

THE CAUCASUS — ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN AND GEORGIA: EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

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Federation programmes in the Caucasus continue to move towards development. Several important evaluations and assessments have been carried out, both by the Federation itself and by donors. These have led to fine-tuning and refinement of some programmes, resulting in even better systems and hence improved service for beneficiaries.

The context

The break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, economic collapse and a series of military conflicts have combined to place hundreds of thousands of Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians in extreme poverty. Since 1993, the Federation has been working alongside National Societies, governments, local authorities, NGOs and international agencies to supply food, shelter, clothing, medicines and other relief items to the most vulnerable. Signs of recovery following privatisation and the transition to a market economy can be observed, but the rich are getting richer while the majority of people have to struggle hard for their daily bread. Unresolved conflicts in the three countries deter international donor organisations from supporting long-term development programmes. Politically, the oil fields in the Caspian Sea attract attention from the USA, China, and from nations within the region.

Latest events

The intricate building of political, military and economic alliances in the region continues. Governments in Moscow, Washington, other CIS countries, the UN and the Minsk Group of the OSCE are pressing the governments of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan to agree on peaceful settlements in their disputed regions.

In July an earthquake in the Noyembrian area of Armenia destroyed the regional hospital and left 3,000 people homeless. Emergency relief was not needed, according to ECHO, UNHCR and Federation information.

The Federation's programmes are moving towards development assistance from relief as the situation in the Caucasus stabilises. Some migration to people's land of origin is taking place, with 23,000 refugees returning to safe zones near Nagorno Karabakh. About half of these returnees were formerly resident in the Southern Camps.

From an operations and programme management perspective, the evaluation of six Federation projects by ECHO's external consultants was one of the most important events during the period. The aim was to assess the impact of the hospital feeding programme in Armenia, food parcel support to lone elderly in Azerbaijan and Georgia and the visiting nurses programmes in all three countries. The conclusions of this evaluation were generally very positive. Along with a number of recommendations aimed at increasing efficiency of the ongoing activities (better targeting, tighter end-use monitoring) the evaluation recommended that these programmes should continue.

An excerpt from the portion of the report which deals with Georgia states: *"Globally the operation has had a positive impact on a group of people who needed this aid to feed themselves in a sufficient manner. The positive impact of the operation is most visible on very vulnerable persons; these individuals might not even survive without this food aid."*

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Armenia •

Food and Non-Food

During the reporting period the International Federation concluded its last large-scale food distribution to 71 long-stay hospitals and institutions, which was benefiting around 10,000 patients. Considerably reduced funding from the donor community brought this successful programme to an end.

The Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) will still support patients in psychiatric institutions if funding is available. Concurrently, the Armenian Red Cross and the Federation have decided to shift priorities to food assistance: specifically to lone elderly and handicapped. Surplus food from the institutional feeding programme has been packed into 35 kg food parcels and distributed to 1,700 Visiting Nurses Programme beneficiaries. 10,000 lonely elderly will receive three food parcels (similar to the ones provided in Georgia) during the winter period. Bulk food, purchased by Danish Red Cross, was repacked by the Georgia Delegation at its Food Parcel Production Line in Batumi. Thirty thousand parcels were then produced and delivered to the Armenia Red Cross Warehouse in Yerevan.

Renovation of Psychiatric Hospitals

Following the very successful precedent set in Georgia, (see Georgia section, following) ARCS/Federation started renovations to psychiatric institutions. Implementation of this project will substantially improve living conditions for hundreds of long-stay patients, providing them with decent living conditions including heating and sanitation. All works scheduled to be completed by mid-October 1997.

Health

ARCS continued provision of health and social welfare assistance to 1,700 beneficiaries through the Home Visiting Nurses project.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in June with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to further expand health activities through a Campaign Against Sexually Transmitted Diseases. The campaign against Intestinal and Skin Parasites has continued to increase preventive knowledge of parasites in both urban and rural areas.

