development interventions
3. To assist Congolese refugees in Burundi with available information on their home communities to allow them to decide on the most appropriate durable solution

The programme accomplishes these objectives through information, mediation, counselling and legal assistance, by strengthening local capacity on human rights and by supporting adequate and coordinated response to the protection needs of the refugee, returnee, IDP and host populations.

The ICLA programme commenced its activities in Burundi in Makamba province in 2004. Since then it has expanded its areas of intervention to Bujumbura Rural, Muyinga and Rutana provinces. ICLA's main collaborators include UN agencies (Unicef, UNHCR), governmental ministries and specialised bodies (e.g. PARESI), international nongovernmental organisations, local government officials and community based organisations. The main funders of the programme include: Norwegian MFA, SIDA and Unicef.

The programme does not appear to have a clear or fixed time-frame, though NRC's current assessment of the political situation and pattern of returns, as well as a number of obstacles that still need to be overcome, indicate that NRC could potentially withdraw from Burundi in 2010.¹

iv. Principal findings

The principal findings for the assessment of ICLA Burundi include:

Strengths

- Motivated and well qualified employees;
- An appropriate mandate well linked to beneficiaries;
- The programme gives a direct assistance to beneficiaries, in particular the listening and advice centres and the training and awareness-raising activities;
- There is a good appreciation of the work by beneficiaries, in particular of the listening and advice centres and the training and awareness-raising activities;
- There is a good appreciation of specific aspects of the programme by project counterparts and partners, in particular in relation to the work on expulsions;
- There is a reasonably good field presence which appropriately prioritises locations affected by displacement.

Weaknesses and Risks

- A main weakness in the programme is the lack of viability, ownership and consequently sustainability of the programme as a result of lack of built capacity with CBOs and other local community structures;
- Insufficient needs assessment carried out prior to the commencement of the project resulting in a lack of scalable baseline information to measure efficiently and fully the progress made in respect of the beneficiaries;²
- Insufficient internal and external indicators to measure the impact of programme activities;
- There are insufficient relations, coordination, collaboration and sharing of information with local and national authorities and other local and international actors concerned by ICLA's work;
- Institutional differences in approach and the real or perceived risk of mandate and activity overlap with certain institutions such as UNHCR could have been better managed by NRC;
- At times insufficient coordination and collaboration between ICLA and the other programmes of NRC resulting in a lack of synergy of outputs;

¹ NRC Country Strategy Burundi 2007-2008.

² It is unclear whether any needs assessment took place. Changes in staff personnel and poor record-keeping have resulted in a lack of institutional memory within NRC Burundi. If a needs assessment did indeed take place, the results of such an assessment are not available to existing programme managers and are not factored in to regular internal assessment and evaluation systems.

- At times difficulties to adapt the ICLA programme to the actual and evolving needs on the ground, in particular the monitoring project and the work of the information and advice centres;
- Insufficient outreach to beneficiaries to advise them of the services offered by ICLA, particularly in relation to the information and advice centres which reach far too few beneficiaries;
- At times insufficient follow-up and support of the work of field-based staff, in particular in respect of high-level individual case interventions of the information and advice centres;
- At times, the locations selected to hold awareness-raising sessions did not achieve optimal coverage of focal areas;
- Delays in receipt of project funding have at times had a negative impact on the planning and timing of project outputs;
- Gender policy is insufficiently integrated into the overall orientation of the programme and the project activities (personnel resources, beneficiaries, daily work);
- Reconciliation policy is not reflected in the personnel resources: lack of ethnic balance in ICLA personnel resources.

Opportunities

- There is a possibility to increase relations and collaboration between ICLA/NRC and local authorities, international agencies and organisations and local community based organisations. There is a continuing and insufficiently explored potential to create formal partnerships and other more regularised working relationships;
- There is a possibility to more directly integrate local, provincial and national authorities in project implementation;
- There are important synergies to explore between the different areas of activity of ICLA, between ICLA and other programmes of NRC and with external organisations and institutions.

v. Principal Recommendations

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the following recommendations are made in respect of the ongoing ICLA programme in Burundi.

1. Policy cohesion

NRC should develop Burundi specific policies and positions regarding all major challenges impacting target groups: e.g., land and property issues; durable solutions and villagisation in order to ensure consistent interventions between and within programmes. These policies and positions should be widely known and understood by all staff and fully incorporated into the daily work.

2. Sustainability

Empowerment and progress to self-sufficiency in the structures are essential for long term change. Future interventions should be more participatory, involving beneficiaries as well as local and international organisations and officials, as appropriate in the initial conceptualisation of the programme as well as with the implementation of programme activities. The ICLA programme has implemented all activities directly. It is recommended that from the outset, a strategy aimed at involving local actors in all aspects of the programme be in place. This may be a tiered or progressive approach to local engagement if the context so requires.

3. Coordination

Relations, coordination, collaboration and sharing of information should be enhanced with stakeholders, partners and beneficiaries. ICLA should engage deeply in discussion and coordination with other organisations. Coordination and collaboration should be understood as a cross-cutting objective, not solely as a means to achieving other objectives. ICLA should enhance coordination and collaboration with other programmes of NRC.

4. Mainstreaming gender

The NRC has produced a gender strategy which is in force. It would be desirable for NRC to develop practical guidelines for its country missions on how to implement the strategy, complemented where necessary, by staff training, the provision of expert advice to programmes on what changes should be made and how, given the current context. As has been indicated, gender sensitivity has not been specifically targeted or integrated into the strategies and activities of ICLA. The programme had a high level of interaction with target groups affected by gender based violence and, as identified in the assessment, their concerns and perspectives were not specifically considered in programme design or implementation, nor were staff especially trained to service their particular need. Thus, gender sensitivity should be regarded as a cross-cutting issue for future programmes, particularly in areas relating to integration and reconciliation, and should be incorporated into the overall orientation of the programme and the project activities (personnel resources, beneficiaries, daily work).

5. Recruitment policy

According to the realities of the Burundi social situation and the policy of reconciliation promoted within the country, NRC recruitment policies should, in addition to professional competency, take into account ethnic balance as part of its recruitment policy, as well as gender.

6. Improving programme delivery

There are a number of areas in which ICLA Burundi's work could be enhanced, as is explained throughout the Report. The evaluation team draws particular attention to the following specific areas:

➤ Poor Beneficiary attendance rates at CECOs

It is recommended that the Programme Manager take immediate steps to improve the attendance rates at centres, and that for future programmes, NRC include an outreach strategy to accompany all activities with beneficiaries to maximise impact. This should include:

- a) Consultations with beneficiary target groups in the most affected centres to obtain their views on the accessibility of the centres.
- b) Take steps to publicize the CECO's by affixing visible signs in community areas to advice of the services provided by the CECO's, the opening hours and days of operation.
- c) Ensure that staff is present on the opening hours and days of operation to ensure continuity.
- d) Consider earlier opening hours to meet beneficiary needs.³
- e) Provide regular information to local grassroots groups and other civil society agencies on the activities of the CECOs to maximise referrals and collaboration.

In addition, the evaluation team believes that further mobility of CECOs could potentially enhance access to beneficiary groups in more remote locations. The Programme Manager's idea to introduce mobile CECO activities at the end of sensitisation meetings appears appropriate and perhaps could be introduced as a test model in one of the CECO sites in Makamba with the most consistently poor attendance rates.

➤ Maximising the utility of monitoring reports

Survey samples should be aligned with the needs and purposes of the survey and efficiency considerations such as statistical sampling should be incorporated into monitoring work, in order to speed up report completion. A more rigorous approach to deadlines should be taken. In addition, the use of other monitoring techniques such as focus groups should be encouraged, particularly with those groups whose voices have traditionally been silenced: women, children, the elderly, as well as minority ethnic groups.

³ Part of the reason for the late opening hours is the security restrictions which impede travel before a certain hour. Whilst the evaluators are not suggesting that security protocols be overlooked, it is suggested that security protocols should continually be revised in light of the changing security situation, and in some areas of the country, an earlier travel time may be feasible.

7. Evaluating impact

The existing monitoring systems for ICLA do not provide for qualitative statements about achieved changes or outcomes, nor are the quantitative indicators developed in the context of the desired changes or outcomes. This is particularly important for advocacy or human rights focused programmes in which one is often seeking to effectuate changes to policies and behaviours. Without such a framework, it becomes exceedingly difficult to appraise sustainability and results.

When the change primarily happens at an individual or community level, where delivered resources turn into activities and service is provided to the target groups (or beneficiaries) a future outcome-monitoring should orientate towards these changes. To gain more reliable information about the outcome of activities, future programmes should focus on the beneficiaries as additional information providers and take care to integrate them into internal outcome-monitoring processes. Community participation can be arranged through jointly elaborated questionnaires, result workshops and small scale evaluations on the spot.

As a first step for future activities, NRC should revise existing M&E structures and develop strategies for outcome-focused monitoring activities. Initial needs assessments should contain scalable baseline information from which to evaluate progress.