Azerbaijan •

Southern Camps

The relief operation in the seven Southern Camps continued to be one of the Federation's flagship operations in the Caucasus region. Support from ECHO, USAID, Norwegian and Swiss Red Cross Societies, among others, has ensured that all outstanding requirements will be covered until the end of 1997. A carry-over of food supplies to the beginning of 1998 has created an important bridge allowing requirements for the first two-to-three months — when resources are traditionally low — to be met.

One of the most important events which took place during the reporting period was a comprehensive survey in the Southern Camps conducted by an assessment team from the Federation Secretariat in close co-operation with the regional staff and personnel of the Azerbaijan Delegation. It included a survey of the nutritional status of the IDPs in the Camps, health and water/sanitation conditions.

Contrary to initial expectations, the assessment discovered that over 300 children aged under five were malnourished while obesity among the elderly was explained by the monotonous diet, heavily reliant on flour-based food. The survey created a solid basis for negotiations with donors regarding requirements in the camps and for new assistance schemes, among them supplementary feeding for children.

Relief assistance in the Southern Camps was accompanied by other activities aimed at enhancing self-sustainability among IDPs, laying the ground for their return to the safe zones in the Fizuli area. ICRC assisted the Federation in visiting a number of villages in the safe zones in order to better understand the existing problems and obstacles for the return of the IDPs. The Federation and Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society are the only two organisations with free access to the safe zones.

The income generation programme supported by Norwegian Red Cross allowed 143 families in the camps to open small businesses. This support extends to four Azerbaijan Red Crescent branches, which have already started to generate income with the initial investments made by this project. Ten other small income generation projects were under discussion with the National Society.

Agricultural programmes contribute to a more balanced diet as well as generating some income for families in the camps. It also has considerable effect on the psychological status of IDPs, giving them the opportunity to work and take care of themselves. A total of 140 hectares of land were cultivated and harvested, 1,670 families were involved, and in spite of a considerable loss due to bad weather, almost 80 MT of vegetables were produced through this pilot project.

The Anti-Malaria Campaign started its second round on 1 May 1997. Apart from the camp residents, 200,000 people in four administrative districts will directly benefit from this prevention campaign.

Medical staff in the six clinics in the camps made an average of 6,500 consultations each month.

Food and Non-Food / Health

60,000 food parcels were delivered to lone elderly beneficiaries (2 rounds of 30,000 parcels). The Visiting Nurses Programme continued to take care of 7,000 beneficiaries and children suffering from oncological diseases received a one-year supply of the required medicines.

Georgia •

Relief Operation

Batumi continued to be a vital link for the Caucasus relief operations, following the arrival of bulk food for the second round for 1997 of food parcels for lone elderly in Georgia. In total 50,000 parcels were produced in the period and dispatched to regional distribution centres in West and East Georgia. All parcels were distributed door-to-door within the period.

Bulk food and hygienic items have been provided to 73 institutions throughout Georgia on a regular basis since early 1996. Better targeting of assistance and stringent monitoring of end use produced a surplus in stock, thereby extending the period of regular supply to September 1997. In total 7,000 patients have been provided with food assistance.

Renovation of Psychiatric Hospitals

Living conditions endured by patients in these hospitals are truly awful. Following completion of the tendering process for all construction works (installation of heating systems, roofing repairs, plastering, replacement of windows and doors, painting, etc.) construction companies were awarded contracts. All works were completed on schedule by the end of August with final hand-overs to the Ministry of Health scheduled for September. Nine hundred desperately-vulnerable patients benefited from this intervention.

Health Programmes

During May all medicaments for the health programmes: Medicines for Psychiatric/Neurological Disorders, Medicines for Chronically Ill Elderly, and Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, were received and stored prior to distribution.

A regional meeting was held in Tbilisi between 19 and 21 May with medical co-ordinators from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia attending. The Regional Health Delegate co-ordinated all activities focusing on achievements, problems, future plans, development, integration of programmes into National Societies (Georgia).

The Visiting Nurses Programme continued to provide home care to over 3,000 lone pensioners. First Aid Training Seminars were held in July in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Batumi for 85 of the medical personnel within the programme.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Thanks to support rendered by the donor community, almost all 1997 activities have been guaranteed, although coverage for delegations' management costs remains of concern. Support for this component of the operation is vital.

